

## SOME SIMILARITIES BETWEEN F-16 PROGRAM IN POLAND AND ROMANIA

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DOI: 10.19062/2247-3173.2016.18.2.41

***Abstract:** By making a comparison between historic acquisition of the F-16 by two European countries, Poland and Romania, we can affirm that in both states, the procurement process was a lengthy one, not easy, sometimes controversial, but gave them a certainly status within NATO as well as the security guarantee.*

*By the time of the actual purchase of F-16, people who supported the purchase, always bring into discussion the need that Air Forces should be equipped with such an airplane due to its capabilities and performances.*

*However, indirectly, the purchase of F-16 was dominated by the political factor and guarantees to the states holder the national security in front of Russia regional dominance or in front of other elements that could provide a regional insecurity state.*

***Keywords:** F-16, Air Force, acquisition process, security statue, interoperability.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the economic crisis that Romania has faced in recent years and being threated by ethnic and territorial conflicts deployed in the eastern part of the country, the resources management, whatever these may be, has become an essential element of the defense system. Military resources management is very complex and highlights the continuing need to improve institutional systems, budgeting and decision-making of all military structures.

An efficient resources management in military transactions must consider the combination of three key issues, namely technology, doctrine and organization. So, the used technologies must belong to the newest generation, the doctrines need to be combined, interoperable and multinational, and the military structures must be flexible and mobile.

Considering all these elements and referring, especially, to our country, we can affirm that the military resources management (resources allocated to the Ministry of National Defense), represents the fulfillment of commitments undertaken by our country within NATO and EU, in line with the Army transformation process.

Also, in the Air Force, the resource management is an extremely important process, being the cornerstone of the performance of all security objectives.

In this context, we can say that the effectiveness of a state air power depends, to a large extent, by the Air Forces endowment in line with their objectives and tasks, through the acquisition of specific equipment. The purchase of modern military combat systems, reliable, with outstanding performance, with low-cost maintenance and operation, that

meet all operational requirements, in accordance with the environment characteristics in which they are used, but also the full support of military systems logistics are binding principles for achieving Romania's air power.

## **2. THE F-16 ACQUISITION PROCESS IN POLAND - SHORT PRESENTATION**

In December 2002, Poland made public the decision to purchase 48 F-16 combat aircraft from Lockheed Martin and this transaction was called by many international officials "the deal of the century" [1] and was sealed on April 2003 with the signing of the contract by Polish and USA officials, and Lockheed Martin senior executives. The acquisition involved three separate, but related, agreements: the sale of 48 F-16 52+; an offset package to invest in Poland over a 10 year period; and favorable USA Government-backed low-interest financing.[2]

Poland's decision to purchase the F-16 had interwoven capability, interoperability, economic, and political dimensions. The main issues that determine Poland to adopt such a decision (the purchase of the F-16 multirole aircraft) included a technical analysis of: competing aircraft, their prices/costs, financing, offsets, and politics. The mass media and the business community, particularly in Poland, portrayed the deal primarily in economic terms, emphasizing the favorable financing offered by the USA and the unprecedented offset agreement. Polish officials and politicians painted a picture of a more balanced decision for their constituents, one that emphasized price, tactical, and operational criteria over offsets.[3]

But academics, pundits, and officials from the losing bidders, Dassault and Saab/BAE, weighed politics more heavily in their assessment of the decision process than aircraft capabilities or economics. The hypothesis of this paper is that although capability, interoperability and economic interests played important roles in the Polish decision to purchase the F-16, political considerations dominated.

When the Iron Curtain fell, Poland found itself with a fairly robust, but eroding Air Force. The country had a total of approximately 800 combat aircraft in 1990. This number decreased rapidly to 300 in 1998, with a target of about 100 slated for 2002. The deteriorating fighter aircraft inventory and the target plan of 100 influenced the mindset of the Polish decision-makers leading up to the decision at the end of 2002 to purchase the F-16.

In the post-Cold War period, existing Polish aerospace companies were divided, fragmented, their production capacities visibly decreased, even deteriorated in some cases and, also, their capabilities deteriorated. One company that has resisted to the disintegration of the Soviet Union was PZL-Mielec, and it became the largest Polish aircraft manufacturer. But, this company was not able to produce a modern combat fourth generation aircraft. In addition, Mielec fought unsuccessfully to produce the PZL M-93M, an advanced trainer aircraft.

