



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON DC

2 Apr 2014

Ms. Brenda S. Farrell  
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farrell:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report GAO-14-316, "AIR FORCE: Actions Needed to Strengthen Management of Unmanned Aerial System Pilots," dated March 6, 2014 (GAO Code 351792).

The Department is providing official written comments for inclusion in the report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John T. Park", is positioned above the typed name.

JOHN T. PARK, SES  
Deputy Director, Force Management Policy

Attachment:  
DoD Comments to the GAO Recommendations

**GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MARCH 6, 2014**  
**GAO-14-316 (GAO CODE 351792)**

**“AIR FORCE: ACTIONS NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN MANAGEMENT OF  
UNMANNED AERIAL SYSTEM PILOTS”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS  
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION**

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to update crew ratios for RPA units to help ensure that the Air Force establishes a more accurate understanding of the required number of RPA pilots needed in its units.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Concur This is already in progress. The United States Air Force directed the Air Force Personnel Command/Manpower Directorate to conduct an updated manpower study, and continues to analyze the RPA crew ratio. Having the correct ratio of crew members to missions flown will greatly facilitate the growth and development of the RPA career field. Once the RPA enterprise reaches program of record strength in people and equipment, there will be capacity for continuation training for current and future missions.

**ECD: 1 Feb 15**

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to establish a minimum crew ratio in Air Force policy below which RPA cannot operate without running unacceptable levels of risk to accomplishing the mission and ensuring safety.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Concur Currently the Air Force deploy-to-dwell redline is 1:2. RPA units are deployed-on-station providing no quantitative metric when a deploy-to-dwell redline is crossed. Establishing a minimum crew ratio would provide clear service redlines for use when the Air Force receives a request for forces. This would not negate the continued ability of the Secretary of Defense to manage risk depending on the situation.

**ECD: 1 Feb 15**

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to develop a recruiting and retention strategy that is tailored to the specific needs and challenges of RPA pilots to help ensure that the Air Force can meet and retain required staffing levels to meet its mission.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Concur The Air Force’s competitive advantage begins with its ability to recruit, develop, and retain innovative warriors. This year, Headquarters Air Force/A1 has continued to develop and mature its accessions process to help recruiting. Additionally, retention methods like the Air Force’s annual Aviation Retention Pay program must be utilized for the 18X specialty-coded RPA pilots in future years.

**ECD: 1 Oct 2015**

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to evaluate the viability of using alternative personnel populations including enlisted or civilian personnel as RPA pilots to identify whether such populations could help the Air Force meet and sustain required RPA pilot staffing levels.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Partially Concur During the establishment of the RPA community, the Air Force, on multiple occasions, examined the use of enlisted RPA operators and repeatedly decided an officer is necessary to ensure rank is commensurate with responsibility. Most recently on 26 Nov 13, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force concluded that the use of alternative personnel populations was not necessary based on an Headquarters Air Force/A1 game plan to fix accessions which is now proving successful. The Air Force has, however, initiated a holistic review of Air Force missions and rank requirements to execute those missions. This review may eventually include an examination of the use of enlisted Airmen in rated positions.

**ECD: 31 December 2014**

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to incorporate feedback from RPA pilots by using existing mechanisms or by collecting direct feedback from RPA pilots.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Concur The Air Force thrives in large part due to the innovation, imagination, and dedication of its incredible Airmen. The Air Force uses standardized feedback mechanisms across all units through the Air Force Unit Climate Assessment and other similar surveys. Consideration should be given to assess whether this is appropriate to collect feedback from RPA pilots and at the appropriate levels desired and, if so, the Air Force will analyze and incorporate feedback from a validated survey and feedback process.

**ECD: 1 Mar 15**

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to analyze the effects of being deployed-on-station to determine if there are resulting negative effects on the quality of life of RPA pilots and take responsive actions as appropriate.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Partially concur DoD requests the GAO change the recommendation to read: “The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense directs the Secretary of the Air Force to evaluate the studies done on the effects of being deployed-on-station on RPA pilots and take responsive actions as appropriate to mitigate the negative effects on the quality of life of RPA pilots.” The Air Force has ample data showing the analyzed effects of RPA pilots being deployed-on-station over the last nine years. The stressors have been identified and discussed at length and many stressors could likely be addressed with personnel solutions (increased crew ratios, as mentioned). If the GAO has continued concern over quality of life for RPAs GAO should recommend a review of all the Air Force studies, evaluate the recommendations and take additional actions as appropriate.

**ECD: 31 Dec 14**

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Air Force to include the career field effect of being an RPA pilot into Air Force Personnel Center's analysis to determine if and how being an RPA pilot is related to promotions and determine if the factors Air Force Personnel Center identified in its analysis of Line of the Air Force officers are also related to RPA pilot promotions.

**DoD RESPONSE:** Partially concur To further build RPA career field leadership and enhance retention, it is important to understand promotion dynamics within the RPA force. Continued tracking and analysis of the promotion rates of RPA pilots is currently underway. For promotions, the RPA career field is a subsection of the Line of the Air Force. Therefore, factors related to promotions identified in analysis of the Line of the Air Force are directly related to RPA pilot promotions.

**ECD: 1 Mar 15**