

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on
Conventional Forces and Alliance Defense,
Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

September 1992

OPERATION DESERT STORM

Lack of Accountability Over Materiel During Redeployment



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**National Security and
International Affairs Division**

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The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman, Subcommittee on Conventional
Forces and Alliance Defense
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As requested, we reviewed the Department of Defense's controls over the return of materials from overseas theaters. This report addresses the controls over materiel being returned from Southwest Asia. A second report, which will be issued in the near future, will discuss the management of excess materiel in Europe.

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly release this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days after the date of the report. At that time, copies of the report will be sent to other appropriate congressional committees; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and the Secretaries of Defense and the Army. We will make copies available to others on request.

This report was prepared under the direction of Donna M. Heivilin, Director, Logistics Issues. She may be reached at (202) 275-8412 if you or your staff have any questions. Other major contributors to this report are listed in appendix I.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Frank C. Conahan'.

Frank C. Conahan
Assistant Comptroller General

Executive Summary

Purpose

The Chairman, Subcommittee on Conventional Forces and Alliance Defense, Senate Committee on Armed Services, was concerned that large quantities of supplies and materiel from Operation Desert Storm may have been lost, misused, or otherwise not properly accounted for. The Chairman asked GAO to determine whether military assets were (1) adequately safeguarded, (2) properly accounted for, and (3) efficiently and effectively returned to the wholesale supply system upon redeployment from Southwest Asia. GAO's review focused on the Army and the Defense Logistics Agency because the Army was responsible for most land-based supplies in Southwest Asia and the majority of the materiel was being returned to the Defense Logistics Agency depots.

Background

The buildup for Operation Desert Storm consisted of extensive movements of troops and equipment. In all, approximately 500,000 military personnel were deployed along with their equipment, supplies, and materiel. In addition, the Department of Defense (DOD) began a massive buildup of resupply or sustainment materiel in Southwest Asia. During the deployment, U.S. personnel unloaded over 500 ships and 10,000 aircraft in the theater of operation. All these preparations were made in anticipation of a lengthy engagement with hostile forces from Iraq.

The air campaign began on January 17, 1991, and was followed by the ground campaign, which began on February 24, 1991. Within 100 hours of the beginning of the ground war, the conflict was over. During the war, the allied forces encountered less resistance and achieved the victory much quicker than expected. As a result, large quantities of resupply materiel were not used and had to be returned to supply depots in the United States.

At the completion of Operation Desert Storm, DOD faced the overwhelming task of returning about 35,000 containers¹ of materiel to supply depots and units in the United States and Europe. About 22,800 of these containers held Defense Logistics Agency managed materiel, of which approximately 10,000 have been returned to supply depots in the United States. The remaining containers were sent to units in Europe, service maintenance depots, specific units in the United States, or to locations worldwide for humanitarian assistance. As of April 1992, most of the materiel had been moved out of Southwest Asia. However, supply depots were still receiving and processing the items into their supply systems.

¹A container is normally 40-feet long, 8-feet wide, and 8-feet high.

Results in Brief

The Army did not have oversight and control over the materiel returning to the United States. Specifically, it lost accountability and visibility over its materiel during the deployment to Southwest Asia, did not establish basic accountability over the materiel during the redeployment process, and began accounting for the materiel only after it was returned and processed at the final destinations. Consequently, the majority of materiel was vulnerable to loss and theft while it was shipped to Southwest Asia, while it was there, and during the return shipment to the United States until it reached its final destination.

Principal Findings

Accountability and Asset Visibility Were Lost During Deployment to Southwest Asia

Documentation on containers packed at depots in the United States did not include an adequate description of container contents. Consequently, transportation and supply personnel handling the containers in Southwest Asia had to open them to determine their contents and destination. In addition, because the transportation system in Southwest Asia could not move the containers out of the port areas as quickly as they arrived, containers began stacking up in the ports. Materiel designated for specific units often never reached them because no procedures were established to document the arrival of incoming supplies, and the units, in most cases, were not notified when materiel they requisitioned arrived in-theater. In some instances, other units commandeered the materiel without signing for them.

Accountability and Asset Visibility Were Not Established During Redeployment

As a result of the President's decision to rapidly redeploy units from Southwest Asia, many units did not inventory their materiel before packing it and did not prepare the documents necessary to identify container contents or efficiently move the packed containers back to the United States. Consequently, the majority of these containers had to be opened by military teams at each U.S. port to identify the contents and destination. This lack of documentation and resulting delays during redeployment could eventually cost the military over \$50 million in late fees for the containers that were leased from commercial carriers. When late fees for the deployment phase are added, total detention fees could exceed \$150 million.

