

PRESS RELEASE

The future of UK uncrewed military VTOL technology is secure onshore as MOD gives green light to Leonardo for “Proteus” demonstration flight

- Leonardo is racing ahead with advanced research into military VTOL (Vertical Take-Off and Landing) technology
- This will position Leonardo’s Yeovil site as the future hub for the UK’s uncrewed military VTOL expertise, in addition to its continuing role as the ‘Home of British Helicopters’
- A new 71 million Eur (£60 million), four-year investment by the Ministry of Defence will see an uncrewed flying demonstrator, called “Proteus” by the UK Armed Forces, lift off in 2025.

Yeovil, 21/07/2022 – The UK Ministry of Defence's Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) Future Capability Group (FCG) has awarded a four-year contract valued at 71 million Eur (£60 million) to Leonardo to deliver the Rotary Wing Uncrewed Air System (RWUAS) Technology Demonstration Programme (TDP), "RWUAS CCD Phase 3 TDP". This programme funded through Defence Innovation, will include the flight of an advanced uncrewed VTOL prototype referred to by the UK MOD as “Proteus”. Proteus is a key element of the Royal Navy Future Maritime Aviation Force (FMAF) vision for Anti-Submarine Warfare support.

The award supports the company’s strategic goal for its site in Yeovil, Somerset, already the ‘Home of British Helicopters’, to expand and also become the UK’s hub for uncrewed military VTOL aircraft. Internationally, Leonardo is already at the heart of numerous forward-looking uncrewed research and innovation programmes ranging from advanced air mobility to uncrewed combat air, counter-UAS technologies and uncrewed traffic management. The company has demonstrated its expertise and capabilities in the sector during major European exercises such as Unmanned Warrior, Italian Blade and OCEAN 2020.

In the UK, Leonardo is a close partner of the MOD and has already invested substantially in uncrewed military capabilities onshore. In Yeovil, the specialised helicopter design and engineering skills have made the site a focus for uncrewed systems. The company has previously conducted a number of advanced research projects under RWUAS phases 1 and 2. Phase 3 will sustain and grow this onshore design and technology development capability by readying a brand new uncrewed prototype for its maiden flight.

Adam Clarke, Managing Director of Leonardo Helicopters (UK), said, “Uncrewed VTOL aircraft will transform military capability whilst also having application in other market sectors, both in the UK and around the world. This contract represents a major step towards our future in next generation uncrewed military technology and the sustainment of unique engineering skills onshore.”

Following on from learnings and technology developed through the first two phases of the RWUAS CCD programme, Phase 3 will see Leonardo create an up to 2-3t demonstration aircraft that will have modularity at its core. The dual-use RWUAS prototype will be adapted to deliver a wide range of roles in the military and parapublic domains. These include intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, maritime specific missions and logistics supply. The high payload and large volume capabilities, combined with ability to operate in harsh environmental conditions, are expected to be of interest to a wide range of potential users.

The majority of the programme, which leverages Leonardo’s full range of end-to-end capabilities, from design to manufacture, will be conducted at the company’s facility in Yeovil. It will sustain and grow critical skills and generate high value design engineering opportunities. A core team of around 60 people will be employed on the programme, which is expected to expand to around 100 people.

The UK MoD’s RWUAS CCD Phase 2 contract built on the research and development activity which began under the RWUAS CCD Phase 1 programme between 2013 and 2015. Under Phase 2 further research,

development, analysis and experimentation took place, which related to VTOL air-vehicle technologies and platform operations, within future operating environments, fleet mixes and the overall defence aviation capability structure.

Leonardo is the only company in Europe able to provide complete solutions by designing and developing all the elements of uncrewed systems: platforms, sensors, mission systems, control stations and offer customers a certified low risk, high effective, fully integrated capability. The continuous development and integration of cutting-edge solutions across all domains of remotely piloted and autonomous/semi-autonomous systems and technologies is a key element of Leonardo's BeTomorrow2030 Strategic Plan.

Leonardo, a global high-technology company, is among the top world players in Aerospace, Defense and Security and Italy's main industrial company. Organized into five business divisions, Leonardo has a significant industrial presence in Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland and the USA, where it also operates through subsidiaries that include Leonardo DRS (defense electronics), and joint ventures and partnerships: ATR, MBDA, Telespazio, Thales Alenia Space and Avio. Leonardo competes in the most important international markets by leveraging its areas of technological and product leadership (Helicopters, Aircraft, Aerostructures, Electronics, Cyber & Security Solutions and Space). Listed on the Milan Stock Exchange (LDO), in 2021 Leonardo recorded consolidated revenues of €14.1 billion and invested €1.8 billion in Research and Development. The company has been part of the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices (DJSI) since 2010 and has been confirmed among the global sustainability leaders in 2021. Leonardo is also included in the MIB ESG index.

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