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COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S
REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

STATUS OF THE PROCUREMENT OF
THE F-14 WEAPON SYSTEM
AS OF JUNE 1, 1972
Department of the Navy B-168664

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D I G E S T



WHY THE REVIEW WAS MADE

Recent General Accounting Office (GAO) reports on the F-14 carrier-based, fighter aircraft program presented GAO's evaluations of the cost and status of the program and analyzed the contractual commitments between the Government and the contractors.

To provide the Congress with new information, GAO has inquired into certain aspects of the F-14 weapon system.

This report presents information on the program's status, important accomplishments, and various technical problems and issues which may be of considerable importance to the program.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The ultimate effectiveness of the F-14 depends on the successful development, production, and integration of the aircraft, the engines, the Phoenix missile, and the airborne weapon control system.

Each of these subsystems has passed critical tests or milestones, and a number of performance capabilities have been demonstrated. Although the F-14 has elements of a superior weapon system, a number of problems and areas of concern have been uncovered as development has proceeded. They include:

- Engine stalls during flight tests. (See pp. 14 and 24.)
- Reliability problems in the central air data computer as well as maintenance problems. (See p. 14.)
- A considerable degree of concurrency in production and development which reduces the amount of flight-test data available when production decisions must be made. (See p. 15.)
- Development problems with the advanced-technology engine, which caused the Navy to defer indefinitely its purchase of F-14B aircraft. (See pp. 15 and 22.)
- The airborne weapon control system in certain situations not meeting specifications for detecting and tracking multiple targets. (See pp. 7 and 32.)
- Transmitter problems in the airborne weapon control system. (See p. 33.)
- Phoenix missile committed to production before its capabilities have been fully demonstrated. (See p. 42.)

The Navy and the contractors believe it is not unusual to encounter such problems in developing a major weapon system. They are satisfied that progress is being made in resolving the technical difficulties.

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It is important to note that as of June 30, 1972, the major portion of the integrated F-14 weapon system testing was unfinished.

GAO believes, therefore, that it is difficult to assess at this time the significance of problems and areas of concern and their impact on the program. The contractors' success in resolving problems must await future testing, including Navy preliminary evaluation tests and Navy Board of Inspection and Survey trials. During the Navy Board trials, the weapon system is tested to establish a legal basis for specification compliance and a recommendation on its suitability for deployment is made.

These were to start in June 1972 but have been rescheduled for February 1973.

RECOMMENDATIONS OR SUGGESTIONS

This is an information report and contains no recommendations or suggestions.

AGENCY ACTIONS AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES

The Navy and the three principal contractors substantially agreed with the facts presented in this report. They stated that progress had been made subsequent to June 1, 1972, to correct some of the problems noted during GAO's review. (See app. VI.)

Because most major weapon system development programs undergo continual changes, there is almost always an interval after the conclusion of a GAO review in which significant events occur which GAO has no practical means of verifying in time for inclusion in its report.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE CONGRESS

On December 11, 1972, the Navy exercised its option on lot V for 48 additional F-14 aircraft. Grumman Aerospace Corporation restated its position that it could not produce these aircraft at the contract price without sustaining substantial losses and stated publicly that the option is invalid and unenforceable.