DOD Needs to Provide Central Direction for Supporting Coalition Liaison Officers

What GAO Did This Study

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, Congress authorized the Secretary of Defense to provide administrative services and support to foreign coalition liaison officers temporarily assigned to the headquarters of a combatant command or any of its subordinate commands. Congress required GAO to assess the implementation of this legislation. Specifically, GAO's objectives were to determine (1) what guidance the Department of Defense (DOD) has provided on the implementation of this legislation, (2) the extent to which the commands are aware of and are using this legislation, and (3) the level of support being provided by commands using this legislation and the benefits derived from it.

What GAO Found

GAO could find no evidence that DOD had issued any guidance to combatant commanders on how to implement this legislation. In addition, GAO was unable to identify an office within DOD that has responsibility for implementing this legislation. The DOD Office of the Inspector General, as GAO's focal point within DOD, was also unable to identify a responsible office.

Although the legislation was inspired by the needs of the coalition assembled for the Global War on Terrorism, its authority is available through the Secretary of Defense to all combatant commanders. According to the results of GAO's research, the combatant commands' awareness of and need to use the legislation varied widely with Central Command being the only command using the authority to support liaison officers.

Central Command and MacDill Air Force Base, as the host location for Central Command, spent $17 million in fiscal year 2003 to provide administrative services and support to more than 300 coalition liaison officers from over 60 countries. As allowed by the legislation, the command also paid the travel, subsistence, and personal expenses of over 70 of these officers from more than 30 developing countries.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense take the following two actions: (1) designate an office within DOD to take responsibility for this legislation and (2) direct this designated office to promulgate and issue guidance on how to implement this legislation.

DOD officials concurred with the report in oral comments. DOD stated that it would designate the Joint Staff as the office responsible for implementing the legislation and issuing appropriate guidance.

Fiscal Year 2003 Costs by Type of Support Provided to Foreign Coalition Liaison Officers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Support</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support</td>
<td>$14,475,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel and personal expenses</td>
<td>$2,582,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total costs</td>
<td>$17,057,179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Central Command officials stated that they could not accomplish the coalition integration planning and coordination important to the Global War on Terrorism as effectively or efficiently as they are doing without the liaison officers. They also commented that the legislation helps facilitate the participation of a developing country in the coalition if the command can pay for travel and subsistence.


To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Neal P. Curtin at (757) 552-8100 or curtinn@gao.gov.