



SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Additional Actions Are Needed to Effectively Manage Air Reserve Component

Accessible Version

December 2019

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-90](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Over the past decade the Air Force has increasingly relied on the ARC to meet operational requirements. The ARC is composed of two entities—the Air National Guard (ANG) and the Air Force Reserve (AFR)—which together comprise a substantial part of the total Air Force capability. AFSOC relies on either volunteerism or involuntary mobilization to activate ARC units.

House Report 115-676, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, contains a provision for GAO to assess ANG and AFR involuntary mobilization plans to support special operations. GAO evaluated the extent to which (1) AFSOC's mobilization process provides the ARC with timely and reliable forecasts of planned utilization of units and personnel; and (2) the ARC identifies and communicates information to AFSOC on the units and individuals available for mobilization or on voluntary deployments.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that the Air Force should ensure that AFSOC has the organizational capacity to effectively initiate, coordinate, and execute ARC mobilizations; and should develop a method for providing AFSOC with consolidated information regarding units available for mobilizations. DOD concurred with one of these recommendations and partially concurred with two, stating that some information is being shared and a planned initiative could improve the information flow. GAO believes this initiative, if implemented, could address the intent of its recommendations.

View [GAO-20-90](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

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Additional Actions Are Needed to Effectively Manage Air Reserve Component

What GAO Found

The Air Force Special Operation Command's (AFSOC) mobilization process does not fully support Air Reserve Component (ARC) needs for timely and reliable information. While AFSOC has established mobilization processes in line with Air Force guidance, the command faces difficulties, as follows:

- consistently providing ARC units and personnel with timely notifications regarding anticipated demand for their capabilities;
- coordinating with ARC commands on potential requirements for ARC capabilities; and
- sharing reliable information about mission requirements and resources with ARC units and personnel.

According to AFSOC officials, these difficulties stem from AFSOC's limited organizational capacity to conduct the planning, coordination, and execution of involuntary mobilizations (that is, ARC units or personnel ordered to active duty). Other Air Force entities that provide ARC capabilities to meet Air Force-wide requirements have established the capacity within their operations departments to coordinate with the ARC when implementing the involuntary mobilization process. AFSOC officials stated that because AFSOC did not, until recently, regularly use involuntary mobilizations to access the ARC, it was not considered necessary to have an organizational entity dedicated to managing involuntary mobilizations. AFSOC officials stated that the command's operations center has submitted requests to its headquarters for additional resources toward creating such organizational capacity, but the requests were not funded in fiscal years 2018 or 2019, as other requests received higher priority. According to officials, AFSOC is currently exploring possible short-term solutions. In the absence of the organizational capacity to conduct the planning, coordination, and execution of involuntary mobilizations, AFSOC will continue to be impeded in providing the notice required to access the ARC in support of requirements.

The ARC does not provide AFSOC with complete information regarding which of its units could be used to support AFSOC requirements for special operations activities. The Air Force uses a model that captures and organizes Air Force-wide requirements, but the model does not include special operations requirements, and AFSOC is expected to develop its own processes for its unique requirements. According to AFSOC and ARC officials, the ARC has not developed a method for capturing and organizing special operations requirements because it has historically supported special operations activities using volunteerism, which is more flexible and requires less up-front planning. Consolidated information on potential unit deployments would provide units with advanced notification, facilitating deployment preparation activities and helping personnel make arrangements with civilian employers or in their personal lives. Without a method to provide consolidated information on reserve component units available for deployment, the ARC will not have the information it needs to successfully plan its deployments, or to easily identify which of its units will be available for mobilization.

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Abbreviations	
AFSOC	Air Force Special Operations Command
ARC	Air Reserve Component
ANG	Air National Guard
AFR	Air Force Reserve
DOD	Department of Defense

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December 16, 2019

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) relies on its Air Reserve Component (ARC) to support operational needs and provide strategic depth to meet potential future contingencies.¹ The ARC is comprised of two entities: the Air National Guard (ANG) and the Air Force Reserve (AFR). As codified in law, the purpose of the ARC is to “provide trained units and qualified persons available for active duty in the armed forces, in time of war or national emergency, and at such other times as the national security may require to fill the needs of the armed forces whenever more units and persons are needed than are in the regular components.”² While the Air Force has historically relied on the ARC to serve as a reserve force for potential major contingencies, over the past decade the Air Force has increasingly relied on the ARC to meet requirements for ongoing operations. This includes using the ARC to support requirements that are known in advance as well as to provide the ability to respond to unexpected events and emergent threats.

In both roles, ARC units need more predictability and time than do their active duty counterparts to prepare their forces to support special operations activities, according to ARC officials. These officials attribute this need in part to ARC personnel’s having civilian careers, and thus less time available to train for their missions, because they are not full-time members of the military. The immediacy with which the ARC can support activities is also affected by the advance notice required to access the reserve component. ARC officials stress the importance of having timely and reliable information on demands for their capabilities to ensure that units are fully prepared to meet mission needs.

¹The Air Reserve Component (ARC) is not an actual command but is a term used by the Air Force as shorthand to refer to the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve.

²10 U.S.C. § 10102.

House Report 115-676, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, contains a provision for us to assess Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve involuntary mobilization plans to support special operations activities.³ This report evaluates the extent to which (1) AFSOC's mobilization process provides the ARC with timely and reliable forecasts of planned utilization of its units and personnel; and (2) the ARC identifies and communicates information to AFSOC on the units and individuals available for mobilization or on voluntary deployments.

For our first objective, we reviewed Department of Defense and Air Force guidance on accessing the reserve component. Specifically, we analyzed Department of Defense Instruction 1235.12, *Accessing the Reserve Components (RC)*, which establishes policy, assigns responsibilities, and prescribes procedures for ordering units and members of the reserve component to active duty as an operational force; and Air Force Instruction 10-402, *Mobilization Planning*, which provides mobilization process guidance and responsibilities regarding obtaining authority for the issuance of orders to activate reserve component personnel. We also reviewed relevant sections of Title 10 of the U.S. Code, including those concerning the reserve component access authorities for activating reserve component members for involuntary active duty.

For our second objective, we reviewed Air Force policies and guidance related to mobilization within the ARC—specifically, Air Force Instructions 10-401, *Air Force Operations Planning and Execution*, and 10-301, *Managing Operational Utilization Requirements* of the Air Reserve Component Forces. Among other things, these instructions prescribe and explain how the Air Force is to present forces for planning, deployment, employment, sustainment, redeployment, and reconstitution. They also direct the identification, collection, maintenance, and visibility of ARC operational utilization requirements to support planning and decision-making at all levels. We reviewed ANG and AFR information on units available for mobilization. For both objectives, we interviewed officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Secretary of the Air Force Reserve Affairs and Airman Readiness, AFSOC, ANG Readiness Center, AFR Command, and

³H.R. Rep. No. 115-676 at 170-171 (2018). Involuntary mobilization occurs when units or individuals of the ARC are ordered to active duty without their consent under multiple statutory authorities under Title 10 of the U.S. Code.

several reserve component units, along with Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command, to discuss these topics and related challenges.

