

MILITARY AIRCRAFT

18 February 2016

United Kingdom Ministry of Defence places order for two solar-powered Airbus Zephyr 8s

- Contract is first for pioneering high-altitude pseudo-satellite (HAPS) craft
- World-record holding design made even lighter and more efficient

Airbus Defence and Space has won an order from the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) for the manufacture and operation of two solar-powered Zephyr 8 high-altitude pseudo-satellite (HAPS) craft.

Flying at some 65,000ft, the ultra-lightweight Zephyr 8 is uniquely capable of providing persistent surveillance over land or sea, and hosting communications links, over the same area for months at a time without landing. The precise purposes for which the UK MoD will use its Zephyrs have not been disclosed.

Zephyr flies slowly and above weather systems, loitering over a selected area under the close guidance of a ground controller to perform its mission. The earlier Zephyr 7 HAPS holds the world record for 14 days continuous flight set in 2010 – with the aircraft charging its batteries from sunlight during the day and maintaining its high altitude at night.

The latest generation Zephyr 8 has a wingspan of 25 metres, is 30% lighter and can carry 50% more batteries than its predecessor - the 22.5 metre wingspan Zephyr 7. This enables the Zephyr 8 to carry heavier payloads for its surveillance and communications roles. The Zephyr 8 HAPS is designed to fly continuously for over a month before landing, being refurbished, and flying again.

As well as for military purposes, Zephyrs can be used for humanitarian missions, precision farming, environmental and security monitoring, and to provide internet coverage to regions of poor or zero connectivity.

The first Zephyr 8 is under construction at Airbus Defence and Space's Farnborough, UK facility and is due to fly in mid-2017.

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About Airbus Defence and Space

Airbus Defence and Space is a division of Airbus Group formed by combining the business activities of Cassidian, Astrium and Airbus Military. The new division is Europe's number one defence and space enterprise, the second largest space business worldwide and among the top ten global defence enterprises. It employs more than 38,000 employees generating revenues of approximately €13 billion per year.

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