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Congressional Committees:

Subject: *Defense Logistics: Army and Marine Corps's Individual Body Armor System Issues.*

Since combat operations began in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. forces have been subjected to frequent and deadly attacks from insurgents using various weapons such as improvised explosive devices (IED), mortars, rocket launchers, and increasingly lethal ballistic threats. Since 2003, to provide protection from ballistic threats, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), which is responsible for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and other areas, has required service members and Department of Defense (DOD) civilians in its area of operations to be issued the Interceptor Body Armor (IBA) system.¹ Used by all U.S. military service members and DOD civilians in the area of operations, the IBA consists of an outer tactical vest with ballistic inserts or plates that cover the front, back, and sides. As the ballistic threat has evolved, ballistic requirements have also changed. The vest currently provides protection from 9mm rounds, while the inserts provide protection against 7.62mm armor-piercing rounds. Additional protection can also be provided for the shoulder, throat, and groin areas.

Concerns also regarding the level of protection and amount of IBA needed to protect U.S. forces have occurred in recent years, prompted by a number of reports, newspaper articles, and recalls of issued body armor by both the Army and the Marine Corps. In May 2005, the Marine Corps recalled body armor because it concluded that the fielded body armor failed to meet contract specifications, and in November 2005, the Army and Marine Corps recalled 14 lots of body armor that failed original ballistic testing.² Additionally, in April 2005,³ we reported on shortages of critical force protection items, including individual body armor. Specifically, we found reasons for the shortages in body armor were due to material shortages, production limitations, and in-theater distribution problems. In the report, we did not make specific recommendations regarding body armor, but we did make several recommendations to improve the effectiveness of DOD's supply system in supporting deployed forces for contingencies. DOD agreed with the intent of the

¹U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) is one of DOD's five geographic combatant commands, whose area of responsibilities encompasses 27 countries, including Iraq and Afghanistan, in Southwest Asia, South and Central Asia, and the Horn of Africa. Combatant commanders are responsible for overseeing U.S. military operations that take place in their geographic area.

²Army and Marine Corps officials told us they took actions to address the reasons the lots failed.

³GAO, *Actions Needed to Improve the Availability of Critical Items during Current and Future Operations*, GAO-05-275 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 8, 2005).

recommendations and cited actions it had or was taking to eliminate supply chain deficiencies.

Congress has expressed strong interest in assuring that body armor protects ground forces. Additionally, as part of our efforts to monitor DOD's and the services' actions to protect deployed ground forces, we reviewed the Army and Marine Corps's actions to address concerns regarding body armor to determine if they had taken actions to address these concerns. Because of broad congressional interest in the adequacy of body armor for the ground forces, we prepared this report under the Comptroller General's authority to conduct evaluations on his own initiative. Our objectives for this review were to determine to what extent the Army and Marine Corps (1) are meeting the theater requirements for body armor, (2) have the controls in place to assure that the manufacturing and fielding of body armor meet requirements, and (3) are sharing information regarding their efforts on body armor ballistic requirements and testing. We are addressing this report to you because of your committee's oversight responsibilities.

On February 22, 2007, we briefed congressional staff on our preliminary observations. This report expands on the information delivered in that briefing and includes additional information concerning whether contractors or non-DOD civilians obtain body armor in the same way as U.S. forces and DOD civilians given the number of contractors and non-DOD civilians in CENTCOM's area of operation. We are attaching the slides from the briefing as enclosure I.

Scope and Methodology

Our audit work primarily focused on Army and Marine Corps body armor systems for U.S. service members and DOD and non-DOD civilian personnel deployed within CENTCOM's area of operations, including Iraq and Afghanistan. To determine whether the Army and Marine Corps are meeting the theater ballistic and inventory requirements for body armor, we reviewed documentation and interviewed officials from key DOD, Army, and Marine Corps organizations, such as the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, the Defense Logistics Agency, and CENTCOM, which are responsible for managing theater ballistic and inventory requirements. We visited the Army and Marine Corps body armor program offices to obtain and analyze overall development and management of their systems. We analyzed the ballistic requirements and compared these requirements to the body armor systems provided to personnel. The DOD operations officials and the Army and Marine Corps body armor program officials provided us with information about both theater requirements and body armor systems available worldwide for the Army and the Marine Corps. We analyzed this information to determine if the amount of body armor available would meet the amounts needed in theater. Their information included the quantities of the outer tactical vests and its subparts provided to military personnel as well as DOD civilians and contractors embedded in deployed units.⁴ We also visited the following sites—Fort Stewart, Georgia; Fort Lewis, Washington; the Naval Station and the Amphibious Base in Norfolk, Virginia; and the Marine Corps Base in Quantico, Virginia. At Fort Stewart

