

Argentina Looks To Rebuild Its Air Force with Pakistani-Chinese Fighter Jet

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OE Watch Commentary

Argentina is seeking to rebuild its air force with the purchase of 12 JF-17A Block III fighter jets jointly built by Pakistan and China. Argentina's largest daily newspaper, *Clarín*, which is generally opposed to the current left-wing government, reported that if the sale goes through, this would be the first time in history that Chinese fighter jets were sold to a Latin American country. To signal the seriousness of its intention to acquire the Chinese planes via Pakistan, the Argentinian government submitted the request through the 2022 budget proposal process. Argentina seeks Chinese planes because they do not feature parts made in the UK, which has vetoed Argentina's previous attempts to acquire military aircraft, according to regional defense news website *Zona Militar*, given the two countries' ongoing dispute over ownership of the Falkland Islands (known as the Malvinas Islands in Argentina).

Although it is not out of the ordinary to see foreign weapons systems in Latin America—the Russian Federation recently offered Argentina a package comprised of MiG-35 fighters and Mi-171 helicopters, among other weapons systems—it is rarer for China to sell weapons to the region. The sale of Chinese fighter jets dovetails with a burgeoning role for China in Argentina in both the economic and security domains, and the need to service these aircraft could see an even greater Chinese footprint in Argentina. Lastly, the sale of Chinese military equipment to Argentina could impact the balance of power over Argentina's unresolved claim on the Falklands Islands.



A Pakistan Air Force Chengdu JF-17 fighter plane.
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan_JF-17_\(modified\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan_JF-17_(modified).jpg)
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“The JF-17 is an attractive option for Argentina because the aircraft is out of the reach of a possible parts veto by the United Kingdom and, at the same time, it is the only new aircraft within the reach of the Argentine Air Force.”

Source: “El Gobierno planea comprar aviones militares a China a través de Pakistán (The government plans to buy military aircraft from China through Pakistan),” *Clarín* (the largest newspaper in Argentina and generally opposed to the current left-wing government), 20 September 2021. https://www.clarin.com/politica/gobierno-planea-comprar-aviones-militares-china-traves-pakistan_0_6ogiGYHex.html

The Minister of Economy, Martín Guzmán, presented the national budget for fiscal year 2022. There the request was included, without it being disclosed to the media—a debt of \$664 million for the purchase of at least 12 JF-17 Thunder Block III fighters. It is an aircraft jointly developed by the Chinese company “Chengdu Aircraft Industry Corporation” and the Pakistani “Pakistan Aeronautical Complex” at 50 percent cost for each country.

Source: “Podría el Reino Unido evitar que Argentina compre el avión de combate JF-17? (Could the UK prevent Argentina from buying the JF-17 fighter jet?),” *Zona Militar* (a website that compiles regional defense news), 29 September 2021. <https://www.zona-militar.com/2021/09/29/podria-el-reino-unido-evitar-que-argentina-compre-el-avion-de-combate-jf-17/>

The JF-17 is an attractive option for Argentina because the aircraft is out of the reach of a possible parts veto by the United Kingdom and, at the same time, it is the only new aircraft within the reach of the Argentine Air Force. The UK previously pressured suppliers to cancel deals with Argentina, or sabotaged them by seizing critical British components. The UK has effectively maintained an arms embargo on Argentina since the 1982 Falklands War.