

South African GBADS programme faces delays

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The South African Department of Defence (DoD) project to acquire a new ground-based air defence system (GBADS) for the South African Army has fallen critically behind schedule.

The ZAR801 million (USD109 million) contract for Phase 1, the 'local warning segment', of a wider army GBADS project was awarded to South Africa's Denel – the programme prime contractor – on 28 November 2002, with an expected 36-month 'programme period'.

The local warning segment includes: a Reutech Radar Systems ESR-220 Kameelperd air-transportable warning radar/battery fire-control post; two Thales Page air-droppable and manportable local warning radars; eight Thales Starstreak lightweight multiple launchers; an undisclosed number of missiles; a command-and-control (C2) system; and a logistic support package.

The C2 system is being devel-

● South Africa's ground-based air defence system has been delayed by financing problems and the complexity of the project

oped in two portions with Reutech Radar Systems, Alenia Marconi Systems and EADS developing the air-defence control element and BAE Systems and Cybersim the tactical command element.

A five-month delay occurred almost immediately as a result of financing problems. Denel subsequently notified Armscor – the South African DoD's acquisition agency – of first a nine-month delay and then a 45-month delay as the complexities of the project became clear.

Among the problems that Denel encountered were a delay of more than a year in the development of subsystem specifications, delays in contracting local subcontractors and high staff turnover in the Denel

project team: a result of turbulence in the group in the past few years. There were also 'design shortcomings' in the thermal imager of the Starstreak launcher sight unit, the distributed power supply system for the Page radar and the radio interface module.

However, Denel claims that the problems have been resolved.

A joint Armscor/army project team and Denel have now developed an approach to minimise further delays, while the group itself has put a new management team in place for this project.

Denel Chief Executive Officer Shaun Liebenberg is confident that the "legacy problems" have been addressed and that things are now moving quickly and smoothly. Armscor is happy that "all foreseeable risks" have been identified and "detailed risk mitigation plans" have been developed. It will carry out the factory acceptance trials by subsystem element to speed up the overall process.

The first missile firing by an army air-defence crew is now expected to take place in October. ■