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FORCE STRUCTURE

DOD Needs to Integrate Data into Its Force Identification Process and Examine Options to Meet Requirements for High-Demand Support Forces





Highlights of [GAO-06-962](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the war on terrorism has dominated the global security environment. Ongoing overseas operations and heavy reliance on reservists have raised concerns about how the Department of Defense (DOD) will continue to meet its requirements using an all-volunteer force. The Army, in particular, has faced continuing demand for large numbers of forces, especially for forces with support skills.

GAO was mandated to examine the extent of DOD's reliance on personnel with high-demand skills and its efforts to reduce or eliminate reliance on these personnel. Accordingly, GAO assessed (1) the combat support and combat service support skills that are in high demand and the extent to which DOD officials have visibility over personnel who are available for future deployment and (2) the extent to which DOD has conducted a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of alternatives for providing needed skills.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense (1) integrate personnel data with the force identification process and (2) assess options to increase the availability of personnel with high-demand skills. DOD agreed with the recommendations, though it expressed concerns about how GAO characterized the current force identification process.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-962

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Janet St. Laurent at (202) 512-4402 or stlaurentj@gao.gov.

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DOD Needs to Integrate Data into Its Force Identification Process and Examine Options to Meet Requirements for High-Demand Support Forces

What GAO Found

Ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have required large numbers of ground forces, creating particularly high demand for certain combat support and combat service support skills, such as military police and civil affairs. After determining which requirements can be met with contractor personnel, DOD then determines how to meet requirements for military personnel. DOD officials charged with identifying forces have not had full visibility over the pool of skilled personnel available for future deployments. For some skills, the combatant commander's operational requirements have exceeded the initial supply of readily available trained military forces. DOD has met demands for these skills through strategies such as reassigning or retraining personnel. However, many of the skilled personnel in high demand are reservists whose involuntary active duty is limited under the current partial mobilization authority and DOD and Army policy. To meet requirements, officials charged with identifying personnel for future rotations developed an inefficient, labor-intensive process to gather information needed for decision making because integrated, comprehensive personnel data were not readily available. DOD is taking steps to develop comprehensive data that identify personnel according to deployment histories and skills; however, until DOD systematically integrates such data into its process for identifying forces, it will continue to make important decisions about personnel for future rotations based upon limited information and lack the analytical bases for requesting changes in or exceptions to deployment policies.

Although DOD has developed several strategies to meet the combatant commander's requirements for previous rotations, it has not undertaken comprehensive, data-driven analysis of options that would make more personnel available for future rotations in Iraq and Afghanistan. A key reason why DOD has not conducted comprehensive analyses of options is that its process for identifying forces focuses on one rotation at a time and does not take a long-term view of potential requirements. Prior GAO work has shown that reliable data about current and future workforce requirements are essential for effective strategic planning, as is the data-driven analysis of the number of personnel and the skill mix needed to support key competencies. With data that link deployment dates and skills, DOD could assess options, including using more personnel with support skills from the Army and other services, transferring more positions to high-demand areas, and changing deployment lengths. Each of these options has both advantages and disadvantages. However, without a comprehensive analysis of the options and their related advantages and disadvantages, DOD will be challenged to plan effectively for future requirements and to meet recruiting goals. Additionally, without linking data and options, the services may have difficulty deploying all reservists once before other reservists are required to deploy for a second time, which is a key DOD goal. Moreover, the Secretary of Defense and Congress will not have complete information with which to make decisions about the size and composition of the force, mobilization policies, and other issues.

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Abbreviations

DOD Department of Defense
OSD Office of the Secretary of Defense

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

September 5, 2006

The Honorable John Warner
Chairman
The Honorable Carl Levin
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Duncan L. Hunter
Chairman
The Honorable Ike Skelton
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Global War on Terrorism has required large numbers of active duty and reserve¹ military personnel to deploy for overseas missions, including ongoing operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Department of Defense (DOD) now faces the unprecedented challenge of sustaining large-scale, ongoing operations with an all-volunteer military force. As operations have evolved from combat to counterinsurgency operations, the dynamic operational conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan have made it more difficult for DOD to anticipate the number of forces and the specific skills needed in the future. Thus far, operations have continued to require large numbers of ground forces. The combatant commander of U.S. Central Command is responsible for the area of operations that includes Iraq and Afghanistan. The commanders, Joint Forces Command and Special Operations Command, are charged with identifying the forces that can be deployed to meet the combatant commander's requirement considering global risks. While DOD has contracted with private companies for a significant number of support activities, Army forces—particularly those with combat

¹ The reserve components of the U.S. Armed Forces are the Army National Guard of the United States, the Army Reserve, the Naval Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve, the Air National Guard of the United States, the Air Force Reserve, and the Coast Guard Reserve.

support and combat service support skills,² such as military police and civil affairs, which reside heavily in its reserve components—continue to be in high demand. The high pace of operations and heavy reliance on reserve forces along with recruiting challenges raise concerns about whether the U.S. military will be able to continue to meet operational requirements in the future.

DOD has identified the need to transform into a more flexible and responsive force by divesting itself of structure and forces from the Cold War era and reorganizing its forces to meet new threats. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report,³ which outlines the defense program for the future, recognizes that the department needs to rebalance military skills between and within the active and reserve components and that the reserve components need to be more accessible and ready to meet a range of overseas and domestic missions. The report did not provide details on how it will accomplish this. Further, as we have previously reported, the department faces challenges in transforming forces for the future, such as meeting increased requirements for high-demand skills. For example, we have reported on problems in DOD's mobilization⁴ and demobilization of reservists as well as the issues raised by continuing demands for reserve personnel to deploy.⁵ As we reported in July 2005, the number of Army Reserve personnel that can be deployed under current mobilization authorities and deployment policies is declining and many personnel have been moved among units to tailor forces and fill shortages in those units.⁶

² Combat support skills, such as military intelligence, provide operational assistance for combat forces. Combat service support skills encompass those activities that sustain all operating forces on the battlefield, such as transportation.

³ Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 6, 2006).

⁴ Mobilization is the process of assembling and organizing personnel and equipment, activating or federalizing units and members of the National Guard and reserves for active duty, and bringing the armed forces to a state of readiness for war or other national emergency. Demobilization is the process necessary to release from active duty units and members of the National Guard and reserves who were ordered to active duty under various legislative authorities.

⁵ GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Actions Needed to Improve the Efficiency of Mobilizations for Reserve Forces*, [GAO-03-921](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 21, 2003), and *Military Personnel: DOD Needs to Address Long-term Reserve Force Availability and Related Mobilization and Demobilization Issues*, [GAO-04-1031](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 15, 2004).

⁶ GAO, *Reserve Forces: An Integrated Plan Is Needed to Address Army Reserve Personnel and Equipment Shortages*, [GAO-05-660](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 12, 2005).

Further, we have reported that DOD lacks data that would give it visibility over the health status of reserve members.⁷ We also reported that while DOD intends to move military positions to high-demand skills over time to provide more capability, the degree to which this initiative will make more military personnel available for operational missions is uncertain.⁸ Moreover, in November 2005 we reported that the services were facing difficulty recruiting and retaining enlisted personnel and that certain occupational specialties have been consistently over- or underfilled.⁹

The House of Representatives report¹⁰ accompanying the Ronald W. Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005¹¹ directed GAO to examine the extent of DOD's reliance on personnel with high-demand skills and its efforts to reduce or eliminate reliance on these personnel. This report is an unclassified version of a classified report. The classified report contains additional details comparing operational requirements to the Army's supply of trained personnel available to deploy and examining DOD's strategies to meet the requirements for skilled forces. Accordingly, this report assesses (1) the combat support and combat service support skills that are in high demand for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the extent to which DOD has visibility over personnel available for future deployment and (2) the extent to which the department has conducted a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of its alternatives to continue meeting requirements for high-demand forces. We concentrated our analysis on the Army's combat support and combat service support skills because of the continuing high demand for those forces and examined DOD's process to identify forces for rotations, referred to as "sourcing."

