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THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
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F-35 LIGHTNING II PROGRAM

BEFORE THE
AIRLAND SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON
F-35

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Cramer, Ranking Member Kelly, and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program.

Since my predecessor last testified before Congress in 2024, F-35 has proven it is a cornerstone of our Joint Force's tactical airpower and allied interoperability. It delivers the lethality and survivability required to execute combat operations in contested environments.

Recent operations, including Epic Fury and Midnight Hammer, provide evidence of F-35's capability and importance of its role as quarterback in the fight. These successes highlight aircraft maturity, superior combat performance, and combat-ready capabilities operated by the Joint Force and allies today.

As global security continues to grow more challenging and complex, the Department focus remains on homeland defense, Indo-Pacific deterrence, enhancing cooperation with allies, and rebuilding a resilient U.S. defense industry. F-35 operates at the center of each of these priorities.

My top priority is readiness, defined as a cumulative result of sustainment, capability and production making this aircraft available for achieving desired operational outcomes. We reset F-35 sustainment to a government-managed, data-driven model, focused on improving supply chain performance and optimizing maintenance capability. Capability includes providing the warfighter with all 55 Block 4 Capabilities necessary to defend against the threat. Finally, readiness must include production. The warfighter requires the right number of aircraft at the right location at the right time. My job is clear: deliver a reliable and affordable system capable of sustaining high operational tempo, with a path to achieving 80% mission capable rates no later than 2030. The President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2027 requests a generational investment directly informed by

detailed analysis and operational experience, to ensure F-35 continues to deliver and maintain effective capability to our warfighter today and in the future.

SUSTAINMENT RESET

Our current sustainment system was built to support a fleet of 700-800 aircraft. To date, the government has accepted over 1,300 F-35 aircraft worldwide. To address this scaling challenge, we reset our sustainment strategy, increased government oversight, and optimized all aspects of sustainment planning and execution. We are right-sizing spare parts based on validated performance modeling, updating our maintenance processes to enable effective maintenance at all levels, and modernizing our logistics digital systems to enable audit, enhance government control, and connect F-35 with the broader Joint Force. These efforts aim to ensure our sustainment infrastructure reliably meets current and future combat requirements.

By leveraging advanced analytics and real-time data platforms, sustainment teams gain greater visibility into aircraft status, supply levels, and repair cycles that enable the full reach of a global sustainment system. Supply chain reforms, including partnerships with government and industry providers and modernization of digital tracking tools, promote efficient delivery of mission-critical parts and reduce aircraft downtime. Near-term contract revisions will further establish performance metrics to increase accountability and cost savings through meaningful incentives and penalties. Collectively, these actions drive readiness improvements and ensure that F-35 units maintain peak operational capability in dynamic environments.

BLOCK 4 AND TR-3 MODERNIZATION

Modernization efforts remain focused on delivering capability to our fleet faster. We are moving from event-driven software releases to predictable, time-based capability delivery. For

years, the program has been trapped in a cycle where software complexity outpaced available integration and test capacity. We are breaking that cycle. We are attacking the problem from both ends: expanding capacity while fundamentally improving how software is developed, integrated, tested, and fielded. The result is faster capability delivery, more efficient use of taxpayer resources, and reduced risk to the warfighter.

Technology Refresh-3 provides a foundation for continued Block 4 capability upgrades. This enables key improvements in electronic warfare, weapons integration, and mission systems to meet the requirements of contested combat environments. Years of investment have led to capability improvements that surpass those demonstrated in recent combat operations.

Equally important, we are advancing Engine and Power Thermal Management Modernization, including an Engine Core Upgrade. This is not simply an engine effort – it is our foundation that reduces risk for Block 4 and enables future capability growth, by increasing power and cooling capacity, efficiency, and durability while reducing long-term sustainment costs. It also enables more time on wing, reducing maintenance demands and increasing aircraft availability for combat operations.

PRODUCTION STABILITY

The generational investment of the President’s Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2027 funds procurement of 85 F-35 aircraft: 38 F-35As for Air Force, 10 F-35Bs and 17 F-35Cs for Marine Corps, and 20 F-35Cs for Navy.

This procurement profile reflects alignment between production capacity, service requirements, and fiscal constraints. We are focused on improving production efficiency and reducing variability across our enterprise to deliver consistent, reliable outcomes. This approach provides stability necessary to support future contracting strategies, reduce unit costs, and deliver aircraft on cost and on schedule.

Congressional support for multi-year procurement contracts, including F-35 aircraft engines, modifications kits, spare parts, and repairs, as well as for all variants of the aircraft itself, will provide our industrial base stability and necessary predictability to deliver aircraft and components on time while improving affordability. Our supply base features 1,900 businesses in 49 states. Many of our suppliers are small businesses that frequently face solvency challenges during gaps between annual contract awards, forcing owners to absorb personal financial risk to maintain payroll and operations. This systemic unpredictability strains sub-tier suppliers, often driving them toward consolidation with other companies or to exit the defense sector to avoid unsustainable financial exposure. We are aggregating demand and awarding longer term contracts where possible, such as for the procurement of modification kits to retrofit F-35 aircraft with modernized electronic warfare hardware. Multi-year procurement authority expands the contracting options and allows the Department to provide a reliable long-term demand signal to stabilize these vulnerable suppliers, mitigating their financial risk and ensuring uninterrupted production of critical parts necessary to sustain fleet readiness.

GLOBAL DETERRENCE AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

F-35's operational value is universally recognized by our international coalition, which includes the United States, seven partner nations, and 12 Foreign Military Sales Customers. Several cooperative partners are increasing their programs of record and since 2020, eight countries have joined the Foreign Military Sales program. Growing global demand reinforces F-35 as a backbone of allied fifth-generation airpower, deepens allied integration, and strengthens resilience of our shared industrial base.

This strong network of international partners and foreign military sales customers boosts global interoperability and deterrence while offering financial benefits to U.S. taxpayers. Under

our current basing strategy, our partners and allies own and operate over 65% of all F-35s stationed across Europe and the Pacific. The F-35 program creates capacity for allied deterrence, burden sharing, and power projection worldwide.

Through cooperative cost-sharing agreements, our international partners continue to shoulder a significant portion of ongoing F-35 modernization and development burdens. Notably, our seven cooperative partner nations contributions offset United States Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation (RDT&E) costs by approximately 20%. This shared investment model ensures we field advanced fifth-generation capabilities while maximizing efficiency, reach, and lethality for every defense dollar appropriated by Congress. As the F-35 global footprint expands, this coalition remains a key element of interoperability, shared capability development, and long-term affordability.

However, strategic success and rapid expansion of this international coalition inherently amplify our logistical demands through the global sustainment system enabling world-wide parts access and repair capability. To maintain operational readiness for both U.S. and allied forces, our support infrastructure must scale alongside this growing global footprint. As we align procurement assumptions with executable capacity and increase transparency across cost, schedule, and performance, we share this Committee's focus on affordability, accountability, and execution realism.

CONCLUSION

F-35 remains essential to ensure our Nation and its allies can deter aggression and maintain a favorable balance of power. Across today's operational environment, F-35 delivers required combat capability, interoperability, and industrial strength to support that objective. Our focus is

delivering that capability to warfighters to meet current and emerging demands with readiness, reliability, and scale.

I look forward to your questions.