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Washington, DC 20548

September 5, 2006

The Honorable John Warner
Chairman
The Honorable Carl Levin
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Duncan L. Hunter
Chairman
The Honorable Ike Skelton
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Subject: Defense Logistics: Changes to Stryker Vehicle Maintenance Support Should Identify Strategies for Addressing Implementation Challenges

As part of the Army's ongoing transformation efforts, in October 1999 the Army announced the Stryker brigade concept. The Stryker brigade is a unit designed to provide the Army with a rapidly deployable force that is capable of operating against the full spectrum of military threats. To meet the Army's requirements for being rapidly deployable and combat capable, the Stryker brigade relies on new sustainment concepts, such as minimizing the number of personnel and spare parts within the brigade and reaching back to assets outside the brigade for support, which are not found in other existing Army brigades. In a span of 6 years, the Army announced its intention to create a new brigade, chose a vehicle, tested the operational concept, and deployed three brigades in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Army is also sending one Stryker brigade for a second rotation to Iraq and is developing four additional Stryker brigades.

To support the accelerated development and deployment timeline, the Army relied on contractors to support some equipment within the Stryker brigade, such as the Stryker vehicle and computer and communication systems. The largest group of contractor support within the brigade focuses on the Stryker vehicle, and the duties of those contractor personnel include conducting maintenance on the Stryker vehicle and managing the Stryker-specific supply chain. An Army official from the office of

the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology stated that at the time the first brigade deployed, the Army did not have the institutional capacity to train soldiers on conducting Stryker vehicle maintenance, and it faced an immediate need for maintenance personnel to support the deployment. This official also stated that the Army has since developed the institutional capacity to train soldiers to conduct Stryker vehicle maintenance.

On November 1, 2005, the Army directed changes to Stryker vehicle support. One of these planned changes is to replace the Stryker vehicle maintenance contractor personnel within the brigade with soldiers. Army officials stated that the Army's general preference is to use soldiers instead of contractor personnel, and the specific rationale for making this change is to increase the flexibility of the Stryker brigade to perform in different combat missions. The Army expects to begin implementing this change by fiscal year 2008.

We initiated this work under the statutory authority of the Comptroller General to conduct evaluations on his own initiative and are providing this report to you because of your committees' oversight responsibility. We reviewed issues related to implementing the Army's planned change to use soldiers, rather than contractors, to conduct maintenance on the Stryker vehicle and specifically assessed the extent to which the Army's planned change will achieve the desired outcome when implemented.

To assess the extent to which the Army's planned change will achieve its desired outcome, we reviewed Stryker vehicle maintenance support contracts and documents related to the Army's plan for implementing its proposed changes to Stryker vehicle support. We also obtained documentation and met with personnel from three Stryker brigades, representatives from the vehicle maintenance contractor, and officials at Army Headquarters and from various Army major commands. We conducted our review from September 2005 to June 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results in Brief

The Army's change from contractor personnel to soldiers conducting maintenance on the Stryker vehicle may not fully achieve its intended outcome of increasing the brigade's flexibility to perform in different types of combat operations. We identified three potential challenges that may affect the Army's ability to achieve its intended outcome. First, personnel challenges may affect implementation of the planned change. Since vehicle maintenance contractors focus solely on the Stryker vehicle while soldiers perform a variety of tasks in addition to maintenance, the Army's plan replaces the existing 45 Stryker vehicle maintenance contractor personnel with 71 soldiers. Accordingly, to implement its plan, the Army must annually recruit or retain 497 additional soldiers with specific military specialties to support all seven Stryker brigades. As we have previously reported,¹ some of these specialties have been

¹GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Needs Action Plan to Address Enlisted Personnel Recruitment and Retention Challenges*, GAO-06-134 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 17, 2005). Contractors would be replaced with soldiers from five military occupational specialties. We found that the Army has consistently been

consistently underfilled. The Army also may experience difficulties in sustaining soldier skills and knowledge on Stryker vehicle maintenance, due to the limited number of Stryker brigades combined with regularly scheduled transfers of soldiers among units. However, the Army's plan does not include strategies to (1) enable it to recruit and retain the soldiers necessary to implement this change or (2) sustain soldier skills and knowledge on Stryker vehicle maintenance. Second, the Army's plan increases the size of the brigade, and transporting the additional personnel and their associated equipment may exacerbate the existing difficulties in meeting deployment timelines that we have previously reported.² Deploying the Stryker brigade anywhere in the world within 96 hours is a component of the Stryker brigade's flexibility. However, the Army's plan does not address the effect of the increased logistical footprint on the brigade's ability to deploy within 96 hours. Finally, since the Stryker brigade was designed with a limited ability to perform major combat operations, achieving the Army's desired flexibility requires the Stryker brigade to receive additional sustainment support from Army units external to the brigade in order for it to perform a major combat operation. However, the Army has not addressed this support in its planned change. Until the Army addresses all of these challenges as part of its planned change, it may not achieve its intended outcome of increasing the Stryker brigade's flexibility to perform in different types of combat operations.

