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MILITARY OPERATIONS

DOD Needs to Provide Central Direction for Supporting Coalition Liaison Officers



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Highlights of [GAO-04-452](#), a report to the Chairmen and Ranking Minority Members of the Senate and House Committees on Armed Services

Why GAO Did This Study

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, Congress authorized the Secretary of Defense to provide administrative services and support to foreign coalition liaison officers temporarily assigned to the headquarters of a combatant command or any of its subordinate commands. Congress required GAO to assess the implementation of this legislation. Specifically, GAO's objectives were to determine (1) what guidance the Department of Defense (DOD) has provided on the implementation of this legislation, (2) the extent to which the commands are aware of and are using this legislation, and (3) the level of support being provided by commands using this legislation and the benefits derived from it.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense take the following two actions: (1) designate an office within DOD to take responsibility for this legislation and (2) direct this designated office to promulgate and issue guidance on how to implement this legislation.

DOD officials concurred with the report in official oral comments. DOD stated that it would designate the Joint Staff as the office responsible for implementing the legislation and issuing appropriate guidance.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-452.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Neal P. Curtin at (757) 552-8100 or curtinn@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

GAO could find no evidence that DOD had issued any guidance to combatant commanders on how to implement this legislation. In addition, GAO was unable to identify an office within DOD that has responsibility for implementing this legislation. The DOD Office of the Inspector General, as GAO's focal point within DOD, was also unable to identify a responsible office.

Although the legislation was inspired by the needs of the coalition assembled for the Global War on Terrorism, its authority is available through the Secretary of Defense to all combatant commanders. According to the results of GAO's research, the combatant commands' awareness of and need to use the legislation varied widely with Central Command being the only command using the authority to support liaison officers.

Awareness and Use of the Legislation by Combatant Commands

Commands not aware of and not needing to use the legislation	Commands aware of but not needing to use the legislation	Commands using the legislation
Northern Command	Pacific Command	Central Command
Southern Command	Joint Forces Command	
European Command	Special Operations Command	
Strategic Command		
Transportation Command		

Source: GAO.

Central Command and MacDill Air Force Base, as the host location for Central Command, spent \$17 million in fiscal year 2003 to provide administrative services and support to more than 300 coalition liaison officers from over 60 countries. As allowed by the legislation, the command also paid the travel, subsistence, and personal expenses of over 70 of these officers from more than 30 developing countries.

Fiscal Year 2003 Costs by Type of Support Provided to Foreign Coalition Liaison Officers

Administrative support	\$14,475,179
Travel and personal expenses	2,582,000
Total costs	\$17,057,179

Source: Unaudited DOD data analyzed by GAO.

Central Command officials stated that they could not accomplish the coalition integration planning and coordination important to the Global War on Terrorism as effectively or efficiently as they are doing without the liaison officers. They also commented that the legislation helps facilitate the participation of a developing country in the coalition if the command can pay for travel and subsistence.

Contents

Letter

	1
Results in Brief	2
Background	4
DOD Has Not Issued Guidance to Implement This Legislation	5
Awareness and Use of the Legislation by Combatant Commands Vary Widely	5
CENTCOM Support to Liaison Officers Benefits Global War on Terrorism	6
Conclusions	9
Recommendations for Executive Action	10
Agency Comments	10

Table

Table 1: Fiscal Year 2002 and Fiscal Year 2003 Costs by Type of Support Provided to Coalition Liaison Officers	9
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Abbreviations

CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
DOD	Department of Defense

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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

April 9, 2004

The Honorable John W. Warner
Chairman
The Honorable Carl Levin
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Duncan Hunter
Chairman
The Honorable Ike Skelton
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States has been fighting a Global War on Terrorism with support from other countries, such as Great Britain. The coalition partner countries participating with the United States in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have sent more than 300 foreign military personnel to the U.S. Central Command headquarters to serve as liaison officers supporting U.S. planning and operation efforts.

