

# FACT SHEET

[www.ploughshares.ca](http://www.ploughshares.ca)

## Joint Strike Fighter Program



**What is it?** The Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program is an international military development and acquisition program that will see a wide range of military aircraft replaced by the new, fifth-generation F-35 Lightning II. The program was initiated by the United States Department of Defence. Participating countries include the United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, Australia, Denmark, Norway and Canada.

**What is the F-35 Lightning II?** The F-35 Lightning II is a single-seat, single-engine stealth fighter aircraft. As a stealth aircraft, the F-35 will be able to avoid radar detection. It will be used in both air-to-air combat and air-to-ground combat. The JSF program claims that when it enters into service, the F-35 will be the most advanced fighter aircraft in the world.

**Canada and the JSF** Canada joined the Joint Strike Fighter Program in 2002, but it was not until 2010 that the government announced its intention to purchase 65 of the F-35 airplanes. Canada was the first non-U.S. program partner to commit to a final aircraft order. Regardless of the final cost (and many consider the government's projections to be very low), it will be the most expensive military procurement in Canadian history.

### Should Canada buy the F-35?

To justify the cost, the following questions need to be answered.

#### 1. Is the F-35 suited to Canada's unique security needs?

Canada First—the government's national defence strategy—identifies eight threats to Canadian security:

- Failed, failing and unstable states
- Nuclear adversaries
- Islamist militants

- The buildup of conventional forces in Asia and the Pacific
- Terrorism
- Human and drug trafficking
- Foreign encroachment
- The outbreak of infectious disease

Canada First also recognizes the importance of being a strong and reliable defence partner of the United States.

The F-35 could play a role in responding to, at the most, three of these threats. The advantage of using this aircraft over another in these cases is unclear. The F-35 is, however, uniquely suited to accompanying U.S. stealth aircraft on air attacks against states with robust air defences, such as Iran, China and other industrialized countries.

**2. Is the F-35 affordable?** The projected cost of the F-35 aircraft continues to increase. Current estimates cite the per unit production cost at close to twice the initial price. Moreover, additional costs for operating and maintaining the Canadian aircraft could surpass \$17-billion. Over 30 years, Canada's Joint Strike Fighter Program could total \$30-billion.

Apart from the impact that these figures will have on other security programs, the size of this single program expenditure during a time of tight federal budgeting could result in major cuts to government spending outside defence.

**3. Will a JSF program benefit the Canadian economy?** Aerospace is an important component of Canada's economy, an employer and contributor to research and development as well as the country's top exporter of advanced technology. Canada is one of the few nations to have a full range of aerospace design and manufacturing capabilities. The industry produces civilian and military aircraft, electronics, avionics, communications, simulators, space technology, repair and overhaul, gas turbine engines and engineering.

Although Canada's aerospace industry has fared well in winning JSF program subcontracts, the partnership agreement does not guarantee this trend will continue. Benefits of the program are also undermined by a shrinking global market. Initial global projections for the JSF market have already dropped from 6,000 to 3,200 aircraft.

## F-35 and human security

Canadian security involves more than military strategy. It includes adequate funding for development, promotion of democracy, efforts towards disarmament and a commitment to diplomacy. Government spending currently favours defence. Participation in the Joint Strike Fighter Program will make this problem more pronounced.

