



28 March 2017

France and the UK launch next-generation strike missile project with MBDA

Today in London, the United Kingdom and France have signed an agreement to launch a joint concept phase of the Future Cruise / Anti-Ship Weapon (FC/ASW) programme with MBDA. The agreement was signed by Laurent Collet-Billon, head of France's Defence Procurement Agency (DGA - Direction générale de l'armement), and Harriet Baldwin, UK Minister of Defence Procurement.

Running for up to three years, the aim of the concept phase is to lay the ground work and inform the UK and France's decision making and requirements for a potential follow on assessment and demonstration phase of the next generation of cruise and anti-ship missiles, with a planned operational capability to be achieved by the end of the next decade.

Valued at 100 M€, work on the FC/ASW concept phase will be split 50/50 in terms of both quantity and quality of content between the UK and France. The effort will see MBDA mature systems and technologies that will increase the survivability, range and lethality of anti-ship and deep strike missiles launched by both air and naval combat platforms. The DGA will act as the contract authority for the concept phase with MBDA.

Equally funded by France and the UK, the FC/ASW programme is a product of the very close Anglo-French defence relationship set out by the Lancaster House treaties. The FC/ASW Concept Phase is the latest step in the two countries' highly successful collaboration on missile technologies through MBDA. This joint work has allowed the two countries to develop a range of world-class missile systems, such as Storm Shadow/SCALP, Meteor, Aster, and Sea Venom/ANL; to rationalise the development and production of missiles through the 'OneMBDA' organisation; and to harmonise the research and technology efforts of both nations across their entire missile industrial sector through the MCM-ITP (Missile Components and Materials – Innovation and Technology Partnership) programme.

Harriett Baldwin said: "Our relationship with France is strong and enduring. We have a long history of cooperation in defence and security with our European Ally. As demonstrated by having Europe's largest defence budget, the UK is committed to European security and we will continue to collaborate on joint defence programmes across the continent. Today's agreement will sustain 80 jobs in the UK."

Laurent Collet-Billon said: "We are launching today a major new phase in our bilateral cooperation, by planning together a generation of missiles, successor to the Exocet, Harpoon, SCALP and Storm Shadow. The FC/ASW (future cruise/anti-ship weapon) programme's aim is to have by around 2030 a new generation of missiles. This future capability is strategic, industrially as well as operationally. This new programme will be the backbone of our "One Complex Weapons" initiative."

Welcoming the news, Antoine Bouvier, CEO of MBDA, said: “This agreement secures the strategic autonomy of France and UK’s deep strike capabilities for the future. After the ratification last year of the Anglo-French agreement authorising us to operate OneMBDA centres of excellence, the FC/ASW project opens the next page of MBDA’s European strategy. Through this strategy we aim to work in even closer partnership with our domestic military customers in order to converge their requirements, while streamlining our own industrial processes across borders. Only this form of co-operation will allow European industry to continue delivering exceptional products and sustain the long-term critical mass needed to keep providing Europe with independent access to key sovereign technologies.”

Dave Armstrong, Managing Director of MBDA UK and Group Director of Sales and Business Development, added: “FC/ASW represents the future of deep strike capability in Europe. The programme is of strategic importance to MBDA, who will lead a team gathering industrial champions from both nations, and will ensure that the UK and France remain at the cutting edge of missile technologies well into the future.”

Notes to editors:

The concept phase of the FC/ASW programme aims at identifying solutions for the replacement of the two countries’ Storm Shadow/SCALP cruise missiles, France’s Exocet and the UK’s Harpoon anti-ship missiles. The concept phase builds on a previous joint study phase initiated by both nations in 2011.

In 2015 and 2016, the UK and France respectively ratified an inter-government agreement to allow MBDA to specialise its industrial capabilities across both countries in centres of excellence. These centres of excellence focus on key sovereign technologies and enable MBDA to achieve efficiencies that cannot be met when working within national boundaries.

With a significant presence in five European countries and within the USA, in 2016 MBDA achieved a turnover of 3.0 billion euros with an order book of 15.9 billion euros. With more than 90 armed forces customers in the world, MBDA is a world leader in missiles and missile systems.

MBDA is the only European group capable of designing and producing missiles and missile systems that correspond to the full range of current and future operational needs of the three armed forces (land, sea and air).

In total, the group offers a range of 45 missile systems and countermeasures products already in operational service and more than 15 others currently in development.

MBDA is jointly held by Airbus Group (37.5%), BAE Systems (37.5%), and Leonardo (25%).

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