

## Lockheed keen on IAF order for 110 fighter jets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Washington, 7 April

American aerospace and defence major Lockheed Martin has welcomed India's mega procurement initiative for fighter jets worth over \$15 billion and said that it looks forward to responding to the initial tender.

India on Friday began the process to acquire a fleet of around 110 fighter jets in one of the biggest aircraft procurements deal in recent years globally which could be worth over \$15 billion. At least 85 per cent of the aircraft will have to be made in India while 15 per cent of them can be in a flyaway condition. An RFI (Request for Information) or initial tender for the mega deal was issued by the Indian Air Force and

the procurement will be in sync with the government's 'Make in India' initiative in the defence sector, officials said.

"Lockheed Martin welcomes India's fighter aircraft request for information (RFI) and we look forward to responding to it," said Dr Vivek Lall, vice-president, strategy and business development at Lockheed Martin.

"The F-16 remains the only aircraft programme in this competition with the proven performance and industrial scale to meet India's operational needs and 'Make in India' priorities including unmatched export opportunities," he said. Indian-American Lall was last year instrumental in the decision of the Trump administration to sell top-of-the-line unarmed drones from General Atomics.

Lockheed Martin has positioned the newest Block 70

variant of its F-16 aircraft for the Indian Air Force, while Boeing has offered its F/A-18 Super Hornet Block III for the Indian Navy.

"The two aircraft have been positioned complementarily, and the purchase of the pair is an interesting proposition for policymakers from both countries," US-based think-tank Atlantic Council said in a report released in New Delhi on Friday.

In the report, 'India's Quest for Fighter Jets: Make in India vs Make America Great Again', it said China's bellicose incursions in the Indo-Pacific region are challenging US geostrategic supremacy in the region.

Consequently, improving India's capacity to play a stronger role in the region would play a critical role in the US grand strategy, the think-tank said.

While offshoring both the F-16 and F/A-18 assembly lines would appear to contradict Trump's promise to create more manufacturing jobs in the US, nuances in that policy could open a window of opportunity, Atlantic Council said. The F-16s and the F/A-18 Super Hornets manufactured in India would not be sold to the US, it said. The F-16 production line will be used to service the orders from the Indian Air Force, as well as any follow-on international orders. Noting that the US Air Force has not bought an F-16 since 1999, and is transitioning its multi-role fighter force to the F-35, the think-tank said that any additional F-16 orders would be for non-US customers. An India partnership presents an opportunity to sustain F-16 production, with all the economic and strategic benefits arising out of the move, it said.

