



Testimony
Before the Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations, Committee on
Armed Services, House of
Representatives

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 10:00 a.m. ET
Thursday, December 1, 2016

**OVERSEAS
CONTINGENCY
OPERATIONS**

**Observations on the Use
of Force Management
Levels in Afghanistan,
Iraq, and Syria**

Statement of Cary Russell, Director, Defense Capabilities
and Management

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-246T](#), a statement before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States has engaged in multiple efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria since declaring a global war on terrorism in 2001. Currently, in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, U.S. forces are deployed under force management levels set by the administration. Force management levels and similar caps limit the number of U.S. military personnel deployed to a given region and have been a factor in military operations at least since the Vietnam War. Force management levels were also used to shape the drawdowns of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. In June 2016, the President announced that the force management level for Afghanistan is 9,800. According to DOD, in September 2016 the United States authorized additional troops for Iraq and Syria, for a total of 5,262.

Today's testimony discusses some of the actions DOD has taken to maximize military capabilities while operating under force management levels in ongoing operations.

In preparing this statement, GAO relied on previously published work related to operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria since 2001.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made 18 recommendations in prior work cited in this statement. DOD has implemented 12 of them. Continued attention is needed to ensure that some recommendations are addressed, such as improving visibility in total Special Operations funding to determine whether opportunities exist to balance deployments across the joint force.

View [GAO-17-246T](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or RussellC@gao.gov.

December 1, 2016

OVERSEAS CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS

Observations on the Use of Force Management Levels in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria

What GAO Found

Military officials planning for and executing operations under force management levels have taken various actions to maximize military capabilities deployed to countries under those limits, as discussed below:

- **Increased Engagement with Partner Nation Security Forces.** The Department of Defense (DOD) has increased its engagement with partner nations through advise-and-assist missions that rely on partner nation security forces to conduct operations. While this action helps leverage U.S. resources, it can create complications for U.S. planners in terms of allocating capabilities and resources. In 2011, GAO reported that the Army and Marine Corps have faced challenges in providing the necessary field grade officers and specialized capabilities for advisor teams, as well as challenges regarding the effect on the readiness and training of brigades whose combat teams have been split up to source advisor teams. GAO made three recommendations related to advisor teams. DOD concurred and implemented two recommendations relating to improving the ability of advisor teams to prepare for and execute their mission.
- **Reliance on Airpower.** DOD has relied on U.S. and coalition airpower to provide support to partner nation ground forces in lieu of U.S. ground combat capabilities. For example, since U.S. operations related to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) began in August 2014, coalition members have dropped more than 57,000 munitions. Air-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems have also proved critical to commanders by providing them timely and accurate information. While effective, this reliance on air power is not without its costs or challenges. For example, the Secretary of Defense stated in February 2016 that the intensity of the U.S. air campaign against ISIS has been depleting U.S. stocks of certain weapons.
- **Increased Pace of U.S. Special Operations Deployments.** DOD has increased its use of U.S. Special Operations Forces to increase its operational reach and maximize its capabilities under force management levels. However, the increased use of U.S. Special Operations Forces in operations has resulted in a high pace of deployments which can affect readiness, retention, and morale. GAO made 10 recommendations to DOD related to U.S. Special Operations Forces. DOD concurred or partially concurred and has implemented 7 recommendations relating to security force assistance activities and readiness of U.S. Special Operations Forces.
- **Increased Use of Contractors and Personnel on Temporary Duty.** DOD relies on contractors to support a wide range of military operations and free up uniformed personnel to directly support mission needs. During operations in Afghanistan and Iraq contractor personnel played a critical role in supporting U.S. troops and sometimes exceeded the number of deployed military personnel. However, the increased use of contractors and temporary personnel to provide support during operations has its challenges, including oversight of contractors in deployed environments. GAO made four recommendations to improve oversight of operational contract support. DOD concurred with all four, and has implemented three of them. GAO also made a recommendation that DOD develop guidance relating to costs of overseas operations, with which DOD partially concurred and which remains open.

