

GAO

Testimony

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GAO's Review of Contractor Cost
Estimating Systems

Statement of
Mr. Frank C. Conahan
Assistant Comptroller General
National Security and International
Affairs Division

Before the
Subcommittee on Legislation and
National Security
Committee on Government Operations
United States House of Representatives



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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear before the Subcommittee to discuss GAO's evaluation of defense contractor cost estimating systems. In October 1985, I testified on DOD's surveillance of contractor cost estimating systems. I pointed out the surveillance program suffered from lack of (1) agreement among contractors, the Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA), and contracting officers about what constitutes a sound cost estimating system; (2) clear direction for correcting deficient estimating systems; and (3) management emphasis at all levels.

In March 1986, you asked GAO to determine whether defense contractors were developing and proposing accurate and reliable estimates for negotiating DOD contracts. Pursuant to your request, we initiated work to review contractor systems for estimating material costs, manufacturing and engineering labor costs, and other direct costs.¹

¹ Costs estimated on the basis of rates, percentage factors, or cost estimating relationships.

In addition to work at six contractor plants, we distributed questionnaires² to DCAA auditors at major defense contractors to find out

--what policies and procedures contractors have in place to develop contract proposals, and

--what methods were actually used to develop proposals on selected fixed-price contracts which DCAA reviewed between July 1985 and June 1986.

Our work on material estimating systems is complete and I will discuss it today. Our work on labor and other direct costs is scheduled to be completed later and will be provided to the Subcommittee at that time.

**SOUND ESTIMATING SYSTEMS ARE CRITICAL
TO PRICING NONCOMPETITIVE DOD CONTRACTS**

In fiscal year 1986, DOD awarded about \$82 billion in contracts without price competition. In the absence of the competitive marketplace to establish fair and reasonable prices, DOD relies to a great extent on price proposals developed and submitted by its contractors. Since price proposals are generated by contractors'

² Selected questionnaire results are contained in Appendix I. Contractors we visited are listed in Appendix II.

estimating systems, it is important that the systems consistently produce accurate and reliable data. In 1983, the Deputy Secretary of Defense stated:

"A key element in the timely negotiation of a fair and reasonable price is to start with a well-prepared and well-documented contractor proposal. In this regard, we must ensure that contractor estimating systems are formalized and follow good estimating procedures * * *"

Despite the recognized importance of cost estimating systems, there is no requirement for contractors to maintain adequate estimating systems. Questionnaire responses from DCAA auditors at 247 major contractors show 13 percent do not have written estimating policies and procedures. These 32 contractors received about \$3.8 billion in government contracts during their last fiscal year.

Questionnaire responses also show that many contractors' written policies and procedures have flaws. For example, responses from DCAA show that of 211 contractors with written policies and procedures:

--67 contractors have no or minimally adequate procedures for selecting methods and techniques to calculate estimates,

--72 contractors have no or minimally adequate procedures for documenting the rationale and support for estimating judgments, and

--33 contractors have no or minimally adequate procedures to review cost estimates for completeness, accuracy, and compliance with company policy.

These results indicate serious shortcomings in internal controls over the cost estimating function.

CONTRACTORS DID NOT PROVIDE CONTRACTING OFFICERS ACCURATE AND RELIABLE MATERIAL ESTIMATES

Material cost estimates are significant elements to be considered during negotiations. We examined estimates for prospectively priced material³ totaling \$244 million included in 24 prime contracts and found estimates totaling about \$154 million were not accurate and reliable. We identified two basic problems with contractors' material estimates. First, contractors did not evaluate subcontracts or provide evaluation results to contracting officers prior to prime contract negotiations for 28 subcontracts valued at \$112 million. Second, contractors proposed material costs for 580 parts valued at \$42 million based on vendor quotations without disclosing that prices negotiated with vendors are typically lower than quoted.

We believe these problems contributed to contractor material estimates being overstated. Prices paid for material proposed at

³ Material that is not priced at the time of prime contract negotiations.

\$137 million showed contractor estimates were overstated by about \$21 million⁴--or about 15 percent. During negotiations, some contracting officers caught a portion of the excess estimates but contractors still purchased the material for about \$11.8 million less than included in the prime contract prices.

We were unable to determine prices paid for material proposed at \$17 million (\$154 million minus \$137 million) because several subcontracts had not been awarded and contract records were not clear about prices paid for some parts.

Contractors Did Not Evaluate Major Subcontracts Before Prime Contract Negotiations

The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) requires contractors to review and evaluate prospectively priced subcontracts \$1 million or larger and provide the evaluations to contracting officers prior to prime contract negotiations. Subcontract evaluations provide contracting officers a basis for ensuring subcontract prices negotiated in prime contracts are fair and reasonable.

