Airbus Lifts Lid on A400M Stand Off Jammer Variant

By Richard Scott

Airbus Defence and Space GmbH (Manching, Germany) has unveiled a stand-off jammer (SOJ) adaptation of its A400M Atlas airlifter as a potential solution for Germany's Luftgestätze Wirkung im Elektromagnetischen Spektrum (luWES) program.

Shown for the first time at May's AOC Europe 2023 conference and exhibition in Bonn, Germany, the A400M SOJ concept is intended to form part of a wider luWES "system of systems" designed to deliver coordinated and synchronized suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) across a broad frequency spectrum. Airbus has undertaken pre-feasibility study work, together with other members of a German industry "interest group" dubbed the Ruder Acht (Rowing Eight), to outline a notional A400M SOJ configuration.

The luWES program envisages the acquisition of 10 SOJ platforms as part of Germany's SEAD commitment to NATO. A luWES in-service date in the early 2030s is currently forecast.

According to Airbus, its SOJ pre-feasibility study activity has conceptualized an A400M airframe modified with a series of large conformal antenna apertures around the fuselage, together with increased power and cooling provisions. Mission system equipment and consoles would be palletized to allow for installation and removal via the aircraft's rear ramp.

Airbus has adopted the A400M as its baseline assumption for the luWES SOJ platform given that the Luftwaffe already has the aircraft in its fleet. However, the company is also open to exploring alternatives, such as business jets and multi-mission aircraft.

As part of the overarching luWES architecture, high-power stand off jamming would be used to disrupt and degrade low-band early warning radars and communications networks in order to enable a strike package to penetrate the outer screen of an integrated air defense system. The SOJ platform could also perform an electronic warfare command and control role.

The broader luWES architecture also includes an escort jammer (planned to be carried by new Eurofighter EK aircraft) and air-launched decoys/stand-in jammers (deployed using unmanned remote carriers). The expectation is that integration and synchronization of effects will be achieved through a distributed multi-domain "tactical cloud."

Alongside Airbus, the Ruder Acht industry grouping also includes bKEC, Hensoldt, IBM, MBDA Deutschland, Plath, Rohde & Schwarz, and Schönhofer. In November 2022, this collective completed an end-to-end demonstration of a representative SEAD mission, using a combination of real hardware and synthetic models, to promote resident sovereign capability applicable to

luWES.