LOCKHEED MARTIN CORPORATION MAY RESUME PRODUCTION OF F-22 AIRCRAFT

News / Manufacturer

The US Air Force's Chief of Staff, General Mark Welsh, announced the possibility of adding Lockheed Martin Corporation's F-22 aircraft to its fleet at an event hosted by the Air Force Association. The announcement comes at a time when the defense contractor is already focused on the F-35 program.

When Lockheed Martin discontinued the program five years ago it was subjected to severe criticism by government officials. From the looks of things, a revival of the fighter jet may very well be planned for this year, as the House has passed a legislation to consider the possibility of its relaunch. The program however still requires approval from the Senate before it can be initiated in full swing.

Nonetheless, this is not the first time the Air Force is reconsidering the F-22s. In 2010, an Air Force led study carried out by think tank, RAND, estimated the costs to purchase 75 F-22s at $17 billion — those too without the option of any upgrades. If the Air Force decides to equip the fighter jets with latest technology then the price can go even further.

Mr. Welsh said: "I don't think it's a wild idea, I mean the success of the F-22 and the capability of the airplane and the crews that fly it are pretty exceptional. I think it's proven that the airplane is

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exactly what everybody hoped it would be….. “We’re using it in new and different ways and it’s been spectacularly successful and its potential is really, really remarkable. And so going back and looking and certainly raising the idea: Well, could you build more? It’s not a crazy idea.”

He further added that on Congress’ request, the force has started to consider the feasibility of an F-22 revival. The Air Force might decide to have a modified F-22 built this time instead of a sixth-generation fighter. Both the US Air Force and Lockheed Martin are working in synergy to determine the feasibility of the program.

Although the Air Force and the Congress seem excited about the project, Lockheed Martin, at least for now, may not be in a position to start such a program. The company is too focused on its F-35 program, and is trying to get the fighter jets delivered on time. It has faced several delays already and resulted in higher costs of production.

According to Senator John McCain, with all the delays and issues arising in the project, the F-35 program has already cost the US Department of Defense (DoD) more than 51% of its original contract. At such a time, starting the F-22 program may further impact the struggling F-35 program. Recently, the DoD announced that testing on the aircraft has been pushed back for six months and is now expected to be carried out in 2018.

Lockheed Martin is also considering setting up a production plant for its F-16 fighter jets in India. The company already has its hands full with several projects — hence introduction of the F-22 program right now may not be a good idea.

29 MAY 2016

SOURCE: BIDNESSETC
ARTICLE LINK:
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