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October 25, 2004

The Honorable David Walker
Comptroller General
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

I am writing to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigate the use of the explosives, HMX and RDX, in recent terrorist attacks around the world and attacks on American troops in Iraq.

According to today's *New York Times*, the Bush Administration has been told that nearly 380 tons of powerful conventional explosives are missing from Iraq's former military installations.[1] These explosives, mainly HMX and RDX, can be used to demolish buildings, blow up airplanes, make missile warheads, and detonate nuclear weapons. The explosives also can be used in bombing attacks against American troops fighting in Iraq.

Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the International Atomic Energy Agency had publicly warned about the danger of these explosives and the need to secure them. Apparently, these explosives were never safeguarded, even though their location at the Qaqaa facility 30 miles south of Baghdad was well known to U.S. intelligence officials.

For terrorists, a small quantity of these explosives can be a powerful weapon. The bomb used to bring down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 contained less than one pound of these types of explosives. Larger amounts of these explosives were apparently used in the bombing of a housing complex in November 2003 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and bombings of a Moscow apartment complex in September 1999 that killed nearly 300 people. According to Saudi officials, the terrorists who used car bombs to hit the Riyadh housing complex had enough RDX and other explosives to make 132 more car bombs of the same size.[2]

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[1] *Huge Cache of Explosives Vanished from Site in Iraq*, New York Times (Oct. 25, 2004).

[2] *Saudi Attackers Had Explosives to Make 132 More Bombs*, Philadelphia Inquirer (Dec. 4, 2003).

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The apparent spread of these explosives around the world is also troubling. In August 2003, RDX was used in bombings in Bombay, India, that killed 52 people.[3] According to Indian officials, it was the first time that RDX has been used in Bombay in ten years. In August 2004, Russian officials said that traces of RDX were found at the crash site of one of the two planes bombed by Chechen separatists.[4] These plane crashes killed 90 people.

It is important for Congress to assess the potential seriousness of the Administration's failure to secure nearly 380 tons of these powerful explosives. Accordingly, I request that GAO investigate the following:

- Whether HMX or RDX has been used in car bombings or other bombings that have killed or injured American troops in Iraq;
- Whether HMX or RDX has been used in recent terrorist attacks, such as the Madrid subway bombing in March 2004 or the bombings at Egyptian resorts earlier this month;
- Whether there is any evidence that HMX or RDX formerly located at the Qaqaa facility has spread around the world; and
- If HMX or RDX is, in fact, evident in the attacks in Iraq, Madrid or Egypt, whether it came from the explosives stolen from al Qaqaa and whether it is possible for GAO to ascertain the origin of the explosives used in those bombings.

I would appreciate your notifying me as soon as possible if GAO will agree to open such an investigation.

Sincerely,

CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress

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[3] *India Says Military Explosive Used in Taxi Blasts*, Los Angeles Times (Aug. 28, 2003).
[4] *Plane Crashes Won't Hurt Putin in Chechen Vote*, Washington Post (Aug. 29, 2004).