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Department of Defense Contractor and Troop Levels in Afghanistan and Iraq: 2007-2020

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SUMMARY

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Heidi M. Peters
Analyst in U.S. Defense Acquisition Policy

Department of Defense Contractor and Troop Levels in Afghanistan and Iraq: 2007-2020

Throughout its history, the Department of Defense (DOD) has relied on contractors to support a wide range of military operations. Operations over the last thirty years have highlighted the critical role that contractors play in supporting U.S. troops—both in terms of the number of contractors and the types of work they perform. During recent U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, contractors often accounted for 50% or more of the total DOD presence in-country.

For the fourth quarter of fiscal year (FY) 2020, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) reported 43,809 contractor personnel working for DOD within its area of responsibility, which included 27,388 individuals located in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. From FY2011 to FY2019, obligations for all DOD-funded contracts performed within the Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan areas of operation totaled approximately $187 billion in FY2021 dollars.

In late 2017, the DOD stopped reporting the number of U.S. military personnel deployed in support of operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria as part of its quarterly manpower reports and in other official releases. These data remain withheld.

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Introduction

This report provides general background information and data for Congress on the levels of Department of Defense (DOD) military servicemembers and DOD-funded contractor personnel deployed in support of prior and ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. For more information on DOD's use of contractor personnel, see CRS Report R43074, *Department of Defense's Use of Contractors to Support Military Operations: Background, Analysis, and Issues for Congress*, by Heidi M. Peters.

The Role of Contractors in Military Operations

Throughout its history, DOD has relied on contractors to support a wide range of military operations. Operations over the past 30 years have highlighted the critical role that contractors play in supporting U.S. military servicemembers, both in terms of the number of contractors and the type of work they perform. During recent U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, contractors frequently averaged 50% or more of the total DOD presence in-country.

Tracking Contractors During Contingency Operations

Since 2008, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) has published quarterly contractor census reports that provide aggregated data – including elements such as mission category and nationality – on contractors employed through DOD-funded contracts who are physically located within the USCENTCOM area of responsibility.[2]

Analysts and observers have previously raised questions about the reliability of the data gathered by DOD regarding the number of contractors it employs in theater in support of military operations.[3] DOD officials, however, have stated that since 2009, the Department has implemented a variety of mechanisms to improve the reliability of contractor data it

Definition: Defense Contractors

The Code of Federal Regulations defines a *defense contractor* as "any individual, firm, corporation, partnership, or other legal non-federal entity that enters into a contract directly with the DOD to furnish services, supplies, or construction."[1]

Within the defense policy community, the term *contractor* is commonly used in two different contexts. The word can describe the private companies with which DOD contracts to obtain goods and services. It can also describe individuals hired by DOD – usually through private companies, which are also considered contractors in the previous context – to perform specific tasks. The term *contractor* does not refer to military servicemembers, civilian DOD career employees, or civilian political appointees.

This report uses *contractor* to describe individual contractors hired through DOD-funded contracts. These individuals may provide a wide range of services to the DOD, including transportation, construction, base support, intelligence analysis, translation, interpretation, and private security support.

[1] See 32 C.F.R. 158.3, "Definitions;" see also DOD Instruction 3020.41, *Operational Contract Support (OCS)*, August 31, 2018, p. 48, at https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/302041p.pdf.

[2] DOD policymakers and experts define *area of responsibility* as the "geographical area associated with a combatant command within which a geographic combatant commander has authority to plan and conduct operations." USCENTCOM's area of responsibility includes Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Iran, Turkmenistan, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. See CRS In Focus IF11428, *United States Central Command*, by Kathleen J. McInnis and Brendan W. McGarry.

[3] See, for example, U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Iraq and Afghanistan: DOD, State and USAID Face Continued Challenges in Tracking Contracts, Assistance Instruments, and Associated Personnel*, GAO-11-1, October 1, 2010.

gathers. Those improvements include modifications to information technology and data collection systems, such as the joint Synchronized Predeployment and Operational Tracker (SPOT) database; updates and changes to related departmental policies; and changes in "leadership emphasis" within DOD and the combatant commands.[4]

For the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, U.S. Central Command reported 43,809 contractor personnel working for DOD within its area of responsibility, which included 27,388 individuals located in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria (see **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**).

From FY2011 to FY2019, obligations for all DOD-funded contracts performed within the Iraq and Afghanistan areas of operation totaled approximately $187 billion in FY2021 dollars (see **Table 5**).[5]

Force Management Levels for Deployed U.S. Armed Forces

Force management levels, sometimes also described as troop caps, troop ceilings, or force manning levels, have historically been used by the United States to establish bounds on the number of military personnel that may be deployed in a country or region.

The executive and legislative branches of the U.S. government have used force management levels to guide the execution of certain overseas U.S. military operations, as well as the associated presence of DOD personnel. During the 1980s, for example, Congress used provisions within annual appropriations legislation to establish force management levels limiting the number of active duty U.S. military personnel stationed in Europe.[6] The Obama Administration used force management levels to manage its drawdown of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, and to manage the U.S. military presence in Iraq and Syria under Operation Inherent Resolve.[7] The Trump Administration reportedly delegated the authority to establish force management levels for Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria to the Secretary of Defense.[8] It remains unclear how the Biden Administration will establish and adjust force management levels for ongoing and future military operations—however, Congress, as discussed in this report's overview of "U.S. Armed Forces

[4] Email correspondence with DOD official, received by CRS on September 7, 2016.

[5] Iraq areas of operation are defined by CRS as Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Jordan. Afghanistan areas of operation are defined by CRS as Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. See "Analytical Methodology" for a discussion of how these areas of operation were defined and related caveats.

[6] See for example Section 799A of P.L. 97-377, enacted December 21, 1982. This provision was enacted in the larger context of congressional debate at the time regarding the perception that the United States' NATO allies should assume a greater percentage of the mutual defense investment burden.

[7] Established force management levels may be adjusted in response to operational needs or changing circumstances within a country or region, such as the Obama Administration's decision in July 2016 to maintain approximately 8,400 troops in Afghanistan through January 2017. See White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the President on Afghanistan," July 6, 2016, available at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/06/statement-president-afghanistan.

[8] See Luis Martinez, "Trump Gives Pentagon Authority to Set Troop Levels in Syria and Iraq," *ABC News*, April 26, 2017; Jim Garamone, "President Gives Mattis Authority to Set U.S. Troop Strength in Afghanistan," Defense Media Activity, June 14, 2017; and U.S. Department of Defense Press Release, "Statement by Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis on Afghanistan Troop Levels," June 14, 2017. In a March 30, 2017, *Los Angeles Times* article, a DOD spokesperson reportedly noted that "[i]n order to maintain tactical surprise, ensure operational security and force protection, the coalition will not routinely announce or confirm information about the capabilities, force numbers, locations, or movement of forces in or out of Iraq and Syria."

and DOD-Funded Contractor Personnel in Afghanistan" has placed some limitations on adjustments to force management levels in Afghanistan.

In August 2017, the DOD announced that it was revising its force management level accounting and reporting practices for Afghanistan to also include U.S. Armed Forces personnel in-country for short-duration missions, personnel in a temporary duty status, personnel assigned to combat support agencies, and forces assigned to the material recovery element and the Resolute Support sustainment brigade in reported totals.[9] Some observers noted that not accounting for these personnel categories in reported force management levels prior to August 2017 might have misrepresented the actual number of U.S. Armed Forces in Afghanistan during that period.[10]

In late 2017, the DOD stopped reporting the number of U.S. military personnel deployed in support of operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria as part of its quarterly manpower reports and in other official releases. Some DOD officials asserted that withholding this data provided an additional layer of operational security for deployed U.S. forces. Then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis contended that providing public access to detailed deployment data could potentially allow U.S. adversaries to "take advantage of that kind of data, seeing trends at certain times of the year, and what they can expect in the future."[11] Other observers viewed the withdrawal of this information as part of a pattern of decreased "transparency" by DOD under the Trump Administration.[12]

These data remained withheld during the Trump Administration, leading to criticism from some observers and Members of Congress.[13] Under the Biden Administration, it remains unclear if DOD will resume reporting the number of U.S. military personnel deployed in support of ongoing or future military operations.

DOD Usage of Contractors During Ongoing Military Operations

Some observers and experts argued that external "resource limits" of force management levels may have increased DOD's "reliance on…contractor and temporary duty personnel" to effectively execute ongoing military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.[14] In February

[9] See U.S. Department of Defense, Press Operations, "Department of Defense Afghanistan Force Management Level Accounting and Reporting Practices Briefing by Pentagon Chief Spokesperson White and Joint Staff Director Lieutenant General McKenzie in the Pentagon Briefing Room," transcript, August 30, 2017.

[10] See Wesley Morgan, "Pentagon Finally Comes Clean on Afghanistan Troop Levels," *Politico*, August 30, 2017; see also Alex Horton, "The Pentagon Struggles to Provide Accurate Numbers for Deployed Troops," *The Washington Post*, November 27, 2017.

[11] See remarks, the Honorable James N. Mattis, during U.S. Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, *The Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Budget Request from the Department of Defense*, full committee hearing, 115th Cong., 2nd sess., April 8, 2018. See also David Welna, "Pentagon Questioned Over Blackout On War Zone Troop Numbers," *NPR Morning Edition*, July 3, 2018, and Tara Copp, "Pentagon Strips Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria Troop Numbers From Web," *MilitaryTimes*, April 9, 2018.

[12] Loren DeJonge Schulman and Alice Friend, "The Pentagon's Transparency Problem: Why Accurate Troop Levels Are So Hard to Find," *Foreign Affairs*, May 2, 2018.

[13] CRS October 26, 2018, correspondence with DOD officials; David Welna, "Pentagon Questioned over Blackout on War Zone Troop Numbers," *NPR*, July 3, 2018; and Tara Copp, "Pentagon strips Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria troop numbers from web," *Military Times*, April 9, 2018.

[14] See for example the statement as delivered and the prepared statement of Cary Russell, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management, GAO, "Overseas Contingency Operations: Observations on the Use of Force Management Levels in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria," before the U.S. Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Force Management Levels in Iraq and Afghanistan: Readiness and Strategic Considerations*, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., December 1, 2016.

2017, U.S. Army General John Nicholson, then Commander of the NATO Resolute Support Mission and United States Forces–Afghanistan, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that DOD had to "substitute contractors for soldiers in order to meet the force manning levels" in Afghanistan.[15] While the drawdown of U.S. forces contributed to a demonstrable increase in the ratio of contractors to uniformed servicemembers in Afghanistan between 2012 and 2017, it is difficult to assess if the increased ratio supported General Nicholson's assertion.

The House-passed version of the FY2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, H.R. 2810) contained a provision (Section 923) that would have expressed the sense of Congress that the DOD should discourage the practice of substituting contractor personnel for available members of the Armed Forces when a unit deploys to Afghanistan. This section also would have required the Secretary of Defense to provide a related briefing to the congressional defense committees. A similar provision was not included in the Senate amendment to H.R. 2810. While the House receded in conference, the conferees directed the Secretary of Defense to provide a briefing detailing steps taken by DOD to revise deployment guidelines to ensure readiness, unit cohesion, and maintenance were prioritized, as well as the Secretary of Defense's plan to establish a policy to avoid the practice of directly substituting contractor personnel for U.S. military personnel when practicable in the future.

Concern about DOD's use of contractors in contingency operations predates the recent usage of force management levels. For example, the Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan, in its 2011 final report to Congress, expressed its view that operations in Iraq and Afghanistan between FY2002 and FY2011 had led to an "unhealthy over-reliance" on contractors by DOD, Department of State, and USAID.[16]

Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan and Iraq

In Iraq and Afghanistan, armed and unarmed private security contractors have been used by DOD to provide services such as protecting fixed locations; guarding traveling convoys; providing security escorts; and training police and military personnel. The number of private security contractor employees working for DOD in Iraq and Afghanistan has fluctuated significantly over time, and is dependent on a variety of factors, including current force management levels in-country and U.S. operational needs.

Since 2008, the presence of DOD-funded private security contractors peaked in Afghanistan in 2012 at more than 28,000 individuals and in Iraq in 2009 at more than 15,000 individuals. For the fourth quarter of FY2020, DOD reported 4,164 DOD-funded private security contractors in Afghanistan, with 1,813 categorized as armed private security contractors (see **Table 2**). DOD reported 96 DOD-funded security contractor personnel in Iraq and Syria during the same period, none of whom were identified as armed private security contractors (see **Table 4**).

[15] U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Situation in Afghanistan*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., February 9, 2017. This concern was also echoed in a hearing before the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations in December 2016, and in a hearing before the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Readiness on March 8, 2017.

[16] Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan, "Transforming Wartime Contracting: Controlling Costs, Reducing Risks," final report of the Commission to Congress, August 2011, pp. 18-21. Available at https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/cwc/20110929213922/http://www.wartimecontracting.gov/docs/CWC_FinalReport-highres.pdf.

U.S. Armed Forces and DOD-Funded Contractor Personnel in Afghanistan

As of the fourth quarter of FY2020, 22,562 DOD-funded contractor personnel were located in Afghanistan (see **Table 1**).[17] Approximately 35% of DOD's reported individual contractors were U.S. citizens (7,856), approximately 43% were third-country nationals (9,639), and roughly 22% were local nationals (5,067). Of the 22,562 DOD contractor personnel, about 8% were armed private security contractors (1,813).

On November 17, 2020, Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller announced, "we will implement President Trump's orders to continue our repositioning of forces from" Afghanistan, and that the number of U.S. forces there would reach 2,500 by January 15, 2021.[18] As of December 2020, there were reportedly approximately 4,000 U.S. troop in Afghanistan, with the level "dropping quickly" to meet the 2,500 level by mid-January.[19] Section 1215 of the FY2021 NDAA (H.R. 6395; P.L. 116-238) established a limitation on the use of FY2020 and FY2021 DOD funds to make any change to the total number of U.S. Armed Forces deployed to Afghanistan that would result in (1) the reduction of the total number of deployed forces below 4,000 (or the total number deployed as of the date of the FY2021 NDAA's enactment); or (2) the reduction of the total number of deployed forces below 2,000. This limitation could be lifted upon the Secretary of Defense's submission to Congress of a report containing a number of specified elements, such as a risk assessment for the reduction in deployed forces and an assessment of the impact of U.S. troop reductions on counterterrorism, Afghan military capabilities, the NATO-led training mission, and other U.S. policy priorities. The President may waive the reporting requirement with the submission of a written determination that such a waiver is in U.S. national security interests, together with a "detailed explanation" of how it furthers those interests.

