

US reveals details of F-15SE, F-35A bids for South Korea

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Source: **FLIGHT**
INTERNATIONAL

Posted: 4/3/2013

The US Department of Defense formally notified the US Congress of potential sales of the Boeing F-15SE Silent Eagle and Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighter to South Korea on 29 March. The two aircraft are on offer to the Asian nation as part of South Korea's F-X III fighter competition. The Eurofighter Typhoon is a third contender for the 60 aircraft tender.

For the potential F-35 sale, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) says that South Korea could order 60 conventional A-model aircraft and associated support equipment for \$10.8 billion. There would also be provisions for spares including nine additional Pratt & Whitney F135 afterburning turbofans. The package would also encompass training-including simulators.

Lockheed Martin says that it is pleased that the formal Congressional notification process is now under way, but notes that the competing bids are still being evaluated by Korea and price discussions are "on-going".



Lockheed Martin

Boeing's F-15SE Silent Eagle offering is a somewhat more complicated bid because it is a hybrid of a direct commercial sale and government-to-government US foreign military sale (FMS). As such the DSCA notification to Congress is only for certain equipment that would have to be sold to South Korea to support the Silent Eagle sale.

Equipment that would be sold under the auspices of the US government FMS programme include 60 Raytheon-built active electronically scanned array radar (AESA) radars, but it is not specified if those are APG-63 (V)3 or APG-82 sets. Additionally, the F-15SE sale would include 60 digital electronic warfare systems (DEWS), 60 Lockheed AN/AAQ-33 Sniper targeting pods, 60 Lockheed AN/AAS-42 infrared search and track systems and other ancillary hardware. The estimated cost of the FMS portion of the sale would be \$2.41 billion according to the DSCA.

"We do feel we have the lower cost, better value bid here," a Boeing official says, but the company did not say how much the direct commercial sale portion of their bid would cost. In a written statement, Boeing adds: "We are confident our Silent Eagle offering is best suited to address F-X requirements."

While he does not rule out the possibility that South Korea will opt for the Typhoon, Raymond Jaworowski, an analyst with Forecast International, says the contest will most likely come down to a battle between the F-35 and the Silent Eagle. "The F-15 and the F-35 are the frontrunners," he says. "South Korea has previously bought US fighter aircraft and it seems likely that's the way they'll go for this buy."

In the Silent Eagle's favour is the fact that South Korea already has the older F-15K Slam Eagle in service. "The commonality factor will come into play," Jaworowski says. "On the other hand, the F-35 is more and more becoming the dominant fighter on the market." Other factors that play in the F-35's favour are the fact that Japan has already ordered the stealthy fifth-generation jet and growing threats in the region.

But given the state of the South Korean tender, "I think at this point it's too early to predict between the F-35 and the F-15," Jaworowski says.

Source: <http://www.flightglobal.com/news/articles/us-reveals-details-of-f-15se-f-35a-bids-for-south-korea-384180/>