NEW $2.2 BILLION ANGLO-FRENCH FCAS PHASE ANNOUNCED

News / Manufacturer

France and the UK are set to launch a new project under their Future Combat Air System (FCAS) effort that will see unmanned air vehicle prototypes developed under a newly announced £1.54 billion ($2.19 billion) agreement.

UK Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Francois Hollande met in Amiens, France on 3 March, during which they committed funding to build on the programme's two-year £120 million ($170 million) feasibility study phase, that kicked off in November 2014.

The study is expected to conclude in late 2016, and the development of full-scale prototypes is expected to start the following year.

"We are now looking to transition to the next phase in 2017, which will prepare for the full-scale development of unmanned combat air system (UCAS) operational demonstrators by 2025," the governments say.

"This demonstration programme, the most advanced of its kind in Europe, will be centred on a versatile UCAS platform that could serve as the basis for a future operational capability beyond 2030."

The governments intend to invest $2.2 billion in the next stage of the effort and a technical review will be carried out some time around 2020.

"In addition, we will strengthen our collaboration by working together to analyse the future combat air environment, including how manned and unmanned systems might operate together," they add.

The parties involved in the development are split between British and French industry, and include: BAE Systems, Dassault, Finmeccanica Airborne and Space Systems, Rolls-Royce, Snecma/Safran and Thales.

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BAE Systems

The two leaders also signed an agreement for France to explore the purchase of the MBDA Dual-Mode Brimstone 2 missile for its Airbus Helicopters Tiger attack rotorcraft.

Brimstone is used by UK forces in Iraq and Syria, and “would offer a valuable upgrade to the French arsenal”, according to the UK Ministry of Defence.

The March meeting resulted in Cameron and Hollande signing an agreement to begin a joint concept phase for the Future Cruise/Anti-Ship Weapon programme to develop replacements for the MBDA Scalp/Storm Shadow missiles that both countries operate, plus the Harpoon for the UK and Exocet for France.

This concept phase would lead to a decision on replacements by 2020, and it is planned for an

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arrangement for this to be agreed on by the end of 2016, and for contracts to possibly be signed by March 2017.

UK defence secretary Michael Fallon also agreed one strategic airlift flight per month, to be provided to support French troops involved in counter-terrorism operations in Africa. The Royal Air Force operates eight Boeing C-17 transports that would fit the role, Flightglobal's Fleets Analyzer database shows.

The UK is also considering involvement in Operation Barkhane, Paris' ongoing anti-insurgency mission in the Sahel, Africa, "the modalities of which are still being discussed", the governments say.

"France is grateful for this commitment and supports all its operational aspects," the joint statement adds.

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