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Report to Congressional Committees

May 2002

FORCE STRUCTURE

Air Force Needs a Periodic Total Force Assessment

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GAO-02-541

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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

May 2, 2002

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
The Honorable John W. Warner
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Bob Stump
Chairman
The Honorable Ike Skelton
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

In May 2000, the Air Force initiated an assessment to test whether the force requirements derived from its manpower requirements-determination process were sufficient to support the spectrum of military operations envisioned in the defense strategy: from simultaneously fighting two major theater wars to conducting multiple contingency operations in peacetime. This assessment, called the Total Force Assessment, was the Air Force's first evaluation of manpower adequacy in these contexts since 1995. Past assessments have been done on an irregular basis. In addition to assessing whether the Air Force could support the envisioned wartime and peacetime military operations, the most recent Total Force Assessment was generally expected to provide information to assist Air Force leadership in other force-management and decision-making processes. For example, the Air Force anticipated that Total Force Assessment results might be used to assess the appropriateness of its force mix, provide additional support for budgetary submissions, and provide data for day-to-day management of manpower assets.

A sound process for determining the military services' ability to support Department of Defense's (DOD's) strategy for military operations that occurs on a regular basis is critical. Without it, the services cannot assess war-fighting risk and effectively allocate personnel to meet both wartime and peacetime requirements. In setting its corporate-level performance goals, DOD has recognized the need for an appropriately sized force to respond to the full spectrum of crises, and the Congress, too, has

demonstrated interest in knowing whether service force size and structure are consistent with strategy demands.

Accordingly, in this report we address the following questions: (1) Did the Total Force Assessment demonstrate that the Air Force has the forces needed to carry out the full spectrum of military operations envisioned in the defense strategy? (2) To what extent did the Air Force use results from the Total Force Assessment to improve force-management and decision-making processes? We are providing this report to you because of your oversight responsibilities and past interest in the Air Force process.

Results in Brief

Because the Total Force Assessment was not implemented as planned, the Air Force cannot objectively demonstrate that it has the forces needed to carry out the full spectrum of military operations. Although intended to examine whether authorized Air Force personnel were sufficient to meet both the wartime and peacetime scenarios, the assessment only addressed the wartime scenario. Work on the adequacy of manpower for conducting multiple contingency operations in peacetime was never initiated. Further, although Air Force officials concluded that manpower was adequate to support the wartime scenario, this assessment was somewhat inconclusive because the effort was discontinued before all discrepancies in the assessment's results were resolved. The assessment's incomplete nature and its irregular timing suggest that the Air Force is not placing a high priority on this type of analysis. Not completing the assessment as planned and on a regular basis impairs the credibility of the process and prevents the Air Force from consistently and objectively demonstrating that it has a sufficient number and mix of forces to carry out the defense strategy.

Although the Air Force spent considerable time and effort conducting at least a portion of its planned assessment, it has not used the results to the full extent anticipated. On the positive side, Total Force Assessment results have been used by functional managers to discuss the health of their career fields with the chief of staff of the Air Force. For example, the Total Force Assessment identified force mix imbalances and as a result some functional managers have been asked to consider making greater use of reserve forces. However, the results are not being used as planned to support changes in Air Force budget submissions or to provide data for day-to-day management of manpower assets. The Department of the Air Force may be losing important opportunities to improve overall force management processes by not fully using the results of the assessment.

We are recommending that the secretary of defense direct the Air Force to conduct this assessment on a regular basis and clearly define how its results will be used.

The Department of Defense concurred with our recommendation, noting that the Air Force has already taken steps to initiate a new iteration of the Total Force Assessment, with the first results due for completion in December 2002. The department also provided several observations on our analysis, which are addressed on pages seven and eight of this report.

