



June 2023

MILITARY OFFICERS

DOD Can Enhance Promotion and Education Guidance for Addressing Indo- Pacific Region Needs

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-106070](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

According to DOD, China represents the United States' most consequential strategic competitor. Given the importance of the Indo-Pacific region to national security, DOD has taken steps to build regional experience and expertise among military personnel.

Senate Report 117-39, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, includes a provision for GAO to review DOD's efforts to ensure military personnel have adequate education, exposure, and expertise in the Indo-Pacific region. GAO assessed the extent to which DOD and the military services have (1) considered Indo-Pacific region experience as part of the officer promotion process and (2) revised officer PME curricula to address security challenges posed by China.

GAO analyzed relevant laws and DOD and military service guidance and documentation related to officer promotion boards and PME programs. GAO also interviewed DOD and military service personnel.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to DOD to identify and measure the objective of considering Indo-Pacific region experience in promotion decisions, and develop updated timeframes and reporting requirements for the implementation of China-focused learning outcomes. DOD concurred with one recommendation, partially concurred with the other three, and described implementation actions planned or underway. GAO believes the recommendations remain warranted, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-23-106070](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or FarrellB@gao.gov.

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DOD Can Enhance Promotion and Education Guidance for Addressing Indo-Pacific Region Needs

What GAO Found

In 2020, the Department of Defense (DOD) directed the military departments to revise officer promotion board instructions to emphasize the importance of Indo-Pacific region experience. Each military service has since developed promotion board instruction language to address this requirement. However, DOD has not assessed the results of taking these actions, in part because it has not established guidance that clearly identifies its objective or methods for measuring the results. By doing so, DOD could enhance its ability to assess its effectiveness at developing an officer corps that meets the department's needs in the Indo-Pacific region (shown in figure).

Indo-Pacific Command Area of Responsibility



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense documents; Map Resources. | GAO-23-106070

Note: Gray shaded areas are outside of the Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility.

DOD and the military services have taken steps to revise professional military education (PME) curricula to address security challenges posed by the People's Republic of China (China), such as by updating topics covered in core PME courses. In 2022, DOD issued China-focused learning outcomes—concepts to be understood by graduates—to be implemented in PME curricula.

However, the PME programs have experienced challenges with the implementation of the learning outcomes, because DOD has not issued expected timeframes for implementation or associated reporting requirements. By taking these actions, DOD would be better positioned to effectively oversee PME programs' efforts to focus curricula on China.

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Abbreviations

ASD(M&RA)	Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs
ODASD(FE&T)	Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Education and Training
DOD	Department of Defense
JPME	Joint Professional Military Education
NDU	National Defense University
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PME	Professional Military Education

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June 29, 2023

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

According to the Department of Defense (DOD), the People’s Republic of China (China) represents the United States’ most consequential strategic competitor. Accordingly, the 2022 National Defense Strategy prioritized defending the homeland against threats posed by China and deterring aggression from China in the Indo-Pacific region. Given the importance of the Indo-Pacific region to national security, DOD has taken steps to build regional experience and expertise among military personnel.

In September 2020, the Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum requiring the secretaries of the military departments to review and revise promotion selection board precepts and convening orders to emphasize the importance of having senior leaders with experience in the Indo-Pacific region.¹ Separately, based on statements made by the Secretary of Defense in 2020, the department directed the National Defense University (NDU) and each of the military service professional military

¹The military services use promotion selection boards—referred to in this report as promotion boards—made up of designated officers who consider and recommend eligible officers for promotion. The military services use precepts—also referred to as memoranda of instruction—and, in some cases, convening orders to communicate information about a promotion board, such as convening dates and selection criteria. In this report, we refer to these documents collectively as promotion board instructions.

education (PME) programs to focus 50 percent of curriculum content on strategic competitors to the United States, including China.²

Senate Report 117-39, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, included a provision for us to review DOD's efforts to focus promotion and PME policies to ensure military personnel have adequate education, exposure, and expertise in the Indo-Pacific region.³ Our report assesses the extent to which DOD and the military services have (1) considered Indo-Pacific region experience as part of the officer promotion process and (2) revised officer PME curricula to address security challenges posed by China.⁴

For our first objective, our scope included Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Space Force active duty and reserve officers considered for promotion to pay grades O-4 through O-7.⁵ To obtain information on required promotion processes for these officers, we reviewed relevant laws and DOD and military service guidance. We also interviewed DOD and service officials to obtain perspectives on the officer promotion process and associated steps taken to consider Indo-Pacific region experience.

²According to NDU officials, the university began shifting its curriculum to focus on China in 2018, following the direction of the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which named China as a strategic competitor and identified professional military education as an approach to support building a more lethal force. Subsequently, in 2020, the Secretary of Defense directed (1) NDU to refocus its curriculum by dedicating 50 percent of the coursework to China and (2) the military services to make China the focus in their schools, programs, and training. Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Education and Training (ODASD(FE&T)) officials stated that the 50 percent requirement was expanded to be implemented at each of the military services' intermediate- and senior-level PME programs—those attended by officers in pay grades O-4 through O-6—and was reframed so that 50 percent of the curriculum content is focused on strategic competitors to the United States, not just China.

³S. Rep. No. 117-39, at 166 (2021). Consistent with the Secretary of Defense guidance referenced above, we examined promotion boards and PME for officers.

⁴Appendix I has further detail on the extent to which DOD and the military services consider service in combatant commands other than Indo-Pacific Command as part of the promotion process.

⁵An O-4 pay grade in the Army, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, and the Space Force is a major; in the Navy, an O-4 is a lieutenant commander. An O-5 pay grade in the Army, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, and the Space Force is a lieutenant colonel; in the Navy, an O-5 is a commander. An O-6 pay grade in the Army, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, and the Space Force is a colonel; in the Navy, an O-6 is a captain. An O-7 pay grade in the Army, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, and the Space Force is a brigadier general; in the Navy, an O-7 is a rear admiral lower half.

In addition, we analyzed instructions for active duty and reserve officer promotion boards conducted from January 2021 through September 2022 for pay grades O-4 through O-7 to determine whether Indo-Pacific experience was identified as a factor for consideration. We selected this timeframe because the Secretary of Defense requirement to revise promotion board instructions was effective for promotion boards beginning January 1, 2021, and we conducted our analysis in fall 2022. To conduct the analysis, we obtained from each military service a listing of promotion boards held from January 2021 through September 2022 for active duty and reserve officers being considered for promotion to pay grades O-4 through O-7. For each board, we obtained and reviewed promotion board instructions to identify whether language was included that referenced experience in the Indo-Pacific region or in other geographic locations or combatant commands.

For our second objective, our scope included intermediate- and senior-level PME programs, i.e. those that are attended by active duty and reserve officers in pay grades O-4 through O-6. We reviewed relevant laws and DOD and military service guidance related to curricula for these PME programs. In addition, we interviewed DOD and service officials regarding efforts to revise PME curricula to address security challenges posed by China.

We also assessed DOD and PME program documentation to determine the extent to which changes have been made since the 2020 Secretary of Defense guidance to increase the curricula's focus on China. Specifically, we obtained and reviewed information papers and syllabi from NDU and the military services' intermediate- and senior-level PME programs to identify examples of China-focused content in the programs' curricula. We also obtained and reviewed documentation from DOD regarding guidance and oversight for the PME programs' efforts to focus on security challenges posed by China.

We determined that the risk assessment component of internal control was significant to the review, along with the underlying principle that management should define its objectives clearly. Specifically, we assessed the clarity of objectives for the department's efforts to (1) consider Indo-Pacific region experience as part of the officer promotion process and (2) revise officer PME to address security challenges posed by China. To do this assessment, we evaluated relevant DOD guidance and documentation and interviewed DOD and military service officials.

