

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-81](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD must be able to rapidly deploy forces to respond to a range of worldwide contingencies, and in 2007 it established the GRF to enhance that capability. The GRF is a set, or “menu,” of forces from the military services, each of which possesses unique capabilities, and which the Secretary of Defense can deploy rapidly anywhere in the world.

House Report 114-537, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, included a provision for GAO to evaluate challenges DOD may be facing regarding the GRF. GAO reviewed the extent to which (1) DOD has used the GRF, and assessed any risks associated with its use of the GRF; and (2) GRF-assigned units are trained to meet GRF missions individually and as a joint force. GAO reviewed GRF deployment information from 2010 to 2017 and the GRF Execute Order, observed a training exercise, and interviewed knowledgeable officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD (1) assess the risks assumed in its reliance upon the GRF as both an augmentation capability and a tailorable joint force; (2) design appropriate responses following the risk assessment; and (3) designate an authority to establish and enforce integrated joint training as appropriate for GRF-assigned units. DOD concurred with GAO’s three recommendations.

View [GAO-18-81](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

October 2017

MILITARY READINESS

Actions Are Needed to Enhance Readiness of Global Response Force to Support Contingency Operations

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense’s (DOD) Global Response Force (GRF) has two distinct uses: one is to enhance DOD’s ability to rapidly deploy forces in response to a range of worldwide contingencies with a tailorable joint force; and the other is to provide a set, or “menu,” of units that combatant commands can request to augment their capabilities in light of unexpected challenges when requirements exceed their capabilities. Since 2010, according to officials, DOD has used the GRF 35 times in support of worldwide contingencies, with 32 of those times involving deployment of individual GRF units to augment combatant commander needs, and 3 times involving their use as part of a joint task force. This predominant use of individual GRF units to augment combatant commanders’ needs has diminished the set of units available for mission scenarios related to the GRF’s use as a tailorable joint force. For example, when DOD deployed a ballistic missile defense unit as a part of the GRF to augment a combatant command’s missile defense capabilities, the particular capability it supplied to the GRF was not available for participation in a tailorable joint force to respond quickly to a potential worldwide contingency, if such an event occurred. DOD does not know what risks it assumes to readiness for GRF mission scenarios due to its general reliance upon the GRF as an augmentation capability available to individual geographic combatant commands, because DOD has not assessed those risks. Without conducting a risk assessment and taking steps to address any identified risk to accomplishing the GRF’s intended uses, DOD’s attempt to satisfy one of the uses (that is, individual GRF-assigned units assisting combatant commands) may hamper the other use (that is, deployment of a joint task force for a contingency).

GRF units train individually to meet GRF missions, but DOD does not conduct any GRF-specific joint training exercises, and the individual GRF units have limited opportunities to train as part of an integrated joint force, according to DOD officials. While the GRF Execute Order calls for integrating elements of the GRF into existing joint training, the military services lack the authority to direct other services to supply forces for joint training exercises, even when those forces are currently on a GRF rotation. Moreover, since the disestablishment in 2011 of U.S. Joint Forces Command—which, among other things, was the lead agent for joint force training—and because units designated for the GRF mission may be assigned to different combatant commands or may be service-retained, no single commander has the authority to require joint force training of GRF units. As a result, no joint training exercises are specifically designed to exercise GRF units as a joint task force. Army officials told GAO that joint exercises are important because they give individual units from different services the opportunity to identify challenges and develop solutions, thereby enhancing the GRF’s joint task force capability. Without an entity having the responsibility and authority to plan, direct, and conduct joint training exercises focused on GRF-assigned units deploying as a joint task force as appropriate, DOD risks undermining the effectiveness of the rapid deployment of a GRF joint task force in response to unforeseen worldwide contingencies.