We conducted this performance audit from August 2018 to December 2019, 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.

Background

AFSOC is the Air Force component of U.S. Special Operations Command and is responsible for providing Air Force capabilities and forces to support special operations activities. Special operations are operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment, and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments.⁴ Demand for AFSOC capabilities, including those provided by the ARC, is identified as part of the Department of Defense's (DOD) Global Force Management process for assigning and allocating forces to meet global requirements. This process allows the Secretary of Defense to strategically manage forces—including the military services, conventional forces, and special operations forces—to support strategic guidance and meet combatant commander requirements. As part of this process, the Joint Staff validates requirements for forces. U.S. Special Operations Command, as the joint force provider, is responsible for identifying and recommending forces to support special operations requirements.

U.S. Special Operations Command coordinates with its service component commands, including AFSOC, to determine which capabilities and specific units are best suited to meet validated requirements for special operations capabilities. After receiving these requirements, AFSOC considers its available options to provide the capabilities needed. This consideration includes reviewing active duty and reserve component units that provide specific sets of capabilities, such as intelligence,

⁴Special operations are also generally characterized by one or more of the following characteristics: time-sensitive, clandestine, low-visibility, conducted with or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or involving a high degree of risk.

surveillance, and reconnaissance; personnel recovery; and radio and television broadcasting for psychological operations.

If AFSOC, in conjunction with Headquarters Air Force, determines that the best solution to meet a requirement is to use capabilities from the ARC, it can rely on either volunteerism or involuntary recall to active duty—referred to as involuntary mobilization—to activate the needed forces. These two types of activation are described below.

- *Volunteerism.* The Secretary of the Air Force is authorized to activate ARC personnel on active duty with the consent of those individuals; however, the consent of the state governor is required for the voluntary activation of ANG personnel. According to Joint Publication 4-05, *Joint Mobilization Planning* (Feb. 21, 2014), volunteerism is important because it enables a service to fill required positions with reserve component personnel without its counting against the statutory limits related to involuntary mobilization. However, the guidance also states that volunteerism should be used judiciously, because excessive use of volunteers removes personnel from reserve component units, which could result in a reduction of the unit's readiness in the event of unit mobilization. Another factor that mobilization planners must take into account is dwell time policy in relation to deployments.⁵ Furthermore, the Air Force has established specific goals for managing the operational tempo of its forces, and planners need to consider this factor as well.⁶
- *Involuntary Mobilization.* Any unit or individual of a reserve component may be ordered to active duty under multiple mobilization statutory authorities under Title 10 of the U.S. Code that vary regarding the number of personnel who can be mobilized, the duration of the mobilization, and the approval authority. For example, section 12304 of Title 10, U.S. Code, provides authority to the President to involuntarily activate up to 200,000 members of the selected reserve for up to 365 days to augment active forces for an operational mission or in response to certain emergencies.

⁵The term "dwell time" refers to the time that a member of the armed forces or a unit spends at the member's or unit's permanent duty station or home port after returning from a deployment. 10 U.S.C. § 991(f)(1)(A).

⁶The term "operating tempo" refers to the rate at which units of the armed forces are involved in all military activities, including contingency operations, exercises, and training deployments. 10 U.S.C. § 991(f)(2).

AFSOC's Mobilization Process Does Not Fully Support ARC Needs for Timely and Reliable Information

Air Force Has Established Guidance and Processes for Mobilizing the ARC

AFSOC is required to follow Air Force guidance for accessing ARC units and personnel. The Air Force guidance implements DOD Instruction 1235.12, *Accessing the Reserve Components (RC)*, which establishes the overarching policies and procedures for accessing the reserve components for all military departments.⁷ When AFSOC officials determine that ARC capabilities are the appropriate option for a given special operation requirement, their access to the reserve component is governed by Air Force Instruction 10-301, *Managing Operational Utilization Requirements of the Air Reserve Component Forces*.⁸ This instruction outlines roles and responsibilities for managing requirements for reserve component capabilities accessed through both involuntary mobilizations and volunteerism. Among other things, it establishes that AFSOC use the reserve component in a cyclical or periodic manner that provides predictability to ARC individuals, to the individual's employer, and to the combatant command receiving the capabilities.

The process for accessing the reserve component through involuntary mobilization is further outlined in Air Force Instruction 10-402, *Mobilization Planning*.⁹ This guidance implements and expands on the specific timelines for particular milestones during the mobilization process established in DOD Instruction 1235.12, such as the identification of the types of capabilities required and of the unit responsible for providing

⁷Department of Defense Instruction 1235.12, *Accessing the Reserve Components (RC)*, (June 7, 2016, change 1, Feb. 28, 2017).

⁸Air Force Instruction 10-301, *Managing Operational Utilization Requirements of the Air Reserve Component Forces* (Dec. 20, 2017). In addition to implementing DOD Instruction 1235.12, this instruction also implements DOD Directive 1200.17, *Managing the Reserve Component as an Operational Force*, (Oct. 29, 2008), which provides an overarching set of principles and policies to promote and support the management of the reserve components as an operational force.

⁹Air Force Instruction 10-402, *Mobilization Planning* (Mar. 8, 2018).

them.¹⁰ These timelines vary, depending on whether the requirement for capabilities is known well ahead of mobilization—a rotational, or preplanned, requirement¹¹—or, conversely, is emergent.¹²

- **Rotational or preplanned requirements:** AFSOC must provide the reserve component with a request for particular capabilities at least 330 days prior to the mobilization, to allow ANG or AFR officials to identify the specific individuals who are available to support the request. Air Force guidance communicates the time frames in which reserve component personnel are to receive their mobilization orders. Specifically, AFSOC is required to submit requests to mobilize the ARC to Air Force headquarters to provide the Secretary of the Air Force enough time to approve the request; and then to communicate with ANG and AFR in sufficient time to provide personnel with their mobilization orders at least 180 days prior the start date of rotational or preplanned requirements.
- **Emergent requirements:** AFSOC is required to submit requests so that personnel receive notification at least 120 days prior to the mobilization date.¹³ In comparison, there are no specific time frames in the guidance for accessing the reserve component through volunteerism. The guidance generally discusses volunteerism as an approach that allows for ARC personnel to quickly respond to requests for forces.

AFSOC officials told us that they have observed an increase in requests from ARC units to use involuntary mobilizations rather than rely on the use of volunteerism, and that they anticipate this trend to continue, since involuntary mobilizations afford more predictability than do voluntary

¹⁰The communication of such information is consistent with *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, which states that quality information from reliable sources should be communicated throughout the organization to enable personnel to perform their roles in achieving the organization's objectives. *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014).

