



F-35 Lightning II Program

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WASHINGTON, March 25, 2015 – A recent account of F-35 Lightning II aircraft program costs shows decreases, the Air Force's F-35 program executive officer told reporters in a media roundtable yesterday.

Air Force Lt. Gen. Christopher C. Bogdan, citing this year's selected acquisition report on the aircraft, called the roundtable to clarify cost and performance facts in the latest report, he said. He also acknowledged the program has been over budget and is six years late.

"In 2001, we thought we'd be done a long time before now," Bogdan said. But that was before various issues arose, ranging from a security breach to a redesign of one of the F-35 models that was 3,000 pounds over its weight standard, he noted.

Changes in 2010

After the 2010 rebaseline took effect, the program took a turn for the better. "We have not changed a major milestone in this program. Not one," the general said.

Bogdan emphasized to reporters the importance of looking at the F-35 program where it is today and not where it's been. Much of the cost savings in this year's report stem from research, development, test and evaluation, along with procurement and operating and support elements, he said.

As an example, Bogdan mentioned that RDT&E has not seen cost increases in four years.

"The three predominant things that drive [operations and support] costs are manpower, fuel and inflation ... [which] can mask any true cost reduction and that's exactly what happened this year," he said, adding that the report reflected readjusted inflation rates.

Procurement costs also were down \$3 billion from last year, partly because of better-negotiated costs, he said.

Balancing Technical Challenges, Service Needs

"Every program has technical challenges," Bogdan said. "You find things you don't expect and you have to fix [and test] them." He said the software that handles the mechanics of the aircraft produced challenges for the F-35, especially for mission systems.

He said he projects the final software to be four to six months behind schedule, "If we don't do anything differently."

When the program was rebaselined, he said, it wasn't known the services -- Marine Corps, Air Force and Navy -- would set initial operational capability dates. But accommodations were made to get the aircraft to the services on time, Bogdan said.

"We have 109 airplanes out there now, and 28,500 hours of flying time," he said.

Overall, the major milestones, aircraft delivery and other commitments did not fundamentally change, Bogdan said, and the F-35's safety is good. "I wouldn't put anything in the field I myself wouldn't fly," he noted.