

## Weapons given to Iraq are missing

2007-08-07 23:13:07 by Southern

30 percent of arms are unaccounted for, GAO estimates

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The Pentagon has lost track of about 190,000 AK-47 assault rifles and pistols given to Iraqi security forces in 2004 and 2005, according to a new government report, raising fears that some of those weapons have fallen into the hands of insurgents fighting U.S. forces in Iraq.

The report from the Government Accountability Office indicates that U.S. military officials do not know what happened to 30 percent of the weapons the United States distributed to Iraqi forces from 2004 through early this year as part of an effort to train and equip the troops. The highest previous estimate of unaccounted-for weapons was 14,000, in a report issued last year by the inspector general for Iraq reconstruction.

The United States has spent \$19.2 billion trying to develop Iraqi security forces since 2003, the GAO said, including at least \$2.8 billion to buy and deliver equipment. But the GAO said weapons distribution was haphazard and rushed and failed to follow established procedures, particularly from 2004 to 2005, when security training was led by Gen. David H. Petraeus, who now commands all U.S. forces in Iraq.

The Pentagon did not dispute the GAO findings, saying it has launched its own investigation and indicating it is working to improve tracking. Although controls have been tightened since 2005, the inability of the United States to track weapons with tools such as serial numbers makes it nearly impossible for the U.S. military to know whether it is battling an enemy equipped by American taxpayers.

'No idea where they are'

"They really have no idea where they are," said Rachel Stohl, a senior analyst at the Center for Defense Information who has studied small-arms trade and received Pentagon briefings on the issue. "It likely means that the United States is unintentionally providing weapons to bad actors."

One senior Pentagon official acknowledged that some of the weapons probably were being used against U.S. forces. He cited the Iraqi brigade created at Fallujah that quickly dissolved in September 2004 and turned its weapons against the Americans.

Stohl said that insurgents frequently use small-arms fire to force military convoys to move in a particular direction -- often toward roadside bombs that target troops and

vehicles. She noted that the Bush administration frequently complains that Iran and Syria are supplying insurgents but has paid little attention to whether U.S. military errors inadvertently play a role. "We know there is seepage and very little is being done to address the problem," she said.

Stohl noted that U.S. forces, focused on a fruitless search for weapons of mass destruction after Baghdad fell, failed to secure massive weapons caches. The failure to track small arms given to Iraqi forces repeats that pattern of neglect, she added.

The GAO is studying the financing and weapons sources of insurgent groups, but that report will not be made public. "All of that information is classified," said Joseph A. Christoff, the GAO's director of international affairs and trade.

In an unusual move, the train-and-equip program for Iraqi forces is being managed by the Pentagon. Normally, the traditional security assistance programs are operated by the State Department, the GAO reported. The Defense Department said this change permitted greater flexibility, but as of last month it was unable able to tell the GAO what accountability procedures, if any, apply to arms distributed to Iraqi forces, the report said.

Iraqi security forces were virtually nonexistent in early 2004, and in June of that year Petraeus was brought in to build them up. No central record of distributed equipment was kept for a year and a half, until December 2005, and even now the records are on a spreadsheet that requires three computer screens lined up side by side to view a single row, Christoff said.

The GAO found that the military was consistently unable to collect supporting documents to "confirm when the equipment was received, the quantities of equipment delivered, and the Iraqi units receiving the equipment." The agency also said there were "numerous mistakes due to incorrect manual entries" in the records that were maintained.

The GAO reached the estimate of 190,000 missing arms -- 110,000 AK-47s and 80,000 pistols -- by comparing the property records of the Multi-National Security Transition Command for Iraq against records Petraeus maintained of the arms and equipment he had ordered. Petraeus's figures were compared with classified data and other records to ensure that it was accurate enough to compare against the property books.

In all cases, the gaps between the two records were enormous. Petraeus reported that about 185,000 AK-47 rifles, 170,000 pistols, 215,000 pieces of body armor and 140,000 helmets were issued to Iraqi security forces from June 2004 through September 2005. But the property books contained records for 75,000 AK-47 rifles, 90,000 pistols, 80,000 pieces of body armor and 25,000 helmets.

A military commander involved in the program at the time, speaking on condition of

anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the report, acknowledged in an e-mail, "We did issue some items, including weapons, body armor, etc. to new Iraqi units that were literally going into battle."

'Not much of a choice early on'

But, the commander argued, "there was, frankly, not much of a choice early on: We had very little staff and could have held the weapons until every piece of the logistical and property accountability system was in place, or we could issue them, in bulk on some occasions, to the U.S. elements supporting Iraqi units who were needed in the battles of Najaf, Fallujah, Mosul, Samarra, etc."

The GAO plans to look for similar problems in the training of Afghan security forces.

During the Bosnian conflict, the United States provided about \$100 million in defense equipment to the Bosnian Federation Army, and the GAO found no problems in accounting for those weapons.

Much of the equipment provided to Iraqi troops, including the AK-47s, originates from countries in the former Soviet bloc. In a report last year, Amnesty International said that in 2004 and 2005 more than 350,000 AK-47 rifles and similar weapons were taken out of Bosnia and Serbia, for use in Iraq, by private contractors working for the Pentagon and with the approval of NATO and European security forces in Bosnia.

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