

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



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.