



Highlights of [GAO-10-472](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Contractors provide a broad range of support to U.S. forces deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, with the number of contractors at times exceeding the number of military personnel in each country. The Department of Defense (DOD) has acknowledged shortcomings in how the role of contractors was addressed in its planning for Iraq and Afghanistan. In its report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, the Senate Armed Services Committee directed GAO to assess DOD's development of contract support plans. This report examines (1) what progress DOD has made in developing operational contract support annexes for its operation plans, (2) the extent to which contract requirements are included in other sections of operation plans, and (3) DOD's progress in establishing a long-term capability to include operational contract support requirements in operation plans. GAO reviewed DOD policies, selected operation plans and annexes, and interviewed officials at the combatant commands, the Joint Staff, and Office of the Secretary of Defense.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making a number of recommendations aimed at improving the ability of combatant command planners to identify contract support requirements in their operation plans and ensuring the department effectively institutionalizes its organizational approach to addressing contractors in its plans. DOD agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-10-472](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact William M. Solis at (202) 512-8365 or solisw@gao.gov.

WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

DOD Needs to Improve Its Planning for Using Contractors to Support Future Military Operations

What GAO Found

Although DOD guidance has called for combatant commanders to include an operational contract support annex—Annex W—in their operation plans since February 2006, we found only four operation plans with Annex Ws have been approved and planners have drafted Annex Ws for an additional 30 plans. According to combatant command officials, most of the annexes drafted to date restated broad language from existing DOD guidance on the use of contractors to support deployed forces. Several factors help explain the difficulties planners face in identifying specific contract support requirements in Annex Ws. For example, most operation plans contained limited information on matters such as the size and capabilities of the military force involved, hindering the ability of planners to identify detailed contract support requirements. In addition, shortcomings in guidance on how and when to develop contract support annexes complicate DOD's efforts to consistently address contract requirements in operation plans and resulted in a mismatch in expectations between senior DOD leadership and combatant command planners regarding the degree to which Annex Ws will contain specific information on contract support requirements. Senior decision makers may incorrectly assume that operation plans have adequately addressed contractor requirements. As a result, they risk not fully understanding the extent to which the combatant command will be relying on contractors to support combat operations and being unprepared to provide the necessary management and oversight of deployed contractor personnel.

According to combatant command officials, detailed information on operational contract support requirements is generally not included in other sections or annexes of the operation plans. Although DOD guidance underscores the importance of addressing contractor requirements throughout an operation plan, including the base plan and other annexes as appropriate, GAO found that nonlogistics personnel tend to assume that the logistics community will address the need to incorporate operational contract support throughout operation plans. For example, combatant command officials told GAO that they were not aware of any assumptions specifically addressing the potential use or role of operational contract support in their base plans. Similarly, according to DOD planners, there is a lack of details on contract support in other parts of most base plans or in the nonlogistics (e.g., communication or intelligence) annexes of operation plans.

DOD has launched two initiatives to improve its capability to address operational contract support requirements in its operation plans, but these initiatives are being refined and their future is uncertain. DOD has placed joint operational contract support planners at each combatant command to assist with the drafting of Annex Ws. In addition, the department has created the Joint Contingency Acquisition Support Office to help ensure that contract support planning is consistent across the department. For both initiatives, a lack of institutionalization in guidance and funding and staffing uncertainties have created challenges in how they execute their responsibilities.