

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4305

August 24, 2011

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics
3010 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-3010

Dear Dr. Carter,

As the Senate prepares to consider your nomination to serve as the next Deputy Secretary of Defense, I write to express disappointment with your apparent lack of commitment to the success of the largest DoD major defense acquisition program in our nation's history, the F-35 Lightning II. This program is the centerpiece of our strategy to retain air dominance for decades to come, and it is critical to our long-term national security. If confirmed by the Senate to serve in this important role, your personal commitment to making F-35 succeed will be essential. Simply put, there is no acceptable alternative to the F-35 program, and it must be placed on a path to success.

As you know, the three variants of the F-35 will replace our military's aging fleets of AV-8s, A-10s, F-16s, and F-18s. In your written testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee in May of this year, you correctly stated that "the F-35 will form the backbone of U.S. air combat superiority for generations to come." This 5th-generation stealth aircraft, with its multi-role precision attack capability, represents a tremendous leap in capabilities, as compared to the legacy aircraft it will replace. However, the U.S. is not alone in pursuing this level of capability, as both Russia and China have made substantial progress in developing their own 5th-generation tactical aircraft. If we fail to field the F-35 in adequate numbers, our nation will run the risk of losing its status as the preeminent air power in the coming years.

I am concerned that the DoD's failure to sufficiently defend and advocate for the F-35 program has enabled and even invited unwarranted criticisms from many corners, including calls for partial or complete cancellation of the program. It is my hope that, as Deputy Secretary of Defense, you would be a champion of the F-35 program, using your voice to remind Congress that this weapon system is one our nation cannot do without. I strongly encourage you to step up your defense of this key program.

I look forward to discussing this issue with you before your Senate confirmation, and I would appreciate your written answers to the following questions:

1. Why is it imperative for the United States to successfully field the F-35 for the Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy, as envisioned in the latest Future Years Defense Program?

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter

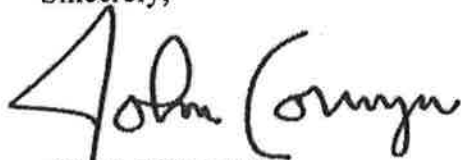
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2. In the FY12 budget request, the Department cut approximately \$12 billion from the F-35 production budget and returned just \$4.6 billion back into the development budget. The Department then spent a significant portion of the remaining \$8 billion on 4th-generation F/A-18E/F aircraft. Continuing to procure less capable 4th-generation aircraft is a questionable strategy given that our adversaries are already developing their own 5th-generation aircraft, and cutting F-35 production funding in order to fund these 4th-generation aircraft makes little sense. Can you assure me that this will not occur again in the future?
3. After the Department moved a net \$8 billion out of the F-35 program, it then submitted a reprogramming request to cover early production cost growth and concurrency costs. Can you assure me that you will budget for sufficient funding to cover known costs in the future?
4. As you testified in May, while procurement has been held flat in FY10 – FY12, your intent is to support a 1.5X “ramp rate” going forward. Will this Administration begin to ramp up in FY13 at 1.5X per year, or will the Department continue to use the F-35 program as a bill-payer for other programs, undermining affordability and driving up costs to both the U.S. Government and our F-35 international partners?
5. This program is critical to the national security of our eight F-35 international partners and for the successful execution of future coalition operations. As such, will you commit to a more proactive dialogue with the international partners on this program in the future?

Thank you for your service to our nation, and for your prompt reply to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Cornyn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

JOHN CORNYN
United States Senator