

Audit of the impact of the integration of AFCSO operations into the FOITT in terms of reliability

Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication, Armed Forces Command Support Organisation and Armed Forces Staff

Key facts

The autonomous operation of the Armed Forces and the strengthening of security in cyberspace and in the electromagnetic sphere are priorities of the Federal Council. In its dispatch of September 2021 on the amendment of the Armed Forces Act and its organisation, it established the basis for the creation of Cyber Command. In terms of operations, the Armed Forces' IT objectives for 2026 seek to separate mission-critical and non-critical services. Consequently, in 2022 the Chief of the Armed Forces decided to transfer the operation of the former from the Armed Forces Command Support Organisation (AFCSO) to Cyber Command. Operation of non-critical services will be transferred to the Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication (FOITT).

The Defence Group (D Group) and the FOITT agreed on the principles of this split¹, which will take place in two stages. In the first stage, all operations, including mission-critical services, will be transferred to the FOITT, with a few exceptions. The transfer of AFCSO operations is to be carried out en bloc and completed by the end of December 2023. Some 340 employees and more than 500 applications and services will be affected. In a second stage, critical services will be repatriated to Cyber Command. The AFCSO's revised operating budget for 2023 is around CHF 142 million.

In its audit, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) concluded that, on the whole, the conditions are in place in the short term to maintain the current level of system and application operations. However, it noted that many questions remain unanswered for the medium term. There are dependencies with numerous ongoing projects and activities. Close collaboration between the parties involved will be necessary.

Conditions in place for reliable operations in 2024

The transition project establishes that the services and part of the organisation of the operations will be transferred as they are from the AFCSO to the FOITT. For 2024, the FOITT has drawn up a budget of CHF 194 million for the purpose. This budget provides for the partial correction of understaffing and includes funding of around CHF 132 million from the D Group. Most of the employees have signed their new contracts with the FOITT.

Uncertainties remain over certain elements of the transferred scope of operations, but the foundations for the relationship between service provider and service users have been laid, and the escalation processes in the event of disagreement have been defined. This transfer

¹ The SFAO already carried out an audit in this area in 2022: "Audit of the DTI key project DDPS Programme to split basic ICT services" (audit mandate 22102), available on the SFAO website.

en bloc means that, overall, the conditions for reliable operations have been met in the short term.

In the medium term, uncertainties over the scope and resources of operations

In the long term, a number of factors could undermine the reliability of the operations. A programme has been defined to manage the return of some of the applications transferred to Cyber Command. A roadmap is currently being drawn up. However, this programme is complex, extending over several years and dependent on the completion of the Armed Forces' new digitalisation platform. Delays could force the FOITT to extend its operation of the applications concerned. In addition, the scope of operations transferred will evolve. Development projects will move into the operational phase and gaps in systems lifecycle management will have to be filled. Decommissioning plans are currently being drawn up.

There are also questions about the long-term availability of resources for operations. The resources provided by the D Group could be reduced. In addition, it is not certain that the FOITT will be able to make up for all the staffing shortfalls, and some operational employees are approaching retirement. Human resources planning will have to adapt to these requirements, but the available capacity could prove insufficient. In view of these developments, the stakeholders have defined various measures but have little additional room for manoeuvre. In the SFAO's view, the Armed Forces Staff needs to define a more ambitious decommissioning programme to keep the scope of operations under control.

Transversal functions are largely covered

Only a small fraction of the cross-functional administrative activities linked to operations (finance, procurement, etc.) have been transferred to the FOITT, which will have to replace the missing employees. Recruitment is underway, but the job market is tight. However, a minimum level of knowledge transfer can be organised.

The participants acknowledged the importance of operational safety as a cross-cutting function. However, questions about its governance and the division of tasks and responsibilities remain open. The constraints relating to FOITT employees' access to Cyber Command's monitoring tools have also not been fully resolved. In the SFAO's view, a project should be defined from 2024 onwards to ensure that these issues are finalised and coordinated with the work already underway to improve security.

The list of risks drawn up in the 2022 preliminary analysis has been reworked and is being followed up in the transition and splitting of projects. Channels for jointly managing changes in these risks have been put in place.

Performance measurement: a very important task, with transitional solutions planned

Defining the services transferred into the FOITT's performance monitoring system is a major task. The Armed Forces Staff's current definitions can serve in part as a working basis and as a transitional solution. An ad hoc collaboration has been set up between the Armed Forces Staff and the FOITT.

The current financial monitoring systems do not provide the required transparency regarding operating costs. The FOITT is working on corrective measures.

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