



October 2018

AFGHANISTAN SECURITY

Some Improvements
Reported in Afghan
Forces' Capabilities,
but Actions Needed to
Enhance DOD
Oversight of U.S.-
Purchased Equipment

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.

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Abbreviations

AAF	Afghan Air Force
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANASOC	ANA Special Operations Command
ANDSF	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces
ANP	Afghan National Police
CECOM	U.S. Army Communications–Electronics Command
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan
DOD	Department of Defense
MHz	megahertz
MSFV	Mobile Strike Force Vehicle
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NMSGVS	National Maintenance Strategy Ground Vehicle Support contract
NSOCC-A	NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan
ORC	operational readiness cycle
OSD-P	Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
TAAC-Air	Train, Advise, and Assist Command–Air

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October 15, 2018

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Developing self-sustaining Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) is a key component of U.S. and coalition efforts to counter terrorist threats and create long-term security and stability in Afghanistan. In January 2015, the ANDSF—comprising mainly the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP)—formally assumed security responsibilities for all of Afghanistan. Since this shift, the United States has continued to aid the ANDSF through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led mission, Resolute Support.¹ The United States is the largest contributor of funding and personnel to the coalition effort through which it provides and maintains equipment for these forces, and offers training, advising, and assistance intended to enable the ANDSF to sustain the equipment in the future. In total, the United States has allocated approximately \$84 billion for Afghan security in the 17-year period spanning fiscal years 2002 through 2018, according to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).² In August 2017, the United States announced its South Asia Strategy, renewing its commitment to helping the ANDSF become more effective and self-

¹Resolute Support is a noncombat mission launched on January 1, 2015, after the conclusion of the previous NATO-led mission, the International Security Assistance Force. As of November 2017, Resolute Support consisted of a coalition of 26 NATO allies and 13 operational partner nations that contribute personnel, equipment, and funding to the mission. In addition to Resolute Support, the United States conducts a counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan.

²We calculated this sum using data reported by SIGAR on April 30, 2018, on the following authorities used for Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of State security programs: Afghanistan Security Forces Fund; Afghanistan Freedom Support Act; Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities; Foreign Military Financing; International Military Education and Training; International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement; Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Programs; Train and Equip; and Voluntary Peacekeeping. See SIGAR, *April 30, 2018 Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (Arlington, Va.: Apr. 30, 2018).

sustaining.³ The strategy removed any timelines for the United States to withdraw support for the ANDSF and committed approximately 3,500 additional U.S. military personnel—an increase of 33 percent—to bolster the Department of Defense’s (DOD) efforts in Afghanistan, according to DOD reporting.⁴

House Report 114-537, accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, included a provision for us to review the ANDSF’s capability and capacity to operate and sustain U.S.-purchased weapon systems and equipment.⁵ This report is a public version of a sensitive report that we issued on September 20, 2018.⁶ Our September report included three objectives, including one on the extent to which DOD considers ANDSF input and meets their needs when identifying equipment requirements. DOD deemed the information related to that objective to be sensitive, requiring that it be protected from public disclosure. Consequently, we removed that objective and a related recommendation from this public report. This version includes information on the other two objectives: (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. Although the information provided in this report is more limited, the report uses the same methodology for the two objectives as the sensitive report.

To identify what has been reported about ANDSF capabilities and capability gaps as well as the steps DOD has taken to try to address

³The South Asia Strategy shifted from a timelines-based approach to a conditions-based approach with regard to when the United States would withdraw support for the ANDSF; increased troop levels; expanded U.S. military offensive authorities; and authorized the expansion of the train, advise, and assist mission for conventional forces below the ANA corps and ANP zone levels.

⁴For the purposes of this report, “DOD reporting” refers to publicly-issued DOD reports, primarily including DOD’s semiannual reports on efforts to enhance security and stability in Afghanistan, also known as DOD’s semiannual Section 1225 reports to Congress.

⁵According to DOD Joint Publication 3-20, which provides guidance for planning, executing, and assessing U.S. security cooperation activities, *capability* refers to the partner nation’s ability to execute a given task. *Capacity* refers to the partner nation’s ability to self-sustain and self-replicate a given capability. See Joint Publication 3-20, *Security Cooperation* (May 23, 2017).

⁶GAO, *Afghanistan Security: Some Improvements Reported in Afghan Forces’ Capabilities, but Actions Needed to Enhance DOD Oversight of U.S.-Purchased Equipment*, [GAO-18-662SU](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 20, 2018).

those gaps, we reviewed NATO and DOD documents and reports—such as DOD’s semiannual Section 1225 reports to Congress (which we hereafter refer to as “DOD reporting”)—created after the start of Resolute Support on January 1, 2015. We also reviewed DOD-commissioned assessments of ANDSF capabilities conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses and reporting from SIGAR and the DOD Office of Inspector General, and interviewed Center for Naval Analyses representatives and DOD officials, including DOD officials at the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (OSD-P) who helped create the DOD reporting we reviewed.

To determine the extent to which DOD has information about the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain equipment, we reviewed DOD documents and reports and interviewed DOD officials in the United States and Afghanistan, including DOD officials who advise the ANDSF. We also reviewed federal internal control standards to determine what responsibilities agencies have specifically related to information collection.⁷ To provide illustrative examples of what information DOD has about the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment and what that information indicates about the ANDSF’s abilities and challenges we interviewed and analyzed written responses from DOD officials, including DOD officials who provide procurement and lifecycle management for some ANDSF aircraft and vehicles, about three equipment types—MD-530 helicopters, Mobile Strike Force Vehicles (MSFV), and radios.⁸ We selected these three equipment types from a list that we developed, for an August 2017 report, of key ANDSF equipment the United States purchased from fiscal years 2003 through 2016.⁹ (See

⁷GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

⁸Our analysis of the information DOD has about these three equipment types is not generalizable and is intended to provide context about DOD’s information on the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment.

⁹We selected these equipment types based on a number of considerations, such as (1) how critical the equipment is to the ANDSF’s ability to achieve its mission; (2) which ANDSF component uses the equipment (i.e., ANP, ANA, or both); (3) whether DOD intends to continue procuring the equipment for the ANDSF; and (4) whether the equipment had been in use at least 5 years. For our August 2017 report on key ANDSF equipment purchased by the United States, see GAO, *U.S.-Funded Equipment for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces*, [GAO-17-667R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 10, 2017).

app. I for more information about our objectives, scope, and methodology.)

The performance audit upon which this report is based was conducted from August 2016 to September 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We subsequently worked with DOD from September 2018 to October 2018 to prepare this public version of the original sensitive report for public release. This public version was also prepared in accordance with those standards.

Background

U.S. Missions in Afghanistan

Since 2001, the United States has made a commitment to building Afghanistan's security and governance in order to prevent the country from once again becoming a sanctuary for terrorists. To achieve its security objectives, the United States currently has two missions in Afghanistan: a counterterrorism mission that it leads and the NATO-led Resolute Support train, advise, and assist mission, which it participates in with other coalition nations. The objective of Resolute Support, according to DOD reporting, is to establish self-sustaining Afghan security ministries and forces that work together to maintain security in Afghanistan.¹⁰ The United States is conducting these missions within a challenging security environment that has deteriorated since the January 2015 transition to Afghan-led security. The United Nations reported nearly 24,000 security incidents in Afghanistan in 2017—the most ever recorded—and, despite a slight decrease in the overall number of security incidents in early 2018, the United Nations noted significant security challenges, including a spike in high-casualty attacks in urban areas and coordinated attacks by the insurgency on ANDSF checkpoints.

¹⁰The ANDSF comprise the Ministries of Defense and Interior and the security forces—principally the ANA and ANP, respectively—that the ministries oversee.

DOD provides both personnel and funding to support its efforts in Afghanistan. DOD documents indicate that the United States contributes more troops to Resolute Support than any other coalition nation. As of May 2018, the United States was contributing 54 percent of Resolute Support military personnel, according to DOD reporting. Of the approximately 14,000 U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan as of June 2018, about 8,500 were assigned to Resolute Support to train, advise, and assist the ANDSF, according to DOD reporting. For fiscal year 2018, Congress appropriated about \$4.67 billion for the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund—the primary mechanism of U.S. financial support for manning, training, and equipping the ANDSF. Other international donors provided about \$800 million, and the Afghan government committed to providing about \$500 million, according to DOD reporting.

