

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106587](#), a report to congressional committees.

## Why GAO Did This Study

Over the past two decades, DOD increased the size of SOF to combat threats of violent extremism, but DOD has recognized a need to refocus SOF to counter near-peer adversaries. According to officials, SOF service members must now decide whether to embrace the shift or leave the military to pursue other career options in civilian life.

The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 includes a provision for GAO to review SOF service members' use of DOD transition programs. This report assesses (1) the extent to which SOF service members participate in DOD's transition programs, (2) challenges they experience when they separate from active-duty, and (3) the extent to which DOD provides information on private-sector transition assistance support.

GAO reviewed relevant laws and policies and interviewed cognizant DOD officials and 5 private-sector organizations. GAO also spoke with a nongeneralizable sample of 11 active-duty discussion groups and 21 veteran SOF service members.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations to DOD, including to analyze TAP data of SOF service members and develop corrective action plans, as needed. DOD concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-24-106587](#). For more information, contact Kristy Williams at (404) 679-1893 or [williamsk@gao.gov](mailto:williamsk@gao.gov).

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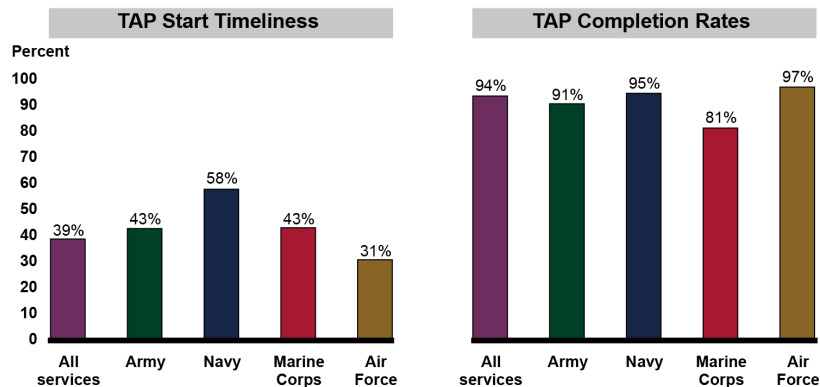
## TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

### Additional Data Analysis and Reporting Would Improve Special Operations Forces Experiences

## What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) provides a variety of programs to help service members transition from the military to civilian life, including its mandatory Transition Assistance Program (TAP). GAO found that three of four Special Operations Forces (SOF) service component commands met DOD's completion goal of 85 percent but only about 39 percent of SOF service members started TAP on time, based on an analysis of available data from fiscal year 2023 (see fig.). Starting TAP on time is critical for service members to reap the full benefits of the program. GAO examined TAP data by different SOF characteristics, such as rank, class attendance, and years of military service, and found that those characteristics affected timeliness of both starting and completing TAP.

**Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Timeliness and Completion Rates Among Special Operations Forces (SOF) by Military Service for Fiscal Year 2023**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data. | GAO-24-106587

SOF service component commands do not analyze data on TAP, including by relevant SOF characteristics such as rank, because there is no requirement to do so. The SOF service component commands also do not develop corrective action plans to address any challenges identified by such an analysis. Without analyzing comprehensive data on TAP, the SOF service component commands may not have a complete picture of the magnitude and scope of any challenges facing SOF service members as they transition to civilian life, and why those challenges may occur.

SOF officials, active-duty service members, and veterans told GAO they experience a variety of challenges—such as high operational tempo; need to document medical issues; and loss of their SOF identity—as they separate from the military. These challenges can make starting, participating in, and completing TAP and other transition activities difficult, according to DOD officials.

Many private sector organizations also provide transition assistance to SOF. However, per policy, DOD does not endorse any private-sector organization, but provides information about Veteran Service Organizations and the National Resource Directory, according to the Military-Civilian Transition Office. DOD officials stated they have informal relationships with private sector organizations, and some SOF service members utilize them.