



September 2019

WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

Actions Needed to Improve Explosive Ordnance Disposal Forces Planning

Why GAO Did This Study

EOD forces are a high demand, critical asset that support DOD's ability to execute military operations. DOD increased the number of EOD forces by more than 70 percent from 2002 to 2012 because of increased demand. When not deployed, EOD forces provide support to civil authorities. One of these missions is protecting U.S. and foreign dignitaries—also referred to as VIP support missions.

House Report 115-200 included a provision for GAO to review matters related to EOD capabilities and requirements. This report assesses the extent to which (1) the military services consider all combatant command EOD requirements, including DSCA, in determining the number of EOD personnel needed, and (2) DOD evaluates the effect of VIP support missions on the military preparedness of EOD forces. GAO reviewed relevant guidance, analyzed EOD data, and interviewed EOD and manpower officials. This is a public version of a sensitive report that GAO issued in July 2019. Information that DOD deemed sensitive has been omitted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations including that DOD (1) update the appropriate service guidance to ensure that all EOD missions, including DSCA missions, are considered in determining the required number of EOD forces, and (2) incorporate into appropriate guidance a requirement for the military services to notify the Joint Staff and combatant commands when VIP support missions negatively affect the military preparedness of EOD units. DOD did not provide comments on the draft of this report.

View [GAO-19-698](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

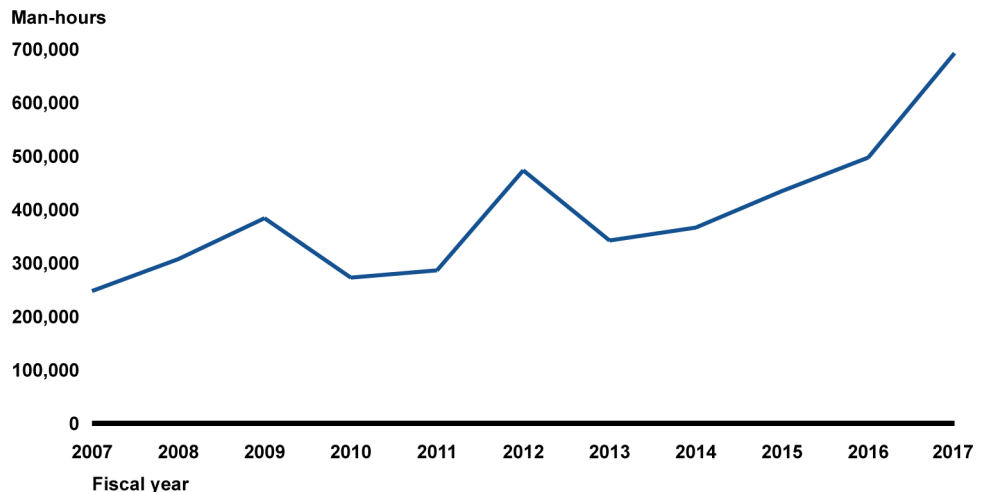
WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

Actions Needed to Improve Explosive Ordnance Disposal Forces Planning

What GAO Found

The military services' processes for determining the necessary number of explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) personnel are based on combat-related missions. However, these processes do not fully consider some defense support of civil authority (DSCA) missions that EOD forces conduct. Demand for EOD forces for DSCA missions can be manpower-intensive and frequent. For example, EOD forces' workload for protecting U.S. and foreign dignitaries—also referred to as Very Important Person (VIP) support missions—increased from about 248,000 to over 690,000 man-hours in fiscal years 2007 to 2017 (figure). However, according to officials, the services do not consider DSCA missions in determining the number of EOD personnel needed, instead focusing on combat-related missions. Unless the Department of Defense (DOD) ensures that the services update guidance to consider the total EOD force required to support both missions, decision makers cannot accurately assess the EOD forces' sufficiency.

Total Explosive Ordnance Disposal Man-hours Spent on Very Important Person Support Missions, Fiscal Years 2007-2017



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Northern Command data. | GAO-19-698

DOD guidance specific to VIP support missions does not include a requirement for the services to report on the effect of VIP support missions on military preparedness. According to officials, military preparedness is degraded when the services' EOD forces are unable to concurrently complete predeployment tasks such as training for combat. Per DOD guidance, Secret Service support requests are to be evaluated based on their effects on military preparedness. Without this information, decision makers are precluded from understanding the risk to EOD forces' military preparedness resulting from the routine VIP support missions. Decision makers need this information to ensure efficient and effective accomplishment of both VIP support missions and preparation for combat-related missions for affected combatant commands.

