

China Markets Its FC-31 Fighter Jet At Paris Air Show

Defense-aerospace

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Although it only brought a scale model of its FC-31 stealth fighter to the Paris Air Show instead of an actual aircraft, China's AVIC is marketing it at a price of around \$70 million a copy. (Internet photo)

China is determined to tap the military aircraft market of developed nations with the domestically developed FC-31 stealth fighter jet, the plane's chief designer said on Monday.

Lin Peng of the Shenyang Aircraft Design and Research Institute under Aviation Industry Corp of China told China Daily in an exclusive interview the FC-31 has received a lot of attention from potential foreign buyers.

AVIC has a model of the FC-31 on display at the 52nd International Paris Air Show, which opened on Monday at Paris-Le Bourget Airport. This has been the first time the State-owned aircraft giant brought its latest stealth fighter jet to a Western air show and the second time for the FC-31 to be shown at a foreign exhibition. The first was at the 14th Dubai Airshow in the United Arab Emirates in November 2015.

"We will strive to use the fifth-generation combat plane to seize some share in the military aircraft market of developed nations," he said.

Lin said FC-31's appearance in Paris is intended to showoff China's capabilities in the research and development of advanced military aircraft and to enable potential buyers to know more about the plane so they can communicate "in-depth" with AVIC about the fighter jet.

The FC-31 is not yet in production, but these appearances are intended to generate interest that could lead to sales.

The air show, which is believed to be the largest and most influential of its kind in the world, is also a good occasion for the Chinese stealth fighter jet to compete with its counterparts, the designer added.

The FC-31 was unveiled in October 2012 as a twin-engine, radar-evading fighter jet. At that time, the first prototype had made its maiden flight, becoming the country's second fifth-generation fighter jet following the J-20, which made its first flight in January 2011. The People's Liberation Army Air Force has begun to receive deliveries of the J-20.

Lin said the FC-31 features high survivability, a low radar signature, supreme electronic countermeasures, strong information capacity, outstanding situation awareness and beyond-visual-range combat capability.

The aircraft has a large weapon bay and several external hard points that are capable of carrying Chinese-or foreign-made air-to-air missiles and air-to-surface weapons, he said.

Specifications from AVIC show the FC-31 has a maximum takeoff weight of 25 metric tons, a combat range of 1,200 km and a top speed of Mach 1.8, or 2,205 kilometers per hour. It can carry 8 metric tons of weapons and has a designed service life of up to 30 years.

Fu Qianshao, an aircraft expert with the PLA Air Force, expected that the plane's price will be around \$70 million, about half that of the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II from the United States, which is the only fifth-generation fighter jet available on the market from the US. The US only sells it to allies.

Li Yuhai, deputy general manager of AVIC, previously told reporters that AVIC plans to use the FC-31 to "put an end to some nations' monopolies on the fifth-generation fighter jet" and this plane "is able to compete with any other aircraft of its kind".