Chairwoman Hartzler, Ranking Member Speier, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss some of the actions the Department of Defense (DOD) has taken to maximize military capabilities while operating under force management levels in ongoing operations. Currently, in Afghanistan and in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, U.S. forces are deployed under force management levels set by the administration. Force management levels limit the number of U.S. military personnel deployed to a given region and have been a factor in military operations at least since the Vietnam War. Force management levels have also been used in the past to shape the drawdown of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. In June 2016, the President announced the force management level for Afghanistan is 9,800. For Iraq and Syria, the Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations reported that, as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, the United States authorized an additional 615 troops in September 2016, bringing the total authorized forces in support of that Operation to 5,262.^{1,2}

While force management levels have long been used as a policy tool to shape and direct the deployment of U.S. military forces, they can present a unique challenge to military planners. Under joint doctrine, the joint operational planning process consists of a set of logical steps to examine the mission; develop, analyze, and compare courses of action; select the best course of action; and produce a plan or order. The focus is on defining the military mission and developing and synchronizing plans to accomplish that mission. As Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, states, “Planning begins with the end state in mind, providing a unifying purpose around which actions and resources are focused.”³ As the process proceeds, the commander identifies the forces needed to accomplish the concept of operations. Although force management levels

¹Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, *Operation Inherent Resolve: Report to the United States Congress* (Washington, DC: July 1, 2016-September 30, 2016).

² Operation Inherent Resolve is dedicated to countering the terrorist threat posed by the ISIS in Iraq, Syria, the region, and the broader international community. The U.S. strategy to counter ISIS includes support to military operations associated with Operation Inherent Resolve as well as diplomacy, governance, security programs and activities, and, separately, humanitarian assistance.

³Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Aug. 11, 2011).

may be part of the input as plans are developed, and may be taken into account as existing plans are assessed and updated, they may also have the effect of essentially reversing the planning order and establishing resource limits that DOD planners and commanders need to adjust to or work around as they develop and execute their plans.

My statement today discusses some of the actions DOD has taken to maximize military capabilities when operating under a force management level in its ongoing operations. This statement is based on our body of work on DOD's contractor oversight, its use of advise and assist teams, key enablers in operations, and other GAO reports.⁴ To perform our prior work, we analyzed DOD guidance and personnel and readiness data, and we interviewed cognizant DOD officials involved in planning and operations. The reports cited throughout this statement contain detailed discussions of the scope of the work and the methodology used to carry it out. The work on which this statement is based was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform audits 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.

Background

U.S. Operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria

The U.S. government has engaged in multiple efforts in Afghanistan since declaring a global war on terrorism in 2001 that targeted al Qaeda, its affiliates, and other violent extremists. These efforts employ a whole-of-government approach that calls for the use of all elements of U.S. national power to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its affiliates and prevent their return. In March 2011, U.S. forces shifted their role from carrying out combat operations to advising and assisting Afghan forces as lead security responsibility was transitioned to Afghan forces.

U.S. government efforts for the global war on terrorism in Iraq began in 2003 with Operation Iraqi Freedom. Similar to U.S. efforts in Afghanistan,

⁴A list of related classified and unclassified GAO products is provided in appendix I.

U.S. military operations in Iraq shifted focus from combat and counterinsurgency to that of an advising and training role for Iraqi security forces. The U.S. and Iraqi governments signed an agreement in 2008 to draw down U.S. forces in Iraq to a complete withdrawal no later than December 31, 2011. In 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) emerged as a major force in Iraq and Syria.⁵ In September 2014, the President announced the U.S. strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIS. Also in 2014, Congress passed and the President signed legislation authorizing DOD to provide assistance, including training and equipment, to vetted Syrian opposition forces to fight ISIS, among other purposes.⁶ Similar legislation authorized assistance to military and other security forces of or associated with the Government of Iraq, including Kurdish and tribal security forces or other local security forces with a national security mission.⁷

Use of Force Management Levels

Force management levels and similar caps are generally set by the Executive Branch to limit or manage the number of military personnel deployed at any one time to specific countries. Force management levels can also be derived from various other sources. For example, we reported that during the Balkan operations of the 1990s, DOD limited U.S. troops to 15 percent of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization force in Kosovo. Also, the overall number of U.S. forces may be limited by the host nation to which they are deploying. Force management levels and similar caps have been a factor in military operations for a long time—dating at least to the Vietnam War, during which troop ceilings were used to manage the number of deployed U.S. forces. As such, operating under limitations to the total number of deployed forces is something with which DOD has become familiar.