Accordingly, we are making recommendations to the Secretary of Defense to direct the Secretary of the Army to develop and include, as part of the Army's planning process for changes to Stryker vehicle support, (1) strategies to enable the Army to recruit and retain the additional soldiers needed to implement the changes, in light of existing personnel challenges; (2) strategies to sustain Army skills and knowledge on Stryker vehicle maintenance, given the limited number of Stryker brigades; (3) an assessment of the effects of an increased logistical footprint, such as the need for additional airlift, on the brigade's deployment timeline; and (4) plans to ensure the Stryker brigade can receive additional sustainment support so that the brigade can participate in major combat operations.

In commenting on a draft of this report, the Department of Defense (DOD) partially concurred with our recommendations, but said that no additional direction was required because the Army could achieve its missions using existing processes and strategies for recruiting and training soldiers and deploying and supporting the Stryker brigade. We continue to believe that our recommendations have merit and that the Army should identify strategies for addressing these implementation challenges. DOD's comments are reprinted in enclosure I and our evaluation of its comments is on page 12.

unable to fill one of these specialties. The Army also experienced challenges filling the other four specialties in fiscal year 2005.

²GAO, *Military Transformation: Realistic Deployment Timelines Needed for Army Stryker Brigades*, GAO-03-801 (Washington, D.C.: June 30, 2003).

Background

As part of the Army's ongoing efforts to transform its forces, in October 1999 the Army announced the creation of a new brigade that would provide a lighter and more rapidly deployable force, capable of operating against the full spectrum of military threats, ranging from small-scale contingencies to a major theater war. This brigade—known as the Stryker brigade—was designed to balance lethality, mobility, and survivability with the capabilities required for responsiveness, deployability, sustainability, and a reduced in-theater footprint. By February 2009, the Army plans to create a total of seven Stryker brigades, of which three have been completed and deployed to Iraq. These brigades will be stationed inside and outside the continental United States. Each of the seven Stryker brigades is expected to have approximately 320 Stryker vehicles, of which there are 10 variants that use a common vehicle platform. A total of 2,559 Stryker vehicles have been funded, and 8 of the 10 Stryker vehicle variants³ have been distributed to Army units. Additionally, Stryker vehicles are used by other organizations, such as Special Operations Command, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, and Air Force Tactical Air Control Parties.⁴

Currently, contractors support some equipment within the Stryker brigade, and the largest group provides maintenance support for the Stryker vehicle. These 45 contractor personnel, who are embedded in the Stryker brigade, are centrally managed by the Stryker brigade support battalion, and the brigade support battalion commander directs the priority of Stryker vehicle maintenance.⁵ Army officials stated that the Stryker vehicle contractor personnel perform duties associated with several Army military occupational specialties,⁶ to include conducting maintenance on the Stryker vehicle and some subsystems and ordering and tracking Stryker vehicle spare parts. Army officials stated that this contracted maintenance support exceeded the Army-established performance goal of maintaining a 90 percent operational readiness rate.⁷ For the first two Stryker brigades that deployed to Iraq, Army officials reported operational readiness rates for the Stryker vehicle averaging 96 percent from October 2003 through September 2005. Contractor personnel were able to exceed the Army's performance goal of maintaining a 90 percent operational readiness rate despite the

³The Stryker vehicle variants are: (1) Infantry Carrier Vehicle; (2) Medical Evacuation Vehicle; (3) Reconnaissance Vehicle; (4) Commander's Vehicle; (5) Mortar Carrier Vehicle; (6) Antitank Guided Missile Vehicle; (7) Engineer Squad Vehicle; (8) Fire Support Vehicle; (9) Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Reconnaissance Vehicle; and (10) the Mobile Gun System. The Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Reconnaissance Vehicle and Mobile Gun System are in various stages of development and testing.