In addition, we determined that the monitoring component of internal control was significant to our second objective, along with the underlying principle that management should establish and operate activities to monitor the internal control system and evaluate the results. We evaluated DOD documentation and interviewed DOD and military service officials to determine whether DOD has established monitoring activities for PME programs' implementation of guidance related to China-focused learning outcomes.

For both objectives, we interviewed personnel management officials from the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and its subordinate component commands to obtain perspectives on the extent to which the promotion process and PME have supported the commands' officer staffing needs.

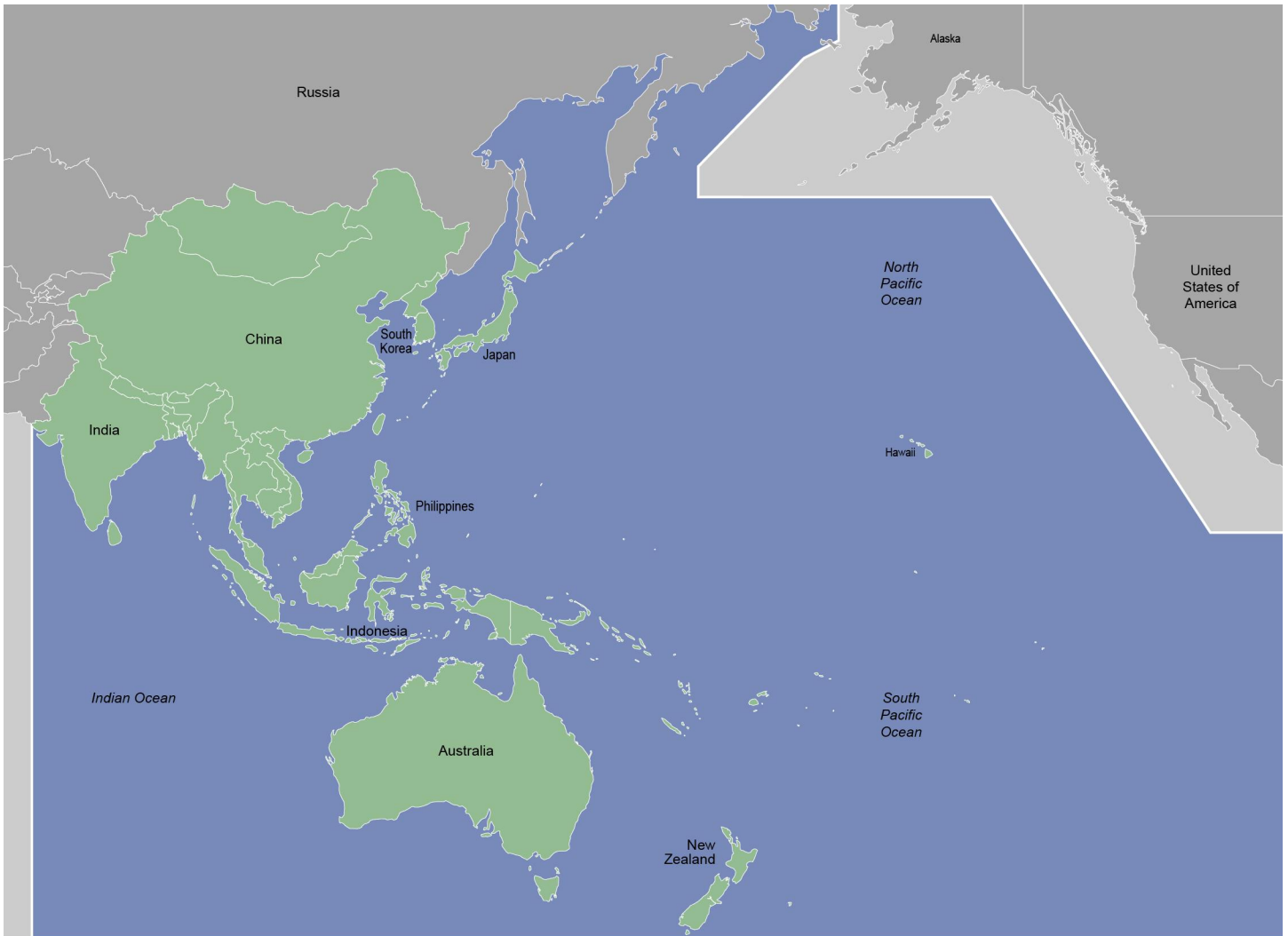
We conducted this performance audit from June 2022 to June 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Indo-Pacific Command

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command was established in 1947 and is the oldest and largest of the United States' unified commands, encompassing an area of responsibility for 36 nations including Japan, Korea, and China. Indo-Pacific Command is supported by multiple component and sub-unified commands, including U.S. Forces Korea, U.S. Forces Japan, U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific, U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. Marine Forces Pacific, U.S. Pacific Air Forces, and U.S. Army Pacific. Approximately 375,000 U.S. military and civilian personnel are assigned to the Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility. According to DOD, Indo-Pacific Command is committed to enhancing stability in the Asia-Pacific region by promoting security cooperation, encouraging peaceful development, responding to contingencies, deterring aggression, and, when necessary, fighting to win. The Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Indo-Pacific Command Area of Responsibility



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense documents; Map Resources. | GAO-23-106070

Note: Gray shaded areas are outside of the Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility.

Officer Promotions

Military officers are selected for promotion to the next pay grade through a formal process guided by legislation and DOD policy, which includes the use of promotion boards made up of members who determine the eligible officers most qualified for promotion. The *Defense Officer Personnel Management Act*, as amended, created a standardized system

for managing the promotions for the officer corps of each of the military services.⁶ In addition, the *Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986* instituted certain requirements for promotion, including that officers must complete a joint duty assignment—such as in a combatant command like the Indo-Pacific Command— prior to being promoted to the pay grade of O-7.⁷ The officer promotion selection process is overseen at the department level and carried out by the military departments.

Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). Within OSD, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness oversees the DOD Commissioned Officer Promotion Program, exercising authorities delegated by the Secretary of Defense. The office reviews reports of promotion board proceedings for compliance with law and DOD guidance and approves reports of promotion boards selecting officers to grades O-3 to O-6. Under the authority, direction, and control of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (ASD(M&RA)) develops and oversees policies governing the promotion of commissioned officers. The OSD General and Flag Officer Matters directorate is responsible for processing all general and flag officer promotions and nominations through the Senate for approval.

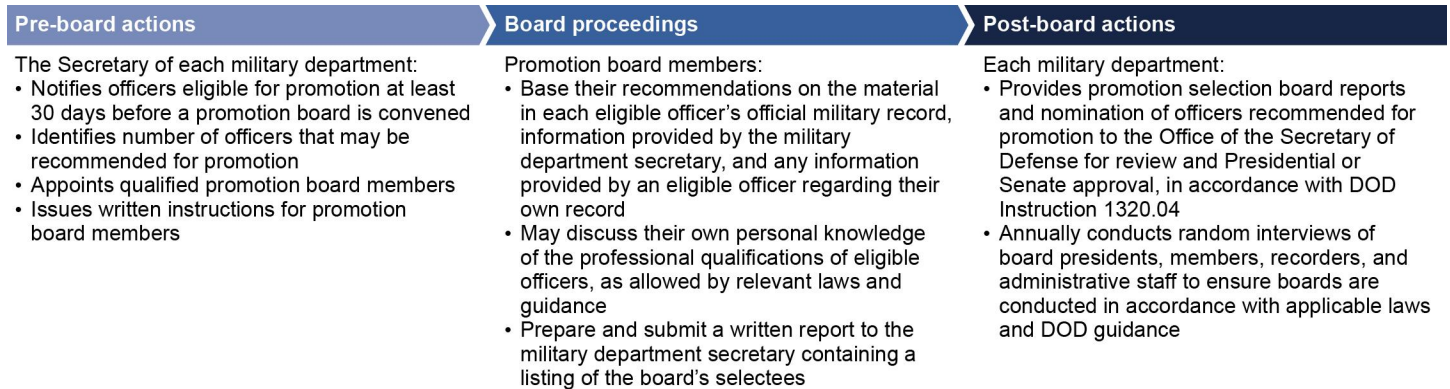
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposes and reviews policies and reviews reports provided by promotion boards to ensure the boards give appropriate consideration to joint officers.