In addition, the Army does not know whether materiel was stolen from containers or whether entire containers were diverted while in-transit.

Officials at the 82nd Airborne Division told us that some of their units reported items missing that they were certain they had packed into the containers before leaving Southwest Asia. Also, the Army Criminal Investigation Division has several ongoing investigations concerning materiel in containers and entire full containers being stolen.

Depot Processing of Containers Has Been Time-Consuming

During the redeployment, depots in the United States were not given basic information about the containers being sent to them, including the number of containers, what was in them, or when they would arrive. Depot officials stated that without this basic information, they could not control the flow of materiel into the depots. Moreover, because the materiel coming from Southwest Asia is not visible to the supply system until it has been received at the depot, inventoried and recorded, item managers might purchase materiel that is already in-transit from Southwest Asia. Also, Army officials told us that, as of June 1992, the Army's major commands still have about \$422 million of excess materiel that will eventually be returned to wholesale supply depots. Until declared excess and returned to the wholesale supply level, this excess materiel is not visible to the item managers and cannot be used to satisfy other units' demands. Finally, due to the lack of basic documentation, the Army and DLA do not know how much materiel has been lost or stolen.

Shipping Guidance Not Followed

Units in Southwest Asia did not follow existing guidance regarding shipping Defense materiel back to U.S. locations via commercial transportation. For example, the guidance requires that all containers shipped via commercial carriers include a detailed packing list and a military shipping label for tracking the container while in-transit. However, GAO observed that hundreds of containers at the Military Ocean Terminal, Bay Area, and the Defense Distribution Region West did not have either a packing list or shipping label attached.

Efforts to Address Weaknesses

In response to the accountability weaknesses experienced during and after Operation Desert Storm, DOD is considering or working on several efforts. First, the Army has developed a plan that outlines a series of corrective actions essential to streamlining its distribution of supplies and equipment. Also, DOD is developing a standard, automated, in-transit visibility and documentation system to support worldwide operations. Lastly, DOD is evaluating the feasibility of operating logistics depots in forward supply areas as part of the wholesale supply system.

Recommendations

GAO is not making recommendations in this report.

Agency Comments

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD acknowledged that there was inadequate accountability over materiel being returned from Southwest Asia. Stating that the numerous contributing factors are extensively documented in "lessons learned" published by the respective services, DOD plans to correct systemic deficiencies and to prevent similar problems in the future. To achieve this, DOD stated that it has pledged a substantial amount of financial and managerial resources, which it believes will improve the handling, shipping, and tracking of materiel in future contingencies.

DOD pointed out that it has regained accountability of nearly all of the materiel returned from Southwest Asia since the GAO audit. It also made several suggestions for specific changes in the draft that GAO considered and adopted where appropriate.

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Abbreviations

DLA	Defense Logistics Agency
DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
MTMC	Military Traffic Management Command

Introduction

On August 7, 1990, the U.S. military began deploying equipment, supplies, and personnel to protect American interests in Saudi Arabia. During the initial deployment, U.S. personnel operated from the Ad Dammam and Al Jubail seaports and the Dhahran airport in Saudi Arabia. From August 1990 to March 1991, military and civilian personnel unloaded 576 ships and 10,002 aircraft containing military equipment and supplies. In addition, military personnel at the airport processed 354,900 personnel. This buildup was accomplished in anticipation of a lengthy ground war.

In November 1990, the U.S. objective changed to expelling Iraq from Kuwait. On January 17, 1991, the coalition forces began an air campaign designed to eliminate Iraqi command and communication capabilities. This was followed by a ground assault that began on February 24, 1991. The ground offensive encountered little resistance from Iraqi forces and within 100 hours the conflict was over.

In March 1991, the return or redeployment of troops, equipment, and supplies from Operation Desert Storm to the United States and Europe began. Redeployment is the process of returning the troops, their equipment, and supplies from an area of operation. While a variety of means exist for returning equipment and supplies, commercial containers² were used extensively to redeploy materiel from Southwest Asia. These containers were used to transport all types of materiel except very large equipment, weapons, ammunition, or other classified materiel. The materiel in the containers generally included such items as spare and repair parts, clothing, food, medical items, and construction materiel.