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003,¹ Congress authorized the Secretary of Defense to provide administrative services and support to foreign coalition liaison officers temporarily assigned to the headquarters of a combatant command, a component command, or a subordinate operational command.² Congress also allowed the Secretary to pay for travel, subsistence, and personal expenses of those coalition

¹ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, Public Law 107-314, title XII, section 1201, (Dec. 2, 2002).

² A combatant command is a unified command established and so designated by the President of the United States with a broad continuing mission under a single commander, typically with geographic or functional (e.g., transportation) responsibilities. A component command consists of a commander and those forces of a military service assigned to a combatant command. A subordinate operational command is established on an area or functional basis by a combatant commander to conduct operations.

liaison officers from developing countries.³ These services, support, and expenses may be provided with or without reimbursement from or on behalf of the receiving coalition liaison officers. Congress required us to assess the implementation of this legislation. Specifically, our objectives were to determine (1) what guidance, if any, the Department of Defense (DOD) has provided on the implementation of this legislation, (2) the extent to which the commands are aware of and are using this legislation, and (3) the level of support being provided by commands using this legislation and the benefits derived from it.

To address these objectives, we used a data collection instrument to gather information from officials serving in the headquarters of combatant commands, component commands, and subordinate operational commands. This instrument was designed to measure the awareness of the legislation among these various commands, to identify the commands using the legislation, and to obtain the costs incurred to provide support to foreign coalition liaison officers. To assess how the commands are implementing this legislation, we visited U.S. Central Command headquarters and met with officials who have responsibility for tracking costs incurred by foreign coalition liaison officers. As agreed with your offices, we did not independently validate the costs incurred by the command. We conducted our review from September 2003 through January 2004 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results in Brief

We could find no evidence that DOD has issued any guidance to combatant commanders on how to implement this legislation. In addition, we were unable to identify an office within DOD that has responsibility for implementing this legislation. The DOD Office of the Inspector General, as our focal point within the department, was also unable to identify a responsible office.

Although the legislation was inspired by the needs of the coalition assembled for the Global War on Terrorism, its authority is available through the Secretary of Defense to all combatant commanders. However, not all combatant commands were aware of or have a need to use this

³ The term “developing country” as defined by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, an international organization to which the United States belongs, is a country included in the organization’s list, “Least Developed: Other Low Income and Lower Middle Income.”

legislation. Five of the nine combatant commands were not aware of, nor did they have a need to use, the authority in the legislation; three were aware of, but had no need to use, the authority; and one, along with one of its subordinate commands, was using it to support coalition liaison officers. In response to a data collection instrument we created and distributed to the combatant commands, representatives from Northern, Southern, European, Transportation, and Strategic Commands stated they were not aware of the legislation. Representatives from Pacific, Central, Joint Forces, and Special Operations Commands stated they were aware of the legislation. Central Command and one of its subordinate commands were the only commands providing support to coalition liaison officers.

Central Command, with some of its component and subordinate commands, and MacDill Air Force Base, as the host location for Central Command, provided administrative services and support to more than 300 coalition liaison officers from over 60 countries at a cost of about \$14.5 million in fiscal year 2003. The command also paid travel, subsistence, and personal expenses of over 70 of these officers from more than 30 developing countries at a cost of about \$2.6 million in fiscal year 2003. The command has established internal operating procedures to define what support it will provide and what guidelines, including the use of the Joint Federal Travel Regulations, to use in setting appropriate spending limits. The command provides office space, furniture, equipment, phones, and other administrative support for all coalition liaison officers, as well as pays for travel, subsistence, and personal expenses for officers from developing countries. Command officials stated that they could not accomplish the coalition integration planning and coordination important to the Global War on Terrorism as effectively or efficiently as they are doing without the liaison officers. They also commented that the legislation helps facilitate the participation of a developing country in the coalition if the command can pay for travel and subsistence.

We are recommending that the Secretary of Defense take two actions: (1) designate an office within the Department of Defense to take responsibility for the legislation and (2) direct this designated office to promulgate and issue guidance to implement the legislation.

In official oral comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with the report. DOD stated that it would designate the Joint Staff as the office responsible for implementing the legislation and issuing appropriate guidance.

