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AFGHANISTAN SECURITY

Some Improvements
Reported in Afghan
Forces' Capabilities,
but Actions Needed to
Enhance DOD
Oversight of U.S.-
Purchased Equipment

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-116](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Developing independently capable ANDSF is a key component of U.S. and coalition efforts to create sustainable security and stability in Afghanistan under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led Resolute Support mission. The United States is the largest contributor of funding and personnel to Resolute Support, providing and maintaining ANDSF equipment, along with training, advising, and assistance to help the ANDSF effectively use and sustain the equipment in the future.

House Report 114-537 included a provision for GAO to review the ANDSF's capability and capacity to operate and sustain U.S.-purchased weapon systems and equipment. This report addresses (1) what has been reported about ANDSF capabilities and capability gaps and (2) the extent to which DOD has information about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. To conduct this work, GAO analyzed DOD and NATO reports and documents, examined three critical equipment types, and interviewed DOD officials in the United States and Afghanistan.

This is a public version of a sensitive report issued in September 2018. Information that DOD deemed sensitive has been omitted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD develop options for collecting reliable information on conventional ANDSF units' ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. DOD concurred with this recommendation.

View [GAO-19-116](#). For more information, contact Jessica Farb at (202) 512-7114 or farbj@gao.gov.

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AFGHANISTAN SECURITY

Some Improvements Reported in Afghan Forces' Capabilities, but Actions Needed to Enhance DOD Oversight of U.S.-Purchased Equipment

What GAO Found

Since the Resolute Support mission began in 2015, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) have improved some fundamental capabilities, such as high-level operational planning, but continue to rely on U.S. and coalition support to fill several key capability gaps, according to Department of Defense (DOD) reporting. DOD has initiatives to address some ANDSF capability gaps, such as a country-wide vehicle maintenance and training effort, but DOD reports it does not expect the ANDSF to develop and sustain independent capabilities in some areas, such as logistics, for several years.

Examples of U.S.-Purchased Equipment for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces



Tactical radio



Mobile Strike Force Vehicle



MD-530 helicopter

Source: Department of Defense, Defense Video Imagery Distribution System; photos by Sgt. Benjamin Tuck (radio), Spc. Austin Boucher (vehicle), and Capt. Jason Smith (helicopter). | GAO-19-116

While DOD has firsthand information on the abilities of the Afghan Air Force and Special Security Forces to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment, it has little reliable information on the equipment proficiency of conventional ANDSF units. U.S. and coalition advisors are embedded at the tactical level for the Air Force and Special Security Forces, enabling DOD to directly assess those forces' abilities. However, the advisors have little direct contact with conventional ANDSF units on the front lines. As a result, DOD relies on those units' self-assessments of tactical abilities, which, according to DOD officials, can be unreliable.

GAO's analysis of three critical equipment types illustrated the varying degrees of DOD's information (see figure above). For example, DOD provided detailed information about the Air Force's ability to operate and maintain MD-530 helicopters and the Special Security Forces' ability to operate and maintain Mobile Strike Force Vehicles; however, DOD had limited information about how conventional forces operate and maintain radios and Mobile Strike Force Vehicles. DOD's lack of reliable information on conventional forces' equipment operations and maintenance abilities adds to the uncertainty and risk in assessing the progress of DOD efforts in Afghanistan.

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Abbreviations

AAF	Afghan Air Force
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANASOC	ANA Special Operations Command
ANDSF	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces
ANP	Afghan National Police
CECOM	U.S. Army Communications–Electronics Command
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan
DOD	Department of Defense
MHz	megahertz
MSFV	Mobile Strike Force Vehicle
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NMSGVS	National Maintenance Strategy Ground Vehicle Support contract
NSOCC-A	NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan
ORC	operational readiness cycle
OSD-P	Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
TAAC-Air	Train, Advise, and Assist Command–Air

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October 15, 2018

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Developing self-sustaining Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) is a key component of U.S. and coalition efforts to counter terrorist threats and create long-term security and stability in Afghanistan. In January 2015, the ANDSF—comprising mainly the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP)—formally assumed security responsibilities for all of Afghanistan. Since this shift, the United States has continued to aid the ANDSF through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led mission, Resolute Support.¹ The United States is the largest contributor of funding and personnel to the coalition effort through which it provides and maintains equipment for these forces, and offers training, advising, and assistance intended to enable the ANDSF to sustain the equipment in the future. In total, the United States has allocated approximately \$84 billion for Afghan security in the 17-year period spanning fiscal years 2002 through 2018, according to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).² In August 2017, the United States announced its South Asia Strategy, renewing its commitment to helping the ANDSF become more effective and self-

¹Resolute Support is a noncombat mission launched on January 1, 2015, after the conclusion of the previous NATO-led mission, the International Security Assistance Force. As of November 2017, Resolute Support consisted of a coalition of 26 NATO allies and 13 operational partner nations that contribute personnel, equipment, and funding to the mission. In addition to Resolute Support, the United States conducts a counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan.

²We calculated this sum using data reported by SIGAR on April 30, 2018, on the following authorities used for Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of State security programs: Afghanistan Security Forces Fund; Afghanistan Freedom Support Act; Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities; Foreign Military Financing; International Military Education and Training; International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement; Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Programs; Train and Equip; and Voluntary Peacekeeping. See SIGAR, *April 30, 2018 Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (Arlington, Va.: Apr. 30, 2018).

sustaining.³ The strategy removed any timelines for the United States to withdraw support for the ANDSF and committed approximately 3,500 additional U.S. military personnel—an increase of 33 percent—to bolster the Department of Defense’s (DOD) efforts in Afghanistan, according to DOD reporting.⁴

House Report 114-537, accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, included a provision for us to review the ANDSF’s capability and capacity to operate and sustain U.S.-purchased weapon systems and equipment.⁵ This report is a public version of a sensitive report that we issued on September 20, 2018.⁶ Our September report included three objectives, including one on the extent to which DOD considers ANDSF input and meets their needs when identifying equipment requirements. DOD deemed the information related to that objective to be sensitive, requiring that it be protected from public disclosure. Consequently, we removed that objective and a related recommendation from this public report. This version includes information on the other two objectives: (1) what has been reported about ANDSF capabilities and capability gaps and (2) the extent to which DOD has information about the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. Although the information provided in this report is more limited, the report uses the same methodology for the two objectives as the sensitive report.

