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IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Availability of Forces, Equipment, and Infrastructure Should Be Considered in Developing U.S. Strategy and Plans

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Defense Capabilities and Management



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Highlights of [GAO-09-380T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States is in the process of developing its strategy for operations in Afghanistan, as well as for the drawdown and continued operations of forces in Iraq. As of December 2008, approximately 32,500 U.S. troops were deployed in Afghanistan. Moreover, DOD may add an additional 30,000 troops in Afghanistan. Since 2001, the war in Afghanistan changed from a violent struggle against al Qaeda and its Taliban supporters to a multi-faceted counterinsurgency effort. As of December 2008, U.S. troops in Iraq numbered approximately 148,500. DOD also had about 162,400 contractors in Iraq as of mid-2008.

Today's testimony addresses (1) key observations regarding the development of U.S. strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan; (2) factors that should be considered as the United States refines its strategy for Iraq and plans to draw down forces; and (3) factors that should be considered as the United States develops a strategy for Afghanistan and plans for increasing forces.

This statement is based on GAO reports and testimonies on Iraq and Afghanistan.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, [click on GAO-09-380T](#). For more information, contact Janet St. Laurent, 202-512-4400, stlaurentj@gao.gov.

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

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What GAO Found

Lessons learned from GAO's past work indicate that U.S. strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan should reflect a governmentwide approach and contain a number of key elements, including clear roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms among government agencies, as well as specific goals, performance measures, and time frames that take into account available resources. Given the heavy commitment of U.S. forces to ongoing operations over the past several years, the availability of forces, equipment, and infrastructure will need to be closely examined in developing plans to reposition military forces. Finally, in light of future demands on the federal budget, attention will be needed to ensure that U.S. plans are developed and executed in an efficient and cost-effective manner. Clearly, strong oversight by the Congress and senior decision makers will be needed to minimize past problems such as contract mismanagement and insufficient attention to overseeing contractors.

In refining its strategy and plans for the drawdown of forces in Iraq, senior leaders will need to consider several operational factors. For example, DOD will need to develop plans to efficiently and effectively relocate thousands of personnel and billions of dollars worth of equipment out of Iraq; close hundreds of facilities; and determine the role of contractors. Furthermore, the capacity of facilities in Kuwait and other neighboring countries may limit the speed at which equipment and materiel can be moved out of Iraq.

With regard to Afghanistan, DOD will likely face an array of potential challenges related to people, equipment and infrastructure. For example, the availability and training of personnel will be critical considerations as the force is already significantly stressed from ongoing operations and current training capacity has been primarily focused on operations in Iraq. Additionally, the availability of equipment may be limited because the Army and Marine Corps have already deployed much of their equipment to Iraq and much of the prepositioned assets also have been withdrawn to support ongoing operations. Similarly, DOD will need to assess its requirements for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities given its current allocation of these assets to support ongoing operations in Iraq. Further, the ability to transport personnel and equipment into Afghanistan will be challenged by the limited infrastructure and topography of Afghanistan. Moreover, the extent to which contractors will be used to support deployed U.S. forces must be considered as well as how oversight of these contractors will be ensured. Given all of these factors, sound planning based on a well-developed strategy is critical to ensure lessons learned over the years from Iraq are incorporated in Afghanistan and that competing resources are prioritized effectively between both operations.

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss issues for consideration as the United States develops its strategy and plans for the future with regard to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. As conditions in Iraq have improved, the war in Afghanistan has now entered its eighth year with a deteriorating security situation. As such, the new administration is in the process of reviewing and revising U.S. strategy. Also, the Department of Defense (DOD) has begun planning for a reallocation of forces, which includes beginning to draw down U.S. forces in Iraq while increasing the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. According to DOD, these plans may include an increase of up to 30,000 troops in Afghanistan. Since September 11, 2001, Congress has provided about \$808 billion to DOD for the Global War on Terrorism, which includes operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Operation Iraqi Freedom began in March 2003, and since that time the United States has maintained a sizeable presence in Iraq, rotating forces into and out of the country in support of ongoing operations. After the U.S. military surge of five additional brigades peaked in June 2007, those additional brigades began withdrawing in September 2007. In his April 2008 *Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq*, the Commander, Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), recommended that the drawdown of brigade combat teams continue to pre-surge levels and that an assessment then be performed to examine the conditions on the ground and, over time, determine when he could make a recommendation for further reductions. In the meantime, the November 2008 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the United States and the Republic of Iraq that took effect January 1, 2009, specifies in detail and with specific dates the requirements for future drawdown of U.S. forces from Iraq. As of July 2008, there were approximately 162,400 DOD contractors and, as of December 1, 2008, approximately 148,500 U.S. troops in Iraq.

