

Spanish Air Force Finally Resumes Eurofighter Deliveries, Accepts A Dozen

Defense-aerospace



The Spanish air force has now incorporated a dozen new-build Eurofighter combat aircraft that were warehoused on Albacete air base while the defense ministry resolved budgetary difficulties that prevented their delivery and payment. (Eurofighter photo)

In the closing days of 2016, the Spanish Air Force finally put into service a dozen Eurofighter combat aircraft that it had stored on Albacete air base immediately after they were delivered because it lacked the funds to pay for them.

The aircraft, a mix of Tranche 2 and Tranche 3 aircraft, have now been incorporated into the air force's 11th Wing, stationed at Moron air base at Seville, thanks to what Defensa, the Spanish website which first reported the transaction, calls an "economico-administrative regularization." These additional aircraft take Spain's Eurofighter fleet to 60 operational aircraft.

These Eurofighters were assembled by Airbus Defense and Space at Getafe, near Madrid, and officially handed over to NETMA, the NATO Eurofighter and Tornado Management Agency, which stored them at Albacete pending re-delivery to the Spanish air force. The air force, however, was told it could not accept them because of "administrative payment problems which prevented it from adding to the budget deficit" – in other words, spending the money to pay for the aircraft would exceed Spain's authorized budget deficit.

An agreement between NETMA and the Spanish air force allowed the aircraft to be maintained by Albacete's 14th Wing while this bureaucratic knot was being resolved, and each aircraft was flown every 20 days to maintain its operational capabilities and to keep its airworthiness certificate current.

The final handover, in late December, created a large volume of unexpected administrative work for the air force's Matériel Groups, which are attempting to accelerate the incorporation of the aircraft into four air force squadrons which already operate the Eurofighter.

Spain initially planned to buy 87 Eurofighters, but finally decided to take 73, of which two (a two-seater in August and a single-seater in June 2014) were written off after accidents which killed two pilots.

The delivery of the final 13 units is planned for 2017 and 2018, but the air force doesn't exclude that the final deliveries may slide into 2019. All of these aircraft belong to the latest Tranche 3 standard.

In parallel, the air force's Centro Logistico de Armamento y Experimentacion (CLAEX) and the Logistical Support Command are working to upgrade all the Tranche 1 aircraft so as to give them some of the capabilities of the later standards.