

Taiwan's Air Force buys choppers from Eurocopter

Written by Taipei Times

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Washington-based weekly Defense News reported on Tuesday that the Taiwan Air Force had selected the Eurocopter EC225 helicopter, a medium-lift helicopter, for search and rescue operations.

The US\$111 million contract for three helicopters, which is to be signed in the next few days, was awarded in December and includes an option for a total of 20 helicopters, Defense News reported.

US-based Sikorsky Aircraft Corp, a subsidiary of United Technology Corp, was also a bidder for the deal with its S-92 Helibus medium-lift helicopter.

Eurocopter is a subsidiary of European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS), which is headquartered in the Netherlands.

Through its many subsidiaries, EADS produces civilian aircraft (Airbus), satellite technology (Astrium) and various weapons systems, from missiles to combat aircraft.

The military deal is the first made by a European defense company since the sale of Mirage 2000 aircraft and Lafayette-class frigates in the early 1990s.

Since then, European firms have shied away from major military sales to Taiwan for fear of compromising lucrative sales in the Chinese market.

According to its Web site, Eurocopter recorded a turnover of 4.6 billion euros (US\$6.38 billion) globally, of which 896 million euros was in Asia. This marked a turnover growth of 58 percent for Eurocopter in the Asia-Pacific region.

Eurocopter is also in a partnership with the Aviation Industry of China in the development of EC175/Z15 helicopters.

China's Maritime Surveillance Agency also possesses EC225 helicopters.

The news comes in the wake of an announcement by Washington of a US\$6.4 billion arms package to Taiwan last month, to which Beijing retaliated with the suspension of military contacts and the threat of sanctions against US firms involved in the deal — including Sikorsky, which manufactures the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters included in the package.

At press time, Beijing had yet to respond to the announcement of the Eurocopter sale.

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