To identify what has been reported about ANDSF capabilities and capability gaps as well as the steps DOD has taken to try to address

³The South Asia Strategy shifted from a timelines-based approach to a conditions-based approach with regard to when the United States would withdraw support for the ANDSF; increased troop levels; expanded U.S. military offensive authorities; and authorized the expansion of the train, advise, and assist mission for conventional forces below the ANA corps and ANP zone levels.

⁴For the purposes of this report, “DOD reporting” refers to publicly-issued DOD reports, primarily including DOD’s semiannual reports on efforts to enhance security and stability in Afghanistan, also known as DOD’s semiannual Section 1225 reports to Congress.

⁵According to DOD Joint Publication 3-20, which provides guidance for planning, executing, and assessing U.S. security cooperation activities, *capability* refers to the partner nation’s ability to execute a given task. *Capacity* refers to the partner nation’s ability to self-sustain and self-replicate a given capability. See Joint Publication 3-20, *Security Cooperation* (May 23, 2017).

⁶GAO, *Afghanistan Security: Some Improvements Reported in Afghan Forces’ Capabilities, but Actions Needed to Enhance DOD Oversight of U.S.-Purchased Equipment*, [GAO-18-662SU](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 20, 2018).

those gaps, we reviewed NATO and DOD documents and reports—such as DOD’s semiannual Section 1225 reports to Congress (which we hereafter refer to as “DOD reporting”)—created after the start of Resolute Support on January 1, 2015. We also reviewed DOD-commissioned assessments of ANDSF capabilities conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses and reporting from SIGAR and the DOD Office of Inspector General, and interviewed Center for Naval Analyses representatives and DOD officials, including DOD officials at the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (OSD-P) who helped create the DOD reporting we reviewed.

To determine the extent to which DOD has information about the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain equipment, we reviewed DOD documents and reports and interviewed DOD officials in the United States and Afghanistan, including DOD officials who advise the ANDSF. We also reviewed federal internal control standards to determine what responsibilities agencies have specifically related to information collection.⁷ To provide illustrative examples of what information DOD has about the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment and what that information indicates about the ANDSF’s abilities and challenges we interviewed and analyzed written responses from DOD officials, including DOD officials who provide procurement and lifecycle management for some ANDSF aircraft and vehicles, about three equipment types—MD-530 helicopters, Mobile Strike Force Vehicles (MSFV), and radios.⁸ We selected these three equipment types from a list that we developed, for an August 2017 report, of key ANDSF equipment the United States purchased from fiscal years 2003 through 2016.⁹ (See

⁷GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

⁸Our analysis of the information DOD has about these three equipment types is not generalizable and is intended to provide context about DOD’s information on the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment.

⁹We selected these equipment types based on a number of considerations, such as (1) how critical the equipment is to the ANDSF’s ability to achieve its mission; (2) which ANDSF component uses the equipment (i.e., ANP, ANA, or both); (3) whether DOD intends to continue procuring the equipment for the ANDSF; and (4) whether the equipment had been in use at least 5 years. For our August 2017 report on key ANDSF equipment purchased by the United States, see GAO, *U.S.-Funded Equipment for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces*, [GAO-17-667R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 10, 2017).

app. I for more information about our objectives, scope, and methodology.)

The performance audit upon which this report is based was conducted from August 2016 to September 2018 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. We subsequently worked with DOD from September 2018 to October 2018 to prepare this public version of the original sensitive report for public release. This public version was also prepared in accordance with those standards.

Background

U.S. Missions in Afghanistan

Since 2001, the United States has made a commitment to building Afghanistan's security and governance in order to prevent the country from once again becoming a sanctuary for terrorists. To achieve its security objectives, the United States currently has two missions in Afghanistan: a counterterrorism mission that it leads and the NATO-led Resolute Support train, advise, and assist mission, which it participates in with other coalition nations. The objective of Resolute Support, according to DOD reporting, is to establish self-sustaining Afghan security ministries and forces that work together to maintain security in Afghanistan.¹⁰ The United States is conducting these missions within a challenging security environment that has deteriorated since the January 2015 transition to Afghan-led security. The United Nations reported nearly 24,000 security incidents in Afghanistan in 2017—the most ever recorded—and, despite a slight decrease in the overall number of security incidents in early 2018, the United Nations noted significant security challenges, including a spike in high-casualty attacks in urban areas and coordinated attacks by the insurgency on ANDSF checkpoints.

¹⁰The ANDSF comprise the Ministries of Defense and Interior and the security forces—principally the ANA and ANP, respectively—that the ministries oversee.

DOD provides both personnel and funding to support its efforts in Afghanistan. DOD documents indicate that the United States contributes more troops to Resolute Support than any other coalition nation. As of May 2018, the United States was contributing 54 percent of Resolute Support military personnel, according to DOD reporting. Of the approximately 14,000 U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan as of June 2018, about 8,500 were assigned to Resolute Support to train, advise, and assist the ANDSF, according to DOD reporting. For fiscal year 2018, Congress appropriated about \$4.67 billion for the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund—the primary mechanism of U.S. financial support for manning, training, and equipping the ANDSF. Other international donors provided about \$800 million, and the Afghan government committed to providing about \$500 million, according to DOD reporting.

