

Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Inducts First Squadron of JF-17 Thunder Jet aircraft

CLAWS RESEARCH TEAM

The JF-17 Thunder, also designated Chengdu FC-1 *Xiaolong* (which means *Fierce Dragon* in English) is a light-weight, single-engine, modern, multi-role combat aircraft developed jointly by the Chengdu Aircraft Industries Corporation (CAC) of China, the PAF and the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC), Kamra. JF-17 is short for “Joint Fighter-17” and FC-1 is short for “Fighter China-1”. The ‘17’ in its name is an increment over the 16 of F-16, to signify that the JF-17 shall be a modern successor to the F-16 in the PAF.

The PAF officially inducted its first JF-17 squadron on 18 February 2010. A special ceremony was held for this purpose at PAF airbase near Kamra Aeronautical Complex. It has also participated in the PAF Exercise High Mark 10.

The JF-17 was primarily developed to meet the requirements of the PAF for a cost-effective combat aircraft as an inexpensive replacement for its large fleet of aging Nanchang A-5 bombers, Chengdu F-7P/PGG interceptors and Dassault Mirage III/V fighters. The JF-17 is expected to cost approximately US\$15 million per unit. The project cost was approximately US\$500 million, shared equally by China and Pakistan. The PAF has announced that it will induct 150 JF-17’s, which may increase to 250 aircraft by 2025. Azerbaijan, Zimbabwe and eight other countries have expressed interest in purchasing the fighter jet.

The serial production of JF-17 Thunder has already started and the production capacity would be gradually taken to 25 aircraft per year by 2011. The production facilities for the aircraft have been set up in Pakistan. The first batch of 50 JF-17 Thunder aircraft has been equipped with the Chinese/Pakistani avionics and missiles, while those in the later batch are to be equipped with more advanced radars and missiles some of them will be of French origin as suggested by some

reports. About 60 per cent of the aircraft's frame and 80 per cent of its avionics have been manufactured in Pakistan.

As of 2010, the FC-1 is in competition with the MiG-29 in the international market. It was displayed internationally for the first time at the Farnborough International Airshow 2010 where two aircraft of the No. 26 *Black Spiders* Squadron were put on display alongside a Chinese weapons package. This included the C-802A anti-ship missile, LS-6 guided glide bomb, KG300G airborne self-protection jamming pod, WMD-7 day/night targeting pod and the air-to-air missiles, SD-10A and PL-5. News also emerged that of 250 JF-17s to be built for the PAF until 2025, a number would be configured as "stealthy 5th generation" fighters.