

Fifth-generation Russian combat aircraft go ahead

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RUSSIA PLANS to press ahead and procure a fifth-generation fighter and a long-range strike aircraft to replace the Tupolev Tu-22M Backfire, according to Col Gen Piotr Deinekin, commander-in-chief of the Russian air force.

Deinekin also confirms that a reconnaissance variant of the Sukhoi Su-27IB will be developed.

In an interview with governmental newspaper *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, Deinekin says that the number of different types in each branch of the air force will be reduced to one or two through introducing aircraft with multi-function capabilities.

The Tu-22M and Sukhoi Su-24 Fencer bombers will be replaced by a "multi-functional bomber with increased combat capabilities".

This statement indicates that the air force is still committed to the development of the Sukhoi T-60S, development of which was begun in the mid-1980s. There are uncon-



Su-27IBs will be built, but at what rate?

firmed reports that a prototype is under construction.

Deinekin says: "We are expecting the MFI multi-functional front-line fighter, which has recently been handed over for flight tests at Zhukovsky, to enter operational service."

Two prototypes of the Mikoyan 1.42 have been built. MAPO-MiG sources say that if air force funding is made available for flight tests, then the aircraft could be flown before the end of this year. So far,

however, the necessary cash has not been made available.

Funding issues have raised a serious question mark over the future of the programme, with some senior MAPO-MiG officials claiming that the air force could not afford to buy the aircraft in operational numbers.

Deinekin says that fighter-bomber aviation units will receive the twin-seat Su-27IB, which is now being flight-tested.

Col Gen Abrek Ayupov, air force former deputy commander-in-chief for acquisition, acknowledges that, for 1996, the service has enough money to pay only for "...one and a half Su-27IBs produced by Novosibirsk plant".

Deinekin says: "Ground-attack aviation needs an advanced all-weather attack aircraft," probably referring to the Sukhoi Su-25TM.

The air force has withdrawn all older types from operational service. About 1,700 single-engine tactical aircraft await the scrap-heap. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ TAIWAN MIRAGE ARRIVES

Taiwan has taken delivery of the first of 60 Dassault Aviation Mirage 2000-5 combat aircraft. The Taiwanese Government has also purchased 1,200 Matra Mica air-to-air missiles, as well as other weaponry.

■ PAKISTAN/LEBANON DEAL

Pakistan is negotiating to purchase ten Dassault Mirage III fighters from Lebanon. A high-ranking Pakistani delegation visited Beirut on 16 May and discussed the proposed deal. The aircraft have been grounded for some years, and extensive refurbishment will be needed to return them to operational condition. It is possible that Pakistan wants to cannibalise the aircraft for spares.

■ EXTRA F-7S FOR SUDAN

China has delivered seven Chengdu F-7 fighters to the Sudanese air force. Middle-Eastern sources claim that Iran has financed the deal which also includes spares for previously procured F-7s.

Summit holds key to Tiger

A FRANCO-GERMAN summit between French president Jacques Chirac and German chancellor Helmut Kohl on 5 June holds the key to the future of the Eurocopter Tiger and NH90 joint helicopter projects.

Confusion remains over France's commitment to both programmes following the Government's recent defence plan. Sources predict that Eurocopter may have to lay off up to 1,500 employees if neither goes ahead. "It's a worst-case scenario," says Eurocopter, "and we're still hoping that it won't happen."

The summit should lead to final agreement on the industrialisation of the Tiger and the NH90, and secure funding for both types. Eurocopter, with slack orders for its existing military helicopters, badly needs assurances on their future so that it can develop its business

plan for the next few years.

The *Loi de Programmation*, which is now being debated in parliament, and will be voted at the end of June, envisages orders for 25 Tigers and 11 NH90s by the year 2002, with first deliveries of the Tiger the following year. It outlines major programmes from 1997-2002, and does not specify funding for either type. This will probably subsequently be decided annually.

"The key is an agreement on tooling up for production," says one source. "Once it has that, Eurocopter can plan for the future," the source adds.

France has to come up with half of the Fr3 billion (\$600 million) needed for Tiger industrialisation under the agreement forged between France and Germany in June 1995 covering the unit price and tooling costs for the helicopter. □

Hughes and GEC begin to evaluate export AirHawk seeker options

HUGHES AND GEC-Marconi are examining an imaging-infra-red (IIR)-guided variant of the AirHawk, being offered by Hughes to meet the UK's conventional stand-off missile (CASOM) requirement, for the export market.

Hughes and GEC unveiled a formal tie-up on 23 May for the UK bid, with GEC involvement covering "final assembly and integration of the [missile] inner package", says Peter Quast, Hughes UK's managing director.

The AirHawk bid being offered for the UK requirement uses digital scene-matching area correlation (DSMAC). The DSMAC, however, would not be released by the USA for some of its potential export customers, say Hughes officials. In those cases, GEC-Marconi IIR

seekers could be used.

Potential export markets for the winner of the UK Ministry of Defence's CASOM competition include Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

GEC is offering the MoD its Pegasus missile, based on the Hakim family of weapons developed for the UAE. It is also offering the Centaur missile which is similar to the Pegasus to the UAE.

The indications are that GEC is unlikely to win with the Pegasus in the UK. This will hamper its chances of winning in the UAE, where it is in competition with Matra, offering the Apache. A range-limited IIR-guided variant of the AirHawk could be offered by Hughes UK and GEC in the UAE, according to sources. □