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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

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STATEMENT OF

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PROCUREMENT, LOGISTICS, AND READINESS DIVISION

before the

Investigations Subcommittee

Committee on Armed Services

House of Representatives

on

Department of Defense

DoD Procurement Plan for

A New Semi-Automatic 9mm Pistol

as the

Standard Military Sidearm

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee on behalf of the General Accounting Office to discuss the status of our work concerning the Joint Services Small Arms Program. The primary focus of our current work is to determine whether appropriate consideration was being given to other, possibly more cost-effective, alternatives to replacing the .45 and .38 caliber pistols with a new 9 millimeter (mm) semi-automatic.

In March 1980 we reported (LCD-80-41) on the need for the Army to improve its management and inventory control of small arms. In that report we found that the Army had not established nor maintained accurate inventory information needed to effectively manage its M2 machine gun program. As a result the Army could not determine whether decisions on procurement, distribution, or disposal of the M2s were appropriate. For example, after we identified that M2s were available in the Army as well as in the Navy and Air Force inventories, of which the Army was unaware, the Army cancelled a planned $10.2 million purchase of M2s. Instead of purchasing new weapons, available M2s were redistributed among the services. The available M2s had not been considered because of incorrect inventories, invalid status and condition, and improper reporting by the services of weapons they no longer need for immediate requirements.

Our current work deals with the Department of Defense's decision to purchase a new 9 millimeter semi-automatic pistol as the standard personal defense weapon. The Defense decision to standardize on one caliber could aid in stopping the proliferation of different makes, models, and types of handguns in the U.S. military inventories. The proliferation causes many problems with regard to stocking spare parts, maintenance of specification for each weapon, training of handgun repair personnel, inventory control, and proliferation of ammunition used in weapons.

The issue of handgun proliferation was studied in a Surveys and Investigation Staff report to the Committee on Appropriations in March 1978. In October 1980, we also reported (LCD-81-5) on the disparate management of small arms by Federal civilian law enforcement agencies.

In view of past problems in the small arms weapons management field, we decided to look into the Department of Defense's decision to standardize on the 9mm semi-automatic pistol. This decision is significant because all pistols, and perhaps other small arms (submachine guns), will ultimately be 9mm caliber. While 9mm pistols are widely used by our NATO allies they are not now the predominant sidearm used by the U.S.

military. The vast majority of the current U.S. military pistols are .45 or .38 caliber.

I must emphasize that our current work is only in the preliminary stages and we have not reached any conclusion on the appropriateness of the decision to purchase new 9mm semi-automatic pistols. Our current work indicates that the Army has not adequately considered the alternative of modifying existing Colt Model 1911, .45 caliber semi-automatic pistols to use 9mm ammunition. The Army is the single manager for conventional ammunition and is the lead service for orchestrating this major effort.

We have explored the possibility of converting the existing .45 caliber pistols to a 9mm pistol and have found that this is feasible. Whether it is cost-effective and whether it can meet all the services specified needs, requires considerably more work. The estimated number of .45 caliber pistols now in inventory is about 400,000. The estimates for the procurement of new 9mm pistols is also about 400,000.

As a first step in exploring this alternative, we asked the Weapons Maintenance Section at Lackland Air Force Base to modify a .45 caliber pistol and make a reliability test of that

modified pistol by firing 2,000 rounds. The testing has been completed and a written report should be available soon. The test report, we were told, will show that the modified pistol operated satisfactorily. (See attached photo, p. 8.)

With 9mm substitution parts on hand, an Air Force gun smith needed about 8 to 10 minutes to substitute the 9mm parts for the .45 caliber parts. The result of this substitution was a 9mm semi-automatic pistol. (See attached photo, p. 9.)

Our preliminary estimates of the potential cost of converting the .45s to a 9mm is about half the cost of purchasing a new 9mm pistol. While this cost information is very tentative, we believe it does suggest that the alternative should be fully explored before committing significant resources to the purchase of a new 9mm pistol. The potential program cost for the new handgun could total $100 million, exclusive of data rights, support, silencer and ammunition requirements.

