



Highlights of [GAO-04-547](#), a report to the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Senate Committee on Armed Services; Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, House Committee on Armed Services

Why GAO Did This Study

Recent U.S. combat operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq benefited from new Department of Defense (DOD) strategies and technologies, such as improvements in force networks and increased use of precision weapons, designed to address changes in the security environment resulting from the continuing terrorist threat and the advent of the information age.

Based on the authority of the Comptroller General, GAO reviewed these conflicts, with a focus on bombing operations, to gain insight into the changes being implemented by DOD. This report focuses on (1) assessing the impact on operational effectiveness of improvements in force networks and in the use of precision weapons and (2) identifying key barriers to continued progress.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD take steps to improve standardization of information used in bombing operations, address continuing problems with battle damage assessments, develop a unified battlefield information system to improve analyses of combat effectiveness, and develop realistic joint training to help personnel adapt to emerging changes to the operating environment. DOD generally agreed with the recommendations and stated that it is addressing the issues GAO raised in a variety of ongoing efforts.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-547.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Neal Curtin, (757) 552-8100, CurtinN@gao.gov.

MILITARY OPERATIONS

Recent Campaigns Benefited from Improved Communications and Technology, but Barriers to Continued Progress Remain

What GAO Found

Improvements in force networks and in the use of precision weapons are clearly primary reasons for the overwhelming combat power demonstrated in recent operations. However, the full extent to which operations have been speeded up or otherwise affected is unclear because DOD does not have detailed measures of these effects. Enhancements to networked operations, such as improved sensors and surveillance mechanisms, and more integrated command and control centers, have improved DOD's ability to share a broad view of the battlefield and communicate quickly with all elements of the force—reducing the time required for analysis and decision making in combat operations. However, recognizing that the full impact of these changes is unclear, DOD is conducting a series of case studies to better understand the effects of networked operations. Improvements in force networks have also been enhanced by the use of precision-guided weapons and associated technologies. These improvements not only provide commanders with greatly increased flexibility, such as the ability to conduct bombing operations in poor weather and from higher and safer altitudes, but also increase the accuracy of bombing operations. GAO's analysis found that the percentage of attacks resulting in damage or destruction to targets increased markedly between operations in Kosovo and those in Afghanistan.

Notwithstanding these improvements, certain barriers inhibit continued progress in implementing the new strategy. Four interrelated areas stand out as key:

- A lack of standardized, interoperable systems and equipment, which reduces effectiveness by requiring operations to be slowed to manually reconcile information from multiple systems and limiting access to needed capabilities among military services.
- Continuing difficulties in obtaining timely, high quality analyses of bombing damages, which can slow ground advances and negate other improvements in the speed of operations.
- The absence of a unified battlefield information system to provide standardized measures and baseline data on bombing effectiveness, which creates confusion about the success of new tactics and technologies, about assumptions used in battlefield simulation programs, and about procurement decisions.
- The lack of high quality, realistic training to help personnel at all levels understand and adapt to the increased flow of information, more centralized management, and other changes in the operating environment brought about by the strategic changes.