

South Korea to field spy aircraft by 2000

AN INTERNATIONAL multi-million dollar competition is under way to supply South Korea with an indigenous airborne intelligence-gathering capability, beginning in three years.

The classified project, known in US military circles as Peace Pioneer, will reach a climax this month when South Korea is due to pick the payload contractors and business-aircraft manufacturer expected to provide the platform. Both are expected to be under contract before the end of this year.

The military-intelligence project is a key element of Yulgok, South Korea's five-year force-modernisation programme. It will acquire four signal-intelligence (SIGINT) mission aircraft and an equal number of militarised aircraft mounting synthetic-aperture (SAR) radars.

They will replace US Army RC-12/RU-21 Guardrail communications intelligence and electronics-signals intercept aircraft. The new turbofan-powered aircraft will also take over the role of ageing SAR-equipped RV-1 Mohawks now used to protect Seoul. The US aircraft are to leave South Korea within the next one to three years.



RC-12s similar to the one shown will be withdrawn from South Korea

Word of the project first leaked out in 1994. It was reported that South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff were under fire for their handling of the eight-aircraft buy, valued at \$625 million.

Recently, the Pentagon disclosed South Korea's move to acquire up to eight tactical-reconnaissance aircraft, including four Raytheon Hawkers, and related ground-based equipment worth an estimated \$550 million (*Flight International*, 20-26 September).

The Pentagon names E-Systems and Loral Defense Systems as the prime contractors. What the Pentagon does not say

is that E-Systems, Raytheon Aircraft and Loral are still locked in a competition with other US companies. Rival bids involve Canadian, French, German and Israeli firms.

Informed sources say that E-Systems was selected over TRW's ESL and Raytheon Electromagnetic Systems to represent the USA in the continuous SIGINT payload competition which also includes Thomson-CSF and Rafael of Israel, supported by Litif, the German subsidiary of Litton Industries.

Loral "...had been the odds-on favourite until recently" to win the

SAR work, but a rival bid submitted by Canada's MacDonald-Dettwiler has gained ground, the sources add.

All SIGINT and SAR manufacturers were directed by the South Korean Government to recommend airborne platforms. Three business aircraft are still being considered: the \$12 million Raytheon Hawker 800, the \$10 million Cessna Citation III and the \$15 million Dassault Falcon 50.

E-Systems, which originally proposed using the Citation III, switched to the Hawker 800 after Raytheon's purchase of E-Systems.

Thomson-CSF and MacDonald-Dettwiler are tied to the Cessna aircraft, while Rafael/Litif is believed to favour the Hawker 800.

Sources say that the Hawker 800 cannot handle the Loral radar's power needs without running the auxiliary power unit full-time. "Realistically, Loral must go with the larger Falcon 50," they conclude. A purchase including mixes of aircraft is possible, but not favoured.

The first SIGINT mission aircraft would reach South Korea by the end of 1998, and the initial SAR-equipped aircraft would become operational a year later. □

Czechs freeze MiG-21 modifications

THE CZECH DEFENCE ministry has frozen the upgrading of three Mikoyan MiG-21 Fishbed prototypes, and has established a joint team with US Government specialists to study the acquisition of Lockheed Martin F-16A/Bs.

The decision was announced at the end of September by Czech defence minister Vilem Holan, following the visit of US defence secretary William Perry.

Holan says that the upgrade programme would be halted immediately and a joint team would begin studying ways to allow the Czechs to obtain used F-16s.

As recently as mid-September, the MiG-21 programme was being touted by the Czech defence ministry as the only realistic option for

modernising the air force's fighter fleet (*Flight International*, 27 September-3 October).

The modernisation programme called for the upgrade of three MiG-21 prototypes, with the programme, if successful, eventually being expanded to include 24 aircraft.

Several schemes are being examined which would enable the Czechs to obtain the F-16s, including a lease option.

The USA has already provided the Czechs with pricing and availability information on the F-16s, with similar data expected to be made available on the McDonnell Douglas F-18. The Czechs have not ruled out the possibility of at least evaluating other Western aircraft. □

Malaysians to upgrade C-130Hs

THE MALAYSIAN air force is planning to upgrade its fleet of Lockheed C-130H Hercules transport aircraft with new cockpit avionics and an integrated self-defence countermeasures system.

Rockwell-Collins is understood to have been selected to equip the aircraft with its flat-panel EFIS-90 electronic flight-instrumentation system, a new digital tactical airborne-navigation system and replacement UHF/VHF communications suite.

Plans to replace the aircraft's Collins AP-105 autopilot with the new APS-85, similar to that being fitted to upgraded Canadian C-130s, have been shelved for budgetary reasons.

Malaysia is evaluating the idea of fitting the aircraft with chaff/fare

dispensers and electronic jammers, as a result of the increasing number of missions being flown in hostile airspace to support UN peace-keeping operations. Competing for the contract are Canadian Marconi, Danish Aerotech, Lockheed Sanders and Westinghouse.

The programme has been officially approved, but is still subject to a contract being finalised with Airod for the work to be undertaken locally at Subang Airport. CAE will provide integration support.

It is initially planned to upgrade five of Malaysia's nine C-130s, with the option to add a sixth aircraft later. The air force recently concluded a deal to purchase an additional five stretched C-130H-30s to boost its lift capability (*Flight International*, 20-26 September). □