Since 2001, the character of the war in Afghanistan has evolved from a violent struggle against al Qaeda and its Taliban supporters to a multifaceted counterinsurgency effort. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in order to end the ability of the Taliban regime to provide safe haven to al Qaeda and to put a stop to al Qaeda's use of

Afghanistan territory as a base of operations for terrorist activities.¹ After the fall of the Taliban, the character of the war shifted to a counterinsurgency effort. As of December 1, 2008, approximately 32,500 U.S. troops were deployed in Afghanistan—19,900 as part of OEF and 12,600 as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). ISAF operates under United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1833 and is comprised of about 50,000 military personnel from 41 nations. ISAF forces concentrate on stability and reconstruction operations, including command of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). ISAF forces do not have a mandate to perform any police training, but both OEF and ISAF forces train and mentor the Afghan National Army. OEF is a smaller multinational force that also pursues a more aggressive counterterrorism role.

Afghanistan is a unique country with characteristics that will continue to have distinct impacts on military operations there. For example, it is slightly smaller than Texas but about a third larger than Iraq. Afghanistan is a mountainous, arid, land-locked country with limited natural resources. Its population, estimated at over 31 million, is ethnically and linguistically diverse, with many regions populated by multiple ethnic groups speaking over 30 languages. The population is largely rural and mostly uneducated. Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries and ranks near the bottom of virtually every development indicator category. Afghanistan has a poorly developed infrastructure with few roads and little household access to electricity and running water. According to the Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, Afghanistan has only 4 airports with runways over approximately 3,000 meters. By way of comparison, Iraq has 19 airports with runways over approximately 3,000 meters. Additionally, while Iraq has about 38,000 kilometers of paved roads, Afghanistan has only about 12,000 kilometers of paved roads.

As you requested, my testimony will focus on the U. S. government's efforts to develop a strategy for both Iraq and Afghanistan, and factors DOD should consider as it develops and implements that strategy. Specifically, I will address (1) key observations regarding the development of U.S. strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan, (2) factors that should be considered as the United States refines its strategy for Iraq and plans to

¹Congressional Research Service, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 23, 2009).

draw down forces, and (3) factors that should be considered as the United States develops a strategy for Afghanistan and plans for increasing forces.

My statement is based on our extensive body of work examining Iraq and Afghanistan issues. A list of selected GAO reports and testimonies is provided at the end of this testimony. This work was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Summary

U.S. strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan should be comprehensive and contain a number of key elements, including clear roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms among government agencies and other sectors, as well as specific goals, objectives, performance measures, and time frames for achieving the goals, taking into account available resources. In refining its strategy and plans for the drawdown of forces in Iraq and an increase of forces in Afghanistan, there are several operational factors that DOD must consider to ensure a successful approach. For example, with regard to an Iraq drawdown, DOD's plans will need to consider the fact that some early planning assumptions about the conditions and timing of redeployments may no longer be applicable in light of the SOFA and evolving U.S. strategy. For example, DOD's plans assume that redeployments would be based on assessments of security and other conditions in Iraq. In addition, the effectiveness and efficiency of DOD's redeployment efforts from Iraq will depend on the extent to which it develops plans that address challenges such as efficiently and effectively moving thousands of personnel and billions of dollars worth of equipment out of Iraq. DOD's ability to move equipment and materiel from Iraq may be constrained, impacting its ability to quickly deploy these resources in Afghanistan or elsewhere. Specifically, the availability of facilities in Kuwait and other neighboring countries may limit the speed at which equipment and materiel can be moved out of Iraq. With regard to a military build-up in Afghanistan, some of the same challenges encountered during operations in Iraq may also apply to that operation, but there will likely be several new challenges as well. For example, the availability and training of personnel will be critical considerations as the force is already significantly stressed from ongoing operations and current training capacity has been primarily focused on operations in Iraq. Additionally, the availability of equipment may be limited because the Army and Marine

Corps have already deployed much of their equipment to Iraq and much of their prepositioned assets also have been withdrawn to support ongoing operations. Similarly, DOD will need to assess its requirements for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities to support increased force levels in Afghanistan, given its current allocation of assets to support ongoing operations in Iraq. Further, the ability to transport personnel and equipment into Afghanistan will likely be constrained due to the limited infrastructure and topography of Afghanistan. Moreover, the extent to which contractors will be used to support deployed U.S. forces must be considered as well as how oversight of these contractors will be ensured. Given all of these factors, sound planning based on a well-developed strategy is critical to ensure lessons learned over the years from Iraq are incorporated in Afghanistan and that competing resources are prioritized effectively between both operations.

