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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

November 5, 2009

Congressional Committees

Subject: Afghanistan's Security Environment

In March 2009, out of concern that the overall security situation in Afghanistan had not improved after more than 7 years of U.S. and international efforts, the administration completed a 60-day strategic review of U.S. policy and the security environment in Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹ Based on this review, and recognizing the vital U.S. interest in addressing security threats posed by extremists in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the administration announced a strategic goal of disrupting, dismantling, and eventually defeating these extremists and eliminating their safe havens in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.² Subsequently, in August 2009, the United States issued an integrated civilian-military campaign plan for support to Afghanistan.³ The strategy and campaign plan call for, among other things, the execution of an integrated counterinsurgency mission and continued efforts to build the capacity of military and civilian elements of the Afghan government to lead counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts and provide internal security for the Afghan people. Accordingly, the focus for U.S. forces in Afghanistan will be to (1) secure Afghanistan from insurgent and terrorist threats and (2) rapidly train Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF)⁴ to lead military and law enforcement operations.

We have previously reported on security conditions in Afghanistan and the need for additional personnel to help build capable ANSF.⁵ This report provides updated information on (1) the security situation as gauged by trends in enemy-initiated attacks, (2) challenges for U.S. reconstruction efforts posed by security conditions, and (3) the recent increase in U.S. and coalition troop presence. To address these objectives, we incorporated information from our past and continuing work;

¹A subsequent assessment of the situation in Afghanistan by the commander of the International Security Assistance Force and U.S. forces in Afghanistan is currently under way. The commander's initial assessment was completed in August 2009.

²The President announced his strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan on March 27, 2009.

³GAO is currently performing a separate congressionally mandated review of the U.S. campaign plan for Afghanistan.

⁴The ANSF consists of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. We reported on U.S. efforts to develop capable ANSF in June 2008. See GAO, *Afghanistan Security: Further Congressional Action May Be Needed to Ensure Completion of a Detailed Plan to Develop and Sustain Capable Afghan National Security Forces*, [GAO-08-661](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 18, 2008).

⁵See GAO, *Afghanistan: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight*, [GAO-09-473SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 21, 2009).

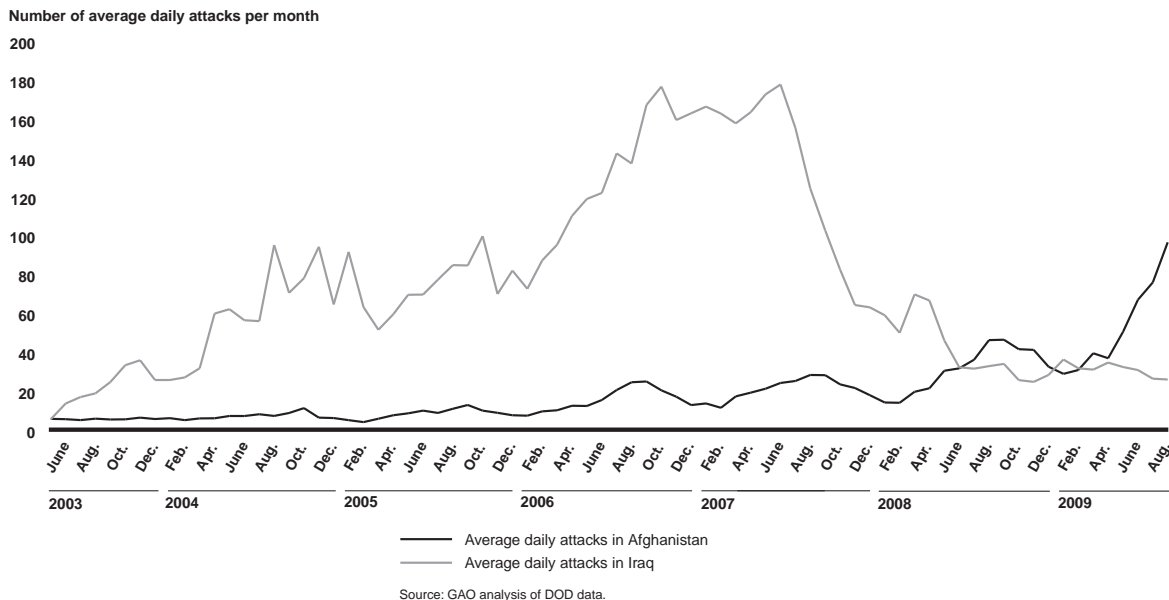
analyzed updated data on attacks, troop numbers, and U.S. funding; and reviewed relevant documents from the Departments of Defense (DOD) and State (State), as well as the administration's White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan and the recently developed civilian-military campaign plan for Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's Security Situation Continues to Worsen as Enemy-Initiated Attacks Increase

