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Articles taken from the Flight Global website

14th December 2010: The world's biggest military aircraft programme is ending 2010 in much the same manner that it started the year, with uncertainty surrounding its long-term health, cost and delivery schedule.

In mid-October, the UK government surprised many by switching its planned production allegiance from the F-35B to the larger C-model carrier variant (CV). However, it remains notionally wedded to buying up to 138 of the type, although firm details about its eventual fleet requirements will emerge only during its next Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2015.

Separately, the results of a recent baseline technical review into the JSF programme's overall health are likely to be disclosed soon. Some forecasts suggest that this could result in a further cost overrun of up to \$5 billion and a new schedule slip of around one-year. This has fuelled recommendations from some quarters that the US Department of Defence should cancel its minority variant, the F-35B, or even terminate the programme altogether.

Lockheed officials decline to reveal the possible number of F-35 test flights to be achieved during 2011, but confirm that the type will fly for the first time late in the year with the programme's alternate engine.

Despite the challenges facing the programme, executive vice-president F-35 programmes Tom Burbage is optimistic that the F-35 will deliver on Lockheed's promise to the type's future operators - and in all three variants. "I think that when you look across the partnership everybody has good faith that the US is going to deliver the airplane that people need, and confidence in the process that we've used to develop it," he says. "On balance, we're pretty pleased with where we are moving forward."

6th January 2011: Lockheed Martin may need to redesign the airframe structure and propulsion system of the short take-off and vertical landing F-35B, says US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates.

The changes would raise the weight and cost of the variant ordered by the US Marine Corps. As a result, the F-35B will be placed on the equivalent of a two-year probation, with termination possible if the programme fails to recover.

7th January: Australia has welcomed the restructuring of the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II programme.

"Australia's variant [the conventional take-off and landing F-35A] is less expensive and less complex than the other variants," says acting minister for defence Jason Clare. "The restructuring announced by Secretary Gates means it is now at the front of the production

queue."

10th January: The US Secretary of Defence has warned it may be necessary to redesign the STOVL F-35 Lightning Joint Strike Fighter over a two-year period to accommodate testing problems.

12th January: The US Air Force's top official confirms that entry-into-service date for the Lockheed Martin F-35A variant will be delayed again due to the programme's second major restructuring in less than a year.

The changes first announced on 6 January that extend the system development and demonstration phase to early 2015 "implies" a new delay for the initial operational capability (IOC) milestone, secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley told reporters on 12 January.

The new delay for the F-35A's IOC milestone means the USAF will have to commit more resources to sustain Lockheed F-16s. Details of the new service life extension programme for F-16s will likely be revealed when the USAF submits the Fiscal 2012 budget request to Congress in early February.