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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

September 8, 2006

The Honorable Terry Everett
Chairman
Subcommittee on Strategic Forces
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Subject: Defense Acquisitions: DOD Needs to Establish an Implementing Directive to Publish Information and Take Actions to Improve DOD Information on Critical Acquisition Positions

Dear Mr. Chairman:

During the course of our work for you examining the space acquisition workforce, we learned that the Department of Defense (DOD) may not be periodically publishing a list of designated critical acquisition positions as required by statute. We are bringing this matter to your attention not only because it is a requirement to publish this data, but because having it is critical to effectively managing DOD's current workforce. To ensure that an organization's workforce is able to meet its mission, the organization must develop strategies to address management challenges such as any gaps that may exist in personnel resources. Strategic workforce management entails having accurate and comprehensive data concerning the workforce,¹ and especially concerning those positions deemed critical to the success of the organization's mission. Operating without this critical information may result in flawed decisions regarding this part of the workforce and may put the organization's ability to sustain its mission or function effectively at risk.

The designation "critical acquisition positions," according to the 1990 Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA)², refers to certain senior-level military and civilian positions that carry significant responsibility and primarily consist of supervisory, oversight, and management duties in the DOD acquisition system. They are a key factor in ensuring that DOD acquisitions—some of which are

¹GAO, *Social Security Administration: Strategic Workforce Planning Needed to Address Human Capital Challenges Facing the Disability Determination Services*, GAO-04-121 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 27, 2004).

²National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991, Pub. L. No. 101-510, §§ 1201-1211 (1990) (codified as amended at 10 U.S.C. §§ 1701-1764). In 1990, Congress passed DAWIA in order to enhance the quality and professionalism of the defense acquisition workforce. DAWIA specifies the minimum qualification standards of those personnel performing functions integral to the acquisition process, formalizes career paths for personnel who wish to pursue careers in acquisition, and defines critical or senior management acquisition positions.

very expensive and critical to the success of current combat operations—are effectively managed. In accordance with DAWIA and as was later codified in Title 10 of the United States Code, the Secretary of Defense is required to periodically publish a list of critical acquisition positions. The service Secretaries are responsible to ensure that the individuals who hold these positions have the appropriate skills, experience, and rank to perform their duties effectively. According to a DOD instruction on the reporting of DOD acquisition personnel data, the services are required to provide data on their critical acquisition positions to the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC).³ In the course of conducting a broader review of the space acquisition workforce at your request, we also sought to determine whether DOD is publishing a list of these positions.

We gathered information regarding critical acquisition positions during an engagement we are conducting for you on the space acquisition workforce. In response to your June 2005 request, we conducted a review of the Air Force portion of DOD's space acquisition workforce. One of our objectives was to determine the extent to which the Air Force's space acquisition workforce is managed using a strategic workforce planning approach. While conducting our work, we learned that DOD may not have published a list of critical acquisition positions, as required by statute. In order to address the broader issue of whether the workforce, including that segment that occupies critical acquisition positions, is managed under a strategic approach, we then investigated whether DOD had the ability to identify whether these critical positions were filled. To do this, we interviewed officials in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, Alexandria, Virginia; as well as a database management official at the Defense Manpower Data Center, Monterey, California. In keeping with the space cadre focus of our original request, we also discussed the issue with officials in the office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition. We asked each of these officials for lists of space-related critical acquisition positions, compared the answers we received to each other and to Air Force Space Command's space professional database, and examined these lists for internal consistency. We conducted our review from October 2005 through June 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. We expect to issue our final report on strategic management of the space acquisition workforce in September 2006.

Results in Brief

It is not clear that the Secretary of Defense has published a list of critical acquisition positions, as he is required to do by Title 10 of the U.S. Code. In reviewing the DAWIA requirement to publish the data, officials in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics (AT&L) said that the information on critical acquisition positions is publicly available through DMDC; however, they were unsure whether this availability constitutes compliance with the DAWIA requirement to publish the data. We believe that the information has not been published in a more direct method because the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense have not established a specific implementing policy to direct AT&L to

³ DODI 5000.55 § 5.3.3.