Afghanistan's security situation has deteriorated significantly since 2005, affecting all aspects of U.S. and allied reconstruction operations. As we reported in April 2009, the rise in enemy-initiated attacks on civilians and on U.S., Afghan, and coalition security forces has resulted from various factors, including a resurgence of the Taliban, the limited capabilities of Afghan security forces, a thriving illicit drug trade, and threats emanating from insurgent safe havens in Pakistan.

Since 2005, attacks on civilians, as well as on Afghan and coalition forces, have increased every year. The most recent data available, as of August 2009, showed the highest rate of enemy-initiated attacks since Afghanistan's security situation began to deteriorate. Overall, nearly 13,000 attacks were recorded between January and August 2009—more than two and a half times the number experienced during the same period last year and more than five times the approximately 2,400 attacks reported in all of 2005. Violence has generally been concentrated in the eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan where U.S. forces operate, with insurgents making increasing use of improvised explosive devices, suicide attacks, and attacks targeting infrastructure and development projects. As figure 1 illustrates, the pattern of attacks is seasonal, generally peaking from June through September each year.

Figure 2: Average Daily Reported Enemy-Initiated Attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan, May 2003 to August 2009



Security Situation Continues to Challenge U.S. Efforts in Afghanistan

Developing a self-reliant Afghanistan is a key end-state goal articulated in the U.S. strategy for Afghanistan, which notes that achieving such an outcome will enable the United States to withdraw combat forces and make a sustained commitment to Afghan political and economic development. While U.S. and international development projects in Afghanistan have made some progress, the deterioration of security has impeded efforts to stabilize and rebuild the country. In particular, U.S. officials have cited poor security as having caused delays, disruptions, and even abandonment of certain reconstruction projects, while also hampering management and oversight of such efforts. For instance, the administration’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan has identified the need for more security in order for civilian personnel and contractors to do their work in Afghanistan. Similarly, the commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)⁷ and U.S. forces in Afghanistan testified in his June 2009 confirmation hearing that improving security was a prerequisite for the development of local governance and economic growth in Afghanistan. The following list provides some specific examples of how the security situation in Afghanistan hampers U.S. efforts:

- **Development programs delayed or abandoned.** U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) staff in Afghanistan cited security as a major challenge to implementing development projects. According to USAID, programs ranging from road reconstruction to power generation and agricultural development face significant cost increases and have been delayed or abandoned due to a lack of security. For example, because attacks prevented

⁷As of October 2009, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization-led ISAF consisted of troops from 42 countries engaged in efforts to secure and stabilize Afghanistan.

contractors from working on an Afghan road to the Kajaki dam, USAID terminated the road contract after it had spent about \$5 million on it.⁸ USAID further noted in its comments on this report that supplies for the Kajaki dam project must now be flown in due to the deteriorating security environment. Additionally, DOD has reported that, although progress has been made in completing construction of the “ring road”—Afghanistan’s major highway—a lack of security has increased the risk of using Afghan roads.

- **Disruption of supply lines.** Supply transportation operations in Afghanistan continue to depend on treacherous overland routes. Although sensitive equipment is flown in by plane, supply convoys moving overland from Pakistan have been subject to repeated threats and attacks.
- **Development of Afghan security forces impeded by security problems.** U.S. officials have reported that efforts to train ANSF have been hindered by security problems. For example, despite the fact that the Afghan National Army is charged with defeating the insurgency and terrorism, Afghan National Police are often reassigned from their training courses to provide immediate assistance with the counterinsurgency effort, thus delaying the completion of their training. Additionally, DOD officials have indicated that distributing equipment to police in the field has been challenged in part by the unstable security situation.
- **Counternarcotics operations challenged by insurgent activity.** About 98 percent of Afghanistan’s opium poppy cultivation is concentrated in the southern provinces where insurgent activity has been heaviest. Recognizing the nexus between the drug trade and the insurgency, in December 2008 DOD adopted policies that allow the U.S. military to increase its involvement in counternarcotics operations.
- **Oversight of ongoing programs restricted.** Afghanistan’s security situation has contributed to U.S. funds being expended with limited U.S. government oversight. For example, USAID officials told us their ability to monitor and evaluate ongoing programs has been restricted by security constraints. In comments on this report, USAID noted that due to deteriorating security in southern and eastern Afghanistan, monitoring of the delivery of health services has been significantly hindered or stopped in some areas. Similarly, State officials told us that poor security has considerably inhibited the oversight of counternarcotics efforts outside Kabul, including programs such as opium eradication, alternative livelihoods, and public information.

