

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-564](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

To move passengers and cargo, DOD supplements its military aircraft with cargo and passenger aircraft from volunteer commercial carriers participating in the CRAF program. Participating carriers commit their aircraft to support a range of military operations in exchange for peacetime business. A House Armed Services Committee mandated GAO to report on matters related to the CRAF program. GAO assessed whether DOD (1) met its military airlift training requirements while also using CRAF participants to the maximum extent practicable, (2) provided justification for restricting commercial carriers from transporting partial plane loads of cargo over certain routes, and (3) has established future requirements for CRAF and how the planned size of CRAF compares to those requirements. GAO reviewed guidance and policies pertaining to the program, flying hour data, and DOD-sponsored CRAF study reports. GAO also interviewed DOD and industry officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force and the Commander, U.S. Transportation Command—in conjunction with the Commander, Air Mobility Command—to use its existing processes for monitoring training to determine when it can shift its distribution of peacetime airlift workload from military to commercial sources. In comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with GAO's recommendation and stated that it believes implementing the recommendation will further improve the Civil Reserve Air Fleet program.

View [GAO-13-564](#). For more information, contact Zina Merritt at (202) 512-5257 or merrittz@gao.gov.

June 2013

MILITARY AIRLIFT

DOD Needs to Take Steps to Manage Workload Distributed to the Civil Reserve Air Fleet

What GAO Found

DOD exceeded the flying hours needed to meet military training requirements for fiscal years 2002 through 2010 because of increased operational requirements associated with Afghanistan and Iraq; however it does not know whether it used Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) participants to the maximum extent practicable. DOD guidance requires it to meet training requirements and to use commercial transportation to the "maximum extent practicable." During fiscal years 2002 through 2010, DOD flew its fleet more than needed to train its crews, although its flying has more closely matched its training needs in recent years. DOD has also used CRAF participants extensively to supplement military airlift. Although DOD has taken steps to make more airlift business available to CRAF participants, officials said that overseas operations have provided enough missions to support both training and CRAF business obligations. However, with the drawdown in Afghanistan, DOD officials expect the need for airlift to decline by at least 66 percent—to pre-September 2001 levels—reducing both training hours available for DOD and business opportunities for CRAF. DOD does not use its process for monitoring flying hours to determine when it will exceed required training hours and allocate eligible airlift missions to CRAF participants. Therefore, it cannot determine whether it is using CRAF to the maximum extent practicable. As a result, DOD may be using its military fleet more than necessary—which officials say is less economical—while risking reduced CRAF participation.

DOD provided several reasons for restricting commercial carriers from transporting partial plane loads of cargo over channel routes, including the need to promote efficiency, meet its military airlift training requirements, and fulfill peacetime business obligations to CRAF participants. Channel route missions are regularly scheduled airlift missions used to transport cargo and provide aircrew training time. These missions also help DOD provide business to CRAF participants. According to U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) officials, DOD generally requires aircraft conducting channel route missions to be completely full of cargo before takeoff. The policy restricting carriers from flying partial loads over channel routes allows DOD to consolidate cargo previously flown by commercial carriers in less than full plane loads and redirect that cargo into the channel route system, where it will be transported by either commercial or military aircraft as part of a full plane load mission. According to DOD, consolidating cargo into full loads flown over the channel route system has increased both the efficiency of these missions and the availability of missions that DOD uses to train its crews and fulfill its business obligations to CRAF.

It is unclear whether the planned size of CRAF will be adequate to meet future airlift requirements. DOD last established its future requirements based on the wartime scenarios in the Mobility Capability Requirements Study 2016, issued in 2010. However, due to changing military strategy and priorities, the 2010 study does not reflect current mission needs. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 requires DOD to conduct a new mobility capabilities and requirements study. DOD has not begun this study or finalized its ongoing reviews of the CRAF program's ability to support future requirements. Once they are finalized, these studies should allow DOD to better understand future requirements for CRAF and whether the CRAF program will meet future airlift requirements.