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Congressional Committees

Military Personnel: Perspectives on DOD's and the Military Services' Use of Borrowed Military Personnel

The House Armed Services Committee has questioned whether the Department of Defense (DOD) continues to divert servicemembers from their unit assignments to perform nonmilitary functions that could be performed by civilian employees.¹ In 2015, we reported that the Army did not know the extent to which it used borrowed military personnel, and we recommended that the Army establish a requirement to collect, track, and report data on the use of borrowed military personnel and provide guidance to ensure that data collected are complete and accurate.² Although the Army concurred with our recommendation at that time, Army officials also stated that it would be unreasonable to require the Army to undertake such a tracking requirement, since the Army policy states that it is acceptable to use soldiers for training missions or for temporary functions. In addition, in August 2020 Army officials stated that Army policy, to be updated by December 2020, will further restrict the use of borrowed military personnel.

House Report 116-120, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, included a provision for us to assess the levels and impacts of borrowed military personnel.³ This report examines DOD's and the military services' policies on the use of borrowed military personnel, the tracking and reporting of their use of borrowed military personnel, and any impacts of that use on readiness.⁴

For this objective, we reviewed and analyzed DOD and military service guidance on having servicemembers perform duties other than their current assignments on a temporary basis,

¹H.R. Rep. No 116-120, at 228 (2019).

²GAO, *Military Personnel: Army Needs a Requirement for Capturing Data and Clear Guidance on Use of Military for Civilian or Contractor Positions*, [GAO-15-349](#) (Washington, DC.: June 15, 2015).

³H.R. Rep. No 116-120, at 228 (2019). The respective services use differing terms and hold differing definitions for the practice of using military personnel to temporarily perform functions other than their assigned duties. For purposes of this report, we use the term "borrowed military personnel" to refer to servicemembers performing duties other than their current assignments on a temporary basis, inside or outside of their military occupational specialties, including functions that could be performed by civilians.

⁴On December 20, 2019, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, Public Law 116-92, established the United States Space Force as a military service within DOD. Since we did not gather data from the Space Force given its status as a new organization, throughout this report we refer only to four military services within DOD.

inside or outside of their military occupational specialties,⁵ including functions that could be performed by civilians. We also interviewed officials from DOD and the military services to obtain their perspectives on procedures for determining the use of borrowed military personnel to perform functions other than their assigned duties that could be performed by other military or civilian personnel. Further, we reviewed DOD and military service readiness reporting policies, as well as interviewed DOD and military service officials, on how they track, report, and assess the use of borrowed military personnel, and any impact that usage has on readiness.

We conducted this performance audit from December 2019 to November 2020 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.

DOD and the Military Services Have Various Policies or Approaches for Managing Borrowed Military Personnel Use and Generally Do Not Find Benefit from Tracking and Reporting Their Use and Its Impact on Readiness

Policies on the use of borrowed military personnel vary among the military services. The Army and the Marine Corps have issued guidance that describes how military personnel may be used on a temporary basis. Further, DOD and the Army, Navy, and Air Force do not centrally track their respective service usage of borrowed military personnel, nor do they assess any impacts of that usage on the readiness of units and personnel to accomplish their assigned missions. According to DOD and Army officials, the relatively limited use of borrowed military personnel, its limited readiness impacts, and the existence of other readiness reporting mechanisms obviate the need to collect and analyze this information centrally, especially given the resources that would be required to establish and maintain such a reporting process.

DOD and the Military Services Have Various Policies and Approaches on Borrowed Military Personnel

Borrowed military personnel have been used for decades as a management tool to, in part, mitigate the effects of budgetary uncertainty, according to DOD.⁶ DOD has not defined the term “borrowed military personnel” and does not require the military services to use a standardized term for this practice. DOD Instruction 1100.22 sets forth overarching criteria for the military services to use to determine appropriateness of military personnel utilization.⁷ Consistent with DOD Instruction 1100.22, tasks that are not militarily essential in nature must be designated for government civilian personnel or contract performance where appropriate. Exceptions will be

⁵Throughout this report, we use the term “military occupational specialty” to refer to servicemembers’ occupations for all of the services. This term describes the type of work performed by servicemembers and is used by the Army and the Marine Corps. The Air Force uses the term “Air Force Specialty Code” and the Navy uses the term “Navy ratings” for the concept that is similar in definition to what the Army and Marine Corps term “military occupational specialty.” In addition, the term “inside” of their occupational specialty refers to servicemembers performing duties they were trained for within their current assignments. The term “outside” refers to servicemembers performing duties for which they were trained, but which are outside of their current assigned positions.

