

DOD Needs to Review Its Defense Agencies and Field Activities for Efficiency and Effectiveness

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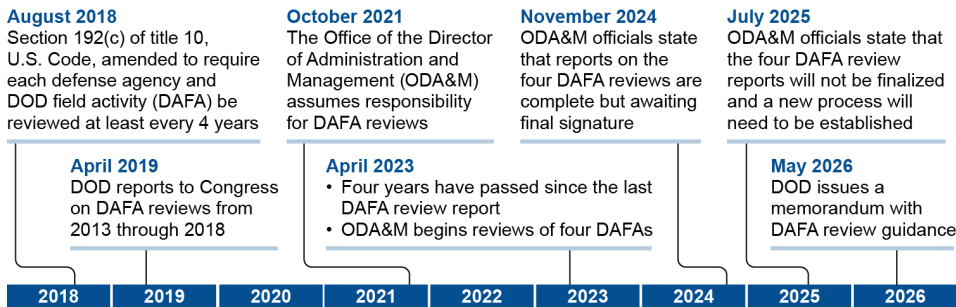
A report to congressional committees.

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What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has not recently met statutory requirements to review and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of its defense agencies and DOD field activities (DAFA). Between April 2023 and September 2024, DOD conducted a review of four DAFAs. However, the department did not finalize the reports based on its reviews or submit the reports to Congress as required. DOD did not have formalized guidance, such as an instruction, in place when conducting these four DAFA reviews. In May 2026, DOD issued a memorandum for future DAFA reviews that includes responsibilities and deadlines. While this is a positive step, DOD previously issued a memorandum for this effort that did not ensure the completion of the reviews. Formalizing guidance for the process would better position DOD to meet its reporting requirements and would provide Congress with better information to inform decision-making related to DOD's efficiency and effectiveness.

Timeline of Defense Agency and DOD Field Activity Reviews Since 2018



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-26-107781

DOD has not assessed the efficiency and effectiveness of its DAFAs, including the Defense Human Resources Agency (DHRA), because the department did not clearly define measures to be used for its most recent DAFA reviews. In its May 2026 memorandum, DOD included standard measures for efficiency and effectiveness, but the memorandum lacks detail on these measures. Moreover, the measures are not clearly defined or established in formalized guidance. Clearly defining how to assess efficiency and effectiveness in formalized guidance for the DAFA reviews would enable DOD to more comprehensively assess DHRA and the other DAFAs' performance.

As part of its DAFA reviews, DOD is statutorily required to identify each activity of a DAFA that is substantially similar to, or duplicative of, an activity carried out by another organization within DOD. GAO found overlap in two training areas within the DAFAs: (1) the leader development programs at DHRA, the Defense Logistics Agency, and the Washington Headquarters Services; and (2) the sexual assault prevention and response training directed by DOD and developed by the military services. However, DOD has not assessed if there are negative effects on efficiency or effectiveness resulting from this overlap. If DOD were to evaluate these training programs, it may find opportunities to streamline them and reduce any inefficient overlap.

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD's 27 DAFAs play a critical role in supporting the department's business operations. For example, DHRA—which DOD renamed the Personnel Readiness Management Agency in June 2026—is a DOD field activity with a stated mission of enhancing the operational efficiency and effectiveness of diverse programs supporting DOD. DOD is required to conduct reviews of each DAFA's efficiency and effectiveness at least once every 4 years.

The House report accompanying a bill for the Department of Defense Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2024 includes a provision for GAO to evaluate DOD's DAFA reviews, with a focus on DHRA. This report examines the extent to which (1) DOD is reviewing and reporting on the DAFAs as required by law; (2) DOD has assessed the efficiency and effectiveness of DHRA as part of these reviews; and (3) DHRA provides training services that are duplicative, overlapping, or fragmented with other select DAFAs and the military services.

GAO reviewed DOD guidance, reports, and relevant statutory requirements and interviewed DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to DOD, including that it formalize guidance for fulfilling statutory requirements; include clearly defined measures for efficiency and effectiveness in formalized guidance; and evaluate DAFA and military service training programs to identify inefficient overlap and take action to address it. DOD did not provide written comments on this report.