⁵The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is also known as Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, Daesh, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

⁶See Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2015, Pub. L. No. 113-164, § 149 (2014); Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, Pub. L. No. 113-235, § 9016 (2014); Carl Levin and Howard P. “Buck” McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, Pub. L. No. 113-291, § 1209 (2014).

⁷See Pub. L. No. 113-291, § 1236. The assistance is subject to certain conditions, including the vetting of planned recipients. See *id.* § 1236(e); see also Pub. L. No. 113-235, div. C, tit. IX.

The executive branch used force management levels to shape the drawdown of forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. In Iraq, U.S. forces drew down from a peak of over 170,000 “boots on the ground” in November 2007 to their withdrawal at the end of 2011. In Afghanistan, U.S. forces have drawn down from a peak of almost 100,000 in March 2011 to 9,300 as of the middle of 2016. In the current counter-ISIS fight in Iraq and Syria, force management levels limited the initial deployment of forces and have been increased over time to enable the deployment of additional forces to carry out the mission.

Actions DOD Has Taken to Maximize Military Capabilities While Operating under Force Management Levels in Ongoing Operations

Military officials planning for and executing operations under force management levels have taken various actions to maximize military capabilities deployed to countries under those limits. For example, we reported in 2013 that with the initial drawdown of forces in Afghanistan starting in 2011, which occurred as U.S. forces shifted from carrying out combat operations to advising and assisting Afghan forces, there were a number of key areas that military planners and operational commanders would have to consider regarding the military capabilities DOD retained in Afghanistan to enable the success of Afghan partner forces. These would include considerations regarding what types of key enablers—such as air, logistics, intelligence, and medical evacuation support—were needed to support Afghan National Security Forces. Similarly, as force management levels in Afghanistan were further reduced to below 10,000 forces in early 2015, military planners and operational commanders faced more fundamental issues about the structure of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Among other things, planners had to consider how reduced force levels would constrain resources for the advising mission, given for example the increasing dedication of resources and personnel to base force protection, the number of enduring base locations, and reduced medical reach. As the force management level in Afghanistan has continued to decline, these are the questions that military planners and operational commanders continue to address through various actions.

Similarly, in the current counter-ISIS mission in Iraq and Syria, planners and commanders have been assessing how to maximize military capabilities while providing the needed support for the mission they are executing under current force management levels. Among the actions

DOD has taken to accomplish these goals in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria is that of increasing its reliance on: (1) partner nation security forces; (2) U.S. and Coalition airpower; (3) special operations forces; and (4) contractor and temporary duty personnel.

Increased Engagement with Partner Nation Security Forces

One of the tools DOD has used to maximize the number of mission-focused personnel under a force management level to achieve its objectives is to increase engagement with partner nation security forces through a range of security cooperation efforts.⁸ For example, as part of the overall transition of lead security from U.S. forces to Afghan National Security Forces and the drawdown of U.S. forces after 2010, the U.S. mission in Afghanistan shifted from a combat role to an advise-and-assist mission. As a result, DOD has used a variety of approaches to provide U.S. advisors to carry out the advise-and-assist mission. In early 2012, the U.S. Army and Marine Corps began to deploy small teams of advisors with specialized capabilities—referred to as Security Force Assistance Advisory Teams—that were located throughout Afghanistan, to work with Afghan army and police units from the headquarters to the battalion level, and advise them in areas such as command and control, intelligence, and logistics.