Background

The Air Force's manpower requirements are determined by individual major commands, using a number of methodologies, including manpower standards, logistical models, and crew ratios. Once approved by Air Force leadership, the results serve as the basis for authorizing military, civilian, and contractor positions in the Air Force and are entered into the Air Force's Manpower Data System.[1]

The Air Force's Directorate of Manpower and Organization designed the Total Force Assessment (TFA) process to assess whether the various methodologies used by the Air Force to determine manpower requirements generated sufficient manpower to accomplish two purposes: (1) meet deployment commitments should it be called on to fight two major theater wars and (2) conduct multiple small-scale contingency operations in peacetime. To assess whether the authorized manpower was adequate for the wartime scenario, the Air Force compared the authorized forces in the Manpower Data System to the deployment commitments demanded by the two major theater wars. It then calculated the effect of deploying these forces on the manpower needed to continue operations at existing airbases (i.e., in-place support forces). Demands for the deployment commitments were identified using troop deployment lists[2] generated from war plans for conducting wars in Southwest and Northeast Asia. The requirements for in-place support forces were calculated using a model that adjusts manpower requirements to account for changes in the

[1] The Air Force's Manpower Data System is the official source of manpower authorization data for active Air Force, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, and civilian and contractor personnel.

[2] Includes deploying combat and support forces identified in the Time Phased Force and Deployment Data, which are based on the operation plans for the two -major -theater -war scenario.

personnel needed to support ongoing Air Force operations when forces are deployed. Plans for assessing the adequacy of forces in peacetime were never finalized.

Total Force Assessment Has Not Established the Air Force's Ability to Carry Out the Defense Strategy

The Air Force conducted only the wartime component of the assessment, not the component assessing the adequacy of its manpower in conducting multiple contingency operations in peacetime. Moreover, the wartime component of the assessment was stopped before all discrepancies were resolved and, as a result, it was not conclusive. The incompleteness and irregular timing of this and similar past assessments indicate that they have not been a high priority for the Air Force.

Total Force Assessment Not Fully Implemented

The Total Force Assessment was not entirely implemented as planned, and as a result the Air Force cannot objectively demonstrate that it has the manpower needed to carry out the operations envisioned by DOD. Begun in May 2000, this effort was conducted, in part, to provide the Air Force with an overarching analysis of its personnel requirements in preparation for the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review. It was to be completed by January 2001. However, as of January 2002, the Air Force had essentially completed its assessment of wartime requirements, but it had not yet begun its assessment of whether Air Force authorized personnel were sufficient to support contingency operations in peacetime. The peacetime analysis was important because it would demonstrate whether particular career fields might be overburdened in peacetime even if sufficient forces were available to meet the two-theater-war scenario.

The results of the wartime analysis were somewhat inconclusive because the Air Force stopped work on the study before some discrepancies in the assessment's results were resolved. These discrepancies occurred because the process used for the study resulted in double counting some requirements, which in turn required the Air Force to manually review results for accuracy. Air Force officials told us they discontinued further work resolving discrepancies because Air Force leadership believed there was a strong likelihood that defense guidance would be changed from the

two major theater war scenario to some other scenario.[3] Such a change would have reduced the utility of any further efforts to produce more accurate results. At the time they stopped work, Air Force officials had concluded that results were about 90 percent accurate. According to Air Force officials, the leadership of the Air Force Directorate of Manpower and Organization believed that, at that point, the assessment results showed that forces were adequate to support the wartime scenario, and these results were subsequently briefed to the chief of staff of the Air Force.

At the time of our review, Air Force officials still planned to conduct the peacetime analysis, but in view of the change in defense strategy they no longer plan to complete this portion of the current assessment. Instead, the Air Force plans to revamp the TFA process. Air Force officials advised us that in the future the TFA might be streamlined and shortened in duration since Air Force leadership believes that the current assessment is too time-consuming and manpower intensive. These officials said that they had proposed that the next TFA capitalize on the modeling that was used in the most recent Quadrennial Defense Review to test whether Air Force manpower is sufficient to meet a wide range of scenarios indicated by that review. Using this new approach, Air Force officials now anticipate completing a new iteration of TFA, covering the full spectrum of conflict, by December 2002.