Internally, there was a strong sense that justified the desire to invest in the purchase of a fourth generation fighter aircraft. As a matter of national pride, Poland, a NATO member nation, no longer wanted to feel like a second-class state compared to other Western countries. Also, Poland wanted as the purchasing of this type of aircraft to reflect the recent country transformation in the military domain. To ensure a rapid reaction force within NATO (NRF - NATO Reaction Force ), composed of 48 modern fighter aircraft, Poland should put at NATO disposal interoperable aircrafts and which had to meet all NATO standards.[4]

Therefore, Poland's decision to purchase F-16 aircraft was adopted by taking into account a series of issues such as aircraft interoperability with NATO systems and its its

high capabilities. But, also, the economic, financial and political issues were not ignored in the F-16 purchase decision making. So, the next steps adopted by Poland in the purchase of F-16 aircraft, included a detailed technical analysis of: competing aircrafts from this class, their prices, the financing mode, the offset packages that were offered by competitors and the political implications.[5]

Polish officials and politicians built in their voters' eyes, vis-a-vis by this acquisition, an image of a wise and balanced acquisition, highlighting the price, tactical and operational aspects, and the advantages of the offset package. The officials from competing companies, who lost the tender, namely Dassault and Saab/BAE, found that their failure stems from the fact that, in the purchase decision making process, the Polish state put a greater accent on political issues and not on the aircraft capabilities or on the economic criteria. The hypothesis of this business is that although the aircraft capabilities and interoperability and economic implications have played a very important role in the decision to purchase the F-16 aircraft, the political considerations were more dominant, in fact the most important element.

There were many voices and controversial discussions around this subject. Thus, in August 2002, a former Defence Secretary of State published an article entitled „Fly or think?“, arguing that the threat that may arise from the east has been replaced by a terrorist threat and this issue does not justify a so large investment, namely the purchase of so expensive combat aircraft. In the same article, he claimed the purchase of second-hand combat aircraft. His opinion was rejected by the Poland Deputy Defence Ministry of that time, in an article entitled „Thinking and Flying“. He demonstrated that used combat aircraft, even if they would cost half the price of the new ones, would have a life duration much more smaller than half of the life duration of the new ones, both in terms of flight hours number and in terms of technology level.

### **3. SOME SIMILARITIES BETWEEN POLAND AND ROMANIA F-16 ACQUISITION PROCESS**

We could start this section with an important aspect, namely the fact that both in Romania and Poland, the military aircraft status and military aircraft industrial production capability were not excellent ones, and the requirement for an advanced fighter aircraft was more and more necessary.[6]

Also, in both states, the political factors were decisive in choosing the F-16 multirole aircraft, although this aspect was not the primordial one.

If we strictly referred to the acquisition process, we may affirm that both in Romania and Poland, there were voices which vehemently opposed to this important acquisition. Both this a long discussion and could be observed in press and mass-media.

Both Poland and Romania, before starting the multirole aircraft acquisition process, conducted an analysis of military aircraft endowment of its own forces, the ability of industry to manufacture/produce military aircraft, but also the need to hold a fighter aircraft with advanced capabilities.[7]

It is important to remark that, in both countries, the purpose and the necessity of equipping Air Force with a multirole fighter aircraft went from the objectives set by the National Defense Strategies of these countries, in order to accomplish the Air Force missions for defending the national territory in peacetime, in crisis and war situations and for the fulfilling of the commitments assumed by these states within NATO and EU adherence.

In both states, the acquisition process had as a starting point several negotiations stages, followed by a decision making process, amid economic difficulties and political

disagreements. Also, the acquisition process tracked, with small but sure steps, many of the initially set out stages. It is a certainty that, in present, Poland operates this multirole airplane and, in September of 2016, the first F-16s squadron will arrive in Romania, and will become operational next year.

In both countries, the acquisition process was a very difficult one, a highly complex acquisition with implications that aimed several plans.

