



Highlights of [GAO-07-406SP](#), a report to congressional committees

DEFENSE ACQUISITIONS

Assessments of Selected Weapon Programs

Why GAO Did This Study

This report is GAO’s fifth annual assessment of selected weapon programs. From 2001 to the present, the Department of Defense (DOD) has doubled its planned investment in new systems from approximately \$750 billion to almost \$1.5 trillion. While DOD expects these systems to transform military operations, their acquisition remains a high-risk area. GAO’s reviews of weapons over three decades have found consistent cost increases, schedule delays, and performance shortfalls. The nation’s growing long-range fiscal challenges may ultimately spur Congress to pressure DOD to cut spending on new weapons and to redirect funding to other priorities. In response, DOD might be compelled to deliver new weapon programs within estimated costs and to obtain the most from its investments.

This report provides congressional and DOD decision makers with an independent, knowledge-based assessment of selected defense programs, identifying potential risks and needed actions when a program’s projected attainment of knowledge diverges from the best practices. Programs assessed were selected using several factors: high dollar value, acquisition stage, and congressional interest. This report also highlights issues raised by the cumulative experiences of individual programs. GAO updates this report annually under the Comptroller General’s authority to conduct evaluations on his own initiative.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-406SP.

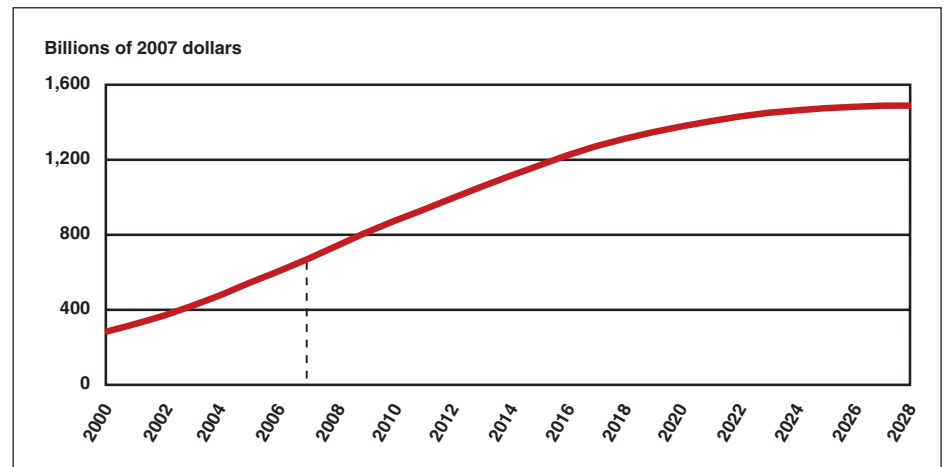
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Paul Francis (202) 512-4841 or FrancisP@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

GAO assessed 62 weapon systems with a total investment of over \$950 billion, some two-thirds of the \$1.5 trillion DOD plans for weapons acquisition (see below). Several of these programs will be developed without needed technology, design, and production knowledge, and will cost more and take longer to deliver. Progress in acquisitions is measured by passage through critical junctures, or knowledge points: Are the product’s technologies mature at the start of development? Is the product design stable at the design review? Are production processes in control by production start? By these best practice measures, limited progress has been made by the programs GAO assessed. Fully mature technologies were present in 16 percent of the systems at development start—the point at which best practices indicate mature levels should be present. The programs that began development with immature technologies experienced a 32.3 percent cost increase, whereas those that began with mature technologies increased 2.6 percent. Furthermore, 27 percent of the assessed programs demonstrated a stable design at the time of design review and in terms of production, very few programs reported using statistical process control data to measure the maturity of production processes.

Effective program management and control are essential to executing a knowledge-based approach. However, DOD does not have an environment that facilitates effective program management. For example, key personnel are rotated too frequently. Further, DOD is increasingly relying on contractors to perform key management functions raising questions about the capacity of DOD to manage new weapon system programs.

Total Cumulative Planned Expenditures on Current Portfolio of Major Defense Acquisition Programs



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.