Redeploying units, both combat and support, were responsible for preparing their equipment and supplies for shipment. This process should involve identifying the materiel to be redeployed, packaging it for shipment, and delivering it to a staging area at or near the port of debarkation. The units were also responsible for preparing the documentation describing the contents and its final destination. In addition, the units should maintain copies of packing lists.

The Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC) arranges for commercial shipment of the containers and ensures that containers are actually shipped. MTMC does not take physical possession of containers but arranges for commercial carriers to pick them up from the units.

²A container is normally 40-feet long, 8-feet wide, and 8-feet high.

The services and DLA are responsible for directing supplies being returned to the wholesale supply system to specific warehouses or other locations. Generally, this decision is made by the item manager responsible for the particular materiel being returned.

The commercial transportation companies, in this case ocean cargo carriers, are responsible for providing transportation from the in-theater port to the final destination. This includes the transportation by sea as well as ground transportation from the port of embarkation to the container's final destination.

Unusual Characteristics of Southwest Asia Redeployment

A variety of unusual factors affected the redeployment from Southwest Asia and the roles and responsibilities of the agencies and commands involved. First, the accelerated redeployment of troops resulted in some units not being able to prepare their equipment and supplies prior to leaving Southwest Asia. In these cases, their materiel was left in Southwest Asia to be prepared for shipment by designated stay-behind units. Second, many redeploying units simply arrived at the ports without coordinating with port authorities or MTMC for commercial shipment. Finally, DLA decided that most of the containers returning to the United States would be sent to the Defense Distribution Region West because it had sufficient capacity and was close to the West Coast ports where most of the containers were arriving. By doing this, DLA bypassed the item managers in determining where supplies would be returned.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The Chairman, Subcommittee on Conventional Forces and Alliance Defense, Senate Armed Services Committee, requested that we review the return of materiel from overseas theaters, specifically Southwest Asia and Europe. The objectives of this review were to determine whether military assets were (1) adequately safeguarded, (2) properly accounted for, and (3) efficiently and effectively returned to the wholesale supply system upon redeployment from Southwest Asia. Our review of the return of excess materiel from Europe will be described in a separate report.

Initially, we performed work at the Departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force and at the Marine Corps. After these initial efforts, we decided to limit the scope of our review to the Army and DLA because (1) the Army was responsible for the land-based supplies in Southwest Asia and had possession of the majority of materiel being returned to the United States and (2) most of the materiel was being returned to DLA depots. In

addition, while we reviewed the return of unit materiel owned by the XVIII Airborne Corps, we concentrated primarily on the return of materiel to the wholesale supply system.

During our review, we held discussions with officials and analyzed regulations, policies, and other documentation at the following locations:

- Army Materiel Command, Alexandria, Virginia;
- Defense Logistics Agency, Alexandria, Virginia;
- Military Traffic Management Command, Falls Church, Virginia;
- Military Traffic Management Command, Eastern Area, Bayonne, New Jersey;
- Military Traffic Management Command, Western Area, Oakland, California;
- Defense Distribution Region East, New Cumberland, Pennsylvania;
- Defense Distribution Region West, Stockton, California;
- Logistics Control Activity, Presidio, California;
- Center for Army Lessons Learned, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas;
- U.S. Army Tank-Automotive Command, Warren, Michigan;
- U.S. Army Aviation Systems Command, St. Louis, Missouri; and
- XVIII Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

We did not perform audit work in Southwest Asia. Consequently, we were unable to review decisions regarding how materiel was safeguarded and whether it would be disposed of in Southwest Asia or returned to the supply system in the United States. For information on the redeployment efforts in Southwest Asia, we relied on data and information compiled by the Army Audit Agency and the Center for Army Lessons Learned. Whenever possible, we also interviewed individuals at the commands we visited that were in Southwest Asia during the redeployment.

We performed our review from June 1991 to April 1992 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Oversight and Control of Materiel Did Not Exist

The Army did not have oversight and control of its materiel redeployed from Southwest Asia after military operations were completed. Units and supply depots did not establish accountability and visibility until the materiel was received and processed at the final destinations in the United States. DOD began redeploying its materiel from Operation Desert Storm in March 1991. As of April 1992, the Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC) estimated that about 35,000 containers had been returned to the United States and Europe and that about 400 containers that needed to be returned were still in Southwest Asia. Of the 35,000 containers that had been returned, about 22,800 consisted of DLA-managed materiel owned by the services. DLA estimated that about 10,000 of these containers had been received at supply depots, about 5,600 were sent to Europe, and 6,700 went to units and service maintenance depots. The remaining containers (12,700) consisted of materiel owned by the services that were sent to specific units in the United States and Europe, the services' maintenance depots, or were still in-transit.

Under normal circumstances, DLA and the services maintain accountability over in-transit materiel.³ Depots routinely receive notification from item managers identifying the type and quantity of materiel the units are sending to the depot. This notification alerts the depot of the anticipated delivery by creating a due-in record at the depot. The materiel is accompanied by a turn-in document that authorizes the return and identifies the activity that returned the materiel. According to depot officials, without this turn-in document, the receipt process is much more time-consuming and the depot has no way of knowing whether it has received all the materiel it is supposed to. Consequently, in-transit loss or theft would be difficult to detect through records or documents.

Accountability and Asset Visibility Were Lost During Deployment to Southwest Asia

According to Army officials and the Center for Army Lessons Learned, a command established to catalog and consolidate Army lessons learned reports, the Army lost oversight and control of its materiel during deployment to Southwest Asia. We found that this lack of visibility was caused by the following three factors:

- The contents of containers sent to Southwest Asia were not properly documented when the containers were packed at depots in the United States.

³Defense Transportation: Ineffective Oversight Contributes to Freight Losses (GAO/NSIAD-92-96, June 18, 1992).

- The transportation system in Southwest Asia could not process the containers as quickly as they arrived.
- Materiel requisitioned by specific units often never reached the units.

According to the Center for Army Lessons Learned, materiel that was consolidated and packed into containers for shipment to Southwest Asia did not include an adequate description of container contents. Transportation and supply personnel could not identify the contents of specific containers when they arrived in-theater or move supplies to specific units or supply points where the materiel was needed. The documentation for many containers stated that the contents were “general cargo.” For example, Army aviation units in Southwest Asia reported a shortage of key aviation repair parts. Item managers at the Army Aviation Systems Command told us, however, that an ample supply of these items were in-theater but could not be located or moved to the units that needed them.

We also found that U.S. military transportation units in Southwest Asia did not have sufficient personnel or equipment to move the containers out of the ports of debarkation as they were off-loaded. In addition, because port personnel had to open containers to identify contents and destination, port processing slowed greatly. Consequently, thousands of containers were backlogged, and containers continued to arrive. The containers already in port were often buried under the new arrivals and were some of the last to be moved. As a result, Army officials stated that units did not receive their supplies and were requisitioning items that were already in-theater but could not be located.

The final factor contributing to accountability and visibility problems was that materiel designated for specific units often never reached them. Since no procedures were established to document the arrival of incoming supplies, the requisitioning unit, in most cases, was not notified when the materiel arrived. As discussed in the following section, failure to establish accountability over the materiel in-transit to Southwest Asia contributed to the accountability problems experienced during redeployment.

Accountability and Asset Visibility Were Not Established During Redeployment

As a result of the President's decision to rapidly redeploy units from Southwest Asia, units either hastily packed their equipment and supplies or left materiel in-theater. In their haste to pack, units usually did not inventory their materiel or document and seal containers. Furthermore, the materiel left for other units to pack was not inventoried nor was its ownership or destination documented. Therefore, most of the containers were delayed upon arrival at U.S. ports until their contents were identified and disposition instructions were received.

MTMC officials estimated that thousands of containers were in-transit to Southwest Asia or in ports in Southwest Asia when the war ended. These containers were redeployed to the United States without being opened or any return documentation prepared.

Because the Army had virtually no oversight or control of in-transit assets, military teams at each port had to open most of the containers entering the United States to determine their contents and probable destination. According to MTMC officials at the Military Ocean Terminal, Oakland, California, this process was both difficult and time-consuming. It has also caused delays and backlogs in the ports. According to these officials, they often had to search through these containers to find any indication as to which unit owned the materiel or whether it needed to be shipped to a depot.

The Army occasionally sent the containers to the wrong locations. According to officials at the XVIII Airborne Corps, they never received about 50 containers of their materiel. MTMC officials believe that some of these containers were probably inadvertently sent to a depot. For some of the other containers, they believe that the XVIII Airborne Corps' records of container numbers are inaccurate and that the Corps actually received the containers, or it received some of the materiel in different containers because the contents had been repacked in-transit. On the other hand, officials at the 82nd Airborne Division stated that some of their units reported items missing that they were certain they had packed into containers prior to leaving Southwest Asia. Since these units did not prepare packing lists, however, they cannot determine specifically what is missing. In either case, it is unlikely that the XVIII Airborne Corps or MTMC will be able to resolve this issue.

The Army Criminal Investigation Division has several ongoing investigations concerning materiel in containers and entire full containers

being stolen. Because these investigations are ongoing, we were unable to obtain information on them.

Lack of Control Over In-Transit Containers

The Army had inadequate oversight and control of the containers once they were turned over to the commercial carriers. While in Southwest Asian ports, some carriers lacked sufficient secured space to store all of the containers. Consequently, containers were often stacked in unsecured areas while awaiting shipment. Once the containers were loaded on ships, the Army was unable to track their movement. According to MTMC officials, containers were often off-loaded at other ports around the world and reloaded onto other ships before reaching the United States. They also stated that some containers damaged in-transit were unloaded and their contents loaded into other containers. Furthermore, this off-loading and unloading of containers increases the risk of theft or loss of materiel.

According to MTMC officials, the Army and the commercial carriers could not track the containers by the container numbers. Each container owned by a commercial carrier has a number stenciled on the outside that is used to track its movement. However, units in Southwest Asia often painted their unit designations over the container number or painted the containers with desert camouflage, which made tracking by container number almost impossible. Also, in instances where the ship manifests listed container numbers, the manifests were not always accurate. Containers that were listed on the manifests were often not on the ship, and other containers on the ship were not on the manifest.

The delays experienced in getting the leased containers to their final destinations during redeployment could cost DOD over \$50 million in detention fees. The leasing agreements require that DOD pay detention fees to the commercial carriers for any period of time beyond the leasing agreement. MTMC officials estimate that the average detention charges per container for the redeployment phase will be about \$1,500. For the estimated 35,000 containers, the total could amount to about \$52.5 million. According to DLA officials, total detention fees since initial deployment to Southwest Asia could exceed \$150 million. MTMC is monitoring the carriers' billings to preclude paying detention fees for any periods not covered by the lease agreement. However, MTMC officials stated that the Army Audit Agency has been reviewing the carriers' invoices for container leasing and detention fees and has identified that the carriers are charging excessive fees.

Depot Processing of Containers Has Been Time-Consuming

Of the approximately 35,000 containers of materiel returning from Southwest Asia, DLA estimates that about 10,000 have been shipped to supply depots. Most have been received and processed at the Defense Distribution Region West in California. Efficient and effective depot processing of the containers is essential because visibility is not established until the receipts are inventoried and documented. However, the containers from Southwest Asia have been free flowing into the DLA supply depots. Consequently, the depots could not plan their workload because they did not receive prior notification of the amount or type of materiel being sent to them. In addition, due to the lack of documentation, the depot must inventory and account for each item in the containers. Furthermore, DOD estimates that units returning from Southwest Asia have millions of dollars worth of excess materiel that will eventually be returned to the wholesale supply system. We found, for example, that the XVIII Airborne Corps reported in January 1992 that over 50 percent of their on-hand stocks were excess to their needs.

Officials at DLA and at Defense Distribution Region West stated that, during the redeployment from Southwest Asia, they had not been provided any reliable information on how much materiel they were going to receive or when they would receive it. In addition, the depots had no control over when carriers delivered containers. Consequently, the depots have been forced to operate in a reactionary mode without being able to plan for the receipt and processing of the materiel. Although these officials said that they had been periodically notified when containers reach the U.S. ports, this information was generally inaccurate and they were not informed when the containers left the ports. For example, one carrier instituted the practice of only delivering containers to depots on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Consequently, the depots knew when containers were going to be delivered, but not how many or what materiel they would have to process. Because the depots are structured to process different types of materiel in different areas, their capacities may be under- or over-utilized depending on the number and contents of containers delivered.

Because the Army did not establish visibility over its materiel during the redeployment process, all materiel received at the depots had to be counted and placed on the accountable records. Consequently, processing of returns has been time-consuming. The returns from Southwest Asia are not visible to the item managers until the items are processed into the depots' records. Because the redeployment process has taken over a year to complete, many of these items have not been included in the records of any command during that period.

Until the item managers are aware that these items are being returned to the depots, the potential exists for purchasing items that are already in-transit from Southwest Asia. Officials at the Army Tank-Automotive Command stated that they have attempted to account for the returns from Southwest Asia in making procurement decisions. However, in the three cases we looked at, actual receipts exceeded expected turn-ins by 7 to 550 percent. Officials stated that this occurs because there is no documentation of materiel that was in the pipeline to Southwest Asia when the hostilities ceased. Furthermore, because the depots were not informed of the type or amount of materiel being sent to them, DOD has no means of ensuring that all materiel destined for a depot is actually received or of determining if it is lost or stolen in-transit.