Background

The United States prefers to conduct operations as part of a coalition when possible.⁴ In prosecuting the Global War on Terrorism, the United States, through the U. S. Central Command (CENTCOM), has acted in concert with a number of other countries as part of a coalition to conduct Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq.⁵ Most of these countries have sent officers to CENTCOM headquarters—located at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida—to act as liaisons between their countries and CENTCOM commanders and assist in planning and other operational tasks.

As coalition liaison officers began arriving to assist in Operation Enduring Freedom, CENTCOM officials established a secure area with trailers outfitted as offices for the officers to use. As the coalition expanded and Operation Iraqi Freedom started, the number of liaison officers grew, as did the need for more trailers and administrative support. CENTCOM officials initially paid for the support from Combatant Commander's Initiative Funds⁶ earmarked for short-term initiatives identified by the commander. However, as the coalitions for both operations grew and were expected to continue into fiscal year 2003, CENTCOM requested that Congress allow the command to use funds from its budget to pay for the support provided to the liaison officers. Congress responded in the fiscal year 2003 National Defense Authorization Act by authorizing the Secretary of Defense to provide administrative services and support to those liaison officers of countries involved in a coalition with the United States and to pay the travel, subsistence, and personal expenses of those liaison officers from developing countries. This legislation expires September 30, 2005. The legislation does not direct us to assess whether it should be renewed and we did not do so.

⁴ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002.

⁵ The exact number of countries in the coalition is classified.

⁶ Combatant Commander's Initiative Funds are provided to the combatant commander by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for certain activities authorized by 10 U.S.C. section 166a. Joint Chiefs of Staff policy normally precludes using these funds for multiyear activities.

DOD Has Not Issued Guidance to Implement This Legislation

Although it is the responsibility of the Secretary of Defense to formulate general defense policy and policy related to all matters of direct and primary concern to DOD, we could find no evidence of guidance issued by DOD to combatant commanders on how to implement the legislation allowing DOD to provide support to coalition liaison officers. Also, we could not identify any office within DOD that has responsibility for implementing the legislation and, therefore, may have promulgated guidance on the legislation. Guidance for issues that affect all the components originates at the DOD level. Typically, DOD will issue a directive—a broad policy document containing what is required to initiate, govern, or regulate actions or conduct by DOD components. This directive establishes a baseline policy that applies across the combatant commands, services, and DOD agencies. DOD may also issue an instruction, which implements the policy or prescribes the manner or a specific plan or action for carrying out the policy, operating a program or activity, and assigning responsibilities. In our opinion, this guidance is important for consistent implementation of a program across DOD.

To determine what guidance has been provided to the commands, we contacted offices within DOD, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Staff to determine which office has responsibility for implementing this legislation. After calls to the Offices of Legislative Affairs and Comptroller within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, as well as the Joint Staff's Plans and Policy Directorate and Comptroller, neither we nor the DOD Inspector General, our focal point within DOD, were able to locate any office having this responsibility.

In the data collection instrument we sent to the combatant commands, we asked whether the commands had received any guidance on how to implement the legislation. All commands replied that they had received no guidance from any office within DOD.

Awareness and Use of the Legislation by Combatant Commands Vary Widely

Although the legislation was inspired by the needs of the coalition assembled for the Global War on Terrorism, its authority is available through the Secretary of Defense to all combatant commanders. However, according to the results of our research, the awareness of and need to use the legislation by combatant commands vary widely. To determine the extent to which the combatant commands are aware of and using this legislation, we created a data collection instrument and e-mailed it to representatives at each combatant command. In responding to this instrument, representatives from Northern Command, Southern Command, European Command, Transportation Command, and Strategic

Command stated that they were not aware of nor did they have a need to use the legislation, while representatives of Joint Forces Command, Special Operations Command, and Pacific Command were aware of, but had no need to use, the legislation. CENTCOM and one of its subordinate commands were the only commands both aware of and using the legislation.

CENTCOM is providing administrative services and support to more than 300 foreign coalition liaison officers from over 60 countries fighting the Global War on Terrorism with the United States.⁷ In addition, CENTCOM is paying travel, subsistence, and personal expenses to over 70 liaison officers from more than 30 developing countries that are included in the larger number.

