

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2010, the Department of Defense (DOD) spent billions of dollars to move troops and materiel into Afghanistan, a mountainous, land-locked country with poorly developed infrastructure. The increase of 30,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan as of August 2010, along with thousands of civilians and contractors supporting U.S. efforts, have required further development of DOD's already-complex distribution network to support and sustain U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.

GAO conducted this review to assess distribution issues in Afghanistan, including (1) DOD's oversight of distribution operations; (2) DOD's performance in providing supplies and equipment; and (3) challenges that have affected DOD's ability to provide supplies and equipment. GAO reviewed joint doctrine and DOD policies on distribution, analyzed DOD delivery data, and interviewed DOD officials in the United States and in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes 15 recommendations for DOD to clarify its distribution policy, improve documentation of performance, and address several other challenges. DOD concurred or partially concurred with 11 of GAO's recommendations, but did not concur with four recommendations. GAO continues to believe that DOD should implement the recommendations, and GAO's rationale is discussed on the next page.

View [GAO-12-138](#) or key components. For more information, contact William M. Solis at (202) 512-8365 or solisw@gao.gov.

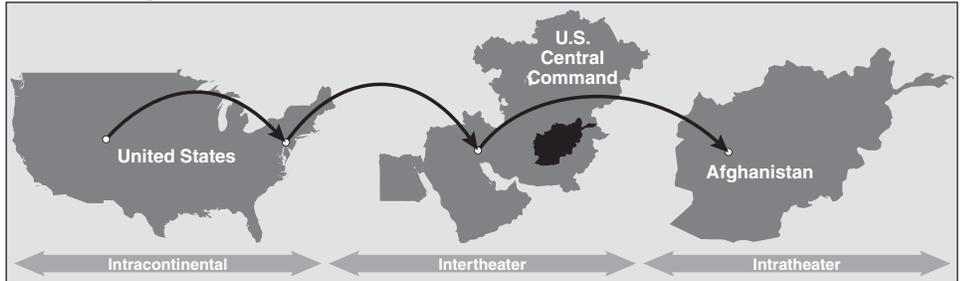
WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

DOD Has Made Progress, but Supply and Distribution Challenges Remain in Afghanistan

What GAO Found

Although U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) has established some processes for oversight, it does not have full oversight of the distribution of supplies and equipment to the warfighter in Afghanistan. DOD's distribution pipeline includes four legs—intracontinental, intertheater, intratheater, and point of employment—and involves numerous organizations responsible for various aspects of the distribution process for delivering supplies and equipment to Afghanistan. TRANSCOM, as DOD's Distribution Process Owner, is responsible for overseeing the overall effectiveness, efficiency, and alignment of DOD-wide distribution activities. However, as applied and interpreted by DOD, TRANSCOM's oversight role does not extend all the way to final delivery to warfighters at forward-based combat outposts. Instead, its oversight efforts terminate at major logistics bases in Afghanistan. The oversight from these bases to combat outposts is carried out at varying levels and without uniformity by U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and its component services. As a result of this fragmented structure, TRANSCOM does not have the ability to conduct its oversight role all the way to final delivery to the warfighter, nor does it have the visibility over distribution performance from major bases to outposts necessary to fully oversee the effectiveness of the DOD-wide distribution system and coordinate potentially necessary improvements to the system.

First Three Legs of Distribution: Intracontinental, Intertheater, and Intratheater



Source: GAO analysis of DOD joint doctrine.

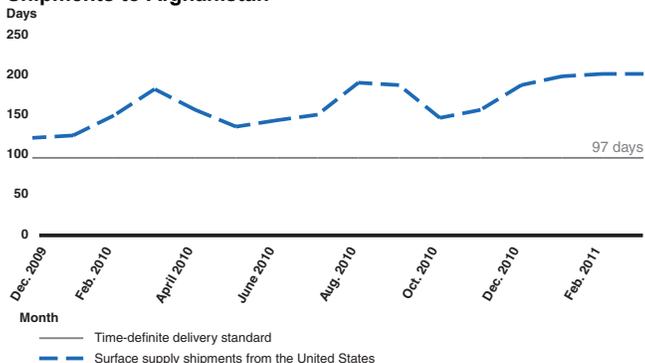
Final Leg of Distribution: Point of Employment



Source: GAO analysis of DOD joint doctrine.

