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Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

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# AFGHANISTAN SECURITY

## Corrective Actions Are Needed to Address Serious Accountability Concerns about Weapons Provided to Afghan National Security Forces

Statement of Charles M. Johnson, Jr., Director  
International Affairs and Trade



**GAO**

Accountability \* Integrity \* Reliability

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February 12, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here to discuss the report GAO is releasing publicly today on accountability for small arms and light weapons that the United States has obtained and provided or intends to provide to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)—the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police.<sup>1</sup> Given the unstable security conditions in Afghanistan, the risk of loss and theft of these weapons is significant, which makes this hearing particularly timely.

My testimony today focuses on (1) the types and quantities of weapons the Department of Defense (Defense) has obtained for ANSF, (2) whether Defense can account for the weapons it obtained for ANSF, and (3) the extent to which ANSF can properly safeguard and account for its weapons and other sensitive equipment.

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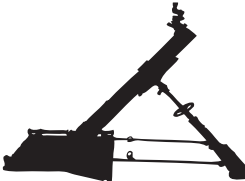
## Defense Has Obtained Weapons for ANSF through U.S. Procurement and International Donations

During fiscal years 2002 through 2008, the United States spent approximately \$16.5 billion to train and equip the Afghan army and police forces in order to transfer responsibility for the security of Afghanistan from the international community to the Afghan government. As part of this effort, Defense—through the U.S. Army and Navy—purchased over 242,000 small arms and light weapons, at a cost of about \$120 million. As illustrated in figure 1, these weapons include rifles, pistols, shotguns, machine guns, mortars, and launchers for grenades, rockets, and missiles.

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<sup>1</sup>GAO, *Afghanistan Security: Lack of Systematic Tracking Raises Significant Accountability Concerns about Weapons Provided to Afghan National Security Forces*, [GAO-09-267](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan 30, 2009).

**Figure 1: Types and Quantities of U.S.-Procured Weapons Shipped to Afghanistan for ANSF (December 2004–June 2008)<sup>a</sup>**

Weapon category	Quantity shipped
 Rifles	117,163
 Pistols	62,055
 Machine guns	35,778
 Grenade launchers	18,656
 Shotguns	6,704
 Rocket-propelled grenade launchers	1,620
 Mortars and other weapons <sup>a</sup>	227
<b>Total</b>	<b>242,203</b>

Source: GAO analysis of Defense data.

<sup>a</sup>Defense began shipping weapons it procured to Afghanistan for ANSF in December 2004.

In addition, CSTC-A has reported that 21 other countries provided about 135,000 weapons for ANSF between June 2002 and June 2008, which they

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have valued at about \$103 million.<sup>2</sup> This brings the total number of weapons Defense reported obtaining for ANSF to over 375,000.

The Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) in Kabul, which is a joint service, coalition organization under the command and control of Defense's U.S. Central Command is primarily responsible for training and equipping ANSF.<sup>3</sup> As part of that responsibility, CSTC-A receives and stores weapons provided by the United States and other international donors and distributes them to ANSF units. In addition, CSTC-A is responsible for monitoring the use of U.S.-procured weapons and other sensitive equipment.

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## Defense Could Not Fully Account for Weapons

Lapses in weapons accountability occurred throughout the supply chain, including when weapons were obtained, transported to Afghanistan, and stored at two central depots in Kabul. Defense has accountability procedures for its own weapons, including (1) serial number registration and reporting<sup>4</sup> and (2) 100 percent physical inventories of weapons stored in depots at least annually. However, Defense failed to provide clear guidance to U.S. personnel regarding what accountability procedures applied when handling weapons obtained for the ANSF.

We found that the U.S. Army and CSTC-A did not maintain complete records for an estimated 87,000—or about 36 percent—of the 242,000 weapons Defense procured and shipped to Afghanistan for ANSF. Specifically:

- For about 46,000 weapons, the Army could not provide us serial numbers to uniquely identify each weapon provided, which made it impossible for us to determine their location or disposition.

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<sup>2</sup>We were unable to independently verify the weapons quantities that the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) reported to us. Furthermore, CSTC-A officials told us they had not evaluated the reliability of the values assigned by donors for these weapons.

<sup>3</sup>This effort is undertaken with support from the Department of State (State).

<sup>4</sup>The objective of serial number registration and reporting procedures, according to Defense guidance, is to establish continuous visibility over weapons throughout the various stages of the supply process, including “from the contractor to depot; [and] in storage.” See DoD 4000.25-M, Vol. 2, Chap 18, C18.3.1.

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- For about 41,000 weapons with serial numbers recorded, CSTC-A did not have any records of their location or disposition.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, CSTC-A did not maintain reliable records, including serial numbers, for any of the 135,000 weapons it reported obtaining from international donors from June 2002 through June 2008.

