



Highlights of [GAO-07-1030](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) has relied on special operations forces to conduct military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and to perform other tasks such as training foreign military forces. To meet the demand for these forces, DOD established a Marine Corps service component under the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to integrate Marine Corps forces. Under the authority of the Comptroller General, GAO assessed the extent to which (1) the Marine Corps special operations command has identified its force structure requirements, (2) the Marine Corps has developed a strategic human capital approach to manage personnel in its special operations command, and (3) USSOCOM has determined whether Marine Corps training programs are preparing its forces for assigned missions. GAO performed its work with the Marine Corps and USSOCOM and analyzed DOD plans for this new command.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Marine Corps conduct an analysis of the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in its special operations command and that USSOCOM establish a basis to ensure they are trained to be fully interoperable with DOD's special operations forces. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD generally concurred with GAO's recommendations and noted that actions consistent with the recommendations are underway.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1030.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Management Actions Are Needed to Effectively Integrate Marine Corps Forces into the U.S. Special Operations Command

What GAO Found

While the Marine Corps has made progress in establishing its special operations command (Command), the Command has not yet fully identified the force structure needed to perform its assigned missions. DOD developed initial force structure plans to establish the Command; however, it did not use critical practices of strategic planning, such as the alignment of activities and resources and the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes when developing these plans. As a result of limitations in the strategic planning process, the Command has identified several force structure challenges that will likely affect the Command's ability to perform its full range of responsibilities, and is working to revise its force structure.

Although preliminary steps have been taken, the Marine Corps has not developed a strategic human capital approach to manage the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in its special operations command. While the Command has identified some skills needed to perform special operations missions, it has not conducted a comprehensive analysis to determine all of the critical skills and incremental training required of personnel in its special operations forces units. These analyses are critical to the Marine Corps' efforts to develop a strategic human capital approach for the management of personnel in its special operations forces units. Without the benefit of these analyses, the Marine Corps has developed an interim policy to assign some personnel to special operations forces units for extended tour lengths to account for the additional training and skills; however, the policy is inconsistent with the Command's goal for the permanent assignment of some personnel within the special operations community. Until the Command completes an analysis to identify and document the critical skills and competencies needed by its future workforce to perform its full range of special operations missions, the Marine Corps will not have a sound basis for developing or evaluating alternative strategic human capital approaches for managing personnel assigned to its special operations forces units.

USSOCOM does not have a sound basis for determining whether the Command's training programs are preparing units for their missions because it has not established common training standards for many special operations skills and it has not formally evaluated whether these programs prepare units to be fully interoperable with other special operations forces. The Command is providing training to its forces that is based on training programs for conventional units that were assigned some special operations missions prior to the Command's activation and incorporates the training that USSOCOM's other service components provide to their forces. However, USSOCOM has not validated that the training for Marine Corps forces prepares them to be fully interoperable with DOD's other special operations forces. Without an evaluation, USSOCOM cannot demonstrate the needed assurances that Marine Corps forces are fully interoperable with its other forces, which may jeopardize the success of future joint missions.