



Highlights of [GAO-08-670](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, and the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Military operations in support of the Global War on Terrorism, particularly those in Iraq and Afghanistan, have challenged the Department of Defense's (DOD) ability to provide needed ground forces. Section 354 of the Fiscal Year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act directed GAO to report on a number of military readiness issues. In this report, GAO addresses (1) the extent to which DOD's use of nonstandard forces to meet ground force requirements has impacted the force and (2) the extent to which DOD has faced challenges in managing the training and use of these forces, and taken steps to address any challenges. To address these objectives, GAO analyzed DOD policies, guidance, and data and interviewed department, joint, combatant command, and service officials as well as trainers and over 300 deploying, deployed, and redeploying servicemembers.

What GAO Recommends

To better manage the training and use of nonstandard forces, GAO recommends that DOD develop and issue a policy, which clarifies: responsibilities for the training of all nonstandard forces, including individual augmentees; training waiver responsibilities and procedures; and the nature and extent of ground force commanders' authorities to direct the use of nonstandard forces. DOD concurred with this recommendation and stated it has work underway to review existing policy and to ensure necessary guidance is in place.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-670](#). For more information, contact Sharon L. Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov.

MILITARY READINESS

Joint Policy Needed to Better Manage the Training and Use of Certain Forces to Meet Operational Demands

What GAO Found

The use of nonstandard forces—individuals in certain temporary positions, and units with missions that require the unit personnel to learn new skills or operate in different environments—has helped DOD fulfill U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) requirements that the Army otherwise would not have been able to fill, but these efforts have also caused challenges across the force. For certain Navy and Air Force occupational specialties, these nonstandard force deployments have challenged the services' abilities to (1) balance the amount of time their forces are deployed with the amount of time they spend at home, and (2) meet other standard mission requirements. Some of the communities that have been most affected by nonstandard force deployments include the engineering, security force, and explosive ordnance disposal communities. In addition, the services have been challenged by emerging requirements for capabilities which do not exist in any of the services' standard forces, such as the transition teams that train local forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. These requirements are particularly taxing because the teams are composed primarily of officers and senior noncommissioned officers. Because standard forces do not exist to meet these leadership requirements, the services are forced to take leaders from other commands, which must then perform their missions without a full complement of leaders.

The steps that DOD has taken to increase coordination between the services and CENTCOM have helped DOD manage challenges related to nonstandard forces, but additional steps are needed to ensure consistency in training and using these forces. Nonstandard forces face more complex relationships than standard forces, making coordination of their training and use more challenging. Specifically, their training requirements are established by both the services and theater commanders and training may be conducted by trainers from another service. In addition, while deployed, these forces often report to commanders from two different services. Furthermore, authorities concerning the training and use of forces do not specifically address the training and use of nonstandard forces. DOD has taken significant steps to coordinate the training of its nonstandard forces through regular conferences at which CENTCOM and service officials develop detailed training plans for some nonstandard forces. However, the training of individual augmentees has not been fully coordinated. As a result, individuals who perform the same types of tasks may receive different levels of training. Also, the services waive training requirements without consistently coordinating with CENTCOM, so CENTCOM lacks full visibility over the extent to which all of its forces have met requirements. To increase support and oversight of the use of nonstandard forces in theater, the services have taken steps to improve coordination, which have reduced instances where nonstandard forces' missions, tasks, or organization are modified. However, the services do not have full visibility over their nonstandard forces and view the authority of ground force commanders differently, which has sometimes led to differences in their use of nonstandard forces.