JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER
Progress Made and Challenges Remain

Why GAO Did This Study

The Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program—a multinational acquisition program for the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and eight cooperative international partners—is the Department of Defense’s (DOD) most expensive aircraft acquisition program. DOD currently estimates it will spend $623 billion to develop, procure, and operate and support the JSF fleet. The JSF aircraft, which includes a variant design for each of the services, represents 90 percent of the remaining planned investment for DOD’s major tactical aircraft programs. In fiscal year 2004, the JSF program was rebaselined to address technical challenges, cost increases, and schedule overruns.

This report—the third mandated by Congress—describes the program’s progress in meeting cost, schedule, and performance goals since rebaselining and identifies various challenges the program will likely face in meeting these goals in the future.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that DOD limit annual production quantities to no more than 24 aircraft per year until each variant’s basic flying qualities have been demonstrated in flight testing now scheduled in the 2010 time frame. DOD non-concurred, believing its current strategy provides a balance of technical risk, financial constraints, and operational needs.

Accuracy predicting JSF costs and schedule and ensuring sufficient funding will likely be key challenges facing the program in the future. JSF continues to pursue a risky acquisition strategy that concurrently develops and produces aircraft. While some concurrency may be beneficial to efficiently transition from development to production, the degree of overlap is significant on this program. Any changes in design and manufacturing that require modifications to delivered aircraft or to tooling and manufacturing processes would result in increased costs and delays in getting capabilities to the warfighter. Low-rate initial production will begin this year with almost the entire 7-year flight test program remaining to confirm the aircraft design. Confidence that investment decisions will deliver expected capability within cost and schedule goals increases as testing proves the JSF will work as expected. The JSF program also faces funding uncertainties as it will demand unprecedented funding over the next 2 decades—more than $12.6 billion a year on average through 2027.

Overlap of Production Investments and Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cumulative Production Investment (in billions of dollars)</th>
<th>Cumulative Aircraft</th>
<th>Percentage of Flight Test Program Completed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>$0.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>2013</td>
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