

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-580](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2008 DOD has used biometric and forensic capabilities to capture or kill 1,700 individuals and deny 92,000 individuals access to military bases. These capabilities were mainly developed through rapid acquisition processes and were resourced with Overseas Contingency Operations funds—funds that are provided outside of DOD’s base budget process. As a result, concerns have been raised about DOD’s long-term ability to fund these capabilities.

The House Armed Services Committee and House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence included provisions in committee reports for GAO to review DOD’s progress in institutionalizing deployable biometric and forensic capabilities. This report examines, among other issues, the extent to which DOD since 2011 has (1) validated long-term requirements for deployable biometric and forensic capabilities; and (2) taken actions to meet long-term requirements for deployable biometric and forensic capabilities and overcome any related challenges. GAO examined DOD directives, strategies, policies, plans, and requirements and met with cognizant DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 6 recommendations, including that DOD update its biometric enterprise strategic plan; take steps to more effectively manage the acquisition of a recent biometric capability; and consider developing a geographically dispersed back-up capability for its authoritative biometric database. DOD concurred with all of the recommendations and cited actions it plans to take to address them.

View [GAO-17-580](#). For more information, contact Joseph W. Kirschbaum at (202) 512-9971 or KirschbaumJ@gao.gov.

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DOD BIOMETRICS AND FORENSICS

Progress Made in Establishing Long-term Deployable Capabilities, but Further Actions Are Needed

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has validated its requirements for long-term deployable biometric capabilities (such as fingerprint collection devices) and forensic capabilities (such as expeditionary laboratories). Biometric capabilities are used to identify individuals based on measurable anatomical, physiological, and behavioral characteristics such as fingerprints, iris scans, and voice recognition. Forensic capabilities support the scientific analysis of evidence—such as deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and latent fingerprints—to link persons, places, things, and events. DOD utilizes deployable biometric and forensic capabilities to support a range of military operations, such as targeting, force protection, and humanitarian assistance.

DOD has made significant progress in addressing its long-term requirements for deployable biometric and forensic capabilities, such as issuing new doctrine and establishing long-term funding for several capabilities, including DOD’s authoritative biometric database that is used for identifying enemy combatants and terrorists. However, DOD’s efforts to institutionalize these capabilities are limited by the following strategic planning gaps and acquisition management challenges:

- While DOD has a current and approved forensic strategic plan, it does not have one for its biometric capabilities, because no entity has been assigned responsibility for developing such a plan, according to DOD officials.
- The Army did not follow DOD’s acquisition protocols in developing a recent key biometric capability, and it may have missed an opportunity to leverage existing, viable, and less costly alternatives.
- DOD’s authoritative biometric database that is used for identifying enemy combatants and terrorists does not have a geographically dispersed back-up capability to protect against threats such as natural hazards. Having such a back-up could enhance the database’s availability.

Addressing these strategic planning and acquisition management challenges could help DOD sustain the progress it has made to establish enduring deployable biometric and forensic capabilities.

U.S. Military Personnel Apply Biometric and Forensic Capabilities



Source: Department of Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System. | [GAO-17-580](#)

The photographs above depict a warfighter obtaining a biometric iris image (left) and a forensic investigator collecting a latent fingerprint (right).