

F-35 price expected to drop to about \$80 million per plane by fiscal 2019

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By fiscal 2019, the F-35A, which takes off and lands on runways, will cost between \$80-85 million each. (AP Photo/LM Otero, File)

The price of the F-35 will continue to drop and the variant being purchased by the Air Force and international partners could cost as little as \$80 million per plane, the general in charge of the Joint Program Office told lawmakers on Thursday.

Lt. Gen. Chris Bogdan, the F-35 program executive officer, said officials are "on track to keep driving down price." He said that by fiscal 2019, the F-35A, which takes off and lands on runways, will cost between \$80-85 million each.

The Pentagon [reached an agreement](#) with Lockheed Martin this month to buy the 10th lot of 90 aircraft. In that batch, an F-35A cost \$94.6 million, marking the first time the per-plane cost fell below \$100 million. The F-35B version used by the Marine Corps to take off and land vertically cost \$122.8 million, and the F-35C that can take off and land on Navy aircraft carriers cost \$121.8 million per plane.

President Trump has played an [active role](#) in trying to reduce the costs of the F-35 program since the election, even [making calls](#) before his inauguration. With the award of Lot 10, Lockheed Martin credited Trump's "personal involvement" for speeding up negotiations and sharpening the focus on driving down the price.

But [experts say](#) the price reductions were well underway long before Trump's election as lessons learned are implemented and production ramps up.

While the F-35 suffered its fair share of setbacks and technical difficulties, the program has largely been on track in

both time and price since a re-baselining effort in 2011. Bogdan said the program is on track to wrap up the flight test program in a few months and within the cost caps established in that effort.

Trump's administration also directed [two reviews](#) of the F-35 program: one to review all the affordability initiatives the department has taken so far and what it plans to do in the future; and a Navy-specific review to determine the [best mix](#) of F-35Cs and Boeing F/A-18 Super Hornets.

Bogdan also made the case to Congress that the effort to modernize the F-35 should be rolled into the broader acquisition instead of being made its own program, saying that would add millions of dollars in bureaucratic hurdles and potentially months of delays.

"The decision has nothing to do with us not wanting to be transparent in what's going on," Bogdan said. "It has to do with the administrative burden that's placed on starting a new program versus continuing a previous program and adding a modernization program into it."

Lawmakers argued that the cost alone should require the modernization effort to be its own major acquisition program, which would allow more oversight by Congress. Then-Rep. Tammy Duckworth [introduced an amendment](#) last year to the fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act that would have required the modernization to be separated out.

But Bogdan promised that Congress would receive reports to conduct oversight of the program as if it were a separate effort and said he'd provide more frequent updates if lawmakers want.