



Highlights of [GAO-06-839](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

A critical element in the life cycle of a weapon system is the availability of the item's technical data—recorded information used to define a design and to produce, support, maintain, or operate the item. Because a weapon system may remain in the defense inventory for decades following initial acquisition, technical data decisions made during acquisition can have far-reaching implications over its life cycle. In August 2004, GAO recommended that the Department of Defense (DOD) consider requiring program offices to develop acquisition strategies that provide for future delivery of technical data should the need arise to select an alternative source for logistics support or to offer the work out for competition. For this review, GAO (1) evaluated how sustainment plans for Army and Air Force weapon systems had been affected by technical data rights and (2) examined requirements for obtaining technical data rights under current DOD acquisition policies.

## What GAO Recommends

To ensure that DOD can support sustainment plans for weapon systems throughout their life cycle, including revisions to these plans aimed at achieving cost savings and complying with legislative requirements, GAO recommends improvements in DOD's acquisition policies regarding the acquisition of technical data. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-839](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-839).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact William M. Solis at (202) 512-5140 or [solisw@gao.gov](mailto:solisw@gao.gov).

## WEAPONS ACQUISITION

# DOD Should Strengthen Policies for Assessing Technical Data Needs to Support Weapon Systems

## What GAO Found

The Army and the Air Force have encountered limitations in their sustainment plans for some fielded weapon systems because they lacked needed technical data rights. The lack of technical data rights has limited the services' flexibility to make changes to sustainment plans that are aimed at achieving cost savings and meeting legislative requirements regarding depot maintenance capabilities. GAO identified seven weapon system programs that encountered such limitations—C-17, F-22, and C-130J aircraft, Up-armored High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle, Stryker family of vehicles, Airborne Warning and Control System aircraft, and M4 carbine. Although the circumstances surrounding each case were unique, earlier decisions made on technical data rights during system acquisition were cited as a primary reason for the limitations subsequently encountered. As a result of the limitations encountered, the services had to alter their plans for developing maintenance capability at public depots, developing new sources of supply to increase production, or soliciting competitive offers for the acquisition of spare parts and components to reduce sustainment costs. For example, the Air Force identified a need to develop a core maintenance capability for the C-17 at government depots to ensure it had the ability to support national defense emergencies, but it lacked the requisite technical data rights. To mitigate this limitation, the Air Force is seeking to form partnerships with C-17 sub-vendors. However, according to Air Force officials, some sub-vendors have declined to provide the needed technical data needed to develop core capability. Although GAO did not assess the rationale for the decisions made on technical data rights during system acquisition, several factors, such as the extent the system incorporates technology that was not developed with government funding and the potential for changes in the technical data over the weapon system's life cycle, may complicate program managers' decisions.

Current DOD acquisition policies do not specifically address long-term technical data rights for weapon system sustainment. For example, DOD's policies do not require program managers to assess long-term needs for technical data rights to support weapon systems and, correspondingly, to develop acquisition strategies that address those needs. DOD, as part of the department's acquisition reforms and performance-based strategies, has deemphasized the acquisition of technical data rights. Although GAO has recommended that DOD emphasize the need for technical data rights, DOD has not implemented these recommendations. The Army and the Air Force have recognized weaknesses in their approaches to assessing and securing technical data rights and have begun to address these weaknesses by developing more structured approaches. However, DOD acquisition policies do not facilitate these efforts. Unless DOD assesses and secures its rights for the use of technical data early in the weapon system acquisition process when it has the greatest leverage to negotiate, DOD may face later challenges in sustaining weapon systems over their life cycle.