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# France: “MCO-A” Summed Up In A Few Words And Figures

*April 8th, 2024 - By Murielle Delaporte - Following a logic of domains*

In the defense and security sector, operational maintenance (MCO in French for “*Maintien en condition opérationnelle*”) “covers all the resources (human, technical and financial), services and processes that enable defense equipment to remain available throughout their service life, up until their retirement from service, in order to meet the requirements of the armed forces (operations and operational readiness)”, according to the definition proposed in 2020 by the French armed forces Joint Center for Concepts, Doctrines and Experiments<sup>(1)</sup>.

MCO is structured following a logic of domains: aeronautical maintenance (MCO-A for “maintien en condition opérationnelle aéronautique”) refers specifically to the aeronautical environment, by analogy to land-based maintenance (MCO-T for “maintien en condition opérationnelle Terrestre”) or naval maintenance.

Since this is a definition provided by the armed forces, it focuses on military equipment. It should be noted, however, that in the aeronautical sector, the notion of “MCO” has been extended to all state flying assets (gendarmerie, civil security, customs), which is not the case for land or naval equipment.

## **A Procurement Priority**

“MCO” was already considered a priority in the 2019-2025 French "Military Program Law" (LPM), with 35 billion euros earmarked for this period, while the 2024-2030 LPM plans to allocate 49 billion euros.

As far as “MCO-A” is concerned, this accounts to 3 billion Euros a year, according to the ministry of the Armed Forces<sup>(2)</sup>.

These figures mainly concern spare parts and outsourced services. There are, of course, other categories of direct expenditure by the Armed Forces related to what is known as “operational MCO” (as opposed to “industrial MCO”), such as the payroll of technicians working on operational MCO.

## **The share of MCO-A in the French aerospace industry**

Of the 4,000 companies that make up the French Defense Technological and Industrial Base (BITD for “Base industrielle de technologie et de défense”), the number of aerospace companies listed by the French aerospace industry association (GIFAS for “Groupement des industries françaises aéronautiques et spatiales”) is close to 450, including :

- 16 aircraft and systems manufacturers;
- 190 OEMs;
- 221 SMEs;
- 3 service companies.

This sector has a current revenue exceeding €62 billion and a workforce reaching 195,000 employees. It is split between civilian (69%) and defense (31%) activities<sup>(3)</sup>.

It should be noted that four French – or largely French-owned - Airbus, Thales, Dassault and Safran - are among the world's top thirty defense industry groups<sup>(4)</sup>. MBDA, the world's second-largest missile manufacturer, should also be mentioned given its key role in the maintenance of missiles.

## **MCO-A: aircraft and flight hours**

Concretely speaking, French “MCO-A” involves the support of “everything that flies and helps to fly, from drones to the upper atmosphere”, says Engineer General Marc Howyan, Director of the Direction de la maintenance aéronautique (DMAé) – a “joint service reporting to the Armed Forces Chief of Staff (...) in charge of the performance of the operational maintenance of government aircrafts”<sup>(5)</sup>.

This accounts to 1,338 aircraft of 45 different types, divided into the following six support segments:

- Fighter aircraft;
- Instruction transport aircraft;
- Operational support aircraft;
- Helicopters;
- Drones, Safety, Environment;
- Aeronautical information and communication systems.

This represents (2023 figures):

- An estimated asset value of 60 billion euros;
- more than 280,000 flight hours - including 11% in overseas operations in 2023;
- more than 5,500 technical acts carried out by the DMAé;
- the dismantlement of 42 aircraft (including 31 C160s)<sup>(6)</sup>.

In addition to the DMAé, the service in charge of the maintenance of munitions (SIMu for “ Service interarmées des munitions”) also plays a role in the field of “MCO-A” as far as missile maintenance is concerned.

#### **Footnotes:**

<sup>(1)</sup> *CICDE, Publication interarmées PIA-4.17\_MCO(2020) N° 47/ARM/CICDE/NP du 17 mars 2020 (Définition du MCO selon la politique générale du MCO des équipements de défense sur leur cycle de vie) >>> [https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/cicde/20200317-NP-PIA\\_4.17\\_MCO2020\\_VF.pdf](https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/cicde/20200317-NP-PIA_4.17_MCO2020_VF.pdf)*

<sup>(2)</sup> *<https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/maintien-condition-operationnelle-priorite-lpm-2024-2030>*

<sup>(3)</sup> *Chiffres GIFAS : Enjeux et perspectives de la filière aéronautique et spatiale française Horizon 2030.*

<sup>(4)</sup> *Source : Defense News as quoted in Le Monde >>>*

*[https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2024/04/17/armement-comment-l-industrie-francaise-se-mobilise\\_6228261\\_3234.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2024/04/17/armement-comment-l-industrie-francaise-se-mobilise_6228261_3234.html)*

<sup>(5)</sup> *<https://www.defense.gouv.fr/dmae/mieux-nous-connaître/direction-maintenance-aeronautique-dmae>*

(6) Ministère des Armées >>> <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/dmae/missions-chiffres-cles/chiffres-cles-dmae> ; <https://www.archives.defense.gouv.fr/dmae/la-dmae/missions-et-chiffres-cles/missions-et-chiffres-cles>.

Photo: Operational maintenance by a mechanic on the SNECMA M53 engine of a Mirage 2000-5 deployed as part of NATO's Enhanced Air Policing mission © Julien Fechter, French "Armée de l'Air et de l'Espace", Siauliai, Lithuania, December 8th, 2023

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