



Highlights of [GAO-07-113](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on National Security and International Relations, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Why GAO Did This Study

For the military to operate in environments contaminated by chemical and biological warfare agents, the Department of Defense (DOD) has developed collective protection equipment to provide a protected environment for group activities. GAO previously reported persistent problems in providing collective protection for U.S. forces in high threat areas overseas. In this report, GAO examined (1) current intelligence assessments of chemical and biological threats, (2) the extent to which DOD has provided collective protection at critical overseas facilities and major expeditionary warfighting assets, and (3) DOD's framework for managing installation protection policies and prioritizing critical installations for funding. In conducting this review, GAO developed criteria to identify critical sites in the absence of a DOD priority listing of such sites in overseas high threat areas—areas at high risk of terrorist or missile attack.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) update the chemical warfare National Intelligence Estimate and that DOD take actions to provide clearer, more consistent policies that guide the funding and placement of collective protection and other installation preparedness activities. In comments on a draft of this report, the DNI and DOD generally agreed with all of our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-113.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Davi D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov.

CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL DEFENSE

Updated Intelligence, Clear Guidance, and Consistent Priorities Needed to Guide Investments in Collective Protection

What GAO Found

The intelligence community is struggling with the changing security environment and communicating the uncertainties in the quality of chemical and biological threat information. Generally, the two key chemical and biological threats facing DOD forces are from hostile nations using missiles, or terrorist groups (e.g., Al Qaeda) using devices to release chemical or biological agents. DOD expects these threats to grow. The intelligence community has recognized the need to communicate more candidly about the uncertainties in intelligence regarding the type and amount of agents, the number of missiles likely armed with chemical and biological warheads, and the method of dissemination. Communicating these uncertainties helps in understanding the actual threat posed by our adversaries and in making risk management decisions on investments. However, while the intelligence community, under the Director of National Intelligence, has issued a new 2006 intelligence estimate regarding the uncertainties in the biological warfare threat, it has not issued an update on the chemical warfare threat since 2002 due to evolving assessment and communication policies.

Despite the growing threat, collective protection at both critical overseas facilities and in some major expeditionary warfighting assets (e.g., infantry units, naval vessels, and medical units) is limited and inconsistent. Nearly 80 percent of overseas sites identified as critical by combatant commanders based on criteria GAO provided them, did not have collective protection equipment—including about two-thirds of the critical sites in high threat areas. At the same time, GAO found problems such as often vague and inconsistent guidance on the use of collective protection. DOD guidance encourages the use of collective protection but does not prescribe specific standards to guide strategic decisions on its use. Military service guidance, except the Air Force, was also vague and inconsistent on key issues such as (1) whether decisions on the need for the equipment should be left to local commanders' discretion, (2) when the various types of collective protection are most appropriate, and (3) what functions need to be protected. Thus, commanders have difficulty determining the need for collective protection.

DOD's framework for managing collective protection and other related installation protection policies and activities is fragmented, which affects DOD's ability to ensure that collective protection resources are allocated efficiently and effectively. Prior GAO and DOD reports have highlighted continuing problems with fragmented policies and operating concepts among the many and varied programs and organizations involved. These problems result in unresolved conflict about issues, such as which critical facilities should receive priority for funding improvements, and make it difficult for DOD to balance competing warfighting and other needs and ensure that funding resources are prudently allocated. Previously, GAO and others have recommended DOD designate a single authority to integrate and coordinate installation protection policies and activities, and DOD agreed. However, despite a new ongoing reorganization, it has not yet done so.