Relying on partner forces to conduct operations has both positive and negative potential effects. On the positive side, limited U.S. capacity can help to ensure partner forces take the lead, such as in Iraq, where Iraqi Security Forces are leading the attack on Mosul as part of Operation Inherent Resolve. However, as the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency stated, the Iraqi Security forces lack the capacity to defend against foreign threats or sustain conventional military operations without continued foreign assistance. For example, the recapture of the Iraqi city of Sinjar in November 2015 and the Ramadi government center in

⁸Security cooperation is the broad term used to describe DOD activities to build defense relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to host nations. See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Nov. 8, 2010) (as amended through Feb. 15, 2016). For more information see, e.g., Department of the Army, Field Manual No. 3-22, *Army Support to Security Cooperation* (Jan. 22, 2013) (with change June 21, 2013).

December 2015 depended on extensive coalition airstrikes and other support.⁹ As a result, this can create complications for U.S. planners in terms of allocating capabilities and resources within the force management levels. In addition, in 2011 we reported on challenges DOD has faced when supplying advise and assist teams, such as in providing the necessary field grade officers and specialized capabilities.¹⁰ We also found that splitting up brigade combat teams to source these advisor teams had an effect on the readiness and training of those brigades.¹¹ We made three recommendations to the department to ensure that the activities of individual advisor teams are more clearly linked to command goals and to enhance the ability of advisor teams to prepare for and execute their mission. DOD concurred with our recommendations and has implemented two of them.

U.S. and Coalition Airpower

With a limited U.S. footprint under the current force management levels in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, DOD has relied on U.S. and coalition airpower to provide support to partner ground forces in lieu of U.S. ground combat capabilities. For example, U.S. Air Force Central Command reported that since the 2011 drawdown began in Afghanistan, coalition members have flown nearly 108,000 sorties and dropped approximately 16,500 munitions.¹² Additionally, since U.S. operations related to ISIS began in August 2014, coalition members have flown nearly 44,000 sorties and dropped more than 57,000 munitions. While effective, according to senior DOD officials, this reliance on air power is not without its costs or challenges. For example, according to the Secretary of Defense in February 2016, the accelerating intensity of the U.S. air campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria has been depleting U.S. stocks

⁹Vincent R. Stewart, Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps, Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, statement before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, 114 Cong., 2nd sess., February 9, 2016.

¹⁰GAO, *Iraq and Afghanistan: Actions Needed to Enhance the Ability of Army Brigades to Support the Advising Mission*, [GAO-11-760](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 2, 2011).

¹¹GAO, *Security Force Assistance: More Detailed Planning and Improved Access to Information Needed to Guide Efforts of Advisor Teams in Afghanistan*. [GAO-13-381](#). Washington, D.C.: April 30, 2013.

¹²Note that these figures are generated from the start of calendar year 2011 and are drawn from public information released by U.S. Air Force Central Command. We did not independently assess the reliability of the sortie and munitions numbers in this paragraph.

of GPS-guided smart bombs and laser-guided munitions. As a result, DOD requested an additional \$1.8 billion in the fiscal year (FY) 17 budget request to purchase more than 45,000 more of these munitions. Furthermore, DOD is exploring the idea of increasing the production rate of these munitions in the U.S. industrial base.

Similarly, airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) systems have proved critical to commanders to support military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. The success of ISR systems in collecting, processing, and disseminating useful intelligence information has fueled growing a demand for more ISR support, and DOD has increased its investments in ISR capabilities significantly since 2002. According to a senior DOD official, as the United States reduces its footprint in Afghanistan, it is imperative that U.S. intelligence collection capabilities be constant and robust to support forces on the ground. With respect to Iraq and Syria, according to this senior official, there is also a need for significant ISR capabilities to develop and maintain situational awareness of the security environment, particularly in the absence of a large U.S. ground presence. As he noted, ISR platforms with full-motion video capabilities have become fundamental to almost all battlefield maneuvers, adversary detection, terrorist pattern-of-life development, and force protection operations.

Increased Pace of U.S. Special Operations Deployments

In a force management level-constrained environment, DOD has increased the use of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), who are specially organized, trained, and equipped to conduct operations in hostile or politically sensitive environments. As a result, these forces increase the operational reach and capabilities of the limited number of ground forces that can be deployed under a force management level. However, SOF deployments in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria have placed significant demand on the force during this period. As we reported in 2015, DOD has increased the size and funding of SOF and has emphasized their importance to meeting national security needs.¹³ Specifically, the number of authorized special operations military positions, which includes combat and support personnel, increased from

¹³GAO, *Special Operations Forces: Opportunities Exist to Improve Transparency of Funding and Assess Potential to Lessen Some Deployments*, [GAO-15-571](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 16, 2015).

about 42,800 in FY 2001 to about 62,800 in FY 2014.¹⁴ Funding provided to U.S. Special Operations Command for special operations— specific needs has more than tripled from about \$3.1 billion in FY 2001 to about \$9.8 billion in in FY 2014, in FY 2014 constant dollars, including supplemental funding for contingency operations. We made three recommendations to the department to improve budget visibility for SOF and to determine whether certain traditional SOF activities can be transferred to or shared with conventional forces. DOD partially concurred with our recommendations, and they remain open.

While DOD has taken some steps to manage the increased pace of special operations deployments, we have reported that opportunities may exist to better balance the workload across the joint force because activities assigned to SOF can be similar to activities assigned to conventional forces.¹⁵ Conventional forces have been expanding their capabilities to meet the demand for missions that have traditionally been given to SOF, such as stability operations, security force assistance, civil security, and repairing key infrastructure necessary to provide government services and sustain human life. For example, in 2012, we reported that the services were taking steps and investing resources to organize and train conventional forces capable of conducting security force assistance based on identified requirements.¹⁶ We made two recommendations: to improve the way in which the department plans for and prepares forces to execute security force assistance, and to identify and track security force assistance activities. DOD partially concurred with and implemented both recommendations. Recently DOD began establishing conventional forces, such as the Army’s regionally aligned forces, with more extensive language and cultural skills, which are capable of conducting activities previously performed primarily by SOF.

In a May 2014 report to Congress, DOD noted that SOF personnel have come under significant strain in the years since September 11, 2001.¹⁷

¹⁴For purposes of this testimony, “authorized special operations positions” refers to those positions that have been approved by DOD components for funding for a specific fiscal year.

¹⁵[GAO-15-571](#)

¹⁶GAO, *Security Force Assistance: Additional Actions Needed to Guide Geographic Combatant Command and Service Efforts*, [GAO-12-556](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 10, 2012).

¹⁷Department of Defense, *Review and Assessment of United States Special Operations Forces and United States Special Operations Command* (May 5, 2014).

Both the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command acknowledged in 2015 that SOF have sustained unprecedented levels of stress during the preceding few years.¹⁸ Specifically, the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command testified that continued deployments to meet the increasing geographic combatant command demand, the high frequency of combat deployments, the high-stake missions, and the extraordinarily demanding environments in which these forces operate placed not only SOF but also their families under unprecedentedly high levels of stress. According to the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, the high pace of deployments has resulted in both increased suicide incidents among the force and effects on operational readiness and retention due to a lack of predictability.¹⁹ The Commander's statements are consistent with our prior work, which has found that a high pace of deployments for SOF can affect readiness, retention, and morale.²⁰ In that work, GAO made several recommendations to maintain the readiness of SOF to support national security objectives and address human capital challenges. DOD concurred or partially concurred with our recommendations and has implemented them. The military services have also acknowledged challenges that SOF face as a result of operational demands. For example, in 2013 Air Force officials reported that a persistent special operations presence in Afghanistan and elsewhere, increasing requirements in the Pacific region, and enduring global commitments would continue to stress Air Force special operations personnel and aircraft.²¹

¹⁸Honorable Michael D. Lumpkin, Assistant Secretary of Defense, Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, statement before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 114th Cong., 1st sess., March 18, 2015 and General Joseph L. Votel, U.S. Army, Commander, United States Special Operations Command, statement before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 114th Cong., 1st sess., March 18, 2015.

¹⁹See, for example, General Joseph L. Votel, statement before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives.

²⁰GAO, *Special Operations Forces: Opportunities to Preclude Overuse and Misuse*, [GAO/NSIAD-97-85](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 1997). *Special Operations Forces: Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role*, [GAO-06-812](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 31, 2006).