Under Resolute Support and the International Security Assistance Force mission that preceded it, CSTC-A is the DOD organization responsible for (1) overseeing efforts to equip and train the ANA and ANP; (2) validating requirements, including equipment requirements; (3) validating existing supply levels; (4) submitting requests to DOD components to contract for procurement of materiel for the ANDSF; and (5) ensuring that the Afghan government appropriately uses and accounts for U.S. funds provided as direct contributions from the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund.¹¹ OSD-P is responsible for developing policy on and conducting oversight of the bilateral security relationship with Afghanistan focused on efforts to develop the Afghan security ministries and their forces.

U.S.-Purchased Equipment for the ANDSF

In August 2017, we reported that the United States had spent almost \$18 billion on equipment and transportation for the ANDSF from fiscal years 2005 through April 2017, representing the second-largest expenditure category from the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund.¹² In that report, we

¹¹SIGAR, *Procurement of Afghan Army Uniforms: Poor Decisions and Questionable Contracting Processes Added \$28 Million to Procurement Costs*, SIGAR 17-58-TY (July 25, 2017).

¹²See [GAO-17-667R](#). We reported that the largest Afghanistan Security Forces Fund expenditure category for this time period was for sustainment, which includes salaries, ammunition, equipment maintenance, information technology, and clothing. According to a DOD Comptroller official, disbursements for transportation were for costs related to transporting equipment and for contracted pilots and airplanes for transporting officials to meetings.

identified six types of key equipment the United States funded for the ANDSF in fiscal years 2003 through 2016, including approximately:

- 600,000 weapons, such as rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, shotguns, and pistols;
- 163,000 tactical and nontactical radios, such as handheld radios and base stations;
- 76,000 vehicles, such as Humvees, trucks, recovery vehicles, and mine resistant ambush protected vehicles;
- 30,000 equipment items for detecting and disposing of explosives, such as bomb disposal robots and mine detectors;
- 16,000 equipment items for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, such as unmanned surveillance drones and night vision devices; and
- 208 aircraft, such as helicopters, light attack aircraft, and cargo airplanes.

ANDSF Organization and Force Levels

The Ministry of Defense oversees the ANA, and the Ministry of the Interior oversees the ANP. According to DOD reporting, the authorized force level for the ANDSF, excluding civilians, as of June 2018 was 352,000:¹³ 227,374 for the Ministry of Defense and 124,626 for the Ministry of Interior.¹⁴ The ANA includes the ANA corps, Afghan Air Force, Special Mission Wing, ANA Special Operations Command, and Ktah Khas (counterterrorism forces).¹⁵ The ANP includes the Afghan Uniformed Police, Afghan Anti-Crime Police, Afghan Border Police, Public Security

¹³Authorized force level is the number of personnel the ANDSF is authorized to have; it does not reflect the actual number of personnel assigned to the ANDSF. According to SIGAR reporting, as of January 2018, the ANDSF's assigned strength was 313,728, excluding civilians.

¹⁴In addition, the United States funds the Afghan Local Police, which are in the Ministry of Interior chain of command but are not part of the ANDSF's authorized force level. As of June 2018, the Afghan Local Police were authorized to have up to 30,000 personnel. The Ministry of Interior also oversees the Afghan Public Protection Force, which is not part of the ANDSF's authorized force level and does not receive any U.S. funding. As of June 2018, the Afghan Public Protection Force was authorized to have up to 13,712 personnel.

¹⁵The Ktah Khas is a light infantry special operations battalion that performs counterterrorism raids. In addition, DOD reports that a new ANA unit, the ANA Territorial Force, will be piloted in 2018 to provide local security. If successful, it will become a permanent force structure starting in 2019.

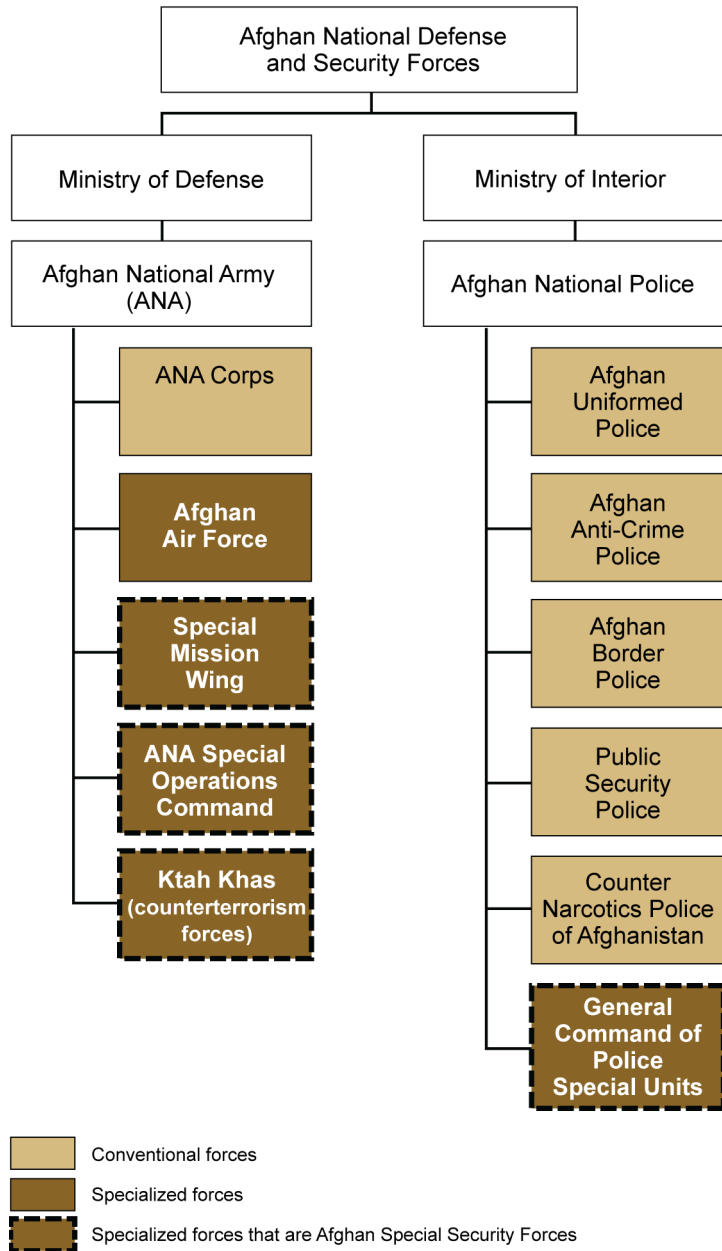
Police, Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan, and General Command of Police Special Units.¹⁶

The ANA Special Mission Wing, Ktah Khas, ANA Special Operations Command, and ANP General Command of Police Special Units are collectively referred to as the Afghan Special Security Forces. In this report, we refer to the Afghan Air Force and the Afghan Special Security Forces as specialized forces, and the other components of the ANDSF as conventional forces. According to DOD reporting, the combined authorized force level for the specialized forces as of June 2018 was approximately 34,500, or about 10 percent of the ANDSF's total authorized force level of 352,000, compared with the conventional forces, which make up about 74 percent of the total authorized force level for the ANDSF.¹⁷ Figure 1 shows the ANDSF's organization.

¹⁶According to DOD reporting, the majority of the Afghan Border Police transferred to the ANA in December 2017 and were renamed the Afghan Border Force. These forces report to the ANA corps. In addition, the Public Security Police were formerly called the Afghan National Civil Order Police, the majority of which transferred to the ANA in March 2018. These transferred components were renamed the Afghan National Civil Order Force, and they report to the ANA corps.

¹⁷The remaining portion of the authorized ANDSF force level (about 16 percent) includes ministry headquarters staff, general staff, intermediate command staff, unassigned staff, and staff who are in training.

Figure 1: Afghan National Defense and Security Forces Organization Chart



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense reports. | GAO-19-116

Resolute Support Advising Strategy and Goals

U.S. and coalition advisors from Resolute Support focus on capacity building at the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, and ANDSF regional headquarters, according to DOD reporting. Ministerial advisors are located at Resolute Support headquarters in Kabul. At the ministerial level, advisors provide assistance to improve institutional capabilities, focusing on several functional areas. Table 1 summarizes the indicators of effectiveness that ministerial advisors are to use to measure ministerial progress in developing functioning systems that can effectively execute each of the functional areas.

