Why GAO Did This Study

Since 1988, the department has spent billions of dollars to implement BRAC rounds to reduce excess infrastructure and meet changing force structure needs. DOD initiated five BRAC rounds from 1988 through 2005. DOD is legally obligated to restore its properties, including BRAC sites, to a level that protects human health and the environment.

Senate Report 116-48 directed DOD to prepare a report by November 2019 to provide information on the costs and savings for each BRAC round. It also includes a provision for GAO to review DOD’s 2019 report and other previous reports related to BRAC. In this report, GAO (1) analyzes how BRAC spending compared to initial estimates, (2) evaluates the extent DOD reported complete and transparent estimates for BRAC future costs and end dates, and (3) evaluates the extent DOD’s 2019 BRAC report presented valid findings for realized savings.

GAO examined the information reported to Congress on costs and savings of BRAC, analyzed information from a database on environmental restoration efforts and from a non-generalizable sample of nine bases, and interviewed DOD officials.

What GAO Found

Department of Defense (DOD) expenditures for Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC)-related activities exceeded initial estimates through fiscal year 2020. This was driven in part by environmental restoration costs, which could not be fully captured in initial estimates. According to DOD data, the department has spent in total about $64.5 billion—an increase of $22.8 billion from DOD’s initial budget estimate—in funding for BRAC-related activities, as of September 2020. Of this total, DOD spent $14.8 billion on environmental activities and caretaking of BRAC sites and estimated it will need an additional $7 billion. DOD data show it has closed 7,334 (83 percent) of the total BRAC sites. GAO has previously reported that it can be difficult to accurately predict total costs for environmental restoration without completing investigations into levels of contamination in accordance with land reuse plans. Costs may also change due to new laws and increased contaminant levels after follow-on testing.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations. When reporting to Congress on BRAC, DOD should (1) identify when sites will reach site closeout and the number and costs of sites estimated to remain in long-term management, and (2) explicitly state the caveats and limitations of its savings estimates. DOD concurred with GAO’s two recommendations.

View GAO-22-105207. For more information, contact Elizabeth A. Field at (202) 512-2775 or FieldE1@gao.gov.