CENTCOM Support to Liaison Officers Benefits Global War on Terrorism

In the absence of guidance from the Office of the Secretary of Defense or the Joint Staff, CENTCOM officials established internal operating procedures to provide the administrative and travel related support that the foreign coalition liaison officers needed. These procedures are not written, but they are based on existing criteria defining developing countries, federal regulations governing travel, economies of scale, and what appears to be prudent fiscal management.

In providing administrative services and support, CENTCOM officials determined that each country's delegation (limited to no more than five foreign coalition liaison officers) would be provided a trailer for office space with furniture, telephone, computer, printer, copier, and shredder. Some of the smaller delegations share office space. CENTCOM pays for the furniture, shredders, copiers, telephones, and part of the custodial expense. MacDill Air Force Base, which is host to CENTCOM, pays for trailer leases, utilities, external security, and part of the custodial expense.⁸ These trailers are located on MacDill property in a fenced compound with security guards on duty. We toured some of the trailers and determined that CENTCOM was providing the space and equipment

⁷ The exact number of coalition liaison officers and countries is classified.

⁸ In January, 2004, we reported on the leases MacDill Air Force Base negotiated for the trailers used as offices by the coalition liaison officers (*Defense Management: Issues in Contracting for Lodging and Temporary Office Space at MacDill Air Force Base*, [GAO-04-296](#), Jan. 27, 2004). In that report, we identified weaknesses in contract management that prevented us from assessing why final costs for the trailers were higher than originally estimated.

typical of a small office for the coalition officers. However, CENTCOM officials told us that some countries have spent their own funds to upgrade the office space provided.

In determining how to pay the travel, subsistence, and personal expenses for coalition liaison officers from developing countries, CENTCOM officials told us they used existing criteria and federal regulations to guide their decisions. Absent a DOD or Department of State list of what would be considered developing countries, CENTCOM officials told us they use a list of countries generated by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, an international organization to which the United States belongs, and defined by that organization as “Least Developed: Other Low Income and Lower Middle Income.” According to the officials, this list is recognized by the Joint Staff. To determine the appropriate amounts to provide for travel, subsistence, and personal expenses, CENTCOM officials use the Joint Federal Travel Regulations.⁹

CENTCOM officials established some basic standards for authorizing travel, subsistence, and personal expenses for the coalition liaison officers from developing countries. CENTCOM pays for one round-trip airplane ticket from an officer’s country of origin to Tampa, Florida, where CENTCOM is headquartered, and return during a tour of duty. Other trips home are at an officer’s or his or her country’s expense. Meals and incidental expenses are based on the Joint Federal Travel Regulations’ rate for Tampa (\$42 per day in fiscal year 2003) paid monthly based on the number of days the officer actually spends in Tampa. CENTCOM provides housing for foreign coalition liaison officers through contracts it has negotiated with gated apartment complexes offering on-site security. Because of the number of officers needing housing (including those officers not from developing countries, who pay for their own housing), CENTCOM officials told us that they were able to negotiate rates for housing between \$58 and \$65 per day, which are less than Joint Federal Travel Regulations’ per diem rate for the Tampa area (\$93 per day in fiscal year 2003). CENTCOM does not pay any expenses incurred for family members of the coalition liaison officer who might accompany the officer to the United States. In fiscal year 2002, the first year the coalition was

⁹ The Joint Federal Travel Regulations govern the amount of per diem, travel, and transportation allowances that federal government employees can receive when they are traveling on official government business.

formed, coalition liaison officers had to find their own housing, which was more expensive than the contracts currently in place.

CENTCOM officials also told us that they rent cars for the coalition liaison officers from the General Services Administration at a cost of \$350 per car per month, which is less expensive than renting from a commercial car leasing company at a cost of \$750 per month. Again, because there are so many officers who require transportation, CENTCOM was able to negotiate a lower rate. Officers are allowed one car for each three members of a delegation. The officer whose name is on the car rental agreement is allowed \$60 per month for gas. The officers assigned to the car must pay for any additional gas.

