

Updated January 22, 2021

Defense Primer: DOD Transfer and Reprogramming Authorities

In provisions of the *U.S. Code* and typically on an annual basis through authorization and appropriations acts, Congress provides the Department of Defense (DOD) limited authority to obligate funds for purposes other than originally approved. These authorities allow the department to *transfer* or *reprogram* funds. A transfer involves shifting funds from one appropriations account to another, while a reprogramming involves shifting funds within the same account. DOD uses the term *reprogramming action* to describe both types of transactions.

Background

The ability to transfer or reprogram funds provides DOD with flexibility to respond to unanticipated budgetary or national security conditions. Changes in financial or operational circumstances can generate costs or savings for the department. For example, costs may arise from the need to replenish expended munitions, expand combat medical training, or cover a price increase that exceeds the budgeted amount for a weapon system. Savings may accrue from military recruitment shortfalls, canceled programs or renegotiated contracts, or favorable fluctuations in foreign exchange rates, fuel prices, or inflation. Congress may address such scenarios by enacting supplemental appropriations or rescissions; DOD may respond by using limited statutory authorities to transfer or reprogram funds.

Title 10, Section 2214, of the *United States Code* generally covers transfers within DOD “whenever authority is provided in an appropriation Act to transfer amounts in working capital funds or to transfer amounts provided in appropriation Acts for military functions of the Department of Defense (other than military construction).” The statute limits use of transfers or reprogrammings to “a higher priority item, based on unforeseen military requirements,” and prohibits their use for an item for which Congress has denied funds. The statute also requires the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) to “promptly notify” Congress “of each transfer made under such authority.” Other notification requirements reside in specific appropriations provisions.

In addition to these statutory notification requirements, the DOD Financial Management Regulation 7000.14-R (FMR) requires some reprogramming actions to be approved by certain congressional committees.

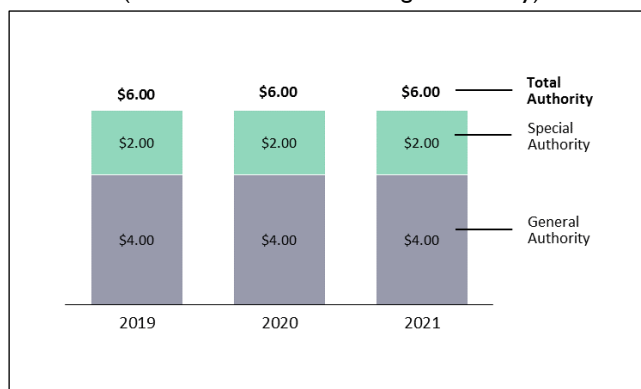
Transfer Authorities

In recent years, defense authorization and appropriations acts have included separate provisions that permit DOD to transfer a certain amount of funding from the *base* budget under General Transfer Authority, or GTA, and an additional amount of funding designated for *Overseas Contingency Operations*, or OCO, under Special Transfer Authority, or STA.

General Transfer Authority. Section 8005 of the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2021 (Division C of P.L. 116-260) allows the Secretary of Defense, with the approval of the Office of Management and Budget, to transfer up to \$4 billion of “funds made available in this Act ... for military functions (except military construction) between such appropriations or funds or any subdivision.” Section 1001, “General Transfer Authority,” of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2021 (NDAA; P.L. 116-283) is the accompanying authorizing language.

Special Transfer Authority. Section 9002 of the FY2021 defense appropriations act allows the SECDEF to transfer up to \$2 billion of OCO funding “between the appropriations or funds” made available in Title IX of the act. Section 1512, “Special Transfer Authority,” of the FY2021 NDAA is the accompanying authorizing language. See **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. DOD General and Special Transfer Authority Limits, FY2019-FY2021
(in billions of dollars of budget authority)



Sources: FY2019-FY2021 defense appropriations acts (P.L. 115-245, P.L. 116-93, and P.L. 116-260).

Separate reprogramming authorities and processes are used for military construction and family housing appropriations and for National Intelligence Program/Military Intelligence Program appropriations.

Types of Reprogramming Actions

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense-Comptroller (OUSD-C) describes reprogramming as “a change in the application of funds.” According to the department, types of reprogramming actions can include the following:

Prior-Approval (PA). Reprogramming actions that require prior approval from the chairman and the ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee (HAC), House Armed Services Committee (HASC), Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC), and Senate Armed

Services Committee (SASC). Prior-approval reprogramming actions:

- increase procurement quantity of a major end item (e.g., aircraft, missile, naval vessel);
- involve congressional special interest items;
- use general or special transfer authority;
- exceed established thresholds (see the “Below Threshold Reprogramming” heading below);
- establish a new program or cancel an existing one; or
- use proceeds to replace certain items sold from inventory.