¹¹Rotational requirements are those needed on a recurring basis, identified in DOD's force management process. Similarly preplanned requirements are also identified in the same process and submitted approximately 2 years prior to the requirement's execution.

¹²Emergent requirements, unlike rotational or preplanned requirements, are those not previously planned for in DOD's force management process.

¹³While the DOD standard is at least 180 days, it is possible for AFSOC to provide mobilization orders fewer than 120 days prior to the mobilization start date for preplanned requirements, and as little as 30 days in the case of time-critical involuntary mobilizations. In both cases, however, doing so requires approval from the Secretary of Defense.

deployments.¹⁴ As such, involuntary mobilizations help personnel manage the frequency of time spent away from home and maximize their access to military medical and retirement benefits. Specifically:

- *Managing time away from home:* Air Force guidance limits the frequency of involuntary mobilizations for an individual to a standard of five periods of time spent at home for every one period spent involuntarily mobilized.¹⁵ For example, an individual involuntarily mobilized for 90 days would not be available to AFSOC for involuntary mobilization for another 450 days after the individual's return. This provides ARC personnel with some assurance that they will not deploy again for a specific window of time, unless they volunteer to do so. We have previously reported on challenges faced by DOD in setting policies to establish thresholds and track the total time individual servicemembers may be away from home, including for exercises, training, and deployment.¹⁶ We found that, with the exception of the Navy and U.S. Special Operations Command, the services either were not enforcing or had not established specific and measurable thresholds in their policies. Additionally, we found that DOD lacked reliable data for tracking the total time individual servicemembers spent away from home. We recommended that DOD clarify its policy to include specific and measurable department-wide thresholds and take steps to emphasize the collection of complete and reliable data. DOD concurred with our recommendation.
- *Medical and retirement benefits:* Involuntary mobilization can also maximize the window during which personnel receive medical and retirement benefits. All ARC personnel are eligible for benefits up to 180 days prior to their involuntary mobilization or voluntary deployment. However, to receive these benefits the individual must also have been issued mobilization orders identifying the mobilization date or, for a volunteer, the deployment date. As previously discussed, Air Force guidance identifies notification time frames designed to provide ARC

¹⁴Specifically, AFSOC officials stated that they had completed six involuntary mobilizations in fiscal years 2017-- 2019 and estimate completing 12 in fiscal year 2021 alone.

¹⁵The Air Force is also authorized to mobilize an individual who has a mobilization-to-dwell ratio lower than 1 to 4, with an endorsement and justification from a General Officer and Secretary of Defense approval. Air Force Instruction 10-402, *Mobilization Planning* (Mar. 8, 2018).

¹⁶GAO, *Military Readiness: Clear Policy and Reliable Data Would Help DOD Better Manage Service Members' Time Away from Home*, [GAO-18-253](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 25, 2018).

personnel involuntarily mobilized to support rotational or preplanned requirements with their orders at least 180 days prior to the mobilization start date. This time frame allows personnel to receive these benefits for the entire time they are potentially eligible. By contrast, personnel who are involuntarily mobilized for emergent requirements are supposed to receive their orders with at least 120 days' notice, and, according to AFSOC officials, volunteers can receive as little as one week's notice. As a result, personnel may prefer involuntary mobilization, as it generally results in their receiving military medical and retirement benefits for more time than they would have received them if they had volunteered to deploy.

AFSOC Has Mobilization Processes but Faces Difficulties in Providing the ARC with Timely and Reliable Information about Requirements

AFSOC has mobilization processes that follow Air Force guidance, but it faces difficulties in implementing these processes. Specifically, we found AFSOC faces challenges in (1) consistently providing ARC units and personnel with timely notifications regarding anticipated demand for their capabilities; (2) coordinating with ANG and AFR commands on potential requirements for ARC capabilities; and (3) sharing reliable information about mission requirements and resources with ARC units and personnel.

AFSOC Has Not Always Provided Timely Notification to ARC Units and Personnel

The notifications that AFSOC gives ARC units or personnel of anticipated demand for their capabilities generally do not meet the notification time frames associated with involuntary mobilizations for non-emergent requirements, thereby impeding ARC units' ability to prepare for deployments.¹⁷ Officials at three of the four reserve component units we spoke with told us that AFSOC routinely provides units with limited notice of requirements for capabilities, even though they predominately support preplanned requirements that are known to AFSOC well in advance of their execution. Therefore, the officials stated, AFSOC should have

¹⁷According to AFSOC officials, two of the six involuntary mobilizations occurring in fiscal years 2017–2019 required waivers to mobilize ARC capabilities with fewer than 180 days' notice. However, ARC officials stated that AFSOC will regularly use volunteers instead of involuntary mobilizations for requirements that receive limited advance notice. It is not necessary to obtain waivers for volunteers who receive limited notice of a requirement.

sufficient time to identify and communicate the requirement for ARC capabilities to reserve component units to enable them to meet required time frames (for example, no less than 180 days in the case of non-emergent requirements). However, according to these officials, they routinely receive 90 or fewer days' notice of when they are expected to provide capabilities for a given requirement. Due to this truncated time frame, the requirement must either be staffed using volunteers or receive approval from the Secretary of Defense to involuntarily mobilize reserve component personnel with limited notice.

Receiving limited notification can create challenges for the ARC unit providing the capabilities for AFSOC requirements. For example, officials at one unit we spoke with stated that they requested that AFSOC provide at least 9 months' notice prior to a mobilization to ensure that personnel received adequate training, because the unit provides a range of specialized capabilities. However, officials stated that what they generally received was 60 to 90 days' notice, and that within this time frame the unit faced challenges in obtaining access to the equipment needed to train personnel for specific missions. Officials at another unit we spoke with stated that since 2015 they had received 60 or fewer days' notice for their support of AFSOC requirements, one of which was an involuntary mobilization supporting a non-emergent requirement. An official explained that while AFSOC's communication of requirements and planning of involuntary mobilizations has improved over time, the unit expects that orders for its next mobilization will be provided with fewer than 180 days' notice. The official explained that in addition to limiting ARC personnel's access to medical and retirement benefits, the abbreviated time frames make it difficult for them to coordinate their absences with their civilian employers. AFSOC officials acknowledged that they have been late to notify units in the past and identified this as an area in which they are working to improve. The officials explained that in some instances the late notification is a result of factors outside of AFSOC's control, such as instances in which the Secretary of Defense's process for approving requirements is delayed.

AFSOC Has Not Always Coordinated Directly with ANG and AFR Commands

We identified concerns regarding AFSOC's practice of communicating directly with reserve component units, rather than formally coordinating with ANG and AFR commands, to develop potential requests for ARC unit capabilities. For example, AFR officials stated that geographic proximity to AFSOC frequently results in one unit's receiving informal requests from

AFSOC for its capabilities. That unit provides remotely piloted aircraft capabilities, which do not require personnel to deploy overseas. Officials explained that AFSOC will contact that unit directly to request capabilities to supplement the active duty personnel completing the same mission, but commonly AFSOC will provide only a few days' notice prior to the requirement. According to these officials, personnel generally respond to these requests by volunteering with limited advance notice.

