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Ressort: Special interest

## Switzerland stroke by Italian Lightning

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Switzerland stroke by Italian Lightning!

It's a foggy and cold day, March 18th 2022 and two Lockheed Martin F35A Lightning II of Italian Air Force 32° Stormo appear in the Swiss skies that are about to land at Emmen Air Base, in the canton of Lucerne.

The presence of the two Italian aircraft was requested by the Swiss government to present the population and authorities the new fighter which was chosen to replace the current aircraft in the Swiss Air Force. Switzerland is now struggling with the use of its defence systems, some of which are almost obsolete, already in previous years it has agreed on the purchase of new drones, of Israeli production, Elbit Hermes 900 "Kochav" to replace the RUAG Ranger ADS 95 which they are now over 30 years old.

With the "Armeebotschaft 2022" (Army Message 2022), the Swiss Federal Council is asking the Federal Chambers for an amount of 9.3 billion Swiss francs (about 9 Billion Euro) for the purchase of the F-35A fighter aircraft (around 6 billion CHF) and the Raytheon Patriot ground-to-air defence system (about 2 billion) and also about 190 million Swiss francs for related infrastructures, the remaining investments for the purchase of equipment for the army and for the construction of new buildings for the "Armee". In the message, the Federal Council also calls for the decommissioning of the Northrop F-5-Tiger II fighter jets that have been flying for over 40 years.

According to the Swiss authorities, these investments must also lead to a concrete increase in work and demand for personnel from Swiss companies through the agreements made with the manufacturing companies. In order to correctly evaluate the choices made by the staff of experts appointed by the federal council, for this event, in addition to the 5th generation multirole fighters, a complete unit of the Raytheon Patriot was also brought from neighbouring Germany.

The Raytheon Patriot ground-to-air defence system guarantees coverage of the 15,000 sq.km required by the defence department with four units in at least two separate areas to be covered.

The units are assigned to the two areas to be covered as appropriate, while the fifth unit will act as a circulating logistic reserve.

The Raytheon Patriot system consists of a coordination stage (Tactical Operation Center Coordination) and one or more fire units, for the Swiss Defence the same configuration used by the US army will be

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purchased, and the guided missiles have been chosen: Guidance Enhanced Missile TBM (GEM-T).

An integrated air defense system through the Patriots and the new fighter aircraft, which with its characteristics the F35A multirole fighter also ensures the reaction against possible attacks from cruise missiles or drones.

Inviting the Aeronautica Militare Italiana with its aircraft was very useful for the Government to give a real impression of the potential and technology of the Lockheed Martin F-35A in particular to its own population. Switzerland, which enjoys direct democracy, has already seen the cancellation of the purchase process for Saab JAS 39 “Gripen” aircraft in 2014 following a referendum.

Even now the opponents to the proposed acquisition of the new fighter aircraft are doing their utmost to present a new referendum, which according to the Swiss government in case of a negative vote could create concrete delays in the purchase of the new fighter and a high increase in costs for Switzerland.

Coming from Amendola AB, home of the 32° Stormo, the two Italian F-35As landed at Emmen AFB on March 18th 2022, and remained there for Swiss government for presentations, until Friday 25th March.

Inside the Flight Test Center new hangars in Emmen AFB there were also the mock-up of the F35A and of the Pratt & Whitney F135-PW-100 engine, the F135 is considered the most advanced fighter engine in the world.

A F35 simulator, presented by the Lockheed Martin Chief of Fighter Flight Operations and F-35 Test Pilot Tony “Brick” Wilson, was also available for the guests of the Swiss Air Force to meet the feeling of being at the controls of one of the most modern multi-role fighters in the world.

On 23th March one of the F35A of Italian Air Force also performed some manoeuvres over the Lucerne military airport together with an F/A-18 Hornets of the Swiss Air Force to measure the noise produced by the 5th generation aircraft. The noise level was among the factors influencing the purchase decision but the F-35 has proven not to bring an excessive increase in noise or pollution compared to previous aircraft.

