

Poland Opts for F-16s

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Poland announced December 27 that it would buy 48 U.S. F-16C/D fighter aircraft in a deal estimated to be worth approximately \$3.5 billion. The package deal includes the weapons, engines, and electronic packages for the planes.

Poland chose the F-16 jet over two rival European offers, the French-built Mirage 2000-5 and the JAS-39 Gripen, which is jointly manufactured by the United Kingdom and Sweden. Deliveries of the fighters to Poland are expected to begin in September 2006 and finish in 2008.

The United States pushed hard for Poland to buy U.S. fighters. The Bush administration will provide Poland with a \$3.8 billion low- interest loan, which Congress has approved, to make the purchase. The loan term is 15 years, during which Poland only needs to pay interest over the first eight years.

Lockheed Martin, the F-16 manufacturer, promised to provide Poland with offsets equaling at least 100 percent of the sale. Offsets are side deals in which the seller compensates the buyer, for example, by transferring technology, establishing production lines, providing training, or investing in the purchasing country.

In December 2001, the United States publicly lobbied Poland to buy U.S. Fighters while criticizing Hungary and the Czech Republic for choosing the Gripen in combat aircraft deals. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said at that time, "If you're going to buy [combat aircraft], buy American." The Czech Republic cancelled its Gripen purchase in November 2002, largely because of funding shortfalls.

Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary all joined the NATO alliance in 1999. One of the expectations of the three joining NATO was that they would modernize their militaries by replacing older former Soviet weaponry with new arms that would allow them to participate in alliance military exercises and missions.

Poland is the 24th country, including the United States, to buy F-16 fighters, of which more than 4,000 have been built and delivered.

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