Establishing a Comprehensive U.S. Strategy Is an Essential First Step in Planning for Future Military Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan

We have identified several key elements of an effective national strategy that should be considered by the new administration in developing national strategies for Iraq and Afghanistan to guide the way forward.²

- First, our work shows that new strategies for both countries should reflect a comprehensive governmentwide approach and clearly delineate U.S. government roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms.³ Not only should the strategy identify the specific U.S. federal departments, agencies, or offices involved, but also the responsibilities of the private and international sectors, and specific processes for coordination and collaboration among the entities. In particular, our work in Iraq has shown problems in these areas. For example, in July 2006, we reported that the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq (NSVI) did not clearly identify the roles and

²In July 2008, we recommended that DOD and State, in conjunction with relevant U.S. agencies, develop an updated strategy for Iraq that defines U.S. goals and objectives after July 2008 and addresses the long-term goal of achieving an Iraq that can govern, defend, and sustain itself. See GAO, *Securing, Stabilizing, And Rebuilding Iraq: Progress Report: Some Gains Made, Updated Strategy Needed*, [GAO-08-1021T](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 23, 2008).

³This is one of GAO's six desirable characteristics of an effective strategy: (1) purpose, scope, and methodology; (2) detailed discussion of problems, risks, and threats; (3) the desired goal, objectives, activities, and outcome-related performance measures; (4) description of future costs and resources needed; (5) delineation of U.S. government roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms; and (6) a description of the strategy's integration among and with other entities.

responsibilities of specific federal agencies for achieving the strategy's objectives, or how disputes among them will be resolved.⁴ Later, in March 2008 we noted that U.S. efforts to build the capacity of the Iraqi government have been hindered by multiple U.S. agencies pursuing individual efforts without overarching direction.⁵ We further noted that no single agency was in charge of leading U.S. development efforts, and that the U.S. State Department, DOD, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) all led separate efforts with little or no coordination.

As the United States considers increasing its presence in Afghanistan, it will be even more important that roles and responsibilities of the various U.S. agencies are clearly identified and their programs and activities are coordinated. For example, DOD's Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP) and other funding have been used to a great extent for building roads. At the same time, USAID has also invested funds in constructing roads. In July 2008, we reported that coordination between DOD and USAID on road projects was problematic because information was not being shared among the agencies. As DOD expands its CERP program, and other agencies expand their respective programs, it will be important that their efforts be coordinated as part of an overall development plan to identify priorities and maximize resources.

- Second, national strategies should include specific goals, objectives, performance measures, and time frames for achieving the goals. Regarding Iraq, one major issue that will need to be addressed is to determine to what extent a drawdown of U. S. forces will be determined based on the achievement of goals or conditions in light of the specific time frames for withdrawal included in the November 2008 SOFA between Iraq and the United States that took effect in January 2009. Adopting a withdrawal timetable marks a major change from the prior U.S. approach of withdrawing forces based on security, political, economic, and diplomatic conditions in Iraq. The SOFA sets a two-phase timetable—but no conditions—for withdrawing U.S. combat forces from Iraq by the end of 2011. The President recently called for the implementation of a responsible drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq. A

⁴See GAO, *Rebuilding Iraq: More Comprehensive National Strategy Needed to Help Achieve U.S. Goals*, [GAO-06-788](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 11, 2006).

⁵See GAO, *Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq: Actions Needed to Address Inadequate Accountability over U.S. Efforts and Investments*, [GAO-08-568T](#) (Washington, D.C.: March 11, 2008).

new U.S. strategy and campaign plan for Iraq will need to clarify how a responsible withdrawal of U.S. forces will be carried out consistent with the SOFA timeframe.

Furthermore, as the administration develops strategies for both countries and plans to adjust force levels, it will need to closely examine the availability of resources, given the heavy commitment of U.S. forces to ongoing operations over the past several years. The high pace of operations, particularly for ground forces personnel, and heavy wear and tear on equipment have taken a toll on the overall readiness of the U.S. military. These factors, coupled with the likelihood of competing demands for certain capabilities to support the drawdown of forces in one location and increase in forces in another, such as strategic airlift, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, and support forces, will need to be considered in assessing the feasibility of various strategy options.

- Third, in light of future demands on the federal budget, attention will be needed to ensure that U.S. efforts are executed in a manner that maximizes the use of available resources and includes mechanisms for oversight. From this perspective, it will be important that the U.S. government make a concerted effort to avoid some of the problems that occurred in Iraq which, in some cases, created numerous opportunities for waste, fraud and mismanagement, particularly with respect to the oversight and management of contractors. Another area warranting attention is in DOD's approach to developing requirements for equipment and other critical items to support operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. As such, it will be important for DOD to carefully screen and validate requirements and use cost-effective approaches to acquiring items. Clearly, strong oversight on the part of the Congress and senior decision makers within DOD will also be a critical element to protecting the taxpayers' interest and resources.

