

or detecting low-RCS [radar cross-section] targets. We have introduced the Mk4 version of the PS-05 and radar performance is far beyond that of any other platform. What we want to do is introduce an AESA system and antenna without having to modify the aircraft extensively. We wanted to find the closest [thing] as possible to a plug-and-play solution."

The report also claims that Saab couldn't offer an automatic ground collision avoidance system (AGCAS). "This is nonsense" the test pilot said. "We introduced the AGCAS on the MS20 system – it has been operational with the Swedish Air Force for more than two years and, more recently, on Hungarian and Czech jets."

The report illustrates how Saab, as a foreign vendor, is unable to include US smart weapons in its offer. Instead the customer has to go through a US acquisition process, adding extra cost. But, as Thorbjörnsson explained, "that is standard practice anyway".

Saab did come out on top when it came to the logistical package. Lockheed's Michael N Kelley told AFM: "The USAF gave a two-year proposal, but Gripen gave ten. We explained that we offered a two-year sustainment set-up because there are a lot of unknowns, and if we had priced out the programme with those, it might have been expensive. A two-

Above: Slovak MiG-29UBS serial 5304 wears a striking tiger scheme combined with Czechoslovak-era camouflage scheme. The 1. taktická letka has been a NATO Tiger member since 2003. Igor Bazovskí **Below:** Russian missiles and operational doctrine will be consigned to history once the F-16's enter Slovakian service. Seen here are the R-60 (AA-8 'Aphid'), R-73 (AA-11 'Archer') and R-27R (AA-10 'Alamo') AAMs as well as pods for 60mm unguided rockets. Alan Wiles



year deal allows the customer to gain operational experience on the platform and then a much better deal two years in. That way the customer doesn't pay too much and, more importantly, they are getting enough of what they need."

AFM put Kelley's explanation to Saab's Krasimira Stoyanova, vice president, head of Central and Eastern Europe, who disagreed. "We consider it the other way around. Our ten-year commitment is very predictable, and this is a cost which is based on our experience with the Gripen

system. The air force would be confident of the cost of the support over ten years. Under the F-16 two-year system, it is unclear what the cost will be over the next eight years – who says it won't go up? It's unpredictable from a budget perspective and our solution is fixed and full."

Slovakia initially wanted the aircraft to be operational next year, when the MiG support contract ends. According to Saab, the Gripen deal could have met that requirement, but the F-16s won't enter operational service in 2023.

Slovakia's Fulcrums

When Czechoslovakia split on January 1, 1993, the existing inventories were divided between the Czech Republic and Slovakia on a roughly 60:40 basis in favour of the former, reflecting the respective physical and population sizes of the two countries. However, there were two exceptions: the MiG-23 Flogger and MiG-29 Fulcrum inventories.

All 64 Floggers remained in Czech hands, but the Fulcrums were divided on an equal basis. Slovakia received MiG-29 serials 3709, 3911, 5113, 5515, 5817, 7501, 8003, 8605 and 9308 as well as three MiG-29UBs: 1303, 4401 and 5304. In December 1993 they were joined by three new single-seat MiG-29s – 0619, 0820 and 0921 – as part of a Russian debt settlement. The same agreement led to another nine aircraft being delivered in 1995-96: serials 2022, 2123, 6124, 6425, 6526, 6627, 6728, 6829 and 6930.

In 2005 a multi-million-dollar deal modernised the communications, navigation and identification systems of 12 jets, to bring them in line with NATO standards. Ten single-seaters (0619, 0921, 2123, 3709, 3911, 6124, 6425, 6526, 6627, 6728) and two MiG-29UBs (1303 and 5304) went through the overhaul and lifetime extension upgrade. They all emerged from the upgrade at LOT Trenčín redesignated as MiG-29AS and MiG-29UBS, respectively. Work was completed in February 2008. Today, around half of these are operated by the Mixed Wing 'Otta Smrika' SIAČ.

Controversy surrounding the support of the Slovakian MiG-29s surfaced in early May, when Slovak Parliament Speaker Andrej Danko disclosed that the country was negotiating further Fulcrum-related contracts with Russia. Local media reported that Russia was providing maintenance services for the MiG-29 fleet, worth up to €50m per year.

Defence ministry spokeswoman Danka Čapáková admitted in May that Slovakia was paying RSK MiG €20m annually plus another €10m for other work. As a NATO member, this arrangement is highly unusual. The support contract with RSK MiG will finish next year, but it's likely to be extended pending arrival of the F-16s. **✪**

Poland

Poland operates 24 MiG-29s – the biggest Fulcrum fleet in Europe. The first nine single-seaters were delivered brand new in 1989 and 1990. They were followed by nine ex-Czech Fulcrums, transferred in December 1995 and January 1996. They were joined by 16 former Luftwaffe MiG-29 single-seaters and three two-seaters that were subjected to an extensive life-extension programme and systems upgrade by the Wojskowe Zakłady Lotnicze Nr 2 (WZL 2, Military Aviation Works No 2)

at Bydgoszcz in conjunction with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) Lahav.

Poland had not lost a Fulcrum since the type was introduced to service, however, two accidents in the past eight months have led to the jets being grounded due to concerns with their ejection seats (the Su-22 Fitters have also temporarily stopped flying). The most recent accident occurred close to Malbork air base on July 6 and claimed the life of the experienced pilot, who had accumulated 500 hours on the MiG-29. His body

was found close to the wreckage. In the other crash last December 18, the pilot did not eject but survived the crash after the aircraft plunged into a forest.

The Polish defence ministry has now initiated Project Harpia, which is the requirement for a new multi-role combat aircraft to replace the MiG-29s and Su-22s. Several companies are said to have taken part in the request for information process, including Lockheed Martin (F-16 Block 70), Saab (Gripen) and Eurofighter.



Above: Polish Air Force MiG-29 '67' from the 23. Baza Lotnictwa Taktycznego (23rd Tactical Air Base) at Mińsk Mazowiecki was the jet written off in a non-fatal accident last December 18. Arnold Ten Pas