Air Force Has Not Made This Type of Analysis a High Priority

The incomplete implementation of the TFA reflects that, to some extent, the Air Force has not placed a high priority on achieving the goals of this type of assessment, as evidenced by the long interval experienced between assessments. A forerunner to Total Force Assessment, FORSIZE, was last completed in 1995—more than 6 years ago. No FORSIZE study was conducted in 1996 or 1997 because the analytical resources needed to conduct the assessment were devoted to the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review instead.[4]

[3] The September 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review report states DOD's intentions to shift the focus of U.S. force planning from optimizing for conflicts in two particular regions to building a portfolio of capabilities that is robust across the spectrum of possible force requirements. DOD intends to maintain the ability to defeat aggression in two critical areas in overlapping time frames.

[4] There were no FORSIZE exercises in 1989 through 1993 because of the changing world environment, numerous Air Force command reorganizations, and the Persian Gulf War.

Planning for the most recent TFA began in 1999, but efforts were impeded by other changes the Air Force was undergoing, such as the recognition that the Air Force needed forces to conduct contingency operations as well as forces to meet the wartime scenarios, a need that then had to be incorporated in TFA's design. While these changes certainly complicated the Air Force analysis, such uncertainty and change have almost become constants within DOD. Doing without a regular, institutionalized process—on the basis of inevitable complications—denies the Air Force's Directorate of Manpower and Organization a way to determine objectively whether it has the forces needed to carry out the defense strategy.

Air Force Not Capitalizing as Anticipated on Assessment's Results

The Air Force did not use the results from the assessment for all of the purposes it had envisioned. On the positive side, Air Force officials told us that TFA results had been useful in helping some functional managers discuss the health of their career fields in briefings to the chief of staff of the Air Force. For example, the Total Force Assessment showed that the number of active forces fell somewhat short of the numbers demanded for the wartime scenario, while the number of reserve forces exceeded demands. In some situations, functional managers were asked to consider making greater use of reserve forces if active forces were deemed insufficient. On the other hand, the Air Force did not use TFA results as anticipated to support changes in budget submissions or to influence day-to-day management of manpower assets. Officials also noted that TFA results were not used to reallocate forces among various functional managers to make the best use of available forces, although they noted that TFA was not designed to do this. As a result, TFA has not lived up to its full potential for assisting Air Force leadership in making manpower decisions that can lead to a more effective force.

We believe there are two possible reasons why the Air Force did not use TFA results to the full extent expected. First, because implementation of TFA was incomplete, the results themselves are incomplete and thus may have been viewed as of limited value for supporting changes to the budget or in making day to day management decisions. For example, officials told us that, with the changes to defense guidance and deployment schedules, TFA results are now viewed as one more data source on which to base decisions. Second, because TFA has not been institutionalized and does not occur on a regular basis, its results may have been viewed as insufficient or not timely for these purposes; for example, the Air Force might not have been able to link TFA results to very formalized and regularly occurring systems like the budget.

Conclusions

Because the Air Force cannot objectively demonstrate that it has the forces necessary to carry out the full spectrum of military operations envisioned in defense guidance, its operational risk in both wartime and peacetime may not be fully understood. Both the secretary of defense and the Congress need this information to effectively discharge their respective oversight responsibilities. Without an institutionalized process for assessing risk, which occurs on a regular basis, the Air Force has no way of knowing what mitigating actions might be warranted. On the positive side, the Air Force has identified other aspects of force management that could benefit from the results of a Total Force Assessment. However, it has not been able to capitalize on this potential because the results to date have been incomplete and irregularly obtained. By not placing a high enough priority on conducting a regularly occurring assessment and by underutilizing assessment results, the Air Force may be shortchanging itself in terms of achieving an appropriate force size and mix and in terms of fully developing the related funding requirements.

Recommendation for Executive Action

To enable the Air Force to objectively demonstrate it has the forces necessary to support the spectrum of military operations envisioned in the defense strategy and to enhance force management processes, we recommend that the secretary of defense direct the secretary of the Air Force to institutionalize a Total Force Assessment process to be conducted on a regular basis with clearly articulated uses for its results.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with our recommendation that the Air Force institutionalize TFA but took issue with some of the findings and analysis in our assessment. DOD's concerns center around whether the Air Force implemented TFA as planned and was able to establish its ability to carry out the full spectrum of missions envisioned by the defense strategy. Our assertion that the TFA was not implemented as planned is based on the fact that the chief of staff of the Air Force tasking letter that initiated TFA and the subsequent overarching guidance written by the Air Force specified an assessment of manpower requirements for both peacetime and wartime operations. At the time of our review, the Air Force had completed the wartime portion, but had not yet addressed peacetime operations. We understand, and noted in our report, that the Air Force now expects to complete a new iteration of TFA, covering the full spectrum of conflict, by December 2002. We endorse this effort and are hopeful that it reaches fruition. It does not alter the fact, however, that the fiscal year 1999 TFA was not fully implemented as planned, and that, lacking requirements for peacetime operations, it did