⁴Other Stryker vehicles are dedicated as Operational Readiness Float (ORF) and Ready-to-Fight (RTF) equipment. ORFs are vehicles that are maintained by the brigade and used at the brigade commander's discretion. There are approximately 10 ORF vehicles per Stryker brigade. The RTF fleet vehicles are used to replenish the ORF. Army officials said that they intend to create three RTF fleets, each with 14 vehicles.

⁵There are 30 contractors that provide support to various Army computer and communication systems in the Stryker brigade. These contractors are not embedded in the Stryker brigade and are centrally managed by brigade logistics support teams that are controlled by the Army Materiel Command.

⁶Stryker vehicle contractor personnel perform duties that are similar to five military occupational specialties: wheeled vehicle mechanic (63B), fire control repair (45G), armament repair (45K), automated logistics specialist (92A), and unit supply specialist (92Y).

⁷The operational readiness rate requirement in the contract is specific to the Stryker vehicle and does not include all of the subsystems on the vehicle. For example, the Stryker vehicle maintenance contractor is responsible for the engine, chassis, and wheels, but is not responsible for communications equipment.

5.6 million miles driven by the Stryker vehicle during the first two deployments, which Army officials estimated to be 800 percent higher than anticipated peacetime usage.

Army personnel in the Stryker brigades also expressed satisfaction with the performance of the Stryker vehicle's contracted support and provided several explanations for the quality of support, noting that the contractors were knowledgeable about maintenance issues; were able to deliver parts faster than the standard Army supply system; provided the Stryker brigades with information on the status of maintenance and repair parts in the frequency and manner requested; and focused exclusively on performing Stryker vehicle maintenance tasks. Army officials also stated that the use of contractor personnel enabled soldiers to dedicate more time to train on soldier skills and perform other missions, such as guard duty and convoy escort. Because Stryker vehicle contractors were able to focus on the Stryker vehicle, soldiers were able to perform these additional tasks without degrading the quality of maintenance on the Stryker vehicle. Additionally, Army officials praised the ongoing collaborative relationship between the Stryker brigade and the contractors, observing that the contractors worked with the soldiers while in garrison. As we have previously reported,⁸ contractors deployed with a Stryker brigade to Army training centers. This preexisting relationship ensured a working collaboration between soldiers and contractors before the brigades deployed to Iraq.

The Army directed that the Stryker vehicle maintenance contractor personnel embedded at the brigade level be replaced with soldiers in order to increase the Stryker brigade's flexibility to perform in different combat operations.⁹ Army officials stated that the plan to transition to soldier maintenance is based on the Army's preference to minimize the number of contractors in forward locations in order to increase flexibility in different combat situations. Based on our review and discussions with various Army officials, this decision to transition was not predicated on the costs of providing support. Army officials specifically cited the march to Baghdad conducted by other Army units during Operation Iraqi Freedom as the type of combat operation the brigade could have the flexibility to perform with the transition from contractor to soldier maintenance.¹⁰ The Army is still developing the plan for transitioning from contractor to soldier field-level maintenance, and one of its assumptions is that its plan will be properly resourced, to include the necessary personnel and funding. The Army intends to begin this transition by fiscal year 2008, and is expected to finalize its plan in 2006.

⁸GAO, *Military Transformation: The Army and OSD Met Legislative Requirements for First Stryker Brigade Design Evaluation, but Issues Remain for Future Brigades*, GAO-04-188 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 12, 2003).

⁹The Army's plan will also reduce the number of contractors that provide support to Army computer and communication systems from 30 to 17.

¹⁰DOD officials also stated that the transition to soldier maintainers would improve the Stryker brigade's deployability in a broader range of environments and conditions, thereby improving the brigade's strategic and operational capability.

Changes to Stryker Vehicle Maintenance Support May Not Achieve Intended Outcome

The Army may be unable to fully achieve the increased flexibility intended by the change to Stryker vehicle maintenance support due to three challenges. First, the Army's ability to replace contractor personnel with soldiers may be affected by personnel challenges, particularly with respect to the recruitment and retention of additional soldiers, as well as sustaining soldier skills and knowledge on Stryker vehicle maintenance. Second, the increased size of the brigade resulting from additional soldiers may exacerbate the brigade's existing difficulty in meeting its 96-hour deployment goal. Third, the planned change does not include additional sustainment support from Army units external to the brigade that could enable the Army to fully achieve the desired flexibility for the Stryker brigade to perform in major combat operations.

