

Why GAO Did This Study

The Joint Exercise Program is the principal means for combatant commanders to maintain trained and ready forces, exercise contingency and theater security cooperation plans, and conduct joint and multinational training exercises. These exercises are primarily aimed at developing the skills needed by U.S. forces to operate in a joint environment and can also help build partner-nation capacity and strengthen alliances.

House Report 114-102 included a provision for GAO to review DOD's Joint Exercise Program. This report (1) describes guidance DOD has developed for its Joint Exercise Program and DOD's approach to assess the effectiveness of the program and (2) evaluates the extent to which DOD uses two information technology systems to manage the program. GAO observed data in JTIMS and analyzed fiscal years 2014-16 financial data and supporting documentation in the Execution Management System.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD comply with current guidance to upload supporting documentation in the Execution Management System and implement effective internal controls to ensure the completeness and accuracy of financial information. DOD partially concurred with both recommendations, noting existing controls in other related systems of record. GAO believes the recommendations remain valid, as discussed in this report.

View [GAO-17-7](#). For more information, contact Cary B. Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

JOINT EXERCISE PROGRAM

DOD Needs to Take Steps to Improve the Quality of Funding Data

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has developed a body of guidance for the Joint Exercise Program and has implemented an approach to assess the effectiveness of the program. In addition to the body of guidance for the program, DOD is working to update a key guidance document for military training in accordance with a congressional requirement. DOD's approach to assess the effectiveness of the Joint Exercise Program is aimed at ensuring that its performance measures are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-phased (commonly referred to as the SMART rubric). The Joint Assessment and Enabling Capability office reviews the performance measures created by the combatant commands against this rubric and provides input and coaching on improving the measures through an ongoing and collaborative process.

DOD uses two key information technology systems—the Joint Training Information Management System (JTIMS) and the Execution Management System—to manage the execution of the Joint Exercise Program, but does not have assurance that funding execution data in the Execution Management System are reliable. JTIMS is the system of record for the Joint Exercise Program that combatant commanders use to plan and manage their joint training exercises. GAO observed significant variation in the type and quality of information entered in JTIMS. Combatant command and Joint Staff officials stated that information in JTIMS lacked consistency in the level of detail provided, sometimes making it difficult to coordinate training with other combatant commands or extract pertinent information about exercises from the system that would be helpful in planning other exercises. Consequently, to help improve the consistency and standardization of information across combatant commands, the Joint Staff published a user guide for JTIMS.

Regarding the Execution Management System, a web-based database DOD uses to track the most recent funding execution data for the Joint Exercise Program, GAO found that DOD does not have assurance that the system produces quality information because supporting documentation is not consistently uploaded into the system and, when it is uploaded, it is not reconcilable to the data entered there. Only U.S. Strategic Command and U.S. Northern Command uploaded supporting documentation for fiscal years 2013-16 as required by the Execution Management System guidance. Reviewing a nongeneralizable sample of uploaded supporting documentation for fiscal years 2014-16, GAO found that the sum of the individual expenditures reported in supporting documentation did not match corresponding total expenditures entered in the system for any of the four combatant commands included in GAO's review. Further, the four combatant commands GAO visited, the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness had not implemented effective internal controls similar to those identified in the *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* to ensure the completeness and accuracy of financial information captured for the Joint Exercise Program. Without such internal controls, DOD and other key decision makers may not have the financial information of sufficient quality to defend the Joint Exercise Program's budget.