JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER TRANSITION PLAN

Recently designated the F-35, the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) will be the next generation strike-fighter for the Marine Corps, Air Force, and Navy. The JSF family of aircraft includes a short take off and vertical landing (STOVL), conventional take off and landing (CTOL) variant, and aircraft carrier-capable (CV) variants. Commonality between the variants helps reduce both the development and life cycle costs and will result in the greatest "bang for the buck" when compared to developing three separate aircraft. The JSF will replace the AV-8B and F/A-18A/C/D in the Marine Corps, the F-16C and the A-10 in the Air Force, and the F/A-18C and F-14A/D in the Navy.

The F-35 will incorporate advanced mission systems, including the Active Electronically Scanned Array radar (AESA), Electro-Optical Targeting System (EOTS), and a Distributed Aperture System (DAS). The AESA, EOTS, and DAS will be fused into a pilot's helmet mounted display system negating the need for a traditional heads up display in the cockpit.

The Marine Corps will operate the STOVL variant that will be capable of operating from large-deck amphibious ships, main operating bases, and austere sites ashore. The STOVL F-35 will provide the Marine Corps with a low-observable, state-of-the-art, high performance, multi-role offensive aircraft. The United Kingdom's Royal Air Force and Royal Navy will also use the STOVL variant.

The Corps will employ the F-35 to execute five of the six functions that Marine Corps aviation performs. This remarkable breadth of employment will allow the Marine Corps to decrease its TacAir inventory, while increasing lethality, survivability, and supportability when compared to legacy aircraft.

The current JSF acquisition strategy for the United States Marine Corps continues to reflect our vision of an "all-STOVL" force. In accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding of August 2002 between Secretary of the Navy, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the Chief of Naval Operations, the Marine Corps' strategy will be maintained until a fair and equitable analysis of the CV and STOVL variants can be conducted during flight-testing scheduled for the 2006-2008-time period.

Once the F-35 begins entering service, the USMC will begin retirement of AV-8Bs

and F/A-18 Hornets. All legacy strike TacAir platforms should be retired by 2023. As the TacAir Integration plan progresses, the Marine Corps will explore the feasibility of incorporating an Airborne Electronic Attack capability into the baseline F-35 to address the eventual retirement of EA-6B Prowlers.

The STOVL JSF is absolutely critical to the future success of the Marine Corps, as it will solve the significant problems of age and attrition currently facing Marine TacAir. The combination of stealth, basing flexibility, and superior performance will revolutionize air warfare and Naval Aviation in the 21st century.