In December 1991, DOD estimated that units returning from Southwest Asia had about \$3.4 billion of excess materiel that should eventually be returned to the wholesale supply system. Until it is declared excess and returned to wholesale supply depots, this materiel is not visible to the item managers and cannot be used to satisfy other units' needs. The XVIII Airborne Corps, for example, reported in January 1992 that of their \$145.4 million total on-hand stocks, about \$83.5 million, or 57.4 percent, was excess to their current requirements. According to officials at the XVIII Airborne Corps, these excess materials were being returned to the wholesale supply system. At our exit conference in August 1992, Army officials told us that its major commands still have about \$422 million of excess materiel that will be returned to the wholesale supply system.

DOD Efforts to Address Redeployment Weaknesses

DOD has several efforts underway to address the accountability weaknesses that occurred during and after Operation Desert Storm. The Army, for example, has developed a plan that outlines a series of corrective actions to streamline its distribution of supplies and equipment. DOD is developing a standard, automated, in-transit visibility and documentation system to support worldwide operations. Lastly, DOD is evaluating the feasibility of operating logistics depots in forward supply areas as part of the wholesale supply system.

Guidance Not Followed

While the Army has no guidance that specifically addresses redeployment, it relies on guidance pertaining to the normal movement of materiel to safeguard assets during redeployment, according to officials at the Center for Army Lessons Learned. This guidance was developed for peacetime operations and deployment.

The redeploying units did not adhere to these Army procedures. For example, a packing list and load diagram are required for each container. However, we found that the vast majority of containers did not contain them. In addition, the Army's procedures also require that a military shipping label be attached to the seal on the container door and to the rear of the container. We observed, however, hundreds of containers at the Military Ocean Terminal, Bay Area, and the Defense Distribution Region West that did not have shipping labels.

Efforts to Address Weaknesses

In response to many of the weaknesses evident during Operation Desert Storm, including redeployment weaknesses, the Army has developed a plan that outlines a series of corrections essential to streamlining its distribution of supplies and equipment. In developing this plan, the Army's objective was to integrate all of the major distribution functions into a more efficient and effective distribution system. The plan sets forth the basic framework for moving units, equipment, and materiel to and from overseas theaters.

The Army's corrective action plan addresses many of the accountability and visibility problems we discuss in this report. For example, it references the need for computer systems that provide peacetime management and control, but that will also have wartime use. The plan also emphasizes the importance of documenting the contents of containers during deployment and redeployment, and the need to maintain visibility over materiel while in-transit to and from theaters of operation.

In-Transit Visibility and Documentation System

DOD is developing a standard, automated, in-transit visibility and documentation system to support worldwide operations. Individual services and agencies have achieved partial visibility over their in-transit assets, and others are developing systems that could improve in-transit asset visibility. Although DOD expects to benefit from these systems, it also plans to develop a new comprehensive system that will do something none of the existing systems do – give visibility of in-transit assets to all operational units, commanders, and managers who need it.

Unless the visibility over assets is improved, DOD expects the problems that occurred in Southwest Asia to be repeated in future conflicts. To preclude this from happening, it has undertaken a comprehensive management initiative to provide operators and logisticians essential visibility of materiel. According to DOD, meeting this objective requires full integration across the functional areas of supply and distribution, transportation, maintenance, and procurement. Although the planned system is still conceptual, DOD envisions that it will standardize policies and guidance throughout all segments of the transportation pipeline, support timely reporting and access to in-transit information, and incorporate enhanced technologies as they become available.

Forward Logistics Depots in Overseas Theaters

DOD is also studying the feasibility of operating logistics depots in forward supply areas as part of the wholesale supply system. During the operations in Southwest Asia, billions of dollars of consumable items were stored in large logistics bases. Although these bases operated much like large wholesale supply depots, the wholesale supply system did not have visibility or control of these assets. According to DOD officials, in-country logistics support could have been improved if the bases had been operated as extensions of the wholesale depot system.

Benefits DOD believes could have been achieved by these depots include the reduced likelihood of customers unnecessarily reordering supplies and item managers recommending additional procurements without complete knowledge of asset posture. Also, DOD believes that a forward logistics depot probably would substantially reduce the number of complaints that people did not know where ordered materiel was once it arrived in-country.

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