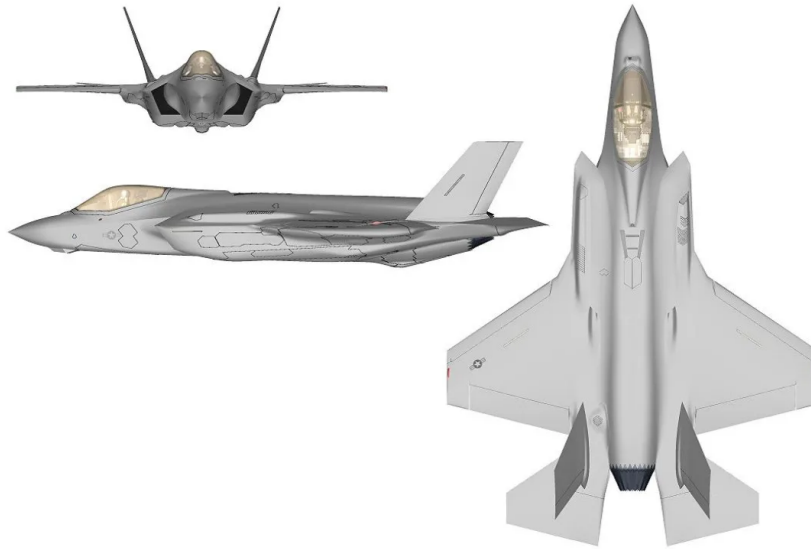




850 F-35s over ten years: The Pentagon's plan to rearm America's skies

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The U.S. Department of Defense and Lockheed Martin have signed a 10-year framework agreement that guarantees the delivery of at least 850 F-35 Lightning II fighters to the U.S. armed forces, pending congressional approval and associated funding.

The agreement, announced Thursday, includes an initial supply of spare parts, as well as 10 years of modification kits and maintenance and sustainment services. The deal also covers orders for foreign customers, maintaining production at a rate of 156 aircraft per year, according to Lockheed.

In exchange for the U.S. government's 10-year commitment, Lockheed has pledged to self-fund initiatives supporting the F-35 program worth at least \$7 billion.

«With the greater certainty resulting from the U.S. government's transformative approach to F-35 production and sustainment, we can make the upfront investments needed to

expand production capacity, improve efficiency, and build a more resilient supply chain», said Lockheed CEO Jim Taiclet. «It is a benefit for taxpayers, our suppliers and, above all, the United States and its allies».

Neither statement disclosed the total value of the deal or the price of each jet. Lockheed specified that the F-35 *Joint Program Office* and the company will establish terms, prices, and timelines in a formal contract only if Congress approves the multiyear procurement and appropriates the funds in the coming months.

The benefits of multiyear procurement and the congressional hurdle

Multiyear procurement allows the Pentagon to purchase weapons systems over several years under a single contract rather than renegotiating annually, generally reducing the unit cost. Lockheed expects this approach to save taxpayers billions of dollars through long-term fixed pricing and industrial volume discounts.

«We have fundamentally changed the way we stabilize America's defense industrial base to produce rapidly and at scale», said Michael Duffey, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment. «This agreement with Lockheed Martin demonstrates that. By aligning financial incentives with actual performance, we ensure our service members have the lethal capabilities needed to fight and win».

With an average of 85 U.S. aircraft per year over 10 years, the figure aligns with the Pentagon's request for 2027.

For comparison, in 2026 Congress had funded the purchase of only 47 F-35s. Moreover, the framework agreement comes just days after the release of an *Air Force* report estimating a requirement for 1,509 combat aircraft by 2035, of which F-35As would account for roughly 40%. However, the agreement must clear several legislative and budgetary hurdles:

- **Defense bill approval:** Although the House passed its version of the annual defense policy bill in April, the legislation is stalled in the Senate and will not be considered before the November midterm elections.
- **Spending budget:** Congress has not yet passed the full-year defense budget. The government is currently operating under a temporary continuing resolution (*stopgap*) valid

through December 11, which freezes spending at the previous year's levels and prohibits the launch of new programs or multiyear procurements.

A solution for operational readiness and economic impact

Lockheed also presented the agreement as a solution to the fleet's operational readiness problems. A *Government Accountability Office* (GAO) report last June found that the percentage of time jets are able to fly at least one assigned mission—the *mission-capable rate*—fell from 67% in 2021 to 44% in 2025.

Ensuring steady orders for suppliers will enable the bulk purchase of raw materials and critical parts, eliminating logistical bottlenecks and delays caused by the annual contracting cycle. Finally, according to data provided by Lockheed, the F-35 program will support 317,000 jobs in the United States and approximately \$79 billion in annual economic activity over the next decade.