Secretaries of the Military Departments. The Secretaries of the military departments administer each department's promotion selection program. Key required steps in the promotion process are depicted in figure 2.

⁶Defense Officer Personnel Management Act, Pub. L. No. 96-513 (1980) (codified as amended at 10 U.S.C. § 615).

⁷Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-433, §§ 401(a), 404 (1986) (codified, as amended, at 10 U.S.C. §§ 619a, 661).

Figure 2: Key Required Steps in the Department of Defense’s (DOD) Commissioned Officer Promotion Program Process



Source: GAO analysis of DOD Instruction 1320.14. | GAO-23-106070

Officer Professional Military Education

DOD relies on PME to prepare officers throughout their careers for the intellectual demands of complex contingencies and major conflicts that typically involve more than a single military service. The military services are responsible for overseeing PME at their respective staff and war colleges and for educating their personnel in service-specific core competencies.⁸ Joint professional military education (JPME) is a subset of PME that is provided in two phases and overseen by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It is to prepare leaders from all five military services to operate as a joint force, including at a combatant command such as Indo-Pacific Command.

The PME continuum consists of five military educational levels that correspond to the five phases of a military officer’s career: (1) precommissioning, (2) primary, (3) intermediate, (4) senior, and (5) general and flag officers. Within this continuum, phase one of JPME is provided as part of the intermediate phase, and phase two of JPME is provided as part of the senior phase. As figure 3 illustrates, intermediate- and senior-level PME and JPME programs are designed for officers at pay grades O-4 through O-6. Additionally, the figure shows the intermediate- and senior-level colleges that provide PME and JPME.

⁸According to DOD officials, the Space Force PME program is embedded in the Air Command and Staff College and the Air War College PME programs in the form of a Space Force concentration.

Figure 3: Department of Defense (DOD) Professional Military Education Continuum, Including Intermediate- and Senior-Level Officers

5	General/Flag Officer
4	<p>Senior</p> <p>Who attends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior level officers in pay grades O-5 and O-6 <p>Professional Military Education (PME) focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on strategic leadership; the National Military Strategy; theater strategy; the National Security Strategy; and interagency, multinational, and cross-domain operations at the national strategic level. <p>Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) Phase II focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the National Defense Strategy, the National Security Strategy, and the National Military Strategy; joint warfare; theater strategy; campaigning in joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational environments; national and joint planning systems and processes; and integration of joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational capabilities, among other things. <p>Senior-level colleges that provide PME and JPME:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army War College, College of Naval Warfare, Marine Corps War College, Air War College, and National Defense University; National War College, Joint Forces Staff College, Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy, College of International Security Affairs, and College of Information and Cyberspace.
3	<p>Intermediate</p> <p>Who attends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intermediate-level officers in pay grade O-4 <p>PME focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the introduction to theater strategy, the National Military Strategy, the National Security Strategy, and operational art in all domains. <p>JPME Phase I focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the national military capabilities command structure and strategic guidance, joint doctrine and concepts, joint and multinational forces at operational level of war, and joint planning and execution process, among other things. <p>Intermediate-level colleges that provide PME and JPME:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army Command and General Staff College, College of Naval Command and Staff, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and Air Command and Staff College.
2	Primary
1	Precommissioning

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information. | GAO-23-106070

Note: An O-4 pay grade in the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Space Force is a major; in the Navy, an O-4 is a lieutenant commander. An O-5 pay grade in the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Space Force is a lieutenant colonel; in the Navy, an O-5 is a commander. An O-6 pay grade in the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Space Force is a colonel; in the Navy, an O-6 is a captain.

JPME is a subset of PME, overseen by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which prepares leaders from the military services to operate as a joint force.

Over time, Congress has passed and the President has signed into law a variety of legislation affecting PME. For example, the *Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986* as amended required the Secretary of Defense, with the advice and assistance of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to periodically review and revise the curriculum of JPME schools to enhance the education and training of officers in joint matters.⁹ In addition, the *Ronald W. Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005* required the Secretary of Defense to implement a comprehensive framework for officer JPME.¹⁰

In 2022, DOD issued DOD Instruction 1322.35, Volume 1, which established military education policy, assigned responsibilities, and provided procedures for organizing, managing, and implementing PME programs.¹¹ The instruction outlines roles and responsibilities for the following:

Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Education and Training (ODASD(FE&T)). ODASD(FE&T) monitors military education program quality to ensure DOD personnel and their leaders are afforded effective learning opportunities that meet current, emerging, and future requirements. Additionally, ODASD(FE&T) formulates recommendations and guides development of DOD military education policy on oversight issues, including reviewing, evaluating, and assessing service and joint education policies, programs, and resources. Further, ODASD(FE&T) distributes reports on military education program quality assessment to appropriate OSD, Joint Staff, or service leadership.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on behalf of the Secretary of Defense, exercises authority,

⁹Pub. L. No. 99-433, § 401(a) (1986) (codified as amended at 10 U.S.C. § 2152(b)).

¹⁰Pub. L. No. 108-375, § 532(a) (2004) (codified as amended at 10 U.S.C. § 2152(a)). Additionally, section 532 creates chapter 107 under title 10 of the U.S. code. This chapter, as amended, contains, among other things, general requirements for officer PME and JPME, a definition of JPME, and a definition of the military services' intermediate- and senior-level schools that provide PME and JPME.

¹¹Military education encompasses all PME, including JPME, professional continuing education, professional development opportunities, doctrinal studies, and graduate-level educational opportunities at Federal or civilian institutions. DOD Instruction 1322.35, Vol. 1, *Military Education: Program Management and Administration* (April 26, 2022).

direction, and control of the National Defense University. Additionally, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff formulates policies for joint professional military education, periodically reviews and revises JPME curriculum guidance, and oversees the accreditation of JPME programs.

GAO Previously Recommended PME Improvements

In February 2020, we identified several issues related to the military services' intermediate- and senior-level officer PME programs.¹² For example, we found that not all of the PME programs met the JPME seminar student mix and joint acculturation requirements. Additionally, we found that while OSD had taken steps to improve its oversight of the military services' PME programs, it was limited in its ability to assess their effectiveness because it lacked a mission statement, performance measures, and a requirement for the military services to report periodically on PME and JPME programs—such as results of program reviews. Further, we found the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)'s ability to monitor the military services' PME programs is limited by incomplete and inconsistent reporting of service budget request data.

As a result, we made seven recommendations, including that DOD:

- take steps to determine its ability to assign Navy officers to PME programs of other services,
- develop policy concerning actions the military services can take to mitigate seminar mix shortfalls and meet joint acculturation requirements,
- develop a mission statement for PME,
- implement performance measures—including tracking of costs—that align with the department-wide mission statement for PME,
- require periodic reporting of information from the military services' PME and JPME programs,
- require the Marine Corps to include a budget request data exhibit for the Marine Corps War College, and

¹²GAO, *Professional Military Education: Programs Are Accredited, but Additional Information is Needed to Assess Effectiveness*, [GAO-20-323](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 20, 2020).

-
- issue guidance to standardize the cost data in the military services' annual PME budget request data.

DOD implemented two of the recommendations.¹³ As of February 2023, DOD stated it was in the process of implementing the remaining five recommendations. It expects to fully implement these by December 2023.

DOD Has Taken Steps to Consider Indo-Pacific Experience in Promotion Boards, but Has Not Assessed the Results

In 2020, DOD required the military departments to revise promotion board instructions to emphasize the importance of Indo-Pacific region experience, and each military service has since developed language to be included in promotion board instructions to address this requirement.¹⁴ Figure 4 shows the language developed by each military service to address the requirement.

