

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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MILITARY OFFICERS

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.