Jeff Babione  
Executive Vice President and General Manager, F-35 Program  
Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company

July 18, 2017

Dear Sir,

Your coverage of the F-35, “Trouble on Deck” (July 17), does not accurately reflect the current status of the programme, the aircraft’s capabilities, nor the detailed responses we provided to your questions.

We simply do not recognise your cost estimates, nor agree with the way you arrived at them. The costs of the jet continue to fall contract-to-contract with the most recent Lot 10 contract in February representing a 62 percent reduction in the F-35A price from the first contract in 2007. The F-35B that the UK is procuring is on a similar cost reduction curve that will ultimately bring the price of a 5th generation F-35 down to that of older 4th generation fighters.

Many of the programmatic issues raised in your coverage are historic and have long since been addressed. The performance of the F-35 speaks for itself and the best people to ask continue to be the operators and maintainers who understand the aircraft’s full potential and capability – not long time critics who have nothing to do with the programme.

For example, earlier this year the former lead of the F-35 Integration Office, Brigadier General Scott Pleus said in an interview with Business Insider that “the capabilities of the F-35 are absolutely eye-watering. The airplane has unbelievable manoeuvring characteristics that make it completely undefeatable in an air-to-air environment.”

The F-35 is combat ready and already making a game-changing difference to the defence of a number of nations. We are in absolute agreement with the assessment of Wing Commander Beck – who has had a key role in testing this jet – that it is “the best aircraft [he has] ever flown” and we are proud of the contribution the jet will make to the defence of the UK, the US and our allies around the world.

JEFF BABIONE  
Executive Vice President and General Manager, F-35 Program, Lockheed Martin

Submitted for publication 18 July 2017