

India to order large number of Javelin anti-tank missiles from US

By [Rajat Pandit](#)

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Much to the dismay of Russians and Europeans, India is increasingly taking the FMS [foreign military sales] route to ink big arms deals with US. The biggest on the verge of finalisation, of course, is for 10 C-17 Globemaster-III giant strategic airlift for upwards of \$3 billion....The US has already showcased the ATGM [anti-tank guided missiles] system during bilateral combat exercises like `Yudh-Abhyas` in Babina last October, as reported earlier.

NEW DELHI: Faced with a huge shortfall of anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM), coupled with the delayed induction of the indigenous `Nag` missile, India will order a "large" number of the quite-expensive Javelin ATGM systems from the US.

The deal for the man-portable, fire-and-forget Javelin ATGM systems will once again be a direct government-to-government one under the American foreign military sales (FMS) programme, without any global multi-vendor competition.

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As for the Javelin contract, defence minister A K Antony told Parliament on Monday the "letter of request" to US government for procurement of the third-generation ATGM, along with "transfer of technology", would be issued soon.

This means India will buy some of the 2.5-km range Javelin systems off-the-shelf, while a much larger number will be indigenously manufactured under licensed production. The US has already showcased the ATGM system during bilateral combat exercises like `Yudh-Abhyas` in Babina last October, as reported earlier.

While the exact number of Javelin systems India will induct is yet to be decided, it could well run into thousands. The Army, after all, has a shortfall of around 44,000 ATGMs of different types. "Though Army has an authorised holding of 81,206 ATGMs, not even half that number is present in its inventory," said a source.

ATGM systems are deemed critical to slow down, if not halt, enemy armoured thrusts into one's territory.

Indian infantry units are as of now equipped with variants of the second-generation 2-km-range Milan and 4-km-range Konkurs ATGMs, produced by defence PSU Bharat Dynamics Ltd under licence from French and Russian companies.

As for the third-generation Nag ATGM, with a 4-km strike range, Army has placed an initial order for 443 missiles and 13 Namicas (Nag missile tracked carriers). After 20 years of development, the Nag is only now getting ready to enter the production/induction phase.

The urgency about the fast-dwindling ATGM stock can be gauged from the fact that Army has ordered 4,100 “advanced” Milan-2T missiles, with “tandem warheads”, as well as 15,000 Konkurs-M missiles over the last couple of years.

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