

DECLASSIFIED

SECRET



MINISTERIAL

6552

7/4/5/5
SUPPORT TEAM

D/VCDS/4/4/6

7 Sep 06

SofS

Copy to:

PS/Min(AF)
PS/Min(DP)
PSO/CDS
PS/PUS

CNS
CGS
CAS
DCDS(C)

CJO
DCDS(EC)
Fin Dir
ACDS(Ops)

ACDS(RP)
D Jt Cap
DEC ALM

*See attached
H/S.*

HELICOPTER CAPABILITY

1. You will recall that earlier this month ACDS(Ops) and I briefed you for a while on, amongst other things, the helicopter issue. Your office subsequently asked me to elaborate on the options for increasing capability that we discussed.

2. It is probably worth saying briefly what we have done to increase capability so far this year, recognizing that we are operating above DSG 05 concurrency levels (which did not envisage 2 medium scale enduring operations over extended LOCs and did not plan for a helicopter fleet to match), and remembering the outcome of the 2004 MTWS exercise¹ where the Department postponed rectifying the acknowledged 15-20%² helicopter shortfall until at least 2010. The essential facts are:

a. CJO's current battlefield helicopter (BH) requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan are being met by the deployment of additional aircraft (increasing from 6 to 8 Chinook by Oct 06 in Afghanistan) and the resourcing of additional flying hours in both theatres. This increased level of activity is, on the face of it, sustainable and the requirement has been confirmed by the recent force level review. In Iraq, PJHQ assesses that there is little potential for reducing the aviation bill in the short term, even when provinces move to Iraqi control – for we shall need to be able to intervene and project forces if required. In Afghanistan, helicopters are the vital enabler and will remain so. It is true that the NATO helicopter order of battle has not been fully filled – the shortage is principally in the heavy lift capability where the deficit across Afghanistan is 23, though in the southern area the figure is 4. But the UK has certainly done NATO well (and is considering a request to provide a communications flight of up to 4 light helicopters for COMARRC in his role as COMISAF).

b. The nature of the campaigns means that we have had to impose a critical theatre entry standard, principally defensive aids suites (DAS) and long range secure communications which means that, even with UORs to date, 65% of the BH fleet is not

1. MTWS 13, £1.5bn savings were taken against the Future Rotorcraft Capability (FRC).

2. DMB(05)48 dated 20 Dec 05 – 'The Battlefield Helicopter Requirement'. 'Chinook Mk 3 will reduce this to 10-15%, although a shortfall of 43% of heavy lift remains.

DECLASSIFIED

SECRET

SECRET
DECLASSIFIED

deployable. Planned UORs³ will reduce this figure to 40%. The cost of modifying the full BH fleet (283 aircraft) is probably in excess of the initial estimate of about £200m, but as not all the BH fleet is suitable for the *current* theatres (the hot and high issue), we shall be looking at a smaller figure.

c. But the unit of currency that really matters is flying hours, which is limited by trained crews as much as airframes. We are redistributing airframes and sweating the assets to the maximum degree – and are, therefore, meeting the demand. In so doing we have:

So far

- (1) Taken risk by withdrawing BH resources from Northern Ireland (8 Pumas) and from the Falklands (one Chinook), and increasing FLEET's contribution to non maritime operations through the use of RN aircraft (Merlin Mk1 and Lynx) and crews, accepting that it is introducing a risk against our maritime capability.
- (2) Generated an extra 2 Chinooks to deploy to Afghanistan by Oct 06 and an additional capability of 2 Chinooks and 2 Lynx for Afghanistan by Jan 07.
- (3) Increased Chinook, Merlin and Apache (AH) flying hours. In the case of AH, this may have a long term effect on the fielding plan if we have to sustain the level.
- (4) Increased the strain on our people, crews and maintainers, by reducing harmony levels well outside DSG guidelines (the average interval between tours for JHC crews in Jul 06 was 15 months, not the 24 that it should be).

