

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED
BY THE DEFENSE SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

**STATEMENT OF
GENERAL JOHN M. PAXTON, JR.
ASSISTANT COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE
OF THE
SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
ON
JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER
19 JUNE 2013**

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Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cochran, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) and the future of Marine Corps tactical aircraft.

As the Marine Corps modernizes its aviation assets, the continued development and fielding of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) remains a top priority. The F-35 will supplant the Marine Corps' aging Tactical Aviation (TACAIR) fleet by replacing F/A-18 Hornets, AV-8B Harriers, and EA-6B Prowlers. The incorporation of the F-35 aircraft into the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) will provide a dominant, multi-role, fifth-generation platform capable of full spectrum combat operations in support of naval and joint forces. We are well into this transition plan and failure to maintain both JSF production rates and legacy aircraft service life extension programs will impact operational readiness and aircraft availability.

While today's U.S. military force is highly adept, new challenges are emerging from nations and non-state actors employing increasingly sophisticated anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) strategies. The proliferation of A2/AD technology enables them to reach out and potentially touch surface targets thousands of miles out to sea. This necessitates America to consider and plan to have sufficient assets available to combat these threats. While designed to meet an advanced threat through low observable lethality and survivability, the F-35 JSF will also bring enhanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities to the battlefield. The aircraft's ability to develop, process, and display information to the pilot and disseminate it to tactical, operational, and strategic levels is what makes the F-35 truly unique and a critical node for the MAGTF across the entire range of military operations. As the nation's expeditionary force in readiness, the Marine Corps must be prepared and able to operate in an A2/AD environment from the sea and ashore to project influence and power at a time and place of the Combatant Commander's choosing. USMC F-35s will be a critical enabler of this capability.

The short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) F-35B will provide the MAGTF with flexible, expeditionary basing options required to maintain the advantage in the future fight. Expeditionary basing includes operating from amphibious ships and from remote locations ashore where few airfields are available for conventional aircraft. Our requirement for expeditionary tactical aviation has been demonstrated repeatedly from the expeditionary airfields and agile jeep carriers of World War II, to austere forward basing in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Today this concept has proven viable for operations in support of the “new normal” – a posture that requires an enhanced baseline of security at U.S. diplomatic facilities and an increased vigilance marking the cascading and deleterious effects of civil uprisings such as those that occurred in Libya and Yemen. In short, the Marine Corps’ ability to tactically base fixed wing aircraft has been instrumental to our success on the battlefield and on the world stage.

At sea, the F-35 can operate from both aircraft carriers and amphibious shipping. The ability to employ the F-35B from 11 big-deck amphibious ships doubles the number of “aircraft carriers” from which the United States can employ a fifth-generation capability. The F-35B also generates launch and recovery flexibility beyond US Navy ships by being cross deck compatible with all international conventional and STOVL capable aircraft carriers.

While operating ashore, the F-35B is not constrained to major airfields of 8,000 feet or more. The ability to operate from short, less than 3,000 foot runways provides a more than three-fold increase in the number of airfields worldwide that STOVL aircraft can utilize. Additionally, STOVL aircraft can operate from expeditionary airfields constructed from airfield matting or established on non-airfield infrastructure such as highways or large parking lots; a capability repeatedly demonstrated during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

The Marine Corps’ acquisition of the F-35C variant will continue and enhance its current participation in United States Navy carrier air wings. Carrier air wing capabilities of the future will be bolstered by the F-35C’s survivability and lethality against anti-access threats that include advanced surface to air and anti-ship missile systems. In the face of emerging threats, a carrier air wing’s ability to project power will rely heavily on the ability to detect, track and prosecute targets while at the same time avoiding detection. Marine Corps F-35C squadrons as part of United States Navy carrier air wings will be an essential element of this power projection capability from the sea.

The F-35 will provide a dominating counter to a broad spectrum of current and future threats while ensuring success on the battlefield that cannot be addressed by current legacy aircraft. Continued funding and support from Congress for the F-35 JSF program is of utmost importance for the Marine Corps and our Nation.

On behalf of the Marines and Sailors who provide this Nation with its versatile, reliable, middleweight force in readiness, I thank Congress for your constant interest in and recognition of

our challenges. Your continued support is requested to ensure the Marines Corps can proceed with the fielding of this aircraft, an aircraft that for the first time in aviation history combines the most lethal fighter characteristics – supersonic speed, radar-evading stealth, extreme agility, a short takeoff/vertical landing capability, and the unmatched capability to collect, fuse and disseminate information – all in a fifth-generation platform. The capabilities offered in this jet are unequaled by anything in the world today. It is a capability critically needed by our Nation and your Marine Corps and a capability whose day is rapidly dawning.