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Pakistan to Receive US Attack Helicopters in 2017

The Pakistan Army is slated to receive three AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters this year.

By Franz-Stefan Gady
February 22, 2017

The United States will deliver three Bell AH-1Z Viper twin-engine attack helicopters to Pakistan in 2017, according to U.S. media reports, part of a total shipment of 12. The first batch of three helicopters will be delivered in 2017, whereas the remaining nine will arrive in 2018, based on information obtained from Bell Helicopters by aviation journalist Alan Warnes.

As I reported elsewhere, the U.S. State Department approved the sale of 15 AH-1Z Vipers, missiles, and communications equipment at an estimated cost of \$952 million in April 2015. Pakistan ordered the first three helicopters in August 2015, and placed an additional order for nine helicopters in April 2016. A U.S. Department of Defense contract notification published in April 2016 only refers to a total of nine AH-1Z Viper helicopters to be purchased by Pakistan for an estimated \$170.2 million contract. So far, Islamabad has not placed an order for the remaining attack helicopters.

The original request by Pakistan also included the sale of 1,000 AGM-114 R Hellfire II missiles.

The AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters will be equipped with H-1 Technical Refresh Mission computers, AN/AAQ-30 Target Sight Systems, 629F-23 Ultra High Frequency/Very High Frequency Communication Systems, H-764 Embedded Global Positioning System/Inertial Navigation Systems, Helmet Mounted Display/Optimized Top Owl, APX-117A Identification

Friend or Foe, AN/AAR-47 Missile Warning Systems, AN/ALE-47 Countermeasure Dispenser Sets, AN/APR-39C(V)2 Radar Warning Receivers, Joint Mission Planning Systems, and General Dynamics M197 20 millimeter cannons.

Pakistan Army Aviation is slated to deploy the helicopters in counterinsurgency operations in Pakistan's tribal areas. By acquiring the helicopters, "Pakistan will enhance its ability to conduct operations in North Waziristan Agency [NWA], the Federally Administered Tribal Areas [FATAs], and other remote and mountainous areas in all-weather, day and night environment," according to an April 2015 Defense Security Cooperation Agency press release.

Pakistan's military will also receive four Russian-made Mi-35M attack helicopters in 2017. The Mi-35M is the export version of the Mi-24 gunship and is particularly suited for operations in mountainous terrain. Pakistan Army Aviation could acquire up to 20 Mi-35Ms in the years ahead. "Given the cost of building the necessary Mi-35M logistics and maintenance infrastructure, expanding the fleet beyond four aircraft would financially be a sound decision for the Pakistani military," I explained elsewhere (See: "Pakistan to Receive 4 Attack Helicopters From Russia").

Islamabad is also considering the Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) T-129 attack helicopter or the Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group (CAIG) Z-10 helicopter gunship as an alternative to the Mi-35M. The new gunships will slowly phase out Pakistan Army Aviation's obsolete fleet of U.S.-made AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters.