



Highlights of [GAO-10-509T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Departments of Defense (DOD) and State (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have relied extensively on contractors, grantees, and cooperative agreement recipients to support troops and civilian personnel and carry out reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. This reliance increases the importance of agencies having reliable data to inform decision-making and oversee the work performed.

To help increase oversight of activities supporting DOD, State, and USAID's efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, as amended, required the agencies to identify common databases of information on their contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and associated personnel. In their July 2008 memorandum of understanding (MOU), the three agencies designated the Synchronized Predeployment and Operational Tracker (SPOT) as their system for tracking the required information.

GAO's testimony addresses (1) how a lack of information hinders agencies' management and oversight of contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and associated personnel, (2) the status of the agencies' continued efforts to implement SPOT, and (3) GAO's prior recommendation to improve SPOT's implementation. It is drawn primarily from GAO's prior work on contracting in contingency operations.

[View GAO-10-509T for key components.](#)
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IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Agencies Face Challenges in Tracking Contracts, Grants, Cooperative Agreements, and Associated Personnel

What GAO Found

GAO has reported extensively on the need for agencies to have reliable information to manage and oversee work being performed to address challenges related to using contracts and grants. The lack of such information may inhibit planning, increase costs, and introduce unnecessary risk. For example, GAO reported last year that by not having insight into contractor provided services, DOD may lack needed information to efficiently allocate contracted services to support remaining U.S. forces in Iraq. GAO also previously determined that by not considering contractor and grantee resources in developing an Afghan assistance strategy, USAID's ability to make resource allocation decisions was impaired. Many of GAO's prior recommendations on contractors supporting contingency operations focused on increasing agencies' ability to track contracts and contractor personnel. Agency officials have indicated that SPOT has the potential of consolidating dispersed information to help them better manage and oversee contractors. SPOT may offer the same potential for grants and cooperative agreements as information on them and their personnel are similarly dispersed.

Although the agencies have made progress in implementing SPOT, the database falls short of providing information to facilitate oversight and fulfill statutory requirements. GAO reported in October 2009 that the criteria used to determine which personnel are entered into SPOT varied and not all personnel were being entered as required. In particular, the agencies cited the need for a SPOT-generated letter of authorization as the primary factor for deciding whether personnel were entered, but not all personnel, particularly local nationals, need this authorization. As a result, officials from the three agencies acknowledge that SPOT data are incomplete, with some questioning the need for detailed data on all contractors. Because of SPOT's limitations, the agencies have relied on other sources, such as periodic surveys, for data on contractor personnel, but we have found these sources to be unreliable. Although contract information is being entered into SPOT, the system continues to lack the capability to accurately import information from other sources as agreed to in the MOU. For example, because SPOT does not require users to enter contract information in a standardized manner, our work has shown that there will be challenges in identifying which contracts' dollar values and competition information should be imported. While our prior findings are specific to contracts and their personnel, together with our ongoing work they point to challenges the agencies will face in using SPOT to track similar data on grants, cooperative agreements, and their personnel.

Last year GAO recommended that the agencies develop a plan for addressing the shortcomings identified in SPOT's implementation. While the agencies agreed coordination is important, they disagreed with the need for a plan. GAO continues to believe that a plan with timeframes that provides consistent criteria and standards is necessary for ensuring that SPOT meets statutory requirements and helping the agencies identify their information needs to manage and oversee contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements.