

The Secretary of State for Defence (Rt Hon John Hutton) said today: We have decided to procure three instrumented test aircraft and associated support equipment to enable UK participation in the joint Initial Operational Test and Evaluation (IOT&E) of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Air System alongside the US Services, and to continue our contributions to the Production Sustainment and Follow-on Development (PSFD) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

This decision will allow the UK to fulfil our plans to participate fully in the IOT&E programme alongside the USA and represents the next crucial stage in the UK's incremental plan to introduce JSF into service and fully to understand the aircraft through-life. In particular it will

enable us to confirm that we will fully meet the UK's Operational Sovereignty requirements for JSF and also to fulfil our obligations for UK release to service, proving the general airworthiness of the aircraft and its ability to operate safely and effectively, in combat conditions.

Acquisition of JSF will provide the UK with an unrivalled "fifth-generation" tactical air system, designed with stealthy characteristics and advanced sensors, which will afford the UK a 'step

change' in capability. Through conducting the IOT&E programme jointly with our US partners, who have many years of experience in operating this type of capability and the technologies inherent within it, we will gain a unique opportunity to optimise our use of this new combat system. This decision is fully coherent with our earlier decision to procure the UK's new Aircraft Carriers and will enable us to move forward effectively in developing our Carrier Strike capability.

With approximately 100 UK companies currently in the supply chain, there is significant UK industrial interest in the JSF Programme ranging from major UK JSF industrial partners such as BAE Systems and Rolls Royce to providers of key sub-systems such as Martin Baker and GE Aviation, and down to lower tier suppliers of composite materials. The potential UK

return on investment is substantial. Over the lifetime of the JSF programme, depending on aircraft costs and numbers ordered, overall expenditure with UK industry is likely to outweigh by far the UK MOD's investment in the programme.