

orlandosentinel.com/business/os-defense-study-targets-f35-20100615,0,2037379.story

OrlandoSentinel.com

Task force puts more heat on Lockheed's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter

By Richard Burnett, Orlando Sentinel

12:26 PM EDT, June 15, 2010

Though the Pentagon recently gave it a new vote of confidence, Lockheed Martin Corp.'s F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program is under fire once again for its high



costs, according to a new congressional task force report.

The Sustainable Defense Task Force placed its crosshairs on the F-35 and several other big-ticket defense programs in identifying nearly \$1 trillion in budget cuts the Pentagon could make to save money over the next decade.

In targeting the F-35, the group compared its escalating costs to the F-22 Raptor combat jet, which was cancelled last year after repeated cost overruns.

"The development of the F-35 is rapidly going the way of the F-22 – late, over cost and less capable than promised," the task force said. "However, even if the aircraft performed according to specifications, it would not be needed in order for us to defeat current and emerging challenges."

Earlier this year, the F-35's cost overruns – which were nearly 60 percent over the original estimate per aircraft – triggered a critical congressional review which could have led to its termination.

In a detailed response, the Pentagon fended off cancellation of the Joint Strike Fighter by affirming it as "essential to national security," explaining the basis of the cost-overruns and restructuring the program to mitigate the costs.

Defense officials insisted that there is no less-expensive option in the U.S. military arsenal that will do what the F-35 will be able to do in terms of air superiority.

"There are no alternatives to the program which will provide acceptable capability to meet the joint military requirement at less cost," Assistant Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter said in a June 1 letter to the House Armed Force Committee.

Lockheed's aeronautics company, based in Fort Worth, Texas, is the prime contractor on the F-35.

Lockheed's Orlando high-tech training and weapons-targeting operations are providing key systems to the aircraft. Melbourne-based Harris Corp. is also a key subcontractor, building the F-35 cockpit communications system.

Hundreds of millions of dollars and hundreds of jobs in Central Florida are tied to the F-35 program.

The Sustainable Defense Task Force also identified potential cuts in the U.S. Marines' Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle, built by General Dynamics Corp., and the MV-22 Osprey aircraft, built by Bell Helicopter.

The task force was comprised of a diverse group of experts from the National Security Network, Taxpayers for Common Sense, Council for a Livable World, Center for Defense Information and the CATO Institute.

It was formed by a bi-partisan congressional group, including Representatives Barney Frank (D-MA), Ron Paul (R-TX), Walter Jones (R-NC), and Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR).

The legislators insisted they are committed to a strong national defense, but argued that a review of military spending must be included in reducing the deficit.

"Deficit reduction must be achieved, and that this can only happen when all federal spending is closely scrutinized to ensure that the taxpayers are getting their money's worth," the group said in a written statement.

Richard Burnett can be reached at rburnett@orlandosentinel.com or 407-420-5256.

Copyright © 2010, [Orlando Sentinel](#)