3. ² Where are we going from here? There is not likely to be any let-up in BH tempo for at least the next 5 years which leaves us with virtually no capacity to meet increased or new demands and a real 'harmony' problem for our BH people. We are looking at the options but all will require additional funding. The fields we discussed in your office were leasing and contracting (short and long term), further development of our existing fleet and advancing the current Future Rotorcraft Capability (FRC) programme⁴ – I cover these in turn:

a. Leasing. Obtaining additional contractor aircraft flown by us is a good option in some circumstances, but resolution of indemnity and financing issues, coupled with delivery timescales, mean that significant new deployable capability at theatre entry standard would take at least a year and more likely 3. But we are already taking this trick in benign theatres like Belize, Brunei and Cyprus (and the Cyprus aircraft are operating the airbridge to Beirut). We can use leased civilian helicopters in the UK for training to release 'green' ones, but only to a limited degree and it does not generate competent crews for operations, nor keep those crews current on operational types. So there is very limited mileage here.

Handwritten note:
this is a mistake

b. Contracting. Using contractor aircraft flown by civilians is an option but we cannot risk transporting military people in this way in theatre, as the aircraft are not DAS'd to our standards. They can be used for moving materiel and there are regular offers of 'assistance' from companies in theatre. But the judgement in theatres and

3. 22 Lynx Mk 9 equipped with improved DAS (awaiting approval) (12 with). Chinook fitted with long range communications and improved DAS.

4. The FRC programme, seeks to maximize the efficiencies and coherence across the MOD's future helicopter fleet, principally in the key Battlefield and Maritime Helicopter capability domain of Lift, Find (reconnaissance), Attack and Search and Rescue (SAR). This programme will include the replacement of Puma, Sea King 3, 4 and 5, Augusta 109.

2
DECLASSIFIED
SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

SECRET

not what was
said to me in
theatre.

PJHQ is that the need is modest at the moment and that such contracts would not be worth it – though we are keeping an eye on this if demand goes up. And we do use such aircraft where we can – for moving people during operational sea training, for example.

c. Further Development of the Existing Fleet. The first issue is that 2 types of aircraft go out of service soon – Puma in 2010 and Sea King Mk4 (the troop carrier) in 2012. To keep them going beyond these dates and until their replacements arrive in 2017 will cost about £155m – money which we have not got in the programme. Additionally, we could make some of our more modern Merlin Mk 1s (which are maritime helicopters) dual capable as BH. We are looking at the options and it looks as though 7 aircraft could become a basic SH at about £8½m or a more sophisticated variety for about £53m – within 12 months if we did it as a UOR. We could extend this to the whole Merlin Mk1 fleet and we are working out the risks to our maritime capability and the implications for crew training.

PRIORITY
you should
ask for
more
data
on this

d. Advancing the FRC Programme.

(1) The plan for the future is the FRC programme and the big contributor to lift is the Chinook (about 2½ times the lift of a medium support helicopter (MSH) like Merlin). But we do have to keep a mix of medium and heavy to meet the range of tasks and a degree of concurrency. That said, heavy lift is what we tend to need in theatre now and Chinook is a winner. An additional £225m in the early FRC years would allow us to bring forward 6 Chinook by 4 to 5 years. This would allow us to meet the heavy lift requirement of 14 aircraft by 2011, thereby releasing all the Chinook Mk2 (standard) aircraft for conventional forces.

(2) On the MSH front an extra c.£650m across the EP period would allow the MSH buy (type not yet known) to be brought forward by 5 years and be in service by 2012 – obviating the need to extend the ageing Puma and Sea King fleets or to lease aircraft (above). This MSH option currently looks to be best value for money.

Post
C.S.R.
decision

(3) Needless to say, these EP options would have STP implications, not only for increased support but also for more aircrew.

4. All these options are being tested now – with the initial focus being improvements to the communications and defensive aids for the most operationally committed aircraft types – upgrading those already fitted and bringing more airframes up to theatre entry standard. It is here that we may first ask for your help in supporting our approaches to the Treasury. In Oct DCDS(EC) will chair a series of Joint Capabilities Boards (JCB) to decide which of the options I have described should be pursued and when. But there are real affordability problems in the early EP years and the levels of contractual commitment means that it will not be easy to shift significant investment away from other capabilities and into helicopters in this round. I suggest we return to this issue in late Oct when we shall know better the worth of the options.

No: it should
happen tomorrow!

VCDS

DECLASSIFIED

SECRET