

## Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2011, DOD reported obligating over \$16 billion for contracts that were executed primarily in Afghanistan. GAO has previously identified the need for DOD to improve its oversight of contractors by non-acquisition personnel, such as CORs, and Congress has addressed this issue in legislation. CORs act as the liaisons between the contractor, the contracting officer, and the unit receiving support.

Following up on previous GAO work on this topic, GAO determined the extent to which (1) DOD's required training prepares CORs to perform their contract management and oversight duties, (2) CORs have the subject area-related technical expertise needed to oversee contracts, and (3) the number of CORs is sufficient to oversee the contracts in Afghanistan. GAO conducted field work in Afghanistan and the United States and focused on the preparedness of CORs to manage and oversee contracts in the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD enhance the current strategy for managing and overseeing contracts in contingency areas such as Afghanistan by, for example, developing training standards for providing operational contract support (OCS), fully institutionalizing OCS in professional military education, and developing standards regarding the number of contracts that CORs can oversee based on the technical nature and complexity of the contract. DOD concurred with all of GAO's recommendations.

# OPERATIONAL CONTRACT SUPPORT

## Management and Oversight Improvements Needed in Afghanistan

### What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has taken steps to enhance its existing training program for contracting officer's representatives (CORs), but the required training does not fully prepare them to perform their contract oversight duties in contingency areas such as Afghanistan. DOD requires that CORs be qualified by training and experience commensurate with the responsibilities to be delegated to them. DOD took several actions to enhance its training program, such as developing a CORs training course with a focus on contingency operations. However, GAO found that CORs are not prepared to oversee contracts because the required training does not include specifics on how to complete written statements of work and how to operate in Afghanistan's unique contracting environment. For example, DOD contracting personnel told GAO about opening delays and additional expenses related to the construction of a dining facility, which was originally constructed without a kitchen because it was not included in the original statement of work. In some cases, contract-specific training was not provided at all. In addition, not all oversight personnel such as commanders and senior leaders receive training to perform contract oversight and management duties in Afghanistan because such training is not required of them. Because DOD's required training does not prepare CORs and other oversight personnel to oversee contracts, units cannot be assured that they receive what they paid for.

CORs do not always have the necessary subject area-related technical expertise to oversee U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) contracts they were assigned to. Contracting officials noted, for example, that the staircases on guard towers at a forward operating base were poorly constructed and unsafe to climb. The COR assigned to that contract had inadequate subject area-related technical expertise, preventing the early identification of the defective welding on the staircases. According to contracting officials, situations like this often occurred due to the shortage of CORs with expertise in construction. Also, at the time of GAO's field work, CORs for contracts written by CENTCOM contracting officers did not have access to subject matter experts, particularly those with construction experience. According to contracting personnel, because CORs do not have the subject area-related technical expertise needed to oversee contracts or access to subject matter experts, facilities were sometimes deficient and had to be reconstructed at great additional expense to the taxpayer.

DOD does not have a sufficient number of CORs to oversee the numerous contracts in Afghanistan. CENTCOM requires CORs to be nominated for all service contracts over \$2,500 that, unless exempted, require significant ongoing technical advice and surveillance from requirements personnel. However, there is no guidance on the number of contracts a single COR should oversee. According to contracting officials and CORs GAO interviewed in Afghanistan, some CORs were responsible for providing oversight to multiple contracts in addition to carrying out their primary military duty. For example, one COR GAO interviewed was assigned to more than a dozen construction projects. According to that COR, it was impossible to be at each construction site during key phases of the project because the projects were occurring almost simultaneously at different locations. Consequently, according to officials, in situations like these, construction was completed without sufficient government oversight and problems were sometimes identified after facilities had been completed.