

US Navy Outlines F-35 Active Expendable Decoy Plan

By Richard Scott

The US Navy has revealed fast-track plans to procure a military-off-the-shelf active expendable decoy (AED) for deployment from Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II strikefighters.

Releasing a sources sought solicitation and associated request for information (RFI) on June 6, Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) said it was looking at an acquisition of up to 8,000 decoy rounds to meet Navy and other customer requirements from Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 through to FY 2029. The wording of the solicitation confirms that a suitable AED has already been integrated and tested on the F-35.

Dispensed from standard chaff/flare launchers, AEDs are small, self-contained, expendable jammers that serve as a “break lock” countermeasure to defeat radio frequency (RF)-guided anti-air missiles in the final stages of an engagement. They function independently of the aircraft to complement on-board RF jammers and provide an additional RF countermeasure capability.

NAVAIR has stipulated a mission load programmable AED with a 2 x 1 x 8-in. form factor that has previously demonstrated RF countermeasures performance at Technology Readiness Level 9 (defined as an actual system proven through successful mission operations). It has also mandated that the AED “must be qualified for use on F-35 and ready for immediate production.”

The RFI said that it was anticipated that F-35 AED end item deliveries will commence as early as four months but no later than ten months after contract award, and no later than ten months after each respective option is exercised. It added

that all quantities must be manufactured and delivered within 12 months of the first delivery in each period, with initial production anticipated to be 120 decoys per month.

NAVAIR acknowledged in its sources sought notice that F-35 aircraft "have tested and integrated [an] AED capability, which resulted in a fielding decision." No details on the vendor or model of the AED concerned were divulged.

According to the RFI, the Navy is planning to award a base year contract in November with up to four option years. The proposed contracting actions will procure an estimated 1,000 AEDs per year for the first two years, increasing to approximately 2,000 per year for follow-on years.

The integration of an AED would add an additional layer of RF protection to the F-35. The aircraft is already fitted with the BAE Systems AN/ASQ-239 integrated electronic warfare suite (which includes an integral self-defence jammer) and can also deploy the BAE Systems' AN/ALE-70 towed RF countermeasure.