

Air Force announces criteria for basing F-35s

The U.S. Air Force recently released additional criteria it will use to select its training and operational bases for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

Luke Air Force remains the top contender for the next generation of aircraft, according to local base supporters.

“Luke AFB should do well in the analysis and competition to become the second F-35 training facility,” said Steve Yamamori, executive director of Fighter Country Partnership.

Many see the F-35 as the insurance the Glendale base needs to survive as it phases out the F-16s.

Last October, a site survey team gave high marks to Luke in a preliminary review that looked at a number of factors, including ramp space, maintenance facilities and range access.

The military installation pumps \$2.17 billion a year into Arizona’s economy.

— Cecilia Chan/*The Republic/azcentral.com*

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA

- » Airspace.
- » Flight training ranges.
- » Weather.
- » Support facilities.
- » Runways.
- » Taxi ramps.
- » Environmental concerns.
- » Cost factors.

HOW LUKE STACKS UP

- » **Airspace:** Barry M. Goldwater training range and Arizona’s special-use airspace for military operations is unparalleled.
- » **Flight training ranges:** A state-of-the-art training environment at the Barry M. Goldwater Range that can’t be replicated anywhere in the country.
- » **Weather:** Year-round flying weather.
- » **Support facilities, runways and taxi ramps:** Two parallel runways, ramp space, hangar space and a number of auxiliary fields.
- » **Environmental concerns:** Potential noise and air-quality issues. Yamamori noted that there are noise contour zones in place and that the Maricopa Association of Governments has determined that if the F-35 were to come to Luke there would be no adverse effect on the county’s ability to meet federal air-quality standards.
- » **Cost factors:** Minor modifications to accommodate F-35s. Base is the world’s largest training facility for F-16 pilots and can easily transition into training F-35 pilots.

HOW CRITERIA WILL BE USED

The Air Force will evaluate more than 200 Air Force sites using the criteria. Once that is completed, officials will consider other factors, including combatant commander requirements, aircraft retirements and integration with the Air National Guard and Reserve.

FALL 2009

- » The Air Force will identify two candidate basing lists, one list for operations and one for training, to place 250 to 300 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft, scheduled for delivery through 2017.
- » Formal environmental impact analysis process begins. Communities around each candidate base will be allowed to participate and provide input.

LATE SPRING 2010

Officials are expected to announce the preferred locations.

EARLY 2011

Announcement of final decisions for both the initial operational bases and the next increment of training bases.

2013

First aircraft expected to arrive at selected base.