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EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL:

DOD Needs Better Resource Planning and Joint Guidance to Manage the Capability

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What GAO Found

Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) forces grew over the past 10 years to meet wartime and other needs, but the Department of Defense (DOD) does not have the data needed to develop a funding strategy to support future EOD force plans. To meet increased demands for EOD personnel, the services increased their EOD forces from about 3,600 personnel in 2002 to about 6,200 in 2012. Anticipating that the need for EOD will continue as forces withdraw from ongoing operations, the services intend to maintain their larger size. The Navy and Air Force have data on the baseline costs for some or all of their EOD activities, but the Army and Marine Corps do not have complete data on spending for EOD activities. Therefore, DOD does not have complete data on service spending on EOD activities needed to determine the costs of its current EOD capability and to provide a basis for future joint planning. Until all the services have complete information on spending, service and DOD leadership will be unable to effectively identify resource needs, weigh priorities, and assess budget trade-offs.

EOD forces from all four services have worked together in Iraq and Afghanistan and the services have developed guidance on tactics and procedures for EOD forces, but challenges persist because DOD has not institutionalized joint EOD doctrine through a joint publication. Joint doctrine facilitates planning for operations and establishes a link between what must be accomplished and the capabilities for doing so. DOD studies have noted commanders' limited awareness of EOD capabilities during combat operations, and EOD personnel reported challenges they attributed to non-EOD forces' lack of understanding of EOD operations. Several DOD organizations have responsibilities for some EOD functions, but no entity has been designated as the focal point for joint EOD doctrine. Joint doctrine could help leaders identify EOD capability requirements and better position combatant commanders in their use of EOD forces in future operations. Joint doctrine that is developed and approved as authoritative guidance would enhance the EOD forces' ability to operate in an effective manner, and would better position the services to identify capability gaps in meeting service, joint, and interagency requirements; to invest in priority needs; and to mitigate risks.

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD has relied heavily on the critical skills and capabilities of EOD forces to counter the threat from improvised explosive devices on battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan. The House Armed Services Committee directed DOD to submit a report on EOD force structure planning and directed GAO to review DOD's force structure plan. DOD's report provided little detail. GAO examined to what extent (1) DOD and the services have addressed increased demands for the EOD capability and identified funding to meet future requirements; and (2) DOD has developed guidance for employing the EOD capability effectively in joint operations. GAO evaluated DOD's report and EOD guidance; analyzed data on EOD missions, personnel, and funding; and interviewed DOD and service officials to gain perspectives from EOD personnel and managers.

What GAO Recommends

To better enable DOD to plan for funding EOD mission requirements and enhance future use of EOD forces in joint combat operations, GAO recommends that DOD direct (1) the Secretaries of the Army and the Navy to collect data on current Army and Marine Corps EOD funding, and (2) the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop joint EOD doctrine that would guide combatant commanders' planning and clarify joint operational roles and responsibilities. In oral comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with the recommendations.

For more information, contact John Pendleton, 404-679-1816, or PendletonJ@gao.gov

Recommendations for Executive Action

Recommendation: To improve the Army's and Marine Corps' ability to ensure adequate support of their EOD forces within expected budgets, the Secretary of Defense should direct the Secretaries of the Army and the Navy to collect data on costs associated with supporting their current EOD forces.

Agency Affected: Department of Defense

Status: Open

Comments: When we confirm what actions the agency has taken in response to this recommendation, we will provide updated information.

Recommendation: To enhance the future employment of EOD forces in joint combat operations, the Secretary of Defense should direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop joint EOD doctrine that would guide combatant commanders' planning and clarify joint operational roles and responsibilities.

Agency Affected: Department of Defense

Status: Open

Comments: When we confirm what actions the agency has taken in response to this recommendation, we will provide updated information.

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