⁴Subparts include protectors for the upper arms and side of the torso in addition to sets of ballistic inserts for the vests.

and Fort Lewis, we interviewed Army officials to determine if body armor was being distributed to service members. To determine the distribution practices for those preparing to deploy, including contractor and non-DOD civilians, we reviewed documentation and interviewed officials at these sites in addition to CENTCOM officials. We analyzed the distribution practices to assure that personnel were receiving body armor systems that met ballistic theater requirements and that these systems were available for those preparing to deploy. We also met with DOD Inspector General staff who have worked on body armor issues, and obtained and reviewed reports they have issued. We selected and analyzed Army classified readiness reports,⁵ from December 2006 to February 2007 and two months of Marine Corps reports from December 2006 and January 2007 for deploying and deployed combat units. Our analysis was to determine whether commanders were reporting problems with body armor, such as shortages, or whether the Army identified it as a critical item affecting unit readiness.⁶

To assess the extent to which the services have controls in place during manufacturing and after fielding to assure that body armor meets requirements, we reviewed documentation and discussed the services' ballistic test processes and procedures with their program and technical officials. We analyzed these test processes and procedures to determine if there are controls in place that assure body armor meets ballistic requirements during manufacturing and after fielding. Our analysis included ballistic test methods for the tactical vests and the protective plate inserts; however, we did not independently verify test results. In addition, we reviewed the services' past experiences where the services concluded that fielded body armor systems failed to meet contract specifications and ballistic testing requirements. We analyzed the services' actions to determine if their actions corrected the failures. We also reviewed documentation and interviewed Army and Marine Corps body armor program officials who provided manufacturer production quality and ballistic testing lot failures for early 2006 through early 2007.

To identify the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps share information regarding their efforts on body armor ballistic requirements and testing, we analyzed the services' body armor programs and policies and discussed with service officials whether there is a requirement to share information between the services regarding their separate programs. We also discussed with officials and reviewed documentation to determine whether the services do share information and if shared, what specific actions they take. To determine whether contractors or non-DOD civilians obtain body armor in the same way as U.S. forces and DOD civilians in CENTCOM's area of operations, we obtained and analyzed DOD and CENTCOM policy regarding personal protection for contractors and non-DOD civilians. We also interviewed Army, Marine Corps, and CENTCOM officials on this issue.

We found the data sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our review and this report. We conducted our review from November 2006 to March 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

⁵We searched commanders' classified comments contained in the Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS) for entries related to body armor and its parts.

⁶To determine the reliability of the unit readiness reports, we spoke with key DOD and service officials and found the data sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our review and this report.

Summary

In this review, we found that the Army and Marine Corps have taken several actions to meet theater requirements, assure testing, and share information on body armor. We also found that contractors and non-DOD civilians receive body armor if this provision is included in a negotiated contract. Specifically, we found that the Army and Marine Corps

- are currently meeting theater ballistic requirements and the required amount needed for personnel in theater, including the amounts needed for the surge of troops into Iraq;
- have controls in place during manufacturing and after fielding to assure that body armor meets requirements; and
- share information regarding ballistic requirements and testing, and the development of future body armor systems, although they are not required to do so.

Regarding contractors or non-DOD civilians, we found that DOD Instruction 3020.41 allows DOD to provide body armor to contractors where permitted by applicable DOD instructions and military department regulations and where specified under the terms of the contract. CENTCOM's position is that body armor will be provided to contractors if it is part of a negotiated contract.

More detailed information on each of these areas is presented below.

- **Requirements:** Army and Marine Corps body armor is currently meeting theater ballistic requirements and the required amount needed for personnel in theater, including the amounts needed for the surge of troops into Iraq. Page 13 of the enclosed briefing details Army and Marine Corps theater requirements and worldwide inventory quantities of the body armor systems. CENTCOM requires that all U.S. military forces and all DOD civilians in the area of operations receive the body armor system. Currently, service members receive all service-specific standard components of the body armor system prior to deploying. For example, the Army issues the shoulder protection equipment to all its forces; however, Marine Corps personnel receive this equipment item in theater on an as-needed basis. The Army and the Marine Corps provide the DOD civilians with components of the armor system. However, the timeframe for receipt of these items varies as some receive the body armor prior to deploying and others upon arrival in-theater.

Army unit commanders only reported one body armor issue in their December 2006 to February 2007 classified readiness reports. This one issue did not raise a significant concern regarding the body armor. Moreover, Marine Corps commanders' comments contained in the December 2006 and January 2007 readiness reports did not identify any body armor issues affecting their units' readiness. In December 2006 and January 2007, the Army, in its critical equipment list did not identify body armor as a critical equipment item affecting its unit readiness.

- **Testing:** The Army and Marine Corps have controls in place during manufacturing and after fielding to assure that body armor meets requirements. Both services conduct quality and ballistic testing prior to fielding and lots are rejected if the standards are not met. They both also conduct formal testing on every lot of body armor (vests and protective inserts) prior to acceptance and issuance to troops. During production, which is done at several sites, the lots of body armor are sent to a National Institute of Justice certified laboratory for ballistic testing and to the Defense Contract Management Agency for quality testing (size, weight, stitching) prior to issuance to troops. Once approved, the body armor is issued to operating forces. Currently, both Army and Marine Corps personnel are issued body armor prior to deployment. The Army lot failure rate from January 2006 to January 2007 was 3.32 percent for the enhanced small arms inserts, and there were no failures for the outer tactical vests.⁷ From February 2006 to February 2007, the Marine Corps lot failure rate was 4.70 percent for the outer tactical vests.

Although not required to do so, after the systems have been used in the field, the Army does limited ballistic testing of outer tactical vests and environmental testing of the outer tactical vests and the inserts. The Marine Corps visually inspects the vest and the plates for damage. According to Army officials, there has been no degradation of body armor based on ballistic and environmental testing results. Additionally, to determine future enhancements and improvements, the Army and the Marine Corps body armor program offices monitor and assess the use of body armor in the field, including the review of medical reports from the Armed Forces Medical Examiner. For example, the Army and Marine Corps added side plates and throat protection based on body armor usage in the field.

DOD has a standard methodology for ballistic testing of the hard body armor plates, but not for the soft body armor vest. Currently, DOD's Director, Operational Test and Evaluation, office is developing a standard methodology for ballistic testing of the soft body armor to eliminate discrepancies in testing methodologies. The new standard is expected to be issued sometime in 2007.

- **Information Sharing:** The Army and Marine Corps share information regarding ballistic requirements and testing, and the development of future body armor systems, although they are not required to do so. For example, in August 2006 the Marine Corps attended the Army's test of next generation body armor types at Fort Benning, Georgia. Similarly, the Army sent representatives to attend the Marine Corps's operational assessment of the new Modular Tactical Vest. DOD officials indicate that there is no requirement to share information. Title 10 of the U.S. Code allows each service to have separate programs, according to Army and Marine Corps officials. Nevertheless, the services are sharing information

⁷The lot failure rate is calculated by dividing the total lots rejected by the total lots tested. A lot is a pallet or grouping of manufactured items varying in number per lot. For example, the Army's outer vest lots range from 1,100 to 1,200. A lot is manufactured within a specific period of time, at a common location.

regarding ongoing research and development for the next generation of body armor.

- **Contractors and non-DOD civilians:** Regarding contractors or non-DOD civilians, we found that DOD Instruction 3020.41 allows DOD to provide body armor to contractors where permitted by applicable DOD instructions and military department regulations and where specified under the terms of the contract. It is CENTCOM's position that body armor will be provided to contractors if it is part of the terms and conditions of the contract. According to CENTCOM officials, non-DOD government civilians such as State Department civilians are expected to make their own arrangements to obtain this protection. However, the officials indicated that commanders, at their discretion, can provide body armor to any personnel within their area of operation.

Agency Comments

DOD officials did not provide written comments to the draft but provided specific technical comments that were incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to other interested congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology and Logistics); the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Copies of this report will also be made available to others upon request. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8365 or solisw@gao.gov. Contact points for our Office of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff that made major contributions to this report includes Tracy Burney, Grace Coleman, Alfonso Garcia, Jennifer Jebo, Lonnie McAllister, Terry Richardson, Lorelei St. James, and Leo Sullivan.



