

Why GAO Did This Study

The mission of the presidential helicopter fleet is to provide safe, reliable, and timely transportation in support of the President. The Navy plans to acquire a fleet of 23 VH-92A helicopters to replace the current Marine Corps fleet of VH-3D and VH-60N aircraft. Initial delivery of VH-92A presidential helicopters is scheduled to begin in fiscal year 2020 with production ending in fiscal year 2023. The total cost of this acquisition program was originally estimated at almost \$5.2 billion.

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 included a provision for GAO to report on the VH-92A program annually, until the Navy awards the full-rate production contract. This report discusses (1) the extent to which the program is meeting its cost and schedule goals and (2) challenges facing the program in system development.

To determine how the program is progressing, GAO analyzed program documents; and spoke with officials from the program office, the Defense Contract Management Agency, contractors, Director, Operational Test and Evaluation, and Department of Defense, Developmental Test and Evaluation. GAO also assessed the program's integrated master schedule against GAO best practices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making any recommendations in this report, but will continue to monitor the potential cost growth and schedule delays as the program responds to challenges meeting capability requirements.

PRESIDENTIAL HELICOPTER

Program Continues to Make Development Progress While Addressing Challenges

What GAO Found

Acquisition cost estimates for the Presidential Helicopter Replacement Program (also known as the VH-92A) have declined from \$5.18 billion to \$4.95 billion, for 23 new helicopters, since the program started in April 2014 (see table), and the program remains within its planned schedule. The contractor attributes this cost decrease to several factors: stable requirements, a low number of design changes, and program efficiencies.

VH-92A Program Continues to Reduce Its Acquisition Cost Estimate

	April 2014 initial baseline	May 2018 latest estimate	Percentage change
Cost estimate (then-year dollars in millions)			
Development	\$2,805.7	\$2,687.6	-4.2%
Procurement	2,379.0	2,263.3	-4.9
Total program acquisition cost	5,184.7	4,950.9	-4.5
Total program acquisition unit cost	225.4	215.3	-4.5
Expected total quantities (number of aircraft)	23	23	0

Source GAO presentation of Navy data. | GAO-19-329

The program has delayed some program milestones—for example, its low-rate production decision—by 5 months from its original baseline goal. Although this remains within the approved schedule, the program will have less time than planned between the end of development testing and start of operational assessment. Program officials told GAO they expect to have enough information from both the government-led integrated testing and the operational assessment to inform the low-rate production decision.

Continuing development challenges concerning performance requirements may affect whether the program can deliver fully capable aircraft on time in the future. These include:

- **VH-92A start procedures:** As we reported last year, the VH-92A was pursuing technical improvements related to Sikorsky's S-92A propulsion system, which has yet to meet a VH-92A performance requirement. Program risk for this performance requirement has not changed since our April 2018 report on the program.
- **Landing zone suitability:** As GAO found in 2018, the program has not yet met a key system capability requirement for landing the helicopter without damaging the landing zone—for example, the White House South Lawn. According to program officials, Sikorsky plans to have a solution for this performance requirement by November 2020.
- **Mission communications system:** The VH-92A program has experienced problems connecting the aircraft's communication system to secure networks, due to changes in network security requirements, presenting a new risk area for the program. The Navy anticipates having a fix by January 2020. These changes are expected to be incorporated into the four production representative helicopters being built under the development contract in time for the program's initial operational test and evaluation.