Although weapons were in Defense's control and custody until they were issued to ANSF units, accountability was compromised during transportation and storage. Organizations involved in the transport of U.S.-procured weapons into Kabul by air did not communicate adequately to ensure that accountability was maintained over weapons during transport. In addition, CSTC-A did not maintain complete and accurate inventory records for weapons at the central storage depots and allowed poor security to persist. Until July 2008, CSTC-A did not track all weapons at the depots by serial number and conduct routine physical inventories. Without such regular inventories, it is difficult for CSTC-A to maintain accountability for weapons at the depots and detect weapons losses. Moreover, CSTC-A could not identify and respond to incidents of actual or potential compromise, including suspected pilferage, due to poor security and unreliable data systems. Illustrating the importance of physical inventories, less than 1 month after completing its first full weapons inventory, CSTC-A officials identified the theft of 47 pistols intended for ANSF.

During our review, Defense indicated that it would begin recording serial numbers for all weapons it obtains for ANSF, and CSTC-A established procedures to track weapons by serial number in Afghanistan. It also began conducting physical inventories of the weapons stored at the central depots. However, CSTC-A officials stated that their continued implementation of these new accountability procedures was not guaranteed, considering staffing constraints and other factors.

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<sup>5</sup>This estimated amount reflects the results of our testing of a generalizable sample selected randomly from 195,671 U.S.-procured weapons for which Defense could provide serial numbers; the estimate has a margin of error of +/- 10,000 weapons at the 95 percent confidence level.

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## ANSF Cannot Fully Safeguard and Account for Weapons

Despite CSTC-A training efforts, ANSF units cannot fully safeguard and account for weapons, placing weapons CSTC-A has provided to ANSF at serious risk of theft or loss. In February 2008, CSTC-A acknowledged that it was issuing equipment to Afghan National Police units before providing training on accountability practices and ensuring that effective controls were in place. Recognizing the need for weapons accountability in ANSF units, Defense and State deployed hundreds of U.S. trainers and mentors to, among other things, help the Afghan army and police establish equipment accountability practices. In June 2008, Defense reported to Congress that it was CSTC-A's policy not to issue equipment to ANSF without verifying that appropriate supply and accountability procedures are in place.<sup>6</sup> While CSTC-A has established a system for assessing the logistics capacity of ANSF units, it has not consistently assessed or verified ANSF's ability to properly account for weapons and other equipment.

Contractors serving as mentors have reported major ANSF accountability weaknesses. Although these reports did not address accountability capacities in a consistent manner that would allow a systematic or comprehensive assessment of all units, they highlighted the following common problems relating to weapons accountability.

- *Lack of functioning property book operations.* Many Afghan army and police units did not properly maintain property books, which are fundamental tools used to establish equipment accountability and are required by Afghan ministerial decrees.
- *Illiteracy.* Widespread illiteracy among Afghan army and police personnel substantially impaired equipment accountability. For example, a mentor noted that illiteracy in one Afghan National Army corps was directly interfering with the ability of supply section personnel to implement property accountability processes and procedures, despite repeated training efforts.
- *Poor security.* Some Afghan National Police units did not have facilities adequate to ensure the physical security of weapons and protect them against theft in a high-risk environment. In a northern province, for example, a contractor reported that the arms room of one police district

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<sup>6</sup>See Department of Defense, Report to Congress in Accordance with 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1231, P.L. 110-181), *United States Plan for Sustaining the Afghanistan National Security Forces* (Washington, D.C.: June 2008), 13.

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office was behind a wooden door that had only a miniature padlock, and that this represented the same austere conditions as in the other districts.

- *Unclear guidance.* Afghan government logistics policies were not always clear to Afghan army and police property managers. Approved Ministry of Interior policies outlining material accountability procedures were not widely disseminated, and many police logistics officers did not recognize any of the logistical policies as rule. Additionally, a mentor to the Afghan National Army told us that despite new Ministry of Defense decrees on accountability, logistics officers often carried out property accountability functions using Soviet-style accounting methods and that the Ministry was still auditing army accounts against those defunct standards.
- *Corruption.* Reports of alleged theft and unauthorized resale of weapons are common, including one case in which an Afghan police battalion commander in one province was allegedly selling weapons to enemy forces.
- *Desertion.* Desertion in the Afghan National Police has also resulted in the loss of weapons. For example, contractors reported that Afghan Border Police officers at one province checkpoint deserted to ally themselves with enemy forces and took all their weapons and two vehicles with them.

In July 2007, Defense began issuing night vision devices to the Afghan National Army. These devices are considered dangerous to the public and U.S. forces in the wrong hands, and Defense guidance calls for intensive monitoring of their use, including tracking by serial number. However, we found that CSTC-A did not begin monitoring the use of these sensitive devices until October 2008—about 15 months after issuing them. Defense and CSTC-A attributed the limited monitoring of these devices to a number of factors, including a shortage of security assistance staff and expertise at CSTC-A, exacerbated by frequent CSTC-A staff rotations. After we brought this to CSTC-A's attention, it conducted an inventory and reported in December 2008 that all but 10 of the 2,410 night vision devices issued had been accounted for.

