India SriLanka - Defense deal

What is the issue?

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- Recently the Sri Lankan government made the announcement that it was seeking to procure between eight and 12 combat aircraft to replace its ageing air force assets.
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- This selection process can offer India a unique opportunity both to strengthen military ties with Sri Lanka as well as to make a breakthrough into the aviation export market.
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What is India’s experience?

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- The sale of **Dhruv helicopters to Ecuador** was widely hailed.
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- However, after a number of crashes, the helicopters were withdrawn from use, citing, among other things, poor spares support from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
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- The sale of **Chetaks to Suriname** was plagued by poor contract management and “financial and administrative obstacles” leading to a delay in delivery of the helicopters.
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- Subsequent supplies of aircraft have been gifts or heavily discounted sales of Chetak and Dhruv helicopters and Dornier Do-228 surveillance aircraft to the Maldives, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Nepal and Bhutan.
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What is the experience with Sri Lanka?

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- In the past, India had provided 24 L-70 guns, 24 battle-field surveillance radars, 11 upgraded Super Fledermaus radars, four Indra- I & II radars and 10 mine-protected vehicles to assist in the defence of SLAF air bases.
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- These proved useful against air attack by the former Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)'s air wing consisting of armed microlight aircraft as well as from LTTE infiltrators.
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- India is already a major supplier to the Sri Lankan Navy with two 105m Offshore Patrol Vessels under construction at Goa.
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- India is geographically proximate to Sri Lanka and Indian Air Force support facilities can be made use of.
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- Furthermore, India has had a somewhat low-key but nonetheless important role in equipping the SLAF.
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What is India's potential in arms export?

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- If the SLAF desire a supersonic multi-role aircraft, India's Tejas Mk.1, despite its still being in the developmental phase, could be a viable option.
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- The aircraft has already demonstrated significant capabilities in the **air-to-air and air-to-ground roles** and the limited number of aircraft being sought by the SLAF lends itself to relatively easy accommodation with HAL's production schedule and capacity.
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- On the other hand, if the SLAF is seeking a cost-effective multi-role aircraft with a relatively low operating cost – and is willing to forego the "prestige" of supersonic aircraft - then the BAE-HAL Advanced Hawk has the potential to meet this requirement.
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- The Advanced Hawk has significant combat capabilities with provision for **Brimstone air-to-ground missiles and ASRAAM air-to-air missiles.**
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What is the way ahead?

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- If India is desirous of securing this order, it must not treat it as a purely transactional arrangement.
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- The export of Indian combat aircraft would be a major step forward for Indian arms exports and, as such, India should be flexible in respect of prices.
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- India should also not hesitate to offer attractive financing packages and lines of credit at low interest rates to encourage Sri Lanka to “buy Indian”
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Source: IDSA

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