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The Honorable USW(R&E) Emil Michael  
Office of the Under Secretary of War, Research and Engineering (USW(R&E))  
1010 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1010

Subj: GAO Findings and Recommendations on Digital Engineering and Iterative Development

Dear Hon. USW(R&E) Emil Michael:

GAO Report GAO-26-108457 *Weapon Systems Annual Assessment*, July 2026, includes the following assessment:

Weapon systems do not consistently implement leading practices to deliver innovative capability with speed. Most programs, including newer programs like MTAs and future weapon system acquisitions, that GAO reviewed do not fully implement leading practices to achieve efficiencies. In reports dating back to 2022, GAO has recommended that DOD revamp its weapon system acquisition, test and evaluation, systems engineering, and digital engineering (DE) policies to fully incorporate iterative development and other leading practices. DOD concurred with many recommendations but has yet to fully implement them.

My previous letters to you provided recommended leading practices that are consistent with GAO findings and recommendations. This letter augments the following letters.

5/2/26 Subj: Implementing EO *Promoting Efficiency, Accountability, and Performance in Federal Contracting*

Excerpt: The white paper, *Integrating the Embedded Software Path, Model-Based Systems Engineering, MOSA, and DE with Program Management*...includes enhanced improvements to DoDI 5000.97 and recommendations to use the digital thread for schedule performance metrics, technical performance incentives, schedule performance incentives, the Minimum Viable Product (MVP), and the Minimum Viable Capability Release (MVCR).

1/18/26 Subj: Hold Program Managers and Contractors Accountable to Deliver on Time specify digital artifacts in the digital thread as authoritative sources of truth. The artifacts should be on the critical path towards delivering the MVP and the MVCR...be evidence of schedule performance...determining technical performance incentives and disincentives.

Please consider those recommendations when complying with the EO, implementing the Acquisition Transformation Strategy, and the following findings and recommendations in the recent GAO Report:

Few Programs Are Fully Benefiting from Developing a MVP. Most programs have yet to incorporate an MVP that fully meets leading practices.

Most Programs Reported They Are Not Consistently Using DE Tools

Most of the 48 programs we reviewed are not consistently using DE tools—such as digital twins and digital threads—that fully meet leading practices. Consequently, most programs cannot achieve the full efficiencies associated with these tools when designing, developing, and testing system-level physical and digital prototypes in an operational environment.

Further, four of 48 programs are planning or developing a digital twin that partially meets all key elements of the leading practice, with the four programs reporting that they will not incorporate real-time data into their “digital twin”. Real-time data is essential to receive the full benefits of a digital twin, and it is the real-time automated data connection that distinguishes a digital twin from digital prototypes, models, simulations, and shadows.

Congress directed each Secretary of a military department to develop and implement a standard reference architecture to guide the use of and best practices for DE for program design, development, and testing within each covered armed force under the jurisdiction of that Secretary.

Yours truly,



Paul Solomon

CC:

- Hon. Ken Calvert, Chairman, Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
- Hon. Dep. Sec. Stephen Feinberg
- Hon. Adam Smith, HASC
- Hon. Mike Rogers, HASC
- Hon. Roger Wicker, SASC
- Hon. Russell Vought, Director, OMB
- Hon. Gen. Saltzman, U.S. Space Force
- Hon. Dan Driscoll, Sec. of the Army
- Anthony Capaccio, Bloomberg News
- Michael Cadenazzi, Asst. Sec. of War for Industrial Base Policy
- Under Secretary of War (A&S) Michael Duffey
- Hon. Vice Chair HASC Wittman
- Shelby Oakley, GAO
- Hon. David Norquist NDIA
- Hon. Troy Meink, Sec. of the AF
- Hon. Hung Cao, Acting Sec. of the Navy
- Hon. Pete Hegseth, Sec. of War
- Hon. DoW CIO Kirsten Davies
- Acting USD(C)/CFO Michael Powers