

Up to 56,000 More Contractors Likely for Afghanistan, Congressional Agency Says

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The surge of 30,000 U.S. troops into Afghanistan could be accompanied by a surge of up to 56,000 contractors, vastly expanding the presence of personnel from the U.S. private sector in a war zone, according to a study by the Congressional Research Service.

CRS, which provides background information to members of Congress on a bipartisan basis, said it expects an additional 26,000 to 56,000 contractors to be sent to Afghanistan. That would bring the number of contractors in the country to anywhere from 130,000 to 160,000.

The tally “could increase further if the new [administration] strategy includes a more robust construction and nation building effort,” according to the report, which was released Monday and first disclosed on the Web site Talking Points Memo.

The CRS study says contractors made up 69 percent of the Pentagon’s personnel in Afghanistan last December, a proportion that “apparently represented the highest recorded percentage of contractors used by the Defense Department in any conflict in the history of the United States.” As of September, contractor representation had dropped to 62 percent, as U.S. troop strength increased modestly.

As the Pentagon contracts out activities that previously were carried out by troops in wartime, it has been forced to struggle with new management challenges. “Prior to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, contracting was done on an ad-hoc basis and was not adequately incorporated into the doctrine — or culture — of the military,” according to the CRS report. Today, according to Defense Department officials, “doctrine and strategy are being updated to incorporate the role of contractors in contingency operations.”

The Pentagon’s Joint Contracting Command in Afghanistan has increased the size of its acquisition workforce and is adding staff to monitor performance. To enhance oversight, Congress has appropriated \$8 million for an electronic system that will track all contract-related information for Iraq and Afghanistan.

On Thursday, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs ad-hoc subcommittee on contracting oversight, led by Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.), is scheduled to hold a hearing on the increase in the number and value of Afghanistan contracts. She plans to focus on ensuring that contracts are adequately managed and “whether contracting oversight lessons learned from Iraq are being applied in Afghanistan,” according to her staff members.

Contracts, in the meantime, continue to be solicited and awarded. Over the past week, the

military awarded a \$44.8 million contract to a Florida firm to provide dogs and their handlers for operational use in areas of southern Afghanistan along the Pakistan border, where some of the most violent fighting is taking place.

The U.S. command in Afghanistan also published a notice that it would be seeking intelligence analyst services from a contractor that include “collecting, analyzing and providing recommendations necessary for the government to produce and disseminate intelligence products in several subject areas.” The contract would be for one year, plus options for four additional years.

The Defense Logistics Agency disclosed that it is looking for a contractor that can provide distribution and warehousing services for U.S. and NATO forces in the Kandahar area, which is near the center of fighting. The contractor is to supply the workforce needed to receive, store, inventory and prepare shipment of up to 4,000 items using government-provided warehousing facilities and open storage areas.

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