Under Resolute Support and the International Security Assistance Force mission that preceded it, CSTC-A is the DOD organization responsible for (1) overseeing efforts to equip and train the ANA and ANP; (2) validating requirements, including equipment requirements; (3) validating existing supply levels; (4) submitting requests to DOD components to contract for procurement of materiel for the ANDSF; and (5) ensuring that the Afghan government appropriately uses and accounts for U.S. funds provided as direct contributions from the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund.¹¹ OSD-P is responsible for developing policy on and conducting oversight of the bilateral security relationship with Afghanistan focused on efforts to develop the Afghan security ministries and their forces.

U.S.-Purchased Equipment for the ANDSF

In August 2017, we reported that the United States had spent almost \$18 billion on equipment and transportation for the ANDSF from fiscal years 2005 through April 2017, representing the second-largest expenditure category from the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund.¹² In that report, we

¹¹SIGAR, *Procurement of Afghan Army Uniforms: Poor Decisions and Questionable Contracting Processes Added \$28 Million to Procurement Costs*, SIGAR 17-58-TY (July 25, 2017).

¹²See [GAO-17-667R](#). We reported that the largest Afghanistan Security Forces Fund expenditure category for this time period was for sustainment, which includes salaries, ammunition, equipment maintenance, information technology, and clothing. According to a DOD Comptroller official, disbursements for transportation were for costs related to transporting equipment and for contracted pilots and airplanes for transporting officials to meetings.

identified six types of key equipment the United States funded for the ANDSF in fiscal years 2003 through 2016, including approximately:

- 600,000 weapons, such as rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, shotguns, and pistols;
- 163,000 tactical and nontactical radios, such as handheld radios and base stations;
- 76,000 vehicles, such as Humvees, trucks, recovery vehicles, and mine resistant ambush protected vehicles;
- 30,000 equipment items for detecting and disposing of explosives, such as bomb disposal robots and mine detectors;
- 16,000 equipment items for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, such as unmanned surveillance drones and night vision devices; and
- 208 aircraft, such as helicopters, light attack aircraft, and cargo airplanes.

ANDSF Organization and Force Levels

The Ministry of Defense oversees the ANA, and the Ministry of the Interior oversees the ANP. According to DOD reporting, the authorized force level for the ANDSF, excluding civilians, as of June 2018 was 352,000:¹³ 227,374 for the Ministry of Defense and 124,626 for the Ministry of Interior.¹⁴ The ANA includes the ANA corps, Afghan Air Force, Special Mission Wing, ANA Special Operations Command, and Ktah Khas (counterterrorism forces).¹⁵ The ANP includes the Afghan Uniformed

¹³Authorized force level is the number of personnel the ANDSF is authorized to have; it does not reflect the actual number of personnel assigned to the ANDSF. According to SIGAR reporting, as of January 2018, the ANDSF's assigned strength was 313,728, excluding civilians.

¹⁴In addition, the United States funds the Afghan Local Police, which are in the Ministry of Interior chain of command but are not part of the ANDSF's authorized force level. As of June 2018, the Afghan Local Police were authorized to have up to 30,000 personnel. The Ministry of Interior also oversees the Afghan Public Protection Force, which is not part of the ANDSF's authorized force level and does not receive any U.S. funding. As of June 2018, the Afghan Public Protection Force was authorized to have up to 13,712 personnel.

¹⁵The Ktah Khas is a light infantry special operations battalion that performs counterterrorism raids. In addition, DOD reports that a new ANA unit, the ANA Territorial Force, will be piloted in 2018 to provide local security. If successful, it will become a permanent force structure starting in 2019.

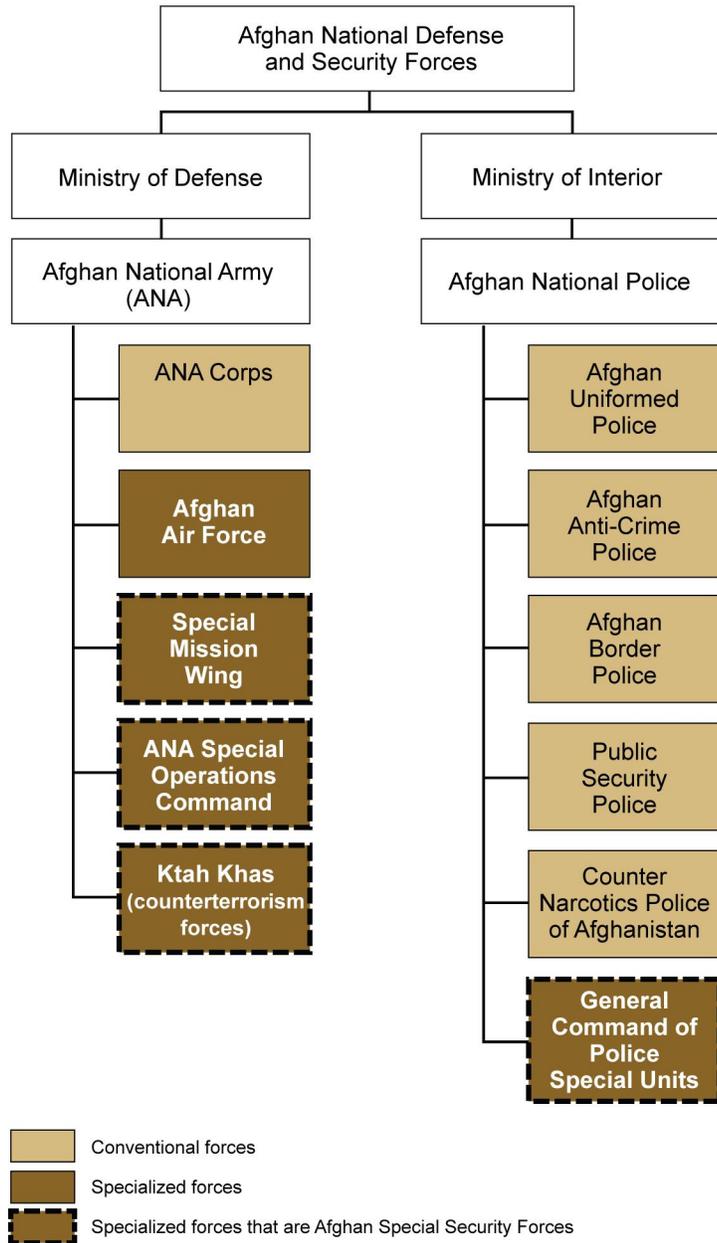
Police, Afghan Anti-Crime Police, Afghan Border Police, Public Security Police, Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan, and General Command of Police Special Units.¹⁶