¹³These two recommendations are (1) determining whether the Navy can assign the required number of officers to the other military departments' JPME programs, consistent with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff guidance, and (2) developing policy the military services can take to mitigate JPME seminar student mix shortfalls and still meet the joint acculturation requirement.

¹⁴Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Promotion Selection Board Guidance* (Sep. 22, 2020). This memorandum, effective for promotion boards held on or after January 1, 2021, directed the military departments to review and revise promotion board instructions, as applicable, to emphasize the importance of having senior leaders with Indo-Pacific region experiences. A separate set of promotion board instructions is generally issued for an individual promotion board considering a group of officers, such as those of a particular pay grade or occupation.

Figure 4: Secretary of Defense Requirement and Language Developed by Each Military Service to Address Indo-Pacific Region Experience in Promotion Board Instructions

Secretary of Defense requirement

As indicated in the National Defense Strategy, China is leveraging military modernization and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage. As China continues to seek economic and military ascendance, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that tries to displace the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future.

Recognizing this challenge to U.S. national security interests, the Department must grow an officer corps that includes strategists and leaders who excel in their knowledge of the political-military affairs and U.S. strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

You are directed to review and revise promotion selection board precepts and convening orders, as applicable, to emphasize the importance of having senior leaders with Indo-Pacific region experiences.

Army

Indo-Pacific Region Experience. Recognizing the challenge of adversary economic and military ascendance, the Army must grow an officer corps that includes strategists and leaders who excel in their knowledge of the political-military affairs and U.S. strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. As such, it is imperative that the board consider officers who possess skills and or experience such as assignment history within U.S. Indo-Pacific Command or fields of study on the region.

Navy

Indo-Pacific Area Experience. As indicated in the National Defense Strategy, China is leveraging military modernization and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage. As China continues to seek economic and military ascendance, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that tries to displace the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future. Recognizing this challenge to U.S. national security interests, the Navy must grow an officer corps that includes strategists and leaders who excel in their knowledge of the political-military affairs and U.S. strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

Marine Corps

When reviewing an officer's qualifications for the next higher grade, you should also consider that the Marine Corps benefits when the officer corps possesses a broad spectrum of experiences such as foreign language proficiency and cultural awareness, most especially within the China and Indo-Pacific region.

Space Force

Deployment and assignment information may be reflected in various documents in an officer's record. Space Force personnel who have performed duty in or are performing duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Indo-Pacific region, and other areas of the world have developed or are developing combat, international partnering, and coalition-building skills that need to be retained and utilized for future application.

Air Force

Air Force personnel performing duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Indo-Pacific region, and other areas of the world are developing combat, international partnering, and coalition-building skills that need to be retained and utilized for future application.

Deployment information, critical language skills, and assignments in the Indo-Pacific region may be reflected in various documents in an officer's record. You should not make this a pass-fail item in your assessment. There are officers who have not had the opportunity to deploy or have not been assigned to the Indo-Pacific region. However, a successful tour in a deployed environment, or assignment in the Indo-Pacific region, especially as a commander, provides insights into an officer's potential for assuming the next higher grade.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense and military service documents. | GAO-23-106070

In comparing the language developed by each military service, we identified differences across the services:

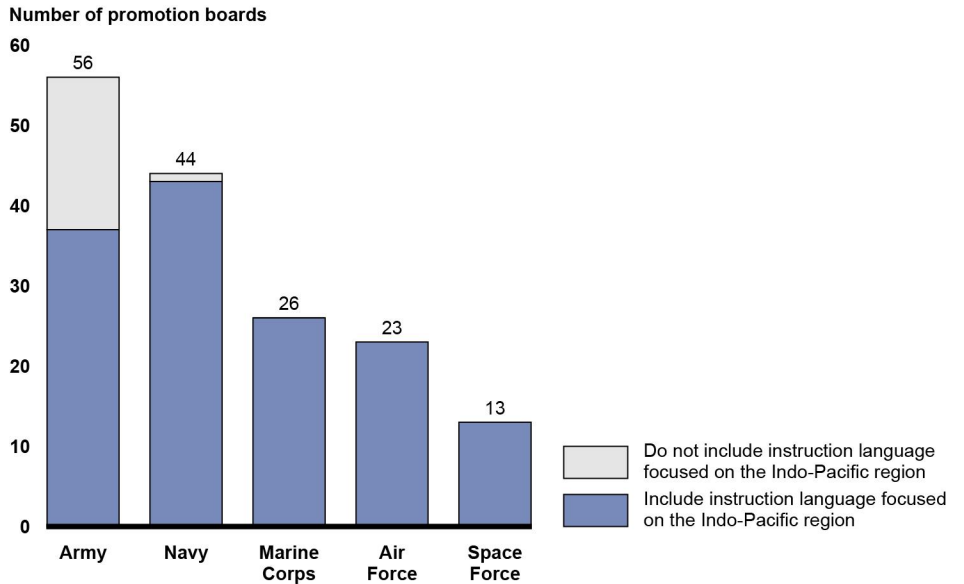
- The Army and the Navy developed language that closely mirrors the language used in the Secretary of Defense memo.
- The Marine Corps developed language that focuses on officers' experiences, "most especially within the China and Indo-Pacific region."
- The Air Force developed language that emphasizes the importance of officers' experience in the Indo-Pacific region, while specifically noting that promotion board members should not "make this a pass-fail item" in their assessment.
- The Space Force developed language that refers to Indo-Pacific region experience, in conjunction with experience in Iraq, Afghanistan, "and other areas of the world."

ASD(M&RA) officials stated they reviewed a sample of each military service's promotion board instructions, including the added language. Although the language varied among the services, these officials said they determined that each service had met the intent of the Secretary of Defense memo.

We reviewed documentation for selected promotion boards held since January 2021, and found that the required language was included in instructions for all Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force boards, 98 percent of Navy boards, and 66 percent of Army boards within our scope.¹⁵ Figure 5 illustrates the number of applicable promotion boards for each service for which instructions included and did not include language focused on Indo-Pacific region experience.

¹⁵We reviewed promotion board instructions and convening orders, as applicable, for boards held from January 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022, that selected officers for promotion to the pay grades of O-4 through O-7. Instructions for one Navy board did not include the required language regarding Indo-Pacific experience. A Navy official stated that the board, while held since January 1, 2021, had been an extension of a board held prior to that time, and the instructions had been signed prior to receiving the requirement to include the Indo-Pacific-related language.

Figure 5: Analysis of Instructions for Selected Military Service Officer Promotion Boards Held From January 2021 through September 2022



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense and military service documents. | GAO-23-106070

Accessible Data for Figure 5: Analysis of Instructions for Selected Military Service Officer Promotion Boards Held From January 2021 through September 2022

	Include instruction language focused on the Indo-Pacific region	Do not include instruction language focused on the Indo-Pacific region
Army	37	19
Navy	43	1
Marine Corps	26	0
Air Force	23	0
Space Force	13	0

Among the Army’s promotion boards, instructions for two categories of boards did not include the required language focused on Indo-Pacific region experience. First, the Army’s instructions for promotion boards considering promotion to the pay grades of O-4 through O-6 among active duty officers in certain medical professions did not include the required language. An Army headquarters official stated this omission was in error, and this official has directed the Army Medical Department to include the required language in all future promotion board instructions.

In addition, the required language was not included in instructions for the Army's promotion boards considering promotion to the pay grade of O-7. The OSD General and Flag Officer Matters directorate informed cognizant officials from the military services, including the Army, of the requirement in September 2020. According to an official from the OSD General and Flag Officer Matters directorate, that office conducted an audit in 2022 to verify that the required language had been included in the instructions for each service's general officer promotion boards and identified that the Army had not included the required language.