AFSOC officials stated that communicating informally with the units to determine the availability of their personnel and capabilities enables AFSOC to expedite the identification of personnel potentially available to meet a requirement. However, headquarters officials for both ANG and AFR—who are responsible for identifying the specific personnel available to meet a requirement—stated that these indirect communications impede their ability to strategically manage and appropriately resource units. For example, headquarters AFR officials identified an instance in which changes to a unit's anticipated contribution to a mission were arranged with the unit, but not with officials at their higher headquarters at the AFR. The requirement was originally for the AFR unit to supplement an active duty unit already providing the capability for AFSOC, but was expanded to require the AFR unit to have sole responsibility for providing part of the capability. The absence of direct communication and formal coordination between AFR headquarters and AFSOC during this expansion led to differing expectations regarding the number of AFR personnel needed to provide the capability required. AFR officials stated that as a result of limited transparency into future requirements for that unit, AFR headquarters did not request the appropriate level of funding for the unit, thereby limiting the resources available to support the requirement. AFSOC officials acknowledged that their use of informal communication with units instead of coordinating with ANG and AFR headquarters is not an ideal approach and could be improved.

AFSOC Does Not Always Share Reliable Information about Mission Requirements and Resources

We identified concerns regarding the frequency with which AFSOC has changed the information it has communicated to ARC units about anticipated requirements, thereby creating unpredictability and impeding those units' ability to train for and ultimately provide the capabilities needed to execute those requirements. While requirements may change subject to combatant command needs, AFSOC's availability to proactively coordinate with both the combatant command and the ARC has been limited. AFSOC officials stated that, due to their limited capacity to

manage involuntary mobilizations, they are often dedicating time only to those mobilizations that require urgent attention, as opposed to refining the details of the requirement and coordinating with the units in advance of the mobilization.

ARC officials stated that the unpredictability resulting from the changes that occur can introduce challenges to the units' ability to execute requirements. For example, officials at one unit stated that the location of a previous requirement changed at least three times in the 60 days preceding its involuntary mobilization. Officials explained that changes to the location of the requirement meant that the capabilities required by AFSOC also changed, because the unit provides intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities that need to be supported by specific communications equipment. Depending on the location, this equipment may already be in place, or it may be that the unit must bring it with them. In a different instance, the same unit arrived at a location to provide its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities and found that the location lacked the communications equipment the unit needed to effectively use its capabilities.

Further, ARC officials explained that changes regarding what capabilities are needed can create training challenges unique to the reserve component. ARC unit officials explained that while reserve component personnel maintain a standard level of readiness at all times, deployments may require them to train to a specific skill set to meet a mission requirement. For example, special tactics squadrons supporting AFSOC requirements can support three different mission sets, each of which may require specialized training to prepare for a specific mission, according to unit officials. Given the nature of the reserve component, these personnel have to complete this training during the limited windows of time in which they are called in from their full-time civilian jobs. As a result, the ARC has limited flexibility in responding to changes in training requirements. AFSOC officials acknowledged that the ARC can face challenges in meeting training requirements and that the advanced planning associated with involuntary mobilizations can help ensure that units have enough time to meet training requirements.

Other Air Force Entities Use Alternative Approaches to Planning, Coordinating, and Executing Involuntary Mobilizations, but AFSOC Lacks the Organizational Capacity

Other Air Force entities that provide ARC capabilities to meet Air Force requirements through mobilization have established alternative approaches to initiating, planning, and coordinating their respective requirements for reserve component capabilities. Specifically, officials from Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command, which are Air Force components similar to AFSOC regarding mobilization of ARC units, described entities established within their operations departments to coordinate with the ARC when implementing the involuntary mobilization process. These entities each consist of four to five individuals who are tasked on a full-time basis with ensuring that the reserve components are utilized in a predictable manner. The efforts of these entities include coordinating with the ARC to create plans that cover at least 2 years of anticipated rotational and preplanned requirements. While Air Combat Command and Air Mobility Command officials stated that they are responsible for coordinating a larger number of mobilizations than AFSOC coordinates, they noted that all three follow the same Air Force guidance with regard to the involuntary mobilization process.

Officials from an ARC personnel recovery unit that supports Air Combat Command missions highlighted the benefits of the predictability that comes from Air Combat Command's planning efforts.¹⁸ According to those officials, anticipated mobilizations are communicated to them in a schedule that covers a span of 5 years. More than a year before the unit is scheduled to involuntarily mobilize, Air Combat Command communicates the specifics of the requirement for the mission. The officials stated that, in their experience, these details rarely change once they have been communicated to the unit. By contrast, as previously discussed, we spoke with officials from an ARC special tactics squadron that provides AFSOC with capabilities similar to those of the personnel

¹⁸As a personnel recovery unit, this unit is trained and equipped to conduct rescue missions in any setting, including rescuing military personnel in combat settings and civilians as part of humanitarian or disaster relief efforts.

recovery unit described above,¹⁹ who stated that they regularly receive only 60-90 days' notice prior to being deployed. They stated that they face difficulties in adequately training personnel to provide capabilities within these time frames. AFSOC officials stated that this issue is driven in part by the fact that units coordinate directly with requesting commands to fill their desired requirements.

According to AFSOC officials, AFSOC does not have a headquarters entity dedicated to managing the planning, coordination, and execution of reserve component capabilities because, until recently, AFSOC did not use its reserve components to support ongoing missions to the extent that they do today. As a result, it was not considered necessary to have an organizational entity dedicated to managing involuntary mobilizations. Instead, AFSOC assigned the roles and responsibilities associated with initiating, planning, and coordinating ARC mobilizations within its overall process for managing AFSOC's assignment and allocation of forces. AFSOC and ARC officials stated that under this process, a single individual at AFSOC is responsible for managing the involuntary mobilizations as a secondary duty. AFSOC officials stated that, given the scope of other assigned responsibilities, this individual focuses on managing involuntary mobilizations about half of one day in a work week.

According to the officials, having a limited staff dedicated to initiating, planning, and coordinating involuntary mobilizations results in AFSOC's responding to issues as they become urgent and impedes its ability to utilize the ARC in a predictable and stable manner. AFSOC officials also stated that the shift to using the ARC to support AFSOC's steady state requirements, along with the increasing use of involuntary mobilizations to access ARC capabilities, have exposed the limitations of their capacity to manage involuntary mobilizations.²⁰ These officials added that creating a more robust organizational capacity to manage the involuntary mobilization of the reserve component could counteract some of the

¹⁹Similar to personnel recovery units, special tactics squadrons provide personnel recovery capabilities. In addition, they can provide precision strike capabilities, both in the form of munitions and humanitarian aid drops, and they have the capabilities to assess and open airfields.

