

Why GAO Did This Study

Following the end of major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, DOD is in the process of resetting equipment and materiel to meet mission requirements. Retrograde refers to the movement of non-unit equipment and materiel from one forward area to another area of operation or to a reset program. Reset includes maintenance and supply activities to restore and enhance combat capability to equipment used in combat.

Section 324 of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2014 included provisions for DOD to establish a policy and implementation plan on retrograde and similar efforts related to forces used to support overseas contingency operations and for GAO to review DOD's policy and plan. This report evaluates the extent to which (1) DOD developed a strategic policy and (2) the services developed implementation plans consistent with leading practices on sound strategic management planning for the retrograde and reset of operating forces. GAO reviewed DOD reports, interviewed officials, and assessed documents against those leading practices, which include elements similar to several of the requirements in section 324.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD establish a strategic policy that includes key elements of leading practices; use consistent information and descriptions for budget reporting; and that the Army, Navy and Air Force develop implementation plans for their retrograde and reset efforts. DOD generally concurred with all three recommendations.

View [GAO-16-414](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512- 5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

MILITARY READINESS

DOD Needs to Incorporate Elements of a Strategic Management Planning Framework into Retrograde and Reset Guidance

What GAO Found

In its response to the requirements of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2014, instead of developing new policies for retrograde and reset of operating forces used to support overseas contingency operations, the Department of Defense (DOD) relied on three existing guidance documents as its policy for retrograde and reset activities in support of overseas contingency operations. DOD's November 2014 report to congressional committees—issued in response to requirements in the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2014—states that three DOD guidance documents address the department's retrograde and reset efforts: the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), Guidance for the Employment of the Force, and the Defense Planning Guidance. DOD officials told GAO that they believe the QDR and other documents provide the policy and guidance needed to inform the department's retrograde and reset efforts. However, GAO found that these documents do not include key elements for sound strategic management planning, such as a mission statement and long-term goals. Without a strategic policy for retrograde and reset that incorporates key elements of sound strategic management planning, DOD cannot ensure that its efforts provide the necessary strategic planning framework to inform the military services' plans for these efforts. Further, DOD emphasizes the use of consistent terms across departmental documents, but GAO found that DOD's guidance is not consistent in identifying what information to use in budget reporting on retrograde and reset activities. If DOD does not ensure the use of consistent information and descriptions in policy and other departmental documents used to inform budget estimates on retrograde and reset costs, Congress may not receive consistent and accurate information to make informed decisions concerning these efforts.

GAO found that the Marine Corps has published an implementation plan for the retrograde and reset of operating forces, but the Army, Navy and Air Force have not. In DOD's November 2014 report to congressional committees, DOD pointed to the specific planning activities undertaken by each service related to retrograde and reset. According to DOD officials, the services are responsible for developing their own implementation plans. The Marine Corps has an implementation plan for retrograde and reset, which is contained in two of its guidance documents, and largely meets all the elements of sound strategic management planning, some of which generally correspond to several of the requirements in section 324 of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2014. However, the Army, Navy and Air Force either have not published implementation plans or have provided GAO with published documents or plans that did not include all elements of leading practices for sound strategic planning—such as strategies on how a goal will be achieved, how an organization will carry out its mission, and resources required to meet goals, among others. Without implementation plans that, among other things, articulate goals and strategies for retrograde and reset of equipment, Army, Navy, and Air Force efforts may not align with DOD-wide goals and strategies for retrograde and reset, reset-related maintenance costs may not be consistently included, and resources and funding for retrograde and reset may not be consistently or effectively budgeted or distributed within the services.