An Army official responsible for management of general officer promotions stated that the omission of the required language from promotion board instructions had been in error. After being notified of the omission by OSD in June 2022, the official stated the Army has incorporated the required language into instructions for subsequent promotion boards. The Army provided us with instructions for a September 2022 board that included the required language.

DOD and military service officials cited the importance of promotion board members considering a variety of factors when making promotion selections rather than promoting an officer on the basis of Indo-Pacific region experience alone. For example, officials from the OSD General and Flag Officer Matters directorate stated that the promotion boards' goal is to identify the best qualified officers overall, and they would not want an officer to be unduly penalized for not having Indo-Pacific region experience. In addition, Navy officials stated that Indo-Pacific region experience is one of many factors considered by promotion boards, and that such experience is not a substitute for sustained leadership within the Navy. Space Force officials similarly stated that the Space Force applies a "whole person concept" to promotion, considering a range of factors rather than promoting on the basis of a single factor.

However, we found that DOD and the military services have not assessed the results of including the Indo-Pacific focused language in their promotion board instructions. According to ASD(M&RA) officials, the intent of the memorandum—drafted by their office—was for the military services to incorporate the required language into their promotion board instructions. As previously stated, they determined each service had developed language that met this requirement. The officials further stated that they believe that the addition of the required language was intended to influence promotion board selections and develop the necessary experiences among the senior leader officer corps to engage in scenario planning related to China. However, the officials stated they have not

analyzed any resulting effects of the military services adding the required language to their promotion board instructions.

In addition, officials from each of the five military services stated they have not assessed the results of adding the Indo-Pacific focused language to their promotion board instructions. Army officials, discussing the omission of the required language from certain instructions, stated they did not think the language would have an effect on the outcome of the promotion boards' selections.¹⁶

The memorandum developed by ASD(M&RA) and issued by the Secretary of Defense states that the department must grow an officer corps that includes strategists and leaders who excel in their knowledge of the political-military affairs and U.S. strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The memorandum further directs the military departments to revise promotion board instructions to emphasize the importance of having senior leaders with Indo-Pacific region experience.

Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government state that management should define objectives clearly in specific and understandable terms.¹⁷ Further, objectives should be measurable so that performance in achieving them can be assessed.

However, we identified two issues that have limited the department's ability to assess the results of its efforts to consider Indo-Pacific region experience in officer promotion boards. First, the memorandum does not clearly and comprehensively identify the objective of including the required language in promotion board instructions. Officials from four services stated that the language in the Secretary of Defense memo is broad or generic. Officials from three of these services stated that more specific guidance could be helpful for the promotion boards' decision-making. Specifically:

¹⁶According to officials from the Army General Officer Management Office, that office conducted an analysis of promotion boards held during the time that the required Indo-Pacific focused language had been omitted in error. The officials stated that the analysis showed that more than half of the officers selected for promotion had Indo-Pacific region experience. One official stated the office would not necessarily expect to see an increase in the proportion of officers promoted with Indo-Pacific experience when boards are held with the required language included in the instructions, because members of prior promotion boards would already have been aware of the importance of such experience.

¹⁷GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

- Army promotion board officials stated that the guidance is not clear. The officials added that strengthening it would enable promotion board members to understand how to apply the guidance.
- Space Force officials stated that the DOD guidance did not identify any specific skills or characteristics needed for Indo-Pacific service. As a result, according to the officials, the generic language added to the Space Force promotion board instructions may not make much difference to the board. The Space Force officials further stated that desired skills or characteristics need to be identified to determine how to best address them.
- An Air Force official stated that more specific information on the types of experiences of most value to Indo-Pacific Command would be beneficial.¹⁸

See text box below for Indo-Pacific Command officials' perspectives on needs and challenges associated with officers in the region.

Indo-Pacific Command Perspectives on Officer Needs and Challenges

Officials we interviewed from Indo-Pacific Command and subordinate component command personnel programs identified skills needed among officers in the region and, in some cases, staffing challenges. For example, officials from Indo-Pacific Command and three of its four subordinate component commands identified the need for operational planners within the region. Other needed occupations or skills the officials cited included foreign area officers, linguists, medical professionals, and pilots.

Officials from three of the four Indo-Pacific Command component commands stated that it is difficult to attract officers to serve in the region due to factors including remoteness or isolation of bases in the area and access to resources needed for family members, such as quality education. However, officials from one of these commands stated they believe it has become easier as a result of the language focused on Indo-Pacific experience that was added to its service's promotion board instructions. Officials from the remaining component command and Indo-Pacific Command headquarters stated they believe the promotion board process has effectively met their officer staffing needs.

Source: GAO interviews with Indo-Pacific Command and subordinate component command personnel. | GAO-23-106070

In addition, we found that the department has been limited in its ability to assess the results of its actions because it has not established a method for doing so. Specifically, the Secretary of Defense's September 2020 memorandum did not establish a method to assess the results of considering Indo-Pacific experience in promotion board decisions. The

¹⁸The process for assigning tours of duty, such as to the Indo-Pacific region, is separate from the promotion process. However, as supported by the 2020 Secretary of Defense memorandum, the promotion process can help to grow an officer corps that includes those with specific desired skills or characteristics.

military services currently have processes that can be used for assessing aspects of the promotion board process. For example:

- DOD requires that the military departments report to DOD on promotion statistics related to race, gender, and ethnicity, and the promotion rates of joint officers and acquisition corps officers.¹⁹
- DOD also requires the military departments to conduct random interviews with promotion board members and other relevant personnel to ensure boards are conducted in accordance with applicable laws and guidance.²⁰

However, according to the DOD and military service officials we interviewed, DOD has not leveraged these processes or other methods to assess the results of including the Indo-Pacific focused language in promotion board instructions.

By providing guidance that clarifies the objective of considering Indo-Pacific region experience in promotion board decisions, DOD could help ensure the consistency of promotion boards' application of the guidance. In addition, by using existing or developing other methods to assess the results of including Indo-Pacific focused language in promotion board instructions, DOD could enhance its ability to assess its effectiveness at developing an officer corps that meets the department's needs in the Indo-Pacific region.

DOD and the Military Services Have Taken Steps to Focus PME Curricula on China, but Implementation Challenges Remain

In accordance with DOD direction, NDU and the military services' intermediate- and senior-level PME programs have taken several steps to revise their curricula to address security challenges posed by China. According to officials and program documentation, NDU and military service PME programs have offered new courses, updated topics covered in core courses and electives to focus on various China issues,

¹⁹Department of Defense Instruction 1320.13, *Commissioned Officer Promotion Reports* (Apr. 9, 2021); DOD Instruction, 1320.14, *DOD Commissioned Officer Promotion Program Procedures* (Dec. 16, 2020); Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 1330.05B, *Joint Officer Management Program Procedures* (July 6, 2020).

²⁰DOD Instruction 1320.14.

conducted exercises and war games related to China, held guest lectures on China, and conducted overseas trips to China.

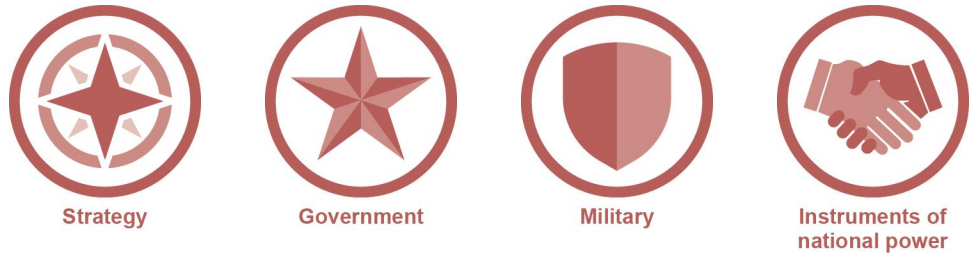
Additionally, NDU and the military services' intermediate- and senior-level PME programs provided syllabi from academic years 2022 or 2023 that demonstrated that their core and elective courses included curriculum content that focused on China. For example, Air War College program documentation indicated that it would offer two new courses in academic year 2023 with a China focus—Introduction to Strategic Studies and Contemporary Great Power Studies. The syllabi for these new courses included the desired lesson objectives, lecture information, assigned reading materials, and any assigned writing or class exercises.