Personnel Challenges May Affect Implementation of Change

Two personnel challenges may affect the Army's ability to implement the change to replace the contractors with soldiers. First, recruiting or retaining the additional soldiers needed for the planned change is a challenge that could affect implementation. According to Army officials, there are currently a total of 45 Stryker vehicle maintenance contractor personnel within each Stryker brigade. To implement the change and have soldiers fill the functions provided by these contractor personnel, the Army plans to add 71 soldiers of different specialties for each Stryker brigade, or a total of 497 soldiers for all seven brigades.¹¹ Recruiting these additional soldiers may be a challenge because, as we have previously reported,¹² the Army faced difficulties in meeting its recruiting goals in fiscal year 2005 (92 percent of target). With the transition from contractor personnel to soldiers, the maintenance and supply tasks currently performed by contractor personnel within the brigade would be conducted by soldiers from five military occupational specialties. Army officials acknowledged that there is a general shortage in maintenance capability across the Army. Additionally, as we have previously reported,¹³ the Army has consistently been unable to fill one of these five specialties. Further, all of these specialties were underfilled in fiscal year 2005. If the Army is unable to find soldiers in these specialties and assign them to the Stryker brigade, the brigade may not have enough people to perform Stryker vehicle maintenance.

The second personnel challenge is the ability of soldiers to develop and sustain skills and knowledge on the maintenance of the Stryker vehicle. Army officials noted that the contractor personnel's exclusive focus on the Stryker vehicle increased their expertise on the system, so they became more knowledgeable about maintenance issues. In contrast, soldiers usually work on a system for about 3 years and then leave the unit because of promotion or a scheduled transfer to another unit. For vehicles

¹¹ Army officials told us that replacing the contractor vehicle maintenance personnel with soldiers would require more than a one-for-one swap. As noted earlier, the vehicle maintenance contractors focus solely on the Stryker vehicle while soldiers perform a variety of tasks in addition to maintenance, to include training, guard duty, and other missions.

¹² GAO-06-134, p. 8.

¹³ GAO-06-134, p. 52.

that are common throughout the Army, soldiers can transfer to another unit and then continue to perform maintenance and develop skills and knowledge on that same vehicle. However, since there will be only seven Stryker brigades, building long-term expertise on the Stryker vehicle would require ensuring that the soldiers conducting Stryker vehicle maintenance are only transferred among the different Stryker brigades. Without long-term personnel management to target soldiers' transfers, the Army may face difficulties in developing and sustaining its skills and knowledge on the Stryker vehicle.

Changes May Exacerbate Existing Difficulties in Meeting Deployment Timelines

The increased size of the Stryker brigade associated with additional soldiers may exacerbate the brigade's existing difficulties in meeting its deployment timelines. According to its organizational and operational concept, the Stryker brigade is designed as an early entry combat force that is intended to deploy within 96 hours of "first aircraft wheels up" and to begin operations immediately upon arrival in theater. Army officials told us that the reason for the 96-hour goal is to deter conflict and promote peace by getting the brigade into the theater quickly. However, as we noted in our earlier report¹⁴ on Stryker brigade deployment timelines, airlift shortages already preclude meeting the 4-day deployment goal, which would require transporting about 15,000 tons of vehicles, equipment, and supplies and about 3,900 personnel. In its response to that report, DOD stated that the Army continues to maintain an overall Stryker brigade program goal of deploying the brigade anywhere in the world in 96 hours and is working with other services to address transportation constraints.

Army officials told us that each Stryker brigade would require more soldiers than the existing number of contractor personnel they were replacing because contractors focus on their specific tasks, while soldiers must perform other activities in addition to their maintenance duties. To support these additional soldiers, Army officials estimated an 8 percent increase in the amount of equipment and supplies required by the brigade. Some items that increase when the brigade adds soldiers include more wheeled vehicles to support the new soldiers as well as additional maintenance parts, fuel, food, and headquarters personnel. Army officials acknowledged that, as more people and their associated equipment are added to the brigade, the logistical footprint grows.

This increase in the Stryker footprint may affect the ability of the brigade to deploy within the 96-hour goal. As we have previously reported, the deployment goal of 96 hours is unrealistic because airlifting a Stryker brigade within that time frame would require use of a sizeable portion of available military airlift. Army officials did not identify deploying the brigade in 96 hours as a concern, and continued to state that the issue is a lack of airlift resources, which is outside of the Army's control. However, the increased size of the Stryker brigade may increase the number of aircraft required to deploy the brigade, and these aircraft may not be available when needed to support the deployment. Without addressing the effects of the increased

¹⁴GAO-03-801, p. 6.

logistical footprint on the deployment timelines, the Army will continue to face challenges in rapidly deploying the Stryker brigade within 96 hours.

