

F-16 CASE FOR SUSTAINMENT

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



In a recent turn of events, the US State Department showcased a possible intent to approve the Foreign Military Sale (FMS) of F-16 fighter jets Case for Sustainment and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$450 million to the Government of Pakistan. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale.

The addition to the fleet of F-16 comes in light of the request made by the government of Pakistan to consolidate prior F-16 sustainment and support cases to the PAF in lieu to add additional continued support elements.

While the proposed sale does not include any new capabilities, weapons, or munitions it, however, is inclusive of US Government and contractor engineering, technical, and logistics services for follow-on support of Pakistan's F-16 fleet to include:¹

- Participation in F-16 Aircraft Structural Integrity Program
- Electronic Combat International Security Assistance Program
- International Engine Management Program

¹ Pakistan – F-16 Case for Sustainment, Defense Security Cooperation Agency, News Release, September 7, 2022, Transmittal No. 22-07, <https://www.dscamilitary.com/sites/default/files/mas/Press%20Release%20-%20Pakistan%2022-07%20CN.pdf>

- Engine Component Improvement Program, and other technical coordination groups
- Aircraft and engine hardware and software modifications and support
- Aircraft and engine spare repair/return parts
- Accessories and support equipment
- Classified and unclassified software and software support
- Publications, manuals, and technical documentation
- Precision measurement, calibration, lab equipment, and technical support services
- Studies and surveys
- Other related elements of aircraft maintenance and program support.

After Pakistan became the front-line state in the aftermath of 9/11, the US resumed its sales of the F-16s to assist Pakistan in the fight against extremist elements and spent about \$3 billion² in F-16 programs in order to upgrade the fighter jet fleet.

Later in 2006, the US DSCA notified Congress via a series of releases of its intention to provide Pakistan with a \$5.1 billion Foreign Military Sales package to upgrade the F-16s.³ In addition, Pakistan also became the eighth international customer to order Lockheed Martin Sniper Advanced Targeting Pod in May 2007 (delivered in 2008-10) which enhanced the PAFs ability to perform intelligence, targeting, surveillance, and recon missions.⁴

Pakistan purchased its first fleet of 40 F-16s from the US in 1981, out of which the US embargoed an order for 28 F-16 jets in the 1990s over concerns about Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. Pakistan's F-16 fleet has bolstered the capabilities of PAF. The origins of the program date back to

² Aaron Stein and Robert Hamilton, "How America's Experience with Pakistan Can Help it Deal with Turkey," War on the Rocks, August 25, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/08/how-americas-experience-with-pakistan-can-help-it-deal-with-turkey/>

³ "Billions to Upgrade and Up-arm Pakistan's F-16s," Defense Industry Daily, December 18, 2019, <https://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/51b-proposed-in-sales-upgrades-weapons-for-pakistans-f16s-02396/>

⁴ "PAF Sniper Advanced Targeting Pod," Current Affairs, February 6, 2022, <https://www.currentaffairs.com.pk/paf-sniper-advanced-targeting-pod-sniper-atp/>

the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States agreed to sell Pakistan F-16s to engage the Soviet and Afghan jets.⁵

In 2009 between Turkish Aerospace Industries and Pakistan authorities signed a deal in an aviation project according to which Turkey agreed to modernise PAFs fleet of F-16s at a cost of \$75 million.⁶ Under the program a total of 42 F-16s will be upgraded at TAI's facilities in 46 months starting from October 2010.⁷

While the previous US F-16 sales to Pakistan have come with certain strings and conditionalities and assigned reps, the recent F-16 rapprochement will not require the assignment of any 'additional' US Government or contractor representatives to Pakistan.⁸ The US believes that the sale of the proposed fighter jets will support its foreign policy and national security interests and will neither support nor alter the basic military design in the region.

With the sale of programs to Pakistan, which underlines technical and security sensitivities, the US has always remained cautious and alarmed. The predominant apprehension remains of "China's likely discovery;" repeatedly US policy pundits have argued that while hundreds of Pakistani engineers and pilots become intimately aware of every aspect of the planes, there is a possibility that the plans, drawings, and pictures can be shared with Chinese operatives.⁹ This factor alone has led to stalling of deals, as well as limited to no access to avionics and electronics of the planes.

The recent proposed sale does not include any new capabilities, weapons, or munitions and the estimated total cost is \$450 million.¹⁰ The addition of new fighter jets will help to continue the sustainment of its F-16 fleet, and will further add spring to PAF's support of counterterrorism operations.

⁵ Aaron Stein and Robert Hamilton, "How America's Experience with Pakistan Can Help it Deal with Turkey," War on the Rocks, August 25, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/08/how-americas-experience-with-pakistan-can-help-it-deal-with-turkey/>

⁶ "Turkey to Modernise Pakistan's F-16s," Tribune, May 15, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1103620/turkey-to-modernise-pakistans-f-16s>

⁷ "Tai to Modernize Pakistan F-16s," Defense Turkey, Issue 19, December 2009, <https://www.defenceturkey.com/en/content/tai-to-modernize-pakistan-f-16s-397>

⁸ "Pakistan – F-16 Case for Sustainment," Defense Security Cooperation agency, September 7, 2022, <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/pakistan-f-16-case-sustainment>

⁹ "Proposed Sale of F-16 Aircraft and Weapons Systems of Pakistan," Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, Second Session, Serial No. 109–220, July 20, 2006, http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa28787.000/hfa28787_0.htm

¹⁰ "Pakistan – F-16 Case for Sustainment," Defense Security Cooperation agency, September 7, 2022, <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/pakistan-f-16-case-sustainment>

The announcement of the proposed deal reflects upon the present and future strategic opening between the two countries. Counter Terrorism (CT) remains an active area of collaboration and engagement between Pakistan and the US with constant re-optimization. Regardless of the past misgivings between the two capitals, and Islamabad's current shift to geo-economics the deal signifies the importance and validity of strategic ties between Islamabad and DC. Issues impacting regional peace and security including; Afghanistan as well as continued cooperation in defense and CT¹¹ sectors have remained a constant area of discussion between officials on both sides.

¹¹ Umair Jamal, "Pakistan's New Government Mends Ties With the US," Diplomat, May 19, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/pakistans-new-government-mends-ties-with-the-us/>