Further, NDU program documentation indicated that the National War College's Introduction to Strategic Logic course would cover several topics and two assignments focused on China. For example, topics included Chinese diplomacy, Chinese cyber operations, Chinese maritime strategy and the South China Sea, China and the weaponization of trade, and the Chinese Communist Party.

In addition, according to ODASD(FE&T) officials, their office provided NDU and the military service PME programs additional guidance in July 2022 that identifies China-focused learning outcomes to be implemented in PME curricula.²¹ These learning outcomes identify concepts students should know upon PME program completion to be successful in their assigned operational environments. Specifically, the Secretary of Defense directed China-focused learning outcomes to be implemented in the intermediate- and senior-level PME curricula that address elements of China's grand strategy, its political system and military, and its use of the instruments of national power, as illustrated in figure 6.

²¹According to ODASD(FE&T) officials, their office developed the China-focused learning outcomes with assistance from NDU's Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs and coordinated them with the military department secretaries, the Joint Staff, and OSD(Policy) during the winter of 2021-2022.

Figure 6: Elements of China-Focused Learning Outcomes to Be Implemented in Intermediate- and Senior-Level Professional Military Education Curricula



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information. | GAO-23-106070

Between July 2022 and January 2023, NDU and military service PME program officials told us that they were in varying stages of implementing the China-focused learning outcomes in their curricula and would do so as part of their routine curriculum review processes. More detailed information on the China-focused learning outcomes to be implemented by intermediate- and senior-level PME programs is provided in appendix II.

However, NDU and the military service PME programs have experienced challenges with implementation of the China-focused learning outcomes. Specifically, we found that PME program officials were uncertain of the required timeframes for implementing the learning outcomes and of any requirement to report on their implementation to ODASD(FE&T).

Timeframes. For example, PME program officials stated that ODASD(FE&T) had not provided clear timeframes for implementation of the China-focused learning outcomes. PME program officials stated that ODASD(FE&T) had originally directed the learning outcomes to be implemented into the curricula by the end of academic year 2022. However, the PME officials stated that the deadline was not feasible since ODASD(FE&T) did not issue the learning outcomes until July 2022. PME program officials stated they have not received updated timeframes from ODASD(FE&T) regarding the implementation of the learning outcomes.

ODASD(FE&T) officials stated that due to the delay in the issuance of the China-focused learning outcomes until July 2022, they understood that NDU and the military service PME programs would not have sufficient time to incorporate the learning outcomes in their curricula for academic year 2022. Instead, the officials stated they would expect the schools to have the learning outcomes implemented by end of summer 2023. This revised timeframe would give them a year after the outcomes were issued. However, as of March 2023, the officials stated they have not

formally communicated these timeframes to NDU and the military service PME programs.

Reporting requirements. Further, officials from three PME programs stated that they believed there would be reporting requirements for assessing the implementation of the China-focused learning outcomes, but they have not received any information or guidance from ODASD(FE&T) related to any such requirements. Officials with the other PME programs we met with told us they were unaware of any reporting requirements.

ODASD(FE&T) has taken steps to collect information on PME programs' curricula related to China, but has not directly assessed the programs' implementation of the China-focused learning outcomes. Specifically, in 2020 and 2022, ODASD(FE&T) collected information from the military service PME programs regarding the extent that lessons are primarily focused on strategic competition, including with China.²² However, this approach has limitations, as described below.

- While the data collection was intended to identify the extent or percentage of PME lessons focused on strategic competition, ODASD(FE&T) officials stated that they no longer plan to hold the PME programs to any requirement based on a percentage.²³ Instead, the officials stated that the current requirement is for the PME programs to implement the China-focused learning outcomes, which is not assessed by the data ODASD(FE&T) has collected.
- In addition, ODASD(FE&T) officials stated that some of the strategic competition information provided by PME programs has, in some cases, been unreliable in instances where some PME programs have characterized lessons as being primarily focused on strategic competition when ODASD(FE&T) officials believe that is not accurate.

Despite these limitations, ODASD(FE&T) officials stated they plan to continue data collection regarding the percentage of lessons focused on

²²Separately, NDU completed an assessment in academic year 2019-2020 that identified the percentage of its curricula focused on strategic competition, including with China. According to ODASD(FE&T) officials, NDU's assessment employed a different methodology than their assessment of the military service PME programs.

²³Based on direction from the Secretary of Defense in 2020, ODASD(FE&T) required the PME programs to focus 50 percent of curricula on strategic competition, including with China.

strategic competition, including expanding its scope to include NDU and using the results to inform a required report to Congress.²⁴

ODASD(FE&T) officials stated that continuing use of this approach will allow them to observe changes over time in the percentage of PME lessons focused on strategic competition, including with China. However, as previously stated, ODASD(FE&T) does not plan to require that PME programs reach a certain percentage of such lessons.

To assess PME programs' implementation of the China-focused learning outcomes, ODASD(FE&T) officials stated that they plan to include reporting requirements as part of the implementation of the department's new model for accreditation of PME programs, referred to as outcomes-based military education.²⁵ However, these officials have not identified a specific process or timeframes for doing so. Officials stated the implementation of outcomes-based education will be a long term process, taking place over several years.

DOD Instruction 1322.35 states that ODASD(FE&T) is responsible for guiding the development of military education policy and monitoring of military education program quality, among other things.²⁶ *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* state that management should define objectives in specific terms so they are understood at all levels of the entity.²⁷ This involves clearly defining what is to be achieved, who is to achieve it, how it will be achieved, and the timeframes for achievement. In addition, management should establish and operate

²⁴Section 558 of Public Law 117-263 requires the Secretary of Defense to submit a report regarding the treatment of China in NDU and the military services' intermediate- and senior-level PME programs' curricula to the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and House of Representatives by December 1, 2023.

²⁵Outcomes-based military education focuses on the output of the learning experience, expressed as knowledge, skills, abilities, and those things graduates must know and be able to do in order to be successful in their assigned operational environments. Each PME program will complete six milestones to transition to the outcomes-based military education model. Upon completion, PME programs will receive accreditation, a quality assurance process intended to ensure that institutions of higher education meet acceptable levels of quality. Prior to the transition to outcomes-based military education, the JPME programs were accredited by the Joint Staff through a process called the Process for Accreditation of Joint Education.

²⁶Department of Defense Instruction 1322.35, Vol. 1, *Military Education: Program Management and Administration* (Apr. 26, 2022).

²⁷[GAO-14-704G](#).

monitoring activities to monitor the internal control system and evaluate the results.

By issuing updated timeframes for implementing China-focused learning outcomes and developing and issuing reporting requirements to assess the implementation of the learning outcomes, ODASD(FE&T) would be better positioned to effectively exercise its oversight of NDU and the military services' PME programs. Additionally, ODASD(FE&T) would ensure that the PME programs' curricula will include required learning outcomes that address China's grand strategy, its political system and military, and its use of the instruments of national power.

Conclusions

According to the 2022 National Defense Strategy, China presents the most comprehensive and serious challenge to U.S. national security. To address this and other threats, DOD intends to attract, train, and promote a workforce with the skills and abilities needed to creatively solve national security challenges in a complex global environment. DOD has taken steps to develop its officer workforce to meet these objectives, such as by requiring that promotion boards consider officers' Indo-Pacific region experience. However, without a clear objective and associated measures, the department will likely be unable to evaluate the effectiveness of its efforts.

