

Italy To Acquire USAF F-16s

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The following was released today by Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company:

On March 15, Italy signed an agreement for the lease of 34 F-16s from the U.S. Air Force inventory and a Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LOA) for aircraft support and services.

The F-16s will replace the Tornado Air Defense Version aircraft currently leased from the United Kingdom and the F-104s, both operated in the air defense role. The first F-16s will be delivered in mid-2003.

The five-year lease is renewable for a second five-year period. The LOA and lease value is approximately \$777 million over 10 years.

Lockheed Martin is expected to receive a contract through the U.S. government for spares, technical support and training. Lockheed Martin will manage the spares requisitioning and distribution at the Italian bases. The support contract, worth about \$313 million over 10 years, is expected to be issued by the end of this year.

"We value the long association we have had with the Italian Air Force on the F-104 and C-130," said Dain M. Hancock, president of Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., in Fort Worth, Texas. "We are honored that Italy's Air Force has selected our product again and look forward to working with them as the newest member of the F-16 family."

The Italian Air Force will receive 30 single-seat F-16A aircraft in the Block 15 Air Defense Fighter (ADF) configuration and four two-seat F-16B aircraft in the Block 10 Operational Capabilities Upgrade configuration. These aircraft have common software and cockpits, and the F-16Bs will be used as training aircraft.

The ADF configuration has AIM-120 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM) radar missile capability, a night identification light, a long-range high-frequency radio, an electronic interrogator/transponder and other features tailored to the air defense role.

The F-16 aircraft are currently in storage at the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center in Tucson, Ariz. Before delivery to the Italian Air Force, all of the flying aircraft will be refurbished and brought up to date with all required inspections and changes. At the same time, the aircraft will receive the Falcon UP structural upgrade. The F100-PW-200 engines will be upgraded to the F-100-PW-220E configuration to improve operability, reliability, maintainability, durability, safety, and operation and support costs.

"This lease is a very cost-effective approach to satisfying our near-term air defense needs on an interim basis," said Brigadier General Tommaso Ferro, the Italian Defense and Air Attache to the United States, in Washington, D.C. "We are looking forward to joining our eight NATO partners who are already flying the F-16 and expect to enjoy the interoperability advantages of operating the same type aircraft. We are confident that the F-16 capability will superbly allow us to cover the gap while waiting for the Eurofighter generation."

Italy will be the 21st country to operate the F-16 Fighting Falcon. They are the sixth country to acquire F-16s from the USAF inventory and are the second country to use the lease approach. Several countries in Central Europe are considering lease/purchase of inventory F-16s as the fastest and lowest-cost option for acquiring Western-built fighters to upgrade their air forces.

The F-16, the world's most sought-after fighter, is the choice of 22 countries, counting the announcements of Italy and Chile. More than 4,000 aircraft have been delivered; hundreds more will be delivered to Egypt, the United States, Israel, Greece, the United Arab Emirates, Korea and Singapore; and production is expected to continue beyond 2010. Major upgrades for all F-16 versions are being incorporated to keep the fleet modern and fully supportable over the aircraft's long service life.

The F-16 is playing a major role as the durable and versatile "workhorse" in allied peacekeeping operations in the Balkans and Iraq.

Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company is the prime contractor for this program and is a leader in the design, development, systems integration, production and support of advanced military aircraft and related technologies. Its customers include the military services of the United States and allied countries throughout the world. Products include the F-22, F-16, F-117, C-5, C-27J, C-130, P-3 and U-2. The company leads a team competing for the development and production of the Joint Strike Fighter.

Lockheed Martin Aircraft & Logistics Centers will provide contractor logistics support, including on-site maintenance, training and component repair. LMALC, headquartered in Greenville, S.C., is the aerospace support arm of the Technology Services Business Area of the Lockheed Martin Corporation and is one of the leading providers of aircraft maintenance and total life cycle support services for the Department of Defense and commercial customers.

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