

## Poland to Pick Helo Supplier in \$3 Billion Deal

By Brendan McGarry

Friday, June 14th, 2013 11:07 am

Posted in Afghanistan, Land



Poland next year plans to pick a company to build as many as 70 military helicopters in a potential \$3 billion deal that's among the biggest opportunities on the international rotorcraft market.

The defense ministry wants to buy 70 combat support helicopters, including 48 transports for the army to replace the Soviet-era Mi-8/17-series, plus 12 maritime versions for the navy and 10 search-and-rescue craft for the air force, according to an e-mailed statement from a government spokesman.

The contest has drawn bids from teams led by Sikorsky Aircraft Corp., part of Hartford, Conn.-based United Technologies Corp.; AgustaWestland, part of Rome-based Finmeccanica SpA; and Eurocopter, part of Leiden, Netherlands-based European Aeronautic Defence & Space Co., according to the statement. Each contractor partnered with a Poland-based firm after Warsaw required that the aircraft be made in the country.

"The Polish competition is one of the bright spots in the military rotorcraft market," Ray Jaworowski, senior aerospace analyst at Forecast International of Newtown, Conn., said in a telephone interview.

Global sales of military helicopters rose each year from 242 aircraft in 2004 to 774 aircraft in 2012, Jaworowski said. Orders are expected to be flat this year and start declining in 2014, driven in part by the drawdown of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan, he said.

"In a declining market ... a sizeable competition like [Poland's] becomes even more fiercely contested among manufacturers because it represents that much larger slice of the market," Jaworowski said.

The Polish government last month accepted applications from the manufacturers to participate in talks, according to the statement. "After examining the submitted documents, the Commission will invite participants to conduct technical negotiations," it stated.

Poland expects to select a winner in June 2014, with deliveries scheduled to take place between 2015 and 2022, according to the document.

Sikorsky is offering the S-70i Black Hawk and Seahawk, AgustaWestland the AW149 and Eurocopter the EC725. Sikorsky will feature the S-70i at the upcoming Paris Air Show, where it's reportedly the only U.S. aircraft scheduled to fly after the Pentagon decided to scale back its presence amid budget cuts.

The S-70i is the export version of the UH-60M Black Hawk, the first model of which entered U.S. Army service in 1979, and costs about \$14 million apiece. Like its U.S. counterpart, it can carry four crew and 11 passengers, and has a cruise speed of 150 knots, range of 250 nautical miles and gross weight of 22,000 pounds.

The S-70i is the only version of the helicopter made outside the U.S. Sikorsky since 2007 has invested about \$135 million to upgrade a plant in the country that now employs more than 2,100 workers.

AgustaWestland's AW149 is a newer design, unveiled less than a decade ago at the Farnborough Air Show in England. The company bills it as a fully digitized and open architecture system. The 18-passenger helicopter in 2011 was offered for sale to the Turkish military, which ended up choosing the Black Hawk instead.

Eurocopter's EC725 was designed for the French air force, first flew in 2000 and can carry as many as 29 passengers. The platform is also used by such countries as Brazil, Mexico and Malaysia.

Also scheduled to appear in Paris is Russia's Mi-8/17, one of the most popular helicopters in its class and the subject of controversy in the U.S.

The Defense Department plans to buy more of the helicopters for Afghanistan from the Russian exporter Rosoboronexport, which Congress has criticized for funneling arms to the regime in Syria. At least 93,000 people have been killed in the country since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began two years ago, the United Nations reported.

President Barack Obama on June 13 authorized the U.S. military to increase support for the rebels, possibly with weapons that include light arms and ammunition.

The Defense Department since 2005 has bought about 50 of the Russian-made transport helicopters to help build the Afghan air force. It plans to buy another 30 – in a sale potentially valued at more than \$500 million – for a total of 80 aircraft.

The chopper was developed by the former Soviet Union for high-elevation flying in Afghanistan. The Moscow-based manufacturer, Russian Helicopters, makes both civilian and military versions of the

aircraft. Another company, Rosoboronexport, the state-owned arms exporter also based in Moscow, sells military variants abroad.

Source: <http://www.dodbuzz.com/2013/06/14/poland-to-pick-helo-supplier-in-3-billion-deal/>