**Our Air Force’s F-35, premier fighter is only available 55% of the time due to inadequate parts and system maintenance issues.**

Gao reports that the F-35, built by Lockheed Martin Corp, is having parts and maintenance problems. The F-35 should be mission capable 85-90% of the time, but is only been mission capable 55% of the time.

More than 950 of the planned 3,000 jets have been delivered. This is a very serious problem for the Air Force. I believe that there is also a shortage of trained maintenance personnel to make the problem really difficult to solve.

The long-term total cost for the F-35 system is $1.7 trillion which means the problem must be solved, or our nation’s defense is in significant trouble.

Additionally, several of our close allies are expected to order F-35s at a cost of $200,000,000 per aircraft. Lockheed Martin has a lot a stake to help solve the F-35s maintenance issues.

For the Air Force, this issue is also compounded by the reality that it is more than 2000 pilots short in the service. Who’s going to fly the remainder 2000 F-35s when the jets are delivered?

Will we have similar problems with our future Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) fighter? Unfortunately, we must presume so, as manpower issues that affect maintenance will not go away. Perhaps, some of these issues can be solved with robotics. With the right robots we can assemble more reliable parts and even perform maintenance. The NGAD fighter will have unmanned versions which will partially address the shortage of pilots.

**=============================================**

**SOURCE:**

**F-35s Are Rarely Flight-Ready and Repairs Are Too Slow, GAO Report Says**

#

**A report this week by the Government Accountability Office shows that F-35 warplanes are ready to fly just 55% of the time. (Master Sgt. Darnell T. Cannady/U.S. Air Force/TNS)**

***Bloomberg News* | By Tony Capaccio, 22 September 2023**

WASHINGTON — **F-35s are available to fly just 55% of the time, and 73% of replacement parts have to be sent back to suppliers because the Pentagon’s maintenance depots are inadequate,** according to a new congressional audit on the troubled upkeep of the fighter jet that is the world’s costliest weapons system.

The **report released this week by the Government Accountability Office came days after a $100 million F-35B crashed over South Carolina**. The warplane’s Marine Corps pilot, who had been on a training mission, ejected safely.

The Marine Corps has only begun its investigation into what went wrong. But Thursday's **GAO report updates the persistent maintenance shortcomings of the advanced fighter fleet built by Lockheed Martin Corp**., which is expected to cost a total of $1.7 trillion including decades of operations and maintenance.

**The 55% average availability rate as of March is “far below” the goal of a “mission capable rate” of 85% to 90%, depending on the different versions of the plane, the GAO** said in its 96-page assessment.

The Marine Corps’ goal for availability of its F-35B version is 85%, for example. Instead, the “mission capable” rate for F-35B training jets in fiscal 2022 was about 55% — and near zero for “full” mission capability, according to Navy statistics cited in the report.

The gist of the GAO assessment is that **maintenance and sustainment challenges will only worsen unless the Defense Department and the military services make drastic and sustained improvements in maintenance** depot capacity as Lockheed continues to turn out the planes. More than 950 aircraft of more than 3,000 F-35s planned already have been delivered to U.S. and international customers.

Lockheed said in a statement that “we stand ready to partner with the government as plans are created for the future of F-35 sustainment ensuring mission readiness and enabling deterrence.” The contractor said “the F-35 is one of the most reliable aircraft in the U.S. fighter fleet with more than 90% of parts performing better than predicted.”

Lt. Gen. Mike Schmidt, the Pentagon’s F-35 program manager, said in a statement that his office is working “to drive improvements across the F-35 enterprise” as the fleet grows. He said that includes setting up “our global repair, transportation and warehousing network at a faster pace.”

Christopher Lowman, the assistant secretary of defense for sustainment, is intensely focused on the F-35 maintenance challenge, officials have said.

The **U.S. military remains “behind schedule in establishing depot maintenance activities to conduct repairs,” and has a “heavy reliance” on Lockheed and its subcontractors for parts information and repairs, the GAO said.**

The **Pentagon “has added new F-35s to its fleet, increasing the demand for repairs**, while continuing to face delays establishing military service depot repair capacity,” it said.

As of March, the **Pentagon “was sending 73% of all F-35 components back to the original equipment manufacturer” under Lockheed oversight “due to delays in standing up a full depot repair capability at the military services’ depots**,” the GAO said. “As a result, component repair times remained slow, with over 10,000 waiting to be repaired.”

That has forced the F-35 program office to buy “new parts instead of repairing the parts it already has in inventory,” a practice that program officials “do not believe is a sustainable solution,” according to the report.

**Among the problems: Maintenance crews at three F-35 bases told the GAO they need part numbers “that reside in a database that is proprietary” to Lockheed. “Not having ready access to part numbers hinders” jet repair because “it delays the ordering and receipt of needed parts**,” the auditing agency wrote.

©2023 Bloomberg L.P. Visit [bloomberg.com.](https://www.bloomberg.com/) Distributed by Tribune Content