

Belgian Navy Tests Schiebel's CAMCOPTER



The Belgian Navy just finished a week-long series of test flights with Schiebel's CAMCOPTER S-100 Unmanned Air System (UAS), which ran from 21 June to 1 July. For these demonstration flights, which sought to test the CAMCOPTER in Search And Rescue (SAR) missions as well as Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions both on land and at sea, the UAS was equipped with two payloads, the L3 Wescam MX-10 and the Overwatch Imaging PT-8 Oceanwatch, as well as an automatic identification system (AIS) receiver and a rescue drop box.

These demonstrations come only a few weeks after the Netherlands and Belgium signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 8 June to launch the joint purchase procedure for four frigates and 12 mine countermeasure (MCM) vessels, which will be split evenly between the two navies.

According to the Belgian Defence White Paper (DWP) published in 2016, *The Strategic Vision for Defence*: "The new mine countermeasures platforms will be larger in order to meet the need for more autonomy, better self-protection and the use of unmanned modules." Similarly, the Dutch DWP published in 2018, *Investing in People, Capabilities and Visibility*, notes: "We are working [with Belgium] on an innovative concept of mother platforms and unmanned mine countermeasures systems." In this context, it could be assumed that the CAMCOPTER might be a possibility for the future MCM vessels scheduled to enter both fleets between 2025 and 2030.

Moreover, according to the Belgian DWP: "Just as the new combat aircraft, these new multirole frigates will also be deployed in missions within the framework of collective security, such as the expeditionary protection of supply routes or counter-piracy missions." The CAMCOPTER's ability to embark payloads for ISR missions, such as the ones tested in the past week, would certainly greatly contribute to these missions as well.

Indeed, the UAS, which has an endurance of 6 hours and above with 34kg payload, a maximum air speed of 240 km/h and can operate in temperatures between -40 degrees and + 55 degrees, can perform a wide range of missions, including: surveillance, border patrol, fire control, target designation, damage assessment, and mine detection.

The foundation for this joint procurement programme was the signing of a first MoU in December 2016 for the common procurement of the vessels whereby it was decided that the Netherlands would take the lead on the frigates programme, to replace the ageing M class frigates, while Belgium would take the lead on the MCM programme, to replace the current 'Tripartite' class mine hunters.