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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-10-485T](#), a testimony before the Strategic Forces Subcommittee, Senate Armed Services Committee

Why GAO Did This Study

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks raised concerns about the security of Department of Energy (DOE) sites with weapons-grade nuclear material, known as Category I special nuclear material (SNM). To better protect these sites against attacks, DOE has sought to transform its protective forces protecting SNM into a Tactical Response Force (TRF) with training and capabilities similar to the U.S. military.

This testimony is based on prior work and has been updated with additional information provided by protective forces' union officials. In a prior GAO report, *Nuclear Security: DOE Needs to Address Protective Forces' Personnel System Issues* (GAO-10-275), GAO (1) analyzed information on the management, organization, staffing, training, and compensation of protective forces at DOE sites with Category I SNM; (2) examined the implementation of TRF; and (3) assessed DOE's two options to more uniformly manage protective forces; and (4) reported on DOE's progress in addressing protective force issues. DOE generally agreed with the recommendations in GAO's prior report that called for the agency to fully assess and implement, where feasible, measures identified by DOE's 2009 protective forces study group to enhance protective forces' career longevity and retirement options.

View [GAO-10-485T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Gene Aloise at (202) 512-3281 or aloisee@gao.gov.

NUCLEAR SECURITY

DOE Needs to Fully Address Issues Affecting Protective Forces' Personnel Systems

What GAO Found

Over 2,300 contractor protective forces provide armed security for DOE and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) at six sites that have long-term missions to store and process Category I SNM. DOE protective forces at each of these sites are covered under separate contracts and collective bargaining agreements between contractors and protective force unions. As a result, the management, organization, staffing, training and compensation—in terms of pay and benefits—of protective forces vary.

Protective force contractors, unions, and DOE security officials are concerned that the implementation of TRF's more rigorous requirements and the current protective forces' personnel systems threaten the ability of protective forces—especially older members—to continue their careers until retirement age. These concerns, heightened by broader DOE efforts to manage postretirement and pension liabilities for its contractors that might have a negative impact on retirement eligibility and benefits for protective forces, contributed to a 44-day protective force strike at an important NNSA site in 2007. According to protective force union officials, the issues surrounding TRF implementation and retirement benefits are still unresolved and could lead to strikes at three sites with large numbers of protective forces when their collective bargaining agreements expire in 2012.

Efforts to more uniformly manage protective forces have focused on either reforming the current contracting approach or creating a federal protective force (federalization). Either approach might provide for managing protective forces more uniformly and could result in effective security if well-managed. However, if protective forces were to be federalized under existing law, the current forces probably would not be eligible for enhanced retirement benefits and might face a loss of pay or even their jobs.

Although DOE rejected federalization as an option in 2009, it recognized that the current contracting approach could be improved by greater standardization and by addressing personnel system issues. As a result, NNSA began a standardization initiative to centralize procurement of equipment, uniforms, and weapons to achieve cost savings. Under a separate initiative, a DOE study group developed a number of recommendations to enhance protective forces' career longevity and retirement options, but DOE has made limited progress to date in implementing these recommendations.

DOE Protective Force Members in Tactical Training

