

## USAF looks for F-16 upgrade funds

COMBAT MISSIONS over Kosovo have driven the US Air Force to seek supplemental funding to refurbish many of its of Lockheed Martin F-16C/D fighters that would otherwise fall short of their projected lifespans.

Lockheed Martin designed the single-engined fighter to last 8,000h within a specific flight profile based on the McDonnell Douglas F-4. Prolonged combat in the Balkans has placed many of the F-16s outside that profile and aircraft are "falling out at 4,000 to 6,000h", according to USAF Air Combat Command's (ACC) Maj Gen Dennis Haines.

Air force officials note that wear and tear on the F-16s would have been more severe had the aircraft not generally operated at 15,000ft (4,575m) and above. Limited air-to-air combat and the widespread use of stand-off weapons minimised high stress manoeuvres.

The air force says it needs as much as \$800 million to structurally overhaul its F-16s. The USAF and Air National Guard operate around 1,500 F-16s, some 650 of which are older high time Block 25 and 30 aircraft and the remainder newer Block 40 and 50s.

Depending on how much money the ACC obtains, engineering work could start in 2000-1. The work needed varies depending on usage, but could be focused on the F-16's centre and aft fuselage sections, control surfaces and other load bearing areas.

An additional study is under way to extend the Block 50's planned 8,000h lifespan by 10% through enhancements to bulkheads. □

# Aerospatiale Matra tanker deal sparks Raytheon exclusivity row

RAMON LOPEZ/WASHINGTON DC

AEROSPATIALE Matra's partnership with Lockheed Martin on an air-to-air refuelling aircraft based on an Airbus Industrie aircraft violates an exclusive agreement between Raytheon and Airbus to develop and market a militarised Airbus A310-300, Raytheon officials claim.

In April, Raytheon Systems and Airbus teamed on the A310-based Multi Role Tanker Transport (MRTT). They will exclusively offer Airbus aircraft with Raytheon tanker modifications in a market estimated at nearly 600 aircraft by 2010. Airbus will only support development of the Raytheon tanker modification and neither will offer their products independently, says the agreement.

Both say the Airbus executive board "with unanimous concurrence of the partners" agreed to the MRTT project, which can be extended to other Airbus models with the agreement of both parties.

Lockheed Martin and Airbus partner Aerospatiale Matra signed a memorandum of agreement (MoA) on 16 June, however, on a tanker/transport partnership based on the A340 as a possible replacement for 500 ageing Boeing KC-135s (*Flight International*, 23-29 June). Lockheed Martin and Aerospatiale Matra also plan to pursue opportunities for tanker modifications of other Airbus aircraft, starting with the UK's Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft (FSTA) competition.

Aerospatiale Matra says it has a deal with Lockheed Martin and the pair will offer a solution to the UK for its FSTA requirement.

Lockheed Martin officials insist they have a legal deal with Aerospatiale Matra. Robert Lang, vice-president for business development at Lockheed Martin Aeronautical Systems, says the two parties agreed "to diligently and exclusively pursue as a team the UK's FSTA programme".

Aerospatiale Matra/Lockheed

Martin will not offer the MRTT, although its bid will probably be based on the A310.

Gerald Iverson, vice-president federal programmes at Raytheon's Greenville, Texas-based aircraft integration systems unit, believes Lockheed Martin's deal with Aerospatiale Matra is an infringement of its agreement with Airbus. "The way we read the [Lockheed Martin-Aerospatiale Matra] agreement, Aerospatiale would compete with us directly in the worldwide market. I view that as a violation of our agreement."

Each Airbus consortium member is "free to pursue business on their own. That is what it appears Aerospatiale [Matra] has elected to do with regard to Lockheed Martin," says Earl Odom, the US-based Airbus vice-president for business development. "Aerospatiale Matra thinks they have the authority [to make such a commitment]. They must feel that Airbus Industrie has given them that authority," adds Lang. □

## French navy production Rafale flies

THE FIRST production naval Rafale fighter has flown from Dassault's Bordeaux plant on the same day that the prototype made its first landing on the nuclear-powered carrier *Charles de Gaulle*. The first Rafale M squadron of 12 aircraft will be formed in 2001. The French navy requires 60 Rafales, 25 of them ordered under the government's 48-aircraft multi-year procurement initiative.



## China and Pakistan agree on Super-7 fighter development work

CHINA AND Pakistan have signed an agreement on the joint development and production of the Chengdu FC-1/Super 7 fighter, firming up a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed two years ago.

According to Chengdu Aircraft Industrial Group (CAC), the agreement was signed at the end of June during a visit to Beijing by

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. It was co-signed by Chinese premier Zhu Rongji. The details of the contract are not being released. CAC says the workshare packages remain to be worked out.

The aircraft is to fly in 2001 and should be in service by 2005, says CAC. It is being developed in a 50-50 partnership between the two countries, to meet a Pakistani light

fighter requirement believed to number 150 aircraft. Agreement was delayed by Pakistan's financial difficulties. Pakistan also made it a pre-condition that the Chinese air force commit to the aircraft.

Avionics may be supplied by either Fiar or Thomson-CSF, after Marconi Electronic Systems, which had been pushing to enter the programme, failed to submit a

tender (*Flight International*, 7-13 July). The winner will have to share development costs with China and Pakistan, recouping its expenditure from the production phase.

Fiar has proposed an avionics and sensor suite based around the Grifo S7 radar being developed for the Super 7, while Thomson-CSF is proposing a system built around the RC400 radar. □