

Highlights of [GAO-03-431](#), a report to Congressional Committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Air Force is developing the F/A-22 aircraft to fly at higher speeds for longer distances, be less detectable, and improve the pilot's awareness of the surrounding situation. The F/A-22 will replace the Air Force's existing fleet of F-15 aircraft. Over the past several years the program has experienced significant cost overruns and schedule delays. Congress mandated that GAO assess the development program and determine whether the Air Force is meeting key performance, schedule, and cost goals. GAO also assessed the implications of the progress of the development program on production.

## What GAO Recommends

To help minimize the risks of producing large quantities of aircraft that may require costly modifications, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense (1) reconsider the decision to increase the annual production rate beyond 16 aircraft until greater knowledge on any need for modifications is established through completion of operational testing and (2) update the 2002 risk assessment and certification with sufficient detail to allow verification of the conclusions. In comments on a draft of this report, the Department of Defense (DOD) stated that it agreed, for the most part, with our description of the current state of the F/A-22 program's content, schedule and cost. However, DOD did not concur with our recommendation.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-431](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-431).

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Allen Li at (202) 512-4841 or [lia@gao.gov](mailto:lia@gao.gov).

## TACTICAL AIRCRAFT

# DOD Should Reconsider Decision to Increase F/A-22 Production Rates While Development Risks Continue

## What GAO Found

The F/A-22 development program did not meet key performance, schedule, and cost goals in fiscal year 2002, and delays in the flight test program have led to an increase in the development cost estimate of \$876 million. In response to this increase, DOD restructured the development program and reduced production aircraft by 27. If additional delays occur, further changes may be required. The program also continues to address technical problems that have limited the performance of test aircraft, including violent movement or "buffeting" of the vertical fins, overheating in portions of the aircraft, weakening of materials in the horizontal tail, and instability of avionics software. Air Force officials cannot predict when they will resolve these problems. These technical problems, along with the late delivery of aircraft to the flight test center, have delayed the development program. Based on F/A-22 flight test accomplishment data and current flight test plans, we believe that operational testing will likely be delayed several months beyond the planned August 2003 start date.

The F/A-22 program is in its final stages of development, and low-rate initial production has begun. Since fiscal year 1997, funds have been appropriated to acquire production aircraft, and the F/A-22 acquisition plan calls for steadily increasing annual production rates. However, GAO considers the Air Force's acquisition strategy at high risk for increases in production costs. In past reports, GAO has reported that acquiring aircraft while significant technical challenges remain does not allow for adequate testing of the aircraft. The uncertainties regarding performance capabilities of the F/A-22 aircraft and its development schedule will persist until technical problems have been addressed, including testing of modifications or fixes necessary to potentially alleviate these problems. In light of those uncertainties, steadily increasing annual production rates could result in the Air Force having to modify a larger quantity of aircraft after they are built.



Source: U.S. Air Force.