

Highlights of [GAO-11-185T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

In light of longstanding problems with delays and backlogs, Congress mandated personnel security clearance reforms through the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA), which requires, among other things, that executive agencies meet objectives for the timeliness of the investigative and adjudicative phases of the security clearance process. Since 2005, the Department of Defense's (DOD) clearance program has been on GAO's high-risk list due to timeliness delays and GAO continued that designation in 2007 and 2009 also due to concerns about quality.

Based on prior and ongoing work, this statement addresses DOD's progress in (1) reducing the timeliness of initial personnel security clearances at DOD and (2) building quality into the processes used to investigate and adjudicate security clearances. GAO reviewed Performance Accountability Council timeliness data and has begun a preliminary analysis of available DOD data, examined key clearance reform documents, and conducted interviews with DOD and the Performance Accountability Council officials about timeliness and efforts to improve the quality of investigations and adjudications. GAO plans to continue examining the timeliness and quality of personnel security clearances in DOD. This work will help inform the Comptroller General's high risk update decision in January 2011.

View [GAO-11-185T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell, 202-512-3604, farrellb@gao.gov

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DOD PERSONNEL CLEARANCES

Preliminary Observations on DOD's Progress on Addressing Timeliness and Quality Issues

What GAO Found

DOD, which comprises the vast majority of clearances, has made significant progress in reducing delays in making personnel security clearance decisions and meeting statutory timeliness objectives since GAO first designated DOD's personnel security clearance program as a high risk area in 2005. In 2007, GAO found that initial clearances for DOD industry personnel took an average of 325 days to complete. With the passage of IRTPA in 2004, timeliness requirements were established in law and executive branch agencies were required to make decisions on at least 80 percent of initial clearances within an average of 120 days. In 2008, GAO found that DOD had made significant improvements in reducing delays, with the fastest 80 percent of clearances taking an average of 87 days to complete. As of December 2009, IRTPA's timeliness objective is for each federal agency to process the fastest 90 percent of initial security clearances within an average of 60 days, including a period of not longer than 40 days to complete the investigative phase and 20 days to complete the adjudicative phase. DOD met the 60 day IRTPA timeliness objective for initial personnel security clearances, as well as the 20 day objective for the timeliness of adjudications, for each of the first, second, and third quarters of fiscal year 2010, according to data provided by the Performance Accountability Council. GAO's ongoing work continues to examine the timeliness of personnel security clearances in DOD.

DOD has taken a number of positive steps to integrate quality into its investigative and adjudicative processes, including issuing guidance and developing tools to measure quality. For example, in November 2009, the Under Secretary for Defense for Intelligence (USD(I)) issued guidance to outline the requirements that adjudicators must adhere to when documenting personnel security clearance adjudication rationales. Similarly, in March 2010, the USD(I) issued guidance to clarify when adjudicators may use incomplete investigative reports as the basis for granting clearances. In addition, DOD created two electronic quality assessment tools—the Rapid Assessment of Incomplete Security Evaluations (RAISE) and the Review of Adjudication Documentation Accuracy and Rationales (RADAR)—to track the quality of investigative and adjudicative documentation. These tools are embedded in DOD's Clearance Adjudication Tracking System (CATS), a system used by all non-intelligence DOD Central Adjudication Facilities. Although these are positive developments that can contribute to greater visibility over the clearance process, these tools have not been fully implemented. GAO's ongoing work continues to examine the implementation of these tools and other efforts to ensure that momentum is sustained.