

Saudis may buy Marinette-built combat ships



Nathan Phelps, Gannett Wisconsin Media 12:38 p.m. CDT October 22, 2015



Navy Crew explains life aboard Marinette-built Littoral Combat Ship

(Photo: MC3 Johans Chavaro/U.S. Navy)

The United States government is considering selling four Lockheed Martin-designed littoral combat ships to Saudi Arabia.

The State Department said this week it has given the green light on the sale, according to [a statement on the Defense Security Cooperation Agency website](#). It hasn't been finalized and is pending a 30-day window for congressional approval of the sale of what is being called the Multi-Mission Surface Combatant.

Many of the details have yet to be finalized, including where the ships will be built. Fincantieri Marinette Marine builds the Lockheed Martin ships for the Navy.

The future USS Milwaukee is expected to be commissioned by the Navy next month in Milwaukee, and six more Navy littoral combat ships are in varying stages of production at the Marinette shipyard.

"We are very pleased to have the opportunity to provide the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with four multi-mission surface combatants, based on the Freedom-class Littoral Combat Ship," Lockheed Martin said in a written statement issued Thursday morning. "We look forward to working with both navies in developing a low-risk, cost effective approach that delivers value back to the customers."

The statement said the company is working with the U.S. Navy to "integrate domestic construction schedules and International Freedom-variant based ship opportunities."

The littoral combat ship is a 388-foot vessel designed to carry out a number of missions — including surface warfare and anti-mine operations — in shallower coastal waters. Two of the Lockheed Martin ships built at Marinette — the USS Freedom and USS Fort Worth — are in service with the Navy, with the Fort Worth in the late stages of 16-month deployment to the Far East.



The U.S. Navy launches the USS Fort Worth, a littoral combat ship during a ceremony at Marinette Marine Corp. in 2010. (Photo: File/Press-Gazette Media)

The sale also includes weapons, additional equipment and systems, and "study, design and construction of operations, support and training facilities." The total value is estimated at \$11.25 billion, according to the post by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency.

Lockheed Martin officials have talked about the possibility of foreign military sales of the littoral combat ship for a number of years, including possible sales Saudi Arabia. In May 2011, Lockheed Martin's then-president and CEO, Robert Stevens, said foreign interest in the ship had been "dramatic."

At that time, he pointed out these kinds of sales are handled on a government-to-government basis.

"When we show execution on the program, the cost and capability of the ship ... we think... there will be a continued and sustained interest here," Stevens said more than four years ago.

About 2,100 people, employees and contractors, work at Fincantieri Marinette Marine which has LCS construction for the U.S. Navy booked into the early 2020s. The Navy has said it could buy more than 50 of the ships split over two variations of the design.

Austal USA is building a different design of the ship in Alabama.

DefenseNews contributed to this story. nphelps@gannett.com and follow him on Twitter @nathanphelpsPG or Facebook at Nathan-Phelps-Gannett-Media-Wisconsin