

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-428](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Readiness, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

A key element of DOD military strategy since 2012 has been a rebalance of U.S. presence and capabilities toward the Asia-Pacific region, PACOM's area of responsibility. U.S. military personnel in this region rely on contracted services to provide support to military operations. PACOM's humanitarian and disaster-relief efforts in response to a May 2015 earthquake in Nepal highlighted the importance of OCS in the Asia-Pacific region.

GAO was asked to assess PACOM's processes to plan for, manage, and oversee contractors that support military operations in the Asia-Pacific region. This report assesses the extent to which PACOM (1) has accounted for contractor personnel and has a process to vet foreign vendors; (2) has established an organizational structure to manage and oversee OCS; and (3) has integrated OCS into key planning documents. GAO reviewed documents and data, interviewed relevant officials involved in OCS activities in the region, and analyzed OCS annexes to certain plans.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations, including that DOD and PACOM develop or update guidance related to contractor personnel accountability, vendor vetting, and OCS organizational structure; and that PACOM develop guidance that clarifies requirements development for plans. DOD concurred with two recommendations and partially concurred with four. GAO continues to believe the recommendations are valid, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-17-428](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

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OPERATIONAL CONTRACT SUPPORT

Actions Needed to Enhance Capabilities in the Pacific Region

What GAO Found

U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) does not fully account for contractor personnel in a steady-state, or peacetime, environment and lacks a process to vet foreign vendors. Department of Defense (DOD) guidance requires the accounting of certain contractor personnel during contingency operations, but is unclear for steady-state environments. PACOM issued limited guidance in November 2016 to address accountability processes in contingency and steady-state environments, and PACOM and some of its components use multiple mechanisms to account for contractor personnel, resulting in inconsistencies in the numbers of contractor personnel accounted for, which could present difficulties in an emergency or contingency operation. Additionally, PACOM lacks a foreign vendor vetting process due to a lack of DOD guidance identifying what vendor vetting processes should be established at combatant commands. PACOM has taken some action on vendor vetting, such as including vetting in exercises and screening some contractor personnel, but it lacks a process that includes details, such as under what circumstances a vetting cell should be established. DOD guidance specifying under what circumstances a vetting cell should be established would better position PACOM to avoid contracting with the enemy in high-threat areas.

PACOM established an interim operational contract support (OCS) organizational structure through a pilot program that ends in June 2017. PACOM officials stated that, upon completion of the pilot, they intend to establish the structure as an enduring OCS capability within the command's logistics directorate. The intent is to provide the combatant command, subordinate unified commands, and service components a central entity to integrate OCS across joint functions, such as directorates dealing with personnel or intelligence. However, service component officials stated that PACOM's OCS organizational structure might have been more effective if it engaged all joint staff functions, including directorates beyond logistics. DOD, Joint Staff, and PACOM guidance identify the important role that directorates beyond logistics should play as stakeholders in OCS. Similarly, GAO has previously reported on the challenges DOD has faced integrating OCS in functional areas beyond logistics. By considering ways to expand its OCS organizational structure beyond the logistics directorate and better integrate the equities of other directorates, PACOM could be better positioned to build on the progress made during the pilot program.

PACOM has integrated OCS into key planning documents, as required by guidance, by developing OCS annexes for 6 of its 11 operational, concept, and campaign plans. Officials added that they will continue to update the remaining plans as planning cycles and resources allow. However, the annexes generally lack key details, such as contractor management and support estimates. PACOM officials told GAO that such details are determined through requirements development at the service component commands, but challenges exist related to these issues due to unclear guidance. Without guidance that clarifies the requirements-development process for OCS annexes, PACOM will continue to lack important details that are needed to determine OCS requirements for operations.