not objectively establish the Air Force's ability to fully execute the defense guidance.

DOD's comments also stress that the two major theater war portion of TFA was completed and briefed to the chief of staff of the Air Force and that the results showed that the Air Force had sufficient manpower to satisfy mission requirements. Our report acknowledges these facts. We noted, however, that the numbers resulting from the assessment were somewhat inconclusive and less useful than they might have been because work on the study was discontinued before all discrepancies were resolved. As stated in our report, Air Force officials estimated that final results were about 90 percent accurate.

DOD's comments further questioned our conclusion that TFA had not capitalized as anticipated on the assessment's results, stating that the results of TFA were used widely for initiating taskings and making decisions. Our report does not indicate that TFA results were not used at all, only that its intended potential was not realized. We were unable to document the extent to which TFA was used for tasking and decision-making because the Air Force Directorate of Manpower and Organization did not produce a final report on TFA results, and it did not establish procedures for systematically tracking issues developed from TFA data and resulting actions to resolve them. Based on information provided by Air Force officials, we did acknowledge in our report that TFA results were used by functional managers to explore increasing the use of reserve forces to mitigate shortfalls in the active forces. However, during our review Air Force officials told us that TFA results would not be used for other purposes envisioned in the initial guidance written for TFA (e.g., supporting budget submissions and for day-to-day management of manpower assets). The department's written comments are presented in their entirety in appendix I.

Scope and Methodology

To evaluate whether the Air Force's Total Force Assessment demonstrated that forces are adequate to carry out the defense strategy, we reviewed Air Force policy, guidance, and documents used in planning and conducting the assessment from calendar year 1999 through 2001. We also reviewed the assessment's results and discussed these results with officials responsible for this analysis. These included representatives of the Air Force's Directorate of Manpower and Organization at the Pentagon; Air Force Manpower Readiness Flight at Fort Detrick, Maryland; and the Air Force Manpower and Innovation Agency in San Antonio, Texas. We also discussed the assessment's methodology and past assessments with these

officials. We did not independently verify the underlying manpower-requirements system information that serves as the starting point for the Total Force Assessment. To determine how the Air Force used the assessment's results, we identified its anticipated uses and discussed with Air Force officials how these results were actually used.

We conducted our review from July 2001 through January 2002, in accordance with generally accepted government audit standards. We obtained comments on a draft of this report from the Department of Defense and incorporated its comments where appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the secretary of defense and the director, Office of Management and Budget. We will also make copies available to appropriate congressional committees and to other interested parties on request. If you or your staff has any questions about this report, please call me at (202) 512-3958. Major contributors to this report were Gwendolyn R. Jaffe, James K. Mahaffey, Norman L. Jessup, Jr., and Susan K. Woodward.

Carol R Schuster

Carol R. Schuster
Director, Defense Capabilities
and Management

Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Defense

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4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

PERSONNEL AND READINESS

APR 15 2002

Ms. Carol R. Schuster
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Schuster:

This is the Department of Defense response to the GAO draft report, "FORCE STRUCTURE: Air Force Needs a Periodic Total Force Assessment," dated March 22, 2002 (Code 350088). We concur with your findings, subject to the issues discussed below and in the enclosed detailed comments.

We agree that the Air Force should institutionalize the Total Force Assessment (TFA) process. The Air Force has already taken steps to do so. However, we take issue with some of the analysis and findings in the report. The report stresses that the Air Force did not fully complete either of the two analytical phases of TFA: two major theater wars (MTW), or steady state contingencies (SSC). By contrast, the two MTW results were briefed—from both total Air Force and individual career field perspectives—to the Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF) last summer. Actions were tasked and decisions were made based on these briefings.