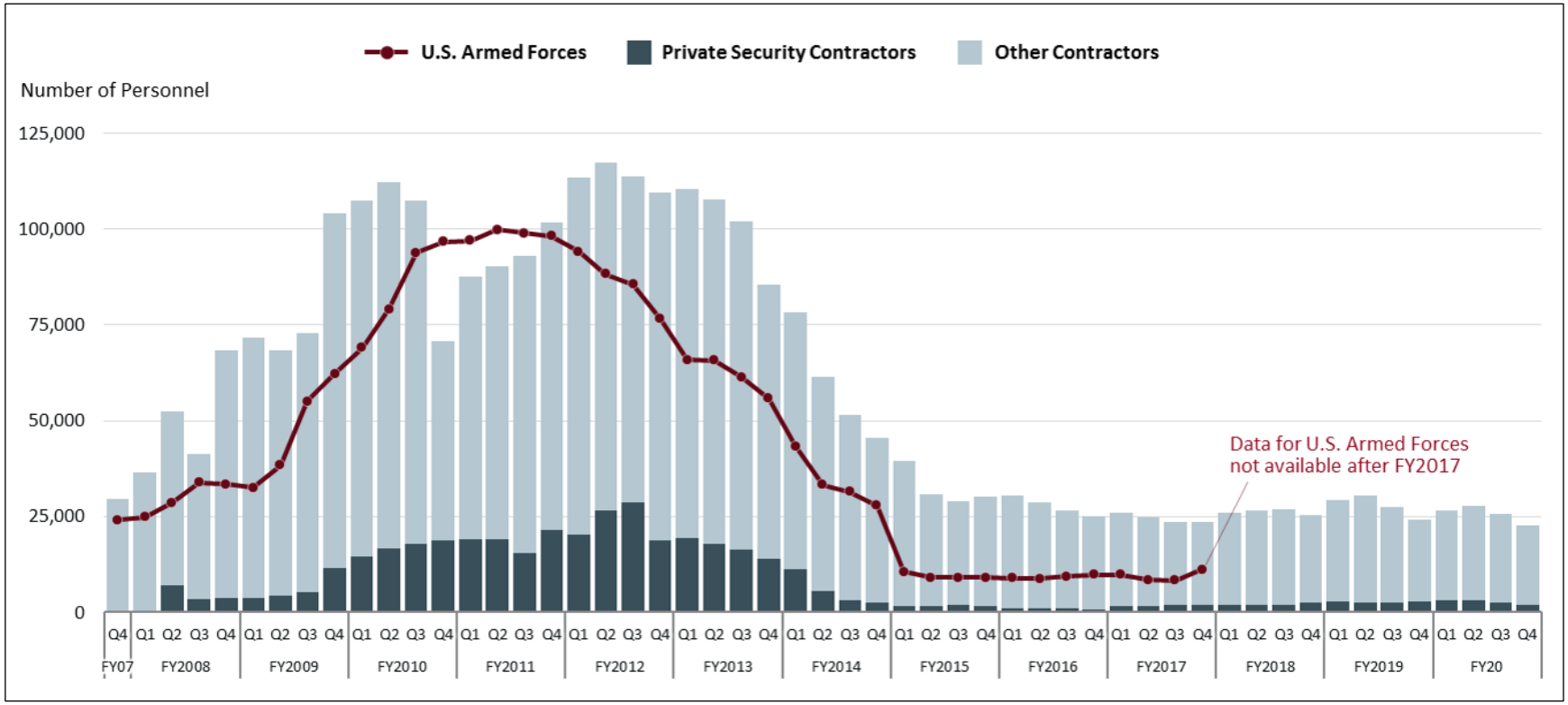
[17] See Department of Defense, *Contractor Support of U.S. Operations in the USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility*, October 2020, at https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/PS/.CENTCOM_reports.html/FY20_4Q_5A_Oct2020.pdf.

[18] Department of Defense, "Acting Secretary Miller Announces Troop Levels in Afghanistan and Iraq," transcript, November 17, 2020, available at https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2418641/acting-secretary-miller-announces-troop-levels-in-afghanistan-and-iraq/. For further discussion of U.S. operations in Afghanistan under Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS), which includes the NATO-led Resolute Support mission, see CRS Report R45122, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief*, by Clayton Thomas.

[19] Hope Hodge Seck, "In First, NATO Forces Now Outnumber US Troops in Afghanistan," *Military.com*, December 21, 2020, available at https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/12/21/first-nato-forces-now-outnumber-us-troops-afghanistan.html.

Figure 1. U.S. Armed Forces and DOD-Funded Contractor Personnel in Afghanistan

Q4 FY2007-Q4 FY2020



Source: Created by CRS. Contractor levels drawn from USCENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Census Reports; U.S. Armed Forces levels through Q4 FY2017 drawn from "Boots on the Ground" monthly reports to Congress.

Notes: DOD began releasing data on contractors in USCENTCOM in Q4 FY2007. U.S. Armed Forces levels from FY2007 to FY2017 included all active and reserve component personnel. After FY2017, DOD began withholding U.S. Armed Forces levels from public release.

Table 1. U.S. Armed Forces and DOD-Funded Contractor Personnel in Afghanistan

(Q4 FY2007-Q4 FY2020)

Quarter (Q) and Fiscal Year (FY)	U.S. Armed Forces	Contractors		
		U.S. National Contractors	Foreign and Host Country National Contractors	Total Contractors
Q4 FY2007	24,056	3,387	26,086	29,473
Q1 FY2008	24,780	5,153	31,367	36,520
Q2 FY2008	28,650	4,220	48,116	52,336
Q3 FY2008	33,902	4,724	36,508	41,232
Q4 FY2008	33,450	5,405	62,847	68,252
Q1 FY2009	32,500	5,960	65,795	71,755
Q2 FY2009	38,350	9,378	58,819	68,197
Q3 FY2009	55,100	10,036	62,932	73,968[a]
Q4 FY2009	62,300	9,322	94,779	104,101
Q1 FY2010	69,000	10,016	97,276	107,292
Q2 FY2010	79,100	16,081	96,011	112,092
Q3 FY2010	93,800	19,103	88,376	107,479
Q4 FY2010	96,600	20,874	49,725	70,599
Q1 FY2011	96,900	19,381	68,102	87,483
Q2 FY2011	99,800	20,413	69,926	90,339
Q3 FY2011	98,900	23,294	69,824	93,118
Q4 FY2011	98,200	23,190	78,599	101,789
Q1 FY2012	94,100	25,287	88,204	113,491
Q2 FY2012	88,200	34,765	82,462	117,227
Q3 FY2012	85,600	30,568	83,168	113,736
Q4 FY2012	76,500	31,814	77,750	109,564
Q1 FY2013	65,800	33,444	76,960	110,404
Q2 FY2013	65,700	33,107	74,689	107,796
Q3 FY2013	61,300	32,442	69,413	101,855
Q4 FY2013	55,800	27,188	58,340	85,528
Q1 FY2014	43,300	23,763	54,373	78,136
Q2 FY2014	33,200	20,865	40,587	61,452
Q3 FY2014	31,400	17,404	34,085	51,489
Q4 FY2014	27,800	17,477	27,872	45,349
Q1 FY2015	10,600	14,222	25,387	39,609
Q2 FY2015	9,100	12,033	18,787	30,820
Q3 FY2015	9,060	10,019	18,912	28,931
Q4 FY2015	9,100	10,347	19,864	30,211