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Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
EODT&T	Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technology and Training
EDD	Explosive Detector Dog
EXORD	Execute Order
DSCA	Defense Support of Civil Authorities
NORTHCOM	United States Northern Command
Secret Service	United States Secret Service
VIP	Very Important Person
VIPPSA	Very Important Personnel Protection Support Activity

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September 30, 2019

Congressional Committees

Military doctrine describes explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) as a high demand, critical capability essential for the success of military operations.¹ Combatant commands rely on EOD to accomplish their missions.² The Department of Defense (DOD) increased its EOD forces by more than 70 percent from 2002 to 2012 because of increased demand for these forces. EOD forces execute a variety of duties during operations including countering improvised explosive devices and collecting and evaluating captured explosive-related enemy materiel. However, demand for EOD forces is not limited to wartime duties. According to officials, when not deployed to combat or on combat-related missions, EOD forces also provide support to civil authorities (referred to as defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) missions). One of these DSCA missions is to provide support to agencies that protect U.S. dignitaries worldwide and foreign dignitaries visiting the United States. These Very Important Person (VIP) support missions can be manpower-intensive.³ For example, a three-city, 5-day visit to the United States by a foreign dignitary generated a request for nearly 800 of DOD's EOD technicians in support of the U.S. Secret Service (Secret Service).

In prior work, we reported that EOD forces had operated jointly in Iraq and Afghanistan to fulfill battlefield requirements, and that the services had jointly developed guidance on tactics, techniques, and procedures for

¹ See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-42, *Joint Explosive Ordnance Disposal*, at xiv, vii (Sept. 9, 2016).

² DOD has 10 combatant commands, each with an assigned geographic region or functional mission. The six geographic commands, which have defined areas of responsibility, are U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, and U.S. Southern Command. The four functional commands, which have unique capabilities and operate worldwide, are U.S. Cyber Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, U.S. Strategic Command, and U.S. Transportation Command.

³ Under DOD's Very Important Personnel Protection Support Activity (VIPPSA) mission, DOD provides EOD support to the U.S. Secret Service and Department of State related to the protection of certain U.S. and foreign officials and persons, including the President of the United States. For purposes of this report, we refer to Very Important Personnel Protection Support Activity missions as VIP support missions.

EOD forces.⁴ However, DOD had not fully institutionalized joint EOD doctrine in the form of a joint publication. We recommended that DOD develop joint EOD doctrine that would guide combatant commanders' planning and clarify joint operational roles and responsibilities. In 2016, DOD published its joint EOD doctrine providing an authoritative description of EOD activities for the combatant commands and military services.⁵

In House Report 115-200, which accompanied a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, the House Armed Services Committee expressed concern about the degree to which EOD requirements and capabilities have been integrated into operational plans. The report included a provision for us to assess matters related to the sufficiency of EOD capabilities to address combatant command requirements.⁶ In this report, we assess the extent to which (1) the military services consider all combatant command EOD requirements, including defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) missions, in determining the number of EOD personnel needed and (2) DOD evaluates the effect of Very Important Person (VIP) support missions on the military preparedness of EOD forces.

This report is a public version of a sensitive report that we issued in July 2019.⁷ DOD deemed some of the information in our July report to be sensitive, which must be protected from public disclosure. Therefore, this report omits sensitive information about specific examples of the effect of recent VIP support missions on EOD forces' military preparedness. This report addresses the same objectives as the sensitive report and uses the same methodology.

For our first objective, we assessed the extent to which the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force manpower processes determine and meet combatant command requirements for EOD, including combat-related missions and DSCA missions. We reviewed relevant DOD guidance

⁴ GAO, *Explosive Ordnance Disposal: DOD Needs Better Resource Planning and Joint Guidance to Manage the Capability*, [GAO-13-385](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 2013).

⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-42, *Joint Explosive Ordnance Disposal* (Sept. 9, 2016).

⁶ H.R. Rep. No. 115-200, at 101-02 (2017).

⁷ GAO, *Warfighter Support: Actions Needed to Improve Planning for Explosive Ordnance Disposal Forces*, [GAO-19-234SU](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 17, 2019).

documents. We collected data on the amount of time EOD forces spent on VIP support missions from 2007 to 2017 to provide an 11-year overview and to identify any trends. Based on U.S. Northern Command's (NORTHCOM) response to our data reliability questionnaire and supporting documentation the command provided, we determined that the data we obtained were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of reporting EOD program information.

We met with EOD officials from each service including officials from the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Indian Head, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technology Division to discuss their respective service's EOD responsibilities and force structure.⁸ We interviewed officials from NORTHCOM and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Joint Staff, and service headquarters to understand their perspectives on the sufficiency of EOD forces as well as gaps, shortfalls, and redundancies associated with existent force structures. Additionally, we met with officials from the Navy's and Army's EOD force providers to understand the services' processes for responding to combatant command requirements. Finally, we met with manpower officials to discuss each service's procedures and processes used to determine manpower for addressing combatant command needs.

