

Joint Strike Fighter Attracts More Partners

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WASHINGTON, March 22, 2002—Several more countries intend to become partners in developing the Joint Strike Fighter [JSF], a family of three aircraft designed to replace aircraft in the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and the British military.

“We’ve been very pleased with the response from the international partners on the Joint Strike Fighter,” said Pete Aldridge, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics. During a Pentagon roundtable today with reporters, he outlined three levels of participation countries are interested in.

Level 1 is for “highly active partners,” he said, such as the United Kingdom, which has contributed \$2 billion for JSF program development. “They were involved with the source selection process, and they have people in the project office,” he said.

Level 2 partners contribute \$800 million to \$1 billion, he said, and Italy and The Netherlands are in the final processes of approving their partnership. “Their cabinets have approved joining and they’ve now taken it to their parliament. A decision is expected by the second week in April.”

Level 3 partners contribute about \$150 million to participate in the aircraft's development. Aldridge said Canada signed up in February, while Denmark, Norway, and Turkey have announced their intent to join.

Singapore has also expressed interest in the JSF, he said. At a recent air show there, Singaporean officials talked about how they might participate,



A Lockheed Martin X-35A Joint Strike Fighter receives fuel from a KC-135 Stratotanker during a test over California's Mojave Desert.

DoD photo

"whether as an industrial partner or as a participant in some type of study," he said. "We've invited them to come."

U.S. officials expect still more countries will come on board, he said, noting that the number of partners will not affect the aircraft's unit cost. The original estimate was based on the United States and United Kingdom buying a total of 3,000 aircraft.

"We're anticipating that the international buy will be in the thousands," Aldridge added.

The Navy recently completed a tactical air requirements study mandated by the 2001 Defense Planning Guidance. The study "validated the absolute necessity of the Joint Strike Fighter," he said. "They have to have it—both the Navy and the Marine Corps."

The study, which has not yet been reviewed or approved by Defense Department officials, recommends about a 30 percent cut in the number of fighters the Navy and Marine Corps plan to buy. Despite the study's findings, Aldridge assured reporters, "This is not a program that is going down the drain. I'll guarantee you that.

"This study will not have any impact on the force structure of the Navy and Marine Corps until the year 2020," he explained. "It has no effect upon the development program for the next four or five years. It has no effect upon the production program until the year 2012."

It's difficult to predict what the military will need in the year 2020, he said. But the Quadrennial Defense Review process requires DoD officials to "anticipate uncertainty and surprise." It might turn out the military can get by with fewer fight-

ers because of the JSF's "phenomenal" sortie rate, reliability, and availability, he noted.

"The world can change in the next two years," Aldridge said. "That's what happened with the B-2 and the bomber forces." Generally, he noted, the bomber's capabilities these days take second place to its munitions' ability to destroy targets effectively.

U.S. defense officials are pursuing other opportunities for international cooperation. Aldridge said some cooperative programs are already in place, such as the Medium Extended Air Defense System with Germany and Italy, and the Alliance Ground Surveillance System with NATO.

He talked about a group that looks for things [on which to cooperate] that are meaningful in the international arena. "We're looking for opportunities that would make a difference and to do things together without getting into export control hassles," he said.

"We're looking for other opportunities centered around things like unmanned aerial vehicles, air-to-air refueling, and combat identification. We've found our allies are quite good at building smaller, more mobile ships because they have smaller waters to defend. In fact, we're leasing a Norwegian ship and an Australian ship to do some experimentation."

Next month, the United States is hosting a conference on international cooperation with the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy.

"The Joint Strike Fighter is obviously going to be high on everybody's list," Aldridge concluded.

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