



Highlights of [GAO-09-615](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. government agencies, including the Department of Defense (DOD) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have spent billions of dollars to develop Afghanistan. From fiscal years 2004 to 2008, DOD has reported obligations of about \$1 billion for its Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), which enables commanders to respond to urgent humanitarian and reconstruction needs. As troop levels increase, DOD officials expect the program to expand.

Under the authority of the Comptroller General, GAO assessed DOD's (1) capacity to manage and oversee the CERP in Afghanistan and (2) coordination of projects with USAID. Accordingly, GAO interviewed DOD and USAID officials, and examined program documents to identify workload, staffing, training, and coordination requirements. In Afghanistan, GAO interviewed key military personnel on the sufficiency of training, and their ability to execute assigned duties.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD evaluate workforce needs, ensure adequate staffing, and establish CERP training requirements, and that DOD and USAID collaborate to create a centralized database of project data, including milestones for completion. DOD concurred or partially concurred with GAO's recommendations, citing recent actions taken. GAO believes its recommendations remain valid.

[View GAO-09-615 or key components.](#)
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MILITARY OPERATIONS

Actions Needed to Improve Oversight and Interagency Coordination for the Commander's Emergency Response Program in Afghanistan

What GAO Found

Although DOD has used CERP to fund projects that it believes significantly benefit the Afghan people, it faces significant challenges in providing adequate management and oversight because of an insufficient number of trained personnel. GAO has frequently reported that inadequate numbers of management and oversight personnel hinders DOD's use of contractors in contingency operations. GAO's work also shows that high-performing organizations use data to make informed decisions about current and future workforce needs. DOD has not conducted an overall workforce assessment to identify how many personnel are needed to effectively execute CERP. Rather, individual commanders determine how many personnel will manage and execute CERP. Personnel at all levels, including headquarters and unit personnel that GAO interviewed after they returned from Afghanistan or who were in Afghanistan in November 2008, expressed a need for more personnel to perform CERP program management and oversight functions. Due to a lack of personnel, key duties such as performing headquarters staff assistance visits to help units improve contracting procedures and visiting sites to monitor project status and contractor performance were either not performed or inconsistently performed. Per DOD policy, DOD personnel should receive timely and effective training to enable performance to standard during operations. However, key CERP personnel at headquarters, units, and provincial reconstruction teams received little or no training prior to deployment which commanders believed made it more difficult to properly execute and oversee the program. Also, most personnel responsible for awarding and overseeing CERP contracts valued at \$500,000 or less received little or no training prior to deployment and, once deployed, received a 1-hour briefing, which did not provide detailed information on the individual's duties. As a result, frequent mistakes occurred, such as the omission of key clauses from contracts, which slowed the project approval process. As GAO has reported in the past, poorly written contracts and statements of work can increase DOD's cost risk and could result in payment for projects that do not meet project goals or objectives.

While mechanisms exist to facilitate coordination, DOD and USAID lack information that would provide greater visibility on all U.S. government development projects. DOD and USAID generally coordinate projects at the headquarters and unit level as well as through military-led provincial reconstruction teams which include USAID representatives. In addition, in November 2008, USAID, DOD and the Department of State began participating in an interagency group composed of senior U.S. government civilians and DOD personnel in Afghanistan to enhance planning and coordination of development plans and related projects. However, complete project information is lacking, because DOD and USAID use different databases. USAID has been tasked to develop a common database and is coordinating with DOD to do so, but development is in the early stages and goals and milestones have not been established. Without clear goals and milestones, it is unclear how progress will be measured or when it will be completed.