



Highlights of [GAO-06-865T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

GAO was asked to address (1) the extent to which coordination between the U.S. military and private security providers has improved since GAO's 2005 report, (2) the ability of private security providers and the Department of Defense (DOD) to conduct comprehensive background screenings of employees, and (3) the extent to which U.S. or international standards exist for establishing private security provider and employee qualifications. For this testimony, GAO drew from its July 2005 report on private security providers, and its preliminary observations from an ongoing engagement examining contractor screening practices.

REBUILDING IRAQ

Actions Still Needed to Improve the Use of Private Security Providers

What GAO Found

Coordination between the U.S. military and private security providers still needs improvement. First, private security providers continue to enter the battle space without coordinating with the U.S. military, putting both the military and security providers at a greater risk for injury. Second, U.S. military units are not trained, prior to deployment, on the operating procedures of private security providers in Iraq and the role of the Reconstruction Operations Center, which is to coordinate military-provider interactions. While DOD agreed with our prior recommendation to establish a predeployment training program to help address the coordination issue, no action has been taken.

Many private security providers and DOD have difficulty completing comprehensive criminal background screenings for U.S. and foreign nationals when data are missing or inaccessible. For example, a DOD policy requires biometric screening of most non-U.S. private security providers accessing U.S. bases in Iraq. Biometric screening (e.g., fingerprints and iris scans) measures a person's unique physical characteristics. Biometric screening is not as effective as it could be because the databases used to screen contractor employees include limited international data. Based on its work to date, GAO believes that incomplete criminal background screening may contribute to an increased risk to military forces and civilians in Iraq, and the military would benefit by reviewing the base security measures to ensure that the risk private security contractors may pose has been minimized. A report on screening will be issued in Fall 2006.

No U.S. or international standards exist for establishing private security provider and employee qualifications. Reconstruction contractors told GAO during its review for its July 2005 report that they had difficulty hiring suitable security providers. Contractors replaced their security providers on five of the eight reconstruction contracts awarded in 2003 that were reviewed by GAO. Contractor officials attributed this turnover to various factors, including their lack of knowledge of the security market and of the potential security providers and the absence of useful agency guidance in this area. In our report, we recommended that the State Department, United States Agency for International Development, and DOD explore options that would enable contractors to obtain security services quickly and efficiently. In response to our recommendation, the agencies met in November 2005 and agreed that our recommendation was not practical. They determined that they could best assist contractors by providing access to information related to industry best practices and other security-related material.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-865T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact William Solis at (202) 512-8365 or solisw@gao.gov.