To assess the key skills in high demand, we collected and analyzed data provided by the U.S. Joint Forces Command, the Joint Staff, and the

⁷ GAO, *Military Personnel: Top Management Attention Is Needed to Address Long-standing Problems with Determining Medical and Physical Fitness of the Reserve Force*, [GAO-06-105](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 27, 2005).

⁸ GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Needs to Conduct a Data-Driven Analysis of Active Military Personnel Levels Required to Implement the Defense Strategy*, [GAO-05-200](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 1, 2005).

⁹ GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Needs Action Plan to Address Enlisted Personnel Recruitment and Retention Challenges*, [GAO-06-134](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 17, 2005).

¹⁰ H.R. Rep. No. 108-491 at 305.

¹¹ Pub. L. No. 108-375 (2004).

U.S. Special Operations Command and examined how requirements from U.S. Central Command have been met for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, we observed Department of the Army and Joint Staff conferences to understand how the department made decisions when identifying support forces for these operations. To assess what forces remain available to meet future requirements, we examined documents provided by the Joint Staff, the U.S. Joint Forces Command, the Army, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), and we discussed with responsible officials the challenges they face in identifying forces for deployment. To assess the extent to which DOD has analyzed alternatives that will allow it to continue to meet requirements for support forces, we reviewed our work on human capital management, identified and examined DOD's initiatives to assess alternatives, and held discussions with officials responsible for identifying forces. We performed our review from February 2005 through June 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. We determined that the data used were sufficiently reliable for our objectives and in the context in which the data are presented. Further information on our scope and methodology appears in appendix I.

Results in Brief

Ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have created continuing high demand for certain combat support and combat service support skills, including military police, engineering, and civil affairs, and officials charged with sourcing future rotations have a limited view of what personnel remain available for future rotations. Many of the high demand skills reside heavily in the reserve component. However, the partial mobilization authority and DOD and Army policy limit reservists' involuntary active duty service duration and eligibility to deploy. As a result, the pool of potentially deployable reserve personnel is decreasing as operations continue, and DOD officials charged with identifying forces for future rotations are challenged to identify personnel with high-demand skills who are eligible to deploy. Facing shortages of available Army personnel in some skills, DOD has used strategies such as reassigning and retraining Army and other service personnel to meet the combatant commander's requirements. To identify personnel who were available to deploy and could be reassigned or retrained, officials charged with identifying personnel for future rotations needed information from across the services on personnel deployments and skills that was not readily available. Lacking integrated, comprehensive personnel data, these officials developed a labor-intensive process of holding a series of conferences where service representatives and others came together to discuss what forces were available to meet operational requirements

based on data gathered from various sources. However, our review of this process showed that the data used were not comprehensive and did not provide a complete picture of what forces were available across the services to meet the requirements. For example, while the Army Reserve and National Guard had data that identified available units, the data did not provide complete information on how many individuals remained deployable or had the required skills. While DOD is taking steps to link data on individual's deployments and skill sets in its new defense readiness reporting system that could be helpful in making decisions about forces for future rotations, these data have not yet been integrated with DOD's process for meeting combatant commander requirements. Until DOD systematically integrates reliable personnel data into its process for identifying forces, it will continue to have limited information with which to efficiently match available forces with the combatant commander's requirements and will not have analytical bases for requesting changes in or exceptions to deployment policies if needed.

Although DOD has examined some options for supporting future rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan, such as identifying personnel who can be retrained in high-demand skills, it has not undertaken a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of options based on complete and reliable data. A key reason why DOD has not undertaken a comprehensive analysis is that DOD's process for identifying forces was created to meet the combatant commander's specific requirements for the next rotation cycle and does not take a long-term view of forces that might be required in the future. Our prior work on human capital management demonstrates the need for strategic workforce planning, especially when the environment has changed significantly.¹² The Army's changing mission from combat to counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan represents just such a change. Further, data-driven analyses of the appropriate number of personnel and mix of personnel to support key competencies are critical components in building a strategic workforce plan. To meet operational requirements, DOD has used strategies such as soliciting volunteers and retraining personnel; however, with comprehensive data it could assess other options, such as transferring more positions to high-demand areas, changing deployment lengths, and increasing the size of the force. Each of these options has both advantages and disadvantages. However, without comprehensive analyses to examine the options and their related

¹² GAO, *A Model of Strategic Human Capital Management*, GAO-02-373SP (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 15, 2002).

advantages and disadvantages, DOD will be challenged to plan effectively for future requirements, while considering global risks and meeting recruiting goals. Additionally, without the ability to link personnel data to options, the services may have difficulty deploying all reservists once before other reservists are required to deploy for a second time, which is a key goal of OSD officials. Moreover, the Secretary of Defense and Congress will not have complete information on which to base decisions about the size and composition of the force, mobilization policies, and other issues, and Congress will not have complete information with which to carry out its oversight responsibilities.

To facilitate decision making on how to meet the combatant commander's requirements for high-demand skills, we are making recommendations to the Secretary of Defense to (1) integrate comprehensive data that link skills to deployment data in its process for identifying personnel for future rotations and (2) conduct comprehensive, data-driven analyses of options for meeting potential requirements for future rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan. Though the department expressed concern about how we characterized the current force identification process, it agreed with our recommendations and cited actions it is taking to compile data that could provide visibility over personnel and to conduct analyses of options for meeting potential requirements for future rotations. DOD's comments and our evaluation are presented in appendix II.

Background

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, DOD has launched two major overseas military operations related to the Global War on Terrorism: Operation Enduring Freedom, which includes ongoing military operations in Afghanistan and certain other countries, and Operation Iraqi Freedom, which includes ongoing military operations in Iraq. In both cases, operations quickly evolved from major combat operations into ongoing counterinsurgency and stability operations, which have continued to require large numbers of forces, ranging from about 138,000 personnel to about 160,000 personnel from 2004 to the present. These operations have required large numbers of forces with support skills, such as military police and civil affairs. While some of these skills have been in high demand across the Army, some skills, such as civil affairs, reside heavily in the Army's reserve components and sometimes in small numbers of critical personnel.

Reserve forces may be called to active duty under a number of authorities. As shown in table 1, two authorities enable the President to involuntarily mobilize forces, but with size and time limitations. Full mobilization,

which would enable the mobilization of forces for as long as they are needed, requires a declaration by Congress.

Table 1: Mobilization Authorities for Reserve Forces

Statute	Provisions
10 U.S.C. 12301(a) “Full Mobilization”	Declared by Congress : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In time of war or national emergency • No limit on numbers of soldiers called to active duty • For duration of war plus 6 months
10 U.S.C. 12302 “Partial Mobilization”	Declared by the President : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In time of national emergency • No more than 1 million reservists can be on active duty • No more than 24 consecutive months
10 U.S.C. 12304 “Presidential Reserve Call-up”	Determined by the President : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To augment the active duty force for operational missions • No more than 200,000 reservists can be on active duty • No more than 270 days

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Code provisions.

On September 14, 2001, President Bush declared that a national emergency existed as a result of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and he invoked the partial mobilization authority.¹³ As table 1 shows, this authority restricts the duration of reservists’ active duty to 24 consecutive months. OSD implements the activation of reservists for Iraq and Afghanistan under this partial mobilization authority. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, who reports to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, is responsible for providing policy, programs, and guidance for the mobilization and demobilization of the reserve components.

On September 20, 2001, OSD issued mobilization guidance that among other things directed the services as a matter of policy to specify in initial orders to reserve members that the period of active duty service would not exceed 12 months. However, the guidance allowed the service secretaries to extend orders for an additional 12 months or to remobilize reserve

¹³ Executive Order 13223, September 14, 2001.

component members as long as an individual member's cumulative service did not exceed 24 months.

