

## F-16 OPERATES WITH PAK AIR FORCE

# Lockheed Seeks to Shake Off Pak Tag, Offers F-21 Series Only for India

F-21 could have certain tech from F-22 & F-35; US co makes F-22 only for the US Air Force

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New Delhi: To shake off the Pakistan tag that has throttled its efforts to pitch the F-16 to India, US aircraft maker Lockheed Martin is willing to recast and rebrand its old warhorse as F-21, just for India.

The new fighter jet may still be on the drawing board, but Lockheed officials claimed that it was a "completely different" plane, tailored specifically for the Indian Air Force.

They also indicated that it could have certain technologies from the F-22 and F-35. Incidentally, the fifth generation F-22 is made specifically for the US Air Force and not sold to any other country.

The F-21, which Lockheed will make with Tata Advanced Systems, will be on offer for bid on India's requirement of 110 combat aircraft.

"The F-21 addresses the Indian Air Force's unique requirements and integrates India into the world's largest fighter aircraft ecosystem with the world's pre-eminent defence company. Lockheed Martin and Tata Advanced Systems would produce the F-21 in India, for India," a statement by the company read.

### INDIA HAS TO SELECT 1ST



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When asked by ET, Lockheed officials said that there were visible changes in the aircraft, including a new 'spine' that is designed to provide more space to get future systems into the jet. The change that has been done is likely to counter the argument that the F-16 had been rejected by the Air Force in the earlier Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft contest on the grounds that the airframe is not capable of integrating future capability expansions.

The renaming will also help Lockheed counter the tag that the F-16 operates with the Pakistani Air Force and is the biggest adversary to the Indian Air Force fighter jets.

"It is a new plane, with a triple rail launcher and an Infra-Red Seeking Tracker (IRST). It is being offered only to India and no other nation," said Randall L Howard, director, business development, Lockheed Martin. Vice President Vivek Lal described the F-21 as a "different animal."

Though Lockheed has promised that technologies developed from the F-35 and F-22 fighter jets will be integrated into the F-21 on offer, it's unlikely that the fighter jet will take off unless India selects it. The India-specific enhancements will also happen at a heavy cost that would have to be integrated into the larger project.



HD Kumaraswamy and Nirmala Sitharaman at Yelahanka airbase - PTI