Our preliminary information indicates that the Army rejected the alternative of modifying .45 caliber pistols because the specification for the new pistol could not be met. As we understand it, the users require features which are not

now available on the .45. For example, the new 9mm pistol specification requires

--a double action instead of single action,

--a minimum magazine capacity of 10 rounds, one more than the 9 rounds in a modified .45 pistol, and

--a left as well as right-hand operation instead of right-hand operation.

The requirement also specifies that an essential characteristic of the pistol must be a silencing capability without modification. We have not had an opportunity to explore the users' requirements other than through a cursory review of the data supporting standardization on a 9mm pistol.

Our preliminary information indicates that the .45 caliber pistols can be modified to 9mm at about one half of the cost of buying new 9mm pistols. User specifications now preclude consideration of this alternative and are driving the decision to purchase new 9mm pistols. In our view, before significant resources are committed to this course of action the following

questions should be considered and satisfactorily answered by the Department of Defense:

Can a .45 caliber pistol, modified to 9mm, serve as a satisfactory personal defense weapon?

Does the specific operational requirement result in overly restrictive, costly or unnecessary specifications for a 9mm pistol?

--i.e. double action
right-hand/left-hand operation
silencer adaptable

How will the existing inventories of military sidearms be disposed of?

Is the purchase of new 9mm pistols the most cost-effective means of satisfying the need for a personal defense weapon?

If standardization to NATO 9mm ammunition is not an overriding consideration, are there other alternatives toward correcting the perceived deficiencies in existing weapons?

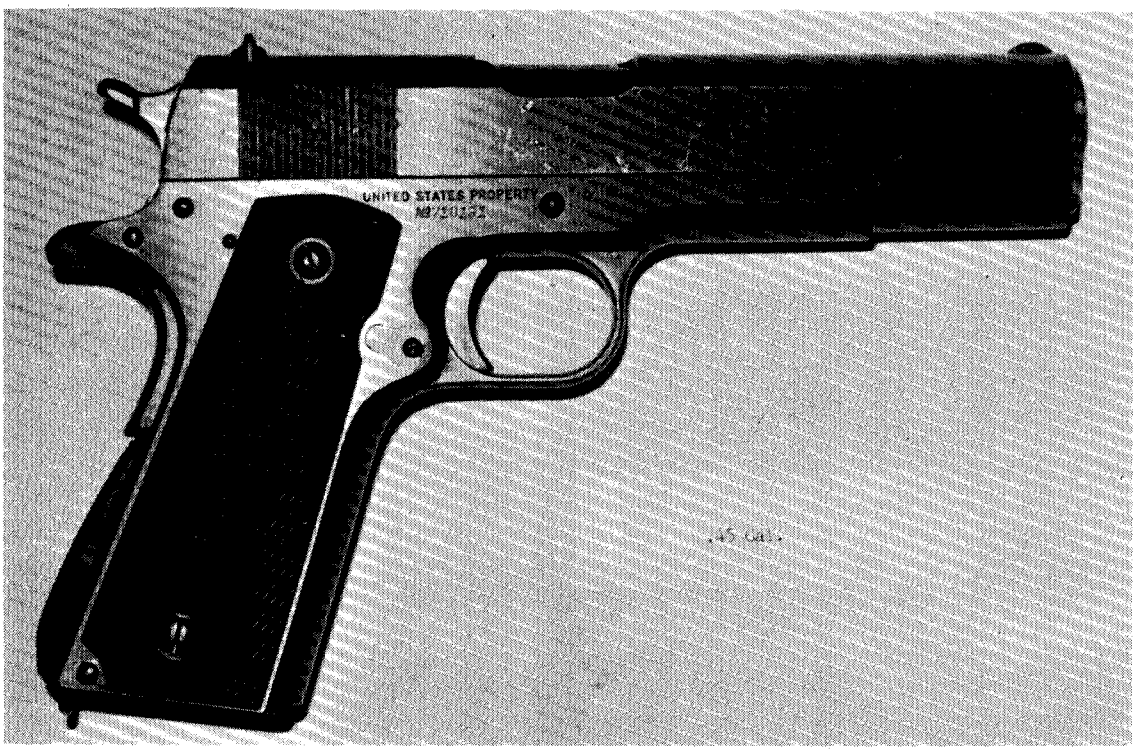
Why has the Army indicated a willingness to accept a "High Risk Schedule" for procurement which mandates a production contract to be awarded by January 1982?