⁶[GAO-15-349](#).

⁷Department of Defense Instruction 1100.22, *Policy and Procedures for Determining Workforce Mix* (Apr. 12, 2010) (incorporating change 1, Dec. 1, 2017).

based upon a demonstrated and documented military need—e.g., to provide a reasonable overseas rotation or career progression base. A memorandum from the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness acknowledges that there may be instances in which military personnel can be used to appropriately satisfy a near-term demand, but states that DOD must be vigilant in ensuring that military personnel are not inappropriately utilized, particularly in a manner that may degrade readiness.⁸ Table 1 describes each military service’s program for the use of borrowed military personnel.

Table 1: Military Service Programs and Examples of Uses of Borrowed Military Personnel

Service	Program description	Uses
Army	<p>The Army uses borrowed military personnel to perform duties where a personnel requirement exists but for which no personnel have been authorized. Borrowed military personnel may also be employed in cases where manpower spaces have been authorized, but the positions are vacant. It will be limited to 90 days.^a</p> <p>The Army restricts the use of military personnel from the performance of non-military-essential functions, unless military personnel are the most cost-effective option.^b</p>	<p>In the Army, examples include guarding the gate, service school instructors working in combat development, and hospital medics supporting units during training exercises and running aid stations. Whenever borrowed military personnel use is necessary, it should be made as beneficial as possible to the soldier by matching the individual’s occupational specialty to the needs of the requirement.^a</p>
Marine Corps	<p>The Marine Corps’ Fleet Assistance Program is used to augment the personnel resources of the installation so that it may provide adequate support to its tenant units without degrading combat readiness.^c</p>	<p>Under this program, military personnel may be used to perform base support functions that can be considered civilian functions, such as fire and rescue, weather forecasting, and air traffic control. Most of these functions closely align with military occupational specialties, and generally speaking the military personnel who would fulfill these functions are working within their areas of expertise.^d</p>
Navy	<p>The Navy does not have a formal program for using borrowed military personnel.</p>	<p>Sailors are used when they are ashore for positions that might be outside of their military occupational specialties, such as security and force protection, fire and emergency services, ambulance, and culinary service, according to Navy officials.^e</p>
Air Force	<p>The Air Force does not have a formal program for using borrowed military personnel.</p>	<p>Personnel have in some cases been used outside of their core training duties in order to augment security forces, according to Air Force officials. According to these officials, the Air Force rarely uses military personnel to perform functions outside of their military occupational specialties.^f</p>

Source: GAO analysis of DOD and military service documentation. | GAO-21-27R

^aArmy Regulation 570-4, *Manpower Management* (Feb. 8, 2006). The updated regulation is expected to contain the following: soldiers may perform only military-essential functions; borrowed military manpower is limited to 90 days per soldier, per calendar year, after which the soldier must be returned to his or her unit of assignment; and to the maximum extent possible, soldiers should be assigned to functions within their military occupational specialties.

^bOffice of the Assistant Secretary for Manpower and Reserve Affairs Memorandum, *Guidance for Utilization of Military Manpower* (Aug. 21, 2014).

^cMarine Corps Order 1000.8, *Fleet Assistance Program (FAP)* (July 12, 1994).

⁸Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, *Guidance Related to the Utilization of Military Manpower to Perform Certain Functions* (Mar. 2, 2012).

^dThroughout this report we use the term “military occupational specialty” to refer to servicemembers’ occupations for all of the military services. This term describes the type of work performed by servicemembers and is used by the Army and the Marine Corps. The Air Force uses the term “Air Force Specialty Code” and the Navy uses the term “Navy ratings” for the concept that is similar in definition to what the Army and Marine Corps term “military occupational specialty.”

^eAdditionally, while the Navy does not consider them to be borrowed military personnel, its Auxiliary Security Forces are sailors assigned to other commands and departments—not permanently assigned to the security department—on the installation, and they are minimally trained to stand security watches. These personnel are active duty servicemembers who augment base security personnel in response to terrorist attacks, natural disasters, civil disturbances, and special events that require heightened levels of security.