Table 1: Resolute Support Advising Functional Areas and Effectiveness Indicators for Security Force Assistance Provided to Afghan Security Ministries

Functional area	Indicators of effectiveness summary
Resource management	Ability to generate requirements, develop a resource-informed budget, and execute spend plans and procurement.
Transparency, accountability, and oversight	Establish effective accountability oversight processes and processes to reduce fraud, waste, and abuse.
Rule of law and governance	Ability to combat corruption and investigate human rights violations and other violations of international law.
Force development	Ability to recruit, train, retain, manage, and develop qualified personnel to meet manpower requirements; create a sustainable training landscape; and manage employment along career paths to create a capable and enduring leadership force.
Operational sustainment and logistics	Ability to sustain the force through effective logistics, maintenance, medical, information, communications, and technology systems at all levels.
Command and control operations	Ability to develop, coordinate, and execute guidance and strategic planning documents throughout the ministries and at various levels of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police.
Intelligence	Sufficient organizations, systems, and processes to establish a sustainable intelligence enterprise.
Strategic communications	Ability to develop communication plans to inform and communicate within the Afghan security ministries.
Gender integration and mainstreaming	Effective processes to integrate women into the force and eliminate gender-based violence and harassment.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information. | GAO-19-116

Regional Resolute Support advisors from seven advising centers located throughout Afghanistan provide support to nearby ANA corps and ANP zone headquarters personnel, according to DOD reporting. Some advisors are embedded with their ANDSF counterparts, providing a continuous coalition presence, while others provide less frequent support, based on proximity to and capability of their ANDSF counterparts. Regional advisors are to track ANDSF capability development by assessing the progress of the ANA corps and ANP zone headquarters

based on five capability pillars (see table 2). DOD and other Resolute Support advisors are to document the results of these assessments each quarter in an ANDSF Assessment Report.¹⁸

Table 2: Capability Pillars Used in Resolute Support Quarterly Progress Assessments of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

Capability pillar	Description
Leadership	Ability of the commander and subordinate leaders (including staff primaries) to demonstrate a mastery of their functional area, and provide purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish all assigned tasks and missions while being accountable for their actions and responsibilities.
Combined arms operations	Ability to field and integrate new systems and develop the capability to bring all available forces, assets, and enabler systems to bear effectively.
Command and control	Exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over all assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of a mission.
Personnel and training	Ability to conduct individual and collective mission-focused training, institutional training, and to assess and maintain proficiency on all critical tasks.
Sustainment	Ability to sustain training and operational missions independently.

Source: Department of Defense (DOD). | GAO-19-116

According to DOD reporting, in addition to ministerial and regional advising, two tactical-level advisory commands provide continuous support for the ANDSF’s specialized forces: Train, Advise, and Assist Command–Air (TAAC-Air) advises the Afghan Air Force down to the unit level, and NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) primarily provides tactical-level special operations advising for the Afghan Special Security Forces.¹⁹ TAAC-Air and NSOCC-A assess capabilities at the headquarters level based on the five capability pillars described above in table 2, and these assessments are included in the quarterly ANDSF Assessment Report.²⁰ Figure 2 shows the levels of advising each Resolute Support advisory command type provides for the ANDSF conventional forces and specialized forces.

¹⁸Before December 2016, this report was produced monthly and called the Monthly ANDSF Assessment Report, or the MAAR. This report is published in DOD’s semiannual reports to Congress and is classified. For the purposes of summarizing capabilities and capability gaps in this report, we relied on unclassified DOD reporting and interviews with DOD officials.

¹⁹NSOCC-A also advises the Afghan Local Police, but at the staff-directorate level, which is similar to the ANP zone level.

²⁰NSOCC-A assesses the capabilities of the Ktah Khas at the battalion level, since it consists of only one battalion.

Figure 2: Levels of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces Advising, by Resolute Support Mission Advisory Command Type

Advising level	Resolute Support Mission Advising Entity			
	Ministerial advisors	Regional advisors	Train, Advise, Assist Command–Air	North Atlantic Treaty Organization Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan
Strategic (e.g., national)	Ministries of Defense and Interior			
Operational (e.g., zone/corps headquarters)		Conventional Army and Police Forces	Air Force	Special Security Forces
Tactical (e.g., frontline units)			Air Force	Special Security Forces

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense reports. | GAO-19-116

ANDSF Capabilities Reportedly Continue to Improve; DOD Has Identified Several Capability Gaps and Initiated Efforts to Address Them

DOD Has Reported the ANDSF Generally Continue to Improve Their Capabilities but Rely on Coalition Forces to Fill Several Critical Capability Gaps

Since Resolute Support began, the ANDSF have improved some capabilities related to the functional areas and capability pillars described above, but face several capability gaps that leave them reliant on coalition assistance, according to publicly available DOD reporting. DOD defines *capability* as the ability to execute a given task. A capability gap is the inability to execute a specified course of action, such as an ANDSF functional area or a capability pillar (see tables 1 and 2 above). According to DOD guidance, a gap may occur because forces lack a materiel or non-materiel capability, lack proficiency or sufficiency in a capability, or

need to replace an existing capability solution to prevent a future gap from occurring.²¹

According to DOD reporting on the Afghan security ministries, ANA corps, and ANP zones, the ANDSF generally have improved in some capability areas since Resolute Support began, with some components performing better than others. For example, DOD has reported that the Afghan ministries have improved in operational planning, strategic communications, and coordination between the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense at the national level. In general, the ANA is more capable than the ANP, according to DOD reporting. According to DOD officials and SIGAR reporting, this is due, in part, to the ANA having more coalition advisors and monitoring than the ANP. DOD officials also noted that the Ministry of Interior, which oversees the ANP, and Afghanistan's justice system are both underdeveloped, hindering the effectiveness of the ANP. Corruption, understaffing, and training shortfalls have also contributed to the ANP's underdevelopment, according to DOD and SIGAR reporting. The Afghan Special Security Forces are the most capable within the ANDSF and can conduct the majority of their operations independently without coalition enablers, according to DOD reporting. DOD and SIGAR reports have attributed the Afghan Special Security Forces' relative proficiency to factors such as low attrition rates, longer training, and close partnership with coalition forces. The Afghan Air Force is becoming increasingly capable, and can independently plan for and perform some operational tasks, such as armed overwatch and aerial escort missions, according to DOD reporting.

However, DOD has reported that the ANDSF generally continue to need support in several key areas. For example, as of December 2017, DOD reported several ministerial capability gaps, including force management; logistics; and analyzing and integrating intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance information. DOD also reported that, as of December 2017, the ANA and ANP continued to have capability gaps in several key areas, such as weapons and equipment sustainment and integrating fire from aerial and ground forces. The ANDSF rely on support from contractors and coalition forces to mitigate capability gaps in these key areas. For some capability areas, such as aircraft and vehicle

²¹Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3170.011, *Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System* (Jan. 23, 2015).

maintenance and logistics, the ANDSF is not expected to be self-sufficient until at least 2023, according to DOD reporting.

According to DOD officials and SIGAR reporting, coalition and contractor support helps mitigate ANDSF capability gaps in the immediate term but may make it challenging to assess the ANDSF's capabilities and gaps independent of such support. For example, vehicle and aircraft maintenance contractors are responsible for sustaining specific operational readiness rates for the equipment they service. While this helps ensure that ANDSF personnel have working equipment to accomplish their mission, thereby closing an immediate capability gap, it may mask the ANDSF's underlying capabilities and potentially prolong reliance on such support, according to DOD officials and SIGAR reporting.

DOD and the ANDSF Have Plans and Initiatives in Place to Address Some ANDSF Capability Gaps

DOD and the ANDSF have begun implementing plans and initiatives that aim to strengthen ANDSF capabilities. These include the following, among others:

- **ANDSF Roadmap.** In 2017, the Afghan government began implementing the ANDSF Roadmap—a series of developmental initiatives that seek to strengthen the ANDSF and increase security and governance in Afghanistan, according to DOD reporting. The Roadmap is structured to span 4 years, but DOD has reported that its full implementation will likely take longer than that. According to DOD reporting, the Roadmap aims to improve four key elements: (1) fighting capabilities; (2) leadership development; (3) unity of command and effort; and (4) counter-corruption efforts.

