MILITARY PERSONNEL

Reserve Components Need Guidance to Accurately and Consistently Account for Volunteers on Active Duty for Operational Support

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) and Congress have expressed concern with the frequency and length of time that volunteer reservists serve on active duty. In fiscal year 2006, DOD nearly doubled its fiscal year 2005 estimate for the total maximum levels of reservists volunteering to be on active duty for operational support, as shown in the table. Congress required GAO to review the reasons behind the increases and expressed an interest in understanding which reservists were being included or excluded from these numbers. In this report, GAO (1) identified the factors that led to the increase in DOD's requests for the maximum number of volunteer reserve personnel authorized to be on active duty for operational support since DOD's initial request in fiscal year 2005 and (2) assessed the extent to which the reserve components have consistently reported the number of reservists serving in an operational support capacity since 2005. In conducting this review, GAO analyzed agency documents and interviewed DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD and the reserve components develop guidance to clarify and consistently define the categories of operational support that should be included in the reported amounts. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with the recommendation.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-93.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek Stewart at (202) 512-5559 or stewardt@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

DOD's requested authorization levels for reserve personnel voluntarily on active duty for operational support grew substantially between fiscal years 2005 and 2006 for two reasons. First, when developing its fiscal year 2005 estimate, DOD used data reported annually that excluded some reservists serving in operational support capacities. Second, the definition of operational support was not included with the legislation and DOD did not distribute an official definition until 6 months after the fiscal year 2005 authorized levels were in place. Based on the published definition and greater outreach to personnel responsible for monitoring the number of volunteers for this type of active duty, most reserve components submitted higher estimates for maximum levels for fiscal year 2006. DOD submitted the same estimates in fiscal year 2007 as fiscal year 2006 because the number of volunteers did not change greatly.

The reserve components have not been consistently identifying the number of reservists serving in an operational support capacity since this monthly reporting requirement was adopted in fiscal year 2005. The reserve components are inconsistently including certain categories of personnel in their reported numbers. For example, two of the six reserve components do not include personnel serving as voluntarily recalled retired reservists in their reported totals, even though this category is listed in DOD's definition of operational support. In addition, only three of the six components include reservists serving on extended active duty missions in their reported numbers. GAO also found that the Navy Reserve erroneously submitted cumulative amounts instead of the highest amount of volunteer reservists each month for 6 months, so that it appeared to exceed its maximum authorized level three times. DOD is implementing a change to its Defense Manpower and Data Center to systematically generate the highest count of reservists each month, but the effectiveness of this change depends on whether the components update and align their policies and systems to provide these data. DOD is in the process of developing an instruction and only four of the reserve components have updated or have plans to update their guidance to clarify and consistently define what categories to include when accounting for these operational support reservists. Without updating and aligning their guidance, inconsistencies and errors in the reported numbers of operational support reservists may continue.

Maximum Authorized Number of Active Duty Reserve Personnel for Operational Support from Fiscal Years 2005 to 2006

Maximum number of reservists authorized	Fiscal year 2005	Fiscal year 2006	Difference	Percentage change
Army Reserve	5,000	13,000	8,000	160%
Army National Guard	10,300	17,000	6,700	65%
Navy Reserve	6,200	6,200	0	0%
Marine Corps Reserve	2,500	3,000	500	20%
Air National Guard	10,100	16,000	5,900	58%
Air Force Reserve	3,600	14,000	10,400	289%
Total	**37,700**	**69,200**	**31,500**	**84%**

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

United States Government Accountability Office