The services implement the authority and guidance according to their policies and practices. To meet the continuing demand for ground forces, in 2004 the Army extended the time that reservists must be deployed for missions related to Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom. DOD's and the Army's current guidance states the goal that soldiers should serve 12 months with their "boots-on-the-ground" in the theater of operations, not including the time spent in mobilization and demobilization activities, which could add several more months to the time a reserve member spends on active duty. Further, senior DOD officials state that under DOD policy, a reservist may not be involuntarily deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan more than once.¹⁴

Since September 11, 2001, there have been several rotations of troops to support Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Currently, DOD refers to troop rotations based on troop deployment dates, although deployments overlap calendar years. For example, the rotation of troops that deployed or are scheduled to serve from calendar years 2004 through 2006 is known as the 04-06 rotation. The 05-07 rotation is composed of troops expected to deploy and serve from 2005 through 2007. DOD recently identified troops to deploy to either theater from 2006 through 2008 in the 06-08 rotation. DOD recently has started planning for the 07-09 rotation to identify forces for deployments from calendar years 2007 through 2009.

Identifying Forces for Ongoing Operations

In response to the new security environment, in May 2005 the Secretary of Defense approved a new integrated force assignment, apportionment, and allocation process, known as Global Force Management. The new process is designed to identify capabilities or forces to conduct operational missions. The Secretary tasked the Joint Forces Command with responsibility for developing global, joint sourcing solutions for

¹⁴ Active duty personnel are not restricted by mobilization authority, but DOD's policy is to allow active duty personnel to remain at home for at least as long as they were deployed to overseas operations. Because the deployment time to Iraq or Afghanistan is 12 months, the Army's goal is to allow individuals or units 1 year at their home stations before they deploy again.

conventional forces¹⁵ in support of combatant commander requirements. A Global Force Management Board, composed of general officer/flag officer-level representatives from the combatant commands, the services, the Joint Staff, and OSD, guides the process by reviewing emerging force management issues and making risk management recommendations to the Secretary of Defense.

Under the Global Force Management process, combatant commanders¹⁶ determine the capabilities they will need to support ongoing operations, including identifying the numbers of personnel and specific skills required to generate the capabilities. In generating their operational plans, the combatant commanders consider whether private contractors or civilians rather than military forces could provide any of the desired capabilities. For missions that require military forces, the combatant commanders request the forces needed to provide the military capabilities from the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, who reviews and validates the requirements. When the requirements are validated, the Chairman sends the requirements for conventional forces to the Commander, Joint Forces Command,¹⁷ and to the Commander, Special Operations Command, for special operations forces such as civil affairs and psychological operations. The commanders, Joint Forces Command and Special Operations Command, are responsible for identifying the forces that can be deployed to meet the requirement considering global risks. The Army Forces Command, which reports to the Joint Forces Command, is charged with identifying the Army units and personnel that can be deployed to meet the requirements of the combatant commanders. The Army Special Operations Command, which reports to the Special Operations Command, is charged with identifying Army units and personnel to be deployed to support combatant commanders' requirements. The Secretary of Defense reviews the commanders' force sourcing recommendations and approves or disapproves them.

¹⁵ The U.S. Joint Forces Command was assigned the responsibility for identifying conventional forces in 2003. Prior to that time, the Joint Staff performed this activity.

¹⁶ There are currently nine combatant commands: U.S. European Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. Southern Command, U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Joint Forces Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, U.S. Transportation Command, and U.S. Strategic Command.

¹⁷ The U.S. Joint Forces Command does not provide forces for the U.S. Strategic Command and the U.S. Transportation Command. These commands identify forces for combatant commanders.

Army Combat Support and Combat Service Support Skills Are in Increasingly Short Supply, and Data on Skilled Individuals Available for Future Deployments Are Not Integrated into the Sourcing Process

Ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have created continuing high demand for certain combat support and combat service support skills, including military police, engineering, and civil affairs, and officials charged with sourcing future rotations have a limited view of what personnel remain available for future rotations. While dynamic operational requirements complicate force-planning efforts, the department will be increasingly challenged to identify forces for future rotations from a diminishing supply of readily available personnel under current deployment policies. The supply of personnel already trained in high-demand skills and eligible to deploy has decreased as operations have continued because many personnel with these skills are reservists whose deployments and duration of involuntary active duty service under the partial mobilization authority are limited by DOD and Army policy. A primary strategy used to meet requirements has been to identify personnel from other Army skills or from other services that can be reassigned or retrained with high-demand skills. However, DOD officials charged with identifying forces for future rotations have not had a source of readily available, comprehensive personnel data on deployment histories and skills across the services. Lacking such information, DOD officials developed a labor-intensive process involving a series of conferences with service representatives, the Joint Staff, and the Joint Forces Command where officials identify actions the services can take to meet the combatant commander's requirements. DOD is taking steps to consolidate personnel, deployment, and skill data to support force management decisions through a new defense readiness reporting system. Until DOD systematically integrates such data into its process for identifying forces, it will continue to use an inefficient process and make important decisions about how to meet the combatant commander's requirements based on limited information. Further, without complete, reliable, and accessible data that provide greater visibility over its available forces, DOD will lack analytical bases for requesting changes in or exceptions to current deployment policies when needed.

As the Supply of Available, Trained Personnel for Some High-Demand Combat Support and Combat Service Support Skills Has Decreased, DOD Has Relied Increasingly on Reassigning and Retraining Personnel to Meet Requirements

As operations have evolved from combat to counterinsurgency operations, requirements for forces with some high-demand skills—especially combat support and combat service support skills—have initially exceeded the number of Army personnel trained and available to deploy.¹⁸ As a result, DOD has relied increasingly on reassigning and retraining personnel to meet combatant commander requirements. The skills where requirements have initially exceeded the number of trained personnel include transportation, engineering, military police, quartermaster, military intelligence, civil affairs, signal corps, medical, and psychological operations. Many of these high-demand skills reside primarily in the Army's reserve component. Reservists serving in Afghanistan and Iraq have been activated under a partial mobilization authority that enables the secretary of a military department, in a time of national emergency declared by the President or when otherwise authorized by law, to involuntarily mobilize reservists for up to 24 consecutive months. DOD policy implementing the mobilization authority states that any soldier who has served 24 cumulative months during current operations is ineligible for any further activation unless the reservist volunteers for additional duty. Further, DOD's policy is that no reservist should be involuntarily deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan more than once, according to senior DOD officials.¹⁹ Consequently, as operations continue and the number of reservists who have already deployed increases, it is likely to become increasingly difficult for DOD to identify reserve personnel skilled in high-demand areas who are eligible to deploy.

One of the primary strategies DOD has used to meet requirements for some high-demand skills has been to reassign and retrain Army or other service personnel.²⁰ The percentage of requirements that have been filled by reassigned or retrained Army personnel to some high-demand skills has increased as operations have continued. In addition, the combatant commander's requirements for Army skills increasingly have been met by retraining personnel from the other services under Army doctrine. The

¹⁸ This report is an unclassified version of a classified report. The classified report contains additional details comparing operational requirements to the Army's supply of trained personnel available to deploy and examining DOD's strategies to meet the requirements for skilled forces.

¹⁹ The Army's goal is to provide active duty personnel at least as much time at home as time deployed.

²⁰ In addition, personnel from other federal agencies have filled requirements for some skills.

strategy of reassigning and retraining available personnel from other services to fill combat support and combat service support requirements supports the department's goal of deploying all reservists at least once before any are involuntarily activated for a second time. This will likely continue to be a primary strategy for providing high-demand forces as operations continue and the pool of skilled personnel who have not deployed continues to diminish. However, DOD officials charged with identifying the personnel who could be reassigned or retrained to meet requirements were challenged because they did not have information that linked data on personnel who remained eligible to deploy and their skills across the services.

DOD's Process for Identifying Forces Is Labor Intensive, and Officials Charged with Identifying Forces Have Not Integrated Comprehensive Data into DOD's Sourcing Process

Officials charged with identifying forces for future rotations did not integrate comprehensive data that would allow them to efficiently identify what skilled personnel are available to be deployed because such data were not readily available when the department began a rotational force deployment schedule. Until the need to sustain large numbers of forces for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan over a long period emerged, DOD officials did not anticipate the need for detailed information on individuals to support a rotational force schedule on a long-term basis. While officials ultimately identified forces to meet the combatant commander's operational requirements, our review of the force identification process showed that the data used were not comprehensive and did not give officials charged with identifying forces a complete picture of what forces remained available across the services to meet the requirements.