Under the Roadmap's initiative to increase the ANDSF's fighting capabilities, DOD and the ANDSF have begun implementing plans to increase the size of the specialized forces. Specifically, DOD reports that the ANDSF plans to nearly double the size of the Afghan Special Security Forces by 2020 as an effort to bolster the ANDSF's offensive reach and effectiveness. The Afghan Special Security Forces are to become the ANDSF's primary offensive force, the conventional ANA forces are to focus on consolidating gains and holding key terrain and infrastructure, and the conventional ANP forces are to focus on community policing efforts. In addition, to provide additional aerial fire and airlift capabilities, the ANDSF began implementing an aviation modernization plan in 2017. The aim is to increase personnel strength

and the size of the Afghan Air Force and Special Mission Wing fleets by 2023.

- **Enhanced vehicle maintenance efforts.** To help improve the ANDSF's vehicle maintenance abilities, DOD awarded a National Maintenance Strategy Ground Vehicle Support contract, which, according to DOD officials, became fully operational in December 2017. The National Maintenance Strategy Ground Vehicle Support contract consolidated five separate vehicle maintenance and training contracts into a single contract and contains provisions for building the capacity of ANDSF and Afghan contractors to incrementally take control of vehicle maintenance over a 5-year period.
- **Additional U.S. military personnel.** As part of the South Asia strategy, the United States committed 3,500 additional military personnel to increase support to its missions in Afghanistan. According to DOD reporting, most of the additional personnel will support the Resolute Support mission, providing more advising and combat enabler support to the ANDSF. Additionally, in March 2018, the United States began deploying a Security Force Assistance Brigade—a new type of unit made up of U.S. Army personnel with expertise in training foreign militaries—to Afghanistan. The Security Force Assistance Brigade will advise conventional and specialized forces at and below the corps and zone levels and will accompany and support ANA conventional forces at the battalion level in ground operations as needed, according to DOD and SIGAR reporting.

DOD Has Some Information on ANDSF Specialized Forces' Ability to Operate and Maintain U.S.-Purchased Equipment but Has Limited Reliable Information on Its Conventional Forces

DOD Advisors Embedded with Specialized Forces Provide Some Information on Those Forces' Capabilities

DOD collects some reliable information about the operation and maintenance abilities of ANDSF specialized forces, in part because advisors are embedded at the tactical level with the specialized forces, according to DOD officials. Specifically, U.S. and coalition forces advise specialized forces at the tactical level under Resolute Support because building ANDSF aviation and special operations abilities are considered particularly important, according to DOD reporting. DOD officials told us that since U.S. and coalition forces are embedded at the tactical level for specialized forces, they can monitor, assess, and report on tactical abilities, including the ability to operate and maintain equipment.

Our analysis of information provided by DOD about the Afghan Air Force's ability to operate and maintain MD-530 helicopters illustrates that DOD has some detailed information about specialized forces. TAAC-Air advisors help train Afghan pilots and maintainers and collect information on their tactical abilities. For example, TAAC-Air advisors track the percentage of maintenance performed by Afghan Air Force maintainers and aircraft operational readiness rates, according to DOD officials. According to DOD reporting and officials, as of December 2017, the Afghan Air Force could independently conduct MD-530 helicopter operations for short intervals without contractor support but relied on contractors to perform the majority of maintenance and sustainment activities. See appendix II for more information on the Afghan Air Force's ability to operate and maintain MD-530 helicopters.

DOD Advisors Have Limited Contact with Conventional Forces in the Field, Yielding Little Information on Their Ability to Operate and Maintain Equipment

U.S. and coalition forces perform high-level assessments of the ANDSF conventional forces' capabilities at the corps and zone levels but do not assess their tactical abilities, such as the ability to operate and maintain equipment, according to DOD officials. For example, U.S. and coalition forces assess the ANA and ANP conventional forces in quarterly ANDSF Assessment Reports, but these reports are at the corps and zone headquarters levels, and are not meant to provide an evaluation of the entire ANDSF, according to DOD reporting. DOD officials stated that other U.S.- and coalition-produced reports and assessments, such as DOD's semiannual Section 1225 reports to Congress, semiannual periodic mission reviews, and annual Afghanistan Plans of Record, provide some information on the ANDSF's high-level capabilities. However, according to DOD officials, these reports do not routinely assess the conventional forces' ability to operate and maintain equipment.

According to DOD officials, DOD does not assess conventional forces' tactical abilities because advisors have had little or no direct contact with conventional units below the corps and zone levels, and thus do not collect such information on conventional forces. Specifically, under Resolute Support, U.S. and coalition forces have not embedded with the conventional forces below the corps and zone levels except in limited circumstances.

Since U.S. and coalition forces do not collect firsthand information on the conventional units' tactical abilities, they rely on those units' self-reporting for information on ANDSF abilities below the corps and zone levels, which, according to DOD officials, may be unreliable. ANDSF reporting is not verified by U.S. officials and can be unreliable in its consistency, comprehensiveness, and credibility, according to DOD officials and SIGAR. For example, the ANDSF produce a monthly tracker on vehicle availability, maintenance backlog, repair times, and personnel productivity, but DOD officials told us that the trackers are of questionable accuracy.

Our analysis of information provided by DOD about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain tactical and nontactical radios illustrates the limited amount of information DOD has on ANDSF conventional forces' tactical abilities. Specifically, DOD officials could not say how well ANDSF personnel on the front lines operate radios in the field and had only limited information on the ANDSF's ability to maintain radios. For example, the officials noted that the ANA conventional forces can perform some unit-level radio repairs but that complex ANA radio maintenance and all ANP radio maintenance is conducted by contractors. DOD officials at Resolute Support headquarters told us that they provide ministerial-level advising on how to manage ANDSF radio systems and do not provide tactical advising or inventory control for radios. See appendix III for more information on the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain radios.

Our analysis of information provided by DOD about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain Mobile Strike Force Vehicles (MSFV) highlights the limited amount of information DOD has on ANDSF conventional forces' tactical abilities compared with specialized forces. DOD officials were able to provide operation and maintenance information for MSFVs that had transferred to the specialized forces as of January 2018 but were unable to provide operation and maintenance information for any other MSFVs. The ANDSF began transferring one of the ANDSF's two MSFV brigades from the conventional to specialized forces in August 2017,

according to DOD officials.²² As part of this transfer, NSOCC-A advisors—who provide tactical-level advising for the Afghan Special Security Forces—assumed oversight for the first brigade from Resolute Support headquarters advisors. DOD officials stated that the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain MSFVs in this brigade prior to the transfer was unknown, as neither Resolute Support headquarters nor the ANA had assessed this. The operation and maintenance abilities of the second brigade, which is still in the conventional forces, remains unknown. DOD officials at NSOCC-A were able to provide information such as inventory and mission capability rates for the MSFVs that had transferred, but only for the short period of time the vehicles had been under the control of the specialized forces. DOD officials told us that NSOCC-A plans to collect more information on the specialized forces’ ability to operate and maintain MSFVs as they are transferred. See appendix IV for more information on the ANDSF’s ability to operate and maintain MSFVs.

In the absence of embedded advisors at the tactical level, DOD has not implemented alternative approaches to collect reliable information about the conventional forces’ ability to operate and maintain equipment. Federal internal control standards state that U.S. agencies should obtain and process reliable information to evaluate performance in achieving key objectives and assessing risks.²³ DOD officials acknowledged that some of the plans described above that DOD and the ANDSF have begun implementing to address capability gaps may provide opportunities for DOD to collect more reliable information on the conventional forces’ ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. For example, the National Maintenance Strategy Ground Vehicle Support contract requires that contractors regularly report the total work orders received, work in progress, and completed maintenance work performed by ANDSF personnel as well as vehicle availability rates, which may be more reliable than the ANDSF’s monthly report on vehicle availability. In addition, the Security Force Assistance Brigade may be able to collect and report on the tactical abilities of units they advise and accompany on missions since they are being deployed at or below the corps and zone levels. However, as of June 2018, DOD officials had not decided which, if any, of these options to pursue. Without reliable information on the equipment

²²According to DOD reporting, the ANDSF plans to transfer the second MSFV brigade in 2018 as part of the ANDSF Roadmap initiative to expand the Afghan Special Security Forces.

²³[GAO-14-704G](#).

operation and maintenance abilities of ANDSF conventional forces, which represent nearly 75 percent of the ANDSF, DOD may be unable to fully evaluate the success of its train, advise, assist, and equip efforts in Afghanistan.

