

Spain Explores Options for New Manned Airborne SIGINT Capability

BY RICHARD SCOTT

A team of Airbus Defence and Space and Indra Sistemas has been contracted to explore options for a future sovereign manned airborne signals intelligence (SIGINT) platform – Sustitución de Sistemas Anteriores en el Espectro Electromagnético – Sistema de Captación Aérea (REE-SCAPA) – for the Spanish Air and Space Force.

The move to reconstitute a strategic airborne SIGINT capability as part of the broader Santiago joint SIGINT system architecture comes over a decade after Spain retired the Boeing 707-based aircraft (designated TM.17-4) previously used in the SIGINT role.

Spain's Ministry of Defence, through the Dirección General de Armamento y Material (Directorate General for Armament and Material), awarded a €16 million (\$18.7 million) sole-source project definition contract to UTE PEM SCAPA industrial partnership in December 2025. UTE PEM SCAPA – a temporary joint venture company representing the interest of Airbus Defence and Space and Indra – will undertake the study over an 18-month period.

According to Airbus Defence and Space, the phase 1 definition phase activity will cover analysis and definition of candidate platforms and SIGINT solutions to provide a national solution based on a fleet of three aircraft. "Airbus Defence and Space will draw up a proposal for an aircraft adapted to the Spanish customer's needs and, together with Indra, will study the integration of electronic intelligence and communications intelligence systems as a preliminary step to defining the

development and implementation of the programme,” the company said.

Phase 2 development – yet to be authorized – envisages Airbus implementing the necessary modifications to the selected airframe to integrate the sovereign SIGINT payload proposed by Indra. CGI released by Airbus shows a conceptual solution based on the A320/A321 airliner family.

Spain’s armed forces are recapitalizing their SIGINT capabilities across all domains under the Santiago Phase II program, of which REE-SCAPA forms one part. Santiago Phase II is a strategic initiative, led by the Ministry of Defence, which seeks to strengthen military intelligence gathering capabilities, reduce strategic dependencies, and elevate the position of Spanish industry.