Operational Factors Should Be Considered in Developing Plans to Draw Down U.S. Forces in Iraq

It is unclear how the timeline in the SOFA and growing operations in Afghanistan will affect DOD plans for redeploying U.S. forces and equipment from Iraq. As of September 2008, DOD's redeployment plans for Iraq were based on three key assumptions that may no longer be applicable in light of the SOFA and evolving U.S. strategy. These assumptions were that

- any redeployment will be based on MNF-I and Department of State assessments of security and other conditions in Iraq;

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- there will be sufficient lead time to refine redeployment plans once an order with a specific timetable and force posture in Iraq is issued; and
 - the redeployment of forces will be deliberate and gradual, predicated on a 180-day process for units leaving Iraq and an estimated flow of no more than 2.5 brigades' worth of equipment and materiel out of Iraq primarily through Kuwait each month.

Based on discussions with DOD officials and an analysis of planning efforts, we found that the effectiveness and efficiency of DOD's redeployment efforts from Iraq will depend on the extent to which it develops plans that address several issues such as the following⁶:

- Although the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) has designated an executive agent to coordinate the retrograde of materiel and equipment from the Iraqi theater of operations, no unified structure exists to coordinate the teams and units engaged in efforts to manage and execute the return of materiel and equipment. This results in confusion and a lack of clarity on the ways those teams should be utilized. Joint doctrine states that an unambiguous chain of command and clear responsibilities and authorities are necessary for any such effort. We have recommended, therefore, that DOD take steps to clarify a unified or coordinated chain of command over logistical operations to support this effort. While DOD has taken some actions to clarify certain aspects of the command and control structure, we believe additional steps are still needed to improve the efficiency of the retrograde process.
- Closing or handing over U.S. installations in Iraq will be time-consuming and costly. As of November 2008, there were 286 U.S. installations in Iraq that will need to be closed or turned over to the Iraqi forces during a U.S. redeployment, depending on its scope. According to U.S. Army officials, experience has shown it takes 1 to 2 months to close the smallest platoon- or company-size installations, which contain from 16 to 200 combat soldiers or marines. However, MNF-I has never closed large, complex installations—such as Balad Air Force Base, which contains about 24,000 inhabitants and has matured over 5 years—making it difficult to accurately predict the time it will take to close them. U.S. Army officials estimate it could take longer than 18 months to close a base of that size.

⁶See GAO, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Actions Needed to Enhance DOD Planning for Reposturing of U.S. Forces from Iraq*, [GAO-08-930](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 10, 2008).

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- Maintaining accountability for and managing the disposition of U.S. government property under the control of contractors may present challenges to redeploying U.S. forces from Iraq. According to Defense Contract Management Agency officials, there is at least \$3.5 billion worth of contractor-managed government-owned property in Iraq. From late 2007 through July 2008, planning for the redeployment of U.S. forces in Iraq did not include a theaterwide plan for contractors.
 - The pace at which units can be redeployed and equipment and materiel returned to the United States from Iraq will be governed by the capacity of facilities in neighboring countries as well as restrictions on the use of those facilities. According to DOD officials, Kuwait is the main point of exit for all personnel, equipment, and materiel in Iraq.⁷ At present there are three U.S. bases and five Kuwait facilities that the United States is using to support operations in Iraq, and the U.S.-Kuwait Defense Cooperation Agreement governs the use of these facilities. According to DOD officials, any redeployment must take into consideration the terms of this agreement, particularly given that in their view, the government of Kuwait desires to limit the size of the U.S. footprint in Kuwait.
 - The availability in theater of military-owned and operated heavy equipment transports and convoy security assets, combined with limits on the primary supply route, could inhibit the flow of materiel out of Iraq. According to DOD officials, two types of heavy equipment transports support U.S. forces in the Iraqi theater of operations: commercially contracted unarmored transports and armored military transports with military crews. Any increase in the number of civilian transports without a corresponding increase in the number of military transports, they maintain, increases the risk of accidents. However, DOD officials have reported shortages of military transports in theater.⁸

⁷ [GAO-08-930](#).

⁸ According to DOD officials, although it is possible to self-deploy vehicles from Iraq to Kuwait (i.e., drive them out under their own power), the resulting wear and tear on a vehicle makes this an unattractive alternative. Hence, when possible, vehicles are transported out of Iraq on heavy equipment transports.

Several Operational Concerns Need to Be Considered as DOD Refines Its Strategy and Plans for Afghanistan

Based on our work examining current and past military operations, there are several operational issues that must be considered as the United States refines its strategy and plans for using military forces in Afghanistan. We have identified several issues in the following five key areas that warrant consideration by DOD planners as they develop strategies and plans for these operations: availability of forces, training of personnel, availability of equipment, transportation of equipment and personnel, and management and oversight of contractors.

Availability of Forces

Given the range of likely forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, DOD may continue to face near-term challenges in providing personnel for operations in both locations. For the past several years, demands on DOD's forces have been extremely high as the department has rotated personnel in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan. As of December 1, 2008, more than 180,000 service members were deployed in the two countries. Demands have been particularly high within certain ranks and occupational specialties. For example, officers and senior noncommissioned officers are in high demand due to increased requirements within deployed headquarters organizations, and requirements for transition teams to train Iraqi and Afghan forces. These teams do not exist in any of the services' force structures, and the demand for these leaders creates challenges because the leaders are generally pulled from units or commands, which are then left to perform their missions while undermanned. The ongoing operations have challenged DOD's ability to provide sufficient numbers of forces for certain specialized capabilities including engineering, civil affairs, transportation, and military police.

As operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have continued, DOD has used a number of different approaches to meet the ongoing requirements. For example, it has adjusted the length and frequency of deployments and reserve component mobilizations; moved personnel between units to support deployments of units that were short of personnel; and used Navy and Air Force personnel to fill some CENTCOM requirements that would otherwise have exceeded the Army's capability to supply personnel. While these approaches have helped DOD fill its ongoing requirements, they have also created a number of challenges. For example, many service members have experienced deployment and mobilization rates in excess of DOD's stated goals. These goals generally call for active component personnel to be deployed for 1 of every 3 years and reserve component personnel involuntarily mobilized 1 of 6 years. In addition, the use of Navy

and Air Force personnel has presented challenges in meeting other service mission requirements.

Faced with these challenges, DOD developed a global force management process that among other things was designed to prioritize requirements, identify the most appropriate forces to meet combatant command requirements, and provide predictability. The portion of the global force management process that is being used to fill stable, recurring world-wide requirements provides predictability and the time necessary to consider a full range of options for meeting the combatant commander requirements. However, a significant portion of emerging requirements, including many of the Afghanistan requirements, are being filled under a “request for forces” process that involves shorter time lines. Within the shorter time lines, DOD may not have a full range of options available to meet its requirements. For example, reserve component forces may not be an option to meet some immediate requirements because reserve forces train part-time and thus require longer lead times to accomplish the same amount of training and preparation when compared to full-time active component forces. If emerging requirements for Afghanistan include many of the high demand support skills that are resident in the reserve components, including military police, engineers, and civil affairs units, DOD is likely to continue to need to use its alternate approaches for filling requirements—such as moving people between units, or using Navy and Air Force personnel to fill traditional Army roles—rather than using longer term options such as growing the force. These near-term challenges could be exacerbated because many of these support forces may also be needed to support the drawdown of forces in Iraq.

Adjustments in Training

To meet mission requirements in CENTCOM, the services, particularly the ground forces, have focused their unit training on counterinsurgency tasks rather than full-spectrum operations. For example, since 2004, all combat training rotations conducted at the Army’s National Training Center have been mission rehearsal exercises to prepare units for deployments, primarily to Iraq and Afghanistan.

While DOD has invested heavily in training for particular mission sets related to requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan, the majority of that effort has been directed at preparing for missions in Iraq, which has had about five times as many U.S. forces as Afghanistan. As the number of forces decreases in Iraq and increases in Afghanistan, it will take time to adjust DOD’s training capacity from one type of mission or theater to another. For example, DOD has designed extensive training areas to mimic Iraqi

urban settings, has incorporated Arabic speakers (the language spoken in much of Iraq) into training exercises, and focused on weapons and tactics useful in densely populated areas, such as training for escorting large armored convoys and using short-barreled weapons in high-density population areas. In contrast, training in Afghanistan has to take into consideration the more austere operating environment, myriad mix of languages and cultures, and lack of major infrastructure, such as paved roads. In addition, to support ongoing operations, the Army has done an admirable job of enlisting personnel returning from deployment to train next-deployers. While DOD has some training infrastructure and combat-tested veterans to support training for the Afghanistan mission, its training base is not currently configured to support a large increase of forces deploying to Afghanistan, and adjustments may need to be made to provide the necessary capacity. Thus, it would be a risk to assume that units that were preparing for deployments to Iraq could be easily rerouted for deployments to Afghanistan with no changes in preparation, equipping, or training.

Availability of Equipment

Our previous work has shown that as of May 2008, DOD had the equivalent of 47 brigades' worth of materiel and equipment in Iraq spread out over some 311 installations of varying size.⁹ The majority of this materiel and equipment, some 80 percent according to DOD officials, is theater-provided equipment which includes approximately 582,000 pieces of equipment such as up-armored High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles, Mine Resistant Armored Program (MRAP) vehicles, and other wheeled and tracked vehicles. Although much of this equipment has remained in Iraq as units rotate in and out, significant amounts will be brought back to the United States if and when there is a decrease in size of U.S. forces in Iraq. Upon returning from operations, equipment is reset in preparation for future operations. The services have also relied on prepositioned equipment stored at land sites around the world as well as ships afloat. As we have previously reported, the Army has withdrawn prepositioned equipment at various stages throughout operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and removed equipment from its prepositioned ships in December 2006 to accelerate creation of two additional brigade combat

⁹GAO-08-930.

teams.¹⁰ The Army plans to reconstitute its prepositioned stocks by 2015; the Marine Corps plans to reconstitute its prepositioned stocks by 2012.