DOD officials involved with the process of identifying forces stated that supporting the rotational force schedule has not permitted them the time or resources to consolidate the services' personnel data. In the absence of such data in the early stages of the ongoing operations, DOD officials developed a labor-intensive process that involves conferences on service and interservice joint levels²¹ where officials discuss various strategies to assign forces because they do not have data that would provide visibility over available forces. For example, while the Army Reserve and National Guard had data that identified available units, the data did not provide complete information on how many individuals remained deployable or had the required skills. Through a series of conferences, officials discussed what personnel remained available for future deployments based on data

²¹ This process is part of DOD's overall Global Force Management process.

they gathered from various sources. While DOD is taking steps to link information about personnel and deployment history in its new defense readiness reporting system that could be helpful in making decisions about forces for future rotations, these data have not yet been integrated with DOD's sourcing process.

The Joint Staff and the services participated in conferences to identify forces for the 04-06 rotation in 2004 when identifying skilled personnel available for deployment became more difficult because of previous deployments, and the Army recognized the need to identify forces as early as possible so that they could be retrained in high-demand skills. The process, managed by the Joint Forces Command, has evolved over time as operations have continued and now involves months of conferences held at the service level and across the department where representatives of the services, the Joint Forces Command, the combatant commander, and others discuss strategies for meeting requirements.²²

To meet the requirements for which the Army could not initially identify available and trained forces, the Joint Forces Command formed working groups composed of representatives from the services and Joint Forces Command, among others, to identify personnel from any of the other services who could be reassigned and retrained according to Army doctrine. The work of the joint functional working groups culminated in another conference, called the Final Progress Review, hosted by the Joint Staff at the Pentagon. During the executive sessions of the Final Progress Review, senior military leaders made decisions as to how the services, including the Army, would fill the remaining requirements.

The process has enabled the department to fill requirements, but efficiency was lost because these officials did not have data that linked personnel skills and deployment availability so that trained forces remaining available under current policies could be readily identified. As a result, conference participants had to defer decisions until they could obtain more complete data. Moreover, the process does not provide assurance that forces identified are the most appropriate match

²² To identify forces to meet civil affairs and psychological operations requirements, the Special Operations Command conducts a series of meetings separately from the Joint Forces Command process. However, for the 06-08 rotation, Special Operations Command officials also participated in the Joint Forces Command process because requirements for civil affairs and psychological operations exceeded the number of available, trained personnel.

considering both current requirements and future readiness. Moreover, it does not provide an ability to make future projections about whether DOD will be able to meet future requirements or will need to consider other alternatives. While DOD has begun compiling data through its new readiness reporting system that links information about personnel according to deployment history and skill set to provide better visibility of available forces, and such data were available beginning in August 2005, this information has not been integrated into the existing sourcing process.

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) has taken steps to develop a new defense readiness reporting system, the Defense Readiness Reporting System,²³ that will link data on personnel availability and skills, according to a senior agency official. The system, which consolidates data from multiple sources, such as the services and the department's manpower data center, is in the early stages of implementation and validation. When fully implemented and validated, the Defense Readiness Reporting System could provide the integrated data that sourcing officials need. However, the information has not yet been integrated into the sourcing process to identify the most appropriate forces to meet current requirements from all the services considering their other missions. In its written comments on a draft of this report, DOD said that although integrated personnel data were not available during the entire 06-08 sourcing process, this system could now provide data and analytical support for identifying forces for future rotations. DOD said that Joint Forces Command and Special Operations Command officials responsible for identifying forces should use the system to assist in identifying available personnel in the future. Until DOD systematically integrates such data into its process for identifying forces, it will continue to use an inefficient process and make important decisions about how to meet the combatant commander's requirements based on limited information. Further, without complete, reliable, and accessible data that provide greater visibility over its available forces, DOD will lack analytical bases for requesting changes in or exceptions to current deployment policies when needed.

²³ The Defense Readiness Reporting System is designed to provide data for managing the global force and assessing readiness for mission performance. According to current plans, the system will be fully operational in September 2007. We did not assess the capability or data reliability of this system.

DOD Has Not Conducted a Comprehensive, Data-Driven Analysis of Options to Enhance the Availability of Personnel with High-Demand Skills for Future Rotations

Although DOD found ways to meet the combatant commander's requirements for high-demand skills through the 06-08 rotation, it has not undertaken a comprehensive analysis of options to support future rotations in Iraq and Afghanistan should they continue for a number of years. DOD has not undertaken a comprehensive analysis because its process for identifying forces was created to meet the specific combatant commander's requirements for the next rotation cycle. Our previous work has shown that in the face of a changing environment, such as that of evolving military operations, valid and reliable data on the number of employees required are critical to prevent shortfalls that threaten the ability of an organization to efficiently and effectively perform its mission.²⁴ However, without a comprehensive assessment of the most efficient and effective way to prepare for future rotations, including comprehensive analyses of various options, DOD will not be able to demonstrate a convincing business case for maintaining or changing its strategies, such as retraining personnel and seeking volunteers, for meeting a combatant commander's requirements.

The Joint Staff's Limited Analyses of Options for the 07-09 Rotation Quantified Shortfalls by Units in Some High-Demand Skills

In summer 2005, the Secretary of Defense asked the Director, Joint Staff, for a briefing on future force structure challenges for the next 2 to 3 years, although the Secretary did not specify how the review was to be conducted. In response to the Secretary's request, in fall 2005, the Joint Staff conducted a study, known as Elaborate Crossbow V, with the objectives of predicting shortfalls of skilled personnel for the 07-09 rotation, recommending options to make personnel available for rotations,²⁵ and identifying risks that demonstrated the difficulties officials face in identifying forces for future rotations, among other objectives. However, the study was limited to units within selected high-demand combat support and combat service support skills for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the 2005 assessment, Joint Staff and DOD officials assumed that the combat commander's requirements for support skills for the 07-09 rotation would be the same as the requirements for the 06-08 rotation, and they compared these requirements to estimates of available units.

Joint Staff officials were charged with developing models that would assess the number of units that could be made available by using several

²⁴ [GAO-02-373SP](#).

²⁵ The study did not specifically identify units or personnel to meet the requirements.

options, including requesting a new partial mobilization authority and allowing redeployment of reserve personnel with residual time under current mobilization authority. Joint Staff officials requested detailed information from the Joint Forces Command and Special Operations Command on (1) the total inventory of units in the force structure, (2) the units' arrival and departure dates from theater, (3) the number of days in theater for the last rotation for individuals in the units, (4) the amount of time individuals spent at home stations, and (5) the remaining time available under the partial mobilization authority for reservists. The Joint Staff officials planned to use the data in the models to determine if changing the underlying assumptions associated with an option would make more units available.

When detailed data were available, Joint Staff officials were able to use their models to test how changing policies would affect the availability of units; however, detailed data were only available for civil affairs units. The fact that an official from the Special Operations Command had accurate and specific information on the civil affairs specialists' dates of deployments and time remaining under the mobilization authority enabled the Joint Staff officials to test how changing policies would change the availability of units to meet the estimated requirement. For example, the analysis showed that if DOD allowed the redeployment of reserve personnel with remaining time under partial mobilization authority, more Army reserve civil affairs companies would become available. However, according to a Joint Staff official who assisted in developing the models, the Joint Staff could not conduct a thorough analysis of other units with skills in high demand because it did not have key data. While the Joint Staff's limited review is a first step, it does not represent systematic analyses of options for continuing to support operations in Iraq and Afghanistan beyond the 06-08 rotation.

