

TACTICAL TRANSPORT PAUL LEWIS / WASHINGTON DC

USAF C-130J funds hang in balance

Congressional move puts multi-year 64 aircraft procurement plan at risk despite air force confidence

The US Air Force is confident of meeting a new Congressional stipulation that the Lockheed Martin C-130J Hercules be certified as operationally effective and suitable as a condition for approved funding in the fiscal year 2003 budget.

The move is vital if multi-year procurement (MYP) of 64 aircraft is to begin. But on its current schedule the air force will not be ready to declare an initial operational capability (IOC) before late FY04.

"They are looking for a commitment or an assurance that we are on track for a successful dedicated operational test and evaluation. We anticipate that happening later this year, and at this point we believe we're on track," says Col Bob Hudson, chief of the USAF's theatre airlift, special operations and trainer division. The C-130J programme is still in the process of addressing system shortcomings highlighted by an initial phase of testing.

The air force claims to have addressed 50 deficiencies and completed qualification testing of the Block 5.3 mission software. Another 43 issues remain to be fixed, and the C-130J fleet has still to be

upgraded from the 5.2 software standard, which has been plagued by false alarms, to the new 5.3. The aircraft will not reach full operational capability until Block 5.4 is fielded, which will include an integrated self-defence capability. But the US Marine Corps plans to declare IOC next year with Block 5.3.

At stake is procurement over five years for 40 stretched CC-130Js (formerly the C-130J-30), which the air force wants to start in 2004 with an initial four aircraft, and a USMC five-year buy of 24 KC-130J tankers beginning next year. The 27 USAF

and 11 marine corps aircraft ordered to date were funded on an annual incremental basis, compared to which the MYP promises to save the air force \$420 million and the USMC \$235 million.

Beyond Block 5.4, the USAF has mapped out a spiral development plan calling for the delivery of updated software every two years, with funding for Block 6.0 starting next year, followed by Block 7.0 in 2005, Block 9.0 in 2007 and Block 9 in 2009. "Blocks 6-8 will be predominantly focused on GATM [global air traffic management]

compliance as we believe we will have fixed most of the mission essential deficiencies in Block 5.3/5.4," says Lt Col Brian Dougherty, of the USAF chief tactical airlift branch.

The C-130J is equipped with GPS satellite navigation, protected instrument landing system and a traffic alert collision avoidance system. It is certificated for required navigation performance 5 already. Capabilities planned to be added include a multimode receiver, voice satellite communications, improved GPS, controller-pilot datalink and 8.33kHz VHF radio.



In-service USAF C-130Js have been procured annually

UNMANNED SYSTEMS

French eye EADS/IAI Hunter

EADS is offering an improved version of the Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) Hunter unmanned air vehicle (UAV) system to the French army as part of co-operation between the European and Israeli manufacturers. If the French army selects the improved Hunter, EADS will manufacture parts of the UAV system.

Two years ago the French army selected the high altitude, long endurance Eagle 1 UAV system – a development of the IAI Heron medium-altitude, long-endurance UAV – but it has a requirement for a shorter-range platform. The French defence ministry purchased a single Hunter UAV for evaluation four years ago. EADS is now offering an enhanced version with an improved payload.

Meanwhile, the US army plans to purchase additional TRW/IAI Hunters and equip its existing systems with improved payloads. The US Army has seven Hunter systems, but cancelled further acquisitions in 1996 following operational difficulties with the system, since when Hunter has matured. The US Army has used Hunter in conflicts in the Balkans, and for training. The army is developing AAI's Shadow UAV, but the Hunter is the only division and corps-level system. Another possibility is to develop the Hunter's ground station also to control Shadows to avoid the need for two separate stations.

IAI sources confirm the army is discussing procuring additional Hunter systems. A competition with other UAVs is expected in 2003.

COMPETITION

Airbus and Boeing trade blows over 'Marshall Plan' allegations

European defence manufacturers have more opportunity to do business and compete for government contracts in the USA than US companies have in Europe, says Jerry Daniels, head of Boeing's Military Aircraft and Missile Systems division. "European manufacturers have done a great job on acquisitions [in the USA] and have very good prospects," he adds, while many recent US transatlantic approaches have "gone nowhere".

Daniels was answering remarks by Airbus president Noel Forgeard, describing a \$20 billion US government programme to lease up to 100 767-200ER in-flight refuelling tankers as a "Boeing Marshall Plan" to cushion a key defence contractor

against plummeting civil aircraft sales (*Flight International*, 18-24 December, 2001).

He says Boeing had been negotiating the tanker deal with the US Department of Defense for three years, "before 11 September". Daniels says he was discussing the deal in the office of the assistant secretary of the US air force when the aircraft hit the World Trade Center.

Daniels has called for reform to reduce manufacturers' costs. He says the US government must commit to multi-year contracts, be more open to manufacturers from different countries working together, and "streamline bureaucratic" export controls to enable a quicker response to opportunities.