William M. Solis, Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

Enclosure

Congressional Committees

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
Chairman
The Honorable Ted Stevens
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman
The Honorable Duncan Hunter
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable John P. Murtha
Chairman
The Honorable C.W. Bill Young
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives



GAO Review of Body Armor Preliminary Observations

February 22, 2007

1

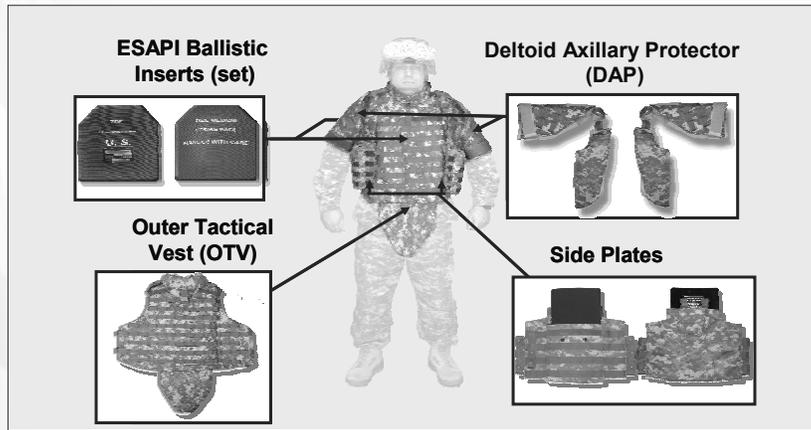


Background

- Since October 2003, CENTCOM required that service members and DOD civilians in its area of operations be issued the Interceptor Body Armor (IBA).
- The Army and Marine Corps use the Interceptor Body Armor system. The protective capability of the system is enhanced with each additional piece.

2

Background - Interceptor Body Armor System (Army Basic System represented below. Marine Corps Basic System excludes deltoid protector.)



Source: PEO Soldier

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Background

- The Outer Tactical Vest can defeat fragmentation and ballistic protection from 9 mm rounds. Enhanced Small Arms Protective Inserts can defeat 7.62 armor piercing rounds while the Side Ballistic Inserts provide flank protection from 7.62 armor piercing rounds. Other Components of the Outer Tactical Vest include the shoulder protection, throat protector assembly, yoke and collar assembly, and groin protector assembly.
- As the ballistic threat has evolved, ballistic requirements have changed. The initial requirement for the body armor was the 9mm ball, which evolved to include 7.62 armor piercing rounds used by snipers. The body armor is currently designed to defeat some fragmentation and blast protection from improvised explosive devices provided. As the threat evolves, the Army and the Marine Corps seek solutions to counter the threat.

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Background

- Concerns about body armor have occurred in recent years.
 - In February 2005, an Armed Forces Institute of Pathology report found that body armor did not provide side protection.
 - In April 2005, GAO reported that there were shortages in body armor due to material shortages, production limitations, and in-theater distribution problems.
 - In May 2005, Marine Corps recalled body armor because it concluded that the fielded body armor failed to meet contract specifications; public concern raised.
 - In November 2005, Army and Marine Corps recalled 14 lots of body armor that failed original ballistic testing, but were accepted by DOD.
 - In January 2006, a New York Times article reported on the Institute of Pathology report and the recalls, raising public concern again.

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Background

- Congress has expressed strong interest in assuring body armor protects ground troops including the amount and level of ballistic protection, testing of body armor before and after fielding, and coordination of requirements and testing between the Army and Marine Corps.
- GAO has conducted prior and ongoing work concerning force protection for ground forces, including truck armor to protect forces from Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).
- GAO began review of body armor as part of its review of protection of ground forces.

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Objectives

- Our overall objective was to determine if the actions of the Army and Marine Corps have addressed body armor concerns. Specific objectives were to determine the extent to which the Army and Marine Corps are
 - meeting the theater requirements for body armor,
 - have controls in place during manufacturing and after fielding to assure that body armor meets requirements, and
 - sharing information regarding their efforts on body armor ballistic requirements and testing.

