
GAO**National Security and International
Affairs Division**

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Evaluations Issue Area
Plan****Fiscal Years 1998-2000**

Foreword

As the auditing and evaluating arm of Congress, GAO is charged with following the federal dollar wherever it goes. Reflecting stringent standards of objectivity and independence, GAO's audits, evaluations, and investigations promote a more efficient and cost-effective government; expose waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement in federal programs; help Congress target budget reductions; assess financial information management; and alert Congress to developing trends that may have significant fiscal or budgetary consequences. In fulfilling its responsibilities, GAO performs original research and uses hundreds of databases or creates its own when information is unavailable elsewhere.

To ensure that GAO's resources are directed toward the most important issues facing Congress, each of GAO's 32 issue areas develops a strategic plan that describes the significance of the issues it addresses, its objectives, and the focus of its work. Each issue area relies heavily on input from congressional committees, agency officials, and subject-matter experts in developing its strategic plan.

The Special Studies and Evaluations (SSE) issue area in the National Security and International Affairs Division addresses public policy questions that are best answered using applied social science research and analytical methods. SSE will undertake studies that involve complex measurement problems, extensive quantitative and qualitative data analyses, and other methodological research challenges. Planned studies will be conducted across a number of substantive areas, including government investments in defense research and technology, the quality of life in the military services, impacts of changes in defense infrastructure, outcomes of foreign assistance programs, and the effectiveness of nontraditional roles and missions of the Department of Defense (DOD).

SSE's proposed plan of work is structured around the following three issues:

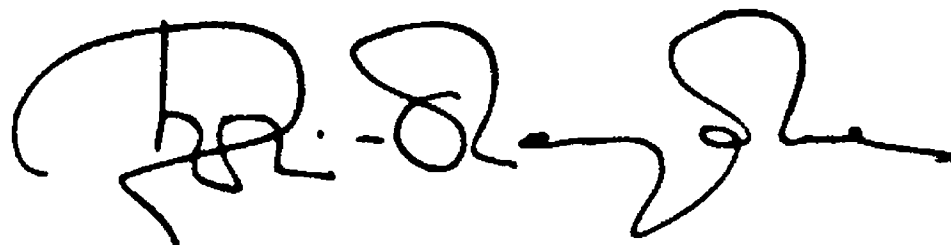
- complex methodological evaluations,
- data quality and measurement, and
- crosscutting issues.

In the pages that follow, we describe our key planned work regarding these issues.

Because events may significantly affect even the best of plans, GAO's planning process allows for updates and the flexibility to respond quickly

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to emerging issues. If you have any questions or suggestions about this plan, please call me at (202) 512-3092.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kwai-Cheung Chan', with a stylized, flowing script.

Kwai-Cheung Chan
Director
Special Studies and Evaluation Issues

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Table I: Key Issues

Issue	Significance
Complex Methodological Evaluations: How can complex methodological evaluations be used to provide better information concerning key programs, policies, and investments?	The demand by Congress for empirical information on program conditions, impacts, and outcomes has grown considerably in recent years as attention has focused on ways to reduce agency funding, increase cost savings, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of programs and operations. Many claims have been made by policy advocates and interest groups about the failures and/or successes of current programs and policies, but few have been supported by convincing data and analyses. Congress enacted the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) to provide greater accountability for results. Studies using complex evaluation approaches and extensive data analyses are needed to determine whether programs (1) are achieving the results they were designed to accomplish, (2) are cost-effective, and (3) are having unintended effects (both positive and negative).
Data Quality and Measurement: Are data and measures used in policy decision-making valid and reliable?	Several issues of congressional concern (as reflected in GPRA and the Chief Financial Officers Act) highlight the need to examine the quality of information used for policy-making. Increasingly, decisionmakers faced with tough legislative choices are hampered by incomplete, inconsistent, and faulty data about the performance and effects of programs and policies. It is important to evaluate the validity, reliability, and utility of data and measures that are currently available (e.g., tracking military research investments and assessing quality-of-life conditions), the methods used to develop such information (e.g., risk assessment methods for estimating health and safety effects of weapons disposal), and the development or adoption of new methods for obtaining information (e.g., approaches to monitor illnesses that may result from overseas deployments).
Cross-Cutting Issues: How can conditions, attributes, and outcomes across different programs and activities be compared?	With increased frequency, Congress has asked policy questions that require a broad examination of several different programs and functions. This may become more apparent as work on GPRA progresses. There is interest, for example, in examining the costs and effectiveness of technologies that are common to many types of weapon systems and the ways technologies affect force structure and readiness. Efforts to improve military effectiveness have also drawn attention to many quality-of-life issues, such as housing, family-life conditions, and the military operations environment, that collectively need to be evaluated. Furthermore, as efforts continue toward consolidating international assistance programs, there is interest in determining what approaches work best to improve agencies' evaluation capabilities and program outcomes.

Table 1: Key Issues

Objectives	Focus of work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use complex evaluation research methods to assess the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of key programs and policies.• Examine the factors that significantly influence program outcomes.• Determine whether alternative approaches are needed to improve program results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and apply a methodological framework to determine impacts and outcomes of selected foreign assistance programs.• Examine DOD's methodologies for assessing the risks of military activities that may affect the health and safety of nearby populations (e.g., weapons testing and disposal).
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analyze existing data on program conditions, trends, and characteristics.• Identify and develop improved measures to evaluate programs, policies, and investments.• Examine the appropriateness of methods used to produce policy-making information.• Identify cost-effective alternatives for improving data, measures, and methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify and develop appropriate measures for determining the outcomes of DOD research and development investments.• Examine the validity and reliability of measures on military quality of life, retention, and readiness.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate programs intended to provide coordinated responses to fulfill military roles and missions.• Identify and assess different programmatic approaches (i.e., lessons learned) that improve efficiency and effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess and compare evaluation capabilities at U.S. and multilateral foreign assistance agencies.• Evaluate costs and benefits of recent military interventions to achieve foreign economic stabilization and development and nation building.• Analyze costs and effectiveness of key military technologies (i.e., stealth technology, global positioning system, ballistic missile defense) and their impacts on force structure, capabilities, readiness, and nondefense applications.

Table II: Planned Major Work

Issue	Planned major job starts
Complex Methodological Evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop models for evaluating the outcomes of DOD's technology investments in chemical and biological warfare detection and prevention (ongoing).• Evaluate government research on Gulf War illnesses in terms of the appropriateness of the design methodologies employed and the likely outcomes that will result (ongoing).
Data Quality and Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate the nature and extent of costs and difficulties related to family life in the military and their impacts on retention and readiness.• Analyze estimates of the prevalence of cancer and other chronic illnesses among Gulf War veterans (ongoing).• Evaluate criteria used for determining real property maintenance costs and needs across the services and compare to practices used in the civilian sector (ongoing).• Assess reliability of international economic and trade data for Asian countries (ongoing).
Crosscutting Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review critical technology investment and development of stealth technology and their impacts on infrastructure, operations and maintenance, and readiness• Evaluate the extent to which DOD-funded animal research activities fulfill valid military needs and avoid unnecessary duplication of research done elsewhere (ongoing).• Examine methodological approaches bilateral and multilateral agencies use to evaluate foreign assistance program impacts and identify promising practices.• Evaluate and compare objectives and outcomes of recent U.S. military interventions such as those in Somalia, Panama, and Haiti.

Table III: GAO Contacts

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