

Highlights of [GAO-12-951T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Armed Services Committee, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2002, the United States and other nations have worked to develop ANSF. In 2010, the United States, NATO, and other coalition partners agreed to transition responsibility for the security of Afghanistan from the international community to the Afghan government by the end of 2014. According to NATO, a successful security transition requires ANSF capable of addressing security challenges in Afghanistan. To support its development, the United States has allocated \$43 billion to train, equip, and sustain ANSF from fiscal years 2002 to 2011, appropriated \$11.2 billion in fiscal year 2012, and requested about \$5.8 billion for fiscal year 2013.

To assist Congress in its oversight, GAO has issued over 20 reports and testimonies on ANSF since 2005. This testimony discusses findings from GAO reports and ongoing work that cover (1) progress reported and tools used to assess ANSF capability, (2) challenges affecting the development of capable ANSF, and (3) use of U.S. Security Force Assistance Advisory Teams to advise and assist ANSF. To perform this work, GAO reviewed DOD and NATO documents, and met with officials in Washington, D.C.; Tampa, FL; Brussels, Belgium; and Kabul, Afghanistan.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations but has made numerous recommendations in prior reports aimed at improving efforts to develop ANSF capabilities. DOD has generally concurred with most of these recommendations and has taken or has planned steps to address them.

View [GAO-12-951T](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr. at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov, or Sharon L. Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov.

July 24, 2012

AFGHANISTAN SECURITY

Long-standing Challenges May Affect Progress and Sustainment of Afghan National Security Forces

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) report progress developing capable Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), but tools used to assess the performance of ANSF units have changed several times. In April 2012, DOD reported progress increasing the number and capability of ANSF, with 7 percent of army units and 9 percent of police units rated at the highest level of capability. GAO has previously found the tools used by DOD and NATO to assess ANSF reliable enough to support broad statements regarding capability. However, issues related to these tools exist. When GAO reported on ANA capability in January 2011, the highest capability rating level was “independent”—meaning that a unit was capable of executing the full spectrum of its missions without assistance from coalition forces. As of August 2011, the highest level had changed to “independent with advisors”—meaning that a unit was capable of executing its mission and can call for coalition forces when necessary. DOD reports, these changes, as well as the elimination of certain requirements for validating units, were partly responsible for the increase in ANSF units rated at the highest level.

Several long-standing challenges may affect the sustainment of capable ANSF, including cost, key skill gaps in Afghan forces, and limited ministerial capacity. First, while the Afghan government and coalition partners agreed in May 2012 to a sustainment model for ANSF, with an annual budget of \$4.1 billion, GAO has previously reported the Afghan government has limited ability to financially support its security forces and is dependent on donor contributions. Second, shortfalls in leadership and logistics capabilities in ANSF persist. Addressing such gaps is necessary to reduce ANSF reliance on coalition support. Finally, the Ministries of Defense and Interior—which oversee the Afghan army and police—continue to require coalition support to accomplish their missions. DOD has also reported these ministries face challenges, such as lack of expertise in human capital and problems with corruption. GAO has made recommendations to address these challenges, including addressing shortages of trainers. Since GAO made its recommendations, additional trainers have deployed to Afghanistan.

As part of the overall transition of lead security responsibility to ANSF, starting in early 2012, the Army and Marine Corps began training and deploying small teams of advisors with specialized capabilities, referred to as Security Force Assistance Advisory Teams (SFAATs). These teams will be located throughout Afghanistan and will work with ANSF personnel from the headquarters to the battalion level and advise and assist in areas such as command and control and intelligence. GAO's past work examining the use of training and advisor teams in Iraq and Afghanistan highlighted certain areas relevant to DOD's plans to provide SFAATs in support of the current mission in Afghanistan. For example, GAO found it is important that DOD assign officers and non-commissioned officers to advisor teams in a timely manner so they can train and exercise as a team prior to deployment. In addition, commanders need to set clear priorities between the advising mission and other operational requirements such as counterinsurgency operations. Given the key role of advising teams in supporting the transition process, these areas will be important considerations for DOD as it continues to refine its plans for forming, deploying, and using advisor personnel to mentor and develop the ANSF.