



Highlights of [GAO-08-644T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Unauthorized individuals, companies, terrorist organizations, and other countries continue their attempts to obtain sensitive items related to the defense of the United States. The Internet is one place that defense-related items can be purchased, raising the possibility that some sensitive items are available to those who can afford them. In addition to the risk that sensitive defense-related items could be used to directly harm U.S. service members or allies on the battlefield, these items could be disassembled and analyzed (i.e., reverse engineered) to develop countermeasures or equivalent technology.

Given the risks posed by the sale of sensitive defense-related items to the public, and the Internet’s international reach and high volume of commerce, the Subcommittee asked GAO to conduct undercover testing to determine whether the general public can easily purchase these items on the Internet, including on the Web sites eBay and Craigslist.

To perform this work, GAO investigators used undercover identities to pose as members of the general public, meaning that they conducted their work with names, credit cards, and contact information that could not be traced to GAO. Investigators interviewed sellers where possible and referred cases to the appropriate law enforcement entities for further investigation.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-644T](#). For more information, contact Gregory D. Kutz at (202) 512-6722 or kutzg@gao.gov.

INTERNET SALES

Undercover Purchases on eBay and Craigslist Reveal a Market for Sensitive and Stolen U.S. Military Items

What GAO Found

GAO found numerous defense-related items for sale to the highest bidder on eBay and Craigslist. A review of policies and procedures for these Web sites determined that there are few safeguards to prevent the sale of sensitive and stolen defense-related items using the sites. During the period of investigation, GAO undercover investigators purchased a dozen sensitive items on eBay and Craigslist to demonstrate how easy it was to obtain them. Many of these items were stolen from the U.S. military. According to the Department of Defense (DOD), it considers the sensitive items GAO purchased to be on the U.S. Munitions List, meaning that there are restrictions on their overseas sales. However, if investigators had been members of the general public, there is a risk that they could have illegally resold these items to an international broker or transferred them overseas.

Examples of Sensitive Items Purchased by Undercover Investigators

No.	Item	Web site	Notes
1	F-14 antenna	eBay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ F-14 components are in demand by Iran, the only country with operating F-14s ▪ Winning bidders on other auctions held by the seller were located in countries such as Bulgaria, China (Hong Kong), and Russia
2	Nuclear biological chemical gear	Craigslist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Could be reverse engineered to develop countermeasures or produce equivalent technology ▪ Stolen military property
3	Enhanced small arms protective inserts	eBay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Body armor plates manufactured in June 2007 and currently in use by troops in Afghanistan and Iraq ▪ Winning eBay bidders on other body armor items offered by this seller included individuals in China (Hong Kong), Taiwan, and Singapore ▪ Stolen from U.S. military or manufacturer

Source: GAO.

GAO investigators also identified examples of U.S. government property that was stolen and sold for a profit rather than being utilized by DOD. For example, GAO found two civilian store owners who acted as conduits for defense-related property that was likely stolen from the military. The store owners told GAO they purchased gear from service members—including Kevlar vests, flak jackets, and gas masks—and sold it through eBay to the general public. GAO also purchased stolen military meals, ready-to-eat (MRE) and found a robust market for stolen military MREs on eBay and Craigslist.

Advertisements for the sensitive defense-related items GAO purchased were not removed by Web site administrators, allowing investigators to buy the items. Both Web sites maintain lists of items that are prohibited from sale, including stolen items, but only eBay contains warnings related to overseas sales and the improper sale of sensitive defense-related items.