For our second objective, we assessed the extent to which DOD evaluates the impact of VIP support missions on the military preparedness of EOD forces. We specifically examined the processes used to provide EOD forces to VIP support missions to understand the extent to which these missions entail risk to military preparedness. Additionally, we discussed these processes with the responsible DOD

⁸ According to DOD officials, although there is not presently a single office in DOD responsible for the management of EOD resources in DOD, the Secretary of the Navy is designated by the Secretary of Defense to serve as the DOD single manager for explosive ordnance disposal technology and training (EODT&T). As such, the Secretary of the Navy is to manage and administer the elements of the EODT&T programs for DOD. DOD Directive 5160.62, *Single Manager Responsibility for Military Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technology and Training (EODT&T)*, encl. 2, para 3.a (June 3, 2011) (incorporating change 2, effective Sept. 24, 2018). DOD guidance also identifies the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict as the Office of the Secretary of Defense proponent for EOD, with responsibilities related to EODT&T. *Id.* para.1. Additionally, the Secretary of Defense was recently required to establish the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Defense Program and, as part of the requirement, to assign responsibility for the direction, coordination, and integration of the program to an Assistant Secretary of Defense, among other required designations. John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, Pub. L. No. 115-232, § 311(a) (2018) (codified at 10 U.S.C. § 2284(b)(1)(A)).

officials. We reviewed VIP support missions because, according to officials, it is the most frequently occurring and manpower-intensive EOD DSCA mission. We reviewed DOD, service, and Joint Staff guidance related to the use of EOD forces in support of other federal agencies and joint doctrine discussing risk management in the context of joint operational planning. We collected data on the Army's combat-related and DSCA demands for its EOD forces because the Army has the largest EOD force of all four military services. Based on the Army's results from our data reliability questionnaire and supporting documentation provided, we determined that the data that we obtained concerning missions and availability of EOD forces were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of reporting EOD program information.

We met with EOD officials from each service to discuss the demand and effects of the VIP support mission on EOD forces. We also met with representatives of NORTHCOM, Joint Force Headquarters-National Capital Region, Joint Staff, service headquarters, the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Global Security, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability and Humanitarian Affairs.

The performance audit upon which this report is based was conducted from September 2017 through July 2019 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We subsequently worked with DOD in August and September 2019 to prepare this unclassified version of the original sensitive report for public release. This public version was also prepared in accordance with these standards.

Background

Types of Missions Conducted by EOD Forces

The military services – Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps – have highly trained EOD personnel to eliminate explosive hazards in support of a variety of events and activities, ranging from major combat operations and contingency operations overseas to assisting the Secret Service in its protection of the President of the United States (see fig.1). EOD forces

are dispersed worldwide to meet combatant commanders' operational requirements related to these missions. Although the services' EOD forces support combatant commanders, NORTHCOM's Joint Force Headquarters-National Capital Region coordinates EOD force support of land-based homeland defense and DSCA missions.

Figure 1: Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician in Training



An EOD technician preparing to render safe a practice munition.

Source: U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Vincent Fausnaught. | GAO-19-698

EOD forces conduct combat-related and DSCA missions that support national military objectives. EOD combat-related missions include preparations for combat such as training and exercises, and the wartime execution of EOD missions. EOD forces play a major role in all phases of combat operations. For example, these forces contribute to information gathering during operations and serve to enable the safe conduct of operations within an operational area. Additionally, EOD forces support freedom of maneuver and force protection. Further, they may directly support missions such as counterterrorism, deterring and defeating aggression, and countering weapons of mass destruction, among others across the spectrum of operations. Officials from each service stated that

EOD forces prepare for these combat-related missions during predeployment in-garrison periods.

EOD forces also conduct DSCA missions when they are not engaged in combat-related missions. DOD provides EOD forces when requested in advance by specific federal agencies and approved by the appropriate DOD official.⁹ Officials stated that generally, EOD forces undertake VIP support missions during in-garrison periods, just after returning from combat-related deployments or while preparing for the next deployment.

DOD Guidance and Processes Related to EOD Manpower and Risks

The military services collectively have more than 6,300 EOD positions to fulfill combatant command missions, and demand for EOD manpower and expertise is high.¹⁰ Each service determines the number of EOD technicians it needs based on its respective requirements, which consider combatant commanders' wartime missions and plans. According to a DOD official, the services take into account the long lead times—up to 3 years in one service—that can be necessary to produce qualified and experienced EOD specialists.

In accordance with DOD policy, when considering EOD wartime requirements, service officials should make certain that national military objectives can be accomplished using a minimum of manpower that produces maximum combat power.¹¹ DOD policy also states that a formal validated process is to be used to determine wartime manpower

⁹ EOD personnel have provided support for planned national special security events, such as state of the union and presidential inaugural addresses, and other special events, such as the 1996 Summer Olympics. Short notice EOD missions requiring two to 50 EOD specialists are referred to in DOD as routine VIP support missions.

¹⁰ Although EOD forces represent a small portion of DOD's 1.4 million active duty members, there has been congressional interest in EOD capabilities as reflected in recent National Defense Authorization Acts. Most recently, the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 required the Secretary of Defense to establish the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Defense Program to ensure close and continuous coordination between the military departments on matters related to EOD support for combatant commanders. Pub. L. No. 115-232, § 311(a) (codified at 10 U.S.C. § 2284).

¹¹ DOD policy provides that national military objectives shall be accomplished with a minimum of manpower that is organized and employed to provide maximum effectiveness and combat power. It further provides that manpower requirements are driven by workload and shall be established at the minimum levels necessary to accomplish mission and performance objectives. DOD Directive 1100.4, *Guidance for Manpower Management*, paras. 3.1, 3.2 (Feb. 12, 2005).

requirements.¹² Generally, manpower requirements are the amount of personnel needed to accomplish a job, mission, or program.¹³ Joint doctrine outlines mission tasks associated with EOD units.¹⁴ Once a service determines the tasks required of a particular community (such as EOD), the service then sizes its forces (i.e., determines the manpower requirement) according to the demand for those tasks among the combatant commands.

Risk is the effect of uncertainty on objectives with the potential for either a negative outcome or a positive outcome or opportunity.¹⁵ In the military, accurately appraising risk allows leaders and staffs to manage and communicate risk effectively to inform decisions across disparate processes. Joint doctrine describes a planning process that aligns resources and military activities, and enables leaders to examine risks, among other factors, to determine a preferred course of action to achieve an objective.¹⁶ Planning for EOD involves military manpower systems that accurately determine the required EOD forces and decision makers who decide how much risk is acceptable if or when there is a shortfall of EOD forces.

According to DOD doctrine on joint planning, regardless of the efforts to mitigate it, some level of risk will remain and should be identified to senior leaders so there is a common understanding of the decisions required and the potential effects of those decisions. Commanders must include a discussion of risk in their interaction with DOD senior leaders and that discussion must be in concrete terms that enable and support decision-making.¹⁷ In the context of strategic and military risk evaluation during

¹² *Id.* para. 3.2.4.1.

¹³ For example, Air Force manpower guidance defines the term “manpower requirement” as a statement of the manpower required to accomplish a specified job, workload, mission, or program. Air Force Policy Directive 38-2, *Manpower* (Apr. 24, 2018).

¹⁴ Specifically, joint doctrine notes that common EOD training, equipment, and technical manuals provide each service with the capability to detect/locate, access, identify, triage, diagnose, stabilize, render safe/neutralize, recover, exploit, and dispose of weapons and explosives. Joint Pub. 3-42, at I-3.

¹⁵ GAO, *Enterprise Risk Management: Selected Agencies’ Experiences Illustrate Good Practices in Managing Risk*, [GAO-17-63](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 1, 2016)

¹⁶ See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-0, *Joint Operations*, at II-5 (Jan. 17, 2017) (incorporating change 1, Oct. 22, 2018).

¹⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Planning*, at I-12 (June 16, 2017).

joint planning, combatant commanders and DOD's senior leaders work together to reach a common understanding of risk, decide what risk is acceptable, and minimize the effects of accepted risk by establishing appropriate risk controls.¹⁸

Military Services' Processes for Determining EOD Manpower Levels Focus on Combat-Related Missions, but Do Not Consider the Increasing Demand for Some DSCA Missions

The military services' processes for determining EOD manpower levels are based on combat-related missions and, accordingly, do not fully consider DSCA missions.¹⁹ However, DOD provides EOD resources for various DSCA missions such as:

- aiding in the protection of the President of the United States and dignitaries through VIP support missions;
- providing assistance to law enforcement agencies and other civil authorities in the United States and its territories when necessary to save lives under DOD's immediate response authority;²⁰ and
- rendering safe military munitions when requested by civil authorities (see fig. 2).

¹⁸ *Id.* at III-14.

¹⁹ This review focuses on DSCA missions that involve EOD activities categorized by DOD as defense support of civil authorities and defense support of civilian law enforcement agencies in the form of render safe and/or disposal of explosive ordnance. Such DSCA missions include support provided to the U.S. Secret Service and Department of State for the protection of the President and Vice-President of the United States, as well as the Secretary of State and other designated dignitaries in accordance with DOD guidance. Such DSCA activities may be executed in conjunction with a planned event or as an emergency response.

For the purposes of this review, combat and combat-related missions are those EOD activities conducted in support of a combatant commander during the phases of joint operations that begin before hostilities commence and continue beyond the cessation of hostilities. These activities are conducted in preparation for or in execution of the joint force and/or the combatant commander's mission objectives in support of US national security.

²⁰ Executing a DSCA mission normally requires approval. However when time does not permit approval from higher DOD authority and under imminently serious conditions, federal military commanders and DOD officials may provide EOD support under immediate response authority to save lives, prevent human suffering, or mitigate great property damage. See DOD Directive 3025.18, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA)*, para. 4.i (Dec. 29, 2010) (incorporating change 2, effective Mar. 19, 2018); Joint Pub. 3-42, at G-4; DOD Manual 3025.01, vol. 1, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities: Overview*, app. 9D (Aug. 11, 2016).