The harsh operating environment and prolonged length of operations have placed tremendous stress on deployed equipment. At the onset of operations in Iraq in 2003, the Army and Marine Corps deployed with equipment that in some cases was already more than 20 years old. The services continue to operate equipment at a pace well in excess of peacetime operations. In response to those challenges, the Army and Marine Corps developed initiatives to retain large amounts of equipment in theater and provide enhanced maintenance over and above the unit level to sustain major equipment items such as High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles and other tracked and wheeled vehicles. In-theater maintenance consists of field-level maintenance in Iraq and some depot-level repair and upgrade capabilities at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait. There are also limited maintenance facilities in Afghanistan. The Army and Marine Corps have developed rotation plans that allow equipment to be sent back to the United States for depot-level maintenance cycles which essentially rebuilds equipment and extends its service life.

Equipment availability may pose challenges depending on equipment requirements for operations in Afghanistan. Army and Marine Corps officials stated that they are in the process of determining equipment requirements for Afghanistan; however, final equipment needs will be based on several factors such as the type of operations, force structure, and capabilities needed. For example, Army and Marine Corps officials recently stated that operations in Afghanistan may require lighter body armor and lighter MRAP vehicles. In addition, geographic and environmental factors also play a role in determining equipment requirements for Afghanistan. For example, heavy brigade combat teams, which include tanks, may not be well suited for the Afghanistan terrain. As a result, the Army is currently developing a lighter version of the MRAP vehicle better suited for the difficult terrain of Afghanistan. Also, given the fact that, since 2006, there have been about 4,800 Army, Marine Corps, and joint urgent needs requests processed to date for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is likely that the number of urgent needs requests will

¹⁰GAO, *Defense Logistics: Army Has Not Fully Planned or Budgeted for the Reconstitution of Its Afloat Prepositioned Stocks*, [GAO-08-257R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 8, 2008).

increase in the future as DOD continues to build up its forces in Afghanistan.

In addition to ground equipment, DOD will need to assess its requirements for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities to support increased force levels in Afghanistan, given its current allocation of assets to support ongoing operations in Iraq. Although DOD has experienced a high level of mission success with ISR, our work has shown that DOD continues to face challenges in maximizing the use of these assets, including unmanned aerial systems.¹¹ ISR assets have proven especially useful in counter-insurgency operations and counter-terrorism, enabling the identification of improvised explosive devices and the enemy forces who planted them. In Iraq and Afghanistan, DOD has employed military ISR collection assets from each of the services, as well as national ISR collection assets. As a result of operational successes, the demand for and use of ISR assets continues to grow.

However, military commanders have also experienced numerous challenges that should be considered as DOD considers its options for adjusting force levels in Iraq to Afghanistan. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, difficulties in airborne ISR assets' abilities to provide strategic, operational, and tactical users with timely, accurate, and actionable intelligence were reported. In addition, our previous work has shown that DOD has faced challenges in optimizing the use of these assets, including unmanned aerial systems. For example, DOD continues to experience problems related to interoperability, availability of communications bandwidths, and airspace integration. Some unmanned aerial systems components cannot easily exchange and transmit data with ground forces because they were not designed to interoperable standards. In addition, stove-piped ISR allocation and tasking systems do not allow consideration of the capabilities of all available ISR assets in determining how best to meet the warfighters' needs. Commanders at the theater level do not have information on how assets controlled by tactical units are being employed, and tactical units do not have information on how theater-level assets or assets controlled by other tactical units are being used. Furthermore, DOD is still in the process of developing metrics to measure the performance of these assets. As we have recommended, improving visibility of all available ISR capabilities and establishing performance metrics would help DOD

¹¹See GAO, *Unmanned Aircraft Systems: Advance Coordination and Increased Visibility Needed to Optimize Capabilities*, [GAO-07-836](#), (Washington, D.C.: July 11, 2007).

identify needs, make decisions about priorities, and optimize the use of available assets.

The Report of the Joint Defense Science Board Intelligence Science Board Task Force on Integrating Sensor-Collected Intelligence stated in 2008 that the number of images and signal intercepts being captured by ISR assets is beyond the capacity of the current ISR infrastructure so there are backlogs of data waiting for translators or image interpreters. The Task Force made recommendations to improve integration of data from different types of ISR assets and ensure that information is visible and widely available to users. We are currently assessing DOD's processes for analyzing, using, and disseminating intelligence information and expect to report on these issues this summer.

Factors Affecting Transportation

Transportation issues should be a key factor in developing a strategy for Afghanistan and continue to be a challenge for commanders. Changes in regional staging base options, stresses on the limited military and commercial air fleets, and underdeveloped infrastructure in landlocked Afghanistan are only a few of the challenges that could exacerbate already difficult transportation into and around the country.

