

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-601](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD maintains military forces with unparalleled capabilities. However, the department continues to confront weaknesses in the management of its business functions that support these forces. DOD uses Executive Agents, which are intended to facilitate collaboration, to achieve critical department objectives.

Senate Report 114-255, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, included a provision that GAO review DOD Executive Agents. This report (1) describes the number and focus of DOD Executive Agents; and evaluates the extent to which DOD (2) tracks its Executive Agents and (3) conducts periodic assessments of its Executive Agents. GAO reviewed relevant DOD directives and the list of Executive Agents; developed and implemented a questionnaire to DOD's Executive Agents; and interviewed relevant DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that ODCMO strengthen its approach to track DOD Executive Agents; verify assessments are conducted; and issue implementing guidance for documenting assessments. DOD concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-17-601](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (213) 830-1011 or vonaha@gao.gov.

September 2017

DEFENSE MANAGEMENT

DOD Needs to Improve Its Oversight of Executive Agents

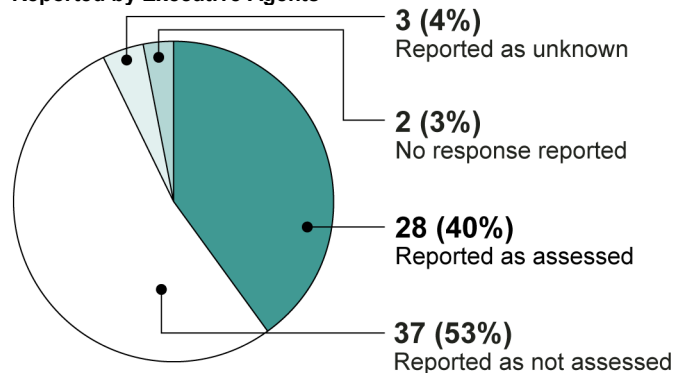
What GAO Found

Based on GAO's analysis, the Department of Defense (DOD) has 81 Executive Agents—management arrangements where the head of a DOD component is designated specific roles and responsibilities to accomplish objectives when more than one component is involved. These Executive Agents are assigned to 12 DOD components and support a range of activities, including managing technology and developing training programs. The Secretary of the Army is designated as the Executive Agent for almost half of them (38 of 81). DOD's Executive Agent directive requires that the Office of the Deputy Chief Management Officer (ODCMO) maintain a list of Executive Agent designations and oversee their assessments, among other things. Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Principal Staff Assistants are required to assess their respective Executive Agents every 3 years to determine their continued need, currency, efficiency, and effectiveness.

GAO found weaknesses in DOD's approach to tracking its Executive Agents, resulting in inaccuracies regarding 10 Executive Agents. For example, DOD's list of Executive Agents included several that are not currently active. While ODCMO is required to maintain a list of Executive Agents, ODCMO officials rely on self-reported information from DOD Executive Agents and OSD Principal Staff Assistants. Without taking steps to accurately track DOD Executive Agents, DOD's list will continue to be out dated and ODCMO cannot effectively oversee DOD Executive Agents.

Principal Staff Assistants had not periodically assessed more than half (37 of 70) of DOD Executive Agents that responded to GAO's questionnaire (see figure). ODCMO is responsible for overseeing the implementation of DOD's Executive Agents directive, which requires that Principal Staff Assistants conduct assessments; however, ODCMO officials told GAO they do not ensure that Principal Staff Assistants have conducted these assessments. GAO also found that Principal Staff Assistants are not required to document these assessments. Without verifying the completion of these assessments and issuing guidance requiring their documentation, DOD does not have reasonable assurance that DOD Executive Agents are accomplishing department objectives.

Number and Percentage of Required Assessments Principal Staff Assistants Conducted, as Reported by Executive Agents



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense questionnaire responses. | GAO-17-601