



Highlights of [GAO-05-285T](#), a statement for the record submitted to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) has six reserve components: the Army Reserve, the Army National Guard, the Air Force Reserve, the Air National Guard, the Naval Reserve, and the Marine Corps Reserve. DOD's use of Reserve and National Guard forces increased dramatically following the events of September 11, 2001, and on January 19, 2005, more than 192,000 National Guard and Reserve component members were mobilized. About 85 percent of these personnel were members of the Army National Guard or the Army Reserve. Furthermore, the availability of reserve component forces will continue to play an important role in the success of DOD's future missions, and DOD has projected that over the next 3 to 5 years, it will continuously have more than 100,000 reserve component members mobilized.

Since September, 2001, GAO has issued a number of reports that have dealt with issues related to the increased use of Reserve and National Guard forces. For this hearing, GAO was asked to provide the results of its work on the extent to which DOD has the strategic framework and policies necessary to maximize reserve component force availability for a long-term Global War on Terrorism.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-285T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek B. Stewart at (202) 512-5559 or stewartd@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

A Strategic Approach Is Needed to Address Long-term Guard and Reserve Force Availability

What GAO Found

DOD does not have a strategic framework with human capital goals concerning the availability of its reserve component forces. The manner in which DOD implements its mobilization authorities affects the number of reserve component members available. The partial mobilization authority limits involuntary mobilizations to not more than 1 million reserve component members at any one time, for not more than 24 consecutive months, during a time of national emergency. Under DOD's current implementation of the authority, members can be involuntarily mobilized more than once, but involuntary mobilizations are limited to a cumulative total of 24 months. Given this implementation, DOD could eventually run out of forces. During GAO's 2004 review, DOD was facing shortages of some reserve component personnel, and officials considered changing their implementation of the partial mobilization authority to expand the pool of available personnel. Under the proposed implementation, DOD could have mobilized personnel for less than 24 consecutive months, sent them home for a period, and remobilized them, repeating this cycle indefinitely and providing an essentially unlimited flow of forces. After GAO's review was done, DOD said it would retain its current implementation that limits mobilizations to a cumulative total of 24 months. However, DOD did not clarify how it planned to meet its longer-term requirements for the Global War on Terrorism as additional forces reach the 24-month mobilization point. By June 2004, 30,000 reserve component members had already been mobilized for 24 months.

DOD's policies also affect the availability of reserve component members. Many of the policies that affect reserve component availability were focused on the services' short-term requirements or the needs of individual service members rather than on long-term requirements and predictability. For example, DOD implemented stop-loss policies, which are short-term measures that increase force availability by retaining active or reserve component members on active duty beyond the end of their obligated service. Because DOD's various policies were not developed within the context of an overall strategic framework, they underwent numerous changes as DOD strove to meet current requirements, and they did not work together to meet the department's long-term Global War on Terrorism requirements. These policy changes created uncertainties for reserve component members concerning the likelihood of their mobilization, the length of service commitments and overseas rotations, and the types of missions they will have to perform. The uncertainties may affect future retention and recruiting efforts, and indications show that some parts of the force may already be stressed. GAO recommended that DOD develop a strategic framework with human capital goals and then link its policies within the context of the strategic framework. DOD generally agreed with the recommendations.