



ELECTRONIC WARFARE

Comprehensive Strategy Still Needed for Suppressing Enemy Air Defenses

Highlights of [GAO-03-51](#), a report to the Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. military aircraft are often at great risk from enemy air defenses, and the services use specialized aircraft to neutralize or destroy them. In January 2001, GAO reported that a gap existed between the services' suppression capabilities and their needs and recommended that a comprehensive strategy was needed to fix the situation. In response to GAO's report, DOD emphasized that a major study underway at the time would provide the basis for a Department-wide strategy and lead to a balanced set of acquisition programs between the services. This report updates our previous work and assesses actions that DOD has taken to improve its suppression capabilities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO continues to recommend that the Secretary of Defense develop a comprehensive, cross-service strategy to close the gap between DOD's suppression capabilities and needs. In addition, an effective coordinating entity is needed to develop and monitor implementation of the strategy.

In answer to a draft of GAO's report, DOD concurred with its recommendations. Staff changes are being made to address cross-cutting issues, and an integrated product team process established to form a comprehensive approach to the electronic warfare mission.

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense continues to face a gap between its need to suppress enemy air defenses and its capabilities to do so, despite some progress in upgrading its capabilities. There are not enough existing suppression aircraft to meet overall requirements, some aircraft are experiencing wing and engine problems, and improvements are needed to counter evolving threats. DOD's primary suppression aircraft, the EA-6B, is also reaching the end of its life cycle and a replacement is needed as early as 2009. Furthermore, some aircraft self-protection equipment, which provide additional suppression capabilities, have also been found to be unreliable.

DOD has not yet developed an integrated, comprehensive approach to the U.S. air defense suppression mission but has recently completed an Analysis of Alternatives that presented the services with 27 options for replacing the aging EA-6B. The services formed a coordinating group to assess the options, and in June 2002 presented service-specific proposals to the Office of the Secretary of Defense for analysis and consideration in the 2004 budget. However, the Analysis of Alternatives did not provide the basis for a comprehensive strategy to address the department's overall suppression needs. It only analyzed the airborne electronic attack portion of the mission and did not address needed improvements in aircraft self-protection systems or the technical and funding challenges of other service programs such as the Navy's and Air Force's air-launched decoy programs.



The EA-6B, DOD's primary suppression aircraft, is reaching the end of its life cycle. A replacement aircraft is needed as early as 2009.

Source: U.S. Navy.