Before the final briefing could be presented to CSAF on August 1, 2001, the underlying Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) that had previously dictated the requirement to plan for two simultaneous MTWs was changed. Because the TFA's doctrinal foundation had been changed, the Air Force did not publish a final report (other than an info copy to the MAJCOMs). The Air Force advised GAO of this and other errors in fact, as addressed in detail in the enclosure.

The OSD primary action officer for this audit is Colonel Sid Evans, USAF, of the Requirements Directorate, (703) 695-0813, e-mail: sidney.evans@osd.mil.

Sincerely,

Jeanne B. Fites
Deputy Under Secretary of Defense
(Program Integration)

Enclosure
As stated

GAO CODE 350088/GAO-02-541

"FORCE STRUCTURE: AIR FORCE NEEDS A PERIODIC TOTAL FORCE ASSESSMENT"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE RECOMMENDATION AND DETAILED COMMENTS TO THE REPORT

RECOMMENDATION: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to institutionalize a Total Force Assessment (TFA) process to be conducted on a regular basis with clearly articulated uses for its results. (Page 7/Draft Report)

DoD RESPONSE: Concur. As discussed during the audit and the exit conference, the Air Force has already initiated a process that should institutionalize TFA and allow for periodic and timely TFA reviews. A copy of the Air Force's August 2001 contract with the ABTech Group of Illinois Institute of Technology Research Institute (IITRI) to develop SSC scenarios was forwarded to the GAO audit team. This portion of the contract is nearly complete and Air Force managers will obligate the funds to complete the TFA modeling effort within the coming weeks. This model will be complete by December 31, 2002 and will allow for periodic and quick-turn analysis of Air Force TFA requirements.

DETAILED COMMENTS TO THE REPORT

"RESULTS IN BRIEF" SECTION:

1a. GAO COMMENTS: (T)he TFA was not implemented as planned . . . the assessments only addressed the wartime scenario. (Page 2/Draft Report)

1b. DoD RESPONSE: Two major theater war (MTW) results were briefed, from both a total Air Force and an individual career field perspective, to the Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF). Career field managers were tasked and decisions were made based on these presentations. However, before the final brief to CSAF on August 1, 2001, the 2 MTW direction was removed from the DPG. Because the Total Force Assessment (TFA) results were based on a previous strategic concept, the Air Staff only provided information copies of the TFA results to the MAJCOMs.

2a. GAO COMMENTS: (T)his assessment was somewhat inconclusive because the effort was discontinued before all the discrepancies in the assessment were resolved. (Page 2/Draft Report)

2b. DoD RESPONSE: As outlined in the DoD response to the recommendation above, the 2 MTW results were briefed to CSAF. These briefings resulted in decisions that impacted resources and force mix. Had the DPG not changed, the TFA data briefed to CSAF would have been used by the functional managers and major commands for an even broader range of

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resource management decisions. No further analysis of the numbers would have taken place, as Air Force manpower managers were confident they had resolved all major discrepancies. The TFA validated that for a 2 MTW scenario, the Air Force had sufficient funded authorizations to satisfy mission requirements, and this position was briefed to CSAF on August 1, 2001.

3a. GAO COMMENTS: (T)he results are not being used as planned to support changes in Air Force budget submissions or to provide data for day-to-day management of manpower assets. (Page 2/Draft Report)

3b. DoD RESPONSE: See the DoD response to the recommendation and para 1b above.

