

Second in a series of year-end updates to previously reported stories-

The JSF Program

We first [wrote](#) about the F-35 "Lightning II" Joint Strike Fighter in August 2009, asking whether Lockheed Martin was ready to ramp up production to the record-setting pace of 20 aircraft per month. It turned out to be our single most popular article.

(For the record, we expressed some doubt, stating, "the JSF program team has set for itself an incredibly ambitious goal of producing a finished aircraft every single working day. It's set the goal despite early design and supply chain problems, and despite almost universal history among other aircraft programs that says it can't be done.")

Two months later, in November 2009, we [asked](#) how much the JSF was going to cost, reporting rumors that the Pentagon's Joint Estimate Team (JET) was telling Defense Department leaders that the program would need anywhere from \$7 to \$15 billion more funding than originally baselined, and would require anywhere from 6 months to 2 years of additional schedule. At least one source predicted a dire breach of the Nunn-McCurdy Act thresholds.

In that article, we also noted a very pessimistic report from the Center for Defense Information, in which the authors asserted that the JET report addressed only known problems, and predicted that new problems (as well as new cost and schedule impacts) were "sure to emerge."

On December 16, 2009, InsideDefense.com reported that "Key lawmakers today expressed strong reservations about the state of the Joint Strike Fighter program following a closed-door briefing on the findings of a recent independent assessment of the effort that suggested billions of additional dollars and more time is required to develop the aircraft."

According to the InsideDefense.com article, "A draft fiscal year 2011 budget directive issued last week by the Office of the Secretary of Defense directed the military services to fund the JSF program to the JET estimate, a move that Pentagon sources say will result in the fighter program's immediate breach of 'critical' Nunn-McCurdy cost thresholds."

InsideDefense.com reports that "the draft resource management decision ... would extend JSF development by at least a year, reduce production by approximately 100 aircraft between FY-11 and FY-15 and require the addition of billions of dollars to the effort through 2015."

Meanwhile, the Fort-Worth Star Telegram [published](#) an article on the same date (12/19/2009) wonders if the F-35 program is entering the same "death spiral" that beset the F-111 and F-22 programs, noting-

First, unrealistic technical requirements, cost estimates and schedules lead to delays and rising costs. Then, far fewer planes are bought than originally planned. That means the cost of each one rises, resulting in even fewer planes being bought, which produces even higher costs per copy, etc. ... One internal study, by the Joint Estimate Team, has predicted it will take an additional 30 months, until 2016, and an additional \$16.5 billion to complete development work, test and bring the Lockheed production line up to speed, goals that were to be met in 2013-14. If that were to occur, the F-35 would trigger congressionally imposed budget reviews that would lead to ever more scrutiny.

Lockheed Martin had this to say about the doomsayers' predictions-

The F-35 is meeting or exceeding every single one of its performance requirements. That performance is being reinforced in both flight testing and laboratory testing. There are no technical showstoppers on the F-35 program.

Costs across the program are declining at significant rates. All F-35 production aircraft under contract to date cost less than Defense Department forecasts. Production efficiency continues to improve dramatically.

The government's procurement-cost forecast for the life of the F-35 program has remained constant for the last two years.

While we acknowledge schedule and cost pressures in the development phase of the program and are working directly with the Office of the Secretary of Defense to resolve them, program trends are very positive overall, and have us on path to meet each of the services' F-35 Initial Operational Capability Requirements beginning in 2012.

We are on track to field the F-35's tremendous capabilities to our war fighters and recapitalize our nation's aging fighter fleet. The program enjoys solid funding support from the Office of Secretary of Defense and Congress. The president's budget recommendations reflect DoD's commitment to international partnerships and common defense solutions.

The aircraft designs are largely complete. All three F-35 variants have been built and two types flown. Early test results are very encouraging and we are preparing to ramp up flight test and production.

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Written by Administrator

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Just for the record, we note that the Lockheed Martin response focuses on technical issues while glossing over at-completion estimates. We wonder what the program internal EACs look like, and whether they have been rigorously evaluated by independent reviewers such as Lockheed Martin's Internal Audit staff?