

CRS Insights

Increased Department of Defense Role in U.S. Ebola Response

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On September 16, 2014, President Obama announced [a major increase](#) in the U.S. response to the current Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The Department of Defense (DOD) submitted requests to Congress to make excess Overseas Contingency Operations funds appropriated for FY2014 available to support this effort. The requested funds would be used to provide humanitarian assistance, including:

- transportation of DOD and non-DOD personnel and supplies;
- coordination of delivery of supplies from both DOD and non-DOD sources such as isolation units, personnel protective equipment, and medical supplies;
- construction of 17 planned Ebola treatment units; and,
- training and education in support of sanitation and mortuary affairs functions to limit the spread of the Ebola outbreak.

DOD officials have stated that DOD personnel will not provide direct medical care to Ebola victims, but that non-governmental organizations are submitting proposals to the World Health Organization and other entities to provide health care workers.

Operation United Assistance

DOD operations have commenced pursuant to the President's announcement. DOD has labeled the effort "Operation United Assistance." According to a [press report citing Defense officials](#) at a September 30 press conference, an initial contingent of about 1,400 soldiers will be deployed in October with about 700 of those from the Army's 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and the remainder will be combat engineers from other units. Troops are being trained in how to avoid contracting Ebola and other endemic diseases. Once these troops have arrived, Army Maj. Gen. Gary Volesky, commander of the 101st, will replace Maj. Gen. Darryl Williams, as commander of the U.S. military response.

DOD Reprogramming Requests

DOD submitted two separate prior approval reprogramming requests dated September 8 and September 17 to the House and Senate appropriations and armed services committees. These would make available up to \$1 billion for DOD's support of the United States' response to the current Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Some of the funding in the initial \$500 million request also would be available to support continuing humanitarian activities in Iraq.

No new appropriations are requested. Under special transfer authority, DOD is asking for prior approval to reprogram funds from accounts that experienced lower than expected costs for planned activities. These funds come primarily from Overseas Contingency Operations appropriations for FY2014 where there were lower than expected maintenance costs and lower than expected civilian and contract personnel subsistence costs.

Congressional Approval Required

Under DOD regulations, the House and Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committees must provide written approval before DOD can effectuate the reprogramming. On September 24, \$50 million was approved for immediate use. Committee staff stated that additional money will be released when DOD provides personnel protection policies, spending plans, goals, and a timeline for the mission.