



F-35 Lightning II Program

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WASHINGTON, March 20, 2012 - The F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter program—the centerpiece of future tactical aviation and a key to implementing new military strategic guidance — made strong progress in its development last year, a defense official said today.

Frank Kendall, acting undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, told the House Armed Services Committee that the fighter aircraft is essential to the Defense Department, and that it made “strong progress” in 2011.

“Last fall, the department engaged in a strategy and budget review, where everything – and I do mean everything – was on the table,” Kendall said. “After a careful look at the joint strike fighter program, the department determined that we do need the JSF [and] that we need all three variants of the fighter, and that we need the planned inventory of 2,443 jets.”

That said, Kendall added, “you must recognize there is still a long way to go for JSF.” The F-35 flight test program is only about 20 percent complete and “many of the more challenging elements of flight test are still ahead of us,” he said.

Kendall noted the F-35 development has reached a crucial point in the conversion from being conceptualized to actual production.

“The JSF program is undergoing the critical transition from development to production,” he said. “Historically, this is always a difficult phase for any program, but particularly so for a high-performance aircraft.”

That transition has been even more difficult for the F-35, Kendall said, because the program began production very early, well before flight testing had begun.

That decision for early production resulted in an unprecedented level of concurrency, which drove the need for significant changes in the program, he said. “With this year’s budget, I believe we are now set on a course for program stability,” he added.

Navy Vice Adm. David Venlet, program manager for the F-35, also said the program now is on track. “The F-35 has schedule and budget realism now going forward,” he said. “It is transparent in the discovery and correction of issues arising in test that are typical in all fighter aircraft development.”

Venlet told the Congress members he believes the F-35 “is a critical presence in the combined force battle space. It makes many other systems and capabilities and effects better because of the presence of the F-35’s sensors.”

Venlet called the F-35 a “critical presence” to many nations, as well as being a bond of joint strength across all U.S. military services.

“It is a bond of capability and a bond economically across many nations that raises the level of technology benefit in our militaries and our industries,” he said.

Venlet called the F-35 “the best possible growth platform to incorporate future advances in weapons, sensors and networks.”

The F-35 also is an assurance to service members that “they will succeed in every mission and return home safely to their loved ones.”