In 2007, GAO designated ensuring the effective protection of technologies critical to U.S. national security interests as a high-risk area. Each year, the Department of Defense spends billions of dollars to develop and produce technologically advanced weaponry. To enhance its foreign policy, security, and economic interests, the U.S. government must approve selling these weapons and defense-related technologies overseas and has a number of programs to identify and protect the critical technologies involved in these sales. These programs include export control systems for weapons and defense-related technologies, the foreign military sales program, and reviews of foreign investments in U.S. companies. Yet, these weapons and technologies continue to be targets for theft, espionage, reverse engineering, and illegal export.

This testimony (1) provides an overview of the safety net of government programs and processes aimed at ensuring the effective protection of technologies critical to U.S. national security interests and (2) identifies the weaknesses and challenges in the U.S. export control system—one of the government programs to protect critical technologies. This statement is based on GAO’s high-risk report and its extensive body of work on the government’s programs designed to protect technologies critical to U.S. national security interests.

As the effectiveness of the system depends on agencies working collectively, we have called for the executive and legislative branches to conduct a fundamental reexamination of the current programs and processes.

View GAO-09-767T or key components.
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