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# Watchkeeper speeds up

Ambitious UAV programme enters next phase with a final go-ahead due in 2004

Four teams have started work under the next phase of the UK Ministry of Defence's Watchkeeper unmanned air vehicle (UAV) programme amid signs the British Army wants to accelerate fielding of the system.

Ralph Starace, Watchkeeper programme manager for the Northrop Grumman team, says the UK has brought forward its desired full operational capability date, previously 2008, to 2007. The MoD wants an initial operational capability as early as 2005.

Northrop Grumman, together with teams led by BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin UK and Thales, last month began work under six-month study contracts bridging the gap between the 12-month first assessment phase, completed in September, and a 12 to 18-month second phase scheduled to begin in the second quarter next year.

The MoD plans to downselect to two teams for assessment phase 2, which is intended to lead to a "main gate" decision in the first quarter of 2004 on whether Watchkeeper will proceed into the

demonstration and manufacturing phase. Estimates of the "whole life" cost of the system range from £1 billion (\$1.4 billion) to £3 billion, Starace says.

Under phase 1, the teams defined concepts for the system, which will provide all-weather, day/night reconnaissance, wide-area surveillance and target identification, with counter-camouflage capability. Starace says Watchkeeper goes "far beyond" the US Army's tactical UAV and "exceeds the capability of Global Hawk", the US Air Force's Northrop Grumman-developed endurance UAV.

Watchkeeper will comprise several configurations of air vehicle, plus different payloads and the ground segment. Under its current six-month contract, Starace says, Northrop Grumman is looking at commercial and government off-the-shelf hardware and software that could be integrated to produce the "most affordable system at lowest risk". In the integration assessment phase due to begin next year, two contractor teams "will do a series of validations of the systems they have selected" and develop the business case to support a decision to move into production.



The British Army has set its sights on beating Global Hawk's capability

## MISSILES

### Have Lite, will travel

The first launch of the new Have Lite air-to-surface missile is planned for May next year according to PGSUS, the Lockheed Martin/Rafael missile joint venture based in Troy, Alabama. Have Lite is a reduced weight version of the AGM-142 Have Nap/Popeye television guided air-to-surface missile. The smaller 1,135kg (2,500lb) weapon is designed for use from single seat fighters such as the Lockheed Martin F-16.

The missile has the same warhead as the 1,400kg AGM-142, but a smaller engine. Improved aerodynamic control surfaces provide the same range as the larger weapon.

## FIGHTER DEVELOPMENT

### Russia to develop first LFI as export version

Russia plans to develop an export version of its Lightweight Frontline Fighter (LFI) first, with a view to using the aircraft as the basis of a variant for the Russian air force. Air force officials quoted in the local media outlined the plans, saying the two aircraft will have 60% commonality.

The decision is believed to have been forced on the Russian defence ministry by funding shortages. During initial development, a large portion of the funding is to be provided by the industrial sources and foreign investors. India has already agreed to join the programme, probably contributing financial and design resources, and it is pos-

sible the first version is aimed at meeting New Delhi's requirement.

The officials said the work on Russia's own LFI variant will not begin in earnest until 2008-9, but the export version should be available between 2010 and 2012.

Meanwhile, industry sources say initial proposals will be submitted by the three bidders - RSK MiG, Sukhoi and Yakovlev - in the first quarter of next year.

The eventual winner will build two flying demonstrators for concept approval and initial flight testing, followed by construction of a series of production prototypes. Full-scale production could lead to introduction after 2010.

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