

Air Marshal M. Matheswaran on the new RFI



Victim of politics or serious intent?

Saab Gripen

The Indian Air Force issued a RFI (Request for Information) on 6 April 2018 to global OEMs of fighter aircraft, and in the process abandoning the RFI for single-engine fighters floated two years earlier. The current RFI of 73 pages is a detailed document, which has derived much from the earlier

fully evaluated MMRCA project, scrapped in 2015. Much of all the information is already available with the IAF, thanks to the earlier evaluation. Nevertheless, the RFI signals an intent, and allows the OEMs to furnish certain technical and policy related information that would be very useful in formulating a very practical and viable RFP.

Effectively, the RFI signals a repeat of the MMRCA process for the same multi-role aircraft, technologies and production intent. The players are the same, similar processes and methodologies, and so, what is different now? Going by GOI's track record on major acquisitions, this would well be another 5-year cycle, which means if everything goes well and efficiently, the first aircraft may be with the IAF not before 8 years, that is not before 2026! Why couldn't the government fast-track the process through a sensible G to G agreement? Quite obviously, affordability is an issue but MMRCA has also become a victim of the politics of the day.

There are some significant differences that come into play in this repeat MMRCA process. In the previous evaluation, there were one or two aircraft that may have been considered as still under development, for example the Gripen-NG and the MiG-35. In the current scenario all competitors will have fully developed and matured platforms, particularly the Gripen E and the MiG-35. New upgraded avionics and sensors may be in operation. In the last evaluation, AESA radar, which was a critical requirement, was mostly part of subjective evaluation as except for the Americans, none had operationalised AESA radar. In the current scenario, all the contenders will field operational AESA radars. Technology requirements asked for in the current RFI



Lockheed Martin F-16