²¹Department of the Air Force, *U.S. Air Force Posture Statement 2013* (Apr. 12, 2013).

Increased Use of Contractors and Personnel on Temporary Duty

In a force management level-constrained environment, DOD relies on contractors to support a wide range of military operations and free up uniformed personnel to directly support mission needs. During operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, contractors played a critical role in supporting U.S. troops with the number of contractor personnel sometimes exceeding the number of deployed military personnel. According to DOD, the level of contracted support has exceeded that required in previous wars, and this level is not expected to change in future contingency operations. For example, even as troop levels began to drop below 90,000 in Afghanistan in early 2012, U.S. Central Command reported that the number of contractor personnel in country grew, peaking at 117,227. As of mid-2016, U.S. Central Command reported that there were 2,485 DOD contractor personnel in Iraq, as compared with a force management level of 4,087 U.S. troops in Iraq.²² DOD has used contractors as a force multiplier, and with a limited force management level, such as in Iraq, contractors have become an increasingly important factor in operations.

DOD uses contractors to provide a wide variety of services because of force limitations on the number of U.S. military personnel who can be deployed and a lack of required skills. The use of contractors can free up uniformed personnel to conduct combat operations and provide expertise in specialized fields. The services provided by contractors include logistics and maintenance support, base support, operating communications networks, construction, security, translation support, and other management and administrative support.

While contractor support plays a critical role in operations, we have previously reported on DOD's long-standing challenges in overseeing contractors in deployed environments, and the failure to manage contract support effectively could undermine U.S. policy objectives and threaten the safety of U.S. forces. For example, we reported in 2012 that DOD did not always have sufficient contract oversight personnel to manage and oversee its logistics support contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Without an adequate number of trained oversight personnel DOD could not be assured that contractors could meet contract requirements efficiently and

²²These data are drawn from public information released by U.S. Central Command. We did not independently assess the reliability of these data.

effectively.²³ We made four recommendations to improve oversight of operational contract support. DOD concurred with our recommendations and implemented three of them. Since DOD anticipates continued reliance on contractors for future operations, it may face similar challenges related to oversight in current and future operations, such as Operation Inherent Resolve, particularly if force management levels limit the number of military personnel available to conduct such oversight.

In addition to contractors, DOD also relies on personnel on temporary duty (TDY) to augment subordinate unified commands and joint task forces during contingency operations. Joint task forces, such as Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve, are established for a focused and temporary purpose; however if the mission is a continuing requirement, the task force may become a more enduring organization. According to DOD, temporary personnel requirements for short-duration missions should be supported through augmentation, TDY tasking, augmented hiring of civilian personnel, or other temporary personnel solutions. We have previously reported that the combatant commands utilize augmentation to support staff operations during contingencies.²⁴ We have also reported that CENTCOM’s service component commands, such as U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, and theater special operations commands rely on temporary personnel to augment their commands.²⁵ We made one recommendation that DOD develop guidance related to costs of overseas operations. DOD partially concurred with our recommendation and it remains open. According to DOD officials, TDY personnel are not counted toward force management level limits. As such, in a constrained-force management level environment, TDY personnel can be used by joint task forces to free up their assigned personnel to meet mission requirements. However, to the extent that force management levels are intended to shape the number of forces deployed to a given country, the use of TDY personnel may not provide a complete picture of U.S. forces engaged in operations.

²³GAO, *Operational Contract Support: Management and Oversight Improvements Needed in Afghanistan*, [GAO-12-290](#) (Washington, D.C.: March 29, 2012).

²⁴GAO, *Defense Headquarters: Geographic Combatant Commands Rely on Subordinate Commands for Mission Management and Execution*, [GAO-16-652R](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 30, 2016).

²⁵GAO, *Defense Headquarters: Guidance Needed to Transition U.S. Central Command’s Costs to the Base Budget*, [GAO-14-440](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 9, 2014).

