



The Big Story

Report: Pentagon must overhaul its MIA effort

By **ROBERT BURNS**

— Jul. 17, 2013 4:50 PM EDT

[Home](#) » [United States Congress](#) » Report: Pentagon must overhaul its MIA effort

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon's efforts to find and identify troops missing in action from past conflicts are undermined by leadership weaknesses, infighting and other problems that jeopardize the mission, according to a new audit released Wednesday.

In response, the office of Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said it will consider a recommended overhaul that could include a streamlined chain of command.

Members of Congress demanded quick action.

"We're going to get to the bottom of this," said Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo. "The problems plaguing our efforts to recover our POW and MIA service members are systemic and seem to extend even beyond the problems identified in this report."

Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., called for an urgent hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee to investigate.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., and a bipartisan group of House members have called for an investigation by the Pentagon's inspector general.

At issue is the effectiveness of the MIA accounting mission, which is overseen by a Pentagon policy organization but executed largely by a Hawaii-based military command known as the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. Their mission is to account for as many as possible of the 83,000 service members missing from World War II and the wars in Vietnam and Korea.

Wednesday's report by the Government Accountability Office echoes in some respects the criticisms cited in an internal Pentagon study disclosed last week by The Associated Press in which key elements of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, or JPAC, were called "dysfunctional." In response to the AP report the Pentagon ordered a "second look" at the study, which was suppressed by the JPAC commander at the time.

The Pentagon said on Tuesday that it has set no deadline for completing its review of the study.

Ayotte, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, called the GAO report deeply troubling.

"Coming on the heels of last week's Associated Press story describing similar problems, it underscores the urgent need for the committee to hear directly from JPAC officials about these disturbing findings and to ensure proper steps are being taken to address these problems," she wrote in a letter to the committee's leaders.

Wednesday's report was done in response to a request by Congress last year and was 12 months in the making. It concluded that the MIA accounting mission, while making "some progress," is being "undermined by longstanding leadership weaknesses and a fragmented organizational structure."

In 2009 the Congress demanded that the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command accelerate its work so that by 2015 it is identifying at least 200 MIAs per year. That compares with an average of 72 per year over the past decade.

The GAO report said the Pentagon's work on a plan for achieving the 200-per-year target is still incomplete, "due to a fragmented approach to planning and disputes among" the various agencies that share responsibility for the mission. Last year JPAC reported making 80 identifications of MIA remains.

"Collectively, these weaknesses jeopardize (the Pentagon's) capability and capacity to accomplish the statutory goals of accounting for missing persons and to provide some measure of closure to those families whose loved ones are still missing as a result of their service to their country," the GAO report said.

The report recommended that the Pentagon consider reorganizing its MIA accounting bureaucracy to create a more effective chain of command and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the groups that perform the work.

It also cited a failure by the Pentagon to prioritize its remains recovery missions on former battlefields and to determine how many recoveries it can reasonably expect. This "further hinders the department's overall progress to achieve its mission," it said.

In a response letter, the Pentagon's policy chief, James N. Miller, wrote that he agreed with the main points in the GAO report. He vowed to fix the problems, but he also indicated that Defense Department budget reductions, which could total \$52 billion next year, may limit the Pentagon's progress.

Follow Robert Burns on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/robertburnsAP>

RELATED

State Dept. 'horrified' by WikiLeaks releases

Here's the truth: The government doesn't shut down

Senate roundly rejects proposal to halt Egypt aid

Military paints dire picture from budget cuts

5 Foods You Should Never Eat Again

Don't Give a Lame Gift. Here are Some Better Choices.

Ad

Ad

Zemanta

Tags