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Scope and Methodology

- Our review focused on Army and Marine Corps body armor for personnel deployed within the Central Command's (CENTCOM) Area of Operation including Iraq and Afghanistan.
- We visited or contacted the following organizations during our review:
 - Office of the Secretary of Defense
 - Army Headquarters Operations & Army Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier
 - Marine Corps Systems Command & Marine Corps Combat Development Command
 - Air Force Security Force Requirements Branch
 - Naval Expeditionary Combat Command & Navy Fleet Forces Command
 - Defense Logistics Agency
 - CENTCOM

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Scope and Methodology

- To determine whether the Army and Marine Corps are meeting the theater requirements for body armor, we interviewed DOD officials and reviewed the CENTCOM policy on body armor. In addition, we reviewed Army and Marine Corps requirements specifying the amount of body armor needed and the ballistic specifications needed for protection against the theater threat.
 - We interviewed service officials and discussed ballistic test processes and procedures, to determine the extent of Army and Marine Corps body armor tested during production and in the field. We did not independently verify test results.
-

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Scope and Methodology

- To determine the extent the Army and the Marine Corps share information regarding their efforts on body armor, we interviewed service officials to determine if there is a policy that requires the services to coordinate, and if not, whether they do, and what actions they take to coordinate.
 - We selected and analyzed Army classified unit readiness reports for deployed and deploying units to CENTCOM's Area of Responsibility from December 2006 to February 2007 and Marine Corps units for December 2006 and January 2007 to determine if commanders' comments reported body armor as an issue. From the classified data, we also extracted and analyzed the total Army's critical equipment items list that identify items that may impact unit readiness—as of December 2006 and January 2007 to determine if body armor was reported as a critical equipment item.
 - We conducted our review from November 2006 to March 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.
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Preliminary Observations Summary

- The Army and Marine Corps have taken several actions to meet theater requirements, assure testing, and share information on body armor.
 - Army and Marine Corps body armor is currently meeting theater ballistic requirements and the required amount needed for personnel in theater, including the amounts needed for the surge of troops into Iraq.
 - The Army and Marine Corps have controls in place during manufacturing and after fielding to assure that body armor meets requirements. The Army and the Marine Corps conduct quality and ballistic testing prior to fielding. Lots are rejected if the standards are not met.
 - The Army and Marine Corps share information regarding ballistic requirements and testing, and the development of future body armor systems, although they are not required to do so.

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Preliminary Observations Requirements

- The Army and the Marine Corps have body armor to meet the theater ballistic requirement and the amount needed for personnel in theater. They also have sufficient quantities of body armor for the surge of troops in Iraq.

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Preliminary Observations Requirements as of February 2007

Body armor systems	Army		Marine Corps	
	Amount needed in theater	Current worldwide available inventory	Amount needed in theater	Current worldwide available inventory
Outer tactical vest	154,000	991,580	23,000	198,088
Enhanced small arms inserts	154,000	402,369	23,000	56,970
Side protection	154,000	244,192	23,000	50,500
Shoulder protection	154,000	243,229	4,600	4,600

Army and Marine Corps amounts include service personnel, DOD civilians, and contractors embedded with units. For the Army, shoulder protection is issued, but its use is optional. Shoulder protection is not issued to all Marine Corps personnel. It is only issued to specialized personnel such as Marine Corps turret gunners.

Source: Army Operations, PEO Soldier and Marine Corps Systems Command.

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Preliminary Observations Requirements

- CENTCOM requires that all U.S. military service members and DOD civilians in the area of operations be issued Interceptor Body Armor. According to Army and Marine Corps officials, all service members currently receive body armor components before they deploy. The Marines receive components prior to deployment, except the shoulder protection, which is provided in theater, if needed.
- DOD civilians receive components from the Army and the Marine Corps. Some receive the body armor prior to deploying, while others may receive it in theater.
- According to Army and Marine Corps officials, CENTCOM tactical-level commanders will prescribe the use of the body armor components based on their estimate of the situation. Situational factors include assessments of enemy threat, environmental conditions, and the tactical missions assigned to their units.

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Preliminary Observations Requirements

- In our review of Army unit readiness data from December 2006 to February 2007 and Marine Corps data for December 2006 and January 2007, only one body armor issue was reported in the commanders' comments. During the December 2006 to February 2007 time period, the five Army brigades identified for the Iraq surge did not indicate that body armor was a problem.
- In our review of Army critical equipment items impacting readiness as of December 2006 and January 2007, body armor was not identified as a critical equipment item impacting unit readiness.

