United Kingdom Announces Approval Of Third F-35B Joint Strike Fighter Purchase

The Joint Combat Aircraft (JCA) program has announced that the United Kingdom has received financial approval to purchase its third Lockheed Martin F-35B Lightning II operational test aircraft, reinforcing the U.K.'s continued commitment to the Joint Strike Fighter program's upcoming Operational Test and Evaluation (OT&E).

"The U.K. this week received financial approval to go ahead and purchase the third U.K. STOVL OT&E aircraft that is planned within LRIP 4. Given the extremely tight financial climate in the U.K. government and the consequent impact across public spending, especially defence, this is a significant achievement," said Air Commodore Graham Farnell, the U.K.'s Joint Combat Aircraft Team head. "I believe it reflects well upon the JSF program and it is a measure of the confidence that the U.K. has in both the F-35 Lightning II and the program to deliver this capability."

This approval follows recent F-35 down-select or procurement commitments by Australia, Norway, the Netherlands, Italy and the United States. The strength of the F-35 business case has enabled program suppliers to obtain the capital financing needed to recapitalize the industrial base and produce the F-35 in high quantities over the next 30 years.

"The United Kingdom's participation in F-35 Operational Test and Evaluation, and the associated commitment to purchase F-35s in early production lots, help ensure production stability as we move from the current assembly rate of one aircraft per month to our goal of one per day," said Matt Maxwell, Lockheed Martin director for F-35 Low Rate Initial Production.

The U.K. has invested $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 aircraft in at least 13 services for nine 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 140,000 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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