

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-243](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD has spent billions of dollars on contract support during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002 and anticipates continuing its heavy reliance on contractors in future operations. Generally, OCS is the process of planning for and obtaining needed supplies and services from commercial sources in support of joint operations. GAO has previously identified long-standing concerns with DOD's efforts to institutionalize OCS.

This report examines the extent to which (1) the geographic combatant commands and the services collect OCS issues to develop lessons learned, (2) DOD has a focal point for integrating OCS issues from the JLLP, and (3) DOD organizations use JLLIS to share OCS issues and lessons learned. GAO evaluated OCS and lessons-learned guidance and plans and met with DOD commands and offices responsible for OCS planning, integration, policy, and contractor-management functions.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that DOD and the services (1) issue service-wide OCS lessons-learned guidance; (2) establish an OCS training requirement for senior leaders; (3) ensure the planned OCS joint proponent's roles and responsibilities include integrating OCS issues from the JLLP; and (4) improve JLLIS's functionality. DOD concurred with three of these recommendations, but partially concurred with the third recommendation, stating the need to first evaluate its courses of action before establishing such a proponent. GAO believes this recommendation is still valid, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-15-243](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

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OPERATIONAL CONTRACT SUPPORT

Actions Needed to Enhance the Collection, Integration, and Sharing of Lessons Learned

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense's (DOD) geographic combatant commands are improving efforts to collect operational contract support (OCS) issues from operations and exercises needed to develop lessons learned, but the military services are generally not collecting them. Currently, four of the six geographic combatant commands—U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. Northern Command, and U.S. Southern Command—have identified OCS as a critical capability in their joint training plans and have incorporated it into planning, execution, and assessment of exercises, while U.S. European Command and U.S. Pacific Command continue to make progress doing so. However, with the exception of the Army, the military services and their component commands are not generally collecting OCS issues to develop lessons learned. Officials from the Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy stated that the lack of OCS awareness caused by not having (1) service-wide guidance on collecting OCS issues and (2) an OCS training requirement for senior leaders hinders their ability to develop lessons learned. Without guidance and a training requirement for senior leaders to improve OCS awareness, it will be difficult for DOD to ensure consistent collection of OCS issues and build on efficiencies that the services have identified to adequately plan for the use of contractor support.

DOD has made progress resolving some OCS issues, but does not have a focal point for integrating OCS issues identified through the Joint Lessons Learned Program (JLLP). The combatant commands and services are to use the JLLP to develop lessons learned related to joint capabilities from operations and exercises to improve areas such as doctrine and training. Currently, there are multiple organizations across DOD that are working on separate and sometimes disjointed OCS lessons-learned efforts. DOD has undertaken initial efforts to assign an OCS joint proponent with lessons-learned responsibilities. A joint proponent is an entity intended to lead collaborative development and integration of joint capability. However, DOD has not determined whether the joint proponent will be responsible for providing formal oversight and integration of OCS issues from the JLLP. As it develops the joint proponent, including such roles and responsibilities will help better position DOD to integrate all OCS issues from the JLLP, thereby addressing any gaps in its efforts.

DOD organizations do not consistently use the Joint Lessons Learned Information System (JLLIS) to share OCS issues and lessons learned due to the system's limited functionality. JLLIS is the JLLP's system of record and is to facilitate the DOD-wide collection and sharing of lessons learned. However, GAO found that geographic combatant commands and the Army use JLLIS to varying degrees. Further, DOD is generally not sharing OCS lessons learned in JLLIS because the system is not functional for users searching OCS issues due to, among other reasons, not having an OCS label and not having a designated location for sharing OCS lessons learned. JLLIS's limited functionality impedes information sharing department-wide. Until DOD improves the functionality of JLLIS, it will be difficult for users to search for OCS issues, and DOD runs the risk of not being able to systematically track and share OCS lessons learned department-wide, which could negatively affect joint force development and readiness.