⁸We reported in July 2008 about U.S. and donor efforts to build roads in Afghanistan. See GAO, *Afghanistan Reconstruction: Progress Made in Constructing Roads, but Assessments for Determining Impact and a Sustainable Maintenance Program Are Needed*, GAO-08-689 (Washington, D.C.: July 8, 2008).

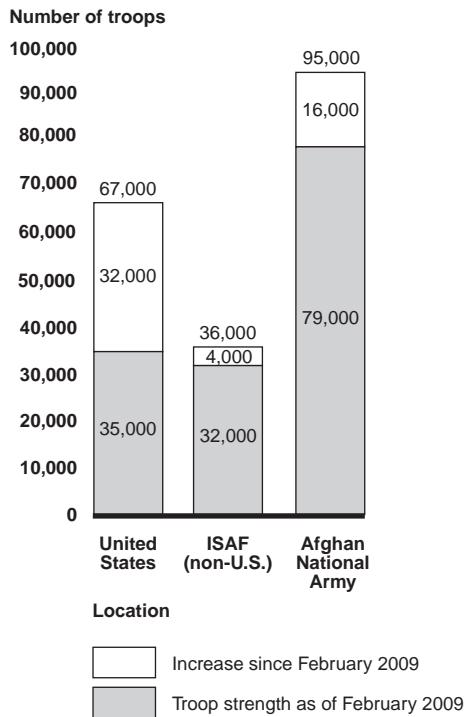
Increased U.S. and Coalition Troop Presence Is Intended to Help Secure Afghanistan and Develop ANSF Capacity

As of November 2009, there were reportedly about 67,000 U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan—an increase of more than 90 percent from the force level of 35,000 we previously reported as of February 2009.⁹ According to DOD, by the end of 2009 U.S. troop levels will rise further to about 68,000. Additionally, as of October 2009, there were reportedly about 36,000 non-U.S. military personnel in ISAF—an increase from the reported February 2009 force level of about 32,000. Furthermore, as of September 2009, DOD reported 95,000 Afghan National Army personnel assigned to the ANSF.¹⁰ According to DOD, the ANSF will reach its authorized end-strength of 230,000 army and police personnel by October 2010. Figure 3 shows the reported increase in U.S., coalition, and Afghan military troop strength between February 2009 and November 2009.

⁹Part of the increase in U.S. troop levels is a result of the President's February 2009 approval to deploy more than 21,000 additional troops to Afghanistan this year. Of these 21,000 troops, about 17,700 are intended to stabilize southern Afghanistan and about 4,000 are intended to support the ANSF development mission.

¹⁰DOD also indicated that there were about 93,000 Afghan National Police assigned to the ANSF as of September 2009. We previously reported in June 2008 that Afghanistan's Ministry of Interior produces the number of police assigned and that, according to DOD, these numbers may not be reliable. Subsequently, in March 2009, we noted that DOD was working with the Afghan government to identify and validate all police personnel on the payroll. See [GAO-08-661](#) and GAO, *Afghanistan Security: U.S. Programs to Further Reform Ministry of Interior and National Police Challenges by Lack of Military Personnel and Afghan Cooperation*, [GAO-09-280](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 9, 2009).

Figure 3: Increase in Reported U.S., Coalition, and Afghan Military Troop Strength between February 2009 and November 2009



Source: DOD and ISAF data.

