DOD’s military and nonmilitary missions differ in terms of roles, duration, acceptance, and capabilities normally employed.

The threat of terrorism has altered some military operations. For example, as of September 11, 2001, the North American Aerospace Defense Command orders combat air patrols over U.S. cities to prevent terrorist attacks.

The 1878 Posse Comitatus Act prohibits the direct use of federal military troops in domestic civilian law enforcement, except where authorized by the Constitution or acts of Congress. Congress has expressly authorized the use of the military in certain situations such as to assist with terrorist incidents involving weapons of mass destruction.

DOD has established new organizations (such as U.S. Northern Command) and implemented a campaign plan for domestic military missions, but it has not evaluated or adjusted its force structure. GAO did not assess the adequacy of the new organizations or the campaign plan because the organizations were not yet fully operational, and the campaign plan was only recently completed. DOD’s force structure is not well tailored to perform domestic military missions and may not be able to sustain the high pace of operations that preceded and followed the attacks on September 11, 2001. While on domestic military missions, combat units are unable to maintain proficiency because these missions provide less opportunity to practice the varied skills required for combat and consequently offer little training value. In addition, from September 2001 through December 2002, the number of servicemembers exceeding the established personnel tempo thresholds increased substantially, indicating that the present force structure may not be sufficient to address the increase in domestic and overseas military missions. As a result, U.S. forces could experience an unsustainable pace that could significantly erode their readiness to perform combat missions and impact future personnel retention.

GAO recommends that DOD assess domestic military mission requirements and determine what steps should be taken to structure U.S. forces to better accomplish domestic military missions while maintaining proficiency for overseas combat missions. DOD generally concurred with the need to do an assessment that is expressed in our recommendation.