Change Does Not Include Sustainment Support for Major Combat Operations

The Army's planned change does not include the additional sustainment support that would enable the Stryker brigade to achieve the desired flexibility to perform in major combat operations. The business case analysis the Army is developing focuses on the cost of the transition between contractor maintenance personnel and soldiers. However, there are other considerations specific to supporting a Stryker brigade in major combat operations. The example cited by Army officials as a rationale for changing Stryker vehicle maintenance support to allow the brigade to perform in different combat operations was the march to Baghdad that occurred during Operation Iraqi Freedom. However, the Stryker brigade was not optimized for this type of combat operation. According to the Stryker organizational and operational concept, the Stryker brigade was optimized for small-scale contingencies instead of major combat operations. Unlike other Army units, the logistical footprint for the Stryker brigade is smaller, and the brigade is capable of sustaining itself for only 72 hours. In order to perform in major combat operations, such as a march to Baghdad, the Stryker brigade would require significant combat service support augmentation. This augmentation would come from Army units external to the brigade, which is generally the Army division under which it fights. Army officials stated that if a Stryker brigade needed augmentation, the Army would then decide what actions to take based on the situation.

According to the Army, units that participated in the actual march to Baghdad experienced some sustainment challenges. Although these Army units were able to successfully defeat the enemy and travel across great distances very quickly, these successes resulted in Army units not receiving an immediate resupply of spare vehicle parts, with some brigades not receiving additional parts for periods greater than a month. This sustainment schedule would be difficult for the Stryker brigade, but the Army's planned change does not address the support challenges associated with determining how the Stryker brigade would receive the necessary sustainment support. Until the Army develops plans to augment the support of the Stryker brigade, the change may not be able to provide the Army's desired flexibility.

Conclusions

The Army is focused on implementing the specific change to replace contractors with soldiers to allow the brigade to perform in all types of combat operations. However, the Army has not addressed challenges that may hinder its ability to achieve this intended outcome. By not addressing personnel recruiting and management challenges, the Army may be unable to replace contractors with soldiers or build and sustain the long-term skills and knowledge necessary to ensure quality Stryker vehicle maintenance. Additionally, without addressing the effect of the increased size of the Stryker brigade on its deployment timeline, the brigade may face even greater difficulty in meeting its 96-hour deployment goal. Finally, if the Army does not plan

for how the Stryker brigade will receive additional sustainment support, it may be difficult for the brigade to perform in major combat operations such as a march to Baghdad. Clear identification of challenges that may limit the Army's ability to achieve the desired outcome of the proposed change, an assessment of the effects of these challenges, and development of strategies to address these challenges during the planning process could enhance the likelihood that the Stryker vehicle continues to receive high levels of maintenance support and meet performance requirements after the proposed change is implemented. Because the Stryker brigade concept is the bridge between the existing force and the Army of the future, the process by which conceptual changes are viewed and implemented determines not only how the Stryker brigade operates, but also how the Army plans to address the same issues for future brigades.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to develop and include, as part of the Army's planning process for changes to Stryker vehicle support, (1) strategies to enable the Army to recruit and retain the additional soldiers needed to implement the changes, in light of existing personnel challenges; (2) strategies to sustain Army skills and knowledge on Stryker vehicle maintenance, given the limited number of Stryker brigades; (3) an assessment of the effects of an increased logistical footprint, such as the need for additional airlift, on the brigade's deployment timeline; and (4) plans to ensure the Stryker brigade can receive additional sustainment support so that the brigade can participate in major combat operations.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD partially concurred with all four of our recommendations. DOD's comments are reprinted in enclosure I. Regarding our recommendation to develop strategies to enable the Army to recruit and retain the additional soldiers needed to implement the changes, in light of existing personnel challenges, DOD partially concurred, stating that it agreed with the importance of recruiting and retaining soldiers. According to DOD, existing processes have achieved the Army's recruiting and retention goals. The department also noted that the Army has effective processes for distribution of occupational skills in support of the total force, which it has used to meet recruiting and retention objectives within the Stryker brigade and can use to fully support the incremental inclusion of soldier mechanics. The department stated that additional direction is not required. We disagree that the existing processes are effective because, as we have noted in this report, the Army has not achieved its recruiting and retention goals in recent years. While the Army may have met the personnel objectives for the Stryker brigade in the past, Army officials have already acknowledged that there is a general shortage of maintenance capability across the Army. Further, implementing the Army's planned transition increases the personnel requirement for the Stryker brigade in five specific occupational specialties where the Army has been unable to meet its recruiting goals. For example, as our report points out, in fiscal year 2005 the Army experienced shortages in filling requirements for wheeled vehicle mechanic

