

US to sell F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan: NYT

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Washington: The US is set to sell eight new F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan despite Washington's growing reservations over Islamabad's fast expanding nuclear arsenal, a media report said.

The decision comes ahead of US President Barack Obama's meeting on Thursday with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, which will mainly focus on the president's decision to extend the American troop presence in Afghanistan and a quiet effort to get Sharif to halt the deployment of a new generation of tactical nuclear weapons, The New York Times reported on Wednesday.

The new aircraft, whose sale could be blocked by Congress, would add to Pakistan's already sizable force of fighter jets. It has more than 70 F-16s and dozens of French and Chinese attack aircraft.

The Federation of American Scientists, a leading American think-tank that monitors the spread of nuclear weapons, published a report on Wednesday which showed Pakistan's expansion of its arsenal to 110 to 130 warheads, up from a range of 90 to 110 four years ago.

While those figures showed a steady increase, the group estimated that by 2025 the figure would rise to 220 to 250 warheads which would make Pakistan the world's fifth-largest nuclear power, behind the US, Russia, China and France.

In May, the US handed over to Pakistan over 14 combat aircraft, 59 military trainer jets and 374 armoured personnel carriers. The weapons supplied to Pakistan were earlier used by American forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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