The ANA Special Mission Wing, Ktah Khas, ANA Special Operations Command, and ANP General Command of Police Special Units are collectively referred to as the Afghan Special Security Forces. In this report, we refer to the Afghan Air Force and the Afghan Special Security Forces as specialized forces, and the other components of the ANDSF as conventional forces. According to DOD reporting, the combined authorized force level for the specialized forces as of June 2018 was approximately 34,500, or about 10 percent of the ANDSF's total authorized force level of 352,000, compared with the conventional forces, which make up about 74 percent of the total authorized force level for the ANDSF.¹⁷ Figure 1 shows the ANDSF's organization.

¹⁶According to DOD reporting, the majority of the Afghan Border Police transferred to the ANA in December 2017 and were renamed the Afghan Border Force. These forces report to the ANA corps. In addition, the Public Security Police were formerly called the Afghan National Civil Order Police, the majority of which transferred to the ANA in March 2018. These transferred components were renamed the Afghan National Civil Order Force, and they report to the ANA corps.

¹⁷The remaining portion of the authorized ANDSF force level (about 16 percent) includes ministry headquarters staff, general staff, intermediate command staff, unassigned staff, and staff who are in training.

Figure 1: Afghan National Defense and Security Forces Organization Chart



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense reports. | GAO-19-116

Resolute Support Advising Strategy and Goals

U.S. and coalition advisors from Resolute Support focus on capacity building at the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, and ANDSF regional headquarters, according to DOD reporting. Ministerial advisors are located at Resolute Support headquarters in Kabul. At the ministerial level, advisors provide assistance to improve institutional capabilities, focusing on several functional areas. Table 1 summarizes the indicators of effectiveness that ministerial advisors are to use to measure ministerial progress in developing functioning systems that can effectively execute each of the functional areas.

Table 1: Resolute Support Advising Functional Areas and Effectiveness Indicators for Security Force Assistance Provided to Afghan Security Ministries

Functional area	Indicators of effectiveness summary
Resource management	Ability to generate requirements, develop a resource-informed budget, and execute spend plans and procurement.
Transparency, accountability, and oversight	Establish effective accountability oversight processes and processes to reduce fraud, waste, and abuse.
Rule of law and governance	Ability to combat corruption and investigate human rights violations and other violations of international law.
Force development	Ability to recruit, train, retain, manage, and develop qualified personnel to meet manpower requirements; create a sustainable training landscape; and manage employment along career paths to create a capable and enduring leadership force.
Operational sustainment and logistics	Ability to sustain the force through effective logistics, maintenance, medical, information, communications, and technology systems at all levels.
Command and control operations	Ability to develop, coordinate, and execute guidance and strategic planning documents throughout the ministries and at various levels of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police.
Intelligence	Sufficient organizations, systems, and processes to establish a sustainable intelligence enterprise.
Strategic communications	Ability to develop communication plans to inform and communicate within the Afghan security ministries.
Gender integration and mainstreaming	Effective processes to integrate women into the force and eliminate gender-based violence and harassment.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information. | GAO-19-116

Regional Resolute Support advisors from seven advising centers located throughout Afghanistan provide support to nearby ANA corps and ANP zone headquarters personnel, according to DOD reporting. Some advisors are embedded with their ANDSF counterparts, providing a continuous coalition presence, while others provide less frequent support, based on proximity to and capability of their ANDSF counterparts.

Regional advisors are to track ANDSF capability development by assessing the progress of the ANA corps and ANP zone headquarters based on five capability pillars (see table 2). DOD and other Resolute Support advisors are to document the results of these assessments each quarter in an ANDSF Assessment Report.¹⁸

Table 2: Capability Pillars Used in Resolute Support Quarterly Progress Assessments of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

Capability pillar	Description
Leadership	Ability of the commander and subordinate leaders (including staff primaries) to demonstrate a mastery of their functional area, and provide purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish all assigned tasks and missions while being accountable for their actions and responsibilities.
Combined arms operations	Ability to field and integrate new systems and develop the capability to bring all available forces, assets, and enabler systems to bear effectively.
Command and control	Exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over all assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of a mission.
Personnel and training	Ability to conduct individual and collective mission-focused training, institutional training, and to assess and maintain proficiency on all critical tasks.
Sustainment	Ability to sustain training and operational missions independently.

Source: Department of Defense (DOD). | GAO-19-116

According to DOD reporting, in addition to ministerial and regional advising, two tactical-level advisory commands provide continuous support for the ANDSF’s specialized forces: Train, Advise, and Assist Command–Air (TAAC–Air) advises the Afghan Air Force down to the unit level, and NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (NSOCC–A) primarily provides tactical-level special operations advising for the Afghan Special Security Forces.¹⁹ TAAC–Air and NSOCC–A assess capabilities at the headquarters level based on the five capability pillars described above in table 2, and these assessments are included in the quarterly ANDSF Assessment Report.²⁰ Figure 2 shows the levels of

¹⁸Before December 2016, this report was produced monthly and called the Monthly ANDSF Assessment Report, or the MAAR. This report is published in DOD’s semiannual reports to Congress and is classified. For the purposes of summarizing capabilities and capability gaps in this report, we relied on unclassified DOD reporting and interviews with DOD officials.

