



Highlights of [GAO-09-828](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

A successful terrorist attack on a facility containing nuclear weapons could have devastating consequences. GAO was asked to compare the Department of Defense's (DOD) and Department of Energy's (DOE) efforts to protect the nation's nuclear weapons where they are stored, maintained, or transported. This report (1) compares the nuclear weapons security policies and procedures at DOD and DOE, and the extent to which cost-benefit analyses are required; (2) compares DOD and DOE efforts to assess threats to nuclear weapons; and (3) identifies total current and projected funding requirements for securing nuclear weapons, including military construction costs. GAO analyzed DOD and DOE nuclear weapons security policies and procedures; visited sites that store, maintain, or transport nuclear weapons; and analyzed funding data for fiscal years 2006 through 2013. This report is an unclassified version of a classified report issued in May 2009.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense improve DOD's process for evaluating and selecting among alternative security measures, improve installation commanders' ability to assess threats, and improve visibility and accountability over Air Force nuclear weapons security funding. DOD partially agreed with the recommendations in this report, noting several actions in process or needed to address the recommendations.

View [GAO-09-828](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov.

HOMELAND DEFENSE

Greater Focus on Analysis of Alternatives and Threats Needed to Improve DOD's Strategic Nuclear Weapons Security

What GAO Found

DOD and DOE nuclear weapons security policies and guidance are similar in that both establish minimum security standards for nuclear weapons. However, DOD's guidance does not emphasize or require a cost-benefit analysis when considering alternative security measures, and therefore the full costs of alternatives may not be considered in a comprehensive manner when choosing among security measures. For example, the Navy plans to spend about \$1.1 billion on security improvements to protect ballistic missile submarines while in transit, but selected one alternative without considering the full life cycle costs of the available alternatives. In contrast, DOE's policy for nuclear weapons security provides local officials greater flexibility than DOD's in determining how to meet security standards, and has a greater emphasis on cost-benefit analysis as a part of the decision-making process.

Although DOD and DOE assess threats to nuclear assets as part of their nuclear weapons security programs, DOD has not provided adequate guidance or capabilities to fully develop local threat assessments where nuclear weapons are stored, maintained, or transported. DOD policies require installation commanders to develop threat assessments using a national assessment as a starting point and tailor that assessment to their installations. However, GAO identified instances where the local threat assessment generally reflected all threats contained in the national assessment, with only minimal adjustments to reflect the local environment. Further, the individuals developing the local assessments had limited guidance, were not trained as intelligence analysts and often used different methodologies. Without clear guidance and necessary threat assessment capabilities, the military services may not be fully leveraging local, regional, and national threat information in preparing local assessments. In contrast, DOE provides guidance and, at the time of GAO's review, was developing an approach to incorporate all available threat information more fully into its assessments, though GAO did not assess its effectiveness because this new approach had not been fully implemented.

DOD and DOE have estimated the funds required to protect nuclear weapons to be approximately \$11 billion for fiscal years 2006 through 2013, but GAO identified shortfalls in the Air Force's ability to centrally manage and track funding that limits the visibility of Air Force requirements. The Air Force and Navy make up over \$8 billion of the total estimated requirement for securing nuclear weapons. The remaining \$3 billion is incurred by the two DOE organizations that handle nuclear weapons. Across all four organizations, over half the \$11 billion is devoted to funding security forces. Although accountability over funding data is critical to enabling decision makers to address nuclear weapons security funding requirements, GAO found that the Air Force lacked a consistent method to identify requirements specifically related to nuclear weapons security because of the decentralized method through which it manages this funding. Without a method to track these costs, the visibility of these requirements is limited, and the Air Force may not be able to effectively manage its nuclear weapons security funding.