Conclusions

The United States invested nearly \$84 billion in Afghan security in the 17-year period spanning fiscal years 2002 through 2018, but DOD continues to face challenges to developing a self-sustaining ANDSF. While DOD has reported the ANDSF have improved in several capability areas, they continue to face critical capability gaps, impeding their ability to maintain security and stability in Afghanistan independent of U.S. and coalition forces. Moreover, DOD lacks reliable information about the degree to which conventional forces—which make up about three-quarters of the ANDSF—are able to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. This limits DOD's ability to fully evaluate the success of its train, advise, assist, and equip efforts in Afghanistan.

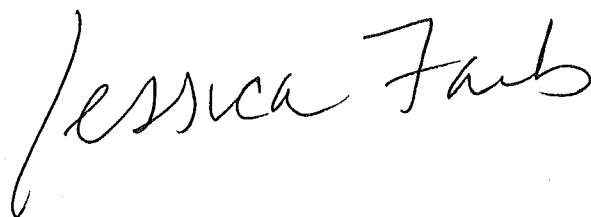
Recommendation for Executive Action

The Secretary of Defense should develop and, as appropriate, implement options for collecting reliable information on the ANDSF conventional forces' ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. (Recommendation 1)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DOD and State for comment. DOD declined to provide written comments specifically on this public version of the report, but DOD's comments on the sensitive version of this report are reprinted in appendix V. The sensitive version of this report included two recommendations, which DOD cited in its comments on the draft of the sensitive report. One of those recommendations related to information that DOD deemed to be sensitive and that must be protected from public disclosure. Therefore, we have omitted that recommendation from DOD's comment letter in appendix V. This omission did not have a material effect on the substance of DOD's comments. In its comments, DOD concurred with the recommendation we made in this version of the report and stated it will take steps to implement it. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. The Department of State had no comments.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of State. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>. If you or your staff has any questions about this report please contact me at (202) 512-7114 or farbj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix VI.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Farb". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessica Farb
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

House Report 114-537 associated with the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 included a provision for us to review the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces' (ANDSF) capability and capacity to operate and sustain U.S.-purchased weapon systems and equipment. This report is a public version of a sensitive report that we issued on September 20, 2018.¹ Our September report included three objectives, including one on the extent to which DOD considers ANDSF input and meets their needs when identifying equipment requirements. DOD deemed the information related to that objective to be sensitive, which must be protected from public disclosure. Consequently, we removed that objective and a related recommendation from this public report. This version includes information on the other two objectives: (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. Although the information provided in this report is more limited, the report uses the same methodology for the two objectives as the sensitive report.

To identify what has been reported about ANDSF capabilities and capability gaps, we reviewed North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and DOD documents and reports, such as DOD's semiannual Section 1225 reports to Congress, produced after the start of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission on January 1, 2015. To determine what steps DOD and NATO have taken to try to address gaps, we reviewed reports the Center for Naval Analyses produced for DOD, as well as DOD and NATO documents and reports produced after January 1, 2015, and reports from GAO, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), and the DOD Inspector General. We also interviewed Center for Naval Analyses representatives and DOD officials in the United States and Afghanistan, including DOD officials at the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (OSD-P) who helped create the DOD reporting we reviewed.

To determine the extent to which DOD has information about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment, we reviewed DOD documents and reports and interviewed DOD officials in the United States and Afghanistan, including DOD officials who advise

¹GAO, *Afghanistan Security: Some Improvements Reported in Afghan Forces' Capabilities, but Actions Needed to Enhance DOD Oversight of U.S.-Purchased Equipment*, [GAO-18-662SU](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 20, 2018).

the ANDSF. We also reviewed federal internal control standards to determine what responsibilities agencies have specifically related to information collection.² To provide illustrative examples of information DOD has about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment and what that information indicates about the ANDSF's abilities and challenges, we interviewed and analyzed written responses from DOD officials, including DOD officials who provide procurement and lifecycle management for some ANDSF aircraft and vehicles, about three equipment types—MD-530 helicopters, Mobile Strike Force Vehicles (MSFV), and radios. We selected these three equipment types from a list that we developed, for an August 2017 report, of key ANDSF equipment the United States purchased from fiscal years 2003 through 2016.³ We made our selections after reviewing DOD documentation and interviewing DOD officials regarding a number of considerations, such as (1) how critical the equipment is to the ANDSF's ability to achieve its mission; (2) which ANDSF component uses the equipment (i.e., Afghan National Police, Afghan National Army, or both); (3) whether DOD intends to continue procuring the equipment for the ANDSF; and (4) whether the equipment had been in use at least 5 years.

We collected detailed information about the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain MD-530 helicopters, MSFVs, and radios, as well as other key statistics DOD provided about the equipment, such as inventory, average lifespan, average cost, role, and training. This information was based mainly on DOD responses collected from January 2018 to February 2018 as well as DOD documents and reports produced after January 1, 2015. The total amount of MD-530s and radios authorized for procurement was based on DOD data that we collected for our August 2017 report on key ANDSF equipment the United States purchased in fiscal years 2003 through 2016, which we supplemented with additional

²GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

³Our analysis of the information DOD has about these three equipment types is not generalizable and is intended to provide context about DOD's information on the ANDSF's ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment. For our August 2017 report on key ANDSF equipment purchased by the United States, see GAO, *U.S.-Funded Equipment for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces*, [GAO-17-667R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 10, 2017).

data DOD provided on U.S.-purchased equipment from October 1, 2016, through December, 31, 2017.⁴

The performance audit upon which this report is based was conducted from August 2016 to September 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate, evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We subsequently worked with DOD from September 2018 to October 2018 to prepare this public version of the original sensitive report for public release. This public version was also prepared in accordance with those standards.

⁴[GAO-17-667R](#).



Source: Capt. Jason Smith, Department of Defense, Defense Video Imagery and Distribution System. | GAO-19-116

Program Essentials

Manufacturer: MD Helicopters, Inc.

U.S. Program Management

Office: U.S. Army, Non-Standard Rotary Wing Aircraft Project Management Office

Program Advising: Train Advise Assist Command–Air (TAAC-Air)

Key Statistics

Variants: All can be armed with .50-cal machine gun pods and/or 2.75 inch rocket pods.

Total Authorized for Procurement: 60 as of December 31, 2017

Inventory: 25 as of January 2018 (30 are scheduled for delivery; attrition of 5 due to crashes and enemy fire)

Target inventory: 55 by September 2019

Average Lifespan: Absent mishaps, and with good maintenance, there is no defined lifespan limit for MD-530s, according to DOD officials.

Average cost: \$6.3 million per aircraft, including all electronic devices, weapons management systems, and weapons (excluding ordnance), according to DOD officials.

Fleet and Maintenance locations: All assigned to Kabul Air Wing; forward deploy to Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar and to other forward locations from those bases

AAF conducts basic maintenance at outlying detachments; contractors conduct maintenance in Kabul, Kandahar, and Mazar-e-Sharif.

Appendix II

MD-530F Cayuse Warrior Helicopter (MD-530)

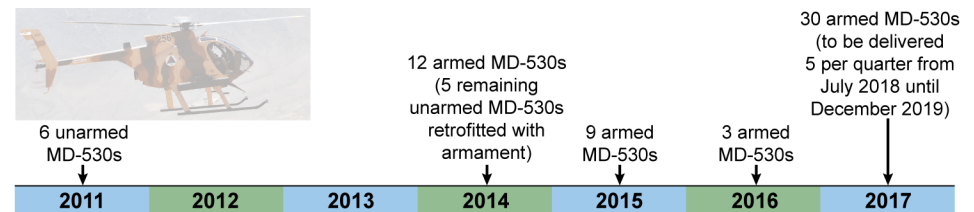
Operated by: Afghan Air Force (AAF)

Primary Capability: Armed Rotary Wing Support

Background

The United States originally procured 6 unarmed MD-530s for the AAF for rotary wing training in 2011. In 2014, the United States purchased 12 armed MD-530s and began retrofitting the 5 remaining trainer helicopters with armament for operational missions to address a close air attack gap. MD-530s were chosen to fill the gap over other aircraft, in part because they could be delivered relatively quickly as the AAF awaited A-29 light attack aircraft that were experiencing procurement delays, according to Department of Defense (DOD) officials. The United States procured additional MD-530s in 2015, 2016, and 2017 because of the aircraft's positive impact on the battlefield, according to DOD officials (see fig. 3).

