

Iraq wants F-16 jet fighters as farewell gift from Bush administration

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WASHINGTON — Industry sources said the Iraqi government has been lobbying Congress as well as major U.S. contractors for the sale of the F-16 to Baghdad. The sources said the government of Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki wanted a decision before the end of the Bush administration in January 2009.

"The feeling is that Bush would be willing to give Iraq the F-16 as a going-away present and Congress could be convinced as well," an industry source said.

On Oct. 16, Iraqi officials were scheduled to attend a two-day conference in Washington on the military and security threat to Iraq. The conference, titled "2nd Iraq Security and Defense Summit," was expecting the arrival of Iraqi Deputy National Security Minister Shirwan Al Waili, Deputy Interior Minister Hussein Fahmi and a seior Defense Ministry official Gen. Anwar Ahmed.

Iraq, who has ordered more than \$10 billion U.S. military equipment, has requested information from the U.S. Defense Department regarding the purchase of 36 F-16s from Lockheed Martin. Officials said the Iraqi Defense Ministry asked for such information as the price of the F-16 and its availability.

But industry sources said the Al Maliki government was pressing to submit a formal request for the F-16s before 2009. The sources said the Iraqi military and Defense Ministry have sought allies within U.S. Central Command, the Pentagon and Lockheed Martin.

"Right now, the industry wants it and the military is not against the sale," the source said. "It's really up to the political echelon."

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