^fAs an example of when this occurs, the Air Force sometimes assigns airmen to its Security Force Augmentee program to perform duties outside of their military occupational specialties. Security Force Augmentee personnel are usually needed during peak traffic hours at installation access points.

DOD and Most of the Military Services Do Not Centrally Track or Report Their Use of Borrowed Military Personnel and Generally Do Not Think It Necessary to Do So

DOD does not centrally track the use of borrowed military personnel by the military services to perform temporary duties that can be performed by other military and civilian personnel, it does not have a requirement to do so, and it does not require the military services to do so. In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Congress removed the requirement for DOD to report on borrowed military personnel in its Quarterly Readiness Report.⁹ In 2013 we reported, accordingly, that DOD did not report on the use of borrowed military personnel in its Quarterly Readiness Reports.¹⁰ DOD officials said that it was unnecessary to track borrowed military personnel because of the small usage of this practice by the military services.

The Army does not centrally track its use of borrowed military personnel and accordingly does not have data on the full extent to which it uses them to perform temporary duties that could be performed by other military and civilian personnel.¹¹ When command and operating agencies are tasked to perform duties for which no personnel resources have been allocated, they may decide to borrow soldiers from one unit to accomplish a higher priority duty in another unit. While each installation can identify the extent of its use of borrowed military personnel, there is no longer a requirement for installations to report this information to Army Headquarters. Army officials stated in response to our request for data on borrowed military personnel that this information was not centrally or readily available. They explained that while they could collect these data (for example, military occupational specialty, or number of days during which positions in the unit were vacant due to the use of borrowed military personnel), doing so would be highly time-consuming. Prior to December 2006, Army Regulation 220-1 required installations to collect and report to Army Headquarters, on a monthly basis, on the number of days during which positions in the unit were vacant due to the use of soldiers as borrowed military personnel. However, the December 2006 update to the regulation rescinded the central reporting requirement.

The Marine Corps tracks its use of borrowed military personnel on a monthly basis by numbers of personnel and location, according to Marine Corps officials. Daily tracking is provided by units to Marine Corps Headquarters. According to Marine Corps officials, the Marine Corps Fleet

⁹Prior to these amendments in 2013, 10 U.S.C. § 482 required reporting on borrowed manpower in DOD’s Quarterly Readiness Reports.

¹⁰GAO, *Military Readiness: Opportunities Exist to Improve Completeness and Usefulness of Quarterly Reports to Congress*, [GAO-13-678](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 26, 2013).

¹¹According to Army officials, the use of borrowed military personnel is tracked at the military-installation level.

Assistance Program calls for host installation commanders to use Marines from tenant commands to fulfill personnel requirements that exceed host command personnel capabilities. This method provides the host command with sufficient personnel resources to support the installation while also training many Marines in their primary military occupational specialties. According to an official, the Marine Corps can identify the number of personnel in the Fleet Assistance Program at any time and can centrally report on it as needed, as well as identify and display numerous personnel statistics on demand.

The Navy does not centrally track its use of borrowed military personnel. According to a Navy official, the Navy assigns sailors to base or shore rotations to avoid having them assigned to an operational environment for the entire duration of their service; periodically, a sailor must take a break from operational duty and come off the ship. As a result, on their shore rotations, sailors may perform functions (such as firefighting and culinary services) that could be performed by civilians but are designated for sailors to perform so that they can retain proficiency in those skills. The Navy also has an Auxiliary Security Force program that supports the base commander with force protection activities. Navy officials did not comment on the usefulness of collecting data on borrowed military personnel.

The Air Force does not centrally track its use of borrowed military personnel. According to Air Force officials, it may use airmen to perform temporary duties that are outside of their assigned positions but still within their military occupational specialties. Air Force officials noted that there was no need to collect or monitor the use of personnel for these purposes because the Air Force rarely uses personnel outside of their specialties. There have been isolated occurrences of such use: for example, personnel may perform non-specialty tasks in emergencies. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Air Force augmented its security forces with personnel for whom security was outside of their specialty. According to an Air Force official, local commanders have an understanding of how their personnel are being used, and accordingly they do not believe they need a requirement to centrally track these personnel.

