

Lockheed's **F-35** fighter jet flying into budget wars

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[Lockheed Martin Corp.'s](#) ▼ **F-35** Joint Strike Fighter hasn't flown a single mission yet, but it is already a veteran of the defense-budget wars.

The aircraft's escalating costs have put the next-generation combat jet on the frontline of congressional battles over ongoing military spending on weapons systems of the future.

The latest skirmish is over a new, alternative engine for the **F-35** -- itself a multibillion-dollar program that Congress recently approved but which is opposed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates. The conflict centers on whether the engine is too risky and expensive for the purported advantages it offers. President Barack Obama has said he will veto any defense budget that includes it.

But the **F-35** may face budget battles even bigger than the one over the engine.

Although the Pentagon recently gave the jet a new vote of confidence, the program is under fire once again for its high costs, according to a new congressional task-force report.

\$1 trillion in cuts?

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

In targeting the **F-35**, the group compared its escalating costs to those of the F-22 Raptor combat jet, which was canceled last year.

"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."

Lockheed's aeronautics company, based in Fort Worth, Texas, is the prime contractor for the **F-35**. But Lockheed's Orlando high-tech training unit and weapons-targeting operations are providing key systems for the aircraft. And Melbourne-based [Harris Corp.](#) ▼ is a key subcontractor, building the **F-35**'s cockpit-communications system.

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

The task force consists of a diverse group of experts drawn 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 bipartisan congressional group that included Reps. Barney Frank, D-Mass.; Ron Paul, R-Texas; Walter Jones, R-NC; and Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore.

The lawmakers said they are committed to maintaining a strong U.S. defense, but they also said that a review of the nation's military spending must be part of any serious discussion about reducing the annual budget deficit.

They stressed that, although the four congressional members represent a wide range of political views on national issues, they are united in their belief that "consequential 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."

Harris radio deal

Melbourne-based [Harris Corp.](#) ▼ said last week it has booked a \$6 million order to build advanced military-radio equipment for an unidentified African nation.

Harris's New York-based RF Communications Division will supply Falcon III multiband networking radios and other communications equipment to the African country, which the company said does not want its name disclosed to the public or news media.

It is Harris' latest foreign-military sale on the African continent and the latest in a series of deals for the Falcon radio systems, which are widely used by the U.S. military in both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

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