

## F-35 Production to Ramp Up

Written by Nick Sanders  
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Recent news stories breathlessly announce that F-35 production is set to ramp up. That's nice.

We are not sure what that means.

For example, according to [this story](#) at Defense One, "F-35 production is slated to hit full steam in 2019, and Lockheed Martin is reshaping its final assembly line to get ready. ... By 2020, one year after the Fort Worth plant hits its full 17-jet-per-month stride, there will be more than 600 F-35s, including nearly 180 sent to U.S. allies." 2019. Last time we checked, that was three years away.

But maybe it's time to celebrate. Maybe the well-publicized program problems are now behind Lockheed Martin and its many customers. That would be nice.

Yet it's hard not to be cynical about claims the program's problems are in the past and that the future looks bright. We've written about the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter before, and it's rarely been good news we've been writing about.

In [this article](#) we noted that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the F-35 program "epitomized" the loss in acquisition buying power, despite the focused efforts of the top leaders at DOD and the "price fighters" of the DOD "should-cost" team.

Going way back to 2009, one of our [earliest articles](#) probed Lockheed Martin's claims that it would ramp up production to 20 aircraft per month, or 230/240 per year (depending on the source).

Less than a year later ( [April 2010](#) ) we reported testimony in Senate hearings that claimed that the JSF Program had "turned the corner" and that both cost and schedule were locked into place. Our article included the following quote (original source DODBuzz.com) –

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‘We’ve turned the corner on production line delays,’ said Air Force Lt. Gen. Mark Shackelford, the service’s top buyer, who expects to take delivery of the first test aircraft this year. The jump in the JSF’s price tag and the delays were due primarily to small design changes, which while minor, rippled through the production line causing excessive ‘churn and stress.’ That production line is now well on the way to ‘maturing,’ he said. He declared the F-35 airframe itself as solid; although the plane’s software package has proven a bit more problematic.

That testimony was proffered in 2010.

So now, in 2016, when we hear that production will ramp up to 17 aircraft per month (not 20) and Plant 4 will reach that capacity by 2019 (not 2016), please pardon us if we seem a little skeptical.