We previously reported that Defense cited significant shortfalls in the number of trainers and mentors as the primary impediment to advancing

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the capabilities of ANSF.<sup>7</sup> According to CSTC-A officials, as of December 2008, CSTC-A had only 64 percent of the nearly 6,700 personnel it required to perform its overall mission, including only about half of the over 4,000 personnel needed to mentor ANSF units.

In summary, we have serious concerns about the accountability for weapons that Defense obtained for ANSF through U.S. procurements and international donations. First, we estimate that Defense did not systematically track over half of the weapons intended for ANSF. This was primarily due to staffing shortages and Defense's failure to establish clear accountability procedures for these weapons while they were still in U.S. custody and control. Second, ANSF units could not fully safeguard and account for weapons Defense has issued to them, despite accountability training provided by both Defense and State. Poor security and corruption in Afghanistan, unclear guidance from Afghan ministries, and a shortage of trainers and mentors to help ensure that appropriate accountability procedures are implemented have reportedly contributed to this situation.

In the report we are releasing today we make several recommendations to help improve accountability for weapons and other sensitive equipment that the United States provided to ANSF. In particular, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense (1) establish clear accountability procedures for weapons while they are in the control and custody of the United States, including tracking all weapons by serial number and conducting routine physical inventories; (2) direct CSTC-A to specifically assess and verify each ANSF unit's capacity to safeguard and account for weapons and other sensitive equipment before providing such equipment, unless a specific waiver or exception is granted; and (3) devote adequate resources to CSTC-A's effort to train, mentor, and assess ANSF in equipment accountability matters.

In commenting on a draft of our report, Defense concurred with our recommendations and has begun to take corrective action.

- In January 2009, Defense directed the Defense Security Cooperation Agency to lead an effort to establish a weapons registration and monitoring system in Afghanistan, consistent with controls mandated by Congress for weapons provided to Iraq. If Defense follows through on this

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<sup>7</sup>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).



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plan and, in addition, clearly requires routine inventories of weapons in U.S. custody and control, our concern about the lack of clear accountability procedures will be largely addressed.

- According to Defense, trainers and mentors are assessing the ability of ANSF units to safeguard and account for weapons. For the Afghan National Army, mentors are providing oversight at all levels of command of those units receiving weapons. For the Afghan National Police, most weapons are issued to units that have received instruction on equipment accountability as part of newly implemented training programs.<sup>8</sup> We note that at the time of our review, ANSF unit assessments did not systematically address each unit's capacity to safeguard and account for weapons in its possession. We also note that Defense has cited significant shortfalls in the number of personnel required to train and mentor ANSF units. Unless these matters are addressed, we are not confident the shortcomings we reported will be adequately addressed.
- Defense also indicated that it is looking into ways of addressing the staffing shortfalls that hamper CSTC-A's efforts to train, mentor, and assess ANSF in equipment accountability matters. However, Defense did not state how or when additional staffing would be provided.

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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## Scope and Methodology

To address our objectives, we reviewed documentation and interviewed officials from Defense, U.S. Central Command, CSTC-A, and the U.S. Army and Navy. On the basis of records provided to us, we compiled detailed information on weapons reported as shipped to CSTC-A in Afghanistan by the United States and other countries from June 2002 through June 2008. We traveled to Afghanistan in August 2008 to examine records and meet with officials at CSTC-A headquarters, visit the two central depots where the weapons provided for ANSF are stored, and meet with staff at an Afghan National Army unit that had received weapons. While in Afghanistan, we attempted to determine the location or disposition of a sample of weapons. Our sample was drawn randomly from a population of

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<sup>8</sup>These programs include Focused District Development and Focused Border Development. We are currently reviewing the Focused District Development program, and plan to report our results in March 2009.

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195,671 U.S.-procured weapons shipped to Afghanistan for which Defense was able to provide serial numbers. We used the results of our sampling to reach general conclusions about CSTC-A's ability to account for weapons purchased by the United States for ANSF. We also discussed equipment accountability with cognizant officials from the Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior, the U.S. Embassy, and contractors involved in building ANSF's capacity to account for and manage its weapons inventory.

We performed our work from November 2007 through January 2009 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.

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## Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

For questions regarding this testimony, please contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr. at (202) 512-7331 or [johnsoncm@gao.gov](mailto:johnsoncm@gao.gov).

Albert H. Huntington III, Assistant Director; James Michels; Emily Rachman; Mattias Fenton; and Mary Moutsos made key contributions in preparing this statement.

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