(63B), fire control repair (45G), armament repair (45K), automated logistics specialist (92A), and unit supply specialist (92Y), and has consistently been unable to fill one of these five specialties. As a result, we continue to believe that the Army may face challenges in recruiting and retaining personnel for the Stryker brigade in current and future years, and that the Army should consider strategies to address this issue in its planning for changes to Stryker vehicle support.

In response to our recommendation to develop strategies to sustain Army skills and knowledge on Stryker vehicle maintenance, given the limited number of Stryker brigades, DOD partially concurred, agreeing that sustaining skills and knowledge is essential. The department stated that the Army's Training and Doctrine command (TRADOC) is meeting current requirements for Stryker training and is prepared to meet the Army's timeline for the transition to soldier field-level maintenance. DOD said that TRADOC will provide the necessary training base for the soldier mechanics and that additional direction is not required. We believe that DOD has misunderstood the intent of our recommendation. We are not questioning the Army's training capability for Stryker vehicle maintenance. As we acknowledged in this report, the Army has developed the institutional capacity to train soldiers on Stryker vehicle maintenance. As this report points out, our concern is about the Army's ability to develop and sustain long-term institutional expertise on the Stryker vehicle. Army officials told us that expertise on any vehicle is best developed by continuous use of the skill through hands-on maintenance, and that this expertise must be managed because soldiers routinely transfer to different units after a 3-year period. These officials also acknowledged that building this expertise would take time because the Stryker vehicle will not be found in all Army units. In contrast, developing and sustaining expertise on other Army vehicles, such as the High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle, requires less management because the vehicle is found throughout the Army and soldiers are able to continue building expertise after reassignment. Since the Stryker vehicle will only be located in the seven Stryker brigades and in a limited number of other locales, ensuring that soldiers are assigned to other units with Stryker vehicles is necessary to develop and sustain their skills and knowledge on maintaining the Stryker vehicle. Accordingly, we continue to believe that our recommendation has merit and that the Army should identify strategies to build long-term expertise on the Stryker vehicle.

The department partially concurred with our recommendation to include in its planning process the effects of an increased logistical footprint, such as the need for additional airlift, on the brigade's deployment timeline, agreeing with the importance of minimizing the effect of any increased logistical footprint. DOD agreed that the structures required to provide the logistics of projecting, moving, protecting, and sustaining contract personnel are not included in Stryker's current structure, but noted that the transition to soldier field maintenance includes adding required equipment into Stryker's formal structure and will facilitate accurate planning for strategic deployability. According to DOD, the transition from interim contractor field maintenance to soldier field-level maintenance will not result in a significant increase to the logistics footprint, so additional direction is not required. We disagree. Army officials estimate that the transition will require an 8 percent increase in the amount of equipment and supplies required for the brigade, which is an increase in

the size of the Stryker brigade logistics footprint. Because the amount of equipment necessary to support contractors is not formalized, as noted in DOD's response, the Army does not currently have an accurate picture of the assets necessary to deploy the Stryker brigade. We are encouraged that DOD is taking steps to facilitate accurate planning for strategic deployability of the Stryker brigade. As we have stated in previous reports, the existing goal of deploying a Stryker brigade anywhere in the world in 96 hours is unrealistic. By implementing the transition, the Army now has the opportunity to reexamine the deployment goals for the Stryker brigade. Therefore, we continue to believe that our recommendation has merit and that the Army, with the data provided by the more formalized logistics structure, should take additional action and consider the effects of the increased logistical footprint on the brigade's deployment timeline, to include identifying the number of assets necessary to transport the brigade to meet more realistic deployment goals.

