



Highlights of [GAO-04-112](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

GAO was asked to assess the condition of key equipment items and to determine if the services have adequate plans for sustaining, modernizing, or replacing them. To address these questions, we selected 25 major equipment items, and determined (1) their current condition, (2) whether the services have mapped out a program strategy for these items, (3) whether current and projected funding is consistent with these strategies, and (4) whether these equipment items are capable of fulfilling their wartime missions.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense reassess program strategies and funding priorities for key equipment items to ensure that the equipment items are sustained until replacement items are fielded. The department should also highlight for the Congress risks involved in sustaining these equipment items and steps the department is taking to address those risks. In its written comments on a draft of this report, the department partially concurred that it needed to reassess program strategies and funding priorities, but did not agree that it needed to provide the Congress with additional information on the potential risks. Because the department did not agree, the report includes a Matter for Congressional Consideration suggesting that the Congress may wish to require the department to provide this information.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-112.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact William M. Solis at (202) 512-8365 or solisw@gao.gov.

MILITARY READINESS

DOD Needs to Reassess Program Strategy, Funding Priorities, and Risks for Selected Equipment

What GAO Found

Many of our assessments of 25 judgmentally selected critical equipment items indicated that the problems or issues we identified were not severe enough to warrant action by the Department of Defense, military services, and/or the Congress within the next 5 years. The condition of the items we reviewed varies widely from very poor for some of the older equipment items like the Marine Corps CH-46E Sea Knight Helicopter to very good for some of the newer equipment items like the Army Stryker vehicle. The problems we identified were largely due to (1) maintenance problems caused by equipment age and a lack of trained and experienced technicians, and (2) spare parts shortages.

Although the services have mapped out program strategies for sustaining, modernizing, or replacing most of the equipment items we reviewed, some gaps exist. In some cases, such as the KC-135 Stratotanker and the Tomahawk missile, the services have not fully developed or validated their plans for the sustainment, modernization, or replacement of the items. In other cases, the services' program strategies for sustaining the equipment are hampered by problems or delays in the fielding of replacement equipment or in the vulnerability of the programs to budget cuts.

For 15 of the 25 equipment items we reviewed, there appears to be a disconnect between the funding requested by the Department of Defense or projected in the Future Years Defense Program and the services' program strategies to sustain or replace the equipment items. For example, we identified fiscal year 2003 unfunded requirements, as reported by the services, totaling \$372.9 million for four major aircraft—the CH-47D helicopter, F-16 fighter aircraft, C-5 transport aircraft, and CH-46E transport helicopter.

The 25 equipment items we reviewed appear to be capable of fulfilling their wartime missions. While we were unable to obtain sufficient data to definitively assess wartime capability because of ongoing operations in Iraq, the services, in general, will always ensure equipment is ready to go to war, often through surging their maintenance operations and overcoming other obstacles. Some of the equipment items we reviewed, however, have capability deficiencies that could degrade their wartime performance in the near term.