

IADE in Tunis

The first airshow of its kind provided a rare opportunity to view the Tunisian Republic Air Force at close quarters. **Arnold ten Pas** reports from Djerba Airport.



Above: A three-ship of F-5F Y92504 'IB' (c/n HX1002, FMS 82-0641) from 15 Squadron and smoke-trailing L-59Ts Y95-065 'JH' (c/n 585805) and Y95-059 'JE' (c/n 585806) from 16 Squadron. The trio performed at the opening ceremony and on the second public day. All photos Arnold ten Pas unless stated

Tunisian Republic Air Force Al-Quwwat al-Jawwiya al-Jamahiriyyah At'Tunisia

Base	Squadron	Type(s)
Bizerte	15 Squadron	F-5E, F-5F
	21 Squadron	C-130B, C-130H
	32 Squadron	AB205A, Bell 205A-1, UH-60M
	36 Squadron	UH-60M
Borj el Amri	EABA	PA-28, TB9, TB10, TB20
Gabès	33 Squadron	SA342
	37 Squadron	OH-58D(R)
	34 Squadron	OH-58D(R)
Sfax	13 Squadron	L-59T
	14 Squadron	SF-260CT, SF-260W
	31 Squadron	AS350B, SA342
Tunis-Carthage/ El Aouina	11 Squadron	C-130J-30
	12 Squadron	L-410UVP-E20
	35 Squadron	Bell 412
	?? Squadron	Maule MX-7-180B*
	Government Flight	Boeing 737-7H3

* MX-7s are distributed across several locations and are used as border patrol aircraft.

Right: During IADE, all three still-active L-410s were noted ferrying VIPs to and from the show. One of the 21 Squadron Turbolets noted at the show was L-410UVP-E20 Z94049/TS-OTI (c/n 962709).

The International Aerospace & Defence Exhibition (IADE) was held at Djerba Airport on the island of the same name, from March 4 to 8. The event broke new ground as the first big airshow of its kind in Tunisia, where local military aviation is not normally very accessible. The exhibition was organised by the same team responsible for the Marrakech Air Show, which was first held in 2008. Tunisia is now promoting itself as a strategic defence and aeronautical partner for the entire African continent and the organisation has

committed to staging IADE biennially for the next ten years. The biennial Marrakech Air Show would normally be taking place this year but has been postponed to 2021 to avoid it clashing with IADE in the years to come.

The first three days of the Tunisian event were focused on trade, while the public was invited to attend the last two. On the first day, IADE was officially opened in the presence of the country's president and commander-in-chief, Kais Saied. The ceremony included a fly-by of a Tunisian Republic

Air Force (TRAF) F-5F from 15 Squadron, flanked by a pair of L-59Ts from 13 Squadron. This was the only air force participation until the second public day, when the fly-by was repeated, followed by a UH-60M demonstration. The airshow also included performances by a Turkish Air Force F-16 of the Solo Türk demo team and the Saudi Hawks. Originally, more TRAF assets had been scheduled, but were cancelled.

The United States provided the majority of the aircraft in the static park, displaying a P-8, C-130J, KC-135 and



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Above: Veteran AB205A L81-705 (c/n 4472) with L-410UVP-E20 Z94047/TS-OTG (c/n 962708) taxiing in the background. The TRAF's light rotary fleet includes over 20 AB205A and Bell 205A-1 aircraft, assigned to 32 Squadron, but they can be found operating throughout the country. **Left:** This AB412, serial L82-604, is one of at least four in use with 35 Squadron at Tunis-Carthage. The aircraft's immaculate appearance belies its VIP transport role. The type entered service from 1992.

a pair of F-16s. Besides these, local air arms showed a C-130J, OH-58D and a National Guard Bell 429. Further participants for the static show were announced in advance but did not materialise. Bearing in mind the ambitions of the organisers, this will hopefully be addressed in future in order to attract more visitors.

Following various acquisitions in recent years, IADE provided a good opportunity to confirm the new units established within the TRAF. The current order of battle is thought to be as follows:

Below: The final H-model Hercules in service with the TRAF is C-130H Z21012/TS-MTB (c/n 5021, ex N41030) flown by 21 Squadron. A single C-130B also remains active.

Tunisian transports

The TRAF has been a long-time user of the Hercules, with examples of the C-130B, C-130H and the latest C-130J in the inventory. All but one of the eight C-130Bs have been withdrawn from use and only a single C-130H survives with 21 Squadron. With the delivery of two C-130Js in 2013 and 2015, 11 Squadron – a former MB-326 operator – was transformed into a transport unit. With two C-130Js in service and just a single C-130H and C-130B left, there's a need for two additional

C-130Js, but no formal contract has been signed.

Three L-410UVPs remain in service with 12 Squadron, out of five delivered. They are used for light transport, VIP transport and medical evacuation.

Jet fleet

The backbone of the TRAF is provided by the F-5E/F, acquired from the US. Three two-seat F-5Fs were delivered, one of which was lost in an accident in 1996. Both surviving F-5Fs were seen during IADE, sporting a Tunisian flag scheme on the underside of the aircraft.