In addition, while DOD and the military services have taken steps to focus PME curricula on China, DOD has experienced challenges ensuring these efforts are consistently implemented and timely. Without effective oversight of the implementation of China-focused learning outcomes into PME curricula and related efforts to focus PME programs on strategic competition, DOD will be limited in its ability to assess whether officers are equipped with the skills and education needed to address national security challenges.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making four recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. Specifically:

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that ASD(M&RA) issues guidance that clearly identifies the objective of considering Indo-Pacific region experience in promotion board decisions. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that ASD(M&RA) establishes a method to measure the results of including Indo-Pacific region experience in promotion board instructions. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Education and Training issues updated timeframes for implementing the China-focused learning outcomes. (Recommendation 3)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Education and Training develops and issues reporting requirements for assessing implementation of the China-focused learning outcomes. (Recommendation 4)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. In its written comments, reproduced in their entirety in appendix III, DOD concurred with one of our four recommendations and partially concurred with the other three. In some instances, DOD described planned or completed actions that it indicated would fully address the recommendation, as discussed below. DOD also provided technical comments, which we have incorporated as appropriate.

In partially concurring with our first recommendation, DOD stated that existing guidance—specifically the 2020 Secretary of Defense memorandum discussed in our report and the 2022 National Defense Strategy—emphasizes the importance of having senior leaders with Indo-Pacific experience. To address the recommendation, DOD stated it will explore options to communicate the existing guidance with appropriate service promotion boards and to highlight the amplification of these points in the National Defense Strategy.

The 2020 Secretary of Defense memorandum stated that the department must grow an officer corps that includes strategists and leaders who excel in their knowledge of the political-military affairs and U.S. strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. However, ASD(M&RA) officials told us that the directive to add language to promotion board instructions

emphasizing the importance of Indo-Pacific region experience was not meant to result in an increase in the rate of promotion among officers with such experience. As a result, the department's objective in directing promotion boards to consider officers' Indo-Pacific experience is unclear.

In addition, as described in our report, officials from four military services stated that the language in the 2020 Secretary of Defense memorandum is broad or generic, and officials from three of these services stated that more specific guidance could be helpful for the promotion boards' decision-making, such as by helping board members to understand how to apply the guidance. We continue to believe that by issuing guidance that clearly identifies the objective of considering Indo-Pacific region experience in promotion board decisions, the department could help ensure the consistency of its application across military service promotion boards.

In partially concurring with our second recommendation, DOD stated that each military service has incorporated instructions to their promotion boards that articulate the value of Indo-Pacific region experience, as discussed in this report. To address the recommendation, DOD also stated it will explore options to request that the services incorporate questions about the instructions into their required promotion board exit interviews, the results of which can then be analyzed to assess the instructions' effectiveness.

As stated in our report, DOD and the military services have not assessed the results of including the Indo-Pacific focused language in their promotion board instructions, in part because DOD had not established a method for doing so. We continue to believe that DOD should ensure that it establishes a method to measure the results of including Indo-Pacific region experience in promotion board instructions. The potential actions described by DOD could, if completed, address this recommendation. By fully addressing the recommendation, DOD could enhance its ability to assess its effectiveness at developing an officer corps that meets the department's needs in the Indo-Pacific region.

In concurring with our third recommendation, DOD stated that ODASD(FE&T) issued updated timeframes in April 2023 for the implementation of China focused learning outcomes in PME curricula. DOD also stated that this step completed its actions to address our recommendation. We will review documentation of this action, once provided, and determine its sufficiency as part of our standard recommendation follow-up process.

In partially concurring with our fourth recommendation, DOD stated that a July 2022 memorandum—which coincided with the distribution of the China-focused learning outcomes—provided general guidelines regarding the reporting of the implementation of the learning outcomes. To address this recommendation, DOD stated it will explore options to issue updated reporting requirements.

We continue to believe that DOD should ensure that it develops and issues reporting requirements for assessing the implementation of the China-focused learning outcomes. As stated in our report, PME program officials we interviewed between July 2022 and January 2023 expressed uncertainty regarding reporting requirements associated with the China-focused learning outcomes. Specifically, officials from three of the PME programs stated they believed there would be reporting requirements, but they had not received any related information or guidance from ODASD(FE&T). Officials from the remaining PME programs told us they were unaware of any reporting requirements.

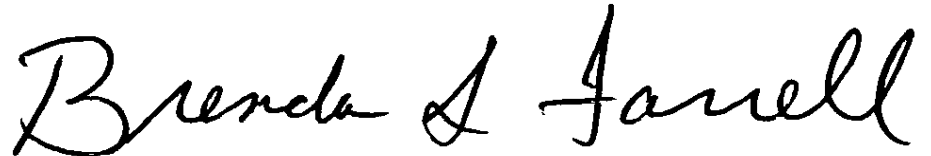
In addition, in October 2022, ODASD(FE&T) officials stated that they plan to include reporting requirements as part of the implementation of DOD's new model for accreditation of PME programs, but they had not yet identified a specific process or timeframes for doing so. We also discussed reporting requirements with ODASD(FE&T) and PME program officials in March 2023, and the officials did not note any existing requirements at that time.

By fully completing actions to develop and issue reporting requirements for assessing the implementation of the China-focused learning outcomes, DOD can more effectively exercise its oversight of officer PME programs to ensure PME program curricula addresses topics related to security challenges posed by China.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Secretary of the Army; the Secretary of the Navy; the Secretary of the Air Force; the Commandant of the Marine Corps; and the Chief of Space Operations, U.S. Space Force. In addition, this report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or members of your staff have any questions regarding this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be

found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda S. Farrell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brenda S. Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Promotion Boards' Consideration of Experience in Combatant Commands or Geographic Areas

We reviewed documentation for selected promotion boards held from January 2021 through September 2022 and found that some military services have included language regarding other combatant commands or geographic areas within their promotion board instructions.¹

Specifically, instructions for 84 percent of Navy promotion boards, all Air Force promotion boards, and the single Space Force O-7 promotion board within our scope referenced experience in other geographic areas—such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan—but included more language or placed greater emphasis on Indo-Pacific region experience. Instructions for Space Force promotion boards considering promotion to O-4 through O-6 referenced experience in Afghanistan and Iraq and did not place greater emphasis on experience in the Indo-Pacific region. We did not identify language focused on experience in other combatant commands or geographic areas in the instructions for any Army or Marine Corps promotion boards.

An official from the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (ASD(M&RA)) stated that the references to Iraq and Afghanistan were in line with prior DOD guidance. Specifically, in 2006, the Deputy Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum that identifies five areas warranting increased emphasis in promotion boards: service in combat, language and cultural awareness, innovation and critical thinking, executive management skills, and equal treatment and equitable consideration in order to encourage service by individuals from all backgrounds. With respect to service in combat, the memorandum states that personnel performing duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other areas of the world are developing combat and nation-building skills that need to be retained and utilized for future application. According to the ASD(M&RA) official, this policy was revisited during the discussion of

¹We reviewed promotion board instructions and convening orders, as applicable, for boards held from January 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022 that selected active duty and reserve officers for promotion to the pay grades of O-4 through O-7.

**Appendix I: Promotion Boards' Consideration
of Experience in Combatant Commands or
Geographic Areas**

creating a new policy focused on Indo-Pacific region experience and was found to still be in effect.