Human Capital Best Practices Rely on Data-Driven Analyses to Guide Decision Making

Our prior work has shown that valid and reliable data about the number of employees an agency requires are critical if the agency is to spotlight areas for attention before crises develop, such as human capital shortfalls that threaten an agency's ability to economically, efficiently, and effectively perform its missions.²⁶ We have designated human capital management as a governmentwide high-risk area in which acquiring and developing a staff whose size and skills meet agency needs is a particular challenge. To meet

²⁶ [GAO-02-373SP](#).

this challenge, federal managers need to direct considerable time, energy, and targeted investments toward managing human capital strategically, focusing on developing long-term strategies for acquiring, developing, and retaining a workforce that is clearly linked to achieving the agency's mission and goals.

The processes that an agency uses to manage its workforce can vary, but our prior work has shown that data-driven decision making is one of the critical factors in successful strategic workforce management. High-performing organizations routinely use current, valid, and reliable data to inform decisions about current and future workforce needs, including data on the appropriate number of employees, key competencies, and skills mix needed for mission accomplishment and appropriate deployment of staff across the organizations. In addition, high-performing organizations also stay alert to emerging mission demands and remain open to reevaluating their human capital practices. The change in the Army's missions from combat to counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan represented a new environment, which provided DOD with the opportunity to reevaluate the mix of personnel and skills and its deployment policies to determine whether they are consistent with strategic objectives.

Several Options Exist to Increase the Army's and Other Services' Supply of Combat Support and Combat Service Support Skills

The United States is in its fifth year of fighting the Global War on Terrorism, and the operations associated with the war, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, may continue. DOD planners are beginning to identify forces for the 07-09 rotation. Based on our review of DOD's deployment policies and our prior work, we identified several options that DOD could assess to increase the supply of high-demand skills to support future rotations. Each of the proposed options involves both advantages and disadvantages, and some options could be implemented in conjunction with others. Moreover, some options might be more appropriate for certain skill sets than others. However, without key data and analyses, such as the amount of time remaining under the partial mobilization authority for each reservist, decision makers will have difficulty weighing which option(s) would best achieve DOD's overall goals of supplying trained and available forces to meet the combatant commander's requirements while considering risks, future readiness, and recruiting and retention. Based on its challenges in providing personnel with high-demand skills in previous rotations, DOD will be faced with difficult choices on how to make personnel in high-demand skills available for future rotations. Options that could increase the supply of combat support

and combat service support skills for future rotations include the following:

- **Retraining personnel within the Army and other services in high-demand skills.** DOD could consider requiring the Army to reassign and retrain more of its personnel as well as relying on the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps to reassign and retrain available personnel for high-demand Army skills. As discussed previously, the Joint Forces Command has identified significant numbers of Army and other service personnel that the Army could retrain for some high-demand skills. As of February 2006, the Joint Staff estimated that over 200,000 reservists from all the services' reserve components could be potentially available for deployment under current policies and might be retrained for high-demand skills, and the services are attempting to verify the actual availability of reservists. However it is unclear how many reservists can be reassigned and retrained to meet Army requirements for skills and rank. OSD officials said the department would consider waiving deployment policies for targeted high-demand skill personnel only when the services can provide a strong business case for the waiver. Instead, the department intends to rely on retraining personnel and seeking volunteers to meet future requirements. Joint Staff officials are currently seeking from the services more detailed data on potentially available personnel, such as their skills and whether they can be assigned and trained for deployment. A key advantage of this option is that Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps personnel who have not deployed already have some military skills and experience, such as an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of their senior leaders and knowledge of military roles and missions that could be useful in supporting ongoing operations. In some cases, experienced personnel from the other services may have specialized skills that are similar to the Army skills in high demand; therefore, they would need less training than newly recruited Army personnel. A disadvantage to this option would be that the other service personnel would not be available to perform missions in their respective services. Further, members of the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps could potentially miss training and other opportunities to enhance their careers in their parent services. Moreover, recruiting and retention could be hindered because potential recruits or experienced personnel may not want to retrain for missions and skills other than those they originally planned to perform.
- **Adjusting force structure through increasing the number of Army positions in combat support and combat service support by further transferring positions from low-demand skills to high-demand areas.** Another option focuses on shifting positions in low-demand skills to high-demand skills, either temporarily or permanently. The Army plans

to transfer some low-demand positions to high-demand skills, such as military police. In addition, DOD plans to expand psychological operations and civil affairs units by 3,700 personnel as a result of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, according to the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*. However, according to a senior Army official, the Army is facing challenges in meeting its current planned time frames for reassigning positions because providing forces to meet the rotational requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan has created delays in planned transfers of skills and modular force transformations may require permanent changes in the numbers and types of skills needed. The advantage of creating more units with high-demand skills is that continuing operational requirements could be met with more available, trained personnel. Further, if more units with the combat support and combat service support skills that are in high demand were in the active component, DOD would not face the restrictions that apply to reserve personnel. A major disadvantage to using this option is that the Army could encounter further delays in providing personnel with high-demand skills because, according to some service officials, limitations in the availability of training facilities, courses, and instructors may reduce the numbers of personnel who can be retrained in the short term.²⁷ Many of the Army's skills in high demand reside primarily in the Army's reserve component. Therefore, if DOD's deployment policies remain unchanged, the Army will continue to face limitations on its use of reservists.

- **Changing the number of days that active duty and reserve Army personnel may be in theater for a deployment.** OSD could consider changing the duration of deployment for Army reservists or active duty personnel in theater, known as “boots-on-the-ground,” from the current 12 months. Current departmental guidance states that Army personnel can serve no more than 12 months within the U.S. Central Command's theater of operations, not including the time spent in mobilization and demobilization activities.²⁸ However, because mobilization and demobilization activities require about 3 months prior to deployment and 3 months after deployment, reservists deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan

²⁷ We did not assess the training requirements and associated costs of this option.

²⁸ According to a July 30, 2004, OSD memo, “Force Deployment Rules for Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom,” Marine Corps units organized below the regimental/group level deploy for 7 months and Marine Corps regimental/group headquarters deploy for 12 months. The Marine Corps volunteers its forces as a surge capability if the on-ground situation requires more forces. Air Force personnel deploy 120 days in a 20-month cycle, and some Air Force personnel will deploy longer than a 120 days, more than once in a 20-month cycle, or both. Navy personnel deploy for 6 months.

typically serve about 18 months on active duty. Under DOD's policy, the Army may use reserve members for a total of 24 cumulative months. Therefore, by the time reservists are deactivated after 18 months of mobilization, they have only 6 months of deployment eligibility remaining under DOD's policy—not enough to remobilize and redeploy for another yearlong overseas assignment. If the amount of “boots-on-the-ground” time was lengthened, from the current 12 months to 18 months, the Army could more fully use reserve personnel under the partial mobilization authority. A key advantage of this option would be that a longer deployment period would permit forces to be in theater longer and provide more force stability and continuity, but individuals could be adversely affected by longer tours of duty. In addition, a slower rotational pace would provide force planners, such as the Army Forces Command, more time to identify available personnel and decide which personnel will best meet requirements for the next rotation. However, lengthening “boots-on-the-ground” time could have negative consequences for individuals. If reservists were away from their civilian careers and families for longer time frames, individual morale could erode, and DOD could face challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled personnel.

Alternatively, the Army could shorten the “boots-on-the-ground” time and involuntarily activate reservists to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan more than once. If deployments were shortened, Army reservists would not be separated from their civilian careers for long periods, and recruiting and retention challenges could lessen. However, a major disadvantage to shortening the Army's deployment lengths to, for example, 6 months is that the Army would have to mobilize and demobilize more personnel in a given period. According to Army and Army Forces Command officials, if reservists' deployments were shortened without change to the “one deployment only” policy, the Army would face critical personnel shortages in many skill areas. Any shortages of available reserve personnel would likely have to be filled with active duty personnel, increasing stress on the active force. Further, less time at home for active forces could disrupt training and lower readiness for future missions.

