

Russian Checkmate to conquer the niche in the global market

By Yuri Laskin

The 15th International Aviation and Space Salon MAKS-2021, which began work on Tuesday in Zhukovsky, near Moscow, was marked with a sensational debut of the newest Russian Light Tactical aircraft (LTS in Russian) being named «The Checkmate». The fighter was developed by the world famous Sukhoi, the United Aircraft Corporation (USC) subsidiary, now - a part of the Rostec Corporation which got the lion's share of the UAC stakes in 2018. The single engine machine has been claimed as an export-oriented fifth generation platform to arise a special interest for the project concept.

The vehicle received unprecedentedly international interest glad to the Rostec unique aggressive marketing presentation which used to be more common to the West than to Russia. Since the Soviet Union times, the Russian military products have been domestically oriented. First of all, they have come in service with the national Armed Forces. In a number of years they received the so called «export image passport» to get a permit for international sales. The only exception which could come across my mind is the Pantsir SHORADS being developed by the Shipunov KBP Design Bureau (nowadays the High Precision Weapons Holding subsidiary) on the contract with the United Arab Emirates worth of USD 760 million. Today Pantsir family systems are in service with the Russian Army and Navy and have been sold internationally, but its prime user were the UAE Armed Forces.

The Checkmate has been developed by Sukhoi in just four years due to the digital process design to become a new fifth generation combat platform (or system in Russian). According to the Rostec CEO Sergey Chemezov latest interview, the aircraft was designed to enjoy stealth technology in combination with high flight performance characteristics. He claimed «the aircraft is equipped with advanced avionics and the most spacious internal weapons compartments in its class» being capable to carry «up to five air-to-air missiles of various ranges and other aviation weapons in an inconspicuous configuration» inside the airframe. The aircraft maximum combat load is claimed to reach 7,400 kilograms, the flight range without additional fuel tanks is estimated as 2,900 kilometers”.

The Checkmate has been designed as a high-tech intelligent aviation platform. Due to an open architecture the aircraft can be tailored for a specific customer demand to enjoy a high potential for further upgrade. According to Mr. Chemezov, «the Checkmate is a "light" aviation complex for solving most combat tasks with minimal costs». The modern on-board equipment is suitable for air combat and ground targets strikes. It employs an active phased array antenna radar, which allows you to attack targets even in conditions of strong interference. At the same time, the onboard electronic suppression and defense system allows the aircraft to escape from detection and destruction means. «The Checkmate can employ a full range of weapons to destroy any air, land or sea targets including the most advanced means of air defense»- added Mr. Chemezov.

The future system development includes an unmanned version of the Checkmate. The UAVs could be used in combat together with the conventional machines, said the Rostec CEO.

The Checkmate presentation to the Russian President Vladimir Putin took place on July, 20th being followed by the enormous row of the foreign delegations to make the Checkmate pavilion the busiest one at MAKS-2021. Various potential customers from the Middle East, the Asia-Pacific region and Latin

America got a chance to acknowledge the vehicle. Mr. Chemezov also mentioned the Matryoshka after sales system which is intended «to organize personnel training, plan maintenance with high accuracy and deliver components in a timely manner. The solution will reduce the cost of after-sales service, increase its efficiency and ensure a high level of combat readiness of the fleet even during high-intensity flights».

The Checkmate has been open for journalists and experts to witness its futuristic concept of the composite materials, glass cockpit and a thrust vectoring engine.

The Sukhoi specialists have been optimistic on the Checkmate prospects. They claim it could become a kind of the MiG-21 successor in a view of the product numbers. The single engine fighter being nicked as a «Fishbed» by NATO had become the world mostly produced combat aircraft being issued in over 14000 units in the USSR, Czechoslovakia, India and China in a period from 1959 till 2012.

According to Aleksandr Mikheev, Rosoboronexport CEO, a number of international partners have stressed their interest «in the newest Checkmate light tactical aircraft». He added that several potential customers were shown the aircraft live and even got a chance to sit in the cockpit.

The head of the Russian State mediator in defense trade noticed that Rosoboronexport had totally used the MAKS-2021 opportunity by «signing 13 export contracts for the supply of Russian military products worth more than 1 billion euros».

Mr. Mikheev also added that Rosoboronexport has already signed in 2021 various contracts over 5 bln. dollars worth with 80% share being related for aviation and air defense equipment.

The company's top selling products were mentioned to include Su-30SME aircraft, Mi-35M and Mi-17V5 helicopters, the Protivnik («Adversary»)-GE radar, the Verba («Willow») MANPADS, as well as modern aviation weapons, a number of armored and automotive equipment samples."

Perhaps, the Checkmate could be able to repeat the Fishbed success story on a new level.

The local media mentioned an estimated price for a Checkmate unit around USD 25-30 million -times smaller than a tag of competitors. According to Yury Borisov, Russian Vice-Prime minister being responsible for defense industry, the so called «anchor customer» for Checkmate has already been determined.

Photo Credit – Yuri Laskin





