

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-189](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Senior federal government officials—including high-ranking DOD officials, cabinet members, and members of Congress—are required or authorized to fly on military aircraft. This high-priority movement of senior government officials, known as special air missions, is accomplished with a fleet of 15 aircraft assigned to the Air Force's 89th Airlift Wing, located at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. Both the Office of Management and Budget and DOD issued guidance on the management and use of these aircraft.

GAO was requested to examine government officials' use of military aircraft and the regulations and policies that govern such travel. GAO examined the extent to which (1) senior federal government officials have used military aircraft and the costs associated with this travel, and (2) agencies have followed guidance governing the use of military aircraft by senior federal government officials. GAO reviewed relevant legislation and guidance, DOD's processes, and special air mission data from fiscal years 2008 through 2012. This review does not include air travel by the President, Vice President, First Lady, and Second Lady.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD ensure federal agencies fully reimburse for special air missions when required by developing a process to identify and track each mission, such as by mission number or another unique identifier, from billing through reimbursement for all applicable costs. In written comments on a draft of the report, DOD concurred with the recommendation.

View [GAO-14-189](#). For more information, contact Chris P. Currie at (404) 679-1875 or [curriec@gao.gov](mailto:curriec@gao.gov).

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## DEFENSE TRANSPORTATION

### DOD Can Better Ensure That Federal Agencies Fully Reimburse for Using Military Aircraft

## What GAO Found

The Air Force's 89th Airlift Wing flew 2,513 special air missions for senior federal government officials during fiscal years 2008 through 2012, with the number of missions increasing by 13 percent from 463 missions in fiscal year 2008 to 522 missions in fiscal year 2012. The cost of special air missions ranged from about \$17 million in fiscal year 2008 to about \$26 million in fiscal year 2012, and the fees paid for secure communication services ranged from about \$4 million in fiscal year 2008 to \$7 million in fiscal year 2012. The federal agencies with the greatest number of special air missions were the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of State. Members of Congress had the next highest number of missions. Collectively, these agencies and Congress constituted about 91 percent of all special air missions flown by the 89th Airlift Wing.

**Number and Cost of 89<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing's Missions (by Fiscal Year)**

Fiscal year	Number of missions	Cost (in millions)
2008	463	\$17
2009	509	14
2010	502	15
2011	517	24
2012	522	26
Total	2513	\$96

Source: GAO analysis of Air Force data.

Note: Dollar values have not been adjusted for inflation.

DOD and other federal agencies followed DOD guidance on the high-priority movement of senior federal government officials on military aircraft, but DOD does not identify and track reimbursements for each mission. This guidance addresses the request, approval, prioritization, scheduling, and reimbursement from non-DOD agencies for special air missions. Federal internal control standards emphasize the importance of internal control activities, such as documenting transactions and events, to help ensure that management's directives are carried out. However, DOD does not identify and track whether it was reimbursed for each special air mission. GAO determined that traveling agencies should have reimbursed DOD approximately \$5 million for 180 special air missions flown during fiscal years 2009 through 2012. However, GAO found that DOD was unable to document reimbursement for 16 of the 180 special air missions. Specifically, 2 of the 16 missions were not billed to the proper agency in fiscal year 2010. DOD officials stated that the remaining 14 missions were properly billed, but officials could not document reimbursement. DOD officials told GAO that they do not routinely identify and track reimbursements for each mission and that DOD's guidance does not specifically require organizations to identify and track each special air mission throughout the billing and reimbursement process, such as tracking by mission number or another unique identifier. This is partly because agencies at times make one payment to DOD for multiple missions. However, without a process to identify and track each special air mission for reimbursement, DOD cannot ensure that it has been fully reimbursed as required by DOD guidance.