Chairwoman Hartzler, Ranking Member Speier, and Members of the Subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

Contacts and Acknowledgments

If you have any questions about this statement, please contact Cary Russell, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management Team, at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov. In addition to the contact named above, James A. Reynolds, Assistant Director; Alissa Czyz; Lori Kmetz; Sean Manzano; Marcus Oliver; Alice Paszel; Michael Shaughnessy; Mike Silver; and Cheryl Weissman made key contributions to this statement.

Related GAO Products

Report numbers with an SU or RSU suffix are Sensitive but Unclassified, and those with a C suffix are Classified. Sensitive but Unclassified and Classified reports are available to personnel with the proper clearances and need to -know, upon request.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan Equipment Drawdown: Progress Made, but Improved Controls in Decision Making Could Reduce Risk of Unnecessary Expenditures. [GAO-14-768](#). Washington, D.C.: September 30, 2014.

Afghanistan: Changes to Updated U.S. Civil-Military Strategic Framework Reflect Evolving U.S. Role. [GAO-14-438R](#). Washington, D.C.: April 1, 2014.

Security Force Assistance: More Detailed Planning and Improved Access to Information Needed to Guide Efforts of Advisor Teams in Afghanistan. [GAO-13-381](#). Washington, D.C.: April 30, 2013.

Afghanistan: Key Oversight Issues. [GAO-13-218SP](#). Washington, D.C.: February 11, 2013.

Afghanistan Drawdown Preparations: DOD Decision Makers Need Additional Analyses to Determine Costs and Benefits of Returning Excess Equipment. [GAO-13-185R](#). Washington, D.C.: December 19, 2012.

Afghanistan Security: Security Transition. [GAO-12-598C](#). Washington, D.C.: September 11, 2012.

Observations on U.S. Military Capabilities to Support Transition of Lead Security Responsibility to Afghan National Security Forces. [GAO-12-734C](#). Washington, D.C.: August 3, 2012.

Afghanistan Security: Long-standing Challenges May Affect Progress and Sustainment of Afghan National Security Forces. [GAO-12-951T](#). Washington, D.C.: July 24, 2012.

Interim Results on U.S.-NATO Efforts to Transition Lead Security Responsibility to Afghan Forces. [GAO-12-607C](#). Washington, D.C.: May 18, 2012.

Security Force Assistance: Additional Actions Needed to Guide Geographic Combatant Command and Service Efforts. [GAO-12-556](#). Washington, D.C.: May 10, 2012.

Afghanistan Security: Estimated Costs to Support Afghan National Security Forces Underscore Concerns about Sustainability. [GAO-12-438SU](#). Washington, D.C.: April 26, 2012.

Afghan Security: Renewed Sharing of Biometric Data Could Strengthen U.S. Efforts to Protect U.S. Personnel from Afghan Security Force Attacks. [GAO-12-471SU](#). Washington, D.C.: April 20, 2012.

Afghanistan Security: Department of Defense Effort to Train Afghan Police Relies on Contractor Personnel to Fill Skill and Resource Gaps. [GAO-12-293R](#). Washington, D.C.: February 23, 2012.

Afghanistan: Improvements Needed to Strengthen Management of U.S. Civilian Presence. [GAO-12-285](#). Washington, D.C.: February 27, 2012.

Iraq

Countering ISIS: DOD Should Develop Plans for Responding to Risks and for Using Stockpiled Equipment No Longer Intended for Syria Train and Equip Program. [GAO-16-670C](#). Washington, D.C.: September 9, 2016.

Iraq: State and DOD Need to Improve Documentation and Record Keeping for Vetting of Iraq's Security Forces. [GAO-16-658C](#). Washington, D.C.: September 30, 2016.

Mission Iraq: State and DOD Have Not Finalized Security and Support Capabilities. [GAO-12-759RSU](#). Washington, D.C.: July 26, 2012.

Mission Iraq: State and DOD Face Challenges in Finalizing Support and Security Capabilities. [GAO-12-856T](#). Washington, D.C.: June 28, 2012.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance: Actions Needed to Improve DOD Guidance, Integration of Tools, and Training for Collection Management. [GAO-12-396C](#). Washington, D.C.: April 5, 2012.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance: DOD Needs a Strategic, Risk-Based Approach to Enhance Its Maritime Domain Awareness.

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