

Why GAO Did This Study

Developing capable Iraqi and Afghan security forces is a key component of the U.S. military effort in Iraq and Afghanistan and, in 2009, the Army began augmenting brigade combat teams (BCT) with advisor personnel to advise the host nation security forces in these countries. House Armed Services Committee report 111-491 directed GAO to report on the Army's plans to augment BCTs to perform advising missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. This report (1) identifies the key characteristics of the augmented BCT concept; (2) assesses the extent to which the Army has provided augmented BCTs, and what challenges, if any, these units have faced; and (3) assesses the extent to which requirements for augmented BCTs have impacted overall Army personnel requirements, including the Army's ability to provide advisor personnel. GAO examined augmented BCT doctrine and guidance, analyzed advisor requirements, reviewed after-action reviews and lessons learned from augmented BCTs, and interviewed Army, theater command, and augmented BCT officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that theater commands assess and refine, as appropriate, advisor requirements and define advisor support and command structures. GAO also recommends that the Army provide certain advisor personnel to brigades earlier in pre-deployment training. DOD concurred with the recommendations.

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Actions Needed to Enhance the Ability of Army Brigades to Support the Advising Mission

What GAO Found

Army guidance identifies key characteristics of the augmented BCT concept, such as how advisors are to be organized, commanded, and supported. For example, BCT commanders are to organize the advisors into teams, with other necessary resources being provided to the teams by the brigade. The theater commander determines the specific numbers and types of advisors based upon the operational environment and mission requirements. BCTs are envisioned to exercise command of advisor teams and provide support such as specialized personnel, equipment, and transportation and security. However, it is recognized that BCTs may have other priorities and must balance the demand for resources between the advising mission and other missions.

The Army has deployed augmented BCTs in response to theater commanders' requests, but units have faced some challenges because commanders did not always set clear priorities between the advising mission and other missions or define specific requirements for how the BCTs should support the advising mission. For example, theater commanders did not require that advisor teams include specialized personnel, such as logisticians or intelligence officers. Because the BCTs already have high demand for these personnel, the brigades are challenged to meet the advisors' requirements for those same personnel. As a result, some advising teams told GAO that they were limited in their ability to advise in some specialty areas or that they may be advising Iraqi and Afghan security forces in functional areas where the advisors have little or no experience. Also, theater commanders' requests did not always specify command relationships. As a result, in some cases, advisors were reassigned to the control of a division or a brigade that they had not trained and deployed with, which disrupted the unity of command envisioned under the augmented BCT concept.

The use of augmented BCTs has decreased the total number of advisor personnel required for the advising mission, but increased requirements for field grade officers, already in short supply. According to Army officials, as a result of these shortages, the Army has faced challenges meeting the requirement to provide field grade advisors at least 45 days prior to the brigades' mission rehearsal exercise. In many cases, advisors did not join the brigades until after the exercise, hindering their integration into the BCTs and complicating efforts to establish support and command structures. Some officials suggested that it would be helpful if at least two or three of the highest-ranking advisors arrived significantly earlier than currently required in order to facilitate integration. Moreover, GAO found that augmented BCTs are organizing their advisors into smaller numbers of larger teams than envisioned in the theater commander requirements. As a result, augmented BCTs may not need the number and rank of advisors currently required by those requests.