Figure 2: Munitions Cache



Cache of munitions awaiting disposal.

Source: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Danny Ray Nuñez Jr. | GAO-19-698

EOD and manpower officials from each of the military services explained that, in practice, their respective services focus on combat-related missions and do not consider DSCA missions in determining the number of EOD personnel needed. Specifically:

- According to Army officials, the Total Army Analysis process that is used to size Army forces considers core functions for combat operations and warfighting requirements. They explained that this process does not consider DSCA requirements in determining the number of EOD forces needed. In Army guidance, manpower is based on wartime missions and wartime requirements for sustained combat operations, among other types of information.²¹ Due in part to force structure adjustments and the drawdown of EOD forces, since 2014, according to information provided by the Army, the Army has

²¹ See Army Regulation 71-32, *Force Development and Documentation* (July 1, 2013).

reduced more than 800 EOD positions, the equivalent of two EOD battalions and 13 EOD companies.

- According to Navy officials, the Navy makes manpower decisions with a focus on wartime requirements by analyzing required operational capabilities against the projected operational environment. In Navy manpower guidance, this analysis is critical to developing fleet manpower requirements for units such as EOD forces.²² Navy officials explained that the process does not consider the DSCA mission in determining EOD manpower.
- The Air Force's EOD manpower standard, which has been updated through 2013, is based on in-garrison needs and wartime requirements.²³ In Air Force manpower guidance, manpower is described as a critical resource that enables combat capability; the guidance further notes that manpower requirements are identified and resources are subsequently allocated for peacetime and wartime missions.²⁴ However, Air Force officials stated that the process focuses on results for combat-related missions and does not specifically include DSCA requirements.
- According to Marine Corps officials, the Marine Corps' EOD forces are sized to support Marine Expeditionary Forces for deployment for overseas combat operations. The Marine Corps' manpower guidance describes a force structure process designed to identify and provide the capabilities, including personnel and equipment, necessary to accomplish mission essential tasks.²⁵ Marine Corps officials stated that the service does not receive additional EOD manpower specifically for DSCA missions.

Although service manpower calculations do not reflect DSCA missions, one of the DSCA missions—VIP support—is manpower intensive and occurs frequently. Specifically, the workload for VIP support can be substantial and has increased from about 248,000 man-hours in fiscal

²² See Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 1000.16L, *Navy Total Force Manpower Policies and Procedures* (June 24, 2015) (change transmittal 1, Apr. 28, 2016).

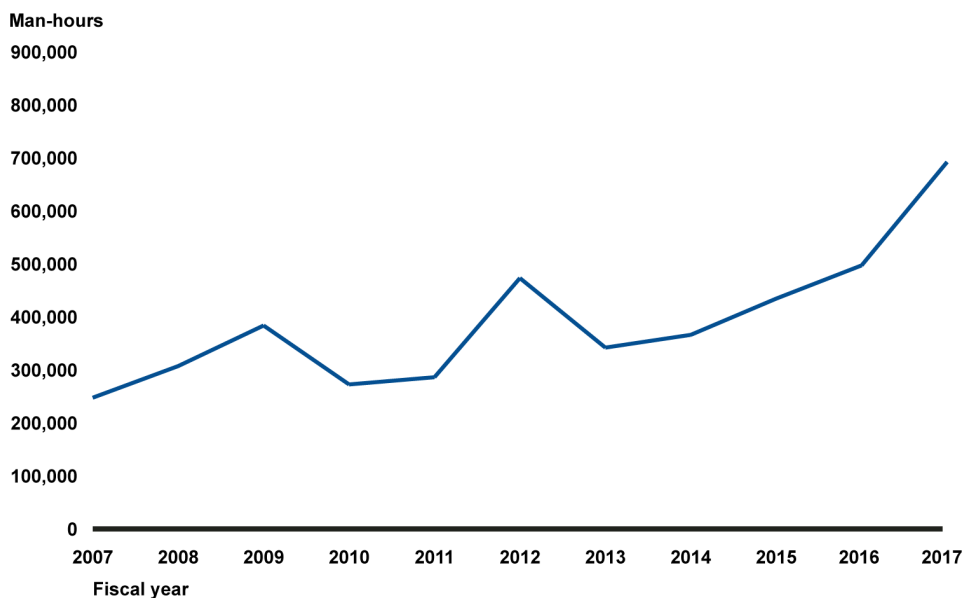
²³ The manpower standard has been updated several times. See Air Force Manpower Standard, *Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Flight 44ED00* (Apr. 9, 2013).

²⁴ See Air Force Policy Directive 38-2, *Manpower* (Apr. 24, 2018).

²⁵ See Marine Corps Order 5311.1E, *Total Force Structure Process* (Nov. 18, 2015).

year 2007 to over 690,000 man-hours in fiscal year 2017.²⁶ According to a NORTHCOM official, this rise is due to an increase in the different types and complexity of threats requiring more EOD personnel to sufficiently support civil authorities. Figure 3 below illustrates the increase in the amount of time the EOD forces have spent on VIP support missions.

