

## US formalizes sale of new F-16 warplanes to Taiwan

Written by Taipei Times  
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An F-16V jet flies during a drill in Hualien on March 26.

**Photo: Yu Tai-lang, Taipei Times**

The government has formally signed an agreement to buy 66 of the latest model F-16 jets built by Lockheed Martin Corp.

The nation's purchase of the F-16s marks the first US sale of advanced fighter jets to Taiwan since then-US president George H.W. Bush announced approval for 150 F-16s in 1992.

A US\$62 billion figure announced by the US Department of Defense on Friday is the upper limit of numerous contracts if all potential foreign customers placed their maximum desired number over the decade.

The US administration first signaled its plans to approve the sale a year ago in an informal notification to the US Congress and it could still be years before the jets are delivered.

The announcement said that work on the 90 jets potentially to be sold under Friday's announcement would be completed by late 2026.

Company officials have previously said they project a market for as many as 400 of the new F-16s.

Government sources in Taipei yesterday said that the Bloomberg report refers to the signing of contracts between the US government and US corporations, as Taiwan has completed its legislative approval and signed a Letter of Acceptance (LOA) last year.

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Ministry of National Defense spokesman Major General Shih Shun-wen (石純文) last year said that the ministry had signed an LOA with the US government regarding the sale of 66 F-16s, estimating at the time that Taiwan would receive two of the advanced jets by 2023, with the delivery of all 66 jets to be completed by 2026.

When the planned sale was announced in August last year, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Hua Chunying (華春瑩) said that “US arms sales to Taiwan severely violate the ‘one China’ principle.”

Hua said at the time that her government was urging the US to “refrain” from selling the “fighter jets to Taiwan and stop arms sales to, and military contact with, Taiwan. Otherwise, the Chinese side will surely make strong reactions, and the US will have to bear all the consequences.”

Since then, China’s ties with the US have only frayed further, with the two nations in a series of disputes ranging from the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic to 5G technology and Beijing’s tightening grip over Hong Kong.

In addition to Taiwan, Morocco is buying 24 F-16s jets in the first tranche of 90 aircraft that the Pentagon said was valued at US\$4.9 billion.

The Pentagon announcement did not name Taiwan or Morocco, but they have been identified in a previous statement and were confirmed on Friday by a person familiar with the contract.

The new F-16s are being assembled at Lockheed’s new facility in Greenville, South Carolina, which opened in April last year.

The contracting mechanism used by the Pentagon “will facilitate faster contract awards and greater pricing clarity for our foreign military partners,” US Air Force spokesman Brian Brackens said in a statement to Bloomberg News before the contract announcement.

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“Taiwan and Morocco are expected to be the first two partner nations that will utilize this contract,” Brackens said.

Taiwan’s F-16s would be equipped with a top-line fire control radar made by Northrop Grumman Corp.

Called the APG-83, it would allow precision-guided munitions to be fired at greater distances, an official familiar with the details said.

Lockheed chief financial officer Kenneth Possenriede told analysts on a July 21 earnings call that the company was anticipating a “quite large” F-16 order “that should get announced sometime this quarter,” in which “the marquee customer is Taiwan.”

The additional 90 F-16s would add to Lockheed’s 38-aircraft backlog.

Additional reporting by CNA

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