



Highlights of [GAO-07-444](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Following the invasion of Iraq in March 2003—known as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)—concerns were raised about how the Department of Defense (DOD) secured Iraqi conventional munitions storage sites during and after major combat operations. Because of the broad interest in this issue, GAO conducted this work under the Comptroller General's authority to conduct evaluations. This report examines (1) the security provided by U.S. forces over Iraqi conventional munitions storage sites and (2) DOD actions to mitigate risks associated with an adversary's conventional munitions storage sites for future operations on the basis of OIF lessons learned. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed OIF war plans, joint doctrine and policy, and intelligence reports, and interviewed senior-level DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to (1) conduct a theaterwide survey and risk assessment on unsecured conventional munitions in Iraq, (2) report related risk mitigation strategies and results to Congress, and (3) incorporate conventional munitions storage site security as a strategic planning factor into all levels of planning policy and guidance. DOD partially concurred with our recommendations. www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-444.

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.

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

DOD Should Apply Lessons Learned Concerning the Need for Security over Conventional Munitions Storage Sites to Future Operations Planning

What GAO Found

The overwhelming size and number of conventional munitions storage sites in Iraq, combined with certain prewar planning assumptions that proved to be invalid, resulted in U.S. forces not adequately securing these sites and widespread looting, according to field unit, lessons learned, and intelligence reports. Pre-OIF estimates of Iraq's conventional munitions varied significantly, with the higher estimate being five times greater than the lower estimate. Conventional munitions storage sites were looted after major combat operations and some remained vulnerable as of October 2006. According to lessons learned reports and senior-level DOD officials, the widespread looting occurred because DOD had insufficient troop levels to secure conventional munitions storage sites due to several OIF planning priorities and assumptions. DOD's OIF planning priorities included quickly taking Baghdad on a surprise basis rather than using an overwhelming force. The plan also assumed that the regular Iraqi army units would "capitulate and provide internal security." GAO analysis showed that the war plan did not document risk mitigation strategies—such as branch plans as recommended by joint planning doctrine—in case assumptions were proven wrong. Not securing these conventional munitions storage sites has been costly, as government reports indicated that looted munitions are being used to make Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) that have killed or maimed many people, and will likely continue to support terrorist attacks in the region. As of October 2006, the Multi-National Coalition-Iraq stated that some remote sites have not been revisited to verify if they pose any residual risk nor have they been physically secured. However, DOD does not appear to have conducted a theaterwide survey and assessment of the current risk unsecured conventional munitions represent to U.S. forces and others.

DOD has taken many actions in response to OIF lessons learned, such as setting up the Joint IED Defeat Organization to develop a more strategic approach to countering IEDs, which typically are made using looted munitions. However, our review of DOD doctrine, policy, guidance, and procedures used to guide operational planning and execution found little evidence of guidance on the security of conventional munitions storage sites. DOD's actions generally have emphasized countering the use of IEDs by resistance groups during post-hostility operations. GAO concludes that U.S. forces will face increased risk from this emerging asymmetric threat when an adversary uses unconventional means to counter U.S. military strengths. For example, one potential adversary is also estimated to have a significant amount of munitions that would require significant manpower to secure or destroy. GAO also concludes that this situation shows both that Iraqi stockpiles of munitions may not be an anomaly and that information on the amount and location of an adversary's munitions can represent a strategic planning consideration for future operations. However, without joint guidance, DOD cannot ensure that OIF lessons learned about the security of an adversary's conventional munitions storage sites will be integrated into future operations planning and execution.