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MARITIME SECURITY

LIMA 2017: Do 228 in box seat for Malaysian MPA?

27th March 2017 - 11:00 by **Gordon Arthur** in *Langkawi*



As the need to maintain effective maritime security in Asia Pacific intensifies RUAG, whose product line includes the **Dornier Do 228NG** aircraft, believes it is in pole position to deliver maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) to Malaysia.

David Jones, general manager for RUAG Aviation Malaysia, assured *Shepherd* that the Do 228NG had been down-selected approximately 18 months ago, although RUAG had kept this news under wraps since that time.

Under a public-private partnership model RUAG is working with its Malaysian partner that chose the Do 228NG, although Jones declined to reveal which company it was. This firm provides a complete interface with the government.

The Malaysian government has not completed a competitive tender process to acquire new MPAs so the selection of the Do 228NG is perhaps best seen as an informal one.

A number of companies believe they are in with a chance to supply MPAs to Malaysia. At LIMA 2017 a **Boeing P-8A Poseidon**, **Lockheed Martin P-3C Orion** and **ATR 72MP** all made appearances.

Under its National Blue Ocean Strategy released last year Malaysia is pursuing cross-agency security cooperation that will promote efficiency and save money. Thus, future MPAs will be centrally operated by the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency, with these assets shared by parties such as the Royal Malaysian Navy, Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF), fisheries and customs.

The MPA programme is being managed by the Prime Minister's Department and one reason for the delay in progress is the difficulty in implementing detailed rules in how such a pool of aircraft would be used in practice. The budgets of various government departments would be tapped to provide the aircrafts' operational budget, for example.

Of course, budgetary restrictions being encountered by Kuala Lumpur are another obstacle to speedy conclusion of a contract.

The Chief of Air Force Gen Affendi Buang said: 'Does the RMAF want AEWC and MPAs? The answer is a resounding yes, but we are pragmatic as we understand that national resources must be optimised to achieve what is best for the nation.'

'As AEWC and MPA are high-value platforms with large dollar signs affixed to them, such procurement must be prudently planned so as not to tax the government operational and development budget.'

The RMAF is also looking to be the operator of a future medium-altitude long-endurance UAV capability that could have a maritime surveillance role.

It is unclear how many aircraft are being sought, but Jones noted that the MPA requirement is broken into two phases. The first will provide aircraft for East Malaysia, where security forces in the Eastern Sabah Security Zone are on high alert against insurgents infiltrating from the Philippines.

When asked what advantages the Do 228NG brings as an MPA Jones cited its 10-hour endurance and 1,400nm range, high wings giving good downward visibility, a glass cockpit, as well as amenities such as a toilet and air-conditioning.

While the cabin is unpressurised, Jones argued that this was irrelevant as the aircraft would be flying below 10,000 feet in any case for surveillance missions. Its minimum control speed is 79kt and maximum airspeed is 235kt, making it ideal for patrolling.

He added that it was more economic in terms of operating efficiency and cheaper maintenance, including its Honeywell **TPE331-10** turboprop engines.

Jones noted that RUAG and its Malaysian partner are offering a solution rather than a mere platform for Malaysia's maritime patrol needs and that this set apart its offer from that of others.

The Do 228 has already been certified for Malaysian operations as it was previously flown commercially which could prove to be another advantage of the type.

The Royal Thai Navy operates seven Do 228s as well and it is being used in the Eyes in the Skies initiative to jointly patrol the Malacca and Singapore Straits.

RUAG now has a stronger presence in Malaysia after opening a maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facility in Subang last November. It specialises in starter generators for helicopters and works with all four of the main players: Honeywell, Safran, Skurka and Thales.

RUAG stated: 'The facility currently provides full repair and overhaul services for starter generators in accordance with the contract established for Honeywell starter generators on **AH139** helicopters. We are also now setting up the requisite workshop facilities for aircraft lighting components (search and landing lights) and fuel boost pump capabilities. This is set to ensure the next phase of growth, as well as expand the services available for our customers and their aircraft.'

The facility has the capacity to overhaul 100-110 generators per year and it has already completed 34 to date. It will repair starter generators for ATR aircraft too.

RUAG is also gaining significant work from the RMAF thanks to a third consecutive direct procurement agreement. Malaysia's air force operates a number of aircraft also used by the Swiss Air Force (e.g. FIA-18 Hornet, PC-7 and Super Puma), which produces synergies for MRO and fleet management.

RUAG, building on its own MRO strengths in Europe, chose Malaysia as its hub for the Asia-Pacific region. The company is duly eyeing the wider region for opportunities in both commercial and military aircraft plus MRO.