

AIRLIFT CONTENDERS: C-17, C-130J, or A400M?

Within the next decade, analysts predict that there will be a growing demand for military transport aircraft. In new aircraft alone, the world's air forces will take delivery of 922 transports valued at US\$53 billion.

Traditional sources for such aircraft, Boeing and Lockheed, are now challenged by Europe's Airbus Military, Alenia and EADS CASA.

But the American manufacturers are set to continue their dominance at least until the end of the decade with Boeing seeing its market share fall off when the C-17 line is closed in 2011. The A400M, CASA C-295 and the Alenia C-27J programs are scheduled to gain about 12% of the market in terms of revenues during 2004-08. But by 2009-2013, analysts predict that the European share will have grown to more than 40%. Most of this will be accounted for by the arrival of the A400M, of which seven partner nations have ordered 180 aircraft. In response, the United States might re-engine all of its C-5Bs and also buy more C-17s. But like the Europeans, both Boeing and Lockheed

Martin have to find sales in the international market for their airlifters.

Only the Russian-Ukrainian Antonov remains from the former Soviet Union's massive aviation industry, but its An-70s will pose little competition. The Russians themselves are critical of its performance and may either turn to Airbus or a new Russian Tupolev Tu-330.

Australia, South Africa and Canada are some of the nations poised to re-equip their strategic airlift fleet within the decade. All three have vast distances to cover and the last two countries have been "making do" with C-130s, some of which are three decades old. South Africa's aircraft acquisition was hindered by the arms embargo, and Canada's by the vacillations of successive Liberal governments – a topic covered by Don McLeod in the previous issue of *FrontLine*.

As the recent tsunami relief effort demonstrated, The Canadian Forces strategic airlift fleet consists of the CC-150 Polaris, five 20-year-old converted airliners. Each can carry 32,000 kg of containerized cargo across the Atlantic,

but as they are commercial airliners, the CC-150s can only land on airport runways on arrival. No STOL, no dirt airstrips, no roll-on roll-off, no air drops for the Airbus fleet. Emphasizing that he was saving money by doing so, former Defence Minister John McCallum "wet-leased" AN-124s from the Russian-Ukrainian company Volga-Dnepr – as did other NATO allies and the South Africans. But in an emergency, the Canadian Forces are forced to compete with all of the world's relief agencies for access.

And it isn't only relief supplies that have to be rapidly deployed. Today, all CF are based at home, but likely to be deployed out of the continent – something that contrasts with the situation during the Cold War when a greater proportion of the CF was forward-deployed in Europe, with logistical facilities in-theatre.

The CC-150s could not carry the CF's Bison and Coyote vehicles to Afghanistan, requiring C-17s from the USAF to do so.

With the choice of airlifter for Canada made even more pressing by the tsunami relief effort, the three candidates Lockheed-Martin, Boeing and Airbus Military have offered Ottawa as many deals as car salesman. *FrontLine* examines each contender in the following pages. **FL**



Peter Pigott is *FrontLine's* Air Force Correspondent. His 12th book, "*On Canadian Wings: One Hundred Years of Flight in Canada*" has just been launched.

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