¹⁹NSOCC–A also advises the Afghan Local Police, but at the staff-directorate level, which is similar to the ANP zone level.

²⁰NSOCC–A assesses the capabilities of the Ktah Khas at the battalion level, since it consists of only one battalion.

advising each Resolute Support advisory command type provides for the ANDSF conventional forces and specialized forces.

Figure 2: Levels of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces Advising, by Resolute Support Mission Advisory Command Type

Advising level	Resolute Support Mission Advising Entity			
	Ministerial advisors	Regional advisors	Train, Advise, Assist Command–Air	North Atlantic Treaty Organization Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan
Strategic (e.g., national)	Ministries of Defense and Interior			
Operational (e.g., zone/corps headquarters)		Conventional Army and Police Forces	Air Force	Special Security Forces
Tactical (e.g., frontline units)			Air Force	Special Security Forces

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense reports. | GAO-19-116

ANDSF Capabilities Reportedly Continue to Improve; DOD Has Identified Several Capability Gaps and Initiated Efforts to Address Them

DOD Has Reported the ANDSF Generally Continue to Improve Their Capabilities but Rely on Coalition Forces to Fill Several Critical Capability Gaps

Since Resolute Support began, the ANDSF have improved some capabilities related to the functional areas and capability pillars described above, but face several capability gaps that leave them reliant on coalition assistance, according to publicly available DOD reporting. DOD defines *capability* as the ability to execute a given task. A capability gap is the inability to execute a specified course of action, such as an ANDSF functional area or a capability pillar (see tables 1 and 2 above). According to DOD guidance, a gap may occur because forces lack a materiel or

non-materiel capability, lack proficiency or sufficiency in a capability, or need to replace an existing capability solution to prevent a future gap from occurring.²¹

According to DOD reporting on the Afghan security ministries, ANA corps, and ANP zones, the ANDSF generally have improved in some capability areas since Resolute Support began, with some components performing better than others. For example, DOD has reported that the Afghan ministries have improved in operational planning, strategic communications, and coordination between the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense at the national level. In general, the ANA is more capable than the ANP, according to DOD reporting. According to DOD officials and SIGAR reporting, this is due, in part, to the ANA having more coalition advisors and monitoring than the ANP. DOD officials also noted that the Ministry of Interior, which oversees the ANP, and Afghanistan's justice system are both underdeveloped, hindering the effectiveness of the ANP. Corruption, understaffing, and training shortfalls have also contributed to the ANP's underdevelopment, according to DOD and SIGAR reporting. The Afghan Special Security Forces are the most capable within the ANDSF and can conduct the majority of their operations independently without coalition enablers, according to DOD reporting. DOD and SIGAR reports have attributed the Afghan Special Security Forces' relative proficiency to factors such as low attrition rates, longer training, and close partnership with coalition forces. The Afghan Air Force is becoming increasingly capable, and can independently plan for and perform some operational tasks, such as armed overwatch and aerial escort missions, according to DOD reporting.

However, DOD has reported that the ANDSF generally continue to need support in several key areas. For example, as of December 2017, DOD reported several ministerial capability gaps, including force management; logistics; and analyzing and integrating intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance information. DOD also reported that, as of December 2017, the ANA and ANP continued to have capability gaps in several key areas, such as weapons and equipment sustainment and integrating fire from aerial and ground forces. The ANDSF rely on support from contractors and coalition forces to mitigate capability gaps in these key areas. For some capability areas, such as aircraft and vehicle

²¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3170.011, *Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System* (Jan. 23, 2015).

maintenance and logistics, the ANDSF is not expected to be self-sufficient until at least 2023, according to DOD reporting.

According to DOD officials and SIGAR reporting, coalition and contractor support helps mitigate ANDSF capability gaps in the immediate term but may make it challenging to assess the ANDSF's capabilities and gaps independent of such support. For example, vehicle and aircraft maintenance contractors are responsible for sustaining specific operational readiness rates for the equipment they service. While this helps ensure that ANDSF personnel have working equipment to accomplish their mission, thereby closing an immediate capability gap, it may mask the ANDSF's underlying capabilities and potentially prolong reliance on such support, according to DOD officials and SIGAR reporting.

DOD and the ANDSF Have Plans and Initiatives in Place to Address Some ANDSF Capability Gaps

DOD and the ANDSF have begun implementing plans and initiatives that aim to strengthen ANDSF capabilities. These include the following, among others:

- **ANDSF Roadmap.** In 2017, the Afghan government began implementing the ANDSF Roadmap—a series of developmental initiatives that seek to strengthen the ANDSF and increase security and governance in Afghanistan, according to DOD reporting. The Roadmap is structured to span 4 years, but DOD has reported that its full implementation will likely take longer than that. According to DOD reporting, the Roadmap aims to improve four key elements: (1) fighting capabilities; (2) leadership development; (3) unity of command and effort; and (4) counter-corruption efforts.

Under the Roadmap's initiative to increase the ANDSF's fighting capabilities, DOD and the ANDSF have begun implementing plans to increase the size of the specialized forces. Specifically, DOD reports that the ANDSF plans to nearly double the size of the Afghan Special Security Forces by 2020 as an effort to bolster the ANDSF's offensive reach and effectiveness. The Afghan Special Security Forces are to become the ANDSF's primary offensive force, the conventional ANA forces are to focus on consolidating gains and holding key terrain and infrastructure, and the conventional ANP forces are to focus on community policing efforts. In addition, to provide additional aerial fire and airlift capabilities, the ANDSF began implementing an aviation

modernization plan in 2017. The aim is to increase personnel strength and the size of the Afghan Air Force and Special Mission Wing fleets by 2023.

- **Enhanced vehicle maintenance efforts.** To help improve the ANDSF's vehicle maintenance abilities, DOD awarded a National Maintenance Strategy Ground Vehicle Support contract, which, according to DOD officials, became fully operational in December 2017. The National Maintenance Strategy Ground Vehicle Support contract consolidated five separate vehicle maintenance and training contracts into a single contract and contains provisions for building the capacity of ANDSF and Afghan contractors to incrementally take control of vehicle maintenance over a 5-year period.
- **Additional U.S. military personnel.** As part of the South Asia strategy, the United States committed 3,500 additional military personnel to increase support to its missions in Afghanistan. According to DOD reporting, most of the additional personnel will support the Resolute Support mission, providing more advising and combat enabler support to the ANDSF. Additionally, in March 2018, the United States began deploying a Security Force Assistance Brigade—a new type of unit made up of U.S. Army personnel with expertise in training foreign militaries—to Afghanistan. The Security Force Assistance Brigade will advise conventional and specialized forces at and below the corps and zone levels and will accompany and support ANA conventional forces at the battalion level in ground operations as needed, according to DOD and SIGAR reporting.

DOD Has Some Information on ANDSF Specialized Forces' Ability to Operate and Maintain U.S.-Purchased Equipment but Has Limited Reliable Information on Its Conventional Forces

DOD Advisors Embedded with Specialized Forces Provide Some Information on Those Forces' Capabilities

DOD collects some reliable information about the operation and maintenance abilities of ANDSF specialized forces, in part because advisors are embedded at the tactical level with the specialized forces,

according to DOD officials. Specifically, U.S. and coalition forces advise specialized forces at the tactical level under Resolute Support because building ANDSF aviation and special operations abilities are considered particularly important, according to DOD reporting. DOD officials told us that since U.S. and coalition forces are embedded at the tactical level for specialized forces, they can monitor, assess, and report on tactical abilities, including the ability to operate and maintain equipment.

Our analysis of information provided by DOD about the Afghan Air Force's ability to operate and maintain MD-530 helicopters illustrates that DOD has some detailed information about specialized forces. TAAC-Air advisors help train Afghan pilots and maintainers and collect information on their tactical abilities. For example, TAAC-Air advisors track the percentage of maintenance performed by Afghan Air Force maintainers and aircraft operational readiness rates, according to DOD officials. According to DOD reporting and officials, as of December 2017, the Afghan Air Force could independently conduct MD-530 helicopter operations for short intervals without contractor support but relied on contractors to perform the majority of maintenance and sustainment activities. See appendix II for more information on the Afghan Air Force's ability to operate and maintain MD-530 helicopters.

DOD Advisors Have Limited Contact with Conventional Forces in the Field, Yielding Little Information on Their Ability to Operate and Maintain Equipment

U.S. and coalition forces perform high-level assessments of the ANDSF conventional forces' capabilities at the corps and zone levels but do not assess their tactical abilities, such as the ability to operate and maintain equipment, according to DOD officials. For example, U.S. and coalition forces assess the ANA and ANP conventional forces in quarterly ANDSF Assessment Reports, but these reports are at the corps and zone headquarters levels, and are not meant to provide an evaluation of the entire ANDSF, according to DOD reporting. DOD officials stated that other U.S.- and coalition-produced reports and assessments, such as DOD's semiannual Section 1225 reports to Congress, semiannual periodic mission reviews, and annual Afghanistan Plans of Record, provide some information on the ANDSF's high-level capabilities. However, according to DOD officials, these reports do not routinely assess the conventional forces' ability to operate and maintain equipment.

According to DOD officials, DOD does not assess conventional forces' tactical abilities because advisors have had little or no direct contact with conventional units below the corps and zone levels, and thus do not collect such information on conventional forces. Specifically, under Resolute Support, U.S. and coalition forces have not embedded with the conventional forces below the corps and zone levels except in limited circumstances.

Since U.S. and coalition forces do not collect firsthand information on the conventional units' tactical abilities, they rely on those units' self-reporting for information on ANDSF abilities below the corps and zone levels, which, according to DOD officials, may be unreliable. ANDSF reporting is not verified by U.S. officials and can be unreliable in its consistency, comprehensiveness, and credibility, according to DOD officials and SIGAR. For example, the ANDSF produce a monthly tracker on vehicle availability, maintenance backlog, repair times, and personnel productivity, but DOD officials told us that the trackers are of questionable accuracy.

Our analysis of information provided by DOD about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain tactical and nontactical radios illustrates the limited amount of information DOD has on ANDSF conventional forces' tactical abilities. Specifically, DOD officials could not say how well ANDSF personnel on the front lines operate radios in the field and had only limited information on the ANDSF's ability to maintain radios. For example, the officials noted that the ANA conventional forces can perform some unit-level radio repairs but that complex ANA radio maintenance and all ANP radio maintenance is conducted by contractors. DOD officials at Resolute Support headquarters told us that they provide ministerial-level advising on how to manage ANDSF radio systems and do not provide tactical advising or inventory control for radios. See appendix III for more information on the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain radios.

