



Highlights of [GAO-08-1032T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Over the past several years, a serious effort has begun to comprehensively reevaluate how the United States maintains its nuclear deterrent and what the nation's approach should be for transforming its aging nuclear weapons complex. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), a separately organized agency within the Department of Energy (DOE), is responsible for overseeing this weapons complex, which comprises three nuclear weapons design laboratories, four production plants, and the Nevada Test Site.

In December 2007, NNSA issued a draft report on potential environmental impacts of alternative actions to transform the nuclear weapons complex, which NNSA refers to as Complex Transformation. NNSA's preferred action is to establish a number of "distributed centers of excellence" at sites within the existing nuclear weapons complex, including the Los Alamos National Laboratory for plutonium capabilities, the Y-12 Plant for uranium capabilities, and the Pantex Plant for weapons assembly, disassembly, and high explosives manufacturing. NNSA would continue to operate these facilities to maintain and refurbish the existing nuclear weapons stockpile as it makes the transition to a smaller, more responsive infrastructure.

GAO was asked to discuss NNSA's Complex Transformation proposal. This testimony is based on previous GAO work.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1032T](#). For more information, contact Gene Aloise at (202) 512-3841 or aloisee@gao.gov.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Views on NNSA's Proposal to Transform the Nuclear Weapons Complex

What GAO Found

Transforming the nuclear weapons complex will be a daunting task. In April 2006 testimony before the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, House Committee on Appropriations, GAO identified four actions that, in its view, were critical to successfully achieving the transformation of the complex. On the basis of completed and ongoing GAO work on NNSA's management of the nuclear weapons complex, GAO remains concerned about NNSA's and the Department of Defense's (DOD) ability to carefully and fully implement these four actions. For this reason, GAO believes that the Congress must remain vigilant in its oversight of Complex Transformation. Specifically:

- NNSA and DOD have not established clear, long-term requirements for the nuclear weapons stockpile. While NNSA and DOD have considered a variety of scenarios for the future composition of the nuclear weapons stockpile, no requirements have been issued. It is GAO's view that NNSA will not be able to develop accurate cost estimates or plans for Complex Transformation until stockpile requirements are known. Further, recent GAO work found that the absence of stockpile requirements is affecting NNSA's plans for manufacturing a critical nuclear weapon component.
- NNSA has had difficulty developing realistic cost estimates for large, complex projects. In September 2007, a contractor provided NNSA with a range of cost estimates for over 10 different Complex Transformation alternatives. However, the contractor stated that (1) its analysis was based on rough order-of-magnitude estimates and (2) NNSA should not use its cost estimates to predict budget-level project costs. In addition, in March 2007 GAO reported that 8 of 12 major construction projects being managed by DOE and NNSA had exceeded their initial cost estimates.
- NNSA will need to develop a transformation plan with clear, realistic milestones. GAO expects that once NNSA decides the path forward for Complex Transformation later this year, NNSA will put forward such a plan. However, GAO has repeatedly documented problems with NNSA's ability to implement its plans. For example, in February 2006 GAO reported problems with the planning documents that NNSA was using to manage the implementation of its new approach for assessing and certifying the safety and reliability of the nuclear stockpile.
- Successful transformation requires strong leadership. In 2006, NNSA created an Office of Transformation to oversee its Complex Transformation activities. However, GAO is concerned that the Office of Transformation may not have sufficient authority to set transformation priorities for all of NNSA, specifically as they affect nuclear nonproliferation programs.