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BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL **116348**
Report To The Chairman, Subcommittee On Energy,
Nuclear Proliferation And Federal Services, Committee
On Governmental Affairs, United States Senate
OF THE UNITED STATES

Security Of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Overseas--Where Does It Stand?

In view of the global significance surrounding the security and use of U.S. nuclear weapons and the serious repercussions that would result from any incident involving the misuse of any U.S. nuclear weapon, it is imperative that U.S.-owned nuclear weapons are effectively protected no matter where they are located. However, GAO found that the state of security among U.S. nuclear weapons held outside the continental United States needs improvement.



GAO's recommendations recognize the political and diplomatic realities that affect any U.S./NATO activity and the limitations such considerations place on any unilateral action the United States may wish to take.



C-EMD-81-2
NOVEMBER 3, 1980

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This is an unclassified digest furnished in lieu of a report containing classified security information.

REPORT TO THE CHAIRMAN,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY,
NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION AND
FEDERAL SERVICES, COMMITTEE
ON GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,
UNITED STATES SENATE

SECURITY OF U.S. NUCLEAR
WEAPONS OVERSEAS--WHERE
DOES IT STAND?

D I G E S T

WHY THIS REVIEW WAS DONE

Over the past 4 years, GAO has issued several reports on various aspects of the U.S. nuclear safeguards program. These included reviews of physical security over

- nuclear weapons-grade materials,
- commercial nuclear power reactors,
- transportation of nuclear materials,
and
- nuclear weapons.

The most recent report, issued in February 1980, addressed the adequacy of the security systems at Department of Defense (DOD) nuclear weapons installations within the continental United States. The basic conclusion of the report was that the security needed improvement. This report continues our evaluation of the U.S. nuclear security programs by reviewing the adequacy of the security of U.S. nuclear weapons held outside the continental United States.

BACKGROUND

Today, there are thousands of U.S.-owned nuclear weapons held at many sites outside the continental United States. Some of the sites are located in the Pacific area, however, many of the sites are located in Europe. All of the sites in Europe are in support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and are under the auspices of that organization. Accordingly, NATO is

responsible for the security of the weapons. At the Pacific sites, however, DOD provides the security.

Until the 1970s, the peacetime security systems at nuclear weapons facilities under both NATO and DOD were directed at protecting against a covert, espionage type threat to the facilities. But in 1972, DOD, and later NATO, changed its approach and initiated a security upgrade effort to counteract the growing terrorist threat to nuclear weapons sites. The overall upgrade program involves bringing each site up to the prescribed minimum standards by requiring a number of additional security elements to be installed at all sites. And, although not bound to follow the security measures prescribed by DOD, NATO adopted the DOD requirements, with some modification, for use at its nuclear weapon sites. Currently, DOD and NATO are upgrading these security systems at their respective sites.

STATUS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS SECURITY OVERSEAS

Security upgrade work in Europe

As part of its upgrade program, DOD developed a set of standard minimum security requirements for all of its nuclear weapons sites. The requirements were issued in July 1975 and later revised in May 1977 and again in September 1978. While the criteria apply to domestic sites and those located in the Pacific, they do not directly apply to the NATO sites in Europe since they are under NATO's jurisdiction.

In January 1975, the DOD requirements for upgrading security were presented to NATO for its consideration in developing its own criteria. Until that time, there were no official security upgrade requirements for the NATO sites to meet. And, it took from

1975 until February 1979 before NATO developed the criteria for upgrading its sites against the more recently identified threat.

While the NATO criteria were being developed, the United States provided funding at several NATO weapons sites so that the upgrading process could begin. Normally, such activities are funded through the NATO organization and are shared by all participating NATO countries. But, the up-front U.S. financing allowed these sites to short-cut the NATO funding process in order to get a headstart on their security upgrading program. Based on the available funds, the construction of such things as guard towers, better fencing and lighting, and more effective communications was provided to many of the sites in Europe. The remaining sites are still awaiting the release of NATO funds so that the on-site security upgrade work can begin.

Vulnerability of U.S. nuclear weapons

In addition to reviewing the overall status of the security upgrading program at sites having U.S. nuclear weapons, GAO did a detailed review of on-site security at a number of nuclear weapons locations outside the United States. Some of the sites were in the Pacific area, but most of them were NATO sites in Europe. Further, of the NATO sites, some were sites where the U.S. performed the security upgrade work and some were not.

GAO was concerned by what it found at these sites, particularly those where the security upgrade program was not prefinanced by the United States. However, because of the security constraints imposed by DOD, GAO cannot discuss any specific security problems found at the sites in this unclassified document.

CONCLUSIONS

In view of the global significance surrounding the security and use of U.S. nuclear weapons and the serious societal repercussions that would result from any incident involving the misuse of any U.S. nuclear weapon, it is imperative that U.S.-owned nuclear weapons are effectively protected no matter where they are located. However, GAO recognizes the political and diplomatic realities that impact on any U.S./NATO activity and the limitations such considerations place on any unilateral action the United States may wish to take. Nonetheless, GAO found that the state of security among U.S. nuclear weapons held outside the continental U.S. needs improvement.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE CONGRESS

In view of these circumstances, GAO believes that the Congress should pursue with NATO, through DOD, to a satisfactory conclusion, options that would improve, in an expeditious manner, the status of security at all sites having U.S. nuclear weapons. The options available include having the U.S. provide up-front funding for the security upgrade programs at all NATO sites having U.S. nuclear weapons, with the possibility of getting reimbursed later, as contrasted to the option of waiting out the natural completion of the lengthy NATO funding process. There are, of course, other alternative approaches that could achieve the objective of improving the security of nuclear weapons outside the continental United States.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

GAO believes it is necessary that the Secretary of Defense provide additional guidance for improving the security for U.S. nuclear weapons. Specifically, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense

review the security practices at all sites having similar types of U.S. nuclear weapons to assure that similar levels of protection are provided wherever the weapons are located.

AGENCY COMMENTS

The Department of Defense provided written comments on this report. Basically, the Department agrees with GAO's conclusions about its need to more expeditiously improve the security of U.S. nuclear weapons overseas. However, it is concerned that some of the options GAO outlined in the report as possible solutions to the problem may be counterproductive. Where appropriate, GAO made revisions to the report based on the Department's comments.