Our analysis of information provided by DOD about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain Mobile Strike Force Vehicles (MSFV) highlights the limited amount of information DOD has on ANDSF conventional forces' tactical abilities compared with specialized forces. DOD officials were able to provide operation and maintenance information for MSFVs that had transferred to the specialized forces as of January 2018 but were unable to provide operation and maintenance information for any other MSFVs. The ANDSF began transferring one of the ANDSF's two MSFV brigades from the conventional to specialized forces in August 2017,

according to DOD officials.²² As part of this transfer, NSOCC-A advisors—who provide tactical-level advising for the Afghan Special Security Forces—assumed oversight for the first brigade from Resolute Support headquarters advisors. DOD officials stated that the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain MSFVs in this brigade prior to the transfer was unknown, as neither Resolute Support headquarters nor the ANA had assessed this. The operation and maintenance abilities of the second brigade, which is still in the conventional forces, remains unknown. DOD officials at NSOCC-A were able to provide information such as inventory and mission capability rates for the MSFVs that had transferred, but only for the short period of time the vehicles had been under the control of the specialized forces. DOD officials told us that NSOCC-A plans to collect more information on the specialized forces’ ability to operate and maintain MSFVs as they are transferred. See appendix IV for more information on the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain MSFVs.

In the absence of embedded advisors at the tactical level, DOD has not implemented alternative approaches to collect reliable information about the conventional forces’ ability to operate and maintain equipment. Federal internal control standards state that U.S. agencies should obtain and process reliable information to evaluate performance in achieving key objectives and assessing risks.²³ DOD officials acknowledged that some of the plans described above that DOD and the ANDSF have begun implementing to address capability gaps may provide opportunities for DOD to collect more reliable information on the conventional forces’ ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. For example, the National Maintenance Strategy Ground Vehicle Support contract requires that contractors regularly report the total work orders received, work in progress, and completed maintenance work performed by ANDSF personnel as well as vehicle availability rates, which may be more reliable than the ANDSF’s monthly report on vehicle availability. In addition, the Security Force Assistance Brigade may be able to collect and report on the tactical abilities of units they advise and accompany on missions since they are being deployed at or below the corps and zone levels. However, as of June 2018, DOD officials had not decided which, if any, of these options to pursue. Without reliable information on the equipment

²²According to DOD reporting, the ANDSF plans to transfer the second MSFV brigade in 2018 as part of the ANDSF Roadmap initiative to expand the Afghan Special Security Forces.

²³[GAO-14-704G](#).

operation and maintenance abilities of ANDSF conventional forces, which represent nearly 75 percent of the ANDSF, DOD may be unable to fully evaluate the success of its train, advise, assist, and equip efforts in Afghanistan.

Conclusions

The United States invested nearly \$84 billion in Afghan security in the 17-year period spanning fiscal years 2002 through 2018, but DOD continues to face challenges to developing a self-sustaining ANDSF. While DOD has reported the ANDSF have improved in several capability areas, they continue to face critical capability gaps, impeding their ability to maintain security and stability in Afghanistan independent of U.S. and coalition forces. Moreover, DOD lacks reliable information about the degree to which conventional forces—which make up about three-quarters of the ANDSF—are able to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. This limits DOD's ability to fully evaluate the success of its train, advise, assist, and equip efforts in Afghanistan.

Recommendation for Executive Action

The Secretary of Defense should develop and, as appropriate, implement options for collecting reliable information on the ANDSF conventional forces' ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. (Recommendation 1)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DOD and State for comment. DOD declined to provide written comments specifically on this public version of the report, but DOD's comments on the sensitive version of this report are reprinted in appendix V. The sensitive version of this report included two recommendations, which DOD cited in its comments on the draft of the sensitive report. One of those recommendations related to information that DOD deemed to be sensitive and that must be protected from public disclosure. Therefore, we have omitted that recommendation from DOD's comment letter in appendix V. This omission did not have a material effect on the substance of DOD's comments. In its comments, DOD concurred with the recommendation we made in this version of the report and stated it will take steps to implement it. DOD also provided technical

comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. The Department of State had no comments.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of State. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>. If you or your staff has any questions about this report please contact me at (202) 512-7114 or farbj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix VI.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Farb". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessica Farb
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

House Report 114-537 associated with the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 included a provision for us to review the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces' (ANDSF) capability and capacity to operate and sustain U.S.-purchased weapon systems and equipment. This report is a public version of a sensitive report that we issued on September 20, 2018.¹ Our September report included three objectives, including one on the extent to which DOD considers ANDSF input and meets their needs when identifying equipment requirements. DOD deemed the information related to that objective to be sensitive, which must be protected from public disclosure. Consequently, we removed that objective and a related recommendation from this public report. This version includes information on the other two objectives: (1) what has been reported about ANDSF capabilities and capability gaps and (2) the extent to which DOD has information about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. Although the information provided in this report is more limited, the report uses the same methodology for the two objectives as the sensitive report.

To identify what has been reported about ANDSF capabilities and capability gaps, we reviewed North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and DOD documents and reports, such as DOD's semiannual Section 1225 reports to Congress, produced after the start of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission on January 1, 2015. To determine what steps DOD and NATO have taken to try to address gaps, we reviewed reports the Center for Naval Analyses produced for DOD, as well as DOD and NATO documents and reports produced after January 1, 2015, and reports from GAO, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), and the DOD Inspector General. We also interviewed Center for Naval Analyses representatives and DOD officials in the United States and Afghanistan, including DOD officials at the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and in

¹GAO, *Afghanistan Security: Some Improvements Reported in Afghan Forces' Capabilities, but Actions Needed to Enhance DOD Oversight of U.S.-Purchased Equipment*, [GAO-18-662SU](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 20, 2018).

the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (OSD-P) who helped create the DOD reporting we reviewed.

