

REPLACEMENT TANKERS IS A LONG TERM PROCESS

The requirements for a tankerforce will not change rapidly and neither will tanker aircraft easily adopt another task but for economical reasons and the fact they face an end of life cycle countries will search for replacements. Two KDC-10 tanker/transport aircraft of the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf) needs replacement in near future and that is why the Netherlands purchased together with Luxembourg as a partner two new Airbus A330 MRTT. Luxembourg is notable because they have no air force itself.

TANKER SHORTAGE

The subject tanker aircraft is still a kind of 'headache' dossier within the NATO. Not only there is a large deficit in Europe. Summarized only about 40 planes can be applied and with that within NATO there is a very dependable situation on U.S. tanker aircraft. For years this situation was very well accepted but nowadays the United States itself is under pressure to continue their tanker capabilities an aging fleet tankers consists mainly of Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker variants supplemented with newer KC-10 Extenders and an economical more beneficial employment of later KC-135 version..They too faces the enormous task to start replacement with many planes counting many flying hours. That can also be said of the Dutch KDC-10's. Those planes were frequently used for the benefit of multinational missions or NATO military operations.

THE NETHERLANDS SET A PRIOR STEP.

The selection, calculation, settlement of plans and objectives that lead to eventually the purchase is a process of many years. It should also be taken into account in following recent developments in the market. Tanker Aircraft are expensive and therefore strategic plans are needed between participating countries. In this kind of concepts they often decide to work and step into new projects together. This too has become a common procedure in Europe. The Netherlands has now taken the lead in an initiative and indications are there that several countries might join this initiative.

AIRBUS WILL DELIVER TWO A330 MRTT'S FROM 2020.

The planes will be owned from that time by NATO and stationed at Eindhoven Air Base (NL). Netherlands and Luxembourg will have the exclusive usage rights. After this decision was made Minister of defence Hennis announced that Norway will also join the tankerproject, and furthermore an interest for this initiative exists in Belgium, Germany and Poland. But so far, Norway, Belgium and Germany have signed a declaration of intent to enter into this and are proceeding to more definitive steps. In the setting of an international Multi Role Tanker Transport (MRTT) joint project in cooperation with Airbus the concerning countries will start an acquisition process for another four aircraft.

Minister Hennis said so in a letter to the Board, which implicates that the total of planes will reach six. Both Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Netherlands and Luxembourg, and the contract with Airbus provide the opportunity of connection with more partners. The Netherlands attracts up to 1 billion euros, and if other countries also participate, the price could drop to 250 million. "The project is an example of innovative, future-oriented cooperation of like-minded European countries," Minister Hennis said. Through joint procurement and smart use of the tankerplanes it will be cheaper to deploy and maintain. These four tankers will be owned by NATO as well, which organization also pays the maintenance cost. Potentially these four planes can also be stationed at Eindhoven Air Base in the future. It is under examination whether Eindhoven can control the pool likewise or in cooperation with the European Air Transport Command (EATC) also located on this airfield. The stationing will involve the Dutch business community substantially. A period of some 30 years is foreseen to have the planes stationed in active duty.

ENGLISH EXPERIENCE WITH THE A330MRTT

The MRTT Aircraft was previously purchased by the United Kingdom (14) and France (12). The latter will receive the first aircraft in 2018 and Britain has been flying with the A330 MRTT for some time and was basically founder for further attention to this type. The A-330 MRTT is a multi-role plane that can be used in addition to the tanker function for transport and passengers as well. Similar concept as the use of the KDC-10. Britain abolished the aircraft under a special contract form. The project started under the name Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft (FSTA) with the aim to replace the VC-10 and TriStar tankers of the RAF when at that time the operational end of them came slowly into view. In 2004 this resulted in the selection and a purchase of 14 planes of which nine are permanently available to the RAF as Voyager KC2 (two planes refuelling ability) and KC-3 (three aircraft refueling).

