

Why GAO Did This Study

CENTCOM is one of six geographic combatant commands that DOD operates to perform its military missions. CENTCOM's geographic region is composed of countries located in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central and South Asia. CENTCOM and each of its service component commands' headquarters are composed of military and civilian personnel and receive millions of dollars in funding each year to accomplish assigned missions. GAO was mandated to review CENTCOM's resources.

This report (1) identifies trends in personnel devoted to CENTCOM and its service component commands since fiscal year 2001 and any steps DOD is planning to take for reducing personnel in the future, and (2) assesses how DOD funds CENTCOM and its service component commands' headquarters costs. GAO analyzed data on authorized positions, temporary personnel, and headquarters costs for CENTCOM and its service component commands from fiscal years 2001 through 2013. GAO also interviewed DOD officials about commands' resources and plans for funding headquarters costs.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD develop guidance for transitioning costs funded by overseas contingency operations appropriations to DOD's base budget. DOD partially agreed stating that the transition's time frame depends on enduring missions and the criteria for future budgets. GAO continues to believe the recommendation is valid, as discussed in the report.

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DEFENSE HEADQUARTERS

Guidance Needed to Transition U.S. Central Command's Costs to the Base Budget

What GAO Found

GAO analysis of U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM) and its service component commands' data shows considerable increases in the number of authorized positions over the past decade. The Department of Defense (DOD) is planning reductions, but the extent of these reductions has not been finalized. The number of authorized military and civilian positions at CENTCOM grew about 70 percent from almost 1,590 in fiscal year 2001 to almost 2,730 in fiscal year 2013, primarily driven by increases in the number of positions within CENTCOM's intelligence directorate and its theater special operations command. However, focusing solely on trends in authorized military and civilian positions provides an incomplete picture of the personnel dedicated to CENTCOM because the command relies heavily on temporary personnel and contractors to augment its headquarters. GAO analysis of CENTCOM's data found that the command headquarters had about 550 temporary personnel, who officials stated are primarily responsible for supporting the command's operations in Afghanistan and do not fill any permanent authorized positions, and 1,100 contractor personnel in fiscal year 2013. Additionally, GAO found that authorized military and civilian positions at CENTCOM's Army and Marine Corps service component commands had also increased. In response to the Secretary of Defense's direction to reduce headquarters spending, DOD is planning to decrease personnel at CENTCOM and its service component command headquarters. For example, CENTCOM is planning to reduce its total authorized positions by 353 positions from fiscal years 2015 through 2019.

As DOD's headquarters reduction efforts continue and contingency operations in Afghanistan wind down, the department has recognized that CENTCOM and its service components' have enduring headquarters costs that are expected to continue after ongoing operations end, but the majority of the costs to operate and support CENTCOM, two of its service component commands, and its theater special operations command headquarters are funded with overseas contingency operations appropriations. For example, CENTCOM's Marine Corps service component command funded \$34 million out of a total of \$42 million in headquarters costs in fiscal year 2013 with overseas contingency operations appropriations. CENTCOM and its components have determined some of these costs are enduring and expected to continue after the end of contingency operations, such as for Isa Air Base in Bahrain, but the military services have not transitioned or developed a time frame to transition these enduring costs to DOD's base budget. DOD's base budget contains the department's priorities for allocating resources. DOD officials stated that the department has not issued guidance that addresses how to fund these costs or established a time frame for when to transition them from DOD's overseas contingency operations budget to its base budget because DOD is waiting on decisions about future military involvement in Afghanistan. Officials also stated that the constrained fiscal environment has contributed to the department's reluctance to transition overseas contingency operations costs to DOD's base budget. However, without guidance that addresses how to pay for enduring headquarters costs funded by overseas contingency operations appropriations and a time frame to transition these costs to DOD's base budget, DOD may not be able to fully resource these activities once the funding decreases or ceases.