- **Allowing redeployment of reserve personnel with time remaining under DOD's 24 cumulative month deployment policy.** DOD's policy is that personnel should not be deployed for more than 24 cumulative months under the partial mobilization authority or involuntarily deployed overseas a second time, irrespective of the number of months served. However, if OSD allowed the redeployment of reserve personnel the services could more fully use reservists' 24 months of involuntary active duty. The major advantage to this option is that the Army would have access to reservists trained in high-demand skills. Further, changing the

redeployment policy could enable the Army to decrease its reliance on retraining its personnel or other service personnel to meet the combatant commander's requirements. If the Army collected detailed data about the number of days a reservist served in theater and the remaining time available under the partial mobilization authority, it could compile a comprehensive list of reservists who could possibly deploy again and identify the time frames that they would be available. However, as discussed in the previous sections of the report, DOD and the Army do not have detailed data about personnel across the services readily available. A major disadvantage of this option would be that DOD would involuntarily activate large numbers of reserve personnel for multiple deployments. Multiple deployments could disrupt a reservist's civilian career and decrease his or her willingness to remain in the military. Another disadvantage of redeploying reservists would be that some reservists could be deployed more than once in 6 years, which differs from the Army's plan under its force rotation model.²⁹ The Army's force rotation planning model is designed to provide reservists more predictability in deployment eligibility.

- **Increasing the Army's active duty end strength.** Congress authorizes annually the number of personnel that each service may have at the end of a given fiscal year. This number is known as authorized end strength. In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006,³⁰ Congress increased the fiscal year 2006 end strength of the Army by 10,000—from 502,400 to 512,400. Congress also authorized additional authority for increases of up to 20,000 active Army personnel for fiscal years 2007 through 2009 to support ongoing missions and to achieve transformation. However, current Army plans project a decrease in personnel to 482,400 active duty forces by fiscal year 2011. The primary advantage of increasing the Army's end strength and funding associated positions would be that the Army could provide more active duty personnel to meet operational requirements for Iraq and Afghanistan, to accommodate the requirements for the modular force, and to help meet the Army's rotational force planning goal of having active personnel deployed for no more than 1 out of every 3 years. Budgetary concerns could be a major drawback to this option. Decision makers would have to weigh the increased cost of

²⁹ The Army has proposed a rotational model for its forces similar to those of the other services with the goal of assuring reservists more predictable deployments of no more than once in 6 years. See Department of the Army, *Army Strategic Planning Guidance* (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 14, 2005). However, as we have reported, when it will be fully implemented is not clear. See [GAO-05-660](#).

³⁰ Pub. L. No. 109-163 at 401 (2006).

permanently increasing the Army's end strength. According to Army personnel and budget officials, in fiscal year 2005, the estimated cost to compensate, retain, and train each Army servicemember was over \$100,000 annually. Further, recruiting personnel to meet the higher end strength levels may be difficult because of the uncertainty of how long operations in Iraq and Afghanistan may continue and whether new recruits could be targeted to high-demand skills. Additionally, the Army would require time to organize, train, and equip additional units to be ready to deploy for overseas operations.

Using more personnel from the Individual Ready Reserve. Members of the Army's Individual Ready Reserve, which is composed of about 112,700 members, include individuals who were previously trained during periods of active service but who have not completed their service obligations, individuals who have completed their service obligations and voluntarily retain their reserve status, and personnel who have not completed basic training. Most of these members are not assigned to an organized unit, do not attend weekend or annual training, and do not receive pay unless they are called to active duty. Members assigned to the Individual Ready Reserve are subject to recall, if needed, and serve a maximum of 24 months.³¹ As of September 2005, of the total Army Individual Ready Reserve population of 112,700, about 5,200 personnel had been mobilized. An advantage of this option is that it could provide the Army with access to personnel who already have some military experience. These reservists could be retrained in their active duty skills or retrained in different skills. A significant drawback to this option would be the time needed to identify, locate, and contact members of the Individual Ready Reserve because, as we have reported previously, the services lack vital contact information.³² Further, based on the Army's recent experience when these reservists were recalled, exemptions and delays were encountered that could limit the services' ability to use these personnel in significant numbers.

Identifying forces for future rotations is likely to become more difficult for DOD without comprehensive analyses of options for meeting potential future requirements. Without complete and accurate data that link

³¹ Individual Ready Reserve personnel who have served on active duty up to 24 months, under 10 U.S.C. 12302, may be retained on active duty under 10 U.S.C. 12301(d), with their consent.

³² GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Actions Needed to Improve the Efficiency of Mobilizations for Reserve Forces*, [GAO-03-921](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 21, 2003).

deployment information and skill areas for military personnel to assist in developing and assessing the options, the department will continue to have limited information with which to make decisions about how to fill the combatant commander's requirements. Further, without a systematic evaluation of options, the current difficulties in providing personnel with the needed skills could worsen and requirements could go unfilled. As the Joint Staff's limited analyses of options showed, having complete and accurate data enables planners to clearly identify how alternative options would affect their ability to efficiently identify forces. Additionally, without linking data to options, the services may have difficulty deploying all reservists at least once before other reservists are required to deploy for a second time, which is a key goal of officials in OSD. If DOD had data-driven analyses of options to increase available skilled personnel, DOD leaders would have a better basis for considering policy changes and congressional decision makers would have more complete information with which to carry out their oversight responsibilities with regard to the size and composition of the force, mobilization policies, and other issues.

Conclusions

Although DOD has accommodated the continuing high demands for combat support and combat service support skills, primarily through retraining and reassigning personnel, the pool of available, trained, and deployable reservists is diminishing rapidly and could leave the department with significant challenges to identifying personnel for future rotations. Until DOD's planners and senior decision makers integrate in the sourcing process comprehensive, reliable data that link personnel by skills and deployment histories, they will have to continue to use an inefficient and time-consuming process to determine which personnel to deploy. Moreover, DOD will be limited in its ability to assess whether it can meet future requirements and to consider a range of alternatives for meeting requirements for skills that are in high demand. If DOD had better visibility over the personnel who are available to deploy and their skills, officials could reduce the amount of time they spend in identifying personnel for rotations, provide assurance that personnel identified are appropriately matched considering both the requirements and future readiness, and better manage the risks associated with moving personnel from other skills and missions to support future operations.

In addition, without an integrated assessment that uses data to examine alternative courses of action, DOD planners and senior leaders will not be well positioned to make informed decisions on how to meet the requirements of future rotations, particularly if rotations continue at roughly the same level for the next few years. To meet requirements for

future rotations, the department intends to continue its strategy of reassigning any eligible personnel the services can identify until all reservists from all services have been deployed at least once. However, there are additional options that DOD could consider that might increase the supply of personnel for high-demand skills for future rotations, although each option could have negative effects as well as positive ones. Data-driven analysis of options could help DOD senior leaders make difficult decisions to balance the advantages and disadvantages for each option and to apply the best-suited option to meet the varying requirements for the range of high-demand skills. Until DOD comprehensively assesses these options using detailed data linked to individual skills and deployment histories, DOD officials cannot weigh what options would be most advantageous to the combatant commander and whether potential negative effects on readiness for future operations would be minimized.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To facilitate DOD's decision making to meet the demands associated with the Global War on Terrorism and to increase the availability of skilled personnel, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense take the following two actions:

- Integrate comprehensive data that identify active and reserve personnel according to deployment history and skill set, including personnel who are available to deploy, with DOD's sourcing process before identifying combat support and combat service support personnel for the next rotation to Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Conduct comprehensive, data-driven analyses of options for meeting potential requirements for future missions to Iraq and Afghanistan. Such analyses should include an assessment of options, such as using more personnel with support skills from the Army and other services; transferring more positions to high-demand areas; changing deployment lengths; and increasing Army end strength, which would increase the availability of personnel in high-demand skills.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

The Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Readiness) provided written comments on a draft of the classified version of this unclassified report. The department agreed with our recommendations and cited actions it is taking to implement them. The department's comments are reprinted in appendix II. In addition, the department provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. In its comments, DOD expressed

concerns that our report (1) does not fully reflect the complicated task of providing forces for dynamic operational requirements and (2) subtly suggests that DOD's flexibility in meeting operational requirements is a sign of failed force management practices. It also stated that its use of the total force, not just the Army, enabled it to meet all combatant commanders' requirements to date. In addition, the department stated that our recommendations should more explicitly recognize and support the use of the newly developed Defense Readiness Reporting System. It stated that the total force visibility our recommendations call for exists in that system and that the Joint Forces Command and the Special Operations Command should use the detailed, individual-level information in that system to support their sourcing processes.

