



Highlights of [GAO-09-380T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States is in the process of developing its strategy for operations in Afghanistan, as well as for the drawdown and continued operations of forces in Iraq. As of December 2008, approximately 32,500 U.S. troops were deployed in Afghanistan. Moreover, DOD may add an additional 30,000 troops in Afghanistan. Since 2001, the war in Afghanistan changed from a violent struggle against al Qaeda and its Taliban supporters to a multi-faceted counterinsurgency effort. As of December 2008, U.S. troops in Iraq numbered approximately 148,500. DOD also had about 162,400 contractors in Iraq as of mid-2008.

Today's testimony addresses (1) key observations regarding the development of U.S. strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan; (2) factors that should be considered as the United States refines its strategy for Iraq and plans to draw down forces; and (3) factors that should be considered as the United States develops a strategy for Afghanistan and plans for increasing forces.

This statement is based on GAO reports and testimonies on Iraq and Afghanistan.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, [click on GAO-09-380T](#). For more information, contact Janet St. Laurent, 202-512-4400, stlaurentj@gao.gov.

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Availability of Forces, Equipment, and Infrastructure Should be Considered in Developing U.S. Strategy and Plans

What GAO Found

Lessons learned from GAO's past work indicate that U.S. strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan should reflect a governmentwide approach and contain a number of key elements, including clear roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms among government agencies, as well as specific goals, performance measures, and time frames that take into account available resources. Given the heavy commitment of U.S. forces to ongoing operations over the past several years, the availability of forces, equipment, and infrastructure will need to be closely examined in developing plans to reposition military forces. Finally, in light of future demands on the federal budget, attention will be needed to ensure that U.S. plans are developed and executed in an efficient and cost-effective manner. Clearly, strong oversight by the Congress and senior decision makers will be needed to minimize past problems such as contract mismanagement and insufficient attention to overseeing contractors.

In refining its strategy and plans for the drawdown of forces in Iraq, senior leaders will need to consider several operational factors. For example, DOD will need to develop plans to efficiently and effectively relocate thousands of personnel and billions of dollars worth of equipment out of Iraq; close hundreds of facilities; and determine the role of contractors. Furthermore, the capacity of facilities in Kuwait and other neighboring countries may limit the speed at which equipment and materiel can be moved out of Iraq.

With regard to Afghanistan, DOD will likely face an array of potential challenges related to people, equipment and infrastructure. For example, the availability and training of personnel will be critical considerations as the force is already significantly stressed from ongoing operations and current training capacity has been primarily focused on operations in Iraq. Additionally, the availability of equipment may be limited because the Army and Marine Corps have already deployed much of their equipment to Iraq and much of the prepositioned assets also have been withdrawn to support ongoing operations. Similarly, DOD will need to assess its requirements for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities given its current allocation of these assets to support ongoing operations in Iraq. Further, the ability to transport personnel and equipment into Afghanistan will be challenged by the limited infrastructure and topography of Afghanistan. Moreover, the extent to which contractors will be used to support deployed U.S. forces must be considered as well as how oversight of these contractors will be ensured. Given all of these factors, sound planning based on a well-developed strategy is critical to ensure lessons learned over the years from Iraq are incorporated in Afghanistan and that competing resources are prioritized effectively between both operations.