

F-35 Program Achieves Milestone C and Full-Rate Production

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, MARCH 12, 2024

Earlier today, the Milestone Decision Authority, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, Dr. William A. LaPlante, approved the Milestone C / Full-Rate Production (MSC/FRP) of the F-35 Lightning II aircraft with the signing of an Acquisition Decision Memorandum (ADM) after a meeting with the Defense Acquisition Board (DAB).

The F-35 achieved this milestone after considering the results from the F-35 Combined Initial Operational Test and Evaluation and Live Fire Test and Evaluation Report, System Development and Demonstration exit criteria, statutory/regulatory documentation compliance, future production strategy, and draft acquisition program baseline details. Proceeding to MSC/FRP requires control of the manufacturing process, acceptable performance and reliability, and the establishment of adequate sustainment and support systems.

The DAB, which met on March 7, 2024, was chaired by Dr. LaPlante, and is the department's senior-level forum for critical decisions concerning acquisition programs at the Department of Defense.

"This is a major achievement for the F-35 Program," LaPlante said. "This decision—backed by my colleagues in the Department—highlights to the Services, F-35 Cooperative Program Partners, and Foreign Military Sales customers that the F-35 is stable and agile, and that all statutory and regulatory requirements have been appropriately addressed. The F-35 Program is the premier system that drives interoperability with our allies and partners while

contributing to the integrated deterrence component of our National Defense Strategy.”

With this milestone, the program is now well positioned to efficiently produce and deliver the next generation of aircraft to meet the evolving needs of our services, partners, and FMS customers.

“I am very proud of our team, and this is a huge accomplishment!” said Lt. Gen. Mike Schmidt, Director and Program Executive Officer, F-35 Joint Program Office. “The F-35 enterprise has made significant improvements over the last decade, and we will always be driven to continuously improve sustainability, interoperability, and lethality so warfighters have the capability needed to fight and win when called to do so. Moreover, the Program and our great people can now focus on the future of the F-35 instead of the past.”

In September 2023, a key gateway for MS C/FRP was achieved when F-35 Runs for Score in the Joint Simulation Environment (JSE) and initial trial validation were completed.

“DOT&E conducted analysis of the results from Initial Operational Test and Evaluation (IOT&E) and Live Fire Test and Evaluation and delivered a comprehensive, combined report as required by statute to inform the Milestone C / Full Rate Production decision. DOT&E also provided a separate annex that assessed post-IOT&E Block 4 operational testing of the 30P06 and 30P07 software.” said Dr. Raymond D. O’Toole, Jr., Acting Director, Operational Test & Evaluation. “The Program is working to address DOT&E’s findings and recommendations contained in the report. One of DOT&E’s concerns is to continue to improve test infrastructure for support development and to ensure readiness to test of the upcoming Block 4 capabilities. This includes timely deliveries of the next iterations of F-35-In-A-Box for integration into the JSE.”

Achieving MSC/FRP is important to the program, and it helps to validate the aircraft's capabilities for present and future partners of the F-35 enterprise.

To date, over 990 F-35 aircraft have been delivered to the U.S. Services, F-35 Cooperative Program Partners, and Foreign Military Sales customers.

The F-35 offers multi-mission capability, including strategic attack, suppression/destruction of enemy air defenses (SEAD/DEAD), offensive/defensive counter air, anti-surface warfare, strike coordination and reconnaissance, and close air support. It brings stealth, sensor fusion, and interoperability to enable access in contested environments and enhances situational awareness.