Most Acquisition Programs Are Meeting Goals Even with Some Management Issues and COVID-19 Delays

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) invests billions of dollars annually to acquire systems that help secure the border, increase marine safety, screen travelers, enhance cybersecurity, improve disaster response, and execute a wide variety of other operations.

As of September 2021, 23 of the 29 programs GAO selected for this review had developed a DHS-approved acquisition program baseline—establishing how the system being acquired will perform, when it will be delivered, and what it will cost—and 20 of those 23 programs were meeting their goals. However, five programs exceeded their cost or schedule goals, or both, at some point during fiscal year 2021. Reasons for the breaches included external factors, such as COVID-19, and an underestimation of program complexity. While two of these five programs restructured their baseline goals to get back on track, the remaining three were still in breach status as of September 2021 (see table).

Additionally, GAO found that nine programs that were meeting their currently established goals rebaselined or were in the process of doing so in fiscal year 2021 due to scope changes, such as a change in quantities, an extended life cycle, or additional funding from Congress.

As of September 2021, GAO found that four programs used a DHS policy allowing programs to adjust schedule milestones up to 6 months due to the effects of COVID-19. These effects included workforce absences due to stay-at-home orders and supply chain delays for needed parts. In most cases, programs were able to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 without baseline adjustments.