Poland and Romania, before taking the purchase decision, made many comparative studies between the capabilities of aircraft that could be purchased. In this regard, the competitors in Poland were: the F-16 from Lockheed Martin, JAS-39 Gripen from Saab/BAE Systems, and the Mirage 2000-5 Mk II from Dassault. In Romania, the specialists studied the offer of the following competitors: the F-16 from Lockheed Martin, JAS-39 Gripen from Saab/BAE Systems, Rafale from Dassault and the Eurofighter Typhoon from the three partner companies consortium: Alenia Aeronautica, BAE Systems, and EADS.

Following these analysis, both countries established the principles relating to the purchase of the F-16 aircraft, the institutional structure of the procurement, the procurement mechanism, and the responsibilities who will be implied in the development of the acquisition process.

Further, in the development of the multirole aircraft acquisition process, there were studied the bids financial construction, the economic issues, the political pressures exerted by governments where competitors came from and the analysis of advantages in the industrial domain offered by offset packages.

Another similarity of the F-16 acquisition was the fact that both countries operated old generation aircraft, and the maintenance and operation of these existing fighters were very expensive/costly. Also, these old generation aircraft did not operate with NATO systems and, therefore, both states could not fulfill their commitments assumed as NATO member states. As Romanian officials, the Poles considered that the existing equipments modernization and the F-16 acquisition will substantially strengthen the state's position within NATO and will help modernize the army.

In the same time, it was understood that the introducing of a fourth generation fighter aircraft would have had a cascading effect and we refer here at the personnel formation and training, including a considerable improvement of the pilots general training who will use these airplanes. Also, the technical, engineering staff and missions planification personnel will be positively „affected” by the implementation of this program in these two countries.

Another similarity of the F-16 acquisition process in Poland and Romania is that both countries planned as this aircraft to enter into the Air Force endowment as close to the time the flight resource for MiG-21 could not be extended, taking into account that these old generation airplanes will be gradually removed from the Air Force endowment.

Another similarity of the F-16 acquisition process in both states was the status of this aircraft within the NATO member states. In this regard, F-16 was considered the backbone of combat aircraft that operate within NATO.

Therefore, in 2002, eight NATO member states hold this type of airplane. It is also possible that the popularity of the F-16 under NATO member states, to have played a determining role in the choice made by Poland and Romania.

Lastly, top representatives of the two governments stressed that the acquisition of a modern combat aircraft will contribute to the country status strengthen within the alliance and, also, to the strategic partnership with the most developed democracies in the world. Another major advantage of this purchase is that these two states are able to protect their

own airspace and to react, in an effective way, if they are faced of with terrorist threats that may arise through air space.

Another common and important aspect of the procurement process conducted in the two countries is represented by the fact that NATO, through its representatives, offered to support both Poland and Romania by training, in a certain period of time, a number of pilots and specialized personnel (engineers, non-commission officers specialized in aviation technique manipulation, missions planning personnel, etc.).

Also, there are other similarities between the multirole aircraft acquisition process in the two states and, certainly, by far, the most important are those related to the political factor pressures and to the advantages in security guarantee that would follow to benefit, subsequently, the two NATO members states.

In this chapter, we should remark that an aspect which was not at all similar is that, unlike the case of Poland, in Romania it has not been concluded an offset contract. In this case, the economic and social impact of the acquisition process in our country was an insignificant one.[8]

In conditions in which the full purchasing contract would have included an offset program, the foreign investments in Romania, certainly, would be amplified, technology transfers would have caught a different shape, and the Romanian and foreign firms would have developed beneficial partnerships for both sides. Therefore, an offset program would have been given our country the chance to develop itself, to develop the jobs market, and to contribute to the creation of a development of a medium and long term strategy.

Therefore, the F-16 acquisition strategy in Poland should have been a lesson learned for the Romanian state in terms of military equipments procurement.

In conclusion, at the unspeakable level of this procurement process, the fact that NATO is the security umbrella in the face of increased potential threats (e.g. Russia, the Middle East threats, etc.) and, implicitly, the political entity that can ensure the NATO member states sovereignty and, on the other side, the fact that USA is the number one power of this international organization, represented the essence of the F-16 choosing by Poland and Romania.

In conclusion, we can affirm that the choice made by these two states authorities identified the optimal solution to ensure the state security and to comply with its obligations as a NATO ally.

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