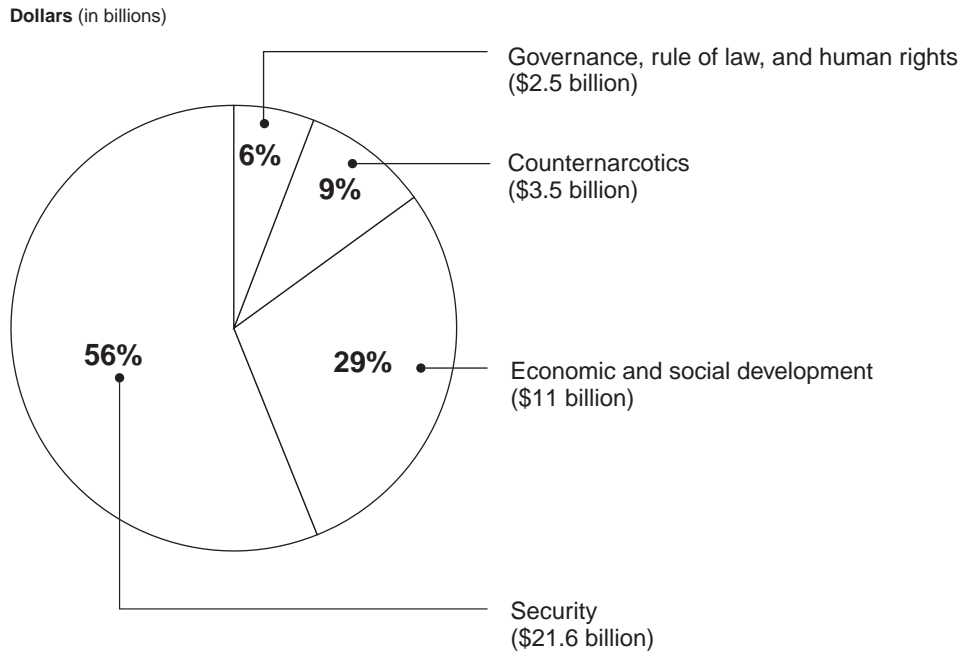
Note: U.S. figures are as of November 2009. ISAF figures are as of October 2009. Afghan National Army figures are as of September 2009.

Since 2001, more than half of the U.S. funding provided to support Afghanistan’s security, governance, reconstruction, and counternarcotics goals as set out in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) has been dedicated to supporting the development of ANSF. As shown in figure 4, the United States has provided more than \$38.6 billion¹¹ to support the ANDS goals since 2001, of which more than \$21 billion has been dedicated to ANSF development. In its 2010 budget request, DOD asked Congress to provide \$7.5 billion for the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund,¹² representing an almost 34 percent increase over 2009 funding levels.

¹¹This figure does not include funding for U.S. military operations in Afghanistan.

¹²The Afghan Security Forces Fund is used to plan, program, and implement structural, institutional, and management reforms of the ANSF.

Figure 4: Breakdown of \$38.6 Billion in U.S.-Provided Support to Afghanistan for Fiscal Years 2002 to 2009



Source: GAO analysis of DOD and State data.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DOD, USAID, and State. DOD and USAID provided written comments, which are reprinted in enclosures I and II of this report, respectively. In response to DOD’s comment that the report should be labeled “For Official Use Only,” we modified sections of the report, resulting in DOD’s determination that the report was no longer “For Official Use Only.” DOD stated that the facts presented in our report are accurate but asserted that our report treats security and development as independent entities rather than interrelated activities. We agree with DOD that security and development are interrelated activities, and our report illustrates several ways in which Afghanistan’s unstable security situation challenges development. For additional details, see GAO comments that follow enclosure I. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate. USAID provided updated information on the impact of Afghanistan’s deteriorating security situation on implementation and oversight of U.S. reconstruction efforts. State did not provide written comments.

Scope and Methodology

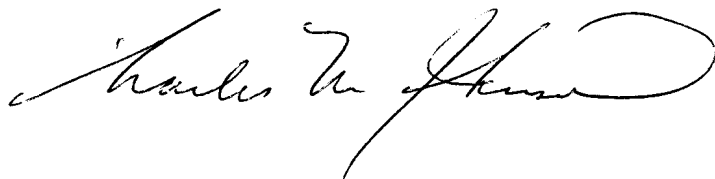
This report represents an update to our prior work on security conditions in Afghanistan and is based on past and continuing work. To address our objectives, we incorporated updated information from current budget and program documents, including updated financial data from DOD. We also incorporated updated attack data from DOD, which we used to assess the level of enemy-

initiated attacks on civilians and on U.S., Afghan, and coalition security forces. We have assessed the reliability of these financial and attack data as part of our previous work and have determined that they are sufficiently reliable for our purposes. Because DOD uses similar methodologies to derive the attack data it reports for Afghanistan and Iraq, we were able to compare both sets of data. The report also incorporates updated data on troop numbers for the Afghan National Army, ISAF, and the United States. We have assessed these data as part of our previous and ongoing work and have determined that they are sufficiently reliable for broad comparative purposes to identify changes in troop numbers over time. However, the report also notes our previously reported concerns with regard to the reliability of figures on the number of Afghan National Police. In addition to incorporating updated data, we also reviewed relevant documents from DOD and State, as well as the administration's White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan and the recently developed civilian-military campaign plan for Afghanistan.

