

DOD Weapons Programs Plagued By Delays, GAO Says

By **Nicole Rosenthal**

Law360 (June 8, 2022, 8:35 PM EDT) -- The U.S. Department of Defense continues to face significant delays in the development and delivery of weapons systems, citing a lack of information during milestone reviews and other important decision times, the U.S. Government Accountability Office said Wednesday.

In its **20th annual report** to congressional committees, the GAO analyzed the DOD's 63 costliest weapon system acquisition programs. It said that missing information about weapons systems' technology, design and production during developmental and initial production phases has resulted in hold-ups.

The missing information is partly due to limited testing and risk assessment while acquiring weapon systems, and the delays are similar to those noted in the GAO's first assessment in 2003, the agency said.

"These challenges still hinder many programs. And they slow the department's current emphasis on delivering capabilities to the warfighter faster," the report said. "Knowledge-based acquisitions attain crucial information about topics such as technology maturity before proceeding beyond key points. But the majority of [major defense acquisition programs] GAO reviewed continue to not fully achieve knowledge that informs key investment decisions."

The analysis found that more than half of the 29 major defense acquisition programs the GAO reviewed that "had yet to deliver capability reported delays in the past year." Lack of funding data for 2023 in the 2022 budget request also hindered the GAO from assessing the programs' cost performance, the report said.

The agency also found that, in 19 programs concerning rapid prototyping and fielding in weapons projects, the programs "generally do not plan to attain sufficient product knowledge before starting follow-on efforts, falling short of leading acquisition practices."

"This approach increases the risk that these follow-on efforts may encounter cost, schedule, or technical challenges during development or production," the GAO said.

The report also noted that cybersecurity for the DOD's weapons systems was "not fully implementing" recommended practices, such as testing.

Most of the 39 programs that reported using a modern software development approach worked slower than expected, the GAO said. In fact, while industry practices recommend software delivery as frequently as every two to six weeks, only six programs using such an approach reported delivering that frequently.

The GAO also recommended that the DOD clarify when assessments should be made of companies that develop and produce weapons systems so as not to be missing parts should a single supplier go out of business. More than half of the programs tracking these risks reported that they did not plan for an assessment specific to their program.

The office recommended that the DOD update its assessment to define the factors that would constitute a projected problem or substantial risk that a necessary business or product would become

lost.

While the DOD concurred with the recommendations, it refuted the software delivery frequency analysis from the GAO, arguing that "the appropriate cadence for delivery capability will vary with context," and that the GAO's conclusion doesn't account for the progress made in the realm of software upgrades.

"In our 20 years of reviewing DOD's largest weapon programs, we continue to see the same types of challenges hindering DOD's ability to deliver weapons quickly to the warfighter," GAO Contracting and National Security Acquisitions Director Shelby S. Oakley told Law360. "While DOD has made many important changes to its acquisition policies in the last few years, the department needs to continue to improve its practices if it is to really transform its acquisition system to meet current and emerging threats. ... We will continue to monitor DOD's progress in adhering to these practices in our future assessments."

--Editing by Adam LoBelia.

Update: This story has been updated to include a statement from the GAO.