United Kingdom Announces F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Purchase

British Defense Secretary John Hutton announced on Wednesday that the United Kingdom will purchase three Lockheed Martin F-35B Lightning II operational test aircraft, signaling the U.K.'s commitment to the upcoming Operational Test and Evaluation phase of the Joint Strike Fighter program. Hutton made the announcement during a visit to Washington, D.C.

The F-35B is the first aircraft to combine stealth with short takeoff/ vertical landing (STOVL) capability and supersonic speed. It will be the next-generation fighter for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, and will be flown from the two new Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers. The U.K. plans to bring 138 F-35s to the fleet.

"From the JSF program's very beginnings, the United Kingdom has been deeply involved in the funding, research, engineering and development of the F-35 Lightning II, and has made enormous contributions to its success," said Tom Burbage, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and F-35 Program Integration general manager. "This purchase reflects the key partnership the U.K. and U.S. will share in joint operational testing, starting early in the next decade. We look forward to the U.K.'s continued central role in making a great aircraft even better."

The U.K. is investing $2 billion in the F-35's development - the largest contribution among the program's eight partner nations. More than 100 British companies are involved in the program, including BAE Systems, which produces the aircraft's aft fuselage and tails; Rolls-Royce developer and manufacturer of the shaft-driven lift fan and other propulsion components for the F-35B STOVL variant; and Martin Baker, maker of the jet's ejection seats.

The F-35 is a supersonic, multi-role, 5th generation stealth fighter. Three variants derived from a common design, developed together and using the same sustainment infrastructure worldwide will replace at least 13 types of aircraft for 11 nations initially, making the Lightning II the most cost-effective fighter program in history.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin is a global security company that employs about 146,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2008 sales of $42.7 billion.

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