To determine the extent to which DOD has information about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment, we reviewed DOD documents and reports and interviewed DOD officials in the United States and Afghanistan, including DOD officials who advise the ANDSF. We also reviewed federal internal control standards to determine what responsibilities agencies have specifically related to information collection.² To provide illustrative examples of information DOD has about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment and what that information indicates about the ANDSF's abilities and challenges, we interviewed and analyzed written responses from DOD officials, including DOD officials who provide procurement and lifecycle management for some ANDSF aircraft and vehicles, about three equipment types—MD-530 helicopters, Mobile Strike Force Vehicles (MSFV), and radios. We selected these three equipment types from a list that we developed, for an August 2017 report, of key ANDSF equipment the United States purchased from fiscal years 2003 through 2016.³ We made our selections after reviewing DOD documentation and interviewing DOD officials regarding a number of considerations, such as (1) how critical the equipment is to the ANDSF's ability to achieve its mission; (2) which ANDSF component uses the equipment (i.e., Afghan National Police, Afghan National Army, or both); (3) whether DOD intends to continue procuring the equipment for the ANDSF; and (4) whether the equipment had been in use at least 5 years.

We collected detailed information about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain MD-530 helicopters, MSFVs, and radios, as well as other key statistics DOD provided about the equipment, such as inventory, average lifespan, average cost, role, and training. This information was based mainly on DOD responses collected from January 2018 to February 2018 as well as DOD documents and reports produced after

²GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

³Our analysis of the information DOD has about these three equipment types is not generalizable and is intended to provide context about DOD's information on the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. For our August 2017 report on key ANDSF equipment purchased by the United States, see GAO, *U.S.-Funded Equipment for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces*, [GAO-17-667R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 10, 2017).

January 1, 2015. The total amount of MD-530s and radios authorized for procurement was based on DOD data that we collected for our August 2017 report on key ANDSF equipment the United States purchased in fiscal years 2003 through 2016, which we supplemented with additional data DOD provided on U.S.-purchased equipment from October 1, 2016, through December, 31, 2017.⁴

The performance audit upon which this report is based was conducted from August 2016 to September 2018 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. We subsequently worked with DOD from September 2018 to October 2018 to prepare this public version of the original sensitive report for public release. This public version was also prepared in accordance with those standards.

⁴[GAO-17-667R](#).

Appendix II: MD-530F Cayuse Warrior Helicopter (MD-530)

**Figure 3: Timeline of U.S.-Purchased MD-530 Helicopter Procurement for the
Afghan Air Force**

Figure 4: Afghan Air Force MD-530 Helicopter Pilot Training Timeline

**Figure 5: Afghan Air Force MD-530 Helicopter Maintainer Skill Levels and
Approximate Timeline**

Appendix III: Tactical and Nontactical Radios

Appendix IV: Mobile Strike Force Vehicle (MSFV)

Figure 6: Timeline of U.S.-Purchased Mobile Strike Force Vehicles for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

**Figure 7: National Maintenance Strategy Vehicle Maintenance and Sustainment Skill
Levels and Timeline**

Appendix V: Comments from the Department of Defense

Note: GAO comments
supplementing those in
the report text appear at
the end of this appendix.

See comment 1.



ASIAN AND PACIFIC
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OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2700 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2700

20 AUG 2018

Ms. Jessica Farb
International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)
441 G Street, NW, Room 1808
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farb:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-18-662, "Afghanistan Security: Some Improvements Reported in Afghan Forces' Capabilities, but Actions Needed to Enhance DOD Oversight of U.S.-Purchased Equipment," dated July 20, 2018. After careful review, DoD concurs in both of GAO's recommendations for executive action.

I want to thank the GAO team for its collaboration with DoD on this important review of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces' capability and capacity to operate and sustain U.S.-purchased weapon systems and equipment. As the report notes, DoD relies on Afghan reporting regarding equipment used by Afghan units that do not benefit from persistent U.S. advising. To improve the quality of this reporting, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan personnel operating as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission work closely with the Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior to improve Afghan equipment accountability systems and processes and reporting capabilities. U.S. advisors also make frequent visits to Afghan logistic and sustainment organizations to conduct assessments and identify and implement process improvements. The Department is committed to ensuring that we are using appropriated funds effectively and that DoD advisors continue to build the Afghans' capacity to sustain their warfighters who are engaged in combat against a resilient insurgency.

Thank you for your support for our men and women in uniform.

Sincerely,

Dr. Colin Jackson
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia)



**GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED JULY 20, 2018
GAO-18-662 (GAO CODE 101053)**

“AFGHANISTAN SECURITY: SOME IMPROVEMENTS REPORTED IN AFGHAN FORCES’ CAPABILITIES, BUT ACTIONS NEEDED TO ENHANCE DOD OVERSIGHT OF U.S.-PURCHASED EQUIPMENT”

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

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should develop and, as appropriate, implement options for collecting reliable information on the ANDSF conventional forces' ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur. DoD advisors will continue to work closely with Afghan counterparts to build their capacity to sustain their equipment and their ability to reliably report information on equipment status.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

GAO Comments

1. The GAO report number cited in DOD's letter refers to a draft of the sensitive version of this report, which we issued on September 20, 2018. Prior to issuing that version, we changed its report number to GAO-18-662SU to reflect its sensitive nature. That version of this report included two recommendations. The second recommendation has been omitted from DOD's letter in this public version because it was related to information that DOD deemed to be sensitive.

Appendix VI: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

Jessica Farb, (202) 512-7114 or farbj@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Joyee Dasgupta (Assistant Director), Kara Marshall, Katherine Forsyth, and Bridgette Savino made key contributions to this report. The team also benefitted from the expert advice and assistance of David Dayton, Neil Doherty, Justin Fisher, Ashley Alley, Cary Russell, Marie Mak, James Reynolds, Sally Williamson, Ji Byun, and J. Kristopher Keener.

Appendix VII: Accessible Data

Agency Comment Letter

Accessible Text for Appendix V Comments from the Department of Defense

Page 1

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(Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia)

Page 2

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