As noted by military officials, operations in landlocked Afghanistan depend on difficult and uncertain overland supply routes from neighboring countries. This makes airlift very important, but Afghanistan operations do not have the benefit of a nearby Kuwait-like environment where staging and reception occur. Kuwait affords the commanders in Iraq both air facilities and a seaport capable of handling ships. To support air operations, commanders in Afghanistan depend on access to bases such as Manas, Kyrgyzstan, which is still a distance from Afghanistan. However, this access may not continue and any strategy developed for operations in Afghanistan may have to consider a regional approach. To this end, the Commander, U.S. Transportation Command, has recently made efforts to secure other options supporting movement into Afghanistan. Land routes, such as the Khyber Pass, are also problematic. We have previously reported the lack of a transloading operation for materiel shipped into Afghanistan, similar to the one at the port of Kuwait for materiel going to Iraq, is a limiting factor. Currently, items being shipped by sea to Afghanistan enter through the port of Karachi, Pakistan, since Afghanistan is landlocked. Officials told us that establishing a transloading operation in Pakistan would be difficult.

U.S. strategy will have to consider the degree to which potentially overlapping operations, the increase in U.S. forces in Afghanistan and decrease of U.S. forces in Iraq, could stress U.S. strategic transportation assets, both military and commercial. The U.S. military primarily depends on commercial aircraft for strategic movement of military personnel (93 percent of DOD personnel during a crisis) and, to a lesser extent, for movement of equipment in a crisis or contingency. Military-contracted commercial aircraft currently do not enter either Iraq or Afghanistan, and military personnel and contractors must transfer to U.S. military aircraft to reach their final destinations. The Afghanistan situation differs from Iraq in that military aircraft moving passengers into Afghanistan must travel greater distances than those arriving in Iraq, and operations tempo and aircraft utilization will reflect these increased demands. Also, U.S. commercial aircraft do not deliver critical equipment into Afghanistan, and essential systems, like MRAPs, arrive via contracted Russian aircraft.

Limited existing facilities currently complicate arrival and onward movement of forces and equipment and, as we increase force levels, may have strategy implications for the near future. Ramp space and fuel availability have been improved since operations began, but infrastructure is limited and may influence the rate that forces can be received and moved forward. For example, the way fuel is obtained and distributed can potentially limit operations. In Afghanistan, Bagram is the hub for fuel distribution, and distribution within the country is difficult. In November 2008, the United States had over 100 forward deployed locations in Afghanistan. Most fuel deliveries are made to forward operating bases using commercial contractors, and we have found through our work that fuel contractors strike often, delay delivery of fuel, or arrive at destinations with fuel missing. Security issues include attacks and threats on fuel convoys, and DOD officials have told us that in June 2008, 44 trucks and 220,000 gallons of fuel were lost in such events. It is unclear how the increased number of troops will impact these issues.

Management and Oversight of Contractors

In Iraq and Afghanistan, DOD relies heavily on contractors to not only provide traditional logistical support—such as base operations support (e.g. food and housing) and the maintenance of weapons systems—but also intelligence analysis and interpreters who accompany military patrols. DOD officials have stated that without a significant increase in its civilian and military workforce, the department is likely to continue to rely on contractors in support of future deployments.

Our body of work has identified several long-standing and systemic problems that continue to hinder DOD's management and oversight of contractors at deployed locations, which have led to negative financial and operational impacts. Although we have made a number of recommendations aimed at addressing these challenges, DOD has made limited progress in implementing these recommendations. The key problems we have identified include the following:

- **Lack of adequate numbers of contract oversight personnel:** Having the right people with the right skills to oversee contractor performance is crucial to ensuring the efficient and effective use of contractors. However, most of the contract oversight personnel we have met with in conducting work at deployed locations have told us DOD does not have adequate personnel at those locations. We have found several cases in Iraq where too few contract oversight personnel limited DOD's ability to identify savings, monitor contractor performance, or resolve contractor performance issues. While these personnel shortfalls are a DOD-wide problem, the more demanding contracting environment at deployed locations creates unique difficulties for contract oversight personnel. Although the Army is taking steps to increase its acquisition workforce, this will take several years, and in the interim, the problems posed by personnel shortages in Iraq and elsewhere are likely to become more significant in Afghanistan as we increase the number of forces and the contractors who support them there.
- **Failure to systemically collect and distribute lessons learned:** DOD has made few efforts to leverage its institutional knowledge and experiences using contractors to support deployed forces, despite years of experience using contractors to support deployed forces in the Balkans, Southwest Asia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. As a result, many of the management and oversight problems we identified in earlier operations have recurred in current operations. For example, we found that a guidebook developed by U.S. Army, Europe on the use of a logistical support contract in the Balkans was not made available to military commanders in Iraq until 2006, limiting their ability to build on efficiencies the Army had previously identified. We have also found a failure to share best practices and lessons learned between units as one redeploys and the other deploys to replace it. Given these challenges, we have concerns that lessons learned from the experience of using contractors to support forces deployed in Iraq may not be shared with forces deploying to Afghanistan and many of the contractor-related issues in Iraq may therefore recur in Afghanistan.