Quarter (Q) and Fiscal Year (FY)	U.S. Armed Forces	Contractors		
		U.S. National Contractors	Foreign and Host Country National Contractors	Total Contractors
Q1 FY2016	8,930	10,151	20,304	30,455
Q2 FY2016	8,730	9,640	18,986	28,626
Q3 FY2016	9,365	8,837	17,598	26,435
Q4 FY2016	9,800	9,142	16,055	25,197
Q1 FY2017	9,200	9,474	16,548	26,022
Q2 FY2017	8,400	9,522	15,378	24,900
Q3 FY2017	8,300	9,436	14,089	23,525
Q4 FY2017	11,100[b]	9,418	14,241	23,659
Q1 FY2018	Not Available	10,189	15,854	26,043
Q2 FY2018	Not Available	10,891	15,756	26,647
Q3 FY2018	Not Available	10,128	16,794	26,922
Q4 FY2018	Not Available	10,989	14,250	25,239
Q1 FY2019	Not Available	11,606	17,783	29,389
Q2 FY2019	Not Available	12,247	18,314	30,561
Q3 FY2019	Not Available	10,648	16,809	27,457
Q4 FY2019	Not Available	10,750	13,452	24,202
Q1 FY2020	Not Available	10,530	16,015	26,545
Q2 FY2020	Not Available	10,711	16,930	27,641
Q3 FY2020	Not Available	9,776	15,874	25,650
Q4 FY2020	Not Available	7,856	14,706	22,562

Sources: Contractor levels drawn from USCENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Census Reports; U.S. Armed Forces levels through Q4 FY2017 drawn from "Boots on the Ground" monthly reports to Congress.

Note: DOD began releasing data on contractors in USCENTCOM in Q4 FY2007. U.S. Armed Forces levels from FY2007 to FY2017 included all active and reserve component personnel. After FY2017, DOD began withholding U.S. U.S. Armed Forces levels from public release.

a. DOD-reported total; note that for Q3 FY2009, DOD reported 10,036 contractors who were U.S. citizens; 11,806 contractors who were third country nationals; and 51,126 contractors who were local/host country nationals. The source of the discrepancy between the DOD-reported total and the sum of the reported contractor country of origin categorizations (73,968 vs. 72,968) is unclear.

b. In August 2017, DOD revised its force management level accounting and reporting practices for Afghanistan to include U.S. Armed Forces personnel in-country for short-duration missions, personnel in a temporary duty status, personnel assigned to combat support agencies, and forces assigned to the material recovery element and the Resolute Support sustainment brigade in reported totals. See U.S. Department of Defense, Press Operations, "Department of Defense Afghanistan Force Management Level Accounting and Reporting Practices Briefing by Pentagon Chief Spokesperson White and Joint Staff Director Lieutenant General McKenzie in the Pentagon Briefing Room," transcript, August 30, 2017.

Table 2. U.S. Armed Forces and DOD-Funded Private Security Contractor Personnel in Afghanistan

(Q2 FY2008-Q4 FY2020)

Quarter (Q) and Fiscal Year (FY)	U.S. Armed Forces	Contractors		
		U.S. National Private Security Contractors	Foreign and Host Country National Private Security Contractors	Total Private Security Contractors[a]
Q2 FY2008	28,650	167	6,815	6,982
Q3 FY2008	33,902	5	3,532	3,537
Q4 FY2008	33,450	9	3,838	3,847
Q1 FY2009	32,500	15	3,674	3,689
Q2 FY2009	38,350	17	4,356	4,373
Q3 FY2009	55,100	19	5,179	5,198
Q4 FY2009	62,300	76	11,347	11,423
Q1 FY2010	69,000	114	14,325	14,439
Q2 FY2010	79,100	140	16,593	16,733
Q3 FY2010	93,800	152	17,780	17,932
Q4 FY2010	96,600	197	18,672	18,869
Q1 FY2011	96,900	250	18,669	18,919
Q2 FY2011	99,800	250	18,721	18,971
Q3 FY2011	98,900	693	14,612	15,305
Q4 FY2011	98,200	603	20,941	21,544
Q1 FY2012	94,100	570	19,805	20,375
Q2 FY2012	88,200	519	26,093	26,612
Q3 FY2012	85,600	480	28,206	28,686
Q4 FY2012	76,500	2,014	16,850	18,914[b]
Q1 FY2013	65,800	2,094	17,320	19,414
Q2 FY2013	65,700	1,378	16,615	17,993
Q3 FY2013	61,300	873	15,345	16,218
Q4 FY2013	55,800	844	13,212	14,056
Q1 FY2014	43,300	1,007	10,325	11,332
Q2 FY2014	33,200	641	4,950	5,591
Q3 FY2014	31,400	424	2,753	3,177
Q4 FY2014	27,800	252	2,220	2,472
Q1 FY2015	10,600	317	1,194	1,511
Q2 FY2015	9,100	398	1,127	1,525
Q3 FY2015	9,060	421	1,358	1,779
Q4 FY2015	9,100	312	1,343	1,655
Q1 FY2016	8,930	176	907	1,083

Quarter (Q) and Fiscal Year (FY)	U.S. Armed Forces	Contractors		
		U.S. National Private Security Contractors	Foreign and Host Country National Private Security Contractors	Total Private Security Contractors[a]
Q2 FY2016	8,730	125	747	872
Q3 FY2016	9,365	174	848	1,022
Q4 FY2016	9,800	145	668	813
Q1 FY2017	9,200	473	1,249	1,722
Q2 FY2017	8,400	436	1,380	1,816
Q3 FY2017	8,300	449	1,246	1,695
Q4 FY2017	11,100	493	1,336	1,829
Q1 FY2018	Not Available	426	1,441	1,867
Q2 FY2018	Not Available	416	1,516	1,932
Q3 FY2018	Not Available	746	1,256	2,002
Q4 FY2018	Not Available	364	2,033	2,397
Q1 FY2019	Not Available	432	2,415	2,847
Q2 FY2019	Not Available	612	1,955	2,567
Q3 FY2019	Not Available	608	2,031	2,639
Q4 FY2019	Not Available	688	2,196	2,884
Q1 FY2020	Not Available	728	2,289	3,017
Q2 FY2020	Not Available	739	2,234	2,973
Q3 FY2020	Not Available	649	1,788	2,437
Q4 FY2020	Not Available	456	1,357	1,813

Sources: Contractor levels drawn from USCENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Census Reports; U.S. Armed Forces levels through Q4 FY2017 drawn from "Boots on the Ground" monthly reports to Congress.

