HELI-EXPO: BELL RULES OUT FUTURE CONVENTIONAL MILITARY HELICOPTER DEVELOPMENTS

News / Events / Festivals, Manufacturer



Mitch Snyder, the chief executive of Bell Helicopter, does not imagine the company offering any future conventional clean-sheet helicopter to the US military after completing delivery of the AH-1Z Viper and UH-1Y Venom.

Snyder, speaking on the eve of the Heli-Expo convention, is putting his faith in tiltrotor technology and other “future of flight concepts” to address long-term military requirements.

“We’re going to pursue upgrades to continue to evolve the Yankee and Zulu, but as far as looking at new clean-sheet type platforms, all of our platforms for the future in the military are not what you’d classify as a helicopter,” he says.

The newly appointed CEO has made investments in futuristic flight technology a strategic priority, particularly aircraft types that can move from one location to another faster and safer than ever before.

"Given the military requirements we are seeing, there's nothing there saying they want to go

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slower [than 230-250kt]," in the future, he says.

Those aircraft must also be highly manoeuvrable in hover for military operations. “There’s lots of technologies out there, and we’re proving it with the tiltrotor,” he says.

Bell expects to continue producing its four-bladed attack and utility H-1 variants, which are 84% common, well into the 2020s. Snyder says both types are involved in competitions around the globe, but there is currently more interest in the AH-1Z gunship, as seen by Pakistan’s recent procurement.

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AH-1Z Viper and UH-1Y Venom

Bell/US Marine Corps

In terms of the next-generation of vertical lift, Bell is investing heavily in its third-generation tiltrotor,

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the V-280 Valor for the US military's Joint-Multi-Role Technology Demonstrator (JMT-TD) effort. Competing against the Sikorsky-Boeing SB-1 Defiant, Bell will propose a production-model V-280 for the US Army’s upcoming Future Vertical Lift-Medium programme.

A mock-up of the V-280 is on display at the show this week, alongside flight-test prototypes of the company’s commercial 525 Relentless and 505 Jet Ranger X.

As part of his future flight strategy, Snyder wants to capture more US government science and technology and prototype demonstrations through the various military laboratories as well as Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and NASA. To win those, though, he says the company must present truly innovative ideas.

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V-280 Valor

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Bell Helicopter

On the commercial side, Snyder doesn't foresee a commercial derivative of the V-280, which is being assembled in Amarillo, Texas, ahead of its first flight in 2017. Instead, Bell will push the AW609 tiltrotor through its continued association with AgustaWestland on the programme.

"For right now, we're in the commercial tiltrotor business already with Agusta on the 609," he says. "As far as V-280 goes, we're focused on JMR-TD. We're going to stay focused there, we're going to deliver those requirements."

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