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Airbus plans to bid for another SAAF new aircraft requirement

By: Keith Campbell
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European aircraft maker Airbus Military, a subsidiary of jetliner manufacturer Airbus and part of the giant EADS group, has confirmed that it intends to bid for the South African Air Force's (SAAF's) new maritime surveillance, maritime patrol and medium transport aircraft programmes, when they are officially launched.

For all three roles, the company will offer different versions of the same aircraft - the C-295.

"Yes, that is our intention," Airbus spokesperson for South Africa **Linden Birns** told *Engineering News Online* on Tuesday at the Airbus Military Trade Press Briefing in Seville, Spain.

"The C-295 is the only aircraft in its category with both transport and maritime surveillance versions already in operation, and the

antisubmarine warfare (ASW) version will be finished before the end of the year. It is the only twin turboprop on the market that can provide platform commonality for both maritime and transport versions."

The SAAF is seeking to replace its very old C-47TP aircraft in both the maritime surveillance and medium transport roles. Although significantly upgraded with modern avionics and turboprop engines, the C-47 was designed more than 70 years ago and the examples operated by the SAAF are at least 65 years old.

The SAAF also desires to acquire new maritime patrol aircraft, to reinstate a capability lost when the air force retired its Avro Shackleton aircraft in 1985.

(For the SAAF, maritime surveillance refers to an unarmed aircraft that can monitor surface shipping, while maritime patrol indicates an armed aircraft that can undertake reconnaissance, ASW and antisurface ship warfare - ASuW - as well).

The maritime surveillance version of the C-295 is already in service with the Chilean Navy and Portuguese Air Force, and the ASW version is being offered to the Chilean Navy. The Portuguese Air Force has also acquired the transport version of the C-295.

The maritime surveillance and ASW versions of the C-295 are fitted with different versions of Airbus Military's Fully Integrated Tactical System (Fits), which integrates a wide range of sensors and interfaces with the aircraft's navigational and tactical communications systems.

The ASW version of Fits can carry out ASW, ASuW, signals intelligence, imagery surveillance, exclusive economic zone and maritime traffic surveillance, maritime law enforcement and search and rescue (SAR) operations. The C-295 ASW aircraft will be equipped with six underwing pylons for the carriage of torpedoes, antiship missiles, mines, depth charges, reconnaissance and/or jamming pods, and search lights.

The maritime surveillance version would omit the combat capabilities and focus on the surveillance, law enforcement and SAR missions.

The transport version of the C-295 is in operation with more than ten countries and has a maximum payload of 9 250 kg, a maximum cruising speed of 480 km/h and a cargo hold that is 12,69 m in length (excluding the rear ramp, which is 3,04 m long) and 2,70 m in width.

No timeframe has yet been announced for these SAAF acquisition programmes.

Keith Campbell is attending the trade press briefing in Seville as a guest of Airbus Military.

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