During the meeting with the media on March 24th, the Commander of the Swiss Air Forces Major General Peter "Pablo" Merz explained the evaluation/purchase factors of both the aircraft and the Patriot ground defense system: interoperability, operational life prospect for a period of more than 30 years, cooperation, technical support and offset. In particular for the F35, the evaluation revealed it as: “the most effective”, “the cheapest”, “the most sustainable”, terms also used by the Federal Council as a presentation of their choice.

According the staff of Swiss experts, the Lockheed aircraft fulfilled all the requests of the staff appointed by the Swiss government, guaranteeing operability for many years and latest technologies available.

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Commander Merz also strengthened this position considering that many European and World Government have chosen for their defense this aircraft which has already reached “Combat Readiness” in many air forces and is increasingly used in real missions.

About production of F35As, this will take place in Italy at FACO facility in Cameri (Piedmont), a Leonardo Company where at least 24 aircraft will be assembled for Switzerland, 4 aircraft will be assembled by RUAG in Emmen, so as to be able to train Swiss staff in local maintenance (a check with Lockheed Martin is also currently underway, to understand if final assembly work will be carried out at RUAG). The first 8 F35As will be produced at Lockheed Martin USA and sent to Switzerland in 2027.

The involvement of Swiss companies with an offset of at least 3 billion of swiss francs is another contractual point established for the purchase of the new Swiss defense systems, which the manufacturing companies will have to strictly comply with, a topic amply clarified also by Swiss Air Force Commander Peter "Pablo" Merz's answers to the questions of the journalists present.

direct offsets: the foreign war material supplier assigns orders to a subcontractor in Switzerland to manufacture and supply war material components that Switzerland intends to purchase. The products and services of the company in Switzerland are included in the military goods to be purchased.

indirect offsets : they are not directly related to the military goods that will be purchased, but originate from the purchase project. The foreign manufacturer undertakes to assign civil or military orders to the Swiss industry for a certain amount relating to its sector of influence or to facilitate access to similar orders (source: Swiss Air Force)

Together with Swiss Air Force Commander Peter Merz, Mr. Peter Huber of the Board of Directors of Mercury Mission System SA and even Mr. Thomas Kipfer, Senior Vice President Business Area Air of RUAG AG also attended the Media Meeting to present the commitments of their companies to support the future new Swiss Air Force F35A fleet and new Swiss defense systems. -

The air bases used by the three F35A squadrons will be the three main and active Swiss military airports: Payerne AFB (Staffel 17 and 18, with 57% of the standard movements), Meiringen AFB (Staffel 11, with about 28% of the movements) and of course Emmen AFB (flight test center, which will be 15% committed). On all three bases, daily maintenance will take place in cooperation with RUAG AG. The supply will start in 2027 and is expected to end in 2030, the year in which the decommissioning of the Boeing F/A-18C/D is expected by the Swiss air forces.

To carry out the defense operations of the Swiss skies, being able to use the new 36 F35A aircraft compared to the current 55 aircraft (30 F/A-18 Hornet and 25 F5 Tiger II) and considering that the number of flight hours will be reduced by 50%, a less need for fuel (around 25% less), a decrease in noise and a significant

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decrease in atmospheric pollution.

The Swiss Air Forces want to have an advanced and complete defense system of the latest technology, with the purchase of a 5th generation aircraft that is amaze current users with its performance, assisted for its work by the Patriot ground defense system, and by Hermes drones, thus ensuring total coverage of the small Alpine state from any danger.

The protection and control of airspace as an air police service, or in cases of special events such as the World Economic Forum, or from the risk of terrorist attacks, for example, and with the current war situation in Europe, Switzerland doesn't wants to be caught unprepared or have to resort to the help of neighbouring states.

The impression given by the Italian F-35A was very positive and appreciated by both the government guests and the spectators who reached the air base from all over Switzerland throughout the week: it looks like it was "love at first sight" between the Swiss and their future combat aircraft.

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