Figure 3: Total Explosive Ordnance Disposal Man-hours Spent on Very Important Person (VIP) Support Missions, Fiscal Years 2007-2017



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Northern Command data. | GAO-19-698

The military services have a long-standing practice of providing support to civil authorities, including EOD support. DOD support to civil authorities is grounded or reflected in statute and DOD guidance. For example, the Presidential Protection Assistance Act of 1976 requires executive agencies, including DOD, to assist the Secret Service on a temporary basis in protecting the President, the Vice President and other persons—

²⁶ Man-hours are calculated based on the mission report and mission release times and do not include travel time to and from the location of the mission.

such as visiting foreign dignitaries (see fig.4).²⁷ In addition, the National Military Strategy and current homeland defense strategy prioritize defending the homeland and providing support to civil authorities.²⁸

Figure 4: Support to the President



DOD provides support to the President.

Source: Department of Defense (DOD) photo by U.S. Marine Cpl. Timothy Turner. | GAO-19-698

Moreover, DOD guidance addresses DSCA generally as well as specific support to the Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security, and law

²⁷ See Pub. L. No. 94-524, § 6 (1976) (as amended) (18 U.S.C. § 3056 note). Among other things, the Act requires executive departments and agencies to assist the Secret Service in the performance of its protection duties by providing services, equipment, and facilities on a temporary basis when requested by the Director of the Secret Service. *Id.* §§ 6, 2(7). The list of protectees includes the President, the Vice President (or other officer next in the order of succession), visiting heads of foreign states or foreign governments, and other distinguished foreign visitors to the United States. *Id.* § 2(3); 18 U.S.C. § 3056(a).

²⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015: The United States Military's Contribution to National Security* (June 2015); Department of Defense, *Strategy for Homeland Defense and Defense Support of Civil Authorities* (Feb. 2013).

enforcement.²⁹ Further, the Secretary of Defense approved a Joint Staff standing execute order (EXORD) which is used to execute routine VIP support missions related to the protection of dignitaries on short notice.³⁰ This order authorizes NORTHCOM to provide EOD support to the Secret Service and U.S. Department of State within the NORTHCOM area of operations, and to coordinate that support at locations worldwide.³¹ Joint doctrine for EOD also lists DSCA as one of nine military missions that EOD forces may directly support, and states that the majority of EOD DSCA missions will be in support of law enforcement or emergency support agencies.³² Finally, the military services' *Inter-Service Responsibilities for Explosive Ordnance Disposal* lists several common responsibilities of the military services' EOD assets that include providing support to civilian agencies such as the Secret Service.³³

While the DSCA mission is emphasized in departmental guidance and support of civil authorities has placed increasing and significant demands on EOD forces, the military services do not fully consider these factors in determining the appropriate number of EOD forces. According to EOD officials, this is because the primary mission of EOD forces is to conduct combat missions in support of combatant commanders and meet operational plans. Service officials stated that DSCA missions are not priority missions when it comes to sizing their respective forces, and that

²⁹ E.g., DOD Directive 3025.18, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA)* (Dec. 29, 2010) (incorporating change 2, effective Mar. 19, 2018); DOD Directive 3025.13, *Employment of DOD Capabilities in Support of the U.S. Secret Service (USSS)*, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (Oct. 8, 2010); DOD Instruction 3025.21, *Defense Support of Civilian Law Enforcement Agencies* (Feb. 27, 2013).

³⁰ Routine VIP support missions are those missions that require 25 or fewer two-person EOD teams. According to Army and NORTHCOM officials, routine missions differ from non-routine missions in that routine missions occur frequently and with little advance notice. While non-routine missions are processed through an approval process overseen by representatives of the Secretary of Defense, NORTHCOM approves routine VIP support missions.

³¹ Joint Staff Execute Order, *DOD Routine EOD and EDD Support to U.S. Secret Service (USSS) and Department of State (DOS)* (Oct. 19, 2012).

³² Joint Pub. 3-42, at I-2, II-1. Joint doctrine regarding DSCA similarly identifies EOD considerations. See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-28, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities*, at IV-4 to IV-5 (July 31, 2013).

³³ Army Regulation 75-14, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 8027.2, Air Force Instruction 32-3002-O, Marine Corps Order 8027.1E, *Inter-Service Responsibilities for Explosive Ordnance Disposal*, para. 2-2 (Mar. 27, 2018).

they do not routinely increase EOD manpower in order to provide support to other federal agencies.

Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government state that management should design control activities to achieve objectives and respond to risks.³⁴ Specifically, management should ensure policies and procedures are relevant and effective in achieving an entity's objectives. In addition, the standards state that management should use quality information to make informed decisions and evaluate the entity's performance in achieving key objectives. Quality information is information that is appropriate, current, complete, accurate, accessible, and provided on a timely basis. DOD manpower policy states that manpower management shall be flexible, adaptive to program changes, and responsive to new management strategies, and that existing policies, procedures, and structures shall be periodically evaluated to ensure efficient and effective use of manpower resources.³⁵

However, the military services' current processes for determining the appropriate amount of EOD manpower do not fully account for the increase in DSCA missions requiring EOD support. While it is understandable that the services prioritize combat missions when determining EOD requirements, they are not considering all available information in their decision-making process. This lack of consideration limits their ability to efficiently and effectively achieve their objectives and manage risks. Accounting for the increase in EOD manpower demand may not necessarily result in an increase in manpower; however, the services will be better prepared to understand the demand on existing EOD forces and evaluate any resulting risks. Ultimately, unless the military services update appropriate guidance to ensure that they consider the total EOD force required to support combat-related and DSCA missions, decision makers cannot accurately assess the sufficiency of EOD forces to meet both missions and the associated risks.

³⁴ GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Sept. 10, 2014).

³⁵ DOD Directive 1100.4, para. 3.1.1.

DOD Cannot Evaluate the Effects of VIP Support Missions on Military Preparedness Because the Services Are Not Required to Notify Decision Makers

DOD cannot evaluate the effects of VIP support missions on military preparedness because current VIP support mission guidance does not require the military services to notify the Joint Staff and appropriate combatant commands when military preparedness is negatively affected by these missions.³⁶ According to officials from the military services, the execution of VIP support missions introduces risk that threatens the services' abilities to execute combat-related missions. Specifically, military preparedness is degraded when the services' EOD forces are unable to concurrently complete predeployment tasks, such as training for combat, because the forces are called upon to execute routine VIP support missions. Officials told us that EOD forces can only conduct these VIP support missions during the time period when EOD forces are scheduled to conduct predeployment tasks and accomplish training. As a result, according to officials, VIP support missions can deleteriously affect military preparedness for EOD forces.

In multiple instances, missions supporting civil authorities have stressed the Army's EOD capabilities, resulting in missed training and the inability to participate in exercises and activities supporting combat-related missions, according to statements and data provided by the Army.³⁷ Furthermore, fulfilling VIP support missions can be particularly difficult because short-notice demand for EOD teams often exceeds the planned VIP support demand that can be supported. As a result, Army EOD teams are sometimes dispatched at the expense of military preparedness for combat-related missions in support of combatant commands, according to Army officials. Specific details of the effect recent VIP support missions have had on the Army's EOD capabilities are included in our July 2019 restricted report.³⁸

Officials from other services also acknowledged that undertaking routine VIP support missions comes at the expense of training for combat-related missions because of the high demand for and limited number of EOD forces. According to a senior Navy official, that service has sometimes

³⁶ DOD guidance documents use the terms military preparedness and military readiness when describing factors to consider in evaluating DSCA requests. For purposes of this report, we use the term military preparedness.

³⁷ Army EOD forces meeting DSCA demands within the NORTHCOM area of responsibility are drawn primarily from the Army's U.S.-based EOD force provider.

³⁸ GAO, *Warfighter Support: Actions Needed to Improve Planning for Explosive Ordnance Disposal Forces*, GAO-19-234SU (Washington, D.C.: July 17, 2019).

refused mission requests to protect dignitaries because of its inability to meet operational demands, such as deployments and training for its EOD forces and support missions to protect dignitaries simultaneously. When this occurs, however, NORTHCOM will ask another service to accept the mission, thereby putting increased demand on that other service's EOD forces that, in turn, may conflict with their scheduled training and preparations for combat missions, according to military service officials.³⁹ Because NORTHCOM has few permanently assigned forces to conduct VIP support missions, it must instead rely on EOD forces from each of the military services that are in-garrison and preparing for but not currently deployed to a combat-related mission.

According to DOD guidance, DOD's ability to grant Secret Service requests for support is to be evaluated based on a number of factors, one of which is the effect on military preparedness.⁴⁰ For example, DOD Directive 3025.18, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA)*, specifies that requests from civil authorities for assistance shall be evaluated for several factors, including the impact on DOD's ability to perform its other primary missions.⁴¹ The guidance also provides that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is responsible for advising the Secretary of Defense on the effects of requests for civil support on national security and military readiness.⁴²

According to joint doctrine, a commander's tasks associated with the function of command and control include managing risk—such as that arising from EOD support for other agencies protecting dignitaries—as well as communicating and ensuring the flow of information across the staff and joint force, and to higher authorities.⁴³ Additionally, in the context

³⁹ According to officials, future readiness is negatively affected when short notice VIP support requests conflict with scheduled training and other preparations for combat missions. According to officials, existing readiness systems do not forecast future readiness for EOD.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., DOD Directive 3025.18, para. 4.e(6); DOD Directive 3025.13, para. 4.d; DOD Instruction 3025.21, encl. 3, para. 4. As noted above, DOD guidance documents use the terms "military readiness" and "military preparedness."