Appendix II: Professional Military Education China-Focused Learning Outcomes

The Secretary of Defense directed that China-focused learning outcomes address China’s grand strategy, its political system and military, and its use of the instruments of national power. The intermediate- and senior-level Professional Military Education programs are to incorporate the China-focused learning outcomes into their programs (shown below in table 1).¹

Table 1: Professional Military Education Learning Outcomes on the People’s Republic of China

	Continuum of Learning Outcomes	Continuum of Learning Outcomes
Learning Elements	Intermediate-Level Education	Senior-Level Education
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The People’s Republic of China leadership threat perceptions and conditions under which they may be prepared to use force to protect or advance national objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The roots of the People’s Republic of China historical strategic world view The People’s Republic of China conception of national interests and objectives How the People’s Republic of China leaders seek to balance domestic and international security goals, political and military objectives, and economic and military development The People’s Republic of China national strategies and policies toward national sovereignty and unification in the context of the Indo-Pacific region The role of science and technology in the Chinese Communist Party’s grand strategy, economic leadership, and military development The critical political, economic, and strategic interest of allies and partners regarding the People’s Republic of China

¹According to Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Education and Training (ODASD(FE&T)) officials, the China-focused learning outcomes are to be implemented by the intermediate- and senior-level PME programs—those attended by officers in pay grades O-4 through O-6.

**Appendix II: Professional Military Education
China-Focused Learning Outcomes**

	Continuum of Learning Outcomes	Continuum of Learning Outcomes
Learning Elements	Intermediate-Level Education	Senior-Level Education
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The basic structure and history of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic of China State The People's Republic of China State's role in managing the People's Republic of China economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The basic structure and history of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic of China State The structure of the People's Republic of China political, diplomatic, economic, and military systems The relative importance of ideology, economic performance, political unity, party-military relations, information control, and repression/coercion in maintaining the People's Republic of China communist rule
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The history and the basic roles, missions and organizational structure of the People's Liberation Army The People's Liberation Army approach to military strategy and military science, the role of the military strategic guidelines and other strategic documents, resource planning, and the influence of the People's Liberation Army expert institutions (e.g., the Academy of Military Sciences) on military strategy and the development of campaigns and capability Key dimensions of the People's Liberation Army modernization, including equipment modernization, systems confrontation and systems destruction warfare, expansion of overseas interests, integrated joint operations, and "informatization" and "intelligentization" Understand the People's Liberation Army thought pertaining to the character of future warfare, including the role and importance of nuclear weapons, cyber, space, information, intelligence, and integrated joint operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The impact of the People's Republic of China strategic culture, the Chinese Communist Party/the People's Liberation Army organizational culture, and the training of People's Liberation Army officers on how the People's Liberation Army operates, trains, and fights The political, economic, regional, and strategic interests of Allies and Partners

**Appendix II: Professional Military Education
China-Focused Learning Outcomes**

	Continuum of Learning Outcomes	Continuum of Learning Outcomes
Learning Elements	Intermediate-Level Education	Senior-Level Education
Instruments of National Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chinese Communist Party use of propaganda and information control • The Chinese Communist Party narrative of the People’s Republic of China political system and economic model as a viable alternative to liberal democracy • The People’s Republic of China use of military power as a foreign policy instrument, including its use of military force, grey zone tactics in territorial disputes, coercion to assert the People’s Republic of China interests, and military diplomacy to engage other countries and seek to dispel concerns about growing the People’s Republic of China power • The sources of the People’s Republic of China economic power and the State’s efforts to use industrial policy, technology acquisition, innovation, trade, and investment to help build the People’s Republic of China into an innovative, technologically advanced, and less dependent economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patterns in the People’s Republic of China approach to bilateral and multilateral diplomacy • The People’s Republic of China use of military power as a foreign policy instrument, including its use of military force, grey zone tactics in territorial disputes, coercion to assert the People’s Republic of China interests, and military diplomacy to engage other countries and seek to dispel concerns about growing the People’s Republic of China power • The sources of the People’s Republic of China economic power and the State’s efforts to use industrial policy, technology acquisition, innovation, trade, and investment to help build the People’s Republic of China into an innovative, technologically advanced, and less dependent economy • The People’s Republic of China employment of economic tools such as trade, aid, investment, technology transfer, and formal/informal sanctions to exert international influence and assess the People’s Republic of China’s record in translating economic power into desired political outcomes • The mechanisms used to apply the People’s Republic of China instruments of national power in a coordinated, strategic manner and the obstacles that complicate this effort

Source: GAO analysis of the Department of Defense information. | GAO-23-106070

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Defense

Appendix III: Comments from the Department
of Defense



ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

READINESS

JUN 12 2023

Ms. Brenda Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) Draft Report, GAO-23-106070, "Military Officers: DoD Can Enhance Promotion and Education Guidance for Addressing Indo-Pacific Region Needs," June 2023.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report. We concur with one recommendation and partially concur with three recommendations. The Department's comments on the GAO draft recommendations are enclosed. The point of contact is Dr. Eric Russi, who can be reached at eric.r.russi.civ@mail.mil or (703) 693-5348.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shawn G. Skelly".

Shawn G. Skelly

Enclosure:
As stated

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MAY 12, 2023
GAO-23-106070 (GAO CODE 106070)

“MILITARY OFFICERS: DOD CAN ENHANCE
PROMOTION AND EDUCATION GUIDANCE FOR
ADDRESSING INDO-PACIFIC REGION NEEDS”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1. The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (ASD(M&RA)) issues guidance that clearly identifies the objective of considering Indo-Pacific region experience in promotion board decisions.

DoD RESPONSE: Partially Concur. DoD believes that current guidance in the Secretary of Defense memorandum titled Promotion Selection Board Guidance, dated September 22, 2020, which has been reaffirmed by the National Defense Strategy (NDS) emphasizes the importance of having senior leaders with Indo-Pacific region experiences. The office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy (ODASD(MPP)) will explore options to communicate this existing guidance with the appropriate Service promotion boards and to highlight the amplification of these points within the NDS.

RECOMMENDATION 2. The Secretary of Defense should ensure that ASD(M&RA) establishes a method to measure the results of including Indo-Pacific region experience in promotion board instructions.

DoD RESPONSE: Partially concur. All Services have incorporated instructions to their promotion boards that articulate the value of Indo-Pacific region experience. In order to provide a quantifiable measurement, the ODASD(MPP) will explore options to request that the Services incorporate questions about the instructions into their required promotion board exit interviews. Any results of these interview questions can then be analyzed to assess their effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Education and Training (DASD(FE&T)) issues updated timeframes for implementing the China-focused learning outcomes.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur. The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)) issued timeline guidance for implementing the China-focused learning outcomes in a memo dated July 8, 2022. The Office of the DASD(FE&T) issued updated timeframes on April 18, 2023, completing the action for this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the DASD(FE&T) develops and issues reporting requirements for assessing implementation of the China-focused learning outcomes.

**Appendix III: Comments from the Department
of Defense**

DoD RESPONSE: Partially concur. The memorandum from the USD(P&R) issued on July 8, 2022, provided general guidelines regarding the reporting of the implementation of the learning outcomes. The Office of the DASD(FE&T) will explore options to issue any updated reporting requirements for assessing the implementation of the China-focused learning outcomes.

Accessible Text for Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Defense

Ms. Brenda Farrell
Director, Defense Capabilities Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell:

JUN 12 2023

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) Draft Report, GAO-23-106070, "Military Officers: DoD Can Enhance Promotion and Education Guidance for Addressing Indo-Pacific Region Needs," June 2023.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report. We concur with one recommendation and partially concur with three recommendations. The Department's comments on the GAO draft recommendations are enclosed. The point of contact is Dr. Eric Russi, who can be reached at eric.r.russi.civ@mail.mil or (703) 693-5348.

Sincerely,

Shawn G. Skelly

Enclosure:
As stated

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MAY 12, 2023 GAO-23-106070 (GAO CODE 106070)

"MILITARY OFFICERS: DOD CAN ENHANCE PROMOTION AND EDUCATION GUIDANCE FOR ADDRESSING INDO-PACIFIC REGION NEEDS"

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Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Brenda S. Farrell, (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Kimberly Seay (Assistant Director), Serena Epstein (Analyst in Charge), Christopher Gezon, Stephanie Moriarty, Lillian Ofili, Michael Silver, and Emily Wilson made key contributions to this report.

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