²⁰In addition to an increasing use of involuntary mobilizations among those ARC units currently supporting AFSOC, AFSOC will be responsible for more ARC units following the anticipated combination of Guardian Angel personnel recovery units with AFSOC's Special Tactics Squadron. As of August 2019, AFSOC officials expected this organizational change to be approved by October 2019.

challenges they have experienced in providing timely notification to ARC units, directly coordinating with ANG and AFR commands, and identifying and communicating reliable information about requirements to ARC units.

AFSOC officials attribute the challenges faced in implementing AFSOC's involuntary mobilization processes to the absence of adequate capacity to manage involuntary mobilizations. Specifically, they acknowledged that with additional capacity they would be better positioned to undertake the efforts needed to (1) provide more timely notification to ARC units, (2) coordinate with ANG and AFR commands, and (3) increase communication with the commands generating requirements. While officials acknowledged that some last-minute changes are unavoidable, they told us that having more personnel dedicated to AFSOC's mobilization process could potentially lead to having more timely notifications or better indications of imminent changes. Further, some factors that can affect the involuntary mobilization process fall outside of AFSOC's control, such as delays in the decision making process at the Secretary of Defense level and changes in combatant commander requirements. Although AFSOC cannot control all factors that affect involuntary mobilization of the ARC, increasing its capacity to manage involuntary mobilizations would improve its ability to anticipate and proactively address the challenges introduced by external factors.

AFSOC officials stated that in recognition of this need, the command's operations center has submitted multiple requests for additional resources to the headquarters in order to create a more robust organizational capacity to manage the involuntary mobilization of the reserve component. For example, the request submitted in January 2019 stated that AFSOC currently does not provide the support and guidance that ARC units need to properly execute the involuntary mobilization process. The request sought one additional full-time position dedicated to managing involuntary mobilizations and coordinating involuntary mobilizations with the ARC. Although AFSOC officials told us that the request was validated by AFSOC leadership, the validation of a request does not ensure that it will receive funding. After competing against other funding requests from other Air Force components, the Financial Management Board did not fund the position in fiscal years 2018 or 2019 because those other requests received higher priority.²¹ As an alternative

²¹The Financial Management Board determines program priorities and ensures effective allocation of resources. Air Force Instruction 65-601, volume 2, *Financial Management Budget Management for Operations* (Jul. 14, 2017).

to the full-time position requested by the operations center, AFSOC officials identified ongoing efforts to coordinate with the ANG that would result in the ANG's allocating personnel to fill a temporary position at AFSOC. The individual in this position would be responsible for supporting the mobilization process. AFSOC officials stated that such an arrangement would help address the capacity challenges they currently face, but also noted that it would be a short-term solution, and highlighted that the individual filling the position would need to be familiar with AFSOC, ANG, and AFR processes to execute his or her duties. In addition, AFSOC officials could consider realigning existing capacity within the command to directly address the limited capacity to manage involuntary mobilizations. However, AFSOC officials emphasized that the command as a whole currently operates with limited capacity.

In the absence of the Air Force developing additional AFSOC organizational capacity dedicated to the planning, coordination, and execution of involuntary mobilizations, AFSOC will continue to be impeded in its ability to manage involuntary mobilizations in accordance with Air Force guidance, including providing the notice required to access the ARC through involuntary mobilization in support of preplanned or rotational requirements. Additionally, at its current capacity AFSOC will likely face increasing challenges in providing timely notification to ARC units, coordinating with ANG and AFR commands, and enhancing communication with the commands generating requirements to help solidify mission specifics, as the number of involuntary mobilizations quadruple by 2021, as estimated by AFSOC officials. As a result, units may not be fully prepared to support requirements or able to effectively conduct their mission once in theater. Further, AFSOC will continue to be impeded in coordinating with ANG and AFR commands in a manner that enables the ARC to strategically manage and resource units in support of AFSOC's requirements.

The ARC Does Not Provide Complete Information to AFSOC on Units Available for Mobilization or on Voluntary Deployments

The ARC Supports Air Force-wide Requirements Identified in the Air Force's Force-Generation Model

The ARC supports both Air Force-wide and special operations-specific requirements, and it follows a distinct process for Air Force-wide

requirements. The Air Force uses a force-generation model that applies to both active duty and reserve component forces. This force-generation model helps the Air Force manage Air Force-wide requirements and provides its components with the information they need to plan their potential deployments to support those requirements. The model is designed to capture Air Force-wide requirements from the total force and allows each of the Air Force components, including AFSOC, to develop its own processes outside the model for its unique requirements. The model organizes Air Force-wide requirements into groups based on the capacity of a particular capability, and it generates a 24-month schedule for active and reserve units. The schedule comprises normal training, preparation, and periods of time when units are susceptible to deployment to meet Air Force-wide requirements. For ARC units, the periods of time during which units are susceptible to deployment are referred to as Reserve Component Periods.²² These potential deployment windows are determined based on providing equivalent capabilities throughout the 24-month cycle and are typically 4 or 6 months long.

For most units, the majority of the 24-month schedule is spent in normal training, during which forces concentrate on unit missions and basic proficiency events in accordance with applicable Air Force directives. As a unit's potential deployment window (or Reserve Component Period for the ARC) approaches, the unit will enter a 2- to 3-month deployment preparation period to focus on specific deployment preparation activities and mission-specific events, if known. Deployment preparation activities could include training, organizing, and equipping the force to be able to perform the mission specified in the force requirement. ARC units then enter their 4- or 6-month Reserve Component Period, during which they or their personnel are susceptible to being the first choice for deployments to meet known or emerging Air Force-wide requirements.²³

ANG and AFR officials stated that the Air Force's force-generation model gives ARC units predictability regarding potential deployments. This allows them to better manage ARC capabilities by identifying ARC units

²²"Reserve Component Period" is a term used by the ARC to refer to the Air Expeditionary Force Vulnerability Period and is part of the overall Air Force's force-generation construct.

²³Each capability operates under its own specific schedule intended to provide maximum support, given the capacity of the units. The Air Force's force-generation model divides its warfighting capabilities into five blocks and assigns to each a goal for its ratio of time deployed in support of a contingency versus time in a dwell state. Each of these blocks is intended to contain an equivalent capability from which to provide forces.

and personnel to support special operations activities well in advance of when they might be expected to deploy. According to these officials, providing ARC units with a 24-month schedule that identifies their Reserve Component Periods gives those units time to plan for and complete specific deployment preparation activities. ANG and AFR officials told us that this is particularly important for ARC units because, in comparison with active duty units, ARC units need more advanced notice in order to include specific deployment preparation activities and mission-specific events in their training schedule, since their personnel have civilian employment and cannot react as quickly as active duty units. The predictability provided by the Air Force's force-generation model is a key aspect of giving them that time.

