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# Deal Near on Sale of Fourteen Rafales to Libya

By

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Commercial and technical negotiations on a sale of 14 French Rafale fighter jets to Libya have been largely completed; and politics will dictate the timing of any announcement of a deal, an industry executive said March 19, 2009.

“The negotiations are done, more or less,” the executive said. Asked when a deal would be announced, the executive said, “It’s politics; it’s always politics.”

Colonel Muammar Khaddafi, the Libyan head of state, signed an agreement granting six months’ exclusive negotiations for the Rafale when he visited Paris in December 2007. Human rights organizations criticized the visit by the Libyan leader and the prospective arms sales.

The Rafales expected to be sold to Tripoli would be similar to the F3 standard entering service in the French Air Force, capable of aerial combat and ground strikes. The weapons package is being negotiated separately. Matra BAE Dynamics Alenia (MBDA), the European missile firm that supplies weapons for the Rafale, declined comment.

France has yet to sell the Rafale to a foreign customer, although the aircraft is flying in a handful of competitions.

“Negotiations are still going on with Libya,” Jacques-Emmanuel Lajugie, the head of the international division of the Délégation Générale pour l’Armement (DGA), said March 17, 2009. The talks were lasting as long as expected, he said. The DGA is the French government’s military procurement office.

The MBDA CEO, Antoine Bouvier said separately March 17, 2009 that he expected a large export sale for missiles tied to the Rafale this year or next, as well as weapons for the Frigate European Multi-Mission (FREMM) frigate, a new warship being built for France and Italy.

There are concerns that the economic crisis will hit defense spending in Brazil and Greece, where the Rafale is competing for orders, the industry executive said.

Switzerland has completed a series of flight trials of the Rafale, Eurofighter Typhoon, and Sweden’s Gripen as part of a tender to replace F-5 fighter jets. It is expected to take six months to evaluate the data from the tests.

India also is looking to buy 126 new warplanes; but that competition is expected to take a long time, even by military procurement timetables, industry executives said.

Dassault is looking for customers to buy the Mirage 2000-9 aircraft that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) intends to replace with Rafales, Chief Executive Charles Edelstenne said March 19, 2009. A first delivery of the Rafale to the UAE would not be before 2012; and the UAE Air Force would probably need about three year’s time to train aircrews on the new aircraft. “We have time to prospect,” he said.

DGA Chief Executive Laurent Collet-Billon said March 17, 2009 that the French Air Force would not be taking the Mirage 2000-9s from the UAE.