Notes: DOD began releasing data on private security contractor personnel levels within Afghanistan in Q2 FY2008. U.S. Armed Forces levels from FY2007 to FY2017 included all active and reserve component personnel. After FY2017, DOD began withholding U.S. U.S. Armed Forces levels from public release.

a. Includes most subcontractors and service contractors, armed and unarmed, hired by prime contractors under DOD contracts.

b. DOD-reported total; note that for Q4 FY2012, DOD reported 2,014 private security contractors who were U.S. citizens; 1,437 private security contractors who were third country nationals; and 15,413 private security contractors who were local/host country nationals. The source of the discrepancy between the DOD-reported total and the sum of the reported private security contractor country of origin categorizations (18,914 vs. 18,864) is unclear.

U.S. Armed Forces and DOD-Funded Contractor Personnel in Iraq (2007-) and Syria (2018-)

DOD ceased publicly reporting numbers of DOD contractor personnel working in Iraq in December 2013, following the conclusion of the U.S. combat mission in Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn), and the subsequent drawdown of DOD contractor personnel levels in Iraq.

In late 2014, in response in part to developing operations in the region, DOD reinitiated reporting broad estimates of DOD contractor personnel deployed in Iraq in support of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). As the number of DOD contractor personnel in Iraq increased over the first six months of 2015, DOD resumed reporting exact numbers and primary mission categories of OIR contractor personnel in June 2015. In the second quarter of FY2018, DOD began reporting a combined total of contractor personnel physically located in Iraq and Syria. As of FY2020, DOD reports the quarterly number of contractors with a mission category of "security" in Iraq and Syria, but does not identify any individuals within this category as specifically *armed* private security contractors.

As of the fourth quarter of FY2020, DOD reported it had 4,826 contractor personnel in Iraq and Syria (see **Table 3**). Approximately 53% of DOD's reported individual contractors were U.S. citizens (2,558), approximately 34% were third-country nationals (1,632); and roughly 13% were local/host-country nationals (636).[20]

As of December 2020 observers and analysts estimated the number of U.S. Armed Forces personnel in Iraq to be approximately 3,000.[21] Reports in late 2020 indicated the Trump Administration intended to drawdown in-country U.S. forces to 2,500 by January 15, 2021.[22]

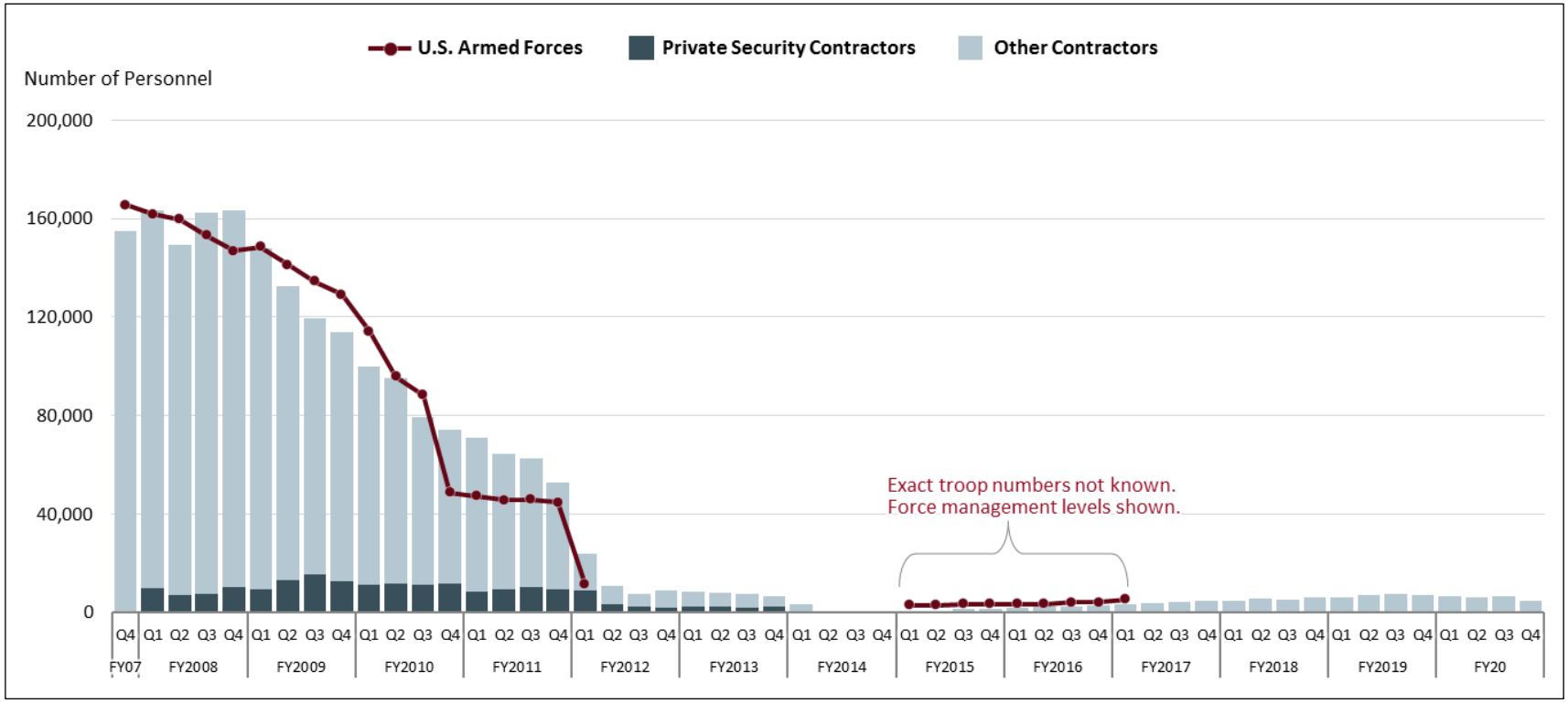
[20] See Department of Defense, *Contractor Support of U.S. Operations in the USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility*, October 2020, at https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/PS/.CENTCOM_reports.html/FY20_4Q_5A_Oct2020.pdf.

[21] Jim Garamone, "U.S. Will Draw Down Forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, Acting Secretary Says," *Defense News*, November 17, 2020, available at https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2418416/us-will-draw-down-forces-in-afghanistan-iraq-acting-secretary-says/.

[22] Ibid.; For further discussion of the U.S. and its coalition partners' efforts to combat the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria under OIR, see CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by Carla E. Humud and CRS In Focus IF10404, *Iraq and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard

Figure 2. U.S. Armed Forces and DOD-Funded Contractor Personnel in Iraq (2007-) and Syria (2018-)

(Q4 F72007-Q1 FY2014; Q1 FY2015-Q4 FY2020)



Source: Contractor levels drawn from USCENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Census Reports and depicts the number of DOD-funded armed private security contractors as a subset of all reported DOD-funded contractors; U.S. Armed Forces levels from Q4 FY2007-Q1 FY2012 drawn from "Boots on the Ground" monthly reports to Congress. U.S. Armed Forces levels for Q1 FY2015-Q1 FY2017 drawn from White House semiannual "War Powers Resolution Report" to Congress.

