

Overview: The F-35 Is Unaffordable, And There Are Alternatives

At least \$8 billion of the Pentagon's budget for fiscal year 2015 is devoted to a single aircraft program: the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. Already on track to be the most expensive weapon system in history, the F-35 is becoming a black hole in the Pentagon budget. In the face of continuing budget cuts, it is worth considering more conservative investments the military could be making.

By the dollars:

- **\$39.1 billion** - amount spent on RDT&E that was never in the Pentagon's original program costs for the F-35. In large part, that money went to contractors for additional research and several rounds of redevelopment when the contractors failed to meet the F-35 goals set by the Pentagon. It doesn't appear that the Pentagon ever penalized the contractors for those failures.
- **\$27 billion** - how much the Department of the Navy will spend between now and fiscal year (FY) 2019 on the F-35, roughly the same as the cost to complete the purchase of the entire remaining identified requirements for the V-22 and the P-8.
- **\$6.3 billion** - amount being spent on FY15 procurement for a single aircraft program. Of the total Pentagon FY15 procurement request of \$90.6 billion, this accounts for just under seven percent of the entire Pentagon unclassified procurement request.
- **\$4.2 billion** - cost of all currently planned modernization for the F-22, the F-15 and the F-16 over many years. This is well within the more than \$4.6 billion the Air Force is asking Congress to devote to procurement and research and development of the F-35 in just the coming fiscal year.
- **\$564 million** - Total cost for 8 Super Hornets. The Department of the Navy FY15 request is for 2 F-35Cs for the Navy and 6 F-35Bs for the Marines. The Department could save a lot of money by purchasing Super Hornets rather than either variant of the F-35.

By the percentages:

- **110%** - How much of its future tactical aircraft modernization plan the Air Force could purchase with just this year's F-35A procurement line.
- **100%** - How much of the Air Force's FY15 Combat Aircraft request is devoted to the F-35A.
- **80%** - A new F-16 is at least 80% cheaper than the Air Force's stated list price for an F-35A and the F-15 won't require additional infrastructure training.



- **60%** - A new F-15E is roughly 60% of the stated list price for an F-35A.
- **23%** - How much of the Department of the Navy's Combat Aircraft request is devoted to the F-35B and F-35C.

By the airframes:

- 26 – How many F-35As are requested for the Air Force.
- 6 – How many F-35Bs are requested for the Marine Corps.
- 2 – How many F-35Cs are requested for the Navy.

The United States enjoys by far the greatest air superiority in the world. The wide range of aircraft employed by the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marines performs at least nine different missions: (1)air-to-surface, (2)air-to-air, (3)Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), (4)Command and Control, (5)Electronic Attack, (6)Tanking, (7)Airlift, (8)Combat Search and Rescue and (9)Global Strike. The F-35 is proposed to fulfill all of those except tanking, airlift, combat search and rescue and some aspects of global strike.

This costly aircraft puts too many of the air mission eggs in one expensive basket, a jack of all trades fighter that is a platinum plated spork. Policymakers should pause and consider what is the most cost-effective means of retaining America's overwhelming air superiority.



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