create such a list and to publish it.⁴ The Director of AT&L Workforce and Career Management stated that he planned to seek a legal interpretation of the DAWIA requirement in order to clarify whether AT&L needed to produce a paper document or DMDC's information on these positions, which is publicly available, would satisfy the requirement to "publish" the information. In any event, however, we found that AT&L and DMDC data on these positions may not be accurate. We asked DMDC for information on critical acquisition positions, but DMDC officials told us that the services, including the Air Force and the civilian personnel data reporting system, were not providing them accurate information. For example, of those personnel who are reported, it is not clear how many work for organizations outside the military services, such as the joint staff or defense agencies.⁵ Additionally, when we asked AT&L to list space-related critical acquisition positions, we received two different replies, each containing data that were nearly a year old. According to the AT&L June 2006 Human Capital Strategic Plan, AT&L will be undertaking a number of initiatives, including actions to improve the accuracy of the acquisition personnel data that reside at DMDC. Having accurate personnel information is critical to an organization's analyzing its workforce and determining what actions need to be taken to improve it. Without accurate data on critical acquisition positions, DOD decisions regarding the management of these positions may be flawed. Moreover, without maintaining and periodically publishing a list of critical acquisition positions as well as maintaining a reliable methodology for identifying who occupies these positions, the Secretary of Defense cannot ensure that key positions in critical programs are filled by individuals of sufficient expertise and experience. Further, he cannot be in a sound position to assure Congress that these positions are adequately filled.

We are making recommendations to publish DOD critical acquisition position data as required by statute, and to improve the accuracy of that data. In its comments, AT&L concurred with our recommendations. AT&L comments are reprinted in enclosure I.

Background

Congress enacted the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) as part of the fiscal 1991 Defense Authorization Act. DAWIA directed the Secretary of Defense to establish policies and procedures for the effective management of people serving in DOD acquisition positions⁶ and delegated implementation of the law to the Under Secretary for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics.⁷ DAWIA also required that the Secretary of Defense designate which positions are critical acquisition positions, and periodically publish a list of the positions so designated.⁸

Within DOD, the Office of the Under Secretary for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics office (AT&L) is responsible for establishing DOD acquisition workforce policies and procedures and for maintaining a suitable management information system to ensure that the DOD acquisition workforce is effectively managed. To

⁴ AT&L officials expressed uncertainty about what the requirement to publish entails. An implementing policy might include such a definition.

⁵ Defense agencies are not service-specific and typically conduct operations that are DOD-wide, such as the Defense Logistics Agency, which provides certain DOD-wide logistics operations.

⁶ 10 U.S.C. §1701.

⁷ 10 U.S.C. §1702.

⁸ 10 U.S.C. §1733 (b).

better manage the acquisition workforce, AT&L issued its Human Capital Strategic Plan in June 2006, which includes initiatives to improve its data management of the DOD acquisition workforce. The Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), also within DOD, is responsible for maintaining all automated records on DOD personnel, and it provides personnel, manpower, training, and financial data to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, including AT&L. DOD components report information on critical acquisition positions to DMDC, but AT&L can also request this information from the DOD components.

DOD Instruction 5000.55 implements a DOD-wide capability for monitoring, reporting, and tracking the composition, education, experience, and training status of the acquisition workforce. It also establishes uniform procedures for submitting manpower, personnel, and assignment information on selected civilian and military positions and personnel of DOD. DMDC is designated as the custodian of all the information to be collected according to the instruction. DOD components are required to establish and maintain accurate management information systems to record this data, and they are required to submit records on acquisition positions and acquisition personnel to DMDC.

AT&L's June 2006 Human Capital Strategic Plan contains initiatives to improve its ability to analyze its workforce. Goal 3 of the plan includes such efforts as reviewing data requirements and reviewing the accuracy of data submitted to DMDC.

It Is Not Clear That DOD Has Published Critical Acquisition Positions

It is not clear that DOD has published a list of its critical acquisition positions, though it is required to do so by Title 10 of the U.S. Code. DMDC officials told us that the information is available to the public through DMDC; however they indicated that they were not sure that this method meets the requirements of the statute. We believe that the information has not been published in a more direct way because DOD has not established a specific implementing policy to direct AT&L to create such a list and to publish it. For lack of an implementing policy, AT&L is still trying to determine what the requirement to publish entails.

DMDC receives, from the services and other DOD activities such as defense agencies, position information that includes critical acquisition position designators. But DMDC and AT&L told us they believe that information is inaccurate. Officials told us that the services report only data about filled civilian positions to DMDC, and that DMDC receives no information to indicate how many total positions, including vacant ones, exist. DMDC also expressed uncertainty regarding how many of the personnel who work for defense agencies are reported. Thus, not only is the data list not published, but the information that is available regarding critical acquisition positions may not be accurate.

In the course of our review of the space acquisition workforce, we asked AT&L to list space-related critical acquisition positions, and received two different replies, each containing nearly year-old data. We noted inconsistencies between the two AT&L lists. The Air Force portion of the first submission contained only data bearing Space Command Unit Identifier Codes, meaning that critical acquisition positions at the National Reconnaissance Office and other offices or commands were omitted.

