Two versions of the Anglo-French variable-geometry aircraft—an impression by "Flight" artist Frank Munger. The RAF version in the foreground carries a pair of Martel air-to-ground missiles, befitting its strike role; the other, with wing fully swept, is a French Air Force intercepter with Matra R.530s. The large relative size of the canopy and missile indicates the aeroplane's size, which is approximately that of a Lightning

Anglo-French Projects go Ahead

1—THE OFFICIAL VIEW

"The Secretary of State for Defence of the United Kingdom, Mr Denis Healey, and the United Kingdom Minister of Aviation, Mr John Stonehouse, had a meeting with M Messmer, French Minister for the Armed Forces, in Paris today to discuss Anglo-French military aeronautical projects.

"Variable-geometry Project *The two delegations agreed that the variable-geometry project should go ahead. The Ministers decided to meet again in March to complete agreement on the technical specification and to take the further decisions required to implement the programme.*

"Helicopters *The Ministers approved a collaborative agreement between the two countries on three helicopters—an airportable tactical helicopter (SA.330), a light helicopter (SA.340) and a utility helicopter (WG.13). The agreement will be signed in a few days' time.*

"Jaguar and Martel *The Ministers noted the continued good progress on these projects."*

—Official communiqué, January 16, 1967.

THE BALD FACTS of the official communiqué were amplified slightly by Mr Healey in the House of Commons on January 18. In reply to questions the Secretary of State made the following points concerning the v.g. aircraft:—

Performance "The Air Staff is fully satisfied with the performance characteristics as so far defined for the aircraft, although we shall be consulting potential purchasers over the next few weeks to see whether any adjustments to these specifications are likely to attract a larger market."

Role "We require the aircraft primarily in the strike role, although we shall also use it for reconnaissance and to some extent for interception. The French require it primarily for interception, but at this stage we have succeeded in reconciling our requirements so far as is necessary."

Agreement "There is a break clause in the agreement because both the French Government and ourselves believe that it would be a great mistake to commit ourselves to a programme of this size without any right to review it at any stage later on."

Deliveries "The RAF is planning to take delivery of these aircraft under this programme in 1974 or thereabouts, the time always envisaged over the last two years, although the French Government will be taking delivery of its version of the aircraft a little later than it originally intended."

Costs "I do not think that I can give the House the current estimates of unit costs for the aircraft, but . . . the French Government and ourselves have probed the cost estimates more carefully than the cost estimates of any previous aircraft project have been probed at this stage of development, and we have added a margin for contingency. . . .

"I cannot without notice give details of cost in the coming year, but it will be very small because we do not expect to authorise production of the prototype until the year end.

"Development costs will be shared equally between the two countries, and it is expected that the two countries will take roughly the same number of aircraft and production costs will be shared in proportion to the number ordered."

Avionics "The details of the requirements for the avionics of the aircraft have not yet been finalised between the two Governments, but we have agreed on the very important general principle that both research and development and production work should balance out across the programme. . . ."

Helicopters "The helicopter package is in no way dependent on the first [the AFVG agreement]. The helicopter package stands on its own feet as an agreement for the joint production of three aircraft which both countries need, balanced in such a way as to ensure that they both get a fair share of the development and production work in relation to their orders."

In the House of Lords on January 17 Lord Shackleton said: "So far as helicopters are concerned, there will be production in both countries of all three aircraft. The amount will vary according to the stage of development. Clearly the SA 330 has gone further along the road, and the proportion of British development will be less. But there is general agreement that this will be balanced. The utility helicopter, WG.13, will be of British design, and it is intended that it should have a British engine. The present position so far as the engines for the SA.330 and SA.340 are concerned is that, because of cost and timescale, they will probably have French engines, but we hope that there will be some element of British production in them."

It is understood that the official estimate of the development cost of the variable-geometry aircraft is about £200 million, shared equally between Britain and France. The unit cost per aircraft according to British sources will be £1.5-£1.6 million; according to French reports the fly-away cost is 23 million francs (about £1.7 million), or 40 million francs (£2.9 million) including spares and ground-support equipment.

The following timescale has been suggested in French reports: September 1967, completion of preliminary design study work and division of work between companies; December 1967, "launching of prototype stage"; 1971-72, first flight; 1974-75, aircraft in service.

Joint companies may be set up by BAC and Dassault, and by SNECMA and BSE, to run the programme (following the precedent of the Jaguar/RB.172).

The total number of variable-geometry aircraft to be acquired by Britain and France is understood to be about 300.

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