Figure 3: Timeline of U.S.-Purchased MD-530 Helicopter Procurement for the Afghan Air Force



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense documents and interviews. | GAO-19-116

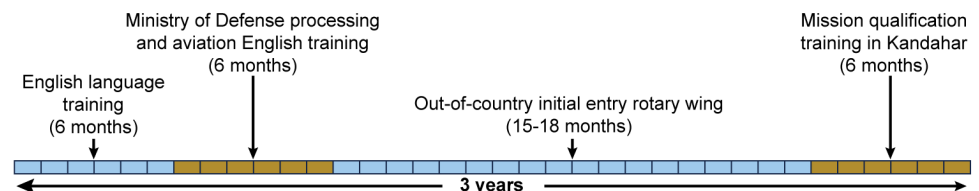
Role

- AAF MD-530s provide armed overwatch and close air attack for ground forces and aerial escort for other AAF aircraft.
- DOD officials stated that MD-530s support all levels of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, depending on the mission, in all but one region of Afghanistan, which is supported by other aircraft.
- MD-530s are typically tasked two at a time for missions, according to DOD officials.
- An MD-530 crew consists of a pilot and co-pilot, according to DOD.
 - Division of labor is based on the individual crew members' capabilities, with one pilot handling navigation and communication while the other identifies targets and operates the weapon systems.

Operational Training

- MD-530 pilot training is conducted by contractors and U.S. Air Force and Army pilot advisors at Kandahar Air Field, according to DOD officials.
 - MD-530 pilot training takes about 3 years (see fig. 4).

Figure 4: Afghan Air Force MD-530 Helicopter Pilot Training Timeline



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense documentation. | GAO-19-116

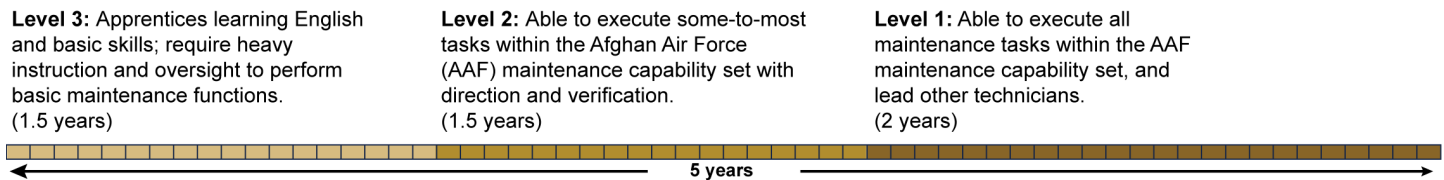
Operational Ability and Challenges

- The AAF conducts MD-530 operations independently within the set of tasks for which U.S. and coalition forces have trained them, according to DOD officials.
- Expanding the AAF’s skill set for MD-530 operations is limited by the following, according to DOD officials:
 - Lack of training because MD-530s being used in combat are unavailable for training, which hinders the AAF’s ability to grow their instructor pilot cadre and build new skills, such as night operations.
 - Ineffective command and control that does not always prioritize MD-530 missions in accordance with strategy and objectives.
 - Inadequate number of pilots to ensure uninterrupted crew availability. Specifically, DOD officials stated that, as of January 2018, the AAF had a requirement for about 75-80 MD-530 pilots; however, according to Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction reporting, the AAF had 59 qualified MD-530 pilots as of March 2018. The AAF plans to recruit and train about 165-170 pilots by 2023 to address the shortfall, according to DOD officials.

Maintenance Training

- Contractors conduct AAF MD-530 maintenance training, including classroom academic instruction and on-the-job technical training and mentorship, according to DOD officials.
- DOD officials stated that TAAC-Air and U.S. Air Force and Army pilots advise and oversee the training.
- According to DOD officials, AAF MD-530 maintenance training has three components: (1) English language training, (2) technical training, and (3) on-the-job training.
- According to DOD officials, AAF aircraft maintenance technicians have three skill levels (see fig. 5).
 - Trainees are deemed ready for upgrade to each skill level by AAF leaders and as recommended by TAAC-Air advisors and contractor personnel.
 - Maintenance training length varies by individual, but generally it takes about 5 years from entrance as a Level-3 apprentice technician to become a Level-1 technician.

Figure 5: Afghan Air Force MD-530 Helicopter Maintainer Skill Levels and Approximate Timeline



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense documentation. | GAO-19-116

Maintenance and Sustainment Ability and Challenges

- As of June 2018, the AAF had 56 trained MD-530 maintenance personnel (27 Level-3; 21 Level-2; 8 Level-1) with 10 more in training for initial Level-3 certification, according to DOD officials.
 - The target maintainer-to-aircraft ratio is 5.25; the AAF had 25 MD-530s as of June 2018, resulting in a requirement for about 132 MD-530 maintenance technicians.
 - Thus, the shortage for MD-530 maintenance personnel was about 58 percent (76 of 132).
- DOD officials stated that the Ministry of Defense and AAF have minimal ability to manage MD-530 maintenance; contractors are responsible for ensuring all aircraft are maintained and conduct most maintenance tasks; DOD manages the contracts.
- As of June 2018, AAF maintainers conducted about 35 percent of MD-530 maintenance tasks, and contractors conducted about 65 percent. AAF maintainers at the detachments and wings were able to perform basic fueling, arming, and sortie generation/recovery, according to DOD officials.
- Advisors provide in-depth advising to maintenance unit commanders for daily scheduling, task assignment, quality assurance, and supervision, according to DOD officials.
- Contractors provide MD-530 supply chain management; it is unlikely that the AAF will be able to run their supply chain and fleet management within the foreseeable future, according to DOD officials.
- DOD officials said that AAF aircraft maintenance is hampered by gaps in English language skills and leadership (i.e., ensuring technicians are trained, utilized effectively, and that their work meets quality standards).
- Similar to the U.S. military, the AAF will always rely on contractors to accomplish certain tasks, according to DOD officials. By 2023, the goal is for the AAF to complete 80 percent of aircraft maintenance and contractors to provide 20 percent of maintenance tasks for overhaul maintenance and in-depth troubleshooting.
- To help improve AAF’s maintenance abilities, DOD officials stated that DOD plans to shift AAF maintenance contracts’ focus from contractor-delivered operational readiness rates to AAF maintainer performance.



Source: Sgt. Benjamin Tuck, Department of Defense, Defense Video Imagery and Distribution System. | GAO-19-116

Tactical and Nontactical Radios

Operated by: Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP)

Primary Capability: Communications

Program Essentials

Manufacturers: Codan, Datron, EF Johnson, Harris, Icom, Motorola, Universal Radio

U.S. Program Management

Office: The ANDSF radio program is managed by the Afghan forces, according to DOD officials, while U.S. Army Communications–Electronics Command (CECOM) and Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) manage radio procurement.

Program Advising: CSTC-A

Key Statistics

Total Authorized for

Procurement: 162,772 as of December 31, 2017

Inventory: Not provided

Target inventory: 170,627

Average Lifespan: 2 to 15 years, according to DOD officials

Variants: handheld; manpack; portable; base station; vehicle mounted; squad/platoon; repeater

Types:

- **Tactical:** militarized radios designed to withstand shock, vibration, moisture, and dust
- **Nontactical:** commercially available handheld radios not designed for combat use

Average cost range: Tactical radios typically cost more than nontactical radios. For example, tactical radios can cost over \$80,000 while the average cost for a nontactical radio can range from about \$700 to over \$14,000, according to DOD officials.

Background

The United States first procured high and very high frequency radios for the ANA in 2003 after the Department of State identified communications infrastructure as essential for meeting Afghanistan’s long-term security needs. Radios were the first items the United States procured for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) as it began to help build the ANA. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), telecommunications coverage was unpredictable, making it difficult for coalition forces to communicate with the ANA. The United States first procured nontactical radios for the ANP in 2006, shortly after constructing a network to facilitate communications between different elements of the ANP and continued to provide radios to the ANDSF through 2017 to expand their capabilities and address shortages.

