

GA-ASI Reports Certifiable Predator-B Progress as UK Commits

AinOnline

Chris Pocock



An artist's impression of the Certifiable Predator B, for which the UK is now a confirmed customer. (Image: GA-ASI)

General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. (GA-ASI) described further progress toward fielding the Certifiable Predator B (CPB), a new version of the MQ-9 Reaper. Coincidentally, the UK Ministry of Defence confirmed the choice of the CPB to meet its future UAS requirement named Protector and began negotiations through the U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) process for a contract that could be worth as much as \$600 million.

Structural integrity testing of the CPB fuselage has now been completed. "This fuselage is designed to meet lightning-strike, damage-tolerance, and turbulence-induced stress requirements specified by the NATO UAV airworthiness standard," said Linden Blue, CEO of GA-ASI. "It will also accommodate an integrated detect-and-avoid system, including an anti-collision radar system," he continued. The company said that the testing includes the effects of airframe bending, aft section torsion, maximum power plant torque, stress tests on the main and nose landing gear mounts, and maximum hoist load.

GA-ASI has already flown the longer wing that forms part of the CPB, having completed structural integrity testing of this wing and the tail last December. The company is using its own funds to develop the CPB, since the U.S. military appears to have no requirement for flying the Reaper or Predator in non-segregated airspace.

According to GA-ASI, "two prospective European customers" have reviewed the CPB design effort. AIN believes this is a reference to the UK and the Netherlands, since neither country is participating in the project definition for the potentially rival European medium-altitude long-endurance (Euro-MALE) UAS. Meanwhile, Spain is joining France, Italy and the UK as an operator of the existing Reaper UAS, with four aircraft now confirmed. Spanish company SENER is GA-ASI's local partner for integration and support.