

South Korea close to relaunching attack helicopter contest

SOUTH KOREA is on the verge of reopening its competition for an attack helicopter to replace some of the army's Bell AH-1 Cobras. Previous attempts to launch the competition have been thwarted by the region's economic crises.

Meanwhile, companies in a similar competition in Turkey expect a delay in selection, amid increasing speculation that Ankara may order a further stage of selection.

Around 30-40 attack helicopters are required by the South Korean army. Previous attempts to launch the competition in 1997 and 1998 were stymied by Korean financial problems, but industry expects the request for proposals to be issued on 7 March.

It is expected that the RFP will be released to the same companies which received the 1998 request. Competitors will be the Agusta A129I Mangusta, Bell AH-1Z SuperCobra, Boeing AH-64D Apache Longbow, Denel CSH-2 Rooivalk, Eurocopter Tiger, Kamov Ka-50/52 and an armed version of the Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk, which is licence-built by Korean Air.

South Korea chose the AH-64A in 1992 but failed to sign a letter of acceptance for 37 helicopters.

Meanwhile, industry sources suggest that the Turkish attack helicopter selection could slip from 15 February and it is possible that, rather than choose a winner, Turkey may instead narrow the list to two competitors.

Battling for the Turkish order are Agusta, Bell, Boeing, Eurocopter and a Kamov entry offering a tandem cockpit Ka-52 with Israel Aircraft Industries-supplied avionics. Competitors are bidding for an initial 50-aircraft order while the full requirement is for 145 attack helicopters. First deliveries are due in November 2002.

■ Bell is back on board Australia's Air 87 combat scout programme after appealing against its exclusion from the shortlist. Letters are expected from the Australian Department of Defence confirming the decision this month. □

US report on Kosovo points out NATO shortcomings

PAUL LEWIS/WASHINGTON DC

THE US DEPARTMENT OF Defense's report to Congress on its performance in Kosovo's Operation Allied Force has identified the need for improvements in critical areas, including NATO alliance capabilities, command and control (C²), intelligence gathering, precision strike and air defence suppression.

The report re-emphasises the need for the NATO alliance to address "shortcomings" in C² and information systems, secure communications, precision strike, air operations support and mobility.

Among its recommendations is the need to improve NATO out-of-area contingency planning and develop an overarching C² policy to avoid potential confusion from parallel US and NATO structures.

The DoD is also looking at ways of better protecting its computers from hacking.

The accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade has highlighted the need for the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Imagery and Mapping Agency to overhaul their databases. Rapid response procedures have already been developed for critical "no strike" target updates.

The Pentagon has called for improved integration of unmanned air vehicles (UAVs) with campaign planning.

Measures being taken include accelerating acquisition of Northrop Grumman Global Hawk high-altitude UAVs, ordering more General Atomics Predators and adding a laser designator capability.

According to the report, the 38,000 sorties flown by coalition

aircraft drew three times as much surface-to-air missile fire as during the Gulf War. While only two aircraft were lost, the report notes that the Yugoslav air defence system was not state-of-the-art.

It says continuing efforts need to be made to improve air defence suppression capabilities. The \$3.5 billion in post-Kosovo supplementary funding includes 7,600 additional Raytheon ALE-50 towed decoys, \$389 million in improvements to the Northrop Grumman EA-6B Prowler and an analysis-of-alternatives study for a replacement jammer aircraft to be fielded around 2010-15.

After the disappointing performance of the Boeing AH-64A Apache, the Pentagon plans to develop a joint deep operations concept for tasking army attack helicopters and tactical missiles. □

Northrop Grumman wins USN UAV contest

NORTHROP Grumman's Ryan Aeronautical Center has been picked to supply the US Navy's next tactical vertical take-off and landing unmanned air vehicle. The system will replace AAI/Israel Aircraft Industry Pioneer fixed-wing UAVs.

The Programme Executive Office, Cruise Missiles and UAVs, has awarded Northrop Grumman a \$94 million engineering and manufacturing development contract. The cost-plus incentive fee/award contract includes options for three low-rate initial production systems.

Ultimately, the USN will receive 12 UAV systems, while the US Marine Corps will take 11. Initial service entry is planned for the third quarter of 2003. The VTOL UAV will operate from air-capable warships, providing near real-time intelligence, surveillance



Schweizer's light helicopter becomes a VTOL UAV

and reconnaissance data gathering.

Northrop Grumman's VTOL UAV is based around a modified Schweizer 333 turbine-powered light helicopter. Losing submissions were Bell's Eagle Eye tiltrotor and the Sikorsky Mariner, a scaled-

up, turbine-powered version of the Cypher ducted-rotor UAV. The Schweizer 333 is a development of the 330SP with an upgraded dynamic system and new rotor blades. Schweizer expects the 333 to be certificated by the US Federal Aviation Administration in April. Other changes for the Rolls-Royce Allison 250-C20-powered UAV include a streamlined fuselage to increase airspeed and additional fuel to meet range requirements.

Working alongside Northrop Grumman are Lockheed Martin Federal Systems (shipboard integration); L-3 Communications (communications); IAI Tamam (the MOSP multi-mission optronic stabilised payload); Sierra Nevada (automated recovery system); and Raytheon (tactical control station). □