CENTCOM and MacDill Air Force Base spent a total of almost \$30 million between fiscal year 2002 and 2003 to support coalition liaison officers (see table 1). In fiscal year 2002, CENTCOM and MacDill Air Force Base spent \$12.4 million to provide the administrative services and support and pay travel, subsistence, and personal expenses for the coalition liaison officers assigned to CENTCOM headquarters. The money came from Combatant Commander's Initiative Funds and MacDill Air Force Base funds. The amount spent in fiscal year 2003—nearly \$17.1 million—included \$898,000 in Commander's Initiative Funds to pay for travel, subsistence, and personal expenses, which was used until the legislation to provide support to coalition liaison officers was passed and the funds became available. The remaining amount came from CENTCOM and MacDill funds.

In addition to CENTCOM, the Coalition Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, a CENTCOM subordinate operating command, reported spending over \$300,000 to provide administrative support and pay travel, subsistence, and personal expenses to 13 liaison officers assigned to the task force headquarters. No other subordinate operating command or component command reported spending funds to support coalition liaison officers.

Table 1: Fiscal Year 2002 and Fiscal Year 2003 Costs by Type of Support Provided to Coalition Liaison Officers

Types of support	Fiscal year 2002	Fiscal year 2003
Administrative support		
Infrastructure improvements	\$232,900	\$1,405,600
Trailer leases	490,600	1,000,400
Furniture	300,000	155,000
Command, control, communication, computer, intelligence equipment ^a	4,972,698	5,038,779
Command, control, communication, computer, intelligence support ^b	4,061,366	5,400,000
Force protection	793,000	956,000
Utilities	207,000	519,000
Miscellaneous one-time costs	136,500	0
Subtotal	\$11,194,064	\$14,475,179
Personal expenses		
Travel	\$480,000	\$1,363,000
Housing and rental vehicles	734,000	1,219,000
Subtotal	\$1,214,000	\$2,582,000
Total	\$12,408,064	\$17,057,179

Source: Unaudited DOD data analyzed by GAO.

^a Includes items such as computers, local area networks, servers, and audio-visual dissemination systems.

^b Includes maintenance, technical support, and repair on equipment.

CENTCOM officials stated that this legislation has benefited the coalition by providing maximum communication and coordination for the deployment of those forces committed to fighting the Global War on Terrorism. They also stated that without the presence of the liaison officers at CENTCOM, they could not accomplish the coalition integration planning and coordination important to the Global War on Terrorism as effectively or efficiently as they are doing. CENTCOM officials stated that the legislation's authority to pay for travel, subsistence, and personal expenses for developing countries' liaison officers also has given the command a tool to use in negotiating with developing countries for their participation in the coalition force.

Conclusions

DOD-wide guidance provides uniform direction throughout the department on how to implement programs and policies. While CENTCOM has developed procedures for managing support to coalition liaison officers and has taken steps to provide the support authorized by the legislation in the least costly way, in the absence of DOD-wide guidance,

there can be no assurance that prudent procedures will always be followed. Moreover, without DOD guidance, should other commands choose to use the authority granted by this legislation, there is no assurance that they will implement it in a uniform and prudent manner. As of January 2004, there was no DOD office responsible for the implementation of the legislative authority allowing commands to pay for support for coalition liaison officers and no DOD-wide guidance on its use.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense take the following two actions: (1) designate an office within DOD to take responsibility for this legislation and (2) direct this designated office to promulgate and issue guidance to the combatant commands and their component and subordinate commands on how to implement this legislation.

Agency Comments

In official oral comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with the report. DOD stated that it would designate the Joint Staff as the office responsible for implementing the legislation and issuing appropriate guidance.

We are sending copies of this report to interested congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; and the Director, Office of Management and Budget. We will also make copies available to others on request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions, please contact me on (757) 552-8100 or by e-mail at curtinn@gao.gov. Major contributors to this report were Steven Sternlieb, Ann Borseth, Madelon Savvides, David Mayfield, and Renee McElveen.



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