

First 'International Contract' for GCAP

By Andrew White

Development of electromagnetic warfare (EW) capability for the Global Combat Air Program (GCAP) – the UK's collaboration with Italy and Japan to develop a sixth-generation fighter – received a significant boost with the award of the program's first "international contract" earlier in April.

The long-awaited contract, which runs until the end of June 2026 and is worth \$926 million, was awarded by the GCAP Agency to the tri-national Edgewing joint venture, which features [BAE Systems](#), [Leonardo](#) and the **Japan Aircraft Industrial Enhancement Company** (JAIEC).

GCAP's EW capability is being developed by GCAP Electronics Evolution (G2E) – a consortium that comprises Leonardo in the UK, Mitsubishi Electric in Japan, and Leonardo and ELT Group in Italy.

A company spokesperson for Leonardo UK explained to JED that the first international contract meant Edgewing could place work and establish governance for the various development areas, including G2E's Integrated Sensing and Non-Kinetic Effects (ISANKE) and Integrated Communications System (ICS) activities.

The spokesperson said the placement of this contract was an enormously positive milestone, and it marked the first time that the consortium had been funded as a fully integrated international program. He added that it marked a major step towards delivering the GCAP and enabled the companies involved to further accelerate development activities that started with the formal establishment of G2E in September 2025. In a further example of progress, Leonardo UK's spokesperson

confirmed that by the end of 2027, G2E plans to embed around 150 people outside their country of origin to work at G2E sites around the world.

According to an official Edgewing statement published on the day of the contract award, funding will support “key design and engineering activities and enable the trilateral partnership to build momentum and accelerate pace of delivery.” Neither the GCAP Agency nor Leonardo UK could detail what type of development work will be undertaken by the G2E in the coming months. However, *JED* understands ISANKE/ICS will include the development of the Multi-Function Radio Frequency System (MRFS), as well as a host of other active and passive, electro-optical, infrared, radio frequency and other sensors.

In February 2026, the world caught a first glimpse of the UK Ministry of Defence’s Excalibur Flight Test Aircraft, which was observed flying in and out of Boscombe Down airfield in the UK, fitted with various sensor “lumps and bumps” and new nose cone which could feature the MRFS.

Although not officially part of the GCAP yet, the modified 757 FTA is part of the UK’s sovereign Future Combat Air System (FCAS) program. Flight tests are scheduled to begin in 2027 with ISANKE/ICS sensor suites to support the development of the FCAS Tempest next-generation fighter demonstrator. Leonardo UK is teamed with 2Excel to roll out the FTA development.

At the DSEI expo in London last year, a Leonardo UK spokesperson confirmed, “There is a lot of unified work, but still individual country requirements,” suggesting Italy and Japan are also looking at their own test aircraft for their own national requirements.

The first GCAP international contract award is understood to have been held up by the UK government’s Defence Investment

Plan (confirming future government spending), which was originally expected to be published towards the end of 2025.

A longer term contract is expected to be in place by the time the interim contract expires at the end of June 2026, Leonardo UK suggested.