AIRBUS PROVES MORE A400M CAPABILITIES, AND EYES EXPORTS

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Airbus Defence & Space reported substantial progress in the flight-testing of functions and **capabilities** for the **A400M** airlifter. But negotiations with the seven launch partner nations about amending the contract again will continue into next year. In the past 12 months, Airbus has made provision for losses of €841 million ($925.2 million) on the A400M.

At media briefings in Seville last week, the company listed 14 capabilities that have already been certified, ranging from transport of heavy vehicles and helicopters through free-fall paratrooping to aerial delivery by gravity extraction. The full-flight envelope has been proved, including low-level flight in VMC, as well as operations onto harder types of unpaved runway. Another 18 capabilities or configurations remain to be proven, with some expected by year-end, including the first of a two-stage implementation of the Defensive Aids Sub-System (DASS), and air-to-air refueling (AAR) from wing pods.

Interestingly, the company did not present these capabilities in terms of SOC standards or Tranches, as previously agreed with the partner nations. New program head Kurt Rossner said that these standards had been dropped and that complex negotiations are taking place with officials from the OCCAR procurement agency, to agree exactly what capabilities should be

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delivered by 2019. Some capabilities are being delivered ahead of schedule, but others are behind. But, he said, the company's relationship with the partner nations had been "substantially rebuilt."

The biggest disappointment of the flight-test program has been the discovery that helicopters cannot refuel from the A400M. An instrumented EC725 Caracal showed evidence of undesirable aerodynamic stress on its rotor blades during AAR from an A400M. Surprisingly, the airflow problem is generated by the airlifter's wings, rather than propwash from the large TP400 engines.

Sixteen A400Ms have now been delivered to France (seven); Germany (one); Malaysia (one); Turkey (two) and the UK (five). Deliveries have not accelerated as planned in 2015, because of the temporary grounding and disruption caused by the fatal crash in May. But Airbus still hopes to hand over up to eight more by the end of the year. The airlifter has already "proved its worth in real operations" according to Rossner. These have included French missions to Africa, a German flight to Senegal, and Turkish flights to Afghanistan.

Antonio Barberan, military aircraft sales head for Airbus D&S, said that the company has presented A400M sales proposals to nine countries. He would not confirm reports that Egypt is one of these, but did say that three were in Latin America, and also acknowledged discussions with Indonesia and New Zealand. Barberan predicted export sales of more than 300 over the next 30 years, with a target of 50 over the next five years. Exports will have to be coordinated with the launch partner nations, he added, presumably to release production slots. He did not mention the company's obligation to pay export levies to the partner nations amounting to $1.5 billion on such sales, a legacy of the rescue agreement for the program in 2010.

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