Fifty-five of the proposals in our questionnaire survey contained major subcontracts valued at about \$1.9 billion. DCAA auditors

⁴ Contractors frequently purchase material in different quantities than proposed. We considered such variances in calculating differences between estimated and actual prices.

indicated contractors did not always comply with FAR requirements on the 55 proposals. Contractors did not:

--evaluate subcontract cost or pricing data for 20 (36%) of the proposals, and

--provide subcontract evaluations to contracting officers for 16 (29%) of the proposals.

Five of the six contractors we visited did not comply with FAR requirements on 28 of 42 subcontracts valued at about \$112 million. The sixth contractor evaluated all the major subcontracts we examined. Not complying with FAR requirements, we believe, is a fundamental estimating system deficiency which causes overstated contract prices.

In those cases where contractors did not perform and provide required evaluations, they negotiated subcontract prices that were \$10.1 million (11%) less than the amounts negotiated in prime contracts. In October 1985, we discussed similar problems with subcontract evaluations and told this subcommittee that contractors negotiated subcontract prices less than included in prime contracts. The DOD Inspector General reported similar problems in 1984.

The following examples illustrate what happened when adequate subcontract evaluations were not provided to contracting officers before prime contract negotiations.

At General Telephone and Electronics Corporation (GTE), we found subcontract evaluations were not always adequately performed before prime contract negotiations. On a Navy electronic warfare systems contract, GTE included a \$2.4 million subcontract estimate for power supplies. Based on a limited evaluation, GTE estimated the material would cost about \$2.3 million.

Although GTE provided its limited evaluation to the contracting officer, it was not used. Recognizing the limited evaluation was inadequate, the contracting officer used an alternate pricing technique to negotiate essentially the same amount--\$2.3 million. After prime contract award, GTE performed detailed evaluations and purchased the material for \$400,000 (17%) less than included in the prime contract.

According to a company official, GTE performs detailed subcontract evaluations only when the company is preparing to negotiate with a subcontractor. If GTE is not preparing to negotiate a subcontract at the time of prime contract negotiations, GTE provides a limited evaluation. The GTE official believes a limited evaluation satisfies FAR requirements. We disagree because GTE's evaluation

was not a cost analysis as required by the FAR, and described in the Armed Services Pricing Manual.

At LTV, we found a contracting officer protected the government's interest on four subcontracts which were not evaluated before prime contract negotiations. In this case, the contracting officer included a clause in the contract which permits a price adjustment once the subcontracts are awarded. LTV proposed the subcontracts at about \$24.1 million but agreed to a price of \$22.1 million. LTV awarded the subcontracts for \$19.7 million, and notified the contracting officer in December 1985 that the prime contract price should be reduced. When we checked in April 1987 the contract price had not been adjusted. In accordance with the price adjustment clause, the prime contract should be reduced by about \$3 million, including profit and add-ons.

At Rockwell International, a contract proposal on the Peacekeeper Missile Program included a \$14.0 million subcontract estimate. The estimate was for integrated circuits to be provided by two subcontractors. Rockwell evaluated the subcontractor proposals several months before prime contract negotiations but did not disclose the evaluations to the contracting officer. Rockwell's evaluations recommended a maximum price of \$13.9 million, with a negotiation objective of \$12.5 million.

The contracting officer accepted Rockwell's \$14 million estimate during prime contract negotiations. After negotiations, Rockwell purchased the integrated circuits for \$12.6 million--near its negotiation objective and \$1.4 million less than included in the prime contract. Rockwell officials attributed the nondisclosure to oversights by material cost estimating personnel.

**Contractors Proposed Vendor Quotations
Without Considering That Prices Paid To
Vendors Are Typically Lower Than Quoted**

Contractors often estimate material purchases of less than \$1 million on the basis of vendor quotations. Unlike major subcontracts, the FAR does not contain specific guidance on how such estimates should be developed. For the contracts we reviewed, actual prices paid to vendors were typically lower than estimates based on quotations. We found, however, contractors did not always adjust their estimates to reflect reductions or disclose information on past reductions to contracting officers.

Questionnaire responses on 78 of 108 (72%) contract proposals reviewed by DCAA during 1986 show contractors did not adjust vendor quotations to reflect reductions typically achieved in vendor negotiations. In the other 30 (28%) proposals, contractors reduced vendor quotations based on historical information, judgment, or other methods.