Of the 12 F-5Es delivered, ten remain in service with 15 Squadron at Bizerte.

In search for additional firepower, the TRAF is aiming to buy four AT-6C Wolverine light attack aircraft. A \$325.8m deal was approved by the US State Department in late February (see *Headlines*, April, p7), just before the start of IADE. It covers a wide variety of supporting equipment, including GBU-12 guided bombs and the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS). Besides that, pilots and technicians will be trained on

the new aircraft. The delivery dates of the Wolverines have not been announced.

Six L-59Ts remain in service with 13 Squadron at Sfax. Originally, 12 were delivered in the mid-1990s, but three have been lost over the years and another three are stored. The L-59T, an export version of the L-39MS, is used for both advanced training and light-attack duties and is equipped with four underwing hardpoints and a centreline GSh-23L cannon. The L-59T's training role will likely be



taken over by T-6Cs in the near future. Last October, the US State Department approved the \$234m sale of 12 T-6C Texan IIs to Tunisia, a sale the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency said at the time would help support Tunisia's "counter-terrorism and border security missions". No details were given about a possible delivery date or base.

Rotary assets

For light transport, over 20 AB205A and Bell 205A-1 helicopters are in service. Assigned to 32 Squadron, the aircraft can be seen at several bases. All UH-1s have now been withdrawn. At least four AB412s are also in TRAF service, being used for VIP transport with 35 Squadron at Tunis-Carthage. In 2014, Tunisia requested the purchase of 12 SH-60Fs through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programme. At the time, the requirement was for (refurbished) SH-60Fs to replace the existing HH-3Fs but changing circumstances in Tunisia saw the request changed to eight new UH-60Ms, plus Battle Hawk kits. Delivery of the first four helicopters took place in 2017, while the remaining four were handed over in June 2018. Included in the \$338m deal was pilot training at Fort Rucker, Alabama, and other support. It also covered an undisclosed number of Level

2 Battle Hawk kits allowing the UH-60Ms to be used as attack helicopters. The TRAF's kits include machine guns, Hydra-70 rocket pods, Hellfire launch systems and a laser-guided rocket capability. In May 2016, the sale of 24 former US Army OH-58Ds to Tunisia was approved. Struggling with terrorist attacks, the country was in need of new equipment. The first six helicopters were delivered to the newly

established 37 Squadron at Gabès in February 2017. The 18 remaining OH-58Ds were delivered later that year, both to 37 Squadron and to the Sfax-based 34 Squadron. Pilot training on the OH-58D was conducted at Roswell International Air Centre, New Mexico, by Integration Innovation Inc (i3) from September 2016 onwards; in all, 24 pilots and 50 technicians were trained. The sale of the helicopters,

worth \$100m, also extended to the delivery of equipment and weapons, including the Common Missile Warning Systems (CMWS), AGM-114R Hellfire missiles, M134 Miniguns, rocket launchers and APKWS rounds.

Training

Basic training for all pilots wishing to join the air force is conducted at the Ecole de l'Aviation de Borj el Amri (EABA, Borj el Amri Aviation School). The EABA is a military higher education institution under defence ministry supervision, and under the patronage of the chief of the air staff. It was created in 1994 from the merger of the School of Civil Aviation and Meteorology (created in 1968) and the Air Academy (established in 1984) and is

located in the grounds of Borj el Amri Airport, 14 miles (23km) southwest of Tunis. Operating under the motto 'At the highest', the school is a civil aviation-approved national centre offering training in aeronautics, air traffic and meteorology. After a theoretical phase lasting 1,350 hours spread out over 18 months, the student undergoes a national examination organised by the Ministry of Transport. Next is the practical phase: another 18 months, followed by award of either a fighter pilot or helicopter pilot certificate for students destined to join air force air units. The unit uses both single-engine and twin-engine aircraft for training, all civil registered. After graduating, pilots destined for the TRAF receive further instruction within its own units. **AFM**



Left: Both surviving TRAF F-5Fs were seen during IADE, sporting a Tunisian flag scheme on the underside of the aircraft. **Below right:** Supplied under Foreign Military Sales channels, Kiowa Warrior serial L81520/TS-VTR is one of 24 former US Army OH-58D(R)s that went to Tunisia together with AGM-114R Hellfire missiles, M134 Miniguns, rocket launchers and APKWS rounds. **Below left:** As well as TRAF types, the Tunisian National Guard was present at the show, with Bell 429 G81-103/TS-QGC (c/n 57295, ex N746BH). Three GlobalRangers were acquired to establish the guard's air unit in early 2017. Shaun Psalia



Above: A recent acquisition, UH-60M L82-304/TS-SRT is operated by 36 Squadron and appeared in the IADE flying display. These Black Hawks can be outfitted with the Battle Hawk kit that includes machine guns, Hydra-70 rocket pods, Hellfire launch systems and a laser-guided rocket capability. **Below:** The TRAF has a requirement for additional Super Hercules beyond the two currently in service. Among them is C-130J-30 Z21121/TS-MTK (c/n 382V-5718, FMS 11-5718), serving with 11 Squadron at Tunis-Carthage/El Aouina. **Right:** James Lawrence

