Lockheed Late In Delivering International F-35 Simulators

Aviation Week
Lara Seligman

Lockheed Martin

PARIS - Lockheed Martin is three months behind schedule in delivering F-35 full-motion simulators to four international customers, a slip that could delay training of those countries' future F-35 pilots.

Lockheed is working through "unexpected issues" in adapting the latest iteration of F-35 simulator software, Block 3i, for international export release, said Orlando Carvalho, company vice president of aeronautics, during an interview at last week's Paris Air Show. This problem affects F-35 partner nations Italy and Norway, as well as foreign military sales customers Israel and Japan.

Lockheed must resolve these issues before the U.S. government certifies the system for export, Carvalho said.

He would not elaborate on the nature of the problem, but it may have to do with data sharing between international F-35 fleets. Government and industry officials have acknowledged challenges deciding what sovereign logistics and threat data can be shared between the partners, and what must be firewalled for security reasons.

"It's the first time out of the chute because up until now all the simulators have been domestically based for F-35s," Carvalho said. So far, Lockheed has successfully stood up 12 U.S. F-35 bases.

Full use of the simulators is critical to preparing international pilots to fly the F-35. Italy's first F-35 rolled off the assembly line in 2015; meanwhile Israel and Japan welcomed their first aircraft in 2016, and Norway is set to receive its first jets in November.

Norway, in particular, has expressed concern that Lockheed will not be ready to support the timeline for the planned standup of the new fleet. Norwegian officials told Aviation Week in January that they are keeping a close eye on some "risk areas," though they did not specifically mention the delay in delivering full-motion simulators. Norway is planning to declare its F-35s combat ready in 2019, with full operating capability expected in 2020.

"They will start training for initial operating capability immediately, and everything needs to be in place for them to do that," said Maj. Gen. Morten Klever, Norway's F-35 program director. "Is the industry ready to support and sustain the aircraft in Norway? There is a risk right now."

Norway's concern is justified, but Lockheed is confident in successfully standing up Norway's F-35 fleet, Carvalho said.

"Given their timeline for declaring [initial operating capability] that has been a concern, and legitimately so because we are a little bit late with delivering that simulator," Carvalho said. "But in our view the rest of the standup is proceeding smoothly."

Lockheed now anticipates that two of Norway's simulators will be ready for use Sept. 8, followed by another two on Oct. 13. Israel's two simulators will be ready Sept. 1, Italy's two on Sept. 22 and Japan's two on Sept. 29, according to the company.

Ongoing delivery of the hardware piece of the simulators has not been affected, Carvalho said.

Each new version of the F-35's simulator software will have to meet exportability requirements. This means the U.S. government will need to certify the next iteration of simulator software, Block 3F, which aligns with F-35 final warfighting capability.