At six locations, we examined estimates for 580 parts proposed at \$42 million based on vendor quotations. Contractors, we found, purchased 401 (69%) of the parts for less than proposed to the government.

Of the 580 parts, we were able to determine the prices included in prime contracts for 538 parts proposed at \$38 million. Although contracting officers reduced proposed prices by \$2.0 million, the contractors still purchased the parts for another \$1.7 million less than negotiated in prime contracts. We believe contractors' failure to maintain and disclose historical data on vendor prices is an estimating system deficiency which causes overstated contract prices.

The following examples illustrate what happened when historical price reduction data was not maintained or disclosed.

At Rockwell International, we reviewed prices for 269 parts proposed at \$12.7 million based on vendor quotations. Contracting officers reduced the prices by \$333,000 during prime contract negotiations, but Rockwell still purchased the parts for \$574,000 less--an additional 4.6 percent reduction. After we brought the matter to their attention, Rockwell officials revised the company's estimating procedures to recognize reductions achieved in prior vendor negotiations.

Our work at LTV showed the company did not disclose historical differences between vendor quotations and actual prices. At LTV, we reviewed prices for 50 parts proposed at \$746,000 based on vendor quotations. The contracting officer accepted the proposed prices during prime contract negotiations. LTV, however, purchased the parts for \$638,000--or about 14.5 percent less than negotiated in the prime contract.

In this case, the negotiation process did not identify the excess estimate and neither DCAA nor the contracting officer questioned LTV's proposed prices. At the time of our review, LTV had analyzed prices paid for 619 parts and found the parts were purchased for \$479,550 (15%) less than included in the prime contract. LTV does not disclose information on historical price reductions, we were told, because it is not required by the FAR.

The FAR does not specifically require contractors to develop and disclose information showing reductions achieved in prior vendor negotiations. DCAA believes a contractor's failure to consider reductions expected from vendor negotiations is an estimating deficiency. We agree with DCAA and believe this information is essential to good contract pricing.

Other procurement officials also believe information on differences between quotes and actual prices is important to achieving fair and reasonable contract prices. In October 1984, the Air Force issued

a policy memorandum intended to ensure contractor cost estimating systems routinely develop the information. Air Force officials, in February 1987, advised us that some major contractors have agreed to develop the information.

DOD ACTIONS TO IMPROVE CONTRACTOR
COST ESTIMATING SYSTEMS

Recently, increased attention has been focused on contractor estimating systems. For example, in June 1986--citing hearings before this subcommittee--both the Air Force and DCAA proposed amending the FAR to eliminate shortcomings in DOD policy on contractor estimating systems. The proposed amendments would establish a contractual requirement for contractors to disclose and maintain acceptable estimating systems. The proposals, which contain specific guidance on estimating system deficiencies, would also authorize contracting officers to disapprove estimating systems and make price reductions where significant estimating deficiencies increased a contract price.

Both proposals were referred to the Defense Acquisition Regulatory (DAR) Council in June 1986 but no action was taken because of concerns that (1) no standards are available to evaluate cost estimating systems, and (2) the problem has not been proven to be so pervasive as to require denying contracts to companies with disapproved cost estimating systems. We were advised in February 1987 the Council is reconsidering the proposals.

In May 1986, the DOD Inspector General reported that estimating deficiencies had not been resolved in a timely manner and noted that contracting officers lacked leverage to deal with contractors unwilling to correct deficient estimating practices. The Inspector General recommended contracting officers be given authority to disapprove deficient estimating systems.

The acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Logistics disagreed with the Inspector General's recommendation stating that existing regulations provide a better approach to resolving estimating deficiencies. We disagree with the Assistant Secretary's position because our past and current work shows DOD regulations are not adequate. First, regulations are not clear as to what constitutes an acceptable system. Second, regulations do not contain clear direction and authority for resolving deficiencies.

The Assistant Secretary also believed a disapproval process could not be administered in a systematic and uniform manner. He stated no standards are available to indicate what conditions must be present to warrant disapproval. We agree existing regulations do not contain the needed standards; however, we believe standards exist in several places. For example, standards are contained in DCAA's audit manual and the proposed FAR amendments. The Air Force

has also established a basic framework for judging the acceptability of contractor estimating systems.

What is needed, we believe, is a DOD-wide effort to assemble and refine available standards so all involved parties clearly understand what constitutes an adequate system. In this regard, we believe the FAR amendments proposed by the Air Force and DCAA in June 1986 could provide DOD a starting point to define an acceptable estimating system.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement. I will be glad to answer any questions you or the subcommittee members may have.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

To broaden our perspective of cost estimating among major defense contractors, we surveyed current contractor estimating policies and practices. The survey was conducted from December 1986 to January 1987 using a two-part questionnaire.

