

The Philippines Seeks Funds for C-130Js and Huey Servicing

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Currently, only half of the PAF's C-130Ts are operational and are unable to provide the airlift necessary to rapidly deploy troops in the required numbers. (Photo: Chen Chuanren)

The Philippines is seeking to raise PHP37 billion (\$741.8 million) to acquire five Lockheed Martin C-130Js to bolster its transport capabilities in both wartime and peacetime. Air force chief Allen Paredes told the country's cabinet that the program is part of 2021's unfunded priority project, which was approved by President Rodrigo Duterte in May. According to the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Paredes now needs 15 percent, or PHP5.5 billion, for down-payment. Local reports are suggesting that the Philippines Air Force (PAF) is eyeing the lengthened C-130J-30.

"This would be enough to serve our mandate to be able to transport one rapidly deployable battalion at one stroke," he said in the cabinet hearing, likely referring to the ability to quickly deploy either paratroops or ground forces into contested islands in the South China Sea or the volatile south against insurgents.

Manila first saw the need for a capable tactical transport fleet after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 uncovered the air force's lack of preparedness to respond to such disasters. The Philippines currently has four ex-U.S. Navy C-130Ts and has two more on order, valued at PHP2.5 billion, co-funded by the U.S. through the Foreign Military Financing program. Paredes added that only 50 per cent of the country's C-130Ts are currently operational, as two are undergoing heavy maintenance in Cebu and Portugal.

In response to queries, Lockheed Martin said it would be "honoured to welcome the PAF to the global C-130J Super Hercules family" and is ready to support its tactical airlift needs.

During the hearing, Paredes also asked for another PHP1.8 billion to service 10 Bell 205/412s that are currently "sidelined" due to a lack of funds. The Bell fleet currently has a serviceability rate of 42 per cent.