

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 23, 2017

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Mattis and Secretary Tillerson:

As the co-chairs of the U.S. Senate India Caucus, we support the safety and security of our Democratic ally, India, and value the strategic importance of the growing United States-India defense and economic relationship. India increasingly serves as an integral partner in the United States' security architecture in the volatile South Asia region, helping to protect our joint interests and deter common threats, and has emerged as a critical trading partner. Moreover, as the largest democracy in the world, India shares key, common core values that advance our global agenda. It is in our national interest to work with India to progress democratic principles through regional security partnerships and burden sharing. To this end, we support the coproduction of our legacy F-16 aircraft in India to help sustain the United States' current fleet of aircraft and aid a critical Indian security need with a proven American product.

The Government of India has launched an effort to recapitalize its combat aircraft fleet, starting with a single engine fighter. With two competitors under consideration, Lockheed Martin's F-16 and Saab's Gripen, this competition presents a unique opportunity to solidify and strengthen the significant gains made in the bilateral U.S.-India defense relationship over the previous two Administrations

The last F-16 for the U.S. Air Force rolled off the production line in Ft. Worth in 1999. Since that time, this aircraft has been an export-only platform dependent on international orders to sustain production. India remains the only major F-16 prospect customer. A primary factor in India's decision will be compliance with Prime Minister Modi's "Make in India" initiative, which will require establishing some level of local production capacity.

Keeping the F-16 in production, will help sustain a fleet of over 1,000 aircraft currently in the Air Force and help preserve thousands of American jobs in the supplier base across 42 states, maintain approximately 800 high value design and engineering jobs in the United States, and

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extend the only scalable single-engine 4th generation fighter aircraft as a significant security cooperation tool for the United States.

An F-16 sale to India would represent a historic win for America that will deepen the U.S.-India strategic defense relationship and cement cooperation between our two countries for decades to come. It would increase interoperability with a key partner and dominant power in South Asia, build India's capacity to counter threats from the north, and balance China's growing military capability in the Pacific.

Given the strategic significance of India selecting a U.S. aircraft as the mainstay for its future Air Force and the potential for a decision this year, we ask that the Administration make the fighter acquisition a priority during initial bilateral discussions. We urge you to weigh in forcefully with the White House on the strategic significance of this deal, both to America's defense industrial base and to our growing security partnership with India.

Thank you and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



JOHN CORNYN
United States Senator



MARK WARNER
United States Senator