



DoD INSTRUCTION 4120.15

DESIGNATING AND NAMING MILITARY AEROSPACE VEHICLES

Originating Component:	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment
Effective:	November 2, 2023
Releasability:	Cleared for public release. Available on the Directives Division Website at https://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/ .
Incorporates and Cancels:	DoD Directive 4120.15, "Designating and Naming Military Aerospace Vehicles," November 29, 2004, as amended
Cancels:	DoD 4120.15-L, "Model Designation of Military Aerospace Vehicles," May 12, 2004, as amended
Approved by:	William LaPlante, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment

Purpose: In accordance with the authority in DoD Directive 5135.02, this issuance:

- Establishes policy and assigns responsibilities to promote clarity and consistency throughout the DoD in referencing military aerospace vehicles.
- Designates the Secretary of the Air Force as lead agent to ensure consistency and uniformity of compliance with this issuance.
- Provides for consistent assignment of unique Mission-Design Series (MDS) designators to all military aerospace vehicles.
- Authorizes:
 - Publication of DAFI 16-401/AR 70-50/NAVAIRINST 13100.16, which governs the designation and naming functions for military aerospace vehicles.
 - A DoD-wide list of approved MDS designators and popular names for military aerospace vehicles, maintained on the Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC)'s Common Access Card-enabled DoD Techipedia website (<https://www.dodtechipedia.mil/dodwiki/display/MDS/MDS+-+Mission+Design+Series>).

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SECTION 1: GENERAL ISSUANCE INFORMATION

1.1. APPLICABILITY.

This issuance applies to OSD, the Military Departments (including the Coast Guard at all times, including when it is a Service in the Department of Homeland Security by agreement with that Department), the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff, the Combatant Commands, the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Defense, the Defense Agencies, the DoD Field Activities, and all other organizational entities within the DoD (referred to collectively in this issuance as the “DoD Components”).

1.2. POLICY.

- a. Each military aerospace vehicle is assigned a unique MDS designator. Only approved MDS designators and popular names are used in referencing these military aerospace vehicles in official documents and public statements.
- b. The Secretary of the Air Force serves as lead agent to ensure consistency and uniformity of compliance with this issuance.

SECTION 2: RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1. UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR ACQUISITION AND SUSTAINMENT (USD(A&S)).

The USD(A&S):

- a. Oversees implementation of this issuance.
- b. Coordinates with the Secretary of the Air Force on MDS designator assignment and popular name usage.

2.2. ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

The Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs ensures public suitability of popular names for each military aerospace vehicle before they are announced to the public.

2.3. DIRECTOR, DTIC.

In addition to the responsibilities in Paragraph 2.5. and under the authority, direction, and control of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, the Director, DTIC, maintains the DoDTechipedia Website.

2.4. SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE.

In addition to the responsibilities in Paragraph 2.5., the Secretary of the Air Force:

- a. As needed, revises and publishes DAFI 16-401/AR 70-50/NAVAIRINST 13100.16, which codifies designating and naming functions for military aerospace vehicles. Coordinates revisions with the other DoD Component heads.
- b. For military aerospace vehicles:
 - (1) Assigns MDS designators in coordination with the USD(A&S).
 - (2) Assigns popular names by:
 - (a) Determining popular name options with the DoD Component head concerned.
 - (b) Coordinating the proposed popular name(s) with the USD(A&S) and the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs in accordance with Paragraph 2.2.
 - (c) Informing the DoD Component head of the MDS designator and popular name assignment.

(3) Maintains a list of approved MDS designators and names for military aerospace vehicles in a single DoD-wide list on DTIC's DoDTechipedia Website. Updates the "MDS – Mission Design Series" listing monthly if official changes have occurred.

2.5. AFFECTED DOD COMPONENT HEADS AND PRINCIPAL STAFF ASSISTANTS.

The affected DoD Component heads and Principal Staff Assistants (as defined in the Glossary):

- a. In coordination with the Secretary of the Air Force and consistent with Paragraph 2.4.b.(2) and DAFI 16-401/AR 70-50/NAVAIRINST 13100.16, propose popular names for their military aerospace vehicles.
- b. Forward suggested changes for DAFI 16-401/AR 70-50/NAVAIRINST 13100.16 and the DoD-wide MDS designator list to the Secretary of the Air Force to facilitate preparations, coordinations, and revisions, as appropriate.
- c. Disseminate the link for DTIC's DoDTechipedia Website to Component personnel, as needed.
- d. Coordinate with the Secretary of the Air Force before referencing, in official documents and public statements, military aerospace vehicles in the planning or predevelopment stages that do not have approved MDS designators or popular names.

GLOSSARY

G.1. ACRONYMS.

ACRONYM	MEANING
AR	Army Regulation
DAFI DTIC	Department of the Air Force instruction Defense Technical Information Center
MDS	Mission-Design Series
NAVAIRINST	Naval Air Systems Command instruction
USD(A&S)	Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment

G.2. DEFINITIONS.

Unless otherwise noted, these terms and their definitions are for the purpose of this issuance.

TERM	DEFINITION
affected DoD Component heads and Principal Staff Assistants	DoD Component heads and Principal Staff Assistants whose organization designs, develops, or purchases aerospace vehicles for the DoD.
DoDTechipedia	The DoD Common Access Card-enabled website that hosts the DoD list of approved MDS designators and popular names for military aerospace vehicles, DAFI 16-401/AR 70-50/NAVAIRINST 13100.16, and other related materials.
MDS	The official designation for military aerospace vehicles used to represent a specific category of vehicles for operations, support, and documentation purposes. The MDS system is comprised of two parts: a required MDS designator and an optional MDS popular name, e.g., “F-35A Lightning.”
MDS designator	The MDS designator is an official DoD recognized alpha-numeric designation of a military aerospace vehicle.
MDS popular name	A plain language name applied to the MDS of certain military aerospace vehicles, which aids communications and media references.

TERM

DEFINITION

**military aerospace
vehicles**

Aircraft, guided missiles, rockets, probes, boosters, and satellites.

REFERENCES

- DAFI 16-401/AR 70-50/NAVAIRINST 13100.16, “Designating and Naming Defense Military Aerospace Vehicles,” November 3, 2020
- DoD Directive 5135.02, “Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (USD(A&S)),” July 15, 2020