DOD has not always met delivery standards and timelines for shipments to major logistics bases in Afghanistan, and it cannot conduct a full assessment of its delivery performance for surface shipments due to incomplete data. DOD has more frequently met delivery standards for shipments transported by airlift than for shipments transported on surface routes, due in large part to the various difficulties in transporting cargo on surface routes through neighboring countries and inside Afghanistan. For example, from December 2009 through March 2011, surface shipments of requisitioned supplies did not once meet the time-definite delivery standard that calls for 85 percent of shipments to arrive within 97 days of being ordered. In contrast, commercial air shipments from the United States met DOD's delivery standard six times over that time frame.

Number of Days to Deliver 85 Percent of Surface Supply Shipments to Afghanistan



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

Furthermore, data on DOD's performance in meeting its required delivery dates are incomplete. Specifically, 42 percent of unit shipments and 19 percent of sustainment shipments with required delivery dates during 2008 through 2010 did not have a documented delivery date in DOD's shipment database. As a result, the status of these shipments is not clear. For those shipments with complete data from 2008 through 2010, 42 percent of unit shipments and 63 percent of sustainment shipments arrived after their required delivery dates, with the majority of those arriving over 1 week late. Without accurate and complete data on when shipments are delivered, DOD lacks the information needed to assess its performance and to take actions to improve timely delivery of cargo to Afghanistan.

Delivery Status of Surface Shipments to Afghanistan

	2008-2010	
	Number	Percent
Delivery date not documented		
Unit shipments	10,928	42
Sustainment shipments	25,648	19
Delivered late		
Unit shipments	6,396	42
Sustainment shipments	68,634	63

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

DOD has taken some steps to mitigate challenges in distributing materiel to forces operating in Afghanistan, but GAO identified several challenges that continue to hinder the Department's distribution efforts:

- DOD does not have adequate radio-frequency identification information to track all cargo movements into and within Afghanistan.
- DOD does not have a common operating picture for distribution data and integrated transportation systems in support of Afghanistan operations.
- Complex customs clearance processes in Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to delay shipments of supplies and equipment.
- DOD continues to face difficulties in collecting information on all incidents of pilferage and damage of cargo.
- DOD is not effectively tracking and managing cargo containers for Afghanistan operations.

Collectively, these issues will likely continue to affect supply operations in Afghanistan and limit DOD's oversight of the supply chain. As a result, DOD's ability to identify and address gaps in distribution to support current deployments and redeployments, sustainment of deployed units, and any future drawdown efforts may be limited.

GAO's Recommendations for Executive Action

Of the 15 recommendations GAO is making, DOD did not concur with the following four recommendations:

GAO recommends DOD clarify its doctrine on how TRANSCOM is to oversee the overall effectiveness, efficiency, and alignment of DOD-wide distribution activities and to include the final leg of distribution. GAO also recommends TRANSCOM improve its distribution metrics by receiving and including data for shipments from major bases to outposts in Afghanistan. In addition, GAO recommends DOD develop the necessary policies and procedures to ensure a sufficient level of data is entered onto radio-frequency identification tags.

DOD did not concur with the recommendations mentioned above and stated that, based on current guidance, TRANSCOM as Distribution Process Owner does not have oversight over the final leg of distribution and already tracks delivery standards for shipments to Afghanistan. DOD also stated that adequate policy and procedures exist for entering data onto radio-frequency tags.

DOD's approach of limiting the Distribution Process Owner's oversight to only the first three distribution legs leaves a fragmented process without any comprehensive oversight or visibility over the entire DOD-wide global distribution pipeline. In addition, although policy may be clear on what radio-frequency data is required, steps to ensure that requirements are met are not clearly implemented. As such, GAO continues to support these recommendations.