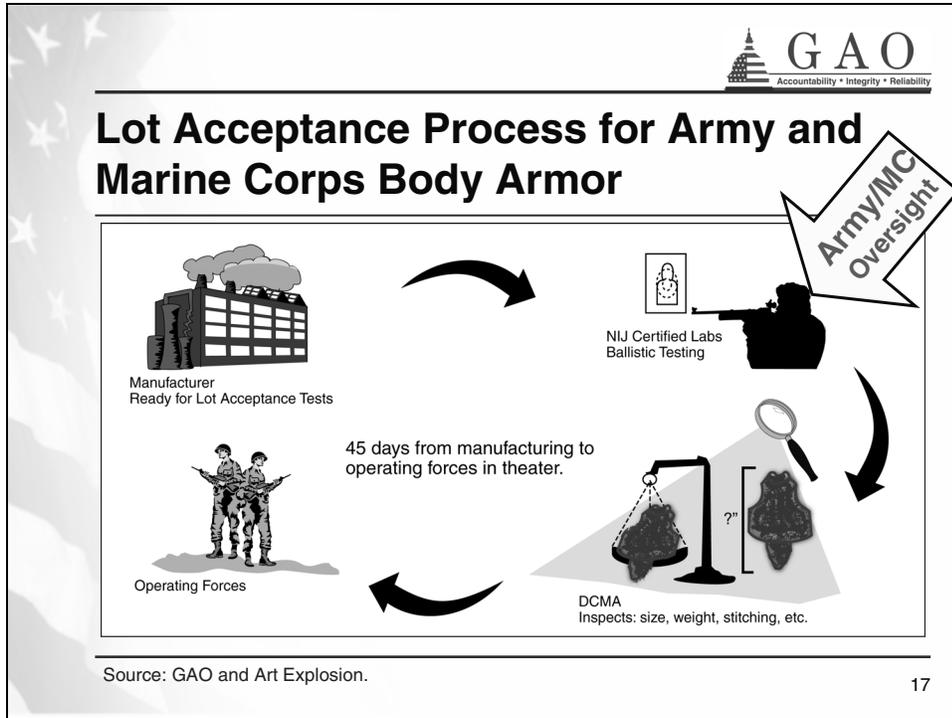
15



Preliminary Observations Testing

- The Army and Marine Corps have controls in place during manufacturing and after fielding to assure that body armor meets requirements. The Army and the Marine Corps conduct quality and ballistic testing prior to fielding. Lots are rejected if the standards are not met.
 - The Army and the Marine Corps conducts formal testing on every lot of body armor (Vests and Protective Inserts) prior to acceptance and issuance to troops. The body armor vests and plates are manufactured at several sites.
 - During production, the lots of body armor are sent to a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) certified laboratory for ballistic testing and DCMA for quality testing (size, weight, stitching) prior to issuance to troops. Once approved, the body armor is issued to operating forces. Both the Army and the Marine Corps are issued body armor prior to deployment.
 - Army lot failure rate from January 2006 to January 2007 was 3.32% for the Enhanced Small Arms Inserts and no failures for the outer tactical vests. From February 2006 to February 2007, the Marine Corps lot failure rate was 4.70% for the outer tactical vests.

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Preliminary Observations Testing

- After fielding, the Army conducts testing on body armor on an ad hoc basis including ballistic testing of deployed outer tactical vests and environment testing of the affects of extreme temperature variations and exposure to the elements. For example, cold weather testing is conducted in Alaska, tropical weather testing is done in Panama, and hot weather testing is performed in Yuma, Arizona. Army officials reported no degradation of body armor during environmental testing.
- The Marine Corps does not conduct testing on body armor after fielding, but they visually inspect the vests and the plates for damage.
- Based on feedback from the medical community and from the field, the Army and the Marine Corps monitor and assess body armor usage to continue improvements.

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Preliminary Observations Testing

- The DOD has had a standard methodology for ballistic testing of hard body armor (plates) since December 1997.
- DOD's Director, Operational Test and Evaluation office is currently developing a standard methodology for ballistic testing of soft body armor (vests). The new standard will eliminate discrepancies in testing methodology that resulted in inconsistent ballistic results contributing to the November 2005 recall. The new standard is expected to be issued sometime in 2007.

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Preliminary Observations Information Sharing

- The Army and Marine Corps share information regarding ballistic requirements and testing, and the development of future body armor systems, although they are not required to do so.
 - The Army and Marine Corps officials said that Title 10 of the U.S. Code allows each to have separate programs.
 - The Army and Marine Corps are sharing information regarding ballistic requirements and testing, and the development of future body armor systems.
 - The Army and Marine Corps informally share information regarding on-going research and development for the next generation of body armor.

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