Will an adequate production base and technical data package be acquired?

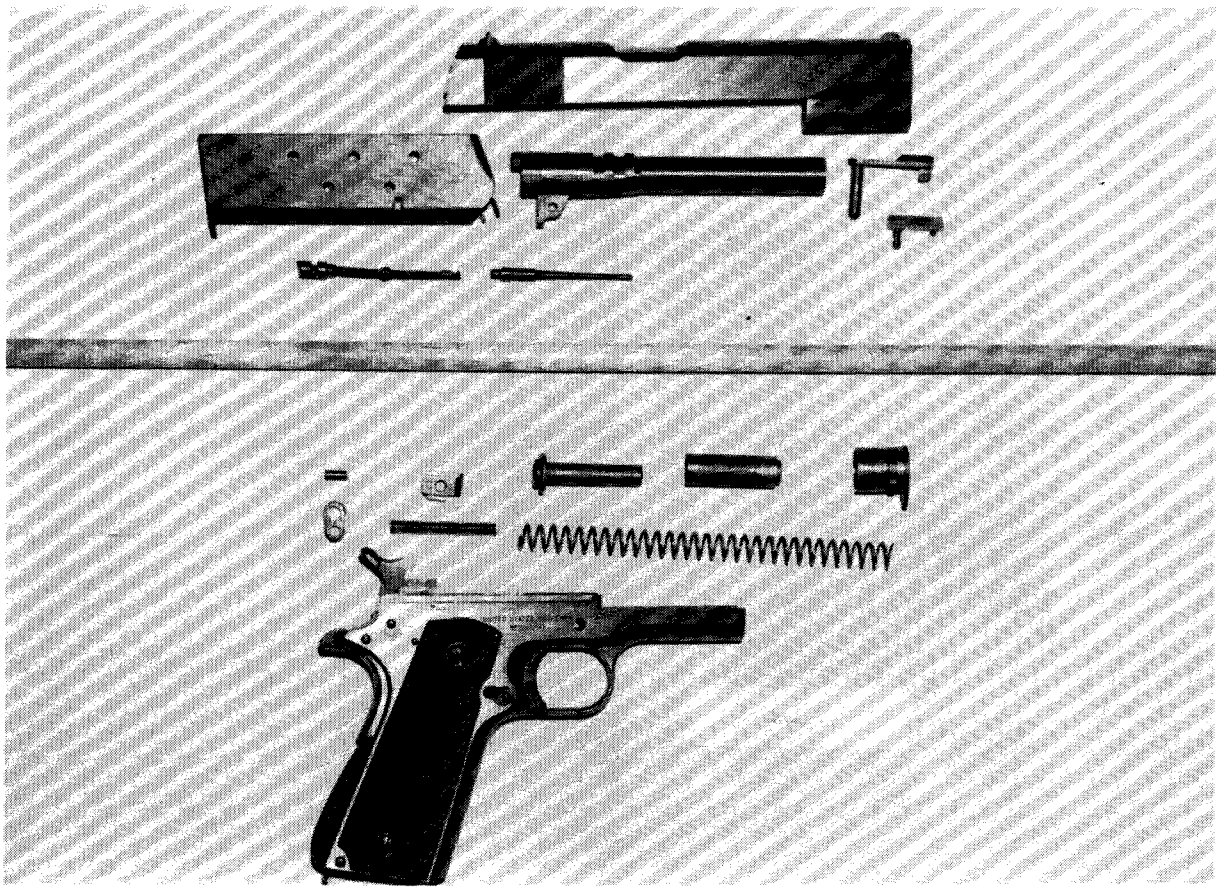
What other weapons (sidearms or handguns) will be in the 9mm family of weapons?

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. We are prepared to respond to your questions.

