UPGRADES PAUL LEWIS / CINCINNATI & WASHINGTON DC

USAF needs creative funding for A-10

Three manufacturers chasing a re-engining deal need to come up with a financing plan – leasing could be the answer

Prospects for re-engining the US Air Force's fleet of 360 Fairchild OA/A-10 Thunderbolts hinge increasingly on industry's ability to find alternative financing schemes and/or secure supplementary funding, with Pratt & Whitney and Rolls-Royce now pushing for an open competition with incumbent supplier General Electric.

"We want to upgrade the aircraft's thrust and improve medium-altitude performance," says Brig Gen Daniel Leaf, USAF director of operational requirements.

"It's a matter of balancing the needs for sustaining the aircraft and ensuring it remains viable and relevant, but we've not yet found something we can fit in the affordability matrix," he adds. The USAF is giving funding priority to the OA/A-10 Precision Engagement programme of avionic and sensor upgrades, but pilots have asked for improved climb rate and manoeuvring above 20,000ft (6,100m).

Companies are looking at creative financing schemes – such as leasing – to help sell the programme. Hurdles remain, however, such as securing Congress' commitment to long-term funding to ensure a viable lease deal.

Others have proposed pre-costed maintenance deals, while some are pinning their hopes on supplemental congressional funding to upgrade the Air National Guard's 100 aircraft.

GE had proposed a flat-rated 10,500lb-thrust (47kN) CF34-8C growth development of the OA/A-10's TF34 powerplant. The engine is heavier and has a larger fan diameter requiring a replacement nacelle, which "made it a more expensive proposition than initially thought", says Stephen Clark, GE manager A-10 propulsion upgrade. Lower-cost proposals include a smaller improved CF34-3B with modified fan and turbine section, or a TF34 retrofit kit.

R-R has unveiled a proposed uprated AE3007L turbofan. "The engine would fit exactly in the nacelle and comes in at the same weight as the TF34. There would be changes to the engine to reach 11,000lb-thrust, but it would be less costly than an -8C," claims Scott Saunders, R-R director USAF programmes.

P&W has identified the PW800 geared fan and PWC308 turbofan as candidates, but is pressing the USAF to release information to narrow down the requirement. "The level of detail has not flowed down. We're interested and think we have the right product and technology and are encouraging the air force to compete the re-engining," says Clayton Small, P&W small military engine director.

SANCTIONS BUSTING

Italy thwarts Libyan move

Italy's Guardia di Finanza has thwarted a Libyan attempt to circumvent UN and other international arms embargoes.

The Guardia di Finanza, a customs police force, discovered at the port of La Spezia in northern Italy a container with four Ivchenko Progress AI-25 engines and an assortment of Aero Vodochody L-39 Albatros spares.

Libya received 170 L-39s for advanced training and light attack roles. Around 130-150 are thought to remain in service although less than half are believed to be serviceable.

Investigators believe the engines were to receive major overhauls in Slovakia before being returned to Libya.

Libya is searching for spare parts as well as overhaul and maintenance services for many of its major weapon systems, with serviceability considered very low following years of arms embargoes.

In recent years some of these efforts involving several types of support and combat aircraft have been discovered and blocked in Europe.

SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT ANDREW DOYLE / SINGAPORE

Japan and USA collaborate on MPA mission system replacements

Japan and the USA are close to agreeing a framework for discussions on jointly developing a mission system to equip their respective Lockheed Martin P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) replacements.

Agreement on the scope of the talks should clear the way for detailed negotiations to start before year-end, say officials. The timing of the talks is being driven primarily by the Japanese side, which aims to have its MP-X replacement operational by 2011.

Japan plans to base the MP-X on an indigenously-developed platform likely to be powered by four turbofans designed by the Japan Defence Agency's Technical Research and Development Institute. A prime contractor is due to be selected by November.

The US Navy, meanwhile, wants to purchase an off-the-shelf platform to meet its future Multi-mission Maritime Aircraft (MMA) requirement.

The Boeing 737 is seen as the most likely candidate, though other possibilities include the Airbus A320, BAE Systems' Nimrod MRA4, the Fairchild Dornier 928JET and the Gulfstream V (*Flight International*, 26 June-2 July).

Japan (left) and the USA could share MPA systems work to replace the P-3

Co-operation talks will focus on whether Japanese industry can take a significant share of development work on a common mission system, which would subsequently be manufactured on separate production lines in Japan and the USA.

This would be likely to entail Japanese industry taking responsibility for specific elements of the mission system, say the sources.

Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon are all expected to compete for prime contractorship of the US MMA programme, but Boeing is the only manufacturer that is in a position to offer its own airframe as part of its bid.

Fuji Heavy Industries, Kawasaki, and Mitsubishi are bidding for the right to be the prime contractor on the MP-X, while Japan Aircraft Manufacturing, Shni-Maywa Industries and Showa Aircraft Industry have submitted proposals for airframe and mission system work.