DEFENSE ACQUISITIONS

Results of Annual Assessment of DOD Weapon Programs

What GAO Found

We recently released our sixth annual assessment of selected DOD weapon programs. The assessment indicates that cost and schedule outcomes for major weapon programs are not improving. Although well-conceived acquisition policy changes occurred in 2003 that reflect many best practices we have reported on in the past, these policy changes have not yet translated into practice at the program level.

None of the weapon programs we assessed this year had proceeded through system development meeting the best practices standards for mature technologies, stable design, and mature production processes—all prerequisites for achieving planned cost, schedule, and performance outcomes. In addition, only a small percentage of programs used two key systems engineering tools—preliminary design reviews and prototypes to demonstrate the maturity of the product’s design by critical junctures. This lack of disciplined systems engineering affects DOD’s ability to develop sound, executable business cases for programs.

Our work shows that acquisition problems will likely persist until DOD provides a better foundation for buying the right things, the right way. This involves making tough decisions as to which programs should be pursued, and more importantly, not pursued; making sure programs are executable; locking in requirements before programs are ever started; and making it clear who is responsible for what and holding people accountable when responsibilities are not fulfilled. Moreover, the environment and incentives that lead DOD and the military services to overpromise on capability and underestimate costs in order to sell new programs and capture funding will need to change. Based in part on GAO recommendations and congressional direction, DOD has begun several initiatives that, if adopted and implemented properly, could provide a foundation for establishing sound, knowledge-based business cases for individual acquisition programs and improving outcomes.