Beat: Technology

U.S. grounds entire F-35 fleet after engine fire

-, 04.07.2014, 13:24 Time

USPA News - The U.S. military has grounded its entire fleet of F-35 stealth fighter jets after an aircraft was severely damaged in an engine fire last month, the Pentagon announced on late Thursday evening, saying return to flight would depend on additional inspections. Pentagon Press Secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby said technical air worthiness authorities of the Air Force and Navy had issued a directive to ground the F-35 fleet, which consists of 97 aircraft built by Lockheed Martin Corp. and equipped with Pratt & Whitney engines.

Thirty-six more jets are expected to be delivered by the end of the year. Kirby said the decision to ground the fleet was based on the initial findings from the incident that occurred at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida on June 23. "The root cause of the incident remains under investigation," the press secretary said, without elaborating on what the initial investigation had revealed. "Additional inspections of F-35 engines have been ordered, and return to flight will be determined based on inspection results and analysis of engineering data. Defense Department leadership supports this prudent approach," Kirby added. He said preparations were continuing for F-35 participation in international air shows in the United Kingdom, though a final decision on its participation had not yet been made. The incident at Eglin Air Force Base on June 23 happened when an F-35 fighter jet caught fire while it was about to take off on a training mission. Emergency responders extinguished the fire with foam, but the aircraft was severely damaged and may have to be written off, officials said at the time. The single-engine, single-seat F-35 is meant to replace aging fighter jets such as the F-16, which is still commonly used around the world. The F-35 is expected to solve the problem of aging fleets and, with stealth and a host of next-generation technologies that allows operators to easily incorporate the latest technological advancements, the F-35 has been described as the world`s most advanced multi-role fighter.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2397/us-grounds-entire-f-35-fleet-after-engine-fire.html

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619