



Highlights of [GAO-05-200](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Congress recently increased active military personnel levels for the Army and the Marine Corps. The Secretary of Defense has undertaken initiatives to use military personnel more efficiently such as rebalancing high-demand skills between active and reserve components. In view of concerns about active personnel, GAO reviewed the ways in which the Department of Defense (DOD) determines personnel requirements and is managing initiatives to assign a greater proportion of active personnel to warfighting duties. GAO assessed the extent to which the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) (1) has conducted a data-based analysis of active military personnel needed to implement the national defense strategy and (2) has a plan for making more efficient use of active military personnel and evaluating the plan's results.

What GAO Recommends

To facilitate decision making on active military personnel levels and achieve greater efficiency, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense (1) establish, as part of the next quadrennial review, an OSD-led, systematic approach to assess active personnel levels needed to execute the defense strategy and report its analysis and conclusions to Congress and (2) develop a plan to manage and evaluate DOD's initiatives designed to assign a greater portion of active personnel to warfighting positions. DOD agreed with the recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-200.

To view the full product, 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.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

DOD Needs to Conduct a Data-Driven Analysis of Active Military Personnel Levels Required to Implement the Defense Strategy

What GAO Found

Our prior work has shown that valid and reliable data about the number of employees required to meet an agency's needs are critical because human capital shortfalls can threaten the agency's ability to perform missions efficiently and effectively. OSD provides policy and budget guidance on active personnel levels and has taken some steps toward rebalancing skills between active and reserve components, but it has not conducted a comprehensive, data-driven analysis to assess the number of active personnel needed to implement the defense strategy. A key reason why it has not conducted such a comprehensive analysis is that OSD has focused on limiting personnel costs in order to fund competing priorities, such as transformation. OSD conducts some analyses of active personnel, such as monitoring actual personnel levels, and the services have processes for allocating the active personnel they are authorized to key missions. However, OSD does not systematically review the services' processes to ensure that decisions about active personnel levels are linked to the defense strategy and provide required capabilities within acceptable risk. If OSD conducted a data-driven analysis that linked active personnel levels to strategy, it could more effectively demonstrate to Congress a sound basis for the active personnel levels it requests. The quadrennial review of the defense program planned for 2005 represents an opportunity for a systematic reevaluation of personnel levels to ensure that they are consistent with the defense strategy.

Although OSD has identified some near- and long-term initiatives for assigning a greater proportion of active personnel to warfighting positions, it has not developed a comprehensive plan to implement them that assigns responsibility for implementation, identifies resources, and provides for evaluation of progress toward objectives. OSD officials told us a key reason why OSD does not have a plan to oversee its initiatives is that they have had to respond to other higher priorities. Sustained leadership and a plan for implementing initiatives and measuring progress can help decision makers determine if initiatives are achieving their desired results. Without such a plan, OSD cannot be sure that initiatives are being implemented in a timely manner and having the intended results. For example, the initiative to convert military positions to civilian or contractor performance is behind schedule. Specifically, OSD's goal was to convert 10,000 positions by the end of fiscal year 2004; however, the services estimate that they had converted only about 34 percent of these positions. By establishing performance metrics and collecting data to evaluate the results of its initiatives, OSD could better determine its progress in providing more active personnel for warfighting duties and inform Congress of its results.