



Highlights of [GAO-10-842T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Defense, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2009, the Department of Defense (DOD) reported that it spent \$4 billion to move troops and materiel into Afghanistan, a mountainous, arid, land-locked country with few roads, no railway, and only four airports with paved runways over 3,000 meters. The terrain and weather in Afghanistan and surrounding countries pose further challenges to transporting supplies and equipment. In December 2009, the President announced that an additional 30,000 U.S. troops will be sent to Afghanistan by August 2010.

Today's testimony discusses GAO's preliminary observations drawn from ongoing work reviewing DOD's logistics efforts supporting operations in Afghanistan, including (1) the organizations involved and routes and methods used to transport supplies and equipment into and around Afghanistan; (2) steps DOD has taken to improve its distribution process, based on lessons learned from prior operations; and (3) challenges affecting DOD's ability to distribute supplies and equipment within Afghanistan, and its efforts to mitigate them. In conducting its audit work, GAO examined DOD guidance and other documentation relating to the processes of transporting supplies and equipment to Afghanistan and met with various cognizant officials and commanders in the United States, Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Qatar.

View [GAO-10-842T](#) or key components. For more information, contact William M. Solis at (202) 512-8365 or [solisw@gao.gov](mailto:solisw@gao.gov).

## WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

### Preliminary Observations on DOD's Progress and Challenges in Distributing Supplies and Equipment to Afghanistan

#### What GAO Found

Movement of supplies and equipment into and around Afghanistan is a complex process involving many DOD organizations and using air, sea, and ground modes of transportation. DOD's ability to provide timely logistics support to units deploying to Afghanistan or already in theater depends on its ability to synchronize all of these activities into one seamless process. For example, U.S. Transportation Command manages air and surface transportation from the United States to and around the U.S. Central Command area of operations; U.S. Central Command's Deployment and Distribution Operations Center validates and directs air movements and monitors and directs surface movements within theater; the Air Force's Air Mobility Division assigns and directs aircraft to carry materiel within the theater; and the Army's 1st Theater Sustainment Command monitors strategic movements of materiel and directly influences movements into theater. Most cargo in theater is transported commercially by ship to Pakistan and then by contractor-operated trucks to Afghanistan, but high-priority and sensitive items are transported by U.S. military and commercial aircraft directly from the United States and other countries to logistics hubs in Afghanistan.

DOD has taken some steps to improve its processes for distributing materiel to deployed forces based on lessons learned from prior operations. For example, in response to lessons learned from problems with keeping commanders informed about incoming materiel in Operation Iraqi Freedom, U.S. Transportation Command established the Central Command Deployment and Distribution Operations Center, which now helps coordinate the movement of materiel and forces into the theater of operations. Also, since GAO reported in 2003 that radio frequency identification tags were not being effectively used to track materiel in transit to, within, and from Iraq, DOD developed policies and procedures to increase tag use on cargo traveling through the U.S. Central Command theater of operations, including Afghanistan.

Challenges hindering DOD's ability to distribute needed supplies and equipment to U.S. forces operating in Afghanistan include difficulties with transporting cargo through neighboring countries and around Afghanistan, limited airfield infrastructure, lack of full visibility over cargo movements, limited storage capacity at logistics hubs, difficulties in synchronizing the arrival of units and equipment, lack of coordination between U.S. and other coalition forces for delivery of supplies and equipment, and uncertain requirements and low transportation priority for contractors. DOD recognizes these challenges and has ongoing or planned efforts to mitigate some of them; however, some efforts involve long-term plans that will not be complete in time to support the ongoing troop increase. DOD is also working to address these challenges through planning conferences to synchronize the flow of forces into Afghanistan. At these conferences, DOD officials stressed the need to balance and coordinate multiple requirements in order to sustain current operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, draw down forces and equipment in Iraq, and increase forces and equipment in Afghanistan.