With respect to our recommendation that DOD develop plans to ensure the Stryker brigade can receive additional sustainment support so that the brigade can participate in major combat operations, DOD partially concurred, agreeing with the objective of enhancing the Stryker brigade's capability to participate in major combat operations, with augmentation, as a subordinate maneuver component within a division or corps, in a variety of possible roles. The department noted that all Army units require some level of support based on mission, enemy, terrain, available troops, time, and civilian considerations. DOD stated that the transition from interim contractor support to a permanent support strategy significantly improves operational flexibility and the Army's ability to employ the Stryker brigade by giving it the capability to logistically support a much broader range of military operations. DOD said that additional direction is not required. While we agree that using soldiers who possess expertise on Stryker vehicle maintenance provides the Stryker brigade with improved operational flexibility, as we stated in this report, the Army has not developed a plan for how to support the Stryker brigade in a major combat operation. Army officials told us that if a Stryker brigade needed augmentation, the Army would decide what actions to take based on the situation. The department's response reinforces this point. As we have stated in this report, the Stryker brigade is different than other Army units in that it has a smaller logistical footprint, is self-sustaining for only 72 hours, and requires augmentation from Army units external to the brigade in order to perform a major combat operation. Since the Stryker vehicle is not found in most other units, the existing division and corps headquarters that would provide combat service support to the Stryker brigade in a major combat operation would not necessarily have the support packages and spare parts needed for the brigade. Resupply functions in Iraq are currently being performed by contractor personnel, and the Stryker brigade is currently operating from forward operating bases. The Stryker brigade deployed for the first time to Operation Iraqi Freedom and has yet to perform as a subordinate maneuver component within a division or corps in a major combat operation and with reduced contractor support. As we have stated in this report, other non-Stryker brigades that had an existing relationship with division support structures still faced resupply challenges while performing major combat operations in the march to Baghdad. We believe that waiting to develop a plan based on the situation would inhibit the rapid use of the Stryker brigade in major combat operations. Therefore, we continue to believe that our recommendation has merit and

that the Army should take action to ensure the Stryker brigade can receive additional sustainment support so that it can participate in major combat operations.

DOD also provided technical comments, which we have incorporated in the body of the report as appropriate. Some of these comments related to the context of the report. Specifically, DOD stated that the transition to soldier maintainers will improve Stryker's deployability at all points of deployment—to include theater reception, staging, and onward integration in a broader range of environments and conditions—thereby improving both strategic and operational capability. We do not dispute the point that soldiers are more deployable than contractors. Instead, our first recommendation focuses on whether the Army can recruit and retain the soldiers necessary to accomplish the plan, and our third recommendation focuses on the effects on the timelines for deploying the brigade given the overall increase in the size of the Stryker brigade's logistical footprint. DOD further stated that the transition from Stryker interim contractor field maintenance to soldier field maintenance may not require more than a one-for-one swap. The department noted that while contractors may be able to dedicate more time to performing maintenance tasks, they are also less deployable than soldiers and require force protection and sustainment. While we agree that contractors are less deployable than soldiers, we disagree that the transition may not require more than a one-for-one swap. Army officials stated that there are currently a total of 45 Stryker vehicle maintenance contractor personnel within each Stryker brigade, and these personnel provide functions similar to five military occupational specialties. According to the Army plan that was provided to us and sent to Army leadership, the Army intends to add 71 soldiers in these five specialties to each Stryker brigade, which is greater than a one-for-one swap. Based on our interviews with Army officials, a one-for-one swap would likely result in a decrease in operational readiness rates for the Stryker vehicle, since soldiers perform multiple functions while contractors focus solely on maintaining the Stryker vehicle.

Scope and Methodology

To determine the extent to which the Army's planned change to Stryker vehicle support will achieve its desired outcome, we reviewed the decision memorandum and briefings prepared for the Army Systems Acquisition Review Council's Sustainment Readiness Review and talked with officials at the Program Executive Office for Ground Combat Systems. We also reviewed Army documents related to the plans for implementing the change and previous GAO reports and reviewed the current and most recent contracts for Stryker vehicle maintenance support. We collected Army statistics on Stryker vehicle operational readiness rates, and met with Army Materiel Command officials to discuss other support for the Stryker brigades.¹⁵ Additionally, we met with officials from the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's System Manager for the Stryker vehicle, the Combined Arms Support Command, the Project Manager's office at the Tank-Automotive and Armaments

¹⁵For this report, we did not address the cost effectiveness of using contractors rather than soldiers to perform maintenance on the Stryker vehicle.

