



F-35 Lightning II Program

Public Affairs Release – 2012 05 08

**SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES, UNITED STATES SENATE
OPENING REMARKS, VICE ADMIRAL DAVID J. VENLET, US NAVY**

Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Brown, and distinguished Members of the Committee.

Thank you for inviting me to discuss the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

My observations and assessments over the past year give me reason to believe the basic aircraft and engine designs are sound and will deliver. Schedule and resource adjustments that have been made to the remaining development program underpin a realistic plan to deliver the required capability. While there is still risk in the program, it is risk balanced rather than low risk, I have confidence in the resilience of the plan to absorb expected further learning and discovery, and stay on track.

There has been very good engine and airframe contractor responsiveness and progress in many areas over the last year. STOVL flight test exceeded plans and expectations and completed a highly successful initial sea trial aboard USS WASP. In addition to the impressive stability, control and performance of the STOVL in slow flight and vertical landing, the F-35 has flown to its maximum speed and hardest turn limits. Carrier test pilots are highly complementary of the carrier version handling characteristics flying precise carrier approaches at Patuxent River, MD. It is a testimony to the very effective and impressive marriage of engine and airframe.

Software development, coupled with flight test execution, will remain the major focus of program execution in the coming year and through the completion of SDD. I have observed performance by industry on software that gives me concern about delivering full capability within the current schedule - without improvement in performance. I will continue to closely examine progress and seek the changes needed to gain required performance. I have a solid program baseline. It ensures the program has resources, tools, and processes in place to make proactive, disciplined decisions regarding the development and delivery of incremental capabilities to the F-35 fleet. However, industry must understand that this new schedule with all of the margin and realism will not execute itself. A rededication to the characteristics of systems engineering fundamentals is crucial and I continue to speak bluntly to industry on this issue.

Concurrency is a transient issue that the program is dealing with right now, but which will lessen over time. I recognize the Department of Defense would prefer to not be in this highly concurrent program situation, it is now my responsibility to navigate through this and deliver the most capable aircraft at the best price.

I believe the procurement strategy for LRIP 6 and 7 will allow the Department of Defense to control production quantity based on the performance of the development program. It is important that Lockheed Martin performs dependably, and sustains confidence that the F-35 is a stable and capable platform.

As in any complex development program there are challenges, but I believe the enhanced capability of the JSF will provide the backbone of the US combat air superiority for years to come. The program's management over the past year has put in place the right fundamentals and realistic plans using sound systems engineering processes, and I am monitoring and tracking performance using detailed metrics.

Technical and cost issues certainly exist – the helmet system has three critical characteristics that need to demonstrate fixes, the carrier hook system, EW antennae quality, buffet loads in flight - all are being worked. There are leading program issues that occupy my focus for 2012, the “critical and significant few” that – if successfully advanced – will bring beneficial tail wind for the entire program and genuine value for the Department and our partner nations.

These leading issues are:

1. Software development performance - and its dependable delivery of capability
2. Concurrency change incorporation improvement - and delivery of affordable full life jets
3. Production Quality - and its ultimate result on affordable price for the US and our allies
4. Continued sustainment estimate cost reduction

All of these have a common fundamental that will advance the external result and performance, and keep reality clearly in view. Systems based analysis and corrective action, with specific eye on impacts to early fleet training operations, will be required in steady and committed execution throughout the industry team – primes and suppliers.

Rigorous management control by the Joint Program Office, supported by the service Systems Commands, will be applied with a development dial on production, and focus on affordable delivered capability, our only meaningful external result.

I look forward to your questions.

