

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-447](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

DOD used expeditionary forensics for collecting fingerprints and deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) to identify, target, and disrupt terrorists and enemy combatants in Iraq and Afghanistan. The increased incidence of improvised explosive devices and other asymmetric threats has increased demand for expeditionary forensic capabilities. Many of DOD's expeditionary forensic activities are resourced through DOD's Overseas Contingency Operations funds. DOD estimates that it cost between \$800 million and \$1 billion of these funds from 2005 through 2012 to support expeditionary forensics activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, as military operations are projected to draw down in Afghanistan, this funding is expected to substantially decline by the end of 2014. Consequently, DOD is taking steps to establish expeditionary forensics as an enduring capability in DOD's base budget. GAO was asked to examine DOD's expeditionary forensic capability. This report assessed the extent to which DOD has taken steps to establish an enduring expeditionary forensic capability. To address this objective, GAO reviewed relevant policy, plans, and budget estimates, and interviewed cognizant DOD officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to DOD, including incorporating key elements in its strategic plan, periodically reviewing and evaluating DOD components' proposed forensic budget estimates—including expeditionary forensics, and issuing guidance on collecting and reporting forensic budget data. DOD concurred with all four recommendations.

View [GAO-13-447](#). For more information, contact Brian Lepore at (202) 512-4523 or [leaporeb@gao.gov](mailto:leaporeb@gao.gov)

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## DEFENSE FORENSICS

### Additional Planning and Oversight Needed to Establish an Enduring Expeditionary Forensic Capability

## What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has taken some important steps to establish an enduring expeditionary forensic capability by issuing a concept of operations in 2008, followed by a directive in 2011 to establish policy and assign responsibilities. As required by the directive, DOD has drafted a strategic plan to guide the activities of the Defense Forensic Enterprise, including expeditionary forensics. Although the plan includes a mission statement, and goals and objectives—two of the five key elements identified by GAO as integral to a well-developed strategic plan—it does not identify approaches for how goals and objectives will be achieved, milestones and metrics to gauge progress, and resources needed to achieve goals and objectives. GAO's prior work has shown that organizations need a well-developed strategic plan to identify and achieve their goals and objectives effectively and efficiently. Officials in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics (OUSD(AT&L)) said that they decided to create a concise, high-level strategic plan and that they plan to issue guidance tasking the DOD components to develop individual implementation plans that include milestones. However, approaches, metrics, and resources needed to accomplish its goals and objectives were absent from the draft guidance. GAO discussed this omission with OUSD(AT&L), and in response, this office plans to revise its draft guidance. Also, the forensic strategic plan has been in draft for 2 years having undergone multiple revisions, and is still undergoing DOD internal review with no publication date set, and by extension, a publication date has not been set for the proposed DOD component implementation plans. The lack of an approved strategic plan and associated implementation plans limits DOD's ability to prioritize its efforts to develop an enduring expeditionary forensic capability by the end of 2014.

Moreover, OUSD(AT&L) has not reviewed and evaluated the adequacy of DOD components' expeditionary forensic budget estimates for fiscal years 2013 through 2018, as required by DOD's directive. OUSD(AT&L) officials said that they were waiting for the DOD components to finalize their budget estimates for fiscal years 2013 through 2018, and waiting for the Joint Capabilities Integration Development System to validate their forensic requirements. Regardless, reviewing and evaluating the DOD components' proposed budget estimates allows OUSD(AT&L) to advise the DOD components on their resource allocation decisions with respect to expeditionary forensic capabilities. OUSD(AT&L) officials cited several factors that also affected their ability to review and evaluate the DOD components' forensic budget data, such as aggregation of components' forensic budget estimates with other costs. Moreover, these officials said the directive does not provide guidance to DOD components on how to collect and report forensic budget data. GAO's Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government notes that agencies should provide policy and guidance to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of operations. Until OUSD(AT&L) reviews and evaluates the adequacy of DOD components' forensic budget estimates, and guidance is in place to inform forensic budget collection and reporting, OUSD(AT&L) will continue to experience challenges with identifying the costs associated with DOD's expeditionary forensic capabilities.