



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](http://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](mailto:stlaurentj@gao.gov).

## FORCE STRUCTURE

# 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.