Additionally, ANG and AFR officials stated that the Air Force's force-generation model helps establish expectations about the quantity of forces the ARC should generate in a 24-month period. The model accomplishes this by helping the ARC identify the expected future demand for a capability. For example, if the projected demand for personnel recovery capability is higher than the ARC's capacity, those commands and units can pursue a corrective course of action. According to the ANG and AFR officials, these actions could include changing unit structures or developing more capacity.

The ARC Does Not Have Consolidated Information on Reserve Component Units Available to Support Special Operations Activities

While the Air Force's force-generation model provides the ARC with a 24-month picture of the units it anticipates will be used to meet potential Air Force-wide deployments, the ARC does not have a comparable model with information on which ARC units could be used to support AFSOC requirements for special operations activities. According to officials, the ARC does not have a force-generation model for two reasons. First, while the Air Force model works for Air Force-wide requirements, it does not apply to special operations-specific requirements because they are unique to the Air Force's special operations component, AFSOC. According to AFSOC officials, their command deploys units and personnel differently from typical Air Force units in order to maximize the number of requirements they can support with a smaller force. Second, the ARC has historically supported special operations activities using volunteerism, which is much more flexible than involuntary mobilization and requires less upfront planning or notification. As a result, ARC

officials did not feel the need to develop a force-generation model for special operations requirements. ANG and AFR officials told us that ARC units will sometimes keep a unit-level schedule of their potential deployments, but that information is not available in a consolidated or consistent format. AFSOC officials added that any force-generation model for special operations should consider the limited capacity of some special operations capabilities. Officials stated that some capabilities in the ARC are limited to one unit, which results in AFSOC deploying parts of units rather than the whole unit to cover more requirements.

ANG and AFR officials agreed that a force-generation model regarding future deployments could help identify which ARC units would be susceptible to deploy during a given period of time, which would be beneficial for planning ARC deployments. Consolidated information on potential unit deployments would provide units with advanced notification, making it easier to accomplish deployment preparation activities and helping ARC personnel make arrangements for their potential deployments. For example, ANG officials told us that advanced notification to units can give the ARC more time to incorporate needed training into drill training. Furthermore, unit personnel would also have more time to make arrangements with civilian employers or in their personal lives, making their transition to active duty easier and making it more likely that they will view mobilizations favorably in the future.

Additionally, these officials stated that, with such a model, ANG and AFR could more easily identify and communicate which ARC units would be available for mobilization to support special operations activities. AFSOC officials stated that, in turn, this could provide AFSOC with more certainty that it would have access to ARC forces when needed. According to ANG and AFR officials, AFSOC officials have expressed some concerns about whether their command will have access to ARC forces. Specifically, since a substantial part of the total Air Force capability resides in the ARC, AFSOC officials are not certain that the capacity of ARC units supporting special operations will be able to meet future requirements. The officials added that by identifying units or individuals susceptible for deployment in advance, AFSOC would have more confidence in the ARC's ability to support the command's requirements.

According to Air Force guidance, a predictable force-generation model is used to ensure proper force readiness and rapid responses to emerging crises. Specifically, Air Force Instruction 10-401, *Air Force Operations Planning and Execution*, calls for the Air Force and its components, including the ANG and AFR, to manage the deployment of its forces in

order to meet global requirements while maintaining the highest possible level of overall readiness. The instruction calls for the Air Force to accomplish this task by establishing a force-generation model that can be used to manage the rhythm of force deployments to meet global combatant command requirements. The intent of the force-generation model is to establish a predictable, standardized pattern to ensure that forces are properly organized, trained, equipped, and ready to sustain capabilities while rapidly responding to emerging crises.²⁴

ANG officials told us that they have taken some initial steps to create a force-generation model and consolidate the various unit-level schedules of ARC forces supporting special operations activities. Specifically, the ANG advisor to AFSOC was developing a consolidated schedule of ARC units intended for use by AFSOC to identify ANG units that could mobilize to support AFSOC requirements. However, according to AFSOC officials, the ANG advisor was expected to retire soon, and we found that ANG headquarters officials were not aware of this effort, and there were no plans to institutionalize it. AFR officials were likewise not aware of any similar effort to consolidate schedules for their units' different capabilities to support special operations activities. Without having a method for providing consolidated information on reserve component units that are available for deployment, the ARC will not have the information it needs to successfully plan its deployments, or easily identify and communicate to AFSOC which of its units are or will be available for mobilization. Furthermore, AFSOC officials may continue to have concerns that they will not have access to high demand ARC capabilities to deploy under a mobilization.

The ARC Does Not Have Complete Information on Voluntary Deployments

According to officials, although ANG and AFR units have a general understanding as to how many volunteers they have supporting special operations requirements at the unit level, the ANG and AFR lack a mechanism for tracking volunteer deployment rates across the ARC. Specifically, information on reserve components' volunteer deployments is not available in a form that facilitates tracking in order to understand rates of volunteering or the contributions made by the ARC in supporting special operations activities, according to officials.

²⁴Air Force Instruction 10-401.

The Air Force requires the ANG and AFR to track key data to ensure proper management of ARC utilization and mission execution. Specifically, Air Force Instruction 10-301, *Managing Operational Utilization Requirements of the Air Reserve Component Forces*, calls for the Air Force to identify full mission requirements for ARC utilization by collecting, tracking, and organizing relevant data and prioritizing requirements.²⁵ It also states that these data are intended to aid in allocating funding, matching units to requirements, executing requirements, assessing each step of the process, and forecasting future requirements. Additionally, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* establishes that management should obtain relevant data from reliable internal and external sources in a timely manner to facilitate effective monitoring.²⁶

ANG and AFR officials told us that voluntary deployments are more difficult to track than are involuntary mobilizations. Specifically, the statutory requirements for involuntarily mobilizing ARC units or personnel make tracking them simpler. For example, according to officials the Secretary of Defense is required to approve or be notified of involuntary mobilizations, and ANG and ARC units receive specific orders, all of which are tracked closely. Voluntary deployments, however, do not have the same approval requirements.

Nevertheless, ANG and AFR officials told us that ARC units may have some information, as detailed below, on the numbers of volunteer deployments, although this information provides only a partial picture of volunteerism.

- **Travel System Data:** Officials from a reserve component unit we visited reported that some of the information on voluntary deployments could be compiled from travel systems used to send ARC units and personnel overseas. However, these officials added that matching travel records to the volunteer status of individuals could be time-consuming, because the travel systems are not designed to perform this function. Furthermore, unit officials told us that this travel information would be incomplete even if it were compiled, because it would not include units and individuals supporting operational requirements from their home stations—that is,

²⁵Air Force Instruction 10-301.

²⁶GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014).

not traveling outside their normal locations. For example, according to unit officials, personnel supporting remote piloted aircraft would not be included in the information collected from the travel systems because they do not travel outside their normal duty stations to carry out their missions. Without travel orders, the system would not show these types of deployments. Unit officials told us that there could be several cases like this one in which the information compiled from the travel system or other sources could be incomplete.

