Marine Corps May Extend AV-8B Harrier Service to 2028

WASHINGTON – The Marine Corps' fleet of AV-8B Harrier II attack aircraft may serve until 2028, the Corps' aviation chief told Congress, a two-year extension of the previous plan.

"We will continue to be a fourth-gen/fifth-gen [tactical aircraft] fleet out until about 2030, with Harriers probably going to 2028 and F/A-18s going to 2030-2031," said Lt. Gen. Steven R. Rudder, the Marine Corps' deputy commandant for aviation. He testified April 4 during a hearing of the Tactical Air and Ground Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee.

The Corps earlier had extended the Harrier's planned service out to 2026 in view of the delays in the F-35B Lightning II joint strike fighter. Rudder's comment indicates that the Harrier may serve until 2028, three years longer than planned.

The F-35B has deployed on two amphibious assault ships, USS Wasp and USS Essex, flying the aircraft's first combat missions in September from the deck of the Essex.

According to one source, a planned F-35B deployment on a third ship this year was assumed instead by a detachment of AV-8Bs.

Rudder said the Corps plans to achieve a 100% fifth-generation tactical fighter force by 2030. He said the mixture percentage of fourth-gen to fifth-gen fighters in the Marine Corps today is 80-20.

The Marine Corps operates three operational F-35B squadrons and its first F-35C squadron, VMFA-314, is in transition.