



Highlights of [GAO-06-812](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Since the Global War on Terrorism, the Department of Defense (DOD) has taken steps to expand the role of the United States Special Operations Command (Command) and its forces. In response, the Command has transformed its headquarters to coordinate counterterrorism activities, and DOD has increased funding and the number of special operations forces positions. Given the expanded mission, it is critical that the Command has personnel with the right knowledge and skill sets. GAO was asked to assess: (1) whether the Command has determined all of the personnel requirements needed to meet its expanded role; (2) the progress and challenges in meeting growth goals; and (3) any effect of deployments on the Command's ability to provide trained forces, and the progress made in managing deployments. GAO performed its work at the Special Operations Command and its service components, analyzed personnel data against requirements, and examined policies and directives.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to improve the information available to the Special Operations Command to manage special operations forces personnel.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD concurred or partially concurred with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-812.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role

What GAO Found

Although DOD plans to significantly increase the number of special operations forces personnel, the Special Operations Command has not yet fully determined all of the personnel requirements needed to meet its expanded mission. While it has determined the number of personnel needed to increase its number of warfighter units, it has not completed analyses to determine (a) how many headquarters staff are needed to train and equip these additional warfighters or (b) how many headquarters staff are needed to plan and synchronize global actions against terrorist networks—a new mission for the Command. DOD plans to begin increasing the number of headquarters positions and has requested funds for these positions in its fiscal year 2007 budget request. Until these analyses are completed, the Special Operations Command cannot provide assurances to the Secretary of Defense and the Congress that currently planned growth in the number of personnel for the Command's headquarters will meet, exceed, or fall short of the requirements needed to address the Command's expanded mission.

The military services and the Special Operations Command have made progress since fiscal year 2000 in recruiting, training, and retaining special operations forces personnel, but they must overcome persistently low personnel inventory levels and insufficient numbers of newly trained personnel, in certain specialties, to meet DOD's plan to increase the number of special operations forces. In addition, GAO's review of the service components' annual reports required by the Special Operations Command shows that the reports have not provided the information needed to determine whether they have enough personnel to meet current and future requirements. Without such information, the Command will be unable to determine whether the service components' human capital management approaches, including recruiting, training, and retention strategies, will be effective in meeting the planned growth targets.

Since fiscal year 2000, the number of special operations forces personnel deployed for operations has greatly increased, and the number deployed for training has simultaneously decreased. The Special Operations Command has taken action to manage the challenge of increased deployments; in August 2005, it began requiring active duty personnel to remain at least an equal amount of time at home as deployed. But the Command's service components have not consistently or fully implemented this policy. This is because the policy lacks clear guidance on the length of time that the components must ensure that personnel remain within the deployment policy guidelines. In addition, officials with the Command's Army and Navy service components expressed concerns regarding the reliability of their information required to track the deployments of their personnel. Without consistent and reliable data, the Special Operations Command does not have the information it needs to effectively manage the personnel deployments of special operations forces, which affects its ability to maintain the readiness, retention, and training of these personnel.