Internal Reprogramming (IR). Actions that do not require congressional approval and that are used to move funds without changing their purpose or congressional intent. Internal reprogramming actions:

- reclassify funds to a different line item, program element, or appropriation without changing the substance of the program;
- use transfer authority to execute funds from designated transfer accounts (e.g., Environmental Restoration accounts; Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities, Defense; Overseas Contingency Operations Transfer Fund; Foreign Currency Fluctuations, Defense); and
- reflect approval to increase procurement quantities for major end items not requiring prior approval of the congressional defense committees.

Below Threshold Reprogramming (BTR). Minor reprogramming actions that do not require congressional approval because they do not meet certain dollar thresholds. The FY2021 defense appropriations act explanatory statement set a \$10 million threshold for reprogramming funds within the following appropriation titles:

- Military Personnel;
- Operation and Maintenance;
- Procurement; and
- Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation.

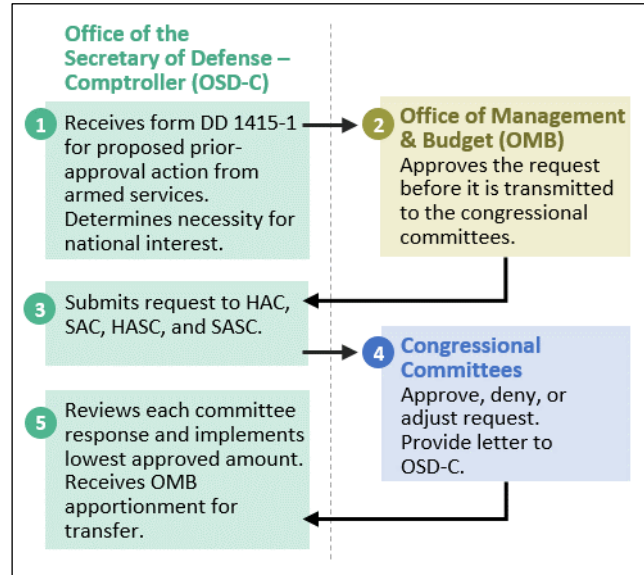
Letter Transfer (LTR). Reprogramming actions that are used to process congressionally directed transfers, such as transfers from the Defense Health Program to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Process

Section 8007 of the FY2021 defense appropriations act directs DOD to submit a report (DD Form 1414) to the congressional committees within 60 days after enactment to establish a baseline against which the department can transfer or reprogram funds. The baseline reflects adjustments since the initial appropriation, to include rescissions, supplemental appropriations, and approved reprogramming actions to date. The provision prohibits DOD from reprogramming or transferring funds until the report is submitted to the congressional committees, unless the SECDEF certifies that the action is an emergency requirement. For internal reprogramming actions, OUSD-C notifies the committees using DD Form 1415-3. For prior-approval reprogramming actions, OUSD-C typically submits to the committees DD Form 1415-1 in one of two ways: (1) as needed for specific requirements, usually on a monthly basis, and (2) as part of a single request for multiple reprogramming actions (known as an *omnibus*

reprogramming action), due prior to June 30 each year. The latter is intended to streamline the process for the committees and DOD. Typically, the committees either approve, deny, or adjust the requested amounts before DOD transfers or reprograms funds. See **Figure 2**.

Figure 2. DOD Process for Prior Approval Reprogramming Actions



Source: CRS based on DOD 7000.14-R FMR.

OUSD-C also submits to the committees a quarterly report (DD Form 1416) on the status of certain reprogramming actions.

Issue for Congress

While DOD regulation requires congressional prior approval of certain reprogramming actions, the department does not view the requirement as *legally* binding. The ability of Congress to create legally binding prior approval requirements on reprogramming actions may be limited by the 1983 U.S. Supreme Court case *Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) v. Chadha*. Some observers may view approval requirements as *practically* binding, however, because the annual appropriations process provides a means for Congress to impose sanctions on violations of comity and trust.

Selected References

- 10 U.S.C. §2214, *Transfer of funds: procedure and limitations*.
- DOD 7000.14-R, *Financial Management Regulation (FMR)*, Volume 3, Chapter 6, September 2015.
- CRS Report R46421, *DOD Transfer and Reprogramming Authorities: Background, Status, and Issues for Congress*.
- CRS Report R43098, *Transfer and Reprogramming of Appropriations: An Overview of Authorities, Limitations, and Procedures*.

Brendan W. McGarry, Analyst in US Defense Budget

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.