



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on June 12, 2026

Pentagon Blows Billions on Overdue, Obsolete Weapons

The Department of Defense (DOD) wastes billions of dollars developing weapons that are often delivered late — if they are delivered at all — a congressional subcommittee heard Tuesday.

“By the time these weapons are in the hands of our warfighters, many will be at least partially obsolete,” [said](#) subcommittee chairman Representative Tim Burchett (R-Tenn.). “Most will cost much more than planned and will deliver less warfighting capabilities than anticipated.”

Burchett heads the House Oversight Committee’s Delivering on Government Efficiency Subcommittee, which held a roundtable on the subject of Pentagon profligacy.

GAO vs. DOD

Among the agencies represented at the hearing was the Government Accountability Office (GAO), which, coincident with its testimony, released a brief-but-brutal [report](#) on the DOD’s weapon-systems acquisition process.

Drawing on previous GAO reports that included recommendations for improvement that, Tuesday’s report noted, “remain unimplemented by DOD,” the office found that Pentagon weapons development is sluggish, expensive, and uncertain. Unlike businesses, which have found ways to “fail fast” with minimal waste of time and money, then pivot to more-promising avenues of product development, the DOD “is still trying to develop 21st-century innovations with 20th-century oversight frameworks.” This approach causes DOD development to “‘fail slow’ in the sense of spending significant time and resources on an effort that ultimately does not make it into users’ hands.”

According to the GAO:

The reasons why DOD accepts flawed business cases are both structural and cultural in nature. Poor acquisition decisions are compounded by a budget planning process that requires DOD to secure long-range funding commitments before a program’s business case is fully understood. The current process incentivizes “starting fast” — awarding massive development contracts quickly, often in the name of preserving the industrial base, and obligating funds rapidly to ensure the budget is not “lost” to another program. *Success is all too often measured by activity (money spent), not by outcomes (capability delivered).* [Emphasis added.]

That, of course, is the case with most government programs. Politicians pour billions of other people’s dollars into efforts with seemingly good intentions (such as alleviating poverty), yet when those



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The Pentagon



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programs fail to achieve their stated objectives, the preferred “solution” is to spend even more on them, not to scrap them.

Case Study

The GAO continued:

Further, most program business cases are based on a slow, linear path that seeks to “manage” risk over a decade. Relying on paperwork and promises rather than actual product performance, they progress through early milestone reviews with incomplete knowledge and overly optimistic assumptions while keeping the appearance of being “on track.” As development progresses and these initial business cases predictably begin to erode, weapon system acquisition programs come under pressure to control growing costs and schedules. This has generally entailed reducing planned quantities, scaling back promised capabilities, and accepting delivery of deficient systems years late. In other words, DOD can pay the same or more to get less than planned, sometimes years later than expected.

Pentagon Capers

The report cited several examples of such boondoggles.

The Army, for instance, has spent an estimated \$1.8 billion since 2018 on “augmented-reality headgear for soldiers in close combat” with nothing approaching the original plans materializing. The program did produce 10,000 units, but they are so useless they’re going into storage. The Army isn’t giving up, though; it has a new program with a new name trying to develop the same technology.

The Navy is now on its third attempt to develop and deliver a handful of small-surface combat ships. On one go-around, the Navy “exercised contract options valued at over \$3.4 billion to construct six ships before completing the frigate’s basic and functional design — an approach counter to shipbuilding leading practices.”

And there’s the infamous money pit known as the F-35 fighter jet, the first development phase of which took 10 years and \$250 billion more than originally planned. The Pentagon tried to speed things up by paying incentives to contractors, but “the structure of on-time delivery incentives allowed the contractor to deliver aircraft up to 60 days late and still earn some of the fee.” The F-35 program is ultimately slated to cost taxpayers [more than \\$2 trillion](#), making it the most expensive weapons program in U.S. history.

Up in Arms

Despite the fact that DOD contracts are often awarded partially with the aim of helping arms makers, they can actually harm them, Julia Gledhill, a research analyst with the National Security Reform Program at the Stimson Center, a Washington-based think tank, told the [Daily Caller](#).

“Overly ambitious acquisition plans set both the military and the arms industry up for failure,” she explained. “The military services develop acquisition plans with little regard for fiscal, industrial and workforce limitations. Military contractors then receive awards for programs they cannot deliver within budget or on schedule, in some cases, for decades.”

On top of that, “We’ve had some egregious examples of price gouging over the last several years,” said



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Gledhill.

The real problem, though, is that government does not — and cannot — operate like a business. As much as the GAO would like the DOD to adopt private-sector practices such as iterative development, the Pentagon has absolutely no incentive to do so. A business has to produce products and services for which customers will willingly pay. Government simply forces people to pay, then doles out the cash with little regard for whether the money is being spent wisely or efficiently. Governments, after all, rarely go out of business.



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