"BACKGROUND" SECTION

4a. GAO COMMENTS: Plans for assessing the adequacy of forces in peacetime were never finalized. (Page 3/Draft Report)

4b. DoD RESPONSE: In August 2001, the Air Force contracted with ABTech to develop small-scale contingency (SSC) scenarios that tie unit type code (UTC) taskings to deployment requirements. ABTech's previous work (J8/NDU Alt Strategic Project, Dynamic Commitment, Positive Match, etc.) allowed them to adapt existing technology and data to rapidly meet TFA requirements. The phases in the contract forwarded to ABTech in August 01 included the three phases outlined below. They are nearing completion of the SSC phase, and the Air Force Directorate of Manpower and Organization will obligate funds in this month to complete the home-station and in-place requirements for various SSCs. They will then finalize the TFA modeling effort. The current statement of work with ABTech outlines the following requirements:

1. Phase 1: Provide manpower deployment requirements for postures of engagement (POEs) that range from current steady state deployments up to the most demanding MTW+ scenarios (i.e., light, medium, and heavy engagements).
2. Phase 2: Define home-station, in-place total force manpower functional requirements for each posture of engagement.
3. Phase 3: Develop a computer model to help allocate forces according to the AEF schedule.

"TOTAL FORCE ASSESSMENT HAS NOT ESTABLISHED THE AIR FORCE'S ABILITY TO CARRY OUT THE DEFENSE STRATEGY" SECTION:

5a. GAO COMMENTS: Moreover, the wartime component of the assessment was stopped before all discrepancies were resolved and, as a result it was not conclusive. The incompleteness and irregular timing of this and similar past assessments indicate that they have not been a high priority for the Air Force. (Page 4/Draft Report)

5b. DoD RESPONSE: The 2 MTW portion of the exercise was completed as outlined in para 1b above. The results were briefed to the CSAF, and Air Staff and major command functional managers have the results. Major discrepancies were resolved and ABTech is nearing completion of its effort to assess SSC impact. The next step is for the Air Staff functional managers to validate or adjust UTC requirements used to determine manpower demand for each SSC.

Originally, the TFA was an attempt to assess the Air Force's ability to execute the 2 MTW scenario dictated by the previous DPG . While coordinating the original plans for TFA at the Air Staff, it became clear that steady state operations (e.g., Operations NORTHERN WATCH and SOUTHERN WATCH) were creating a heavy day-to-day burden on the Air Force. However, the decision was made to focus on the most demanding scenario (i.e., 2 MTW) and accomplish the SSC assessment at a later date. Before that could be implemented, the underlying DoD strategy changed. The SSC analysis was completed on the front end of the new TFA assessment vice the tail end of the FY 99 TFA.

As indicated in paragraph 3b above, the Air Force initiated development of the next TFA, including obtaining support from a leading university research institute, immediately upon completion of the FY 99 TFA (an 18 month effort). In our view, in recent years the Air Force has made great strides to emphasize wartime manpower planning and to incorporate it into resource management processes. We do not believe it appropriate to assert that the Air Force does not consider this type of analysis important. The Air Force expects to have a TFA model, which will allow for periodic reviews based on readily updateable scenarios, available by December 31, 2002.

"TOTAL FORCE ASSESSMENT NOT FULLY IMPLEMENTED" SECTION:

6a. GAO COMMENTS: The Air Force cannot objectively demonstrate that it has the manpower needed to carry out the operations envisioned by DoD. (Page 4/Draft Report)

6b. DoD RESPONSE: See 1b above.

7a. GAO COMMENTS: At the time of our review, Air Force officials still planned to conduct the peacetime analysis, but in view of the change in defense strategy they no longer plan to complete this portion of the current assessment. (Page 5/Draft Report)

7b. DoD RESPONSE: See para 3b above.

"AIR FORCE NOT CAPITALIZING AS ANTICIPATED ON ASSESSMENT'S RESULTS" SECTION:

8a. GAO COMMENTS: TFA has not lived up to its full potential for assisting Air Force leadership in making manpower decisions that can lead to a more effective force. (Page 6/Draft Report)

8b. DoD RESPONSE: See para 1b above. Air Force functional managers briefed CSAF, who in turn, levied taskers and made decisions that impacted resources and total force mix. Contrary to GAO's observation, TFA was the catalyst for many real-world resource management decisions.

TECHNICAL COMMENT:

The Air Force organization that conducted the TFA process is referred to throughout the report as the "Air Force Directorate of Plans and Programs." Please correct your nomenclature to either refer to this office as the "Air Force Directorate of Manpower and Organization" (HQ USAF/XPM) or as its parent organization, the "Office of the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Programs" (HQ USAF/XP).

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