



Highlights of GAO-05-304, a report to congressional committees

## TACTICAL AIRCRAFT

# Air Force Still Needs Business Case to Support F/A-22 Quantities and Increased Capabilities

### Why GAO Did This Study

The Air Force is preparing a modernization plan that expands the capabilities of the F/A-22, which was first designed to serve as an air-to-air fighter aircraft with very limited ability to strike targets on the ground. The Air Force now intends to transform it by adding robust air-to-ground capabilities to attack enemy ground threats and by adding onboard intelligence data gathering capabilities. After the recent budget cut, DOD estimates F/A-22 cost at \$63.8 billion for 178 aircraft. It has been in development for more than 19 years, a decade longer than originally envisioned.

In the face of significant cost and schedule overruns, Congress mandates that GAO annually assess the F/A-22 program. In this report, GAO addresses (1) the Air Force's business case for the F/A-22 modernization plan and (2) the recently completed initial operational test and evaluation.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO is reiterating and expanding upon a 2004 recommendation that DOD complete a new and comprehensive business case that reflects the current budget environment and justifies future investments and specific quantities needed to meet mission requirements. DOD concurred and expects to build a business case through such actions as the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review and analysis required to support future modernization efforts as a separate program.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-304](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-304).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Michael J. Sullivan at (202) 512-4841 or [sullivanm@gao.gov](mailto:sullivanm@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

The Air Force has yet to produce a business case for the next-generation F/A-22. Much has changed in the years since the F/A-22 program began nearly 2 decades ago—adversarial threats against U.S. aircraft have evolved, and a plan to modernize the F/A-22 significantly different than the original aircraft is in progress. A DOD cost estimate in 2003 projected the Air Force's modernization plan to cost \$11.7 billion through 2018. A December 2004 budget decision reduced procurement funding and quantities but did not cut funding for modernization. The decision to terminate procurement after fiscal year 2008 places the current modernization plan in doubt as key ground attack and intelligence-gathering enhancements had been slated for aircraft now eliminated from the program. Without a new business case for adding a more robust ground attack capability and for new intelligence missions, the Air Force may be at a disadvantage when the time comes to justify the modernization plan in the face of future budget constraints. The following table shows the current plan for integrating new capabilities:

**Planned Modernization Enhancements for the F/A-22 Program**

	2007	2011	2013	2015
Examples of capabilities to be added	<b>Air-to-air plus limited air-to-ground:</b> Improved capability to launch Joint Direct Attack Munition at faster speeds; upgrade air-to-air capabilities	<b>Air-to-ground:</b> Add improved radar to seek and destroy advanced surface-to-air missile systems; integrate additional air-to-ground weapons	<b>Additional air-to-ground:</b> Increase capability to suppress or destroy full range of air defenses and improve speed and accuracy of targeting	<b>Enhanced intelligence data gathering:</b> Add integrated intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities.

Sources: Air Force and Office of Secretary of Defense (data); GAO (analysis and presentation).

DOD is set to conduct the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review to weigh the merits of transformational priorities and investments to determine if the best choices are being made to meet military needs within available funding levels. This may further influence an F/A-22 business case.

The F/A-22 program recently underwent initial operational testing, but testing did not include the air-to-ground missions that the Air Force envisions for the aircraft. The Air Force does not expect to conduct testing of these capabilities until after a decision is made to enter full-rate production. Although a final test report was not available for our review, Air Force officials told us that the F/A-22 was extremely effective in performing its air-to-air missions. Evaluation results of capabilities needed to sustain combat operations and maintain aircraft were not as favorable. Additional testing will be required to assess corrective actions for deficiencies identified and to evaluate new ground attack and intelligence-gathering capabilities added by the modernization program.