Notes: DOD began releasing data on DOD-funded private security contractor personnel in USCENTCOM in Q1 FY2008, and ceased reporting data on DOD-funded private security contractor personnel in Iraq in Q4 FY2013. Between Q1 FY2014 and Q4 FY2014, no data on any DOD-funded contractor personnel in Iraq was released. In Q2 FY2018, DOD began reporting a combined total of contractor personnel physically located in Iraq and Syria. U.S. Armed Forces levels for Q4 FY2007-Q1 FY2012 included all active and reserve component personnel. Following the conclusion of the U.S. combat mission in Iraq in 2011, the "Boots on the Ground" reports ceased providing separate force levels for Iraq. Beginning in 2014, in support of U.S. military operations against the Islamic State, additional U.S. military personnel were deployed to Iraq. See **Table 3** for further discussion of recent U.S. Armed Forces and contractor levels in Iraq.

Table 3. U.S. Armed Forces and DOD-Funded Contractor Personnel in Iraq (2007-) and Syria (2018-)

(Q4 FY2007-Q1 FY2014; Q1 FY2015-Q4 FY2020)

Quarter (Q) and Fiscal Year (FY)	U.S. Armed Forces	Contractors		
		U.S. National Contractors	Foreign and Host Country National Contractors	Total Contractors
Q4 FY2007	165,607	26,869	127,956	154,825
Q1 FY2008	161,783	31,325	132,266	163,591
Q2 FY2008	159,700	29,351	120,027	149,378
Q3 FY2008	153,300	29,611	132,817	162,428
Q4 FY2008	146,900	28,045	135,401	163,446
Q1 FY2009	148,500	39,262	108,788	148,050
Q2 FY2009	141,300	36,061	96,549	132,610
Q3 FY2009	134,500	31,541	88,165	119,706
Q4 FY2009	129,200	29,944	83,787	113,731
Q1 FY2010	114,300	27,843	72,192	100,035
Q2 FY2010	95,900	24,719	70,742	95,461
Q3 FY2010	88,320	22,761	56,860	79,621
Q4 FY2010	48,410	20,981	53,125	74,106
Q1 FY2011	47,305	19,943	51,199	71,142
Q2 FY2011	45,660	18,393	45,860	64,253
Q3 FY2011	46,010	18,900	43,789	62,689
Q4 FY2011	44,755	16,054	36,583	52,637
Q1 FY2012	11,445	11,237	12,649	23,886[a]
Q2 FY2012	—	3,260	7,707	10,967[a]
Q3 FY2012	—	2,493	4,843	7,336[a]
Q4 FY2012	—	2,314	6,686	9,000[a]
Q1 FY2013	—	2,356	6,093	8,449[a]
Q2 FY2013	—	2,125	5,780	7,905[a]
Q3 FY2013	—	1,898	5,837	7,735[a]
Q4 FY2013	—	1,626	4,998	6,624[a]
Q1 FY2014	—	820	2,414	3,234[a]
No Data on Contractors Released by DOD from Q2 FY2014-Q4 FY2014				
Q1 FY2015	Up to 3,100[b]	No Data Available	No Data Available	250 (est.)
Q2 FY2015	Up to 3,100[b]	No Data Available	No Data Available	600 (est.)
Q3 FY2015	Up to 3,550[c]	1,140	209	1,349
Q4 FY2015	Up to 3,550[c]	1,098	305	1,403

Quarter (Q) and Fiscal Year (FY)	U.S. Armed Forces	Contractors		
		U.S. National Contractors	Foreign and Host Country National Contractors	Total Contractors
Q1 FY2016	Up to 3,550[d]	1,392	636	2,028
Q2 FY2016	Up to 3,550[d]	1,564	1,055	2,619
Q3 FY2016	Up to 4,087[e]	1,605	880	2,485
Q4 FY2016	Up to 4,087[e]	1,823	1,169	2,992
Q1 FY2017	Up to 5,262[f]	2,035	1,557	3,592
Q2 FY2017	Up to 5,262[f]	2,149	1,206	3,795
Q3 FY2017	Up to 5,262[g]	2,424	2,061	4,485
Q4 FY2017	Up to 5,262[g]	2,644	1,965	4,609
Q1 FY2018	Not Available[h]	2,767	2,160	4,927
DOD-Funded Contractor Personnel in Iraq and Syria				
Q2 FY2018	Not Available	2,869	2,639	5,508
Q3 FY2018	Not Available	2,651	2,672	5,323
Q4 FY2018	Not Available	3,086	3,232	6,318
Q1 FY2019	Not Available	2,850	3,370	6,220
Q2 FY2019	Not Available	3,362	3,567	6,929
Q3 FY2019	Not Available	3,229	4,246	7,475
Q4 FY2019	Not Available	3,152	4,003	7,155
Q1 FY2020	Not Available	2,903	3,683	6,586
Q2 FY2020	Not Available	2,679	3,609	6,288
Q3 FY2020	Not Available	2,938	3,613	6,551
Q4 FY2020	Not Available	2,558	2,268	4,826

Sources: U.S. Armed Forces levels from Q4 FY2007-Q1 FY2012 are drawn from the DOD's "Boots on the Ground" monthly reports to Congress, and include all active and reserve component personnel. Force levels for Q1 FY2015-Q4 FY2017 are drawn from the White House's semiannual "War Powers Resolution Report" to Congress and are force management levels. All listed contractor levels are drawn from USCENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Census Reports.

Notes: DOD began releasing data on contractors in USCENTCOM in the second half of 2007, and initially ceased reporting data on DOD contractor personnel in Iraq in December 2013.

Following the conclusion of the U.S. combat mission in Iraq, the "Boots on the Ground" reports ceased providing separate force levels for Iraq. However, a residual U.S. force remained in county to provide embassy security and security cooperation assistance. Beginning in June 2014, in support of U.S. military operations against the Islamic State, additional U.S. military personnel were deployed to Iraq through OIR to advise and train Iraqi forces, serve as observers, and secure U.S. personnel and facilities.

In Q1 FY2015, DOD resumed releasing data on DOD-funded contractor personnel in Iraq. As the "Boots on the Ground" reports did not provide OIR force levels, CRS used the force management levels for Iraq reported biannually by the White House between December 2014 and June 2017, beginning with the December 2014 "Six Month Consolidated War Powers Resolution Report" and ending with the June 2017 "Supplemental Consolidated War Powers Resolution Report," to provide an indication of the number of U.S. forces estimated to be in Iraq during that period. As of December 2017, the "Supplemental Consolidated War Powers Resolution Report" no longer provides current force management levels for Iraq or Syria.

As of Q2 FY2018, DOD reported a combined total of DOD-funded contractor personnel physically located in Iraq and Syria.

a. DOD reported that DOD-funded contractors in Iraq from Q1 FY2012 through Q1 FY2014 were supporting both U.S. Mission Iraq and the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq.

b. Force Management Level for Iraq, as reported by the White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Letter from the President—Six Month Consolidated War Powers Resolution Report," December 11, 2014, at https://www.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/11/letter-president-six-month-consolidated-war-powers-resolution-report.

c. Force Management Level for Iraq, as reported by the White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Letter from the President—Six Month Consolidated War Powers Resolution Report," June 11, 2015, at https://www.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/06/11/letter-president-six-month-consolidated-war-powers-resolution-report.

d. Force Management Level for Iraq, as reported by the White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Letter from the President—War Powers Resolution," December 11, 2015, at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/11/letter-president-war-powers-resolution.

e. Force Management Level for Iraq, as reported by the White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Letter from the President—War Powers Resolution," June 13, 2016, at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/13/letter-president-war-powers-resolution.

f. Force Management Level for Iraq, as reported by the White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Letter from the President—Supplemental 6-month War Powers Letter," December 5, 2016, at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/05/letter-president-supplemental-6-month-war-powers-letter.

g. Force Management Level for Iraq, as reported by the White House, "Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate," June 6, 2017, at https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/text-letter-president-speaker-house-representatives-president-pro-tempore-senate/.

h. Beginning in December 2017, the "Supplemental Consolidated War Powers Resolution Reports" no longer provide current force management levels for Iraq or Syria. See for example "Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate," December 11, 2017, at https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/text-letter-president-speaker-house-representatives-president-pro-tempore-senate-2/.

Table 4. U.S. Armed Forces and Private Security Contractors in Iraq

(Q1 FY2008-Q4 FY2013)

Quarter (Q) and Fiscal Year (FY)	U.S. Armed Forces	Contractors		
		U.S. National Private Security Contractors	Foreign and Host Country National Private Security Contractors	Total Private Security Contractors[a]
Q1 FY2008	161,783	830	9,122	9,952
Q2 FY2008	159,700	515	6,744	7,259
Q3 FY2008	153,300	1,540	6,164	7,704
Q4 FY2008	146,900	886[b]	9,560	10,446
Q1 FY2009	148,500	727[b]	7,974	8,701
Q2 FY2009	141,300	681	12,261	12,942
Q3 FY2009	134,500	802	14,477	15,279
Q4 FY2009	129,200	670	12,014	12,684
Q1 FY2010	114,300	776	10,319	11,095
Q2 FY2010	95,900	1,081	10,529	11,610
Q3 FY2010	88,320	1,030	10,383	11,413
Q4 FY2010	48,410	1,017	10,611	11,628
Q1 FY2011	47,305	791	7,536	8,327
Q2 FY2011	45,660	917	8,290	9,207
Q3 FY2011	46,010	935	9,479	10,414
Q4 FY2011	44,755	844	8,710	9,554
Q1 FY2012	11,445	751	8,244	8,995
Q2 FY2012	—	288	3,289	3,577
Q3 FY2012	—	116	2,291	2,407
Q4 FY2012	—	102	2,014	2,116
Q1 FY2013	—	235	2,046	2,281
Q2 FY2013	—	259	2,100	2,359
Q3 FY2013	—	217	1,931	2,148
Q4 FY2013	—	147	2,262	2,409

Sources: Contractor levels drawn from USCENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Census Reports; U.S. Armed Forces levels from Q1 FY2008-Q1 FY2012 drawn from "Boots on the Ground" monthly reports to Congress.

Notes: DOD began releasing data on DOD-funded private security contractor personnel levels in USCENTCOM in Q1 FY2008, and ceased reporting data on DOD-funded private security contractor personnel in Iraq in Q4 FY2013. See **Table 3** for further discussion of recent U.S. Armed Forces and contractor levels in Iraq.

a. DOD reported that DOD-funded contractors in Iraq from December 2011 through December 2013 were supporting both U.S. Mission Iraq and the Office of Security Cooperation Iraq.

b. USCENTCOM Quarterly Census Reports from Q4 FY2008 and Q1 FY2009 also included private security contractor personnel from NATO partner and ally countries in the reported totals of U.S. private security contractor personnel.

Table 5. DOD Contract Obligations in Iraq and Afghanistan Areas of Operations (AO)

(FY2011-FY2019; in millions of FY2021 dollars)

	Country	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	Total
Iraq AO	Iraq	$5,589	$460	$592	$85	$273	$753	$2,472	$2,759	$1,153	$14,135
	Bahrain	$567	$364	$960	$230	$608	$743	$871	$775	$551	$5,667
	Kuwait	$4,336	$2,845	$3,420	$1,962	$2,181	$1,972	$4,497	$4,909	$2,230	$28,351
	Qatar	$915	$948	$470	$191	$359	$279	$1,062	$2,272	$564	$7,060
	Saudi Arabia	$337	$620	$1,048	$1,366	$2,269	$1,125	$2,086	$1,924	$1,382	$12,156
	Turkey	$203	$312	$209	$201	$222	$265	$417	$390	$156	$2,375
	United Arab Emirates	$1,157	$1,598	$2,578	$1,913	$1,430	$1,574	$2,852	$2,938	$1,095	$17,134
	Oman	$155	$234	$249	$116	$136	$135	$154	$9	$27	$1,213
	Jordan	$44	$59	$193	$183	$222	$204	$321	$411	$208	$1,845
	Total, Iraq AO	**$13,301**	**$7,439**	**$9,717**	**$6,246**	**$7,699**	**$7,050**	**$14,732**	**$16,385**	**$7,366**	**$89,936**
Afghanistan AO	Afghanistan	$19,848	$21,326	$16,377	$6,818	$3,592	$2,361	$6,718	$7,755	$4,351	$89,145
	Kazakhstan	$82	$85	$102	$63	$85	$38	$72	$93	$23	$642
	Kyrgyzstan	$987	$2,164	$2,202	$745	($2)	($7)	($11)	$2	$4	$6,082
	Pakistan	$71	$17	($4)	$26	$114	$58	$124	$97	$49	$552
	Tajikistan	$4	$10	$10	$8	$8	$0	$12	$5	($1)	$55
	Turkmenistan	$12	$5	$15	$2	$0	$0	($1)	$0	$0	$32
	Uzbekistan	$18	$26	$21	$24	$35	$12	$19	$0	$0	$155
	Total, Afghanistan AO	**$21,020**	**$23,633**	**$18,722**	**$7,685**	**$3,831**	**$2,462**	**$6,931**	**$7,951**	**$4,427**	**$96,663**
	Total, Iraq and Afghanistan AOs	**$34,322**	**$31,072**	**$28,440**	**$13,931**	**$11,530**	**$9,512**	**$21,664**	**$24,336**	**$11,793**	**$186,599**

Sources: beta.SAM.gov Data Bank, as of January 28, 2021 for FY2011-FY2020 data; CRS adjustments for inflation using deflators for converting into FY2021 dollars derived from Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Department of Defense, *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY2021*, "Department of Defense Deflators–TOA By Category 'Total Non-Pay,'" Table 5-5, pp. 60-61, April 2020.

Notes: Numbers may not add due to rounding. See "Analytical Methodology" for additional discussion of CRS methodology in assembling this data table.

