



Highlights of [GAO-05-842T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Threats to national security—such as the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and high-profile espionage cases—underscore the need for timely, high-quality determinations of who is eligible for a personnel security clearance which allows an individual to access classified information.

The Department of Defense (DOD) needs an effective and efficient clearance program because it is responsible for about 2 million active clearances and provides clearances to more than 20 other executive agencies as well as the legislative branch. Despite these imperatives, DOD has for more than a decade experienced delays in completing hundreds of thousands of clearance requests and impediments to accurately estimating and eliminating its clearance backlog. In January 2005, GAO designated DOD's personnel security clearance program as a high-risk area. In February 2005, DOD transferred its personnel security investigative functions and about 1,800 positions to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), after 2 years of negotiation between the agencies.

This testimony provides an update on the challenges that led to GAO's high-risk designation. It identifies both the positive steps that have been taken to address previously identified challenges and some of the remaining hurdles. GAO will continue to monitor this area.

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To view the full product, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek B. Stewart at (202) 512-5559 or stewartd@gao.gov.

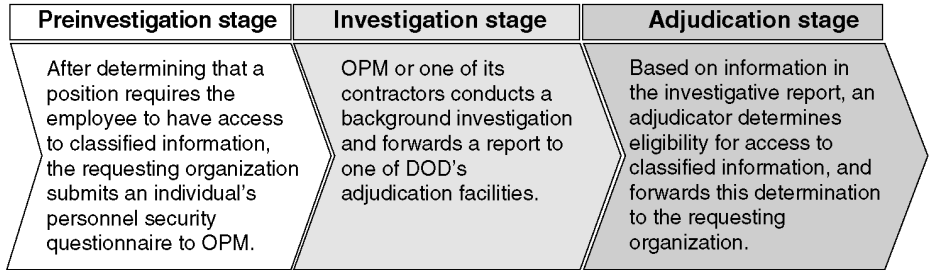
DOD PERSONNEL CLEARANCES

Some Progress Has Been Made but Hurdles Remain to Overcome the Challenges that Led to GAO's High-Risk Designation

What GAO Found

While DOD has taken steps to address the problems that led to designating its clearance program as high risk, continuing challenges are found in each of the three stages of DOD's personnel security clearance process. Figure 1 describes the process.

Figure 1: DOD's Process for Determining Clearance Eligibility



Source: DOD.

Preinvestigation: To address previously identified problems in projecting clearance workload, DOD is identifying the military and civilian positions that require clearances. Identifying clearance requirements for contractor personnel is still in the planning phase. Another problem is the efficient submission of investigation requests. In the 2 years since DOD and OPM announced the transfer of DOD's investigative functions and personnel to OPM, the two agencies did not ensure the seamless submission of DOD requests to OPM. DOD is developing software to remedy this problem.

Investigation: Delays in completing investigations are continuing. For February 2005, OPM—which now supplies an estimated 90 percent of the government's clearance investigations—reported that over 185,000 of its clearance investigations had exceeded timeliness goals. OPM's effort to add investigative staff is a positive step, but adding thousands of staff could result in continued timeliness problems and quality concerns as the staff gain experience. OPM's workload should decrease because of two recent initiatives: (1) eliminating a few of the investigative requirements for some reinvestigations of personnel updating their clearances and (2) requiring the acceptance of clearances and access granted to personnel moving from one agency to another.

Adjudication: In the past, DOD had difficulty monitoring who had been adjudicated for clearances and when the clearances needed to be renewed. While the Joint Personnel Adjudication System has combined databases from DOD's 10 adjudicative facilities to enhance monitoring, wider consolidation of government databases may be required. The Director of OPM will need to integrate all federal agencies into a single governmentwide database in order to meet a requirement established in a recent law. As of September 30, 2003, DOD had a backlog of roughly 90,000 adjudications.