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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-670](#), 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

The way in which the federal government views the defense of the United States has dramatically changed since September 11, 2001. Consequently, the Department of Defense (DOD) has adjusted its strategic and operational focus to encompass not only traditional military concerns posed by hostile states overseas but also the asymmetric threats directed at our homeland by both terrorists and hostile states.

GAO was asked to review DOD's domestic missions, including (1) how DOD's military and nonmilitary missions differ; (2) how DOD's military and nonmilitary missions have changed since September 11, 2001; (3) how the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act affects DOD's nonmilitary missions; and (4) the extent to which DOD's organizations, plans, and forces are adequate for domestic military missions and the consequent sustainability of the current mission approach.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD assess domestic military mission requirements and determine what steps should be taken to structure U.S. forces to better accomplish domestic military missions while maintaining proficiency for overseas combat missions. DOD generally concurred with the need to do an assessment that is expressed in our recommendation.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-670.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Raymond J. Decker at (202) 512-6020 or deckerr@gao.gov.

HOMELAND DEFENSE

DOD Needs to Assess the Structure of U.S. Forces for Domestic Military Missions

What GAO Found

DOD's military and nonmilitary missions differ in terms of roles, duration, acceptance, and capabilities normally employed.

The threat of terrorism has altered some military operations. For example, as of September 11, 2001, the North American Aerospace Defense Command orders combat air patrols over U.S. cities to prevent terrorist attacks.

The 1878 Posse Comitatus Act prohibits the direct use of federal military troops in domestic civilian law enforcement, except where authorized by the Constitution or acts of Congress. Congress has expressly authorized the use of the military in certain situations such as to assist with terrorist incidents involving weapons of mass destruction.

DOD has established new organizations (such as U.S. Northern Command) and implemented a campaign plan for domestic military missions, but it has not evaluated or adjusted its force structure. GAO did not assess the adequacy of the new organizations or the campaign plan because the organizations were not yet fully operational, and the campaign plan was only recently completed. DOD's force structure is not well tailored to perform domestic military missions and may not be able to sustain the high pace of operations that preceded and followed the attacks on September 11, 2001. While on domestic military missions, combat units are unable to maintain proficiency because these missions provide less opportunity to practice the varied skills required for combat and consequently offer little training value. In addition, from September 2001 through December 2002, the number of servicemembers exceeding the established personnel tempo thresholds increased substantially, indicating that the present force structure may not be sufficient to address the increase in domestic and overseas military missions. As a result, U.S. forces could experience an unsustainable pace that could significantly erode their readiness to perform combat missions and impact future personnel retention.

F16 Fighter Aircraft Conduct a Combat Air Patrol over Washington, D.C.



Source: U.S. Air Force.