Role

- The ANDSF use radios for many activities. For example, they use radios to communicate on base for administrative tasks, as well as in tactical situations, according to Department of Defense (DOD) officials.
- According to DOD officials, radios are not standard issue for all ANDSF personnel. Radios often belong to the units and are shared.
- The ANA has most of the ANDSF’s U.S.-purchased tactical radios because, according to DOD officials, they have more of a combat role than the ANP, which has most of the U.S.-purchased nontactical radios.
- The ANDSF have radios with several different frequency ranges. Specifically, they have high frequency radios (operate in the 3–30 megahertz [MHz] frequency range), very high frequency radios (30–300 MHz range), ultra high frequency radios (300–3,000 MHz range), super high frequency radios (3,000–30,000 MHz range), and multiband radios (can operate across more than one range).
 - DOD officials told us that ANDSF often use high frequency radios to talk in the field because the radios are long range and not limited to line-of-sight communication, unlike ultra high frequency radios, which are often used in urban settings. Super high frequency radios are used for radar surveillance and satellite communication.

Operational Training

- The ANA manages and conducts its own radio operational training. Basic skills are taught in a classroom setting and are reinforced with on-the-job experience, according to DOD officials.
 - Officials told us that ANA basic radio operator training takes about 9 weeks and is conducted at the Signal School in Mazar-e-Sharif.
- The ANP does not have a dedicated course for radio operational training.
 - ANP students receive about 4 hours of basic communications training during the initial police training course at regional training centers.
- DOD officials said that CSTC-A and the ANDSF plan to implement a unified training course for the ANA and ANP that will teach both basic and specialized radio operational skills. These officials noted that they were in the early stages of planning as of February 2018.

Operational Ability and Challenges

- DOD officials stated that they have limited visibility into the ANDSF's radio operation proficiency and do not know how well ANA and ANP personnel on the front lines use radios in the field, such as in combat situations.
- DOD officials said it was unlikely that the ANDSF perform self-assessments of radio operational ability because performing assessments is a relatively sophisticated task that the ANDSF are likely unable to do yet.
- The ANDSF face several challenges when learning to operate radios, according to DOD officials. For instance, low literacy rates and lack of familiarity with some technological devices hinder their ability to learn how to operate radios.
- Lack of interoperability between different radios in the field has been a long-standing challenge for the ANDSF, according to DOD officials.
 - The officials stated that the ANDSF have received many different radio models from coalition partners throughout the years, but only radios of the same manufacturer and frequency range can communicate with each other when radios are in encrypted mode, which is the more secure method of communicating.
 - According to DOD officials, lack of interoperability has, at times, led ANDSF personnel to use communication methods that are less secure and more susceptible to enemy interference, such as using mobile phones instead of radios.
 - DOD has not conducted an interoperability test for all ANDSF radios, but it has done localized testing to try to identify solutions for communicating across different radio models, according to DOD officials.
 - DOD officials told us that they have also conducted market research to identify new radios that are interoperable when encrypted, but also relatively low in price, to help ensure the ANDSF will be able to use and procure radios independent of U.S. and coalition forces in the future.

Maintenance Training

- The ANA manages and conducts its own radio maintenance training, according to DOD officials. Officials stated that basic skills are taught in a classroom setting and are reinforced with on-the-job experience.
 - Officials stated that ANA basic maintenance training takes about 9 weeks and is conducted at the Signal School in Mazar-e-Sharif.
- DOD officials stated that the ANP contracts out radio maintenance, and thus does not have maintenance training.

Maintenance and Sustainment Ability and Challenges

- DOD does not assess ANDSF maintenance abilities, and DOD officials were unsure whether the ANDSF perform such assessments. However, based on information DOD officials have received from ANDSF advisors in the field, the ANDSF are resourceful at maintaining radios.
- The ANA can perform basic unit-level repairs for Datron radios, which are the primary radio model the ANA uses, according to DOD officials. The ANA contracts out more complex Datron radio maintenance tasks, as well as maintenance for all other radio brands. According to CECOM officials, Datron radios are easier to maintain than other radio brands, such as Harris.
 - According to DOD officials, for proprietary reasons, more complex radio maintenance will likely always be contracted out, which is similar to U.S. military radio maintenance. However, the better the ANA becomes at basic repairs and preventive maintenance, the less it will need complex repairs.
- While the ANP currently contracts out all radio maintenance tasks, DOD has identified building the ANP's maintenance abilities as a long-term goal, according to DOD officials.
- DOD officials stated that the most common ANDSF radio repairs are replacing batteries, antennas, and headsets, and basic maintenance related to normal wear and tear.
- ANDSF radios have a shorter lifespan than the U.S. military's radios, which generally last about 33 years, DOD officials estimated. These officials cited the following factors that may contribute to the shorter average lifespan:
 - the harsh environment in Afghanistan;
 - lower incentive to maintain unit radios, as opposed to equipment that is issued to individuals, like weapons;
 - limited ANDSF preventive maintenance; and
 - lack of familiarity with certain types of technology and radios.
- The ANDSF rely on CECOM and CSTC-A for radio lifecycle management support. DOD officials explained that lifecycle management for all equipment is a challenge for the ANDSF because they have different resources for, and approaches to, program management than the U.S. military. For example, U.S. military lifecycle management is automated and based on consumption and demand, but the ANDSF process is largely paper-driven, which makes tracking consumption and demand difficult.



Source: Spc. Austin Boucher, Department of Defense, Defense Video Imagery and Distribution System. | GAO-19-116

Program Essentials

Manufacturer: Textron, Inc.

U.S. Program Management

Office: U.S. Army, Product Manager, Allied Tactical Vehicles

Program Advising: NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) for ANASOC and Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) for ANA

Key Statistics

Variants:

- **Turret:** Armed with .50-cal machine gun and 40mm grenade launcher; equipped with turret
- **Gunner:** Armed with .50-cal machine gun; equipped with objective gunner protection kit
- **Ambulance:** Unarmed; outfitted as armored ambulance

Total Purchased: 744 as of January 18, 2017

Inventory (according to DOD):

- **ANASOC:** 399 as of December 2017
- **ANA:** Unavailable

Target inventory: 566 (for ANASOC, according to DOD)

Average Lifespan: Unavailable

Average cost: \$1.2 million, armed

Fleet and Maintenance locations:

Mobile strike force units are based in Kabul and Kandahar but can deploy across Afghanistan.

Afghan forces conduct basic maintenance at unit locations; contractors and Afghan forces conduct higher-level maintenance at eight regional and national sites, according to DOD officials.

Appendix IV

Mobile Strike Force Vehicle (MSFV)

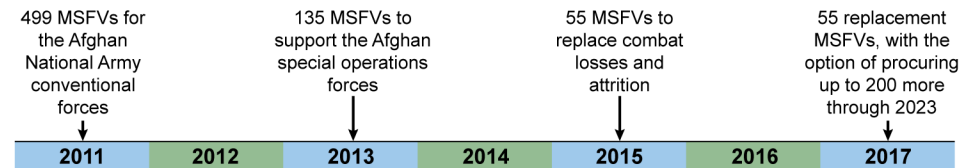
Operated by: Afghan National Army (ANA) and ANA Special Operations Command (ANASOC)

Primary Capability: Protected Mobility

Background

The United States procured MSFVs for the ANA to improve its offensive maneuver capability. The first 499 MSFVs (including 11 test vehicles) were purchased in 2011 to support the ANA conventional forces and the next 135 were purchased in 2013 to support the special operations forces. In 2015, the United States purchased 55 more MSFVs, primarily to replace combat losses and attrition, according to a DOD official. The United States procured 55 MSFVs in 2017, with the option of procuring up to 200 more replacement vehicles in the next 5 years, as needed (see fig. 6).

Figure 6: Timeline of U.S.-Purchased Mobile Strike Force Vehicles for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense documents and interviews. | GAO-19-116

Role

- MSFVs were purchased for the ANA with the intent to provide better mobility, firepower, and protection in offensive situations than other vehicles, such as Humvees, according to DOD officials. However, the ANA regularly used MSFVs non-offensively as moveable checkpoints.
- The ANA conventional forces' MSFVs began transferring to ANASOC in August 2017 as part of a plan to increase the size of the special security forces; with the remainder transferring in the first half of 2018.
- ANASOC, which performs most ANA offensive operations, plans to use MSFVs in more active roles than the ANA did. ANASOC MSFV units are being trained as commandos and will provide overwatch, ground fire support, and protected transport for special operations missions.
- Ambulance MSFVs provide protected transport for wounded personnel.
- All MSFV crews consist of a driver and a commander. Turret and gunner crews include a gunner, and ambulance crews have a medic.

