



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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NATIONAL SECURITY AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DIVISION

B-209124

AUGUST 23, 1983

The Honorable Caspar W. Weinberger
The Secretary of Defense

Attention: DOD Office of the Inspector General
Deputy Assistant Inspector General for
GAO Report Analysis

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Subject: Air Force HH-60D Helicopter Acquisition
Program (GAO/NSIAD-83-49)

This is to advise you that we have completed our review of the HH-60D Helicopter Acquisition Program. In the course of the review, we developed several concerns about the program that we brought to the attention of your staff and the Air Force in a draft report earlier this year. A number of events have occurred since then which are recapped below.

In our draft we observed that the HH-60D may be more capable than existing helicopters, but the planned HH-60D fleet is probably far too small to be very productive in a major conflict, based on our review of an Air Force study of such missions. Further, we observed that losses are likely to be prohibitively high. We anticipated recommending to the Congress that it direct the Secretary of the Air Force to present a credible basis for establishing the appropriate size of the combat rescue fleet and for projecting its relative contribution to combat effectiveness.

Following discussion of that draft with personnel from your Office and the Air Force, and after reviewing documents which they provided, we continued to believe that the Air Force had not convincingly demonstrated the extent to which acquisition of the HH-60D fleet would enhance combat rescue effectiveness. We then considered suggesting that you direct the Secretary of the Air Force to prepare an empirically verifiable estimate of how much more effectively combat rescue can be accomplished with the planned HH-60D fleet than without it. At a subsequent meeting, Air Force and Office of the Secretary of Defense officials indicated Defense could comply with this suggestion.

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We were told by Air Force officials on July 14, 1983, that the program is being restructured and the quantity of HH-60Ds to be procured will be reduced substantially. We were told that this restructuring is being done, at least in part, in deference to congressional concerns expressed in reports on the Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1984.

On May 11, 1983, the House Armed Services Committee reported that while the Committee believes the Air Force has a valid requirement for search and rescue and special operations helicopters, the Committee does not believe this requirement justifies the Air Force proposal to convert a \$5 million UH-60 into a \$20 million aircraft. The Committee directed the Air Force to reassess its requirements and to restructure the program to a less ambitious and more affordable one in time for inclusion in the fiscal year 1985 budget submission. The Committee recommended no advance procurement authorization for the program in fiscal year 1984.

On July 5, 1983, the Senate Armed Services Committee reported the concerns of Committee members as to whether all of the planned 243 HH-60D helicopters must be equipped with identical packages of highly sophisticated equipment. The Committee encouraged the Air Force to consider a force mix comprised of varying levels of capability and a smaller force than currently projected. Although supporting the replacement of existing rescue helicopters, the Committee recommended a 1 year deferral to provide the Air Force time to restructure the program. The Committee recommended no funds be authorized for advanced procurement in fiscal year 1984.

During our July 14 meeting, Air Force officials said that the extent of the restructuring was still under review and that specific details had not yet been decided on. The officials did tell us, however, that the changes would involve a substantial reduction in the quantity of HH-60Ds to be procured for combat rescue. They also indicated that there would be a significant change in the avionics to be installed in many HH-60Ds. The officials were uncertain about the cost impact of the changes. They said these changes were determined possible by a group of Air Force experts who met to reexamine the Air Force's HH-60D requirement. The group has not prepared a written trade-off analysis or other study documents to describe the rationale employed and the decisions reached, but we were assured that such a report would be forthcoming.

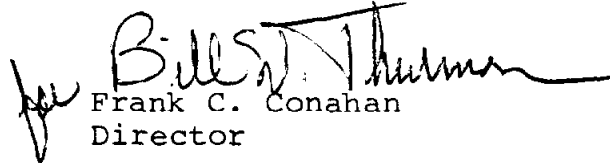
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In view of the Air Force commitment to restructure the HH-60D program, we have no recommendation to make at this time. We do, however, request to be informed of the means the Air Force intends to employ in restructuring the program and the intended aircraft configuration, quantities, and costs. We will continue to monitor the HH-60D program.

We are sending copies of this report to the House and Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committees.

We would be pleased to meet with you or your representatives should you have any questions on this matter.

Sincerely yours,

The signature is written in cursive and reads "Bill S. Thurman". To the left of the signature, there is a small handwritten mark that appears to be "for".
Frank C. Conahan
Director