ATTACHMENT 1

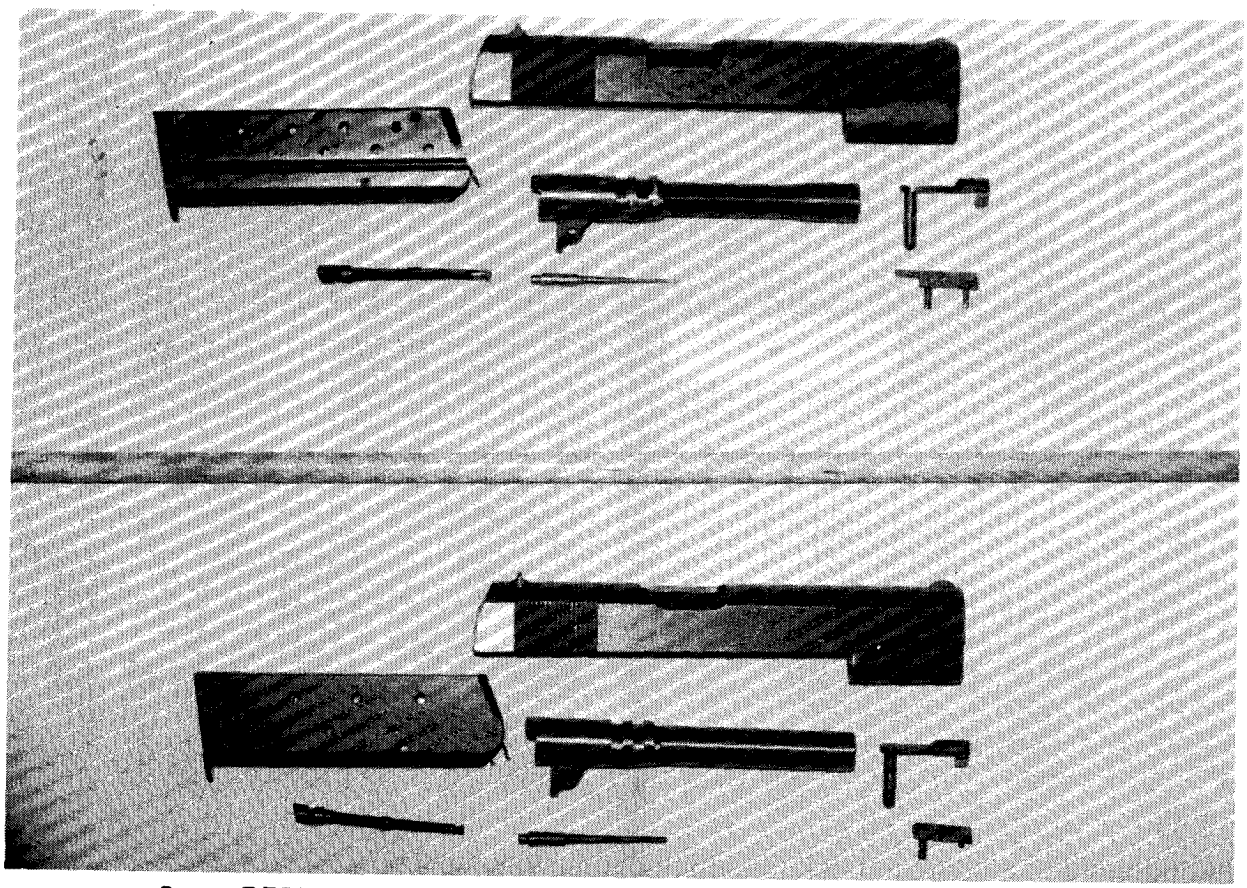


.45 CALIBER PISTOL DRAWN FROM INVENTORY FOR GAO TEST



.45 CALIBER PISTOL PARTS TO BE REPLACED (ABOVE THE BAR)

ATTACHMENT 1



9mm. REPLACEMENT PARTS (ABOVE THE BAR) COMPARED WITH
45A PARTS REPLACED

MODIFIED 9mm. PISTOL TESTED FOR GAO