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- **Inadequate training of military commanders and contract oversight personnel:** We have issued multiple reports regarding the need for better pre-deployment training of military commanders and contract oversight personnel on the use of contractor support at deployed locations. Limited or no pre-deployment training on the use of contractor support can hinder the ability of military commanders to adequately plan for the use of contractors and cause confusion. Several commanders of combat units that deployed to Iraq told us that limited or no pre-deployment training on services contractors would limit their ability to integrate the need to provide on-base escorts for third country and host country nationals, convoy security, and other force protection support to contractors into their planning efforts. As a result, the commanders were surprised by the substantial portion of their personnel they had to allocate to fulfill these missions — personnel they had expected to be available to perform other functions. Lack of training also hinders the ability of contract oversight personnel, such as contracting officer’s representatives, to effectively manage and oversee contractors, creating a variety of problems including concerns about the quality of services being provided and difficulties reviewing contractor performance. Although DOD has taken steps to improve the contractor-related training of military commanders and contract oversight personnel, it is likely that training-related problems will continue to affect the management and oversight of contractors in Afghanistan.
 - **Background screening of host nation and third country contractor personnel:** While contractor employees can provide significant benefits to U.S. forces, they can also pose a security risk to U.S. troops, particularly when U.S. forces are involved in a military operation against an insurgency, as they are in Iraq. DOD and contractors, however, have difficulty conducting background screenings of host nation and third country national contractor employees because of a lack of reliable information. Recognizing the limitations of data, military officials responsible for security at installations in Iraq and elsewhere told us that they take steps such as searching contractors and escorting contractors on base to mitigate the risks contractors, particularly non-U.S. contractors, pose. U.S. forces in Afghanistan currently work with a number of host nation and third country contractor employees. The number of these employees will likely go up as the U.S. presence in Afghanistan increases, further exacerbating challenges related to background screening.

In addition to these long-standing challenges, the unique aspects of Afghanistan along with ongoing efforts regarding the drawdown of forces

in Iraq may present additional challenges regarding the use of contractors to support forces deployed to Afghanistan.

- **Different language needs:** DOD relies on contractors to provide linguist services in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the U.S. presence increases in Afghanistan, so too will demand for contractor personnel able to speak the languages in Afghanistan. The pool of Arabic linguists will not be useful in supporting this requirement, and the department may find it difficult to rapidly acquire sufficient numbers of qualified individuals to support the mission in Afghanistan.
- **Transportation and security concerns:** Operation Iraqi Freedom required the movement of large numbers of personnel and equipment over long distances into a hostile environment involving harsh desert conditions. The collective effort of military, civilian, and contractor personnel in Iraq since then has been complicated by the country's lack of a permissive security environment. Afghanistan presents its own unique transportation and security concerns that will need to be factored into how contractors will be able to support the increased number of U.S. forces and, potentially, bases in Afghanistan.
- **Drawdown will increase demands on contractors and contract oversight personnel in Iraq:** As noted above, the United States is planning for the drawdown of its forces in Iraq. However, our previous work has shown that there is not a one-for-one correlation between the number of troops withdrawn from a contingency and the number of contractors withdrawn. For example in 2003, we noted that when troop levels decreased in the Balkans, contract support increased as additional contractors were needed to continue the missions previously done by service members.¹² There may also be an increase in the overall use of contractors to support the drawdown effort itself. For example it is likely that DOD will need to increase its equipment reset capabilities in theater by adding contractors. These increased requirements will also increase the demands on contract oversight personnel to manage and oversee these contractors. Contract oversight personnel will also face increased requirements due to the need to close out contracts supporting forces in Iraq. As a result, these individuals may not be available to manage and oversee contractors in Afghanistan.

¹²GAO, *Military Operation: Contractors Provide Vital Services to Deployed Forces but Are Not Adequately Addressed in DOD Plans*, [GAO-03-695](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 24, 2003).

Concluding Observations

As I have stated today and as we have previously recommended, in developing a comprehensive strategy for both Iraq and Afghanistan several basic principles apply; that is, both strategies should include clear and actionable near- and long-term goals and objectives, as well as roles, responsibilities, resources to ensure success, and some means to measure progress. In addition, as DOD considers the diverse but related operational factors such as force availability, training, equipment, transportation, contracting, and related infrastructure and regional issues, these principles can be applied to both the drawdown in Iraq and the buildup in Afghanistan. As the United States develops a strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan, and related plans for adjusting force levels, we believe that increased awareness of significant challenges may improve their ability to successfully develop and execute a strategy.

In addition, transparency of these strategies and operational factors will also assist congressional decision makers with their oversight responsibilities, especially as Congress considers programmatic issues and funding requests.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you or other Members of the Committee may have at this time.

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