



Highlights of [GAO-07-549](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has frequently been involved in stability and/or reconstruction operations that typically last 5 to 8 years and surpass combat operations in the cost of human lives and dollars. A 2005 presidential directive requires DOD and State to integrate stability activities with military contingency plans. GAO was asked to address (1) DOD's approach to enhance stability operations capabilities, and challenges that have emerged in implementing its approach; (2) DOD planning for stability operations and the extent of interagency involvement; and (3) the extent to which DOD is applying lessons learned in future plans. To address these issues, GAO assessed DOD policy and planning documents, reviewed planning efforts at three combatant commands, and evaluated DOD's use of lessons learned. GAO is also conducting a related study of the Department of State's efforts to lead and coordinate stability operations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends DOD take several actions to improve its approach to stability operations and interagency planning. DOD partially agreed with GAO's recommendations, but did not specify actions it would take to address them. Therefore, GAO recommends Congress require DOD to develop an action plan and report annually on its efforts to address GAO recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-549.

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

MILITARY OPERATIONS

Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning

What GAO Found

DOD has taken several steps to improve planning for stability operations, but faces challenges in developing capabilities and measures of effectiveness, integrating the contributions of non-DOD agencies into military contingency plans, and incorporating lessons learned into future plans. These challenges may hinder DOD's ability to develop sound plans. Since November 2005, the department issued a new policy, expanded its military planning guidance, and defined a joint operating concept to help guide DOD planning for the next 15–20 years. These steps reflect a fundamental shift in DOD's policy because they elevate stability operations as a core mission comparable to combat operations and emphasize that military and civilian efforts must be integrated. However, DOD has yet to identify and prioritize the full range of capabilities needed for stability operations because DOD has not provided clear guidance on how and when to accomplish this task. As a result, the services are pursuing initiatives to address capability shortfalls that may not reflect the comprehensive set of capabilities that will be needed by combatant commanders to effectively accomplish stability operations in the future. Similarly, DOD has made limited progress in developing measures of effectiveness because of weaknesses in DOD's guidance.

DOD is taking steps to develop more comprehensive military plans related to stability operations, but it has not established adequate mechanisms to facilitate and encourage interagency participation in its planning efforts. At the combatant commands, DOD has established working groups with representatives from several key organizations, but these groups and other outreach efforts by the commanders have had limited effect. Three factors cause this limited and inconsistent interagency participation in DOD's planning process: (1) DOD has not provided specific guidance to commanders on how to integrate planning with non-DOD organizations, (2) DOD practices inhibit sharing of planning information, and (3) DOD and non-DOD organizations lack a full understanding of each other's planning processes, and non-DOD organizations have had a limited capacity to participate in DOD's full range of planning activities.

Although DOD collects lessons learned from past operations, planners are not consistently using this information as they develop future contingency plans. At all levels within the department, GAO found that information from current and past operations are being captured and incorporated into various databases. However, planners are not consistently using this information because (1) DOD's guidance for incorporating lessons into its plans is outdated and does not specifically require planners to take this step, (2) accessing lessons-learned databases is cumbersome, and (3) the review process does not evaluate the extent to which lessons learned are incorporated into specific plans.