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Washington, DC 20548

Comptroller General  
of the United States

May 11, 2023

The Honorable Avril Haines  
Director of National Intelligence  
Office of the Director of National Intelligence  
Washington, D.C. 20511

### Priority Open Recommendations: Office of the Director of National Intelligence

Dear Director Haines:

The purpose of this letter is to provide the overall status of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's (ODNI) implementation of GAO's recommendations and to call your personal attention to areas in which GAO's open recommendations should be given high priority.<sup>1</sup> Our work on Intelligence Community (IC) oversight has generated numerous recommendations to help enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the IC, but we have observed minimal progress in the implementation of these recommendations. In November 2022, we reported that on a government-wide basis, 77 percent of our recommendations made 4 years ago were implemented.<sup>2</sup> As of March 2023, ODNI had 50 open recommendations with an implementation rate of 7 percent for recommendations made in the past 4 years.<sup>3</sup>

In March 2023, ODNI responded to some of the open recommendations and noted that the agency concurred with 14 of our priority recommendations. In addition, ODNI stated that it had taken action to address 10 of them. I urge you to document ODNI's actions taken in response to these recommendations and provide this to us so we can assess the steps taken and determine whether the recommendations can be closed.

In addition to addressing GAO's recommendations, I request your assistance in resolving an issue that is negatively affecting our ability to complete our audit work in a timely manner. Specifically, GAO teams are experiencing significant delays obtaining ODNI's official comments and security/sensitivity reviews on our draft reports. This has led to delays in the issuance of our work and, thus, the delivery of information to Congress. Given the prolonged nature of some of these delays, we have issued some reports without ODNI's official comments. This is a decision we made reluctantly, as obtaining and reflecting official input on our reports is a valuable part of

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<sup>1</sup>Priority open recommendations are those that GAO believes warrant priority attention from heads of key departments or agencies. They are highlighted because, upon implementation, they may significantly improve government operation, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

<sup>2</sup>GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report: Fiscal Year 2022*, [GAO-23-900398](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 15, 2022).

<sup>3</sup>As of March 2023, ODNI's rate of implementation for all of the recommendations we have made since 2011 was 27 percent.

our process. Further, it benefits the audited agency as an opportunity to present its reaction to or perspectives on our recommendations. I ask for your support in addressing this issue moving forward.

The classified enclosure to this letter identifies 19 priority recommendations, of which several are classified, that directly address challenges in key areas of IC management and have an effect on the IC's ability to accomplish its mission.<sup>4</sup> GAO has not added any priority recommendations since 2022.<sup>5</sup> By fully implementing these recommendations, ODNI could improve its ability to help ensure the IC best manages its workforce and infrastructure in order to fulfill its mission of providing intelligence to decision makers, and could improve the IC's ability to efficiently and effectively perform mission activities. We ask for your continued attention to these 19 priority recommendations, which fall into the following four areas:

- **Intelligence Enterprise Management.** We have five priority recommendations related to IC enterprise business functions, systems, and organizations.
- **Infrastructure and Facilities.** We have two priority recommendations related to planning and management of IC infrastructure and facility projects.
- **Workforce Management.** We have seven priority recommendations related to IC human capital and talent management.
- **Personnel Vetting.** We have five priority recommendations related to the personnel vetting and security clearance process.

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In April 2023, we issued our biennial update to our High-Risk List, which identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or the need for transformation to address economy, efficiency, or effectiveness challenges.<sup>6</sup>

ODNI has key equities related to one of our high-risk areas—the [government-wide personnel security clearance process](#). While we have identified some progress in addressing this high-risk issue, we currently have five priority recommendations directed to ODNI regarding personnel vetting. These recommendations are focused on ensuring the timely completion of

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<sup>4</sup>Due to the classified nature of some of the recommendations, additional details on the priority recommendations in the four key areas noted in the letter, including a complete list of all the priority recommendations, report details, and contact information, can be found in a classified enclosure to this letter.

<sup>5</sup>In March 2023, ODNI indicated that it had closed 10 of the 19 priority recommendations. However, ODNI did not provide documentation or evidence to support the actions taken that would close these recommendations.

<sup>6</sup>In January 2018, we added the government-wide personnel security clearance process to our High-Risk List. In our most recent High-Risk report issued in April 2023, we reported that the agencies responsible for reforming the personnel security clearance process have made considerable progress in implementing Trusted Workforce 2.0. Trusted Workforce 2.0 is designed to transform and align the three personnel vetting processes that determine: eligibility to access classified information or to hold a sensitive position (personnel security clearance process), suitability for government employment or fitness to work on behalf of the government (suitability/fitness process), and eligibility to access agency systems or facilities (personnel credentialing process). See GAO, *High-Risk Series: Efforts Made to Achieve Progress Need to be Maintained and Expanded to Fully Address All Areas*, [GAO-23-106203](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 20, 2023).

investigations and adjudications and developing performance measures for assessing the quality of all phases of the personnel security clearance process.

Several other government-wide high-risk areas also have direct implications for ODNI and its operations. These include (1) [improving the management of IT acquisitions and operations](#), (2) [improving strategic human capital management](#), (3) [managing federal real property](#), and (4) [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#).<sup>7</sup> We urge your attention to the ODNI-specific and government-wide high-risk issues. Progress on high-risk issues has been possible through the concerted actions and efforts of Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, and the leadership and staff in agencies, including within ODNI. In March 2022, we issued a report on key practices to successfully address high-risk areas, which can be a helpful resource as your agency continues to make progress to address high-risk issues.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to your continued attention on these issues, Congress plays a key role in providing oversight and maintaining focus on our recommendations to ensure they are implemented and produce their desired results. Legislation enacted in December 2022 includes a provision for GAO to identify any additional congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations and address any underlying issues relating to such implementation.<sup>9</sup>

There are various strategies Congress can use in addressing our recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on ODNI's progress in implementing GAO's priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act. Moreover, Congress could follow up during the appropriations process and request periodic updates. Congress also plays a key role in addressing any underlying issues related to the implementation of these recommendations. For example, Congress could pass legislation providing an agency explicit authority to implement a recommendation or requiring an agency to take certain actions to implement a recommendation.

Copies of this letter are being sent to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and the appropriate congressional committees. In addition, the letter will be available on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

I appreciate ODNI's commitment to these important issues, especially as the United States faces an increasingly complex and interconnected global security environment marked by the growing specter of strategic competition and conflict. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the issues outlined in the letter, please do not hesitate to contact me or Cathleen

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<sup>7</sup>With regard to cybersecurity, we also urge you to use foundational information and communications technology supply chain risk management practices set forth in our December 2020 report: *GAO, Information Technology: Federal Agencies Need to Take Urgent Action to Manage Supply Chain Risks*, [GAO-21-171](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 15, 2020).

<sup>8</sup>GAO, *High-Risk Series: Key Practices to Successfully Address High-Risk Areas and Remove Them from the List*, [GAO-22-105184](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2022).

<sup>9</sup>James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022).

A. Berrick, Managing Director, Defense Capabilities and Management, at [berrickc@gao.gov](mailto:berrickc@gao.gov) or 202-512-3404. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Our teams will continue to coordinate with your staff on the 50 open recommendations as well as those additional recommendations in the high-risk areas for which ODNI has a role. Thank you for your office's attention to these matters.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gene L. Dodaro". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States

Enclosure – 1

cc: The Honorable Shalanda Young, Director, Office of Management and Budget

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