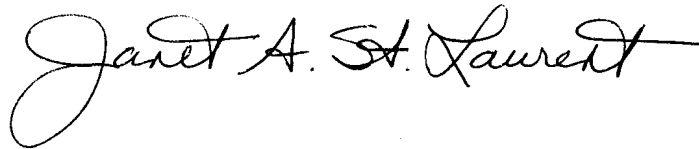
We agree that the process developed to identify forces is very complex. Our report described the process for identifying forces for Army combat support and combat service support requirements. Moreover, our report discussed how DOD has met the demands and how officials used multiple strategies and relied on the total force to meet requirements for high-demand skills. The report does not make a judgment about the appropriateness of the outcomes of the sourcing process. Rather, the report demonstrates that the lack of data complicated the force identification process, and that force planners did not have visibility over detailed information on personnel or how current sourcing decisions would affect the readiness of the force. However, we have modified our report to reflect that DOD's effort to integrate personnel deployment and skill data and readiness information in the new Defense Readiness Reporting System represents a positive step toward providing the visibility over personnel and deployment histories that would be useful to force planners. Although this system has not yet been used to support the sourcing process, when it reaches full operational capability at the end of fiscal year 2007 and DOD has completed data validation, it could be a means to provide visibility over detailed information on personnel to improve the sourcing process, thereby fulfilling our recommendation. We have not modified our recommendation to require that DOD use the Defense Readiness Reporting System in its sourcing process because it is still in development.

With respect to our second recommendation that DOD conduct comprehensive, data-driven analyses of options for meeting continuing operational requirements, DOD agreed that all options should be considered and said it is conducting a variety of data-driven analyses to develop clearer options aimed at better positioning forces to meet current and future operational requirements. We believe that the department's

approach will satisfy the intent of our recommendation if the department bases its assessments on data that provide decision makers complete information on the options and related risks.

We are sending copies to other appropriate congressional committees and the Secretary of Defense. We will also make copies available to other interested parties upon request. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-4402 or stlaurentj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix III.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet A. St. Laurent". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Janet A. St. Laurent
Director, Defense Capabilities
and Management

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To assess the combat support and combat service support skills that are in high demand for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, we collected U.S. Joint Forces Command and U.S. Special Operations Command data showing how U.S. Central Command's requirements were met for two rotations—calendar years 05-07 and calendar years 06-08. Using the data, we compared the number of requirements from U.S. Central Command to the number of requirements that the Army could meet and determined whether and to what extent combat support and combat service support skills initially experienced shortages for the 05-07 and 06-08 rotations. To identify what strategies the Department of Defense (DOD) took to identify forces in cases where demand exceeded the initial supply, we examined the decisions made by officials at the U.S. Joint Forces Command and the U.S. Special Operations Command as documented in their data. We also compared the U.S. Central Command's documents, which identified the specific capabilities and deployment time frames, to the U.S. Joint Forces Command and U.S. Special Operations Command data to identify specific instances where the Army reassigned and retrained its personnel or where personnel from the other services were reassigned and retrained to perform Army requirements. We also reviewed the Joint Chiefs of Staff's analyses of the U.S. Central Command's requirement and the actions taken by DOD to meet the requirements for the 04-06, 05-07, and 06-08 rotations. Since the U.S. Joint Forces Command did not have complete data on how the department identified forces for the 04-06 rotation, we attributed the 04-06 sourcing results to the Joint Staff. We met with an official in the Joint Staff Directorate for Operations to discuss our analysis comparing the combatant commander's requirements for the 05-07 rotation to DOD's 05-07 sourcing decisions to ensure our methodology was comparable to the Joint Staff official's analysis. We also discussed our methodology of analyzing the U.S. Joint Forces Command's data for the 05-07 and 06-08 rotations with officials in the command's Joint Deployment Operations Division. To assess the reliability of the 05-07 and 06-08 rotation data, we reviewed existing information about the data and the systems that produced them, interviewed officials knowledgeable about the data, and performed limited electronic testing. When we found missing information or discrepancies in the key data elements, we discussed the reasons for the missing information and data discrepancies with officials in the Joint Deployment Operations Division, U.S. Joint Forces Command. We determined that the 05-07 and 06-08 rotation data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes.

In addition, to assess the extent to which DOD has visibility over what forces remain available to meet future requirements, we collected and examined the Joint Staff, U.S. Joint Forces Command, and Department of

the Army briefings that document the decisions reached to identify the combat support and combat service support forces identified for the 05-07 and 06-08 rotations and held discussions with officials responsible for identifying forces at DOD organizations. We also examined DOD documents that contained information on deployment policies and the partial mobilization authority to understand how they affect the availability of active military personnel and reservists for future deployments. We discussed the implications of DOD's deployment policies and the status of identifying forces for rotations by obtaining testimonial evidence from officials responsible for managing these efforts at DOD organizations, including, but not limited to, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (Readiness, Programming and Assessment), the Joint Chiefs of Staff Directorate for Operations, the U.S. Joint Forces Command Joint Deployment Operations Division, the U.S. Special Operations Command Operations Support Group, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, the U.S. Army's Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, and the U.S. Army Forces Command Plans Division. Because it did not fall within the scope of our review, we did not assess how the forces were trained or will be trained and equipped or the effects on recruitment and retention as a result of continuing operational needs. We also observed the Department of the Army's conference in April 2005 and the U.S. Joint Forces Command/Joint Chiefs of Staff conference in August 2005 to understand the process used by department officials to identify combat support and combat service support for the 06-08 rotation. As part of this effort, we observed working group meetings that were organized by combat support and combat service support skills to understand how department officials discussed and developed approaches to meet the combatant commander's requirements. At these conferences, we held discussions with officials to fully understand the challenges they face with using the available data to identify personnel.

To determine what percentage of combat support and combat service support skills reside in the Army's active and reserve components, we collected skill set data from the Army's Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and calculated the percentage of positions assigned to several support skills for each of the Army's components in fiscal years 2005 and 2011. In addition, we analyzed transcripts of public briefings and congressional testimony presented by DOD officials. To assess the reliability of the fiscal year 2005 and the projected fiscal year 2011 data on the composition of the Army's active and reserve components by skills, we reviewed existing information about the data and the systems that produced them, interviewed officials knowledgeable about the data, and

compared our analysis to the Army's published analysis. We determined that the Army's data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our objectives.

To assess the extent to which DOD has conducted a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of its alternatives to continue meeting requirements for high-demand forces, we met with officials in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (Readiness, Programming and Assessment), the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the U.S. Army's Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, and the U.S. Joint Forces Command Joint Deployment Operations Division to determine whether the department had plans to conduct assessments. We held further discussions with officials in the Joint Chiefs of Staff Directorate for Force Assessment to gain an understanding of the departmentwide study led by the Joint Staff. Further, we examined the Joint Staff's briefing documents to increase our understanding of the process used to conduct the study, the data and assumptions used during the study, and the results of the study. We discussed the status and implications of the study with officials who participated in the Joint Staff-led study, including the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (Readiness, Programming and Assessment) and officials from the U.S. Joint Forces Command Joint Deployment Operations Division.