We conducted our work from August 2009 to November 2009 in accordance with all sections of GAO's Quality Assurance Framework that are relevant to our objectives. The framework requires that we plan and perform the engagement to obtain sufficient and appropriate evidence to meet our stated objectives and to discuss any limitations in our work. We believe that the information and data obtained, and the analysis conducted, provide a reasonable basis for any findings and conclusions.

We are sending copies of this report to interested congressional committees, DOD, State, and USAID. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in enclosure III.



Charles Michael Johnson, Jr.
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Enclosures

List of Congressional Committees

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chair
The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Chair
The Honorable Richard G. Lugar
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman
Chair
The Honorable Susan M. Collins
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chair
The Honorable Judd Gregg
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chair
The Honorable Howard P. McKeon
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable Howard L. Berman
Chair
The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs
House of Representatives

The Honorable Edolphus Towns
Chair
The Honorable Darrell E. Issa
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chair
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

The Honorable John Tierney
Chair
The Honorable Jeff Flake
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives

Comments from the Department of Defense



INTELLIGENCE

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
5000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-5000

NOV 2

Mr. Charles M. Johnson, Jr.
Director, International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Johnson:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-09-995R, "Afghanistan's Security Environment," dated September 15, 2009 (GAO Code 320709).

While the Draft Report does not contain recommendations to the DoD, general comments are provided in the enclosure to assist you in improving the accuracy and clarity of the Draft Report. Most significantly, the Department believes that the Draft Report should be labeled "For Official Use Only" and not releasable for public review. The rationale for this is due to the inconclusive nature of the information contained in the Draft Report. The language in the Draft Report treats security and development as independent entities, rather than interrelated activities, and allows for open-ended arguments for individuals to establish inappropriate cause and effect relationships.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Draft Report and requests that the enclosed comments be made a part of the final report.

Sincerely,

James R. Clapper, Jr.

Enclosure:
As stated



See comment 1.

Enclosure I

Enclosure

DoD Comments
GAO Draft Report, "Afghanistan Security Environment"
GAO CODE 320709

Page 3. **"Afghanistan's Security Situation Continues to Worsen as Enemy Initiated Attacks Increase.** Afghanistan's security situation has deteriorated significantly since 2005..." Stating the security situation has "deteriorated since 2005" is accurate but the attack metrics do not measure the enemy's ability to influence the population, hold geographic terrain, or set the conditions needed for insurgent success. The metrics themselves are not that meaningful for today's fight without being placed in context. The overall increase in International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) operational tempo (OPTEMPO) and expanded area of operations this year is putting increased pressure on the Taliban. The Taliban are fighting hard to hang onto influence in a number of areas and are increasingly challenged in others. This limited portal into the security environment skews the overall picture of what is happening on the ground. Higher levels of incidents are one measure but they do not reflect the scope, character and impact of the incidents. The higher number of incidents can reflect a worsening situation for the enemy.

See comment 2.

Page 5. "Although never reaching the highest level of attacks in Iraq, the number of attacks in Afghanistan surpassed those in Iraq for the first time in July 2008 and has continued to exceed levels in Iraq in recent months (see fig. 2)." The graph shows attacks in Aug 09 surpassed those in Iraq, but are nowhere near the overall highs in Iraq shown on the graph in 2006/2007. The scope and character of violence and the drivers of instability were far more complex and deep rooted in Iraq than in Afghanistan. The comparison between Iraq and Afghanistan in this instance is inaccurate and loses the context without further explanation.

See comment 3.

Page 7. "*Development of Afghan Security Forces Impeded by Security Problems:* U.S officials have reported efforts to train Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) have been hindered by security problems." The enemy has hindered ANSF development, but what is required is deeper analysis identifying the scope and character of the impact. Illustrate how this has affected training time lines and ANSF preparedness to address/assume security in the future.

See comment 4.

Page 8. Change the authorized end strength of the ANSF from 216K to 230K (per U.S. Central Command).

See comment 5.

General Comments:

This report treats security and development as independent entities, rather than interrelated. Human Terrain integrates security and development, which must be analyzed holistically as a system of systems vice discreet activities. The report presents accurate facts; however, DoD would like a more thorough holistic evaluation of the situation in Afghanistan. Treating security and development as a "cause and effect" scenario is a logical fallacy that fails to reflect the complex nature of instability in Afghanistan.

See comment 6.

