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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-446](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The EA-6B has conducted airborne electronic attack for all services since 1996. In 2002, the Department of Defense (DOD) completed an analysis of alternatives for the EA-6B that concluded the inventory would be insufficient to meet the DOD's needs beyond 2009. Since then, the services have embarked on separate acquisition efforts to develop airborne electronic attack assets. In 2003, the Navy started development of the EA-18G aircraft to replace the EA-6B. This report was done under the Comptroller General's authority and assesses if (1) DOD's 2002 conclusion that the EA-6B inventory would be insufficient beyond 2009 remains valid for assessing the Navy's future needs, and (2) the acquisition approach used to develop the EA-18G is knowledge-based and might mitigate future risks.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD determine how many EA-6Bs with upgraded electronic suites are needed to deal with the existing and near-term capability gap, and consider procuring them. If DOD does this, it should cancel plans to end the electronic suite production line after 2006. If DOD outfits more EA-6Bs with upgraded electronic suites, it should restructure its EA-18G low-rate initial production plans so that procurement occurs after the aircraft demonstrates it is fully functional. DOD partially concurred with our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-446.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Allen Li, 202-512-4841, lia@gao.gov.

ELECTRONIC WARFARE

Option of Upgrading Additional EA-6Bs Could Reduce Risk in Development of EA-18G

What GAO Found

EA-6B aircraft will be able to meet the Navy's suppression of enemy air defense needs through at least 2017 and the needs of the Marine Corps through 2025-- as long as sufficient numbers of the aircraft are outfitted with upgraded electronics suites. The conclusion that the EA-6B inventory would be insufficient past 2009 was not based on the Navy's requirement for 90 aircraft, but on an inventory requirement of 108 aircraft that would meet the needs of all services. The decision to move to a system of systems using multiple aircraft types means the Navy will no longer be required to support all of DOD's electronic attack requirements. However, insufficient quantities of upgraded jamming systems means that the majority of the EA-6B fleet is equipped with the older jamming system that is limited in its ability to conduct numerous critical functions. If the Navy is required to support all services, given the recent Air Force proposal to terminate its EB-52 standoff jammer program, additional EA-6Bs may require the Improved Capability (ICAP) III upgrade.

The risk of cost growth and schedule delays in the EA-18G program is increasing because the program is not following a knowledge-based approach to acquisition. None of its five critical technologies were fully mature as the system development phase began, and that is still the case today. Of particular concern is the ALQ-218 receiver, placed in the harsh wingtip environment on the EA-18G and not the more benign setting of the EA-6B's tail, for which it was developed. While the EA-18G's design appears stable, and almost all its design drawings are complete, that may change once the aircraft is flight-tested. Production of the EA-18G is also risky: One-third of the total buy will be procured as low-rate initial production aircraft based on limited demonstrated functionality.

EA-18G Mockup: F/A-18F Loaded with Jamming Pods



Source: Copyright 2001 the Boeing Company.