DOD and the Military Services Do Not Assess the Impact of Borrowed Military Personnel on Readiness, and They Report It as Having Little or No Impact on Readiness

DOD does not assess the impact of borrowed military personnel on readiness. Prior to amendments enacted in 2013, 10 U.S.C. § 482 required DOD to report on the impact of its use of borrowed military personnel in DOD's Quarterly Readiness Reports. According to a DOD official, the military services do, in effect, track the readiness impacts of personnel resources by realigning resources as needed to meet mission requirements. DOD does not centrally track or assess the impact of borrowed military personnel. That same official stated that each service chief has a responsibility to train, organize, and equip servicemembers and manage their resources and requirements. Further, the official stated that there is no real benefit to tracking borrowed military personnel because their numbers are not static and can change daily. DOD officials stated that if borrowed military personnel were affecting training, their effect would then appear in readiness reporting on training. Therefore, DOD officials do not believe there is a need for a separate reporting requirement for borrowed military personnel.

The Army does not assess the impact of borrowed military personnel on readiness. Formerly the Army collected these data, but in December 2006 it discontinued the requirement for installations to report on special duty personnel, including borrowed military personnel, in the

unit status reports that are centrally reported to the Army.¹² Although this specific reporting requirement is no longer in place, an Army official stated that any effects on readiness would still be captured in such areas as degraded training or proficiency in performing mission-essential tasks. The availability of equipment could also be affected if soldiers were not available to maintain equipment. According to Army officials, the Army is cognizant of the effect that borrowed military personnel have on readiness. However, the practicality and usefulness of obtaining these data must be weighed against the burden placed on unit commanders by having to gather the data. According to one Army official, Army senior leaders who understand borrowed military personnel consider that such data would have a limited value from a readiness reporting perspective.

The Marine Corps does not assess the impact of borrowed military personnel on readiness. Marine Corps officials stated that they use borrowed military personnel to perform functions within and outside of servicemembers' military occupational specialties. However, these servicemembers remain available to their units for mission needs and, accordingly, are not removed from their assigned units in the readiness reporting system. Thus, according to Marine Corps officials, there is no significant impact on their units' readiness. A Marine Corps official stated that in its readiness reports the Marine Corps does not count the personnel in the Fleet Assistance Program against a unit's personnel strength. The same official stated that the number of Marines used as borrowed military personnel from any one unit is low. This official went on to say, however, that units are permitted to address the impacts of personnel used in the Fleet Assistance Program if these personnel affect the unit's collective training in the training component of readiness reporting.

The Navy does not assess the impact of borrowed military personnel on readiness. According to Navy officials, military personnel returning to their bases from duty aboard ships may perform functions that are outside of their military occupational specialties, such as security and force protection, fire and emergency services, ambulance, and culinary service. Additionally, according to Navy officials, military personnel volunteer to participate as borrowed military personnel in the Navy's Auxiliary Security Forces program. These officials stated that their participation does not negatively affect readiness because the program limits their impact in a few ways. For example, borrowed military personnel very rarely miss training, because the Auxiliary Security Forces' program schedule is known in advance and training is scheduled to accommodate their activities. Operational units preparing for deployment are required not to participate as borrowed military personnel.

The Air Force does not assess the impact of borrowed military personnel on readiness. According to Air Force officials, the Air Force rarely uses borrowed military personnel. However, these officials stated that, when used, this practice does not affect readiness because these personnel primarily perform functions within their military occupational specialties, and accordingly do not lose their skills when they return to their assigned units.

¹²Army Regulation 220-1, *Unit Status Reporting* (Dec. 19, 2006). Army Regulation 220-1 was updated in 2010. The latest version similarly does not require the Army to track or report on borrowed military personnel.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report for review and comment to DOD. DOD submitted technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

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, and the Commandant of the U.S. Marines Corps. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any 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 major contributions to this report include Marilyn Wasleski and Beverly Schladt (Assistant Directors), Barbara Wooten (Analyst-In-Charge), Virginia Chanley, Thomas Corless, Alexandra Gonzalez, Carol Petersen, and Cheryl Weissman.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cary Russell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cary Russell, Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

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