⁴¹ DOD Directive 3025.18, para. 4.e(6); see also DOD Directive 3025.13, para. 4.d. DOD Instruction 3025.21 further states that assistance may not be provided if such assistance could adversely affect military preparedness. DOD Instruction 3025.21, encl. 3, para. 4.

⁴² See DOD Directive 3025.18, encl. 2, para. 11.a; DOD Directive 3025.13, encl. 2, para. 13.a.

⁴³ See Joint Pub. 3-0, at III-2.

of evaluating strategic and military risk during joint planning, combatant commanders and senior DOD leaders work together to reach a common understanding of risk, decide what risk is acceptable, and minimize the effects of accepted risk.⁴⁴ The *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* also addresses the importance of an entity using quality information to achieve its objectives.⁴⁵ Specifically, management should use quality information to make informed decisions and evaluate the entity's performance in achieving key objectives and addressing risks.

As previously mentioned, the Joint Staff has issued a Secretary of Defense-approved EXORD that provides guidance for the military to provide EOD support to the Secret Service and Department of State for routine VIP support missions. However, this EXORD does not specify a requirement for the services to notify DOD stakeholders regarding the effect on military preparedness for combat missions.⁴⁶ As a result, the military services are not advising the Joint Staff or NORTHCOM when these VIP support missions are adversely affecting EOD military preparedness for combat-related missions.⁴⁷ Regarding military preparedness, the absence of a notification requirement precludes decision makers from understanding the risk to EOD forces' ability to perform their primary mission. Decision makers need this information to carry out their responsibilities and assess risk to ensure efficient and effective accomplishment of both VIP support missions and preparation for combat-related missions for combatant commands.

⁴⁴ See Joint Pub. 5-0, at III-14. The joint doctrine notes that, for military risk, combatant commanders evaluate the impact of the difference between required and available capability, capacity, readiness, plans, and authorities on their ability to execute assigned missions. Military risk is composed of the risk to mission assessed by the combatant command, risk to the force assessed by the services, and risk to potential future operations. *Id.* at III-15.

⁴⁵ [GAO-14-704G](#).

⁴⁶ The EXORD tasks service chiefs, military department secretaries, or supporting geographic combatant commanders to provide written justification to NORTHCOM for any routine EOD mission support that they are unable to provide. The EXORD also specifies that NORTHCOM is to keep senior leadership informed of EOD support operating tempo in support of the mission. However, it does not include provisions for the services to notify NORTHCOM, relevant combatant commands, or the Joint Staff when providing such support would have a negative effect on military preparedness for combat-related missions.

⁴⁷ Some EOD officials told us that neither Joint Staff nor the combatant commands have sufficient EOD representation on their staffs.

Conclusions

The military services' EOD forces provide the combatant commanders necessary capabilities for combat and combat-related missions. They also provide capabilities through their DSCA missions that are important to supporting U.S. law enforcement agencies and other federal, state, and local civil authorities. DOD has manpower processes that result in careful consideration of the requirements of the combatant commander for combat-related missions. However, those manpower processes do not fully consider DSCA missions, such as the VIP support mission and its accompanying substantial workload. Until DOD processes begin to consider the demand for EOD support for both types of missions, decision makers cannot know the complete manpower requirement for EOD. Consequently, the extent to which the services' EOD forces are sufficient or insufficient to meet national military objectives cannot be fully known. Furthermore, DOD lacks a requirement in guidance specific to the VIP support mission to notify stakeholders regarding the effects of such missions on military preparedness for combat-related missions. As a result, DOD may not be fully considering risks associated with the use of EOD forces for VIP support on the preparation and training of those forces for combat-related missions.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following four recommendations to DOD.

The Secretary of the Army should update Army manpower guidance, or other guidance as appropriate, to ensure that all missions conducted by EOD forces, including DSCA missions, are considered in determining the required number of EOD forces. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of the Air Force should update Air Force manpower guidance, or other guidance as appropriate, to ensure that all missions conducted by EOD forces, including DSCA missions, are considered in determining the required number of EOD forces. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of the Navy should update Navy and Marine Corps manpower guidance, or other guidance as appropriate, to ensure that all missions conducted by EOD forces, including DSCA missions, are considered in determining the required number of EOD forces. (Recommendation 3)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in collaboration with the combatant commands, incorporate into the appropriate guidance a requirement that the military services notify the Joint Staff and the affected combatant commands

when the execution of VIP support missions negatively affects the preparedness of EOD units for combat-related missions.
(Recommendation 4)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. DOD did not provide comments.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix I.



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Director
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Appendix I: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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In addition to the contact named above, Guy LoFaro, (Assistant Director), Ben Atwood, Naba Barkakati, Christopher Gezon, Amie Lesser, Dennis Mayo, Paulina Reaves, Michael Silver, Michael Shaughnessy, Stephen Woods, and Lillian Yob made contributions to this report.

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