The other five units are on demand (surge fleet) housed in a private consortium. Here, the RAF does have first rights in times of crisis, but these planes can be rented in the meantime for tanker capacity or transmission capacity. The thought of this approach was that there was less risk of cost overrun if a private partner was involved. The consortium, called AirTanker, consists of Cobham plc, EADS, Rolls-Royce plc, Thales UK and VT Group plc. and is part of a so-called Private Finance Initiative (PFI), a more experienced form of contract with the English and was elected in 2000. In this full PFI AirTanker is responsible for the purchase, ownership, training and maintenance, and the British Ministry of Defence pays for the hours of use with a minimum purchase of 9,000 flight hours per year.

OWN PURCHASE IS PREFERRED OPTION

There will be many voices saying: Why has The Netherlands not opted for the lease of aircraft from the fleet surge? Well, actually reasons are obvious. France had the first look at this option and found out that a very high hourly rate would be asked for the rent. In addition, the argument was that by the time of delivery of a purchased plane these ones would be already a few years old. That's not a crazy argument because Airbus recently went to air with a new version with aerodynamic improvements leading to 1% reduced fuel consumption. Even more, the English units are equipped with variable coupling systems in the form of hoses while France and the Netherlands preferred just only a boom at the back and so both countries made a choice for their own purchase.

Within the Dutch armed forces, there also is a tradition in procurement procedures called 'sourcing' which will look at targets. The Dutch defense really wants to keep purely military tasks in-house and considers it therefore -contrary to the British - unsuitable for PFI's. They use this category of contracts only in support tasks such as building management. The Dutch initiative is welcomed, especially while the pressure from the United States rises to become more self-sufficient in defense. This need was already proved painful when Europe was dependent on the actions against Libya by US tankerplanes.

REPLACEMENT ALSO ACTUAL IN THE U.S.

Regarding the situation on the other side of the ocean it's remarkable that at first the choice fell on the Airbus A330 MRTT designated KC-45A but this decision met a strong resistance in Congress particularly Republicans who would rather see a purely American machine and thus the complete replacement was awarded to Boeing. Officially the cost of the A330 MRTT were found too high and there was a technical risk which would be too great. It must be said that once a 'boom' fell of a plane during tests. The cost argument is controversial and some people involved seemed at least not entirely reliable. Someone from the Pentagon and someone from Boeing were discredited they and ended up in jail. The KC-135 fleet is truly a legacy to be held in the air because lots of extra attention is to be given to the conditions of the aircraft. There is a certain frustration among experts that jokingly say that the entire Manhattan Project took less time as the replacement of a tanker while still only an already proven civil aircraft had to be refitted with avionics and tank facilities. Just making the choice of the replacement was a ten-year plan and complications led to several delays.

BOEING ULTIMATELY FAVORED

The primary type of Boeing KC-767A didn't make it although four copies were delivered to Italy. A next version was the the KC-767J of which four were delivered to Japan. Then the KC-46A Pegasus followed, a tanker variant of the Boeing 767-2C which now will be used by the USAF, a type of which it seemed to last forever before it flew it's first flight. The US Department of Defense has initially agreed on a lease

deal to replace more than 100 KC-135E, the oldest variant. While the subsequent KC-135R's (the majority) still will be flying around their certainly responsibly flights. This lease deal was criticized politically again and that even by those who are esponsible for the money involved. As a compromise they wanted to decrease the number of leased examples, but then the corruption scandal with Boeing and the Pentagon finally froze all deals in 2003. On February 24, 2011 there suddenly was a 'go' with the KC-46A Pegasus with a new contract in which 19 examples were ordered to be operational in 2017. Early 2017 there was a follow-up order for 15 examples. Boeing hopes eventually to deliver 179 of them. The KC-46A takes a little less fuel along compared to the A330 MRTT. Both planes have been equipped with a video system in which the refuelling is observed, as now is the case on te KDC-10 and both aircraft can be equipped with a boom on the tail or retractable facilities (drogue and hose) at the choice of the customer.

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