Command, and Army Materiel Command. We also interviewed officials from the office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology; personnel from three Stryker brigades; representatives from the contractor that provides vehicle maintenance services, operates the Stryker vehicle supply chain, conducts new equipment training, and performs reset actions; and officials at Army headquarters (Logistics and Force Development), U.S. Army Forces Command, and the Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command. We conducted our review from September 2005 to June 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We are sending copies of this report to interested congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Secretary of the Army; and the Director, Office of Management and Budget. We will also make copies available to others on request. In addition, this report will be available on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact me at (202) 512-8365 or solisw@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Solis', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

William M. Solis
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Enclosures - II

Comments from the Department of Defense

DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR
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AUG 09 2008

Mr. William M. Solis
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Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Solis:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, "DEFENSE LOGISTICS: Changes to Stryker Vehicle Maintenance Support Should Identify Strategies for Addressing Implementation Challenges, dated July 11, 2006 (GAO Code 350742/GAO-06-928R)."

The Department partially concurs with each recommendation. An explanation of the DoD position is enclosed. Additionally, since portions of the draft report supporting the recommendations could be misleading, technical comments are provided to improve the accuracy and clarity of the draft report. The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jack Bell".

Jack Bell

Enclosure:
As stated



**GAO DRAFT REPORT – DATED JULY 11, 2006
GAO CODE 350742/GAO CODE-06-928R**

**“DEFENSE LOGISTICS: Changes to Stryker Vehicle Maintenance Support Should
Identify Strategies for Addressing Implementation Challenges”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to develop and include, as part of the Army’s planning process for changes to Stryker vehicle support, strategies to enable the Army to recruit and retain the additional soldiers needed to implement the changes, in light of existing personnel challenges.

DoD RESPONSE: Partially Concur. The DoD agrees with the importance of recruiting and retaining Soldiers. However, existing processes have achieved U.S. Army recruiting and retention goals. Additionally, the U.S. Army has effective processes for distribution of occupational skills in support of the total force. Using these processes, the U.S. Army has met recruiting and retention objectives within the Stryker Brigade and can fully support the incremental inclusion of Soldier mechanics. Additional direction is not required.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to develop and include, as part of the Army’s planning process for changes to Stryker vehicle support, strategies to sustain Army skills and knowledge on Stryker vehicle maintenance, given the limited number of Stryker Brigades.

DoD RESPONSE: Partially Concur. The DoD agrees that sustaining skills and knowledge is essential. The U.S. Army’s Training and Doctrine command (TRADOC) is meeting today’s requirements for Stryker training. In addition, TRADOC is prepared to meet the U.S. Army’s timeline for the transition to Soldier field level maintenance, and will provide the necessary training base for the Soldier mechanics. Additional direction is not required.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to develop and include, as part of the Army’s planning process for changes to Stryker vehicle support, the effects of an increased logistical footprint, such as the need for additional airlift, on the Brigade’s deployment timeline.

DoD RESPONSE: Partially Concur. The DoD agrees with the importance of minimizing the effect of any increased logistical footprint. Changes to the Stryker support concept are part of the U.S. Army's planned process to implement a Soldier field maintenance strategy within the Brigade, in order to better meet warfighter requirements. The structures required to provide the logistics of projecting, moving, protecting and sustaining contractor personnel are not included in Stryker's current structure. However, the transition to Soldier field maintenance includes adding required equipment into Stryker's formal structure and will facilitate accurate planning for strategic deployability. The transition from interim contractor field maintenance to Soldier field level maintenance will not result in a significant increase to the logistics footprint. Additional direction is not required.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to develop and include, as part of the U.S. Army's planning process for changes to Stryker vehicle support, plans to ensure the Stryker Brigade can receive additional sustainment support so that the Brigade can participate in major combat operations.

DOD RESPONSE: Partially Concur. The DoD agrees with enhancing the Stryker Brigade's capability to participate in major combat operations. The U.S. Army's planning process for transitioning Stryker to a permanent support strategy includes the objective of enhancing the Brigade's capability to participate in Large Scale Combat Operations, with augmentation, as a subordinate maneuver component within a division or corps, in a variety of possible roles. All U.S. Army units require some level of support based on Mission, Enemy, Terrain, Troops available, Time, and Civilian considerations. The transition of Stryker from interim contractor support to a permanent support strategy significantly improves operational flexibility and the U.S. Army's ability to employ the Stryker Brigade by giving it the capability to logistically support a much broader range of military operations. Additional direction is not required.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact William M. Solis, (202) 512-8365 or solisw@gao.gov

Acknowledgments In addition to the contact named above, major contributors to this report were Lawson Gist, Assistant Director; Jim Melton, Karyn Angulo, Renee Brown, Julia Denman, Charles Perdue, and John Van Schaik.

(350742)

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