LEONARDO C-27J LANDS IN OTTAWA AHEAD OF POSSIBLE FWSAR ANNOUNCEMENT

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One of the bidders for the Royal Canadian Air Force's fixed-wing search and rescue (FWSAR) replacement aircraft could receive an early Christmas present.

Judy Foote, Minister of Public Services and Procurement, told the Canadian Aerospace Summit

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on Wednesday that the government is “in the process of evaluating the bids and will be awarding the contract soon.”

“We think ‘soon’ means sometime between now and Christmas,” said retired LGen Steve Lucas, a spokesperson for Team Spartan, which is bidding the C-27J Spartan.

The FWSAR project became an early test case poster child for the previous Conservative government’s 2014 defence procurement strategy, which, among other tools, introduced the value proposition to prospective bids as way to engage more Canadian companies and improve the government’s economic return.

When the request for proposals (RFP) was issued in March 2015, the 200-page document put the onus on industry to propose how many aircraft and bases would be required to cover Canada’s immense area of responsibility (AOR), which extends from the Pacific Ocean to the North Pole and well out into the eastern Atlantic.

“We asked industry to provide an end-to-end solution,” said Foote. “This will mean a modern, reliable and effective fleet, equipped with advanced technology systems, significantly improved radar and sensors, navigation and data management systems.”

The Spartan team, which includes Italian aircraft manufacturer Leonardo, General Dynamics Mission Systems–Canada (GDMS-C), DRS Technologies, KF Aerospace, and IMP Aerospace, took advantage of the conference to steer its demonstration C-27J through Ottawa as it embarks on a tour of potential and current customers in Latin America that includes stops in Panama, Peru and Argentina, including Argentina’s Antarctic base, Marambio.

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The C-27J is one of three aircraft currently being considered, along with Airbus' C295 and Embraer's KC-390.

To meet the in-service support (ISS) requirements, Leonardo and GDMS-C in February formed a joint venture called Spartan Aviation Services to serve as the ISS integrator if their bid is successful.

While the RFP asked bidders to identify solutions to operate from either three or four bases across Canada, Lucas said Team Spartan would prefer to operate from the current four bases in Greenwood, N.S., Trenton, Ont., Winnipeg, Man., and Comox, B.C.

"That would make the most sense," he said, though he would not reveal how many aircraft would be required to service the RCAF's three search regions.

However, the evaluation process included a computer model response of each bidder's aircraft to over 7,000 SAR incidents to which the RCAF has responded in the past five years. The model then measured not only how long it would have taken each aircraft to reach the search area, but also its time on station and recovery time.

If Christmas does come early for one of the FWSAR contenders, the first aircraft will be delivered to the RCAF within 36 months of contract award, with the rest to follow over the next three years.

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