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R E P O R T

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# Managing Air Force Joint Expeditionary Taskings in an Uncertain Environment

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## Summary

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In addition to providing military support to Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan through its AEF structure, the Air Force has been providing personnel since 2004 for what are called “joint sourcing solution” assignments (formerly, ILO, or “in-lieu-of” positions) in Iraq and Afghanistan. These are situations in which the “preferred provider” (usually the Army) has insufficient available personnel to meet a certain need and another military service is required to fill it. For example, a unit of Air Force civil engineers might be used to replace an Army construction engineering unit and would be assigned to an Army organization during the deployment.

By FY 2008, joint sourcing solution positions filled by Air Force personnel accounted for almost 25 percent of the 25,000 airmen located in the USCENTCOM area of operations. Air Force leadership recognizes that filling these positions is a valid combatant command (COCOM) requirement that must be met in order to accomplish the military mission. Nonetheless, because Air Force personnel have the expertise necessary to satisfy emergent requirements in nontraditional support missions, certain career fields (such as security forces and logistics readiness officers) are experiencing deployment strains well beyond what would be expected under the planned AEF construct. This study arose from AF/A4/7P concerns that demands placed on the Air Force by joint sourcing solution requirements would affect the Air Force’s ability to fulfill its agile combat support role in other areas. A better understanding of the new requirements will help the Air Force make resource allocation decisions that will ensure that it can satisfy the full range of demands for its capabilities.

## Process

To help determine the impact of these assignments on the Air Force, we first studied the process that links the origination of a new requirement (a request for forces, or RFF) to the assignment of the requirement to a specific service. Overall, we found that the process functioned well and was not a factor in any impact of joint sourcing assignments on the Air Force—beyond the fact that the Air Force has capabilities that the COCOM requires. A major complaint from participants in the process from all the services, however, is that requests for *forces* should instead be requests for a *capability* and that the services should be allowed more flexibility in suggesting options to meet a COCOM requirement.

## Supply and Demand Analysis

Air Force personnel raised two major concerns during interviews for this study. One was the difficulty in conveying to Air Force leadership—and to their counterparts in other services and on the Joint Staff—the current impact of joint sourcing assignments on individual career fields and the limited availability of personnel in some career fields for deployment. The second was the difficulty of expressing potential future impacts of agreeing to fill joint sourcing positions. We developed three approaches for addressing these concerns.

First, we showed how currently available data collected by the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC)/Directorate of AEF Operations (DPW) (formerly known as the AEF Center) can be used to study the cumulative impact of joint sourcing assignments on different career fields and how these data, combined with other publicly available Air Force personnel data, can be used to compare the supply and demand of personnel using various demographic categories in ways that are more illuminating than the displays that are commonly used. (See pp. 11–17.)

Second, we developed a new modeling tool that helps forecast the impact of RFFs on deployment availability over time. Some organizations already use an “availability pyramid” that starts with the total number of personnel in a given career field and then subtracts personnel in various categories who are not deployable (because of, for example, inexperience, illness, or assignment to a job that “must” be filled) in order to determine the actual number of personnel who are available to fill an emergent joint sourcing solution requirement. While these pyramids were useful, they were limited because they were snapshots of a moment in time. Our new tool extends the basic idea of the pyramid and allows an analyst or functional area manager to study the potential impact over time of fulfilling an RFF. It also allows the user to adjust various policy “levers” (such as deployment-to-dwell ratios, recruitment, and retention) in order to discern how policy changes might help balance the supply of, and demand for, deployed personnel. The tool has the potential to allow automatic updates from a centralized data source, standardizing measures of impact while allowing the flexibility for inputs that vary by career field. (See pp. 19–25.)

Third, we developed two approaches to measure the impact of joint sourcing assignments on AEF capabilities. Both approaches make use of information derived from long-term force requirements outlined in the U.S. Department of Defense’s Steady State Security Posture, as well as Air Force personnel availability data from the AEF library. One approach displays potential capability shortfalls by Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC); the other displays potential shortfalls over time for a particular AFSC and takes into account the possibility that some assignments will “break” other unit type codes (UTCs)—that is, filling a joint sourcing solution might make unavailable an AFSC that is critical for a UTC that provides a completely different capability. Both tools have the potential to enhance the Air Force’s ability to plan for future demands on its forces. (See pp. 25–31.)

## In-Garrison Capability

One goal of this study was to develop measures of the “in-garrison” impact of joint sourcing assignments—that is, how unanticipated deployments of personnel to non-AEF positions can affect functions at a base from which the personnel are deployed. This proved difficult for several reasons. First, it is very difficult to establish standard metrics for “in-garrison perfor-

mance.” For example, if a small headquarters staff loses an officer to a joint sourcing assignment, the workload of those left behind would increase. A training unit would also suffer if it lost an officer instructor to a joint sourcing requirement, but it would be difficult to develop a common measure to show which organization’s mission was affected more. Second, filling joint sourcing assignments can affect unit services that are not directly related to mission accomplishment. For example, if joint sourcing assignments result in a shortage of finance officers at a given base, other base personnel might be inconvenienced, but it would be difficult to measure the impact on mission accomplishment. It would also be impossible to distinguish the impact of an absence due to a joint sourcing requirement from that due to another type of absence, such as an AEF assignment. Finally, the Air Force (like the other services) tends to have a “can-do” attitude, which means that personnel will work very hard to accomplish their mission. Thus, it may not be obvious that a unit is overstressed until the loss of one more person to a deployment leads to some sort of mission failure. This breaking point is difficult to predict. (See pp. 33–39.)

Our suggestions for new ways of looking at available data and the new tools we have developed for analyzing career fields and AEF capabilities should help the Air Force better understand the potential impact of future joint sourcing requirements.