To identify other options that DOD should consider to increase the availability of personnel with high-demand skills, we examined DOD documents containing information on deployment policies and the partial mobilization authority, held discussions with knowledgeable officials about mobilization authority and deployment rules, reviewed recently issued reports from think tanks related to providing forces for rotations, and reviewed our prior audit work related to end strength and initiatives to make more efficient use of military personnel. We identified criteria for examining force levels through our reports on strategic human capital management. Further, we reviewed our prior audit work related to recruiting and retention to enhance our understanding of the factors that affect the military services' ability to attract and retain personnel. Our work was conducted in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area; Norfolk, Virginia; Atlanta, Georgia; and Tampa, Florida. We performed our work from February 2005 through June 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301-4000

Ms. Janet A. St. Laurent
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U. S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street
Washington, D C 20548

Dear Ms. St. Laurent:

This is the Department of Defense response to the Government Accountability Office draft report, "FORCE STRUCTURE: DOD Needs to Identify Available Forces and Examine Options to Meet Operational Requirements for High-Demand Support Skills," GAO-06-552C/GAO CODE 350638.

See comment 1.

We have reviewed the report and are concerned that it does not reflect the Department's structures, policies, analyses and plans to balance competing consideration in deploying the total force to meet Combatant Commander (COCOM) requirements (at both the individual and unit level, in both the near and long-term). Through these efforts, the Department has met all COCOM requirements for forces to date.

See comment 2.

Due to the dynamic operational conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan, Central Command's demand for forces has consistently exceeded their initial projections for each rotation cycle. This uncertainty made force planning in each of the Services difficult as they try to anticipate both the magnitude and duration of specific skill demands. As a result, Joint Forces Command—the DoD agent charged with filling COCOM force requirements—used a variety of strategies such as reassigning and retraining personnel to new skill areas (both within the Army and across Service lines) capitalizing on joint solutions in like-skill areas. In every case, these forces have deployed only after having been fully certified as prepared for their theater missions and have performed admirably.

See comment 3.

The report focuses exclusively on the Army and subtly suggests that our demonstrated flexibility in meeting uncertain operational requirements is a sign of failed force management practices. We strongly disagree with this perception. DoD manages and sources its forces globally, not through an isolated focus on any individual Service. The agility afforded by these flexible practices demonstrates that DoD is able to respond to emergent and dynamic operational requirements. We see this agility as a success, not a failure.

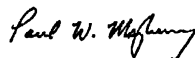
See comment 4.

We agree with the report's conclusion that effective force management must include detailed data and analyses at the individual level. Recognizing the need for global force visibility, the Secretary of Defense signed out a memo in 2004 directing DoD to "...develop the Defense Readiness Reporting System to support Global Force

See comment 5.

Management commitment, availability, readiness, deployment and redeployment data requirements".¹ The data and analytic support referenced in the recommendations are an emerging capability within the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS).

We concur with the report's recommendations, however they need to be more explicit if they are to achieve the effective sourcing outcomes that the report intends. First, the recommendations should recognize and support that the DRRS is the DoD's single readiness reporting/Global Force Visibility tool. The data visibility called for in the report is an existing feature of the system and should not be wastefully replicated through the creation or adaptation of competing systems. Second, JFCOM and SOCOM must use the detailed, individual-level information in DRRS to support their sourcing functions.



Paul W. Mayberry
Deputy Under Secretary of Defense
Readiness

Attachment(s): Technical edits to "FORCE STRUCTURE: DoD Needs to Identify Available Forces and Examine Options to Meet Operational Requirements for High Demand Support Skills," GAO-06-552C/GAO CODE 350638.

¹ SECDEF Memorandum, Subj. "Primary Joint Force Provider", 25 June 2004

GAO DRAFT--DATED April 4, 2006
GAO-06-552C/GAO CODE 350638

**“FORCE STRUCTURE: DOD Needs to Identify Available Forces and Examine
Options to Meet Operational Requirements for High-Demand Support Skills”**

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

See comment 6.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense integrate comprehensive data that identify active and reserve personnel according to skill set and deployment history, including personnel who are available to deploy with DoD's sourcing process before identifying combat support and combat service support personnel for the next rotation to Iraq and Afghanistan.

DoD Response: Concur. We agree that the information outlined above is vital to identifying appropriate forces and, in fact, the DoD is actively creating the comprehensive, individual-level database called for in the recommendation. The Department currently collects data that address the concerns identified in this study. The Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS) centralizes these data and provides consistent, enterprise views for use in force sourcing. These data cover the broad areas of personnel, equipment, ordnance, training, and location data. Specific personnel information includes individual deployment information, Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), languages, unit assignments and deployments. The DRRS Implementation Office has been working with force providers (United States Joint Forces Command and United States Special Operations Command) to develop tools to support the analytic requirements of contingency sourcing.

While DRRS does contain usable information and functionality right now, it is in the early phases of implementation and data validation. The data called for in the report were not available through DRRS through the entire 06-08 sourcing process chronicled in the report. However, current functionality can support ongoing sourcing analyses and must be integrated into the sourcing processes of Joint Forces Command and Special Operations Command.

See comment 6.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense conduct comprehensive, data driven analyses of options for meeting potential requirements for future missions to Iraq and Afghanistan. Such analyses should include an assessment of options, such as using more personnel with support skills from the Army and other services, transferring more positions to high-demand areas, changing deployment lengths, and increasing Army end strength, that would increase the availability of personnel in high-demand skills.

DoD Response: Concur. The DoD is currently conducting a variety of empirical, data-driven analyses aimed at better positioning our forces for current and future operational requirements. The analyses serve to highlight current status and clearer options for

meeting operational requirements. We agree that all mitigation options should be considered.

The following are GAO's comments on DOD's letter.

GAO Comments

1. An objective of the report was to identify high-demand skills, and as part of that assessment, we observed and reviewed DOD's force identification process to meet operational requirements for Iraq and Afghanistan, including DOD's current policies and plans. The report describes in detail the structures developed to identify forces and identifies and assesses major analytical tools used during the process. Our report also acknowledges that the department met the combatant commander's requirements for the 04-06, 05-07, and 06-08 rotations. However, we believe that the force identification process could become more efficient if DOD officials charged with identifying forces relied on comprehensive data to inform decision making.
2. We agree with the department that dynamic operational conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan have made it more difficult for the department to anticipate the number of forces and the specific skills needed in the future, and we have added text on pages 1 and 8 to more fully reflect this challenge.

DOD stated that as a result of the dynamic operational conditions, the Joint Forces Command—the DOD agent charged with filling combatant commanders' force requirements—used a variety of strategies, such as reassigning and retraining personnel to new skill areas (both within the Army and across service lines), capitalizing on joint solutions in like skill areas. According to DOD's comments, in every case, these forces have deployed only after having been fully certified as prepared for their theater missions and have performed admirably. Our report extensively described the process for identifying forces for Army combat support and combat service support requirements and illustrated in detail how DOD officials used multiple strategies to meet requirements for high-demand skills. Assessing the appropriateness of sourcing outcomes and how the forces were trained were outside the scope of this review.

3. Our review focused on the Army because of the high-demand skills that were found predominantly in the Army, such as military police and civil affairs. We disagree that our report implies that DOD's flexibility in meeting uncertain operational requirements is a sign of failed force management. We point out, however, that as rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan have continued to require large numbers of ground forces, data demonstrate that the number of available, trained Army personnel

has declined. According to DOD officials, strategies to meet combatant commander requirements, such as reassigning and retraining personnel, present their own challenges, such as costs for new training. Further, while our draft report recognizes the overall Global Force Management process, it focuses on the part of that process that identifies deployable personnel and develops strategies to meet the combatant commander's force requirements using available personnel.

4. We believe that the Defense Readiness Reporting System could be a mechanism to provide force planners the visibility they need when it is fully operational. We have updated our report to reflect the status of the system; however, we did not assess the data reliability of that system.
5. We do not make a recommendation as to what system DOD could use to supply force planners with the data they need for visibility over personnel skills and deployment histories. If the department decides to use the Defense Readiness Reporting System, it should be integrated into the force identification process.
6. See the Agency Comments and Our Evaluation section.

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

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Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Margaret Morgan, Assistant Director; Deborah Colantonio; Susan Ditto; Nicole Harms; Whitney Havens; Catherine Humphries; James Lawson; David Marroni; Kevin O'Neill; Masha Pastuhov-Pastein; Jason Porter; and Rebecca Shea made major contributions to this report.

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