Analytical Methodology

U.S. Armed Forces and Private Security Contractor Personnel in Afghanistan and Iraq

Various factors may affect the exact number of U.S. Armed Forces personnel indicated to be located in a given location at a given point in time by the Department of Defense in official reports and other releases. Differences in methodological practices – such as which categories of personnel are included or excluded – may result in differences in the U.S. Armed Forces personnel totals provided through official sources.

Afghanistan

Reported U.S. Armed Forces levels from the fourth quarter of FY2007 through the fourth quarter of FY2017 were drawn from the DOD's "Boots on the Ground" monthly reports to Congress as provided to CRS, and included all active and reserve component personnel. After FY2017, DOD began withholding U.S. Armed Forces levels in Afghanistan from public release. Under the Biden Administration, it remains unclear if DOD will resume reporting the number of U.S. military personnel deployed in support of military operations in Afghanistan.

All listed contractor levels are drawn from the USCENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Census Reports, which provide data on contractors in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility going forward from the second half of 2007.

Iraq

Reported U.S. Armed Forces levels from the fourth quarter of FY2007 through the first quarter of FY2012 were drawn from the DOD's "Boots on the Ground" monthly reports to Congress as provided to CRS, and included all active and reserve component personnel.

U.S. Armed Forces levels for the first quarter of FY2015 through the fourth quarter of FY2017 were drawn from the White House's semiannual "War Powers Resolution Report" to Congress and represent force management levels. As noted in the previous discussion of "Force Management Levels for Deployed U.S. Armed Forces" force management levels provide an upper bound on the number of military personnel that may be deployed in a country or region, and may not represent the actual number of personnel in country during the depicted period. CRS used the force management levels for Iraq reported biannually by the White House between December 2014 and June 2017, beginning with the December 2014 "Six Month Consolidated War Powers Resolution Report" and ending with the June 2017 "Supplemental Consolidated War Powers Resolution Report," to provide an indication of the number of U.S. forces estimated to be in Iraq during that period. As of December 2017, the "War Powers Resolution Reports" released by the Trump Administration no longer provided current force management levels for Iraq or Syria. Under the Biden Administration, it remains unclear if DOD will resume reporting the number of U.S. military personnel deployed in support of ongoing or future military operations through the "War Powers Resolution Reports" or other official releases.

All listed contractor levels are drawn from the USCENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Census Reports. DOD began releasing data on contractors in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility in the second half of 2007, and ceased reporting data on DOD contractor personnel specifically

located in Iraq in December 2013. In the first quarter of FY2015, DOD resumed releasing data on DOD-funded contractor personnel specifically located in Iraq.

Obligations within the Iraq and Afghanistan Areas of Operations

As used in the context of U.S. military operations, an *area of operation* can be understood as an "operational area defined by a commander for land and maritime forces that should be large enough to accomplish their missions and protect their forces."[23] For the purposes of this analysis, CRS has defined the Iraq area of operation as Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Jordan. CRS further defined the Afghan area of operation as Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In 2008, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) published a report that tracked the U.S. government's obligations in the Iraqi area of operation from FY2005 through FY2007 using Federal Procurement Data System-Next Generation (FPDS-NG) data that considered most countries bordering Iraq, with the exception of Iran, to be part of the Iraqi area of operations.[24] CRS replicated CBO's methodology for defining the Iraq areas of operation for the purposes of this data analysis, and used a similar methodology in determining the approximate value of annual contract obligations in the Afghanistan areas of operation. Note that there may be overlap between each area of operation—for example, U.S. Air Force personnel stationed at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar may support U.S. military operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Use of beta.SAM.gov Data Bank

Obligations occur when agencies enter into contracts with vendors, employ personnel, or otherwise commit to expending appropriated funds. Many government policymakers and procurement experts monitor money obligated on prime federal contracts through the publicly accessible beta.SAM.gov Data Bank reporting tool (as of October 17, 2020, FPDS-NG data is now only available through beta.SAM.gov as part of an ongoing General Services Administration effort to consolidate and simplify information sources and data input portals related to U.S. government procurement). There is no public database that report federal contract outlays (i.e., payments made by the U.S. federal government) as comprehensively as the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank provides access to obligations data.[25] The beta.SAM.gov Data Bank reports the net amount of funds obligated or *deobligated* (i.e., a downward adjustment of reported contract obligations due to factors such as reductions in material prices or the termination of some portion of contracted activities) by a contract transaction. If the net amount of a transaction is a deobligation, the transaction will be represented as a negative amount in the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank.

The data used by CRS allocates place of performance based on the principal contract place of performance as identified by the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank. Because the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank only allows one country to be listed as the place of performance, contracts listed as being performed in one country can also involve substantial performance in other countries. As such, activities undertaken primarily in other countries excluded from the defined Afghanistan and Iraq areas of operation in support of U.S. military activities, such as contracted activities undertaken at

[23] Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Operations," Joint Publication 3-0, January 17, 2017, incorporating change 1 of October 22, 2018, available at https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_0ch1.pdf.

[24] CBO, *Contractors' Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq*, August 12, 2008, available at https://www.cbo.gov/publication/41728.

[25] Contracting officials must report most contract actions to FPDS-NG, as required by the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR).

USCENTCOM's headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, in support of U.S. operations in Afghanistan, would not be included in this analysis.

Overview of beta.SAM.gov Data Bank Quality and Accuracy Issues

The Government Accountability Office (GAO), CRS, and other organizations have previously raised concerns about the accuracy of procurement data retrieved from FPDS-NG. While public access to government obligation data from FPDS-NG has been transitioned to the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank, contracting officials must still use FPDS-NG to report and record most federal procurement actions, making data retrieved through the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank subject to the same concerns previously raised by GAO and other organizations.[26]

All data have imperfections and limitations. Understanding the limitations of government procurement data—including knowing when, how, and to what extent to rely on data—can help policymakers incorporate data from the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank more effectively into their decision-making process. Data from the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank are best used to identify broad trends and produce rough estimates, or to gather information about specific contracts. Caution is warranted when decision makers use data from the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank to develop policy or otherwise draw conclusions. In some cases, the data themselves may not be reliable. In other instances, a query for particular data may return results that differ, depending on the parameters and timing of the analysis. Updates to "data, including new actions, modifications, and corrections are made on a regular basis," which could result in changes to "data ... for current and/or prior fiscal years."[27] All DOD data available through the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank are also subject to a 90-day availability delay for non-DOD users. Nevertheless, some observers say that despite their shortcomings, the data available through the beta.SAM.gov Data Bank are substantially more comprehensive than what is available on government procurement activities in most other countries in the world.

Author Information

Heidi M. Peters
Analyst in U.S. Defense Acquisition Policy

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[26] For more information, see Appendix A, "FPDS Background, Accuracy Issues, and Future Plans" to the CRS Report R44010, *Defense Acquisitions: How and Where DOD Spends Its Contracting Dollars* for an overview of known issues associated with FPDS-NG data prior to the transition to beta.SAM.gov, including accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of the contract award data.

[27] See FPDS.gov, "DoD Data Availability," available at https://www.fpds.gov/common/html/dodDataAvailability.html.

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