Part A of the questionnaire was designed to find out what written policies and procedures defense contractors adopted to guide their estimators in developing contract proposals. We mailed questionnaires to DCAA offices responsible for reviewing 292 contractors or their subsidiaries. DCAA auditors were asked to answer the questions based on their knowledge of the contractors' current estimating practices. We received information on 247 (or 85%) of these contractors. The information covered 23 of the 25 largest contractors which received about 50 percent of DOD contracts awarded during 1986. The average non-response rate on key questions was 0.4 percent. Based on our analysis, we believe our survey results adequately reflect the estimating policies and procedures of major defense contractors, excluding oil companies.

Part B of the questionnaire was designed to find out what methods major contractors or their subsidiaries used to estimate costs for noncompetitive contracts. We sent this part of the questionnaire to DCAA field offices and asked how proposals were developed for

noncompetitive, fixed-price manufacturing contracts of \$10 million or more awarded to U.S. contractors during the year ending June 30, 1986. Of the 140 contracts meeting these criteria, we received information on 111 or about 80 percent. Our survey results include 16 additional proposals which DCAA reviewed in support of contract negotiations, but where the contracts were ultimately awarded competitively.⁵

The tables on pages 17 through 20 present our analysis of selected questions concerning contractor estimating policies, procedures, and practices. Complete questionnaire results will be reported later.

⁵ Information on contract competition is based on the DD350 data base.

SELECTED RESULTS ON CONTRACTOR
ESTIMATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Table 1: Contractors in GAO Survey

Number of contractors	247
Government contracts awarded in contractors' last fiscal year	\$98.9 billion
Range in revenue	\$14 million - \$6 billion

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Table 2: Contractor Estimating Policies and Procedures

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Cannot determine</u>
Contractor has written policies and procedures	211 (85%)	32 (13%)	4 (2%)
Govt contracts during last fiscal year	\$93.4 billion	\$3.8 billion	\$1.7 billion

Table 3: Adequacy of Contractor Procedures for Selected Estimating Tasks

<u>Task</u>	<u>Procedures</u>	
	<u>None or minimally adequate</u>	<u>Adequate</u>
Selecting appropriate methods and techniques	67 (32%)	145 (68%)
Documenting rationale and support for estimates	72 (34%)	139 (66%)
Reviewing for completeness, accuracy, and compliance with company policy	33 (16%)	179 (84%)

SELECTED RESULTS ON CONTRACTOR
MATERIAL ESTIMATING PRACTICES

Table 4: Proposals in GAO Survey

Number of contract proposals	127
Value	\$14.4 billion
Range in value (note 1)	\$2.6 million - \$1 billion

¹Contracts were eventually awarded for higher or lower amounts than in the proposals.

Table 5: Material Cost in Proposals

Number of contract proposals	127
Number of proposals with materials	126 (99%)
Value of materials	\$5.0 billion

Table 6: Proposals with Major Subcontracts

Proposals with major noncompetitive subcontracts	55
Value of subcontracts	\$1.9 billion

Table 7: Compliance with FAR Requirements for Major Subcontracts Included in 55 Contract Proposals

<u>Requirement</u>	<u>Complied</u>	<u>Did not comply</u>	<u>Cannot determine</u>
Obtain subcontractor cost or pricing data	43 (78%)	9 (16%)	3 (6%)
Provide cost or pricing data to contracting officer	33 (60%)	9 (16%)	13 (24%)
Evaluate cost or pricing data	26 (47%)	20 (36%)	9 (16%)
Provide evaluations to contracting officer	21 (38%)	16 (29%)	18 (33%)

Table 8: Contractor Estimates Based on Vendor Quotations in 108 Contract Proposals

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Quotations not reduced	78	72
Reductions based on historic data	20	19
Reductions based on judgement or other method	<u>10</u>	<u>9</u>
Total	<u>108</u>	<u>100</u>

CONTRACTOR LOCATIONS VISITED

Gencorp Incorporated
Aerojet Strategic Propulsion
Company
Sacramento, California

GTE Government Systems Corporation
Electronic Division
Mountain View, California

Martin Marietta Corporation
Orlando Aerospace
Orlando, Florida

LTV Corporation
LTV Aerospace and Defense Company
Dallas, Texas

Rockwell International Corporation
Electronics Operations
Anaheim, California

Magnavox Company
Magnavox Electronics Systems
Company
Fort Wayne, Indiana