

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-525T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Cyber, Innovative Technologies, and Information Systems, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. potential adversaries—including near-peer competitors Russia and China—are using information to achieve objectives below the threshold of armed conflict. DOD can use information operations to counter these activities.

This testimony summarizes GAO's past work related to DOD's IO capabilities. Specifically, it discusses: (1) DOD's information operation terms and concept, and (2) DOD's actions to implement the 2016 DOD IO strategy and address oversight and integration challenges. This statement is based on GAO's August and October 2019 reports ([GAO-19-510C](#) and [GAO-20-51SU](#)) and updates conducted in April 2021.

What GAO Recommends

In prior work on which this testimony is based, GAO recommended that DOD take five actions to improve leadership and integration for information operations—including that the department should conduct a posture review to assess integration challenges. DOD disagreed with the recommendations. However, Section 1631 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 included several provisions related to our recommendations, such as one that required the Secretary of Defense to conduct a posture review.

View [GAO-21-525T](#). For more information, contact Joseph W. Kirschbaum at (202) 512-9971 or kirschbaumj@gao.gov.

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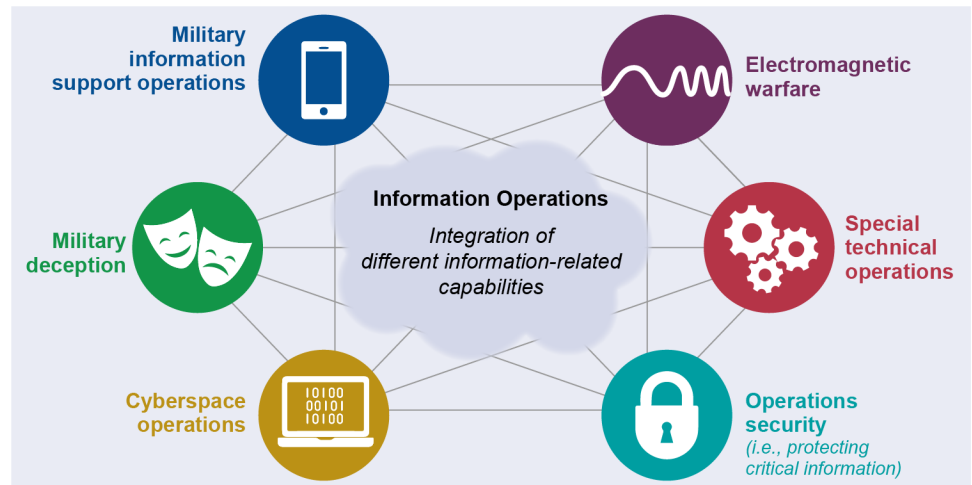
INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

DOD Operations Need Enhanced Leadership and Integration of Capabilities

What GAO Found

At its core, information operations (IO) are the *integration* of information-related capabilities during military operations to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own. (See figure.) For example, in seeking to facilitate safe and orderly humanitarian assistance, the Department of Defense (DOD) would conduct IO by influencing host nation and regional cooperation through the *integration* of public affairs activities and military information support operations.

Information Operations and Selected Information-Related Capabilities



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | [GAO 21-525T](#)

GAO found, in 2019, that DOD had made limited progress in implementing the 2016 DOD IO strategy and faced a number of challenges in overseeing the IO enterprise and integrating its IO capabilities. Specifically:

- In seeking to implement the strategy, DOD had not developed an implementation plan or an investment framework to identify planning priorities to address IO gaps.
- DOD has established department-wide IO roles and responsibilities and assigned most oversight responsibilities to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. The Under Secretary had exercised some responsibilities, such as establishing an executive steering group. However, the Under Secretary had not fulfilled other IO oversight responsibilities, such as conducting an assessment of needed tasks, workload, and resources. Instead, the Under Secretary delegated these responsibilities to an official whose primary responsibilities are focused on special operations and combatting terrorism.
- DOD had integrated information-related capabilities in some military operations, but had not conducted a posture review to assess IO challenges. Conducting a comprehensive posture review to fully assess challenges would assist DOD in effectively operating while using information-related capabilities.