



A Joint Program to Modernize Tactical Intelligence

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The Directorate of Aeronautical Armaments and Airworthiness (DAAA) has recently taken a significant step towards modernizing the operational capabilities of the Italian Armed Forces by issuing the *Preliminary Report and Decision to Contract* for an ambitious joint program. The project directly involves the Army General Staff, the Navy, and the Joint Special Operations Command (COFS), and aims to acquire Mini-class UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) systems, fixed-wing with Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) capabilities.

The program is based on the interforce need to have Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) capable of carrying out *Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)*, *Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Target Acquisition (ISTAR)*, and geo-spatial image acquisition missions. These tasks are increasingly central in modern operational scenarios, ranging from tactical reconnaissance to target identification, and continuous surveillance of sensitive areas.

The systems sought must be *Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS)*, meaning already available on the market, and provided complete with spare parts, logistical support, and engineering

assistance, to ensure a complete and sustainable lifecycle.

The initiative is part of the *Operational Requirement 2022 “Enhancement of the Mini and Micro Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) Capability of Defense”*, approved by the Defense General Staff in May 2022. This requirement responds to the growing need for lightweight, flexible, and highly transportable platforms capable of operating in complex environments, both in urban contexts and in challenging terrains.

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91 UAV Systems for Army, Navy, and Special Forces

The DAAA, aiming to coordinate investments and promote resource rationalization, consulted all involved components: the Army General Staff, the Navy General Staff, and the COFS. All three commands expressed their concrete interest in acquiring the new Mini VTOL RPAS, indicating the numerical need required for their respective operational needs.

The total number of systems requested amounts to 91 units, each of which must be usable for an estimated ten-year technical-operational cycle. This duration will allow for extended and continuous use, reducing the need for replacements over time and minimizing operational interruptions.

To meet this demand, the DAAA has opted for a technical-administrative solution based on a *Seven-Year Framework Agreement*, which will be signed with the winning company of the tender. The goal is to ensure simplified and consistent management of supplies, facilitating the implementation of subsequent and modifiable contracts according to the annual needs of the Armed Forces.

The maximum overall value of the Framework Agreement is estimated at **100 million euros**, spread over seven financial years (from 2025 to 2031). This figure includes the initial supply of systems, related spare parts, personnel training, logistical support, and engineering assistance for the entire planned operational period.

Towards a More Agile and Advanced ISR Capability

The use of fixed-wing VTOL Mini UAVs reflects an increasingly marked trend in modern armed forces: equipping themselves with lightweight, compact systems capable of being rapidly deployed even in the absence of traditional infrastructures. The vertical take-off and landing capability allows for operations from restricted areas, such as ship decks or wooded areas, increasing the tactical flexibility of deployed units.

For the Special Operations Command, in particular, the introduction of these RPAS represents a force multiplier, thanks to the ability to gather real-time information during high-risk operations without compromising operator safety.

The Army and Navy will also benefit from the availability of these systems, both in missions abroad and in surveillance and control activities of the national territory, contributing to strengthening the overall security framework.

The DAAA initiative represents a concrete example of joint synergy and long-term planning in the field of Defense ISR capabilities. With the start of the Framework Agreement and the subsequent awarding of contracts, the Italian Armed Forces will be able to rely on an advanced and flexible tool, in line with the challenges of the 21st century.

The adoption of fixed-wing VTOL Mini UAVs is not just a technological step: it is a strategic choice that demonstrates the willingness to enhance operational readiness, improve situational awareness, and maximize available resources through a shared vision between the Army, Navy, and Special Forces.