

Top Marine asks: Is JLTV worth buying?

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The top U.S. Marine officer questioned on Tuesday the value of buying a new fleet of JLTV armored off-road vehicles now, saying they were still too heavy and that a better short-term option might be modifying existing Humvees.

Marine Corps Commandant General James Conway said the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, or JLTV, being developed still weighed about 22,000 pounds, too much for a force that wants to be able to transport its vehicles by helicopter or amphibious ship.

"We ask ourselves: Is that the vehicle that we need to be buying?" Conway said, talking to reporters at the Pentagon.

Conway's comments underscored concerns about whether the program would be canceled as part of the fiscal 2011 budget.

Lockheed Martin Corp ([LMT.N](#)), General Dynamics Corp ([GD.N](#)) and BAE Systems Plc ([BAES.L](#)) are competing to replace the workhorse High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles, or Humvees, which entered service in 1985.

Rob Stallard, defense analyst for Macquarie Securities, told the Reuters Aerospace and Defense Summit in Washington that increasing pressure on defense budgets and a lack of strong political backing in Congress could make the program vulnerable.

"It's still at relatively early stages, at a point when the budget is getting tighter and the easiest things to whack are things like JLTV," Stallard told the summit.

He said billions of dollars spent by the Pentagon on Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles for use in Iraq, and a newer version modified for off-road use in Afghanistan, could also make defense officials reluctant to proceed with another truck program at this point.

Conway noted that the JLTV envisioned by war planners still needed better technology to make lightweight armor with the same strength of steel, key to protecting troops from roadside bombs that have driven up casualties in Afghanistan.

"Well, it just hasn't happened and the experts will tell you that it's still five years out. That leads us to your question about do we do something in terms of a bridge," he said.

Conway noted that the Marines had tens of thousands of Humvees and that modifying them may be a good, inexpensive option until a light JLTV comes along. Blast testing was underway.

"We're looking at a capability, and I'm won't talk about the manufacturer, but a capability that would elevate that Humvee ... with a V-shaped bottom that would have a protective compartment for the crew," he said.

"There are some manufacturers out there who think they can do that and about for a tenth of the cost of a new vehicle."

Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5BF05520091216>