Enclosure I

The following are GAO's comments on DOD's written responses, dated November 2, 2009, to our draft report.

GAO Comments

1. We modified sections of the report in response to DOD's technical comments. DOD subsequently agreed that our report did not need to be labeled "For Official Use Only."
2. DOD states that higher levels of security incidents are one measure of the security situation but do not reflect the scope, character, and impact of the incidents. Although a full characterization of attacks in Afghanistan is beyond the scope of this report, we provide several examples of how instability affects U.S. efforts. Furthermore, while we acknowledge DOD's position that a higher number of attacks can reflect a worsening situation for the enemy, the commander of ISAF and U.S. forces in Afghanistan stated in his August 2009 initial assessment of the situation in Afghanistan that the insurgency is resilient and growing.
3. DOD asserts that the comparison between attack levels in Iraq and Afghanistan is inaccurate. However, all attack figures found in our report are based on DOD data that Defense Intelligence Agency officials consider a reliable and consistent source of information that can be used to identify trends in enemy activity and the overall security situation. DOD further asserts that the comparison between Iraq and Afghanistan loses context without further explanation. However, a detailed evaluation of factors affecting the levels of violence in Iraq and Afghanistan would involve sensitive information that could not be included in this report.
4. DOD acknowledges that the enemy has hindered ANSF development but notes that a deeper analysis identifying the scope and character of the impact is needed. Although we did not include such an analysis in this update, our prior work on the ANSF has identified specific ways in which the lack of security has affected ANSF development. For example, we noted in March 2009 that a new program to retrain the Afghan National Police and build professional and fully capable police units was taking longer than DOD initially projected, due in part to growing security threats affecting the program.¹³ In addition, we are currently conducting a separate review of U.S. efforts to develop capable Afghan National Army forces. We look forward to working with DOD on that review to examine in further detail how the security situation has impeded development of the Afghan National Army, to include training timelines.
5. We have modified our report to note that the authorized end-strength of the ANSF is now 230,000.

¹³[GAO-09-280](#).

Enclosure I

6. DOD contends that this report treats security and development as independent entities rather than interrelated activities. We agree with DOD that security and development are interrelated activities, and our report illustrates several ways in which Afghanistan's unstable security situation challenges development.

Enclosure II

Comments from the U.S. Agency for International Development



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SEP 29 2009

Mr. Charles Michael Johnson, Jr.
Director, International Affairs and Trade
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I am pleased to provide the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) formal response on the GAO report entitled "Afghanistan's Security Environment" (GAO-09-995R).

USAID would like to provide additional context and updates to two sections of the draft report presented for comment. Under the section of the draft report regarding challenges for U.S. reconstruction efforts posed by security conditions, we must now fly in supplies to the Kajaki dam project due to a deteriorating security situation. In that same section, I would like to further note that compared to the 2008/2009 project implementation season when our implementing partners experienced relative freedom of movement in and around Kunduz province, that flexibility has now decreased and is affecting USAID's wheat seed and fertilizer voucher distribution.

Under the section of the draft report regarding oversight of programs due to security concerns, the ongoing security situation in Afghanistan has made comprehensive and direct oversight of ongoing programs difficult. I would further note that due to the deteriorating security situation in the South and East of the country, monitoring of the delivery of health services has been significantly hindered or stopped in some areas. Additionally, the USAID Agriculture Rapid Response program had three top engineers resign in one month due to threats against them and their families.

In an environment such as Afghanistan, security is a concern that we must deal with on a daily basis. Our Afghanistan Mission is working through various mechanisms to overcome this challenge. For example, we are working with the

U.S. Agency for International Development
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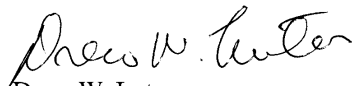
Enclosure II

- 2 -

Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as well as partners and grantees to develop new oversight mechanisms which include the employment of locally engaged Afghan staff and the Quality Assurance/Quality Control contracts to monitor and oversee our activities.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the GAO report and for the courtesies extended by your staff in the conduct of this review.

Sincerely,



Drew W. Luten
Acting Assistant Administrator
Bureau of Management

cc: Peter Orszag, Director, OMB

Enclosure III

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov

Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Hynek Kalkus (Assistant Director), Aniruddha Dasgupta, Emily Rachman, Gloria Leila Mahnad, Joseph Carney, Martin de Alteriis, and Mark Dowling made key contributions to this report. Sarah McGrath, Jeremy Sebest, and Cynthia Taylor provided technical assistance.

(320709)

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