



Highlights of [GAO-03-238](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD has increasingly engaged in multiservice and multinational operations. Congress enacted the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, in part, so that DOD's military leaders would be better prepared to plan, support, and conduct joint operations. GAO assessed DOD actions to implement provisions in the law that address the development of officers in joint matters and evaluated impediments affecting DOD's ability to fully respond to the provisions in the act.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness develop a strategic plan that links joint officer development to DOD's overall mission. This plan should

- identify the number of joint specialty officers needed,
- provide for the education and assignment of reservists who may serve in joint organizations, and
- be developed to provide more meaningful data to track progress made against the plan.

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation because it views provisions in the act as impediments that must be removed before it can develop an effective strategic plan. We do not believe that the act's provisions impede DOD from developing a strategic plan.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-238.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek B. Stewart at (202) 512-5140 or stewartd@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Joint Officer Development Has Improved, but a Strategic Approach Is Needed

What GAO Found

DOD has taken positive steps to implement the Goldwater-Nichols Act provisions that address the education, assignment, and promotion of officers serving in joint positions. However, DOD has relied on waivers allowable under the law to comply with the provisions and has experienced difficulties implementing some of its programs. Because of these difficulties, DOD cannot be assured that it is preparing officers in the most effective manner to serve in joint organizations and leadership positions.

- **Education.** DOD has met provisions in the act to develop officers through education by establishing a two-phased joint education program, but has not determined how many officers should complete both phases. In fiscal year 2001, only one-third of the officers serving in joint positions had completed both phases of the program.
- **Assignment.** DOD has increasingly not filled all of its critical joint duty positions with joint specialty officers, who are required to have both prior education and experience in joint matters. In fiscal year 2001, DOD did not fill 311, or more than one-third, of its critical joint duty positions with joint specialty officers.
- **Promotion.** DOD has promoted more officers with prior joint experience to the general and flag officer pay grades. However, in fiscal year 2001, DOD still relied on allowable waivers in lieu of joint experience to promote one in four officers to these senior levels. Beginning in fiscal year 2008, most officers promoted to these senior levels will also have to complete DOD's joint education program or otherwise meet the requirements to be a joint specialty officer. Our analysis of officers promoted in fiscal year 2001 showed that 58 out of 124 officers promoted to the general and flag level did not meet these requirements. DOD has promoted mid-grade officers who serve in joint organizations at rates equal to or better than the promotion rates of their peers. However, DOD has had difficulty meeting this objective for colonels and Navy captains.

DOD's ability to respond fully to these provisions has been hindered by the absence of a strategic plan that (1) establishes clear goals for officer development in joint matters and (2) links those goals to DOD's overall mission and goals. DOD has not identified how many joint specialty officers it needs and, without this information, cannot determine if its joint education programs are properly structured. The services vary in the emphasis they place on joint officer development and continue to struggle to balance joint requirements against their own service needs. DOD has also not fully addressed how it will develop reserve officers in joint matters—despite the fact that it is increasingly relying on reservists to carry out its mission. Finally, DOD has not tracked meaningful data consistently to measure progress in meeting the act's provisions.