- **Man-Day Estimates:** An AFSOC official told us that the system used to track military personnel appropriation man-days could be another source used to track volunteerism among ANG and AFR units. According to this official, AFSOC uses a data system to transfer man-days to the volunteering ARC unit.²⁷ This official stated that the system used to make these transfers may contain the information needed to track volunteerism, but acknowledged that no one at AFSOC was using the system for this purpose. Furthermore, ANG and AFR officials confirmed that the data system is not currently used for tracking rates of volunteerism among ARC units.

According to AFR officials, tracking volunteerism would allow them to more easily document the ARC's contributions to support special operations and evaluate whether ARC forces were being effectively utilized. Specifically, ANG and AFR officials expressed concerns that different rates of individual volunteerism within and across ARC units may result in a misleading picture of overall unit utilization. In some cases, incomplete data on volunteerism can result in overstating unit contributions. For example, the unit-level figures regarding deployments are actually averages of all the individuals in the unit. Officials expressed concerns that as a result of using averages, units may appear to be more highly utilized than they actually are, due to the high rates at which some individuals from the unit volunteer to deploy. According to ANG and AFR officials, some ARC personnel volunteer at high rates because they prefer the additional income or benefits from these deployments, while other personnel from the same units may prefer to deploy less often. ARC officials expressed concerns that this disparity may not be immediately visible to ARC and AFSOC leadership. AFSOC officials told us that they share some of these concerns.

²⁷The Air Force uses the Command Manday Allocation System as the data system to document Military Personnel Appropriation man-day allocations. A Military Personnel Appropriation man-day is defined as a 24 hour calendar day of active duty for which normal compensations are drawn from the Military Personnel Appropriation to pay ARC personnel for performance of duty.

Other officials expressed concerns that without good information on volunteerism rates, the ANG and AFR could not effectively manage operational tempo goals. To measure operational tempo, DOD has established policies relating to how long military personnel are deployed versus at home (referred to as dwell time, or dwell). For example, ARC personnel who deploy for 7 months and are in dwell for 14 months would have a deployment-to-dwell ratio of 1:2. For ARC units, DOD also tracks the mobilization-to-dwell ratio, which is the ratio of how long ARC personnel are involuntarily mobilized versus not mobilized. DOD guidance establishes that the mobilization-to-dwell ratio for ARC units should be 1:5.²⁸

According to ANG and AFR officials, ARC voluntary deployments are not factored into the dwell calculations for either ratio, making it more difficult to ensure that deployments do not fatigue ARC forces. Additionally, Special Operations Command policy specifies that ARC units supporting special operations should maintain the same deployment cycle as active duty units, which as a goal should be no less than a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio. ANG, AFR, and AFSOC officials agreed that tracking volunteer deployment rates more comprehensively and consistently would provide greater perspective on how ARC units are utilized and help them more effectively manage their operational tempo goals.

Officials stated that an additional consequence of having incomplete data on volunteerism is that the overall contributions of the ARC can be understated, because the full range of support that ARC units and personnel are providing is not being documented. For example, a report used by the Air Force to track force contributions from its components, including the ARC, shows that the AFR contributed forces to support special operations activities for about 6 months of an approximately 4-year period. However, according to AFR officials, the command's contribution to support special operations activities was much higher than what is documented in the report. The officials stated that AFR also provided volunteer support to AFSOC over the entire period but that its contributions are not fully reflected in the report, because volunteers

²⁸Secretary of Defense approval is required for activation requests when ARC units' or personnel's dwell ratios are less than 1:4. For example, 6 months of involuntary activation followed by 24 months dwell yields a mobilization-dwell ratio of 1:4. Department of Defense Instruction 1235.12, *Accessing the Reserve Components (RC)*, (Jun. 7, 2016 incorporating change 1, effective Feb. 28, 2017).

supporting an AFSOC-assigned mission are counted among the contributions made by other active duty forces, rather than by AFR.

Without complete information on volunteer deployment rates among reserve component forces, the ANG and AFR may face difficulties in ensuring the effective utilization of their forces to support special operations activities, documenting force contributions from the ARC, and managing operational tempo and deployment-to-dwell goals. Further, the ARC will not have the information it needs to ensure effective management of its force utilization and mission execution. Specifically, it will not be able to determine whether units are being fully utilized, because of the distorted or incomplete volunteerism information.

Conclusions

With a substantial part of the total Air Force capability residing in the ARC, AFSOC relies on mobilized ARC forces to support its operations. Furthermore, AFSOC's increasing use of ARC as an operational reserve has highlighted the importance of the ARC's and AFSOC's planning and information-sharing efforts. However, AFSOC's implementation of its mobilization process impedes its ability to provide the ARC with timely notification of mobilizations, coordinate with ANG and AFR commands, and share reliable information about requirements with the ARC. Without resolving AFSOC's organizational capacity challenge in managing AFSOC requirements for reserve capabilities, AFSOC's implementation of this process is unlikely to improve.

AFSOC's use of the ARC is also affected by the unavailability of complete information regarding both the units available to mobilize and voluntary deployment rates. Specifically, while the ARC is able to identify the units anticipated to be available to support non-special operations requirements, it does not have a method for communicating consolidated information on the availability of units for special operations requirements. Without such a method, AFSOC and the ARC do not have easily accessible information about the current and future availability of ARC units to support special operations requirements. In addition, voluntary deployments are a key piece of the ARC's support of AFSOC requirements. However, the ARC has not developed a mechanism for tracking the rate at which they occur. Without tracking volunteer deployment rates, the ARC is limited in its ability both to ensure that its forces are effectively utilized and to communicate the level of contribution made by ARC volunteers in support of special operations requirements.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making three recommendations to DOD:

The Secretary of the Air Force, in coordination with ANG and AFR, should ensure that AFSOC has the organizational capacity to effectively initiate, coordinate, and execute ARC mobilizations, to include ensuring timely and reliable notification of requirements to those units. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of the Air Force should ensure that the ANG and AFR develop a method for providing AFSOC with consolidated information regarding units available for immediate and future mobilizations to support special operations activities, such as the Air Force provides to its units with its force-generation model. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of the Air Force should ensure that the ANG and AFR develop a mechanism for tracking volunteer deployments to better manage ARC force utilization. (Recommendation 3)

Agency Comments

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with one recommendation and partially concurred with two recommendations. DOD's comments are restated below and reprinted in appendix I. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate.