Although the second submission, which AT&L provided two weeks later, contained more unit identifier codes, we noted that the total number and the number of Air Force positions both declined. Therefore, it appears that the data that is available is not a full, internally consistent, or accurate listing of space-related critical acquisition positions.

We also asked the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition for information on Air Force critical acquisition positions because of our work for you on the space acquisition workforce. That office was able to identify critical acquisition positions within U.S. Air Force Space Command, but we believe the list was incomplete because Space Command's space professional database shows that there are also senior-level space-related acquisition positions in other Air Force major commands. Since the Under Secretary of Defense for AT&L relies on inputs from the services and DMDC to compile his list, gaps in Air Force data would likely indicate the existence of gaps in departmentwide knowledge.

Without maintaining and periodically publishing a list of critical acquisition positions and assuring a reliable methodology for identifying who occupies them, the Secretary of Defense cannot ensure that key positions in critical programs are filled by individuals of sufficient expertise and experience, or be in a sound position to assure Congress that these positions are adequately filled.

In June 2006, AT&L issued its Human Capital Strategic Plan, which includes a number of initiatives to improve its ability to analyze and manage the DOD acquisition workforce. The Director of AT&L Workforce and Career Management stated that the goal is to have the data reported as required by DOD 5000.55 and to move to a Web-based system to improve transparency of the DOD acquisition workforce. The Director stated that DOD components have raised concerns about the quality of the data that resides with DMDC. The Director also stated that in a few months AT&L will be issuing a report on the status of its human capital plan initiatives.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that DOD has data needed to effectively plan and manage its space acquisition workforce, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense take the following two actions:

- Direct that the Under Secretary of Defense for AT&L issue implementing instructions that establish the method by which information on critical acquisition positions will be published.
- Direct the Under Secretary of Defense for AT&L, as part of its Human Capital Strategic Plan, to include in its initiatives a review of the accuracy of critical acquisition position data that DOD components submit to DMDC; identify the causes of any inaccuracies; and take corrective actions to ensure that this information is accurate and complete.

Agency Comments

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with our recommendations. These comments are reprinted in enclosure I.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretaries of Defense, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force; the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the DOD components. Copies will be made available to others upon request. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on our Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

Major contributors to this report are Lorelei St. James, Assistant Director; Gabrielle Carrington, Linda Keefer, Julie Matta, Sally Newman, and Cheryl Weissman. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at 202-512-5431 or DAgostinoD@gao.gov.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Davi M. D'Agostino". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Davi" being the most prominent.

Davi M. D'Agostino
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cristina Chaplain". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name "Cristina" being the most prominent.

Cristina Chaplain
Director, Acquisition Sourcing and Management

Enclosure I
Comments from the Department of Defense



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEFENSE ACQUISITION UNIVERSITY
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August 31, 2006

Ms. Davi M. D'Agostino
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441G. Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. D'Agostino:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, "DEFENSE ACQUISITIONS: DoD Needs to Establish an Implementing Directive to Publish Information and Take Actions to Improve DoD Information on Critical Acquisition Positions," dated August 7, 2006 (GAO Code 350898/GAO-987R)

The Department concurs with each recommendation as outlined in the enclosed. The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,


Frank J. Anderson, Jr.
President

Enclosure:
As stated

**GAO DRAFT REPORT – DATED AUGUST 7, 2006
GAO CODE 350898/GAO-06-987R**

**“DEFENSE ACQUISITIONS: DoD Needs to Establish an Implementing Directive to Publish
Information and Take Actions to Improve DoD Information on Critical
Acquisition Positions”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics to issue implementing instructions that establish the method by which information of critical acquisition positions will be published. (page 7/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. We are establishing a publishing method which will require posting the list of Critical Acquisition Positions through the AT&L workforce web site. We intend the first posting to be completed by 31 December 2006.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, as part of its Human Capital Strategic Plan, to include in its initiatives a review of the accuracy of critical acquisition position data that DoD components submit to DMDC; identify the causes of any inaccuracies; and take corrective actions to ensure that this information is accurate and complete. (page 8/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE: Concur. We note that the AT&L Human Capital Strategic Plan issued in June 2006, as referenced by the GAO, includes Goal #3 – “Establish a comprehensive, data-driven workforce analysis and decision-making capability.” The supporting initiatives include improving data management, quality, analysis, and transparency. These initiatives will address Critical Acquisition Positions. Our plan calls for updated policy and guidance on workforce data by November 2006.

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