

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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October 25, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

The Honorable Christine Wormuth
Secretary
Department of the Army
1600 Army Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310-1600

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro
Secretary
Department of the Navy
1300 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-1300

The Honorable Frank Kendall III
Secretary
Department of the Air Force
1160 Airforce Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330-1160

Dear Secretaries Austin, Wormuth, Del Toro, and Kendall:

We write to request information about how the Department of Defense (DOD) and military departments are working to improve their accounting of military equipment—including firearms, explosives, and other potentially harmful matériel—to prevent weapons of war from falling into the hands of individuals or organizations who seek to harm U.S. citizens or servicemembers.

In June, the Associated Press (AP) reported that at least 1,900 military firearms were lost or stolen between 2010 and 2019.¹ Several recent incidents also demonstrate that the loss and theft of military weapons and equipment is not an isolated occurrence:

- In 2016, “[s]everal semi-automatic pistols, one small-caliber automatic rifle and a shotgun,” among other equipment, were taken from a military installation in Stuttgart, Germany.²

¹ *Some Stolen U.S. Military Guns Used in Violent Crime*, Associated Press (June 15, 2021) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-business-gun-politics-crime-6caba27108d05a8b7c1860959d1ae130>).

² *Weapons Stolen from Arms Room on US Military Base in Stuttgart*, Stars and Stripes (July 29, 2016) (online at www.stripes.com/news/weapons-stolen-from-arms-room-on-us-military-base-in-stuttgart-1.421510).

- In 2018, Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota reported that “a 42-pound box of explosive grenade rounds” and “a M-240 7.62 caliber” machine gun were unaccounted for after a check of the installation’s equipment inventory.³
- In July 2019, a soldier stationed at Fort Bragg was charged with stealing over \$2 million of military property, including 43 night vision devices.⁴
- In February 2021, ten pounds of C4 plastic explosives “disappeared” in a suspected theft during a training exercise at Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base.⁵ While these explosives were recovered in June, the military has not explained the cause of their disappearance.⁶
- In July 2021, 100 monocular night vision goggles were reported missing from Fort Hood.⁷

Some of these weapons have been used in violent crimes on American streets. In 2018, a pistol reportedly belonging to the U.S. Army was linked to four shootings in Albany, New York.⁸ Stolen Army assault rifles were used in a 2016 robbery in Boston, and rifles taken from Fort Irwin in 2011 were recovered in the home of a California gang member in 2019.⁹

³ *Air Force Base That Lost Explosives: We’re Also Missing a Machine Gun*, Washington Post (May 18, 2018) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2018/05/18/air-force-base-that-lost-explosives-were-also-missing-a-machine-gun/).

⁴ *Fort Hood Officials Are Searching for More than 100 Missing Night Vision Goggles*, National Public Radio (July 17, 2021) (online at www.npr.org/2021/07/17/1017356578/fort-hood-officials-are-searching-for-more-than-100-missing-night-vision-goggles).

⁵ *10 Pounds of Explosives Missing from Twentynine Palms Marine Base*, KABC (Feb. 8, 2021) (online at <https://abc7.com/missing-explosives-military-reward-for-stolen-twentynine-palms/10320573/>).

⁶ *NCIS Recovers C-4 Explosives Missing for Months from Marine Corps Base*, Military.com (June 15, 2021) (online at www.military.com/daily-news/2021/06/15/ncis-recovers-c-4-explosives-missing-months-marine-corps-base.html).

⁷ *Fort Hood Officials Are Searching for More than 100 Missing Night Vision Goggles*, National Public Radio (July 17, 2021) (online at www.npr.org/2021/07/17/1017356578/fort-hood-officials-are-searching-for-more-than-100-missing-night-vision-goggles).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *With Massachusetts Armory Theft, Military Guns Went Public*, Associated Press (June 15, 2021) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-massachusetts-theft-6071075ec1980c35ac3724a6e7dcdf06>); *Pistol Stolen from Army Armory Tied to Boston Robbery*, Associated Press (June 15, 2021) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-boston-robbery-6d0aad14e2faa2f29e2fc49825408802>); *Stolen Assault Rifles Keep Showing Up in California*, Associated Press (June 15, 2021) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-ca-state-wire-california-lifestyle-99a16712dfcc59f9160b476ec5381a81>).

Given the epidemic of gun violence spreading across the United States, which has claimed more than 35,000 lives so far this year, we appreciate that Pentagon leadership is committed to addressing this challenge.¹⁰ Earlier this year, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley acknowledged that he owes Congress “a firm answer” on the true scale of missing military equipment, and Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth further testified that she appreciates the need for congressional oversight of the Army’s missing equipment.¹¹

Nevertheless, we are concerned that DOD has seemingly not yet developed a coherent strategy to improve its ability to account for military weapons and equipment. It also appears that some of the military departments have employed radio frequency identification (RFID) technology to help inventory firearms, which might inadvertently endanger the safety and security of our men and women in uniform.

On September 30, the AP reported that the Army and the Air Force have begun to incorporate RFID technology to facilitate and expedite inventory recordkeeping for equipment stored on base. However, some cybersecurity experts warn that RFID tags can be detected from significant distances, potentially endangering U.S. military personnel on the battlefield. A DOD spokesperson told the AP that the use of RFID technology “pose[s] a significant operations security risk in the field, allowing an adversary to easily identify DOD personnel operating locations and potentially even their identity.” One marine explained the danger, saying, “If I can ping it [RFID], I can find it and I can shoot you.”¹²

Given the potential safety and security risks associated with the potential loss or theft of military field equipment and weapons, as well as the use of RFID technology to inventory firearms, we request that DOD provide our staffs with a briefing by November 19, 2021, which should address the following questions:

1. What steps are DOD and the military departments taking to better account for military equipment, firearms, and weapons in order to prevent loss, theft, or compromise?

¹⁰ Gun Violence Archive, *Gun Violence Archive 2021* (online at www.gunviolencearchive.org/) (accessed Oct. 20, 2021).

¹¹ *Top U.S. General “Shocked” by Report on AWOL Guns, Mulls Fix*, Associated Press (June 17, 2021) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-e2ba30a8314d0642cbe8387fb9f34cae>); *Milley Pushes Back on Stolen Weapons Report, Pledges Transparency to Congress*, Stars and Stripes (June 17, 2021) (online at www.stripes.com/incoming/2021-06-17/Milley-pushes-back-on-stolen-weapons-report-pledges-transparency-to-Congress-1718554.html); *Some Stolen U.S. Military Guns Used in Violent Crime*, Associated Press (June 15, 2021) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-business-gun-politics-crime-6ca6a27108d05a8b7c1860959d1ae130>).


¹² *Military Units Track Guns Using Tech That Could Aid Foes*, Associated Press (Sept. 30, 2021) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/rfid-military-weapons-guns-62c88008478f4ac403047c21f3184677>).

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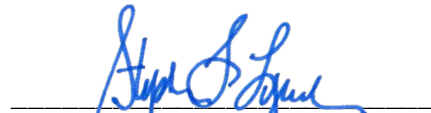
2. What physical security measures are in place across the military departments to prevent the loss, theft, or compromise of military equipment, firearms, and weapons?
3. What steps are DOD and the military departments taking to account for military equipment, firearms, and weapons that remain unaccounted for from U.S. military bases and installations?
4. How widespread is the use of RFID technology across the military departments, and what risks to mission and force are associated with its use?

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Jamie Raskin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and
Civil Liberties



Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security



Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Nancy Mace, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

The Honorable Glenn Grothman, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security

The Honorable Mark Milley, Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff