

**STUART ANDREW MP**  
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE AND MINISTER  
FOR DEFENCE PROCUREMENT

MSU/4/5/2/23/ap

28<sup>th</sup> August 2018

*Dear Julian*

Thank you for your letter of 1 August 2018 to the Secretary of State for Defence, the Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP, regarding the UK's Tier 1 status in the F-35 programme. The work under the formal System Design and Development (SDD) phase of the F-35 Lightning II life-cycle is now complete. Under the Production, Sustainment and Follow-on Development (PSFD) Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) there are no Level 1 Partners alongside the US, so the UK is entitled to a level of influence linked to our nominal 4.5% proportion of the total launch offtake of aircraft.

Throughout the SDD phase, the UK has built a strong working relationship with the F-35 Joint Programme Office (JPO) and US Services, contributing innovation, best practice and integration feedback into the wider enterprise. To continue influencing the US, we have actively encouraged high level visits from the JPO and US Services to the UK in order to demonstrate our capabilities, such as the Typhoon Support Centre, including the Rapid Re-Programming Laboratory at RAF Coningsby; the Agile Thunder and Cutlass integration laboratories; and other F-35 relevant support activity. This has been well received, and the UK is perceived as a value-adding partner and one that has, in several areas, comparable or even enhanced capability to that of the US. For example, the UK has recently persuaded the US Air Force (USAF) to co-fund an important collision avoidance technology bringing together the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory and its USAF counterpart, the Air Force Research Laboratory, and there is a good prospect that this will be adopted for the whole programme with consequent economic benefits.

At the present time, there has been no significant erosion of the UK's status and we continue to have bilateral relationships on sensitive technical and operational issues. The opportunity to enhance our partnering arrangement has not been offered. It is not covered within the PSFD MoU and, in any case, is unlikely to be affordable in the present climate. Moreover, the future programme is based on a continuous design development capability that does not lend itself to a defined investment period. Indeed, it is doubtful that

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the US would consider offering the UK, or anyone else, a capped liability for future capability enhancement. However, as the UK continues to invest in UK or non-US weapon enhancement, this itself provides a platform for the UK to be treated as an investment partner and the overall programme benefits in having a more capable offering to potential customers. For example, the SDD has seen the introduction of ASRAAM and Paveway IV, and we plan the further integration of METEOR and Spear 3 future weapons.

The UK continues to provide personnel to work in carefully selected roles within the JPO, most recently in securing through competition the deputy leader of the Hybrid Product Support Integrator (HPSI), which is the organisation that manages F-35 sustainment.

In summary, the UK has maintained a strong relationship with the programme and the US and has laid foundations for this to continue for the foreseeable future. The basis for this relationship, and the benefit it brings to the UK, are now of a less formal and prescribed nature though nonetheless effective.

Yours  
Stuart

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