Operational Training

- Basic operator training includes instruction on how to drive and utilize MSFVs, while operational training includes instruction on how to tactically maneuver and employ MSFVs in operations, according to a DOD official.
- The ANA conventional forces underwent a 12-week basic MSFV operator and maintenance course, led by contractors at the ANA Armor Branch School, as well as on-the-job training, according to a DOD official.
- ANASOC crewmembers undergo commando training and a 12-week operator and operational course at the ANASOC Mobility School.
- ANA conventional forces' MSFV crewmembers were trained for one position (e.g., driver or gunner) whereas ANASOC is cross-training some positions and offers a field exercise that involves all operational positions.

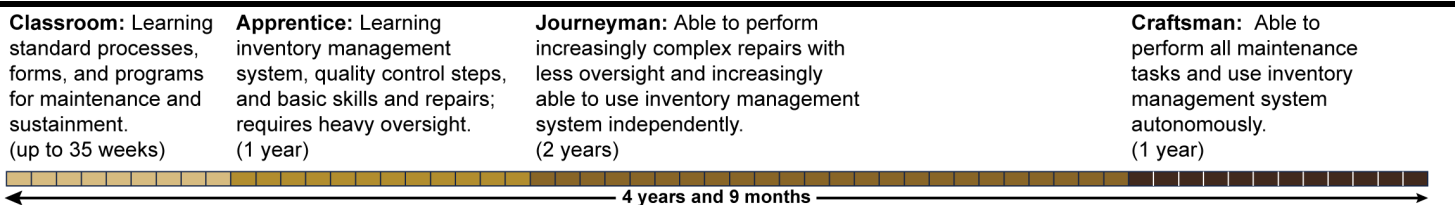
Operational Ability and Challenges

- DOD officials stated that there has been little insight into MSFV crewmembers' operational abilities under the ANA conventional forces, but NSOCC-A plans to collect more information as the MSFVs transfer to ANASOC.
 - According to initial observations DOD officials have made since MSFVs began transferring to ANASOC in August 2017, crewmembers can operate MSFVs independently, but their proficiency varies.
 - NSOCC-A plans to assess performance throughout training, and may perform after-action reviews of how MSFV crews perform in combat situations, according to DOD officials.
- Operational proficiency varies, in part, because MSFV crewmembers did not all receive the same quality of training in the ANA conventional forces, according to DOD officials. For example, the ANA conventional forces do not consistently adhere to operational readiness cycles (ORC), which allow soldiers to dedicate time to training, because many ANA commanders require soldiers to remain in the field to respond to security concerns.
 - According to DOD officials, ANASOC generally adheres to ORCs more consistently and places a greater emphasis on training than conventional forces, which may increase MSFVs' operational ability.
- One DOD official noted that MSFV crewmembers may find the commando training challenging when they move from the conventional forces to ANASOC. Specifically, some crewmembers may have no desire to complete commando training, and some may not be capable of completing the more intense training.

Maintenance Training

- ANASOC MSFV maintainer training includes two separate initial 12-week courses: a junior mechanics course on unit-level MSFV maintenance and a senior mechanics course on how to recover disabled MSFVs. The senior course participates in the field training exercise with the operational trainees.
- Contractors provide on-the-job training for maintenance and supply chain management at regional and national maintenance sites as part of the National Maintenance Strategy Ground Vehicle Support contract (NMSGVS).
 - NMSGVS aims to reduce reliance on coalition contracts over 5 years through training and mentorship for vehicles in the Afghan forces. According to DOD, the contract became fully operational in December 2017.
 - NMSGVS trainees progress through four skill levels over nearly 5 years (see fig. 7).

Figure 7: National Maintenance Strategy Vehicle Maintenance and Sustainment Skill Levels and Timeline



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense documentation. | GAO-19-116

Maintenance and Sustainment Ability and Challenges

- DOD officials stated that no reliable information was gathered on MSFV maintenance ability for the ANA conventional forces from 2011 through August 2017 and that neither CSTC-A nor the ANA had reliable sustainment data, such as inventory and mission capability rates.
 - However, NSOCC-A plans to collect more information on maintenance ability and sustainment as MSFVs transfer to ANASOC and NMSGVS is implemented.
- According to DOD officials, as of January 2018, complex (i.e., non-unit-level) ANASOC MSFV maintenance was split evenly between NMSGVS contractors and ANASOC maintenance providers.
- NMSGVS aims to strengthen Afghans' vehicle maintenance abilities by requiring a systematic decrease in the percentage of maintenance performed by NMSGVS contractors, according to DOD officials.
 - NMSGVS requires that 50 percent of all ANA vehicle maintenance be performed by the ANA in the first year, with a goal of 80 percent for MSFVs by 2023, according to DOD officials. However, an official noted the first year goal was not calculated using current maintenance rates as a baseline, and thus likely will not be met.
 - NMSGVS requires that MSFVs sustain a 70 percent readiness rate over the 5-year contract period, with a target of 90 percent.
- DOD officials noted that MSFV maintainers have often been assigned to non-maintenance activities, such as manning checkpoints, because units need more personnel in the field. Low literacy rates, poor training attendance, and low retention rate of skilled maintainers are also challenges.
- NMSGVS contractors will also provide MSFV supply chain management as they train and mentor Afghans on how to use the Afghan supply management system to request DOD-provided spare parts. For the first 2 years of the contract, NMSGVS contractors can provide spare parts to the Afghan forces if the Afghan forces cannot obtain the parts within a reasonable time frame to repair vehicles through their system.

Appendix V: Comments from the Department of Defense

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.

See comment 1.



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20 AUG 2018

Ms. Jessica Farb
International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)
441 G Street, NW, Room 1808
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Farb:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-18-662, "Afghanistan Security: Some Improvements Reported in Afghan Forces' Capabilities, but Actions Needed to Enhance DOD Oversight of U.S.-Purchased Equipment," dated July 20, 2018. After careful review, DoD concurs in both of GAO's recommendations for executive action.

I want to thank the GAO team for its collaboration with DoD on this important review of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces' capability and capacity to operate and sustain U.S.-purchased weapon systems and equipment. As the report notes, DoD relies on Afghan reporting regarding equipment used by Afghan units that do not benefit from persistent U.S. advising. To improve the quality of this reporting, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan personnel operating as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission work closely with the Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior to improve Afghan equipment accountability systems and processes and reporting capabilities. U.S. advisors also make frequent visits to Afghan logistic and sustainment organizations to conduct assessments and identify and implement process improvements. The Department is committed to ensuring that we are using appropriated funds effectively and that DoD advisors continue to build the Afghans' capacity to sustain their warfighters who are engaged in combat against a resilient insurgency.

Thank you for your support for our men and women in uniform.

Sincerely,

Dr. Colin Jackson
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia)



**GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED JULY 20, 2018
GAO-18-662 (GAO CODE 101053)**

“AFGHANISTAN SECURITY: SOME IMPROVEMENTS REPORTED IN AFGHAN FORCES’ CAPABILITIES, BUT ACTIONS NEEDED TO ENHANCE DOD OVERSIGHT OF U.S.-PURCHASED EQUIPMENT”

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION**

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should develop and, as appropriate, implement options for collecting reliable information on the ANDSF conventional forces' ability to operate and maintain U.S.-purchased equipment.

DoD RESPONSE: Concur. DoD advisors will continue to work closely with Afghan counterparts to build their capacity to sustain their equipment and their ability to reliably report information on equipment status.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

GAO Comments

1. The GAO report number cited in DOD's letter refers to a draft of the sensitive version of this report, which we issued on September 20, 2018. Prior to issuing that version, we changed its report number to GAO-18-662SU to reflect its sensitive nature. That version of this report included two recommendations. The second recommendation has been omitted from DOD's letter in this public version because it was related to information that DOD deemed to be sensitive.

Appendix VI: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

Jessica Farb, (202) 512-7114 or farbj@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Joyee Dasgupta (Assistant Director), Kara Marshall, Katherine Forsyth, and Bridgette Savino made key contributions to this report. The team also benefitted from the expert advice and assistance of David Dayton, Neil Doherty, Justin Fisher, Ashley Alley, Cary Russell, Marie Mak, James Reynolds, Sally Williamson, Ji Byun, and J. Kristopher Keener.

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