

# Beyond Heron – ADF UAV roadmap for the future

In 2009 the ADF urgently acquired a persistent overland ISR capability to support ground operations in Afghanistan, bolstering the surveillance provided by a small detachment of AP-3C Orions which, until recently were, based in the Middle East Theatre of Operations.



THE Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI) Heron Medium Altitude Long Endurance unmanned surveillance system was, and is, leased from Canadian company McDonal-d, Dettwiler & Associates (MDA) under the rapid acquisition Project Nankeen after a shortfall in available ISR capability became evident.

With the exception of the Multi-Mission Unmanned Aircraft System capability, to be acquired in the future under Air 7000 Phase 1B, the Defence Capability Plan has up until now only identified a need for tactical level ISR, currently filled by hand-held and small drones in direct support of troops on the ground and operated by Army.

The more 'strategic' nature of the Heron

capability provides persistent ISR in-theatre commanders and is operated by the No.5 Flight RAAF, a component of Air Combat Group.

The leasing arrangement with MDA has recently been extended again and is currently due to terminate at the end of 2014. With nothing beyond this in the current DCP, save for the recently accelerated MUAS acquisition, what is the future for ADF UAV operations beyond Heron?

## Roadmap for the future

Defence says that its current roadmap for UAVs is classified, but the primary focus in the short to medium term will be on what it defines as 'informed decision mak-

ing and the successful introduction of capabilities already outlined in the DCP.'

The roadmap itself has four main priorities:

- To ensure the successful introduction of systems and capabilities already in train;
- Ensure the successful exploitation of capabilities which are introduced as a result;
- To explore opportunities where UAS systems and emerging technologies have demonstrated advantages;
- and to explore what Defence terms as novel opportunities in systems and technologies and Fundamental Inputs to Capability (FIC).

It says that any consideration of future overland ISR capabilities beyond Heron