

First Flight for U.K.'s Initial Modified BAe 146

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Beechcraft and BAE Systems have undertaken the first flight of a specially modified BAe 146 transport aircraft for the U.K. Royal Air Force.

The U.K. Defense Ministry purchased two ex-TNT Airlines BAe 146-200QTs in early 2012 as part of an urgent operational requirement to support and boost passenger and cargo transport capability in Afghanistan. The aircraft were delivered to BAE and Beechcraft Global Customer Support under a £15.5 million (\$24.3 million) deal.

BAE is responsible for the design and integration of military gear to be fitted to the aircraft as well as the equipment sourcing and management of the supply chain and conversion program, while Beechcraft is carrying out the engineering work. This involves modifying the two regional airliners with defensive-aid suites and other military equipment to prepare them for in-theater operations. The work has been performed in Chester, England.



Credit: Keith Gaskell

The aircraft have been fitted with infrared countermeasures similar to those installed on two 146s already operated by the RAF in a VIP configuration. The two new aircraft have been painted gray and will be used in both passenger and freight roles, supplementing the aging fleet of C-130K Hercules airlifters. Both 146s are scheduled for delivery by March.

BAE says that in commercial operations, the 146QC can carry up to 96 passengers. But in military use, the Defense Ministry anticipates the constraints of operational altitudes and temperatures, as well as the increased weights of armed and body-armored military personnel, will reduce passenger capacities during everyday operations .

The C-130Ks had been due to exit service last year. But the RAF has kept them active to support tactical transport needs in Afghanistan , due to the late arrival of the Airbus Military A400M and late introduction of new block upgrades for the C-130J .