DOD concurred with the first recommendation that the Secretary of the Air Force, in coordination with ANG and AFR, should ensure that AFSOC has the organizational capacity to effectively initiate, coordinate, and execute ARC mobilizations, to include ensuring timely and reliable notification of requirements to those units. In its response, DOD stated that the Air Force continues to balance manning requirements across the spectrum of operations. DOD also stated that fully manning AFSOC for this staff function would be helpful, whether additional manpower is programmed or AFSOC mitigates internally by reallocating manpower. We believe that fully manning AFSOC for this staff function, if fully implemented, would meet the intent of the recommendation. In its comments on this recommendation, DOD also stated that the ARC has a process in place to provide timely notification to ANG and AFR units once

requirements are known. The department added that the ANG implemented the Agile ARC Mobilization Process on June 1, 2019, which streamlined policy and procedural chokepoints and improved notification timelines by an average of 60 days. We note that, while improvements in the notification timelines would be beneficial, it is too soon to understand the long-term effect of the implementation of this process.

DOD partially concurred with the second recommendation that the Secretary of the Air Force should ensure that the ANG and AFR develop a method for providing AFSOC with consolidated information regarding units available for immediate and future mobilizations to support special operations activities, such as the Air Force provides to its units with its force-generation model. In its comments, DOD stated that the AFR currently provides AFSOC with information on units available, using Reserve Component Periods, and that the AFR will assess whether re-posturing in multiple Reserve Component Periods will provide a portion of capability with greater flexibility. We agree that this is a reasonable approach. However, as we noted in our report, consolidated information on reserve component units that are available for deployment could provide ARC units with advanced notification, making it easier to accomplish deployment preparation activities and help ARC personnel make arrangements for their potential deployments. Additionally, DOD stated that current information technology initiatives with the Air Force Integrated Personnel and Pay System will eventually provide the Air Force with functionality allowing a single, integrated system of software suites. According to the department, Air Force Integrated Personnel and Pay System will support a rapid and accurate information flow from the first identification of a requirement through the processing and delivering of orders, allowing the Air Force to start pay and benefits in an auditable manner. However, DOD did not identify a timeline for when that system would be available. We believe that improvements in the flow of information regarding ARC unit availability are necessary and would help to ensure that the ARC can successfully plan deployments, or easily identify and communicate to AFSOC which of its units are or will be available for mobilization. We believe that if this planned system is implemented as described, it would meet the intent of the recommendation.

DOD partially concurred with the third recommendation that the Secretary of the Air Force should ensure that the ANG and AFR develop a mechanism for tracking volunteer deployments to better manage ARC force utilization. In its response, DOD stated that tracking volunteer deployments requires timely information from AFSOC to properly identify

the requirements, establish expeditionary ARC units, and document the transaction when ARC members are activated. Further, it stated that in the short term, the AFR will work with AFSOC on further developing use of the Air Force Consolidated Planning Schedule to better define requirements. While coordination with AFSOC could help improve the tracking process, we believe that the ANG and AFR also need to develop a mechanism for tracking volunteer deployments to better manage ARC force utilization. Additionally, DOD noted that the planned information technology initiative, which it described in its response to our second recommendation, could also have benefits for tracking voluntary deployments. We believe that if the planned system is able to fully track voluntary deployments, it would meet the intent of the recommendation.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness; the Chief of the National Guard Bureau; and the Commanders of Special Operations Command, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Air Force Reserve Command. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://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 respective 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 are listed in appendix II.



Cary Russell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Defense



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

DEC 02 2019

Mr. Cary Russell
Director, Defense Capabilities Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington DC 20548

Dear Mr. Russell,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report GAO-20-90, "SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: ADDITIONAL ACTIONS ARE NEEDED TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE AIR RESERVE COMPONENT MOBILIZATIONS AND UTILIZATION," dated October 18, 2019 (GAO Code 102997).

Attached is DoD's proposed response to the subject report. My point of contact is Col Stacy Wharton, who can be reached at stacy.a.wharton.mil@mail.mil and 703-693-8637.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Shipley', is written over a horizontal line.

Matthew B. Shipley
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(Force Readiness)

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED OCTOBER 18, 2019
GAO-20-90 (GAO CODE 102997)

“SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: ADDITIONAL ACTIONS ARE NEEDED TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE AIR RESERVE COMPONENT MOBILIZATIONS AND UTILIZATION”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Air Force, in coordination with Air National Guard (ANG) and Air Force Reserve (AFR), should ensure that Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) has the organizational capacity to effectively initiate, coordinate, and execute Air Reserve Component (ARC) mobilizations, to include ensuring timely and reliable notification of requirements to those units.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur with Comment. The Air Force continues to balance manning requirements across the spectrum of operations. Fully manning AFSOC for this staff function would be helpful, whether additional manpower is programmed or AFSOC mitigates internally by reallocating manpower.

The ARC has a process in place to provide timely notification to ANG and AFR units once requirements are known. Additionally, the ANG implemented the Agile ARC Mobilization Process on June 1, 2019, which streamlined policy and procedural chokepoints and improve notification timelines by an average of 60 days.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Air Force should ensure that the ANG and AFR develop a method for providing AFSOC with consolidated information regarding units available for immediate and future mobilizations to support special operations activities, such as the Air Force provides to its units with its force-generation model.

DoD RESPONSE: Partially Concur. AFRC currently provides AFSOC with information on units available, using Reserve Component Periods (RCPs). However, AFRC will assess whether re-posturing in multiple RCPs will provide a portion of capability with greater flexibility.

Additionally, current IT initiatives with the AF Integrated Personnel and Pay System (AFIPPS) will eventually provide the Air Force with functionality allowing a single, integrated system of software suites. AFIPPS will support a rapid and accurate information flow from the first identification of a requirement through the processing and delivering of orders. This will allow the AF to start pay and benefits in an auditable manner.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Air Force should ensure that the ANG and AFR develop a mechanism for tracking volunteer deployments to better manage ARC force utilization.

DoD RESPONSE: Partially Concur. This requires timely information from AFSOC to properly identify the requirements, establish expeditionary ARC units, and document the transaction when ARC members are activated. In the short term, AFRC will work with AFSOC on further developing use of the Air Force Consolidated Planning Schedule to better define requirements.

Additionally, current IT initiatives with AFIPPS will eventually provide the Air Force with functionality allowing a single, integrated system of software suites. AFIPPS will support a rapid and accurate information flow from the first identification of a requirement through the processing and delivering of orders. This will allow the AF to start pay and benefits in an auditable manner.

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Cary Russell, (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, individuals who made key contributions to this report include Jim Reynolds, Assistant Director; Adam Anguiano, Tracy Barnes, Adrienne Cline, Shylene Mata, Walter Vance, and Cheryl Weissman.

Appendix III: Accessible Data

Agency Comment Later

Accessible Text for Appendix I Comments from the
Department of Defense

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DEC 02 2019

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Director, Defense Capabilities Management

U.S. Government Accountability Office

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Washington DC 20548

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Sincerely,

Matthew B. Shipley

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

(Force Readiness)

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Page 3

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DoD RESPONSE: Partially Concur. This requires timely information from AFSOC to properly identify the requirements, establish expeditionary ARC units, and document the transaction when ARC members are activated. In the short term, AFRC will work with AFSOC on further developing use of the Air Force Consolidated Planning Schedule to better define requirements.

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