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# ROTOR

BY

AIRBUS HELICOPTERS

IN THEIR WORDS  
**Built for the wild:  
the H125's power  
in Texas**

IN THEIR WORDS  
**Five-bladed H145  
touches down  
in West Africa**

OFF THE  
BEATEN TRACK  
**A400M/H225M:  
a winning duo**

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**Bruno Even, CEO of Airbus Helicopters**

## "From first response to last line of defence – helicopters are indispensable."

Helicopters are indispensable, especially in these turbulent times. With geopolitical tensions and increasing natural disasters, their unique versatility, agility and life-saving capabilities make them essential tools—from first response in climate crises to vital lines of defence. We are certain our helicopters and uncrewed aerial systems will increasingly work as force multipliers, as governments worldwide respond to these challenges. The utility of helicopters is evident in operations like the Super Puma's diverse missions—rescuing, delivering aid and restoring infrastructure in Mayotte after Cyclone Chido—or the NH90's deployment by the Spanish military following devastating floods. As threats evolve, so too must our solutions. Our pioneering work in crewed-uncrewed teaming exemplifies this, offering innovative benefits for civil, parapublic and military operators.

Our products' versatility extends to diverse domains. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, for instance, uses their H125 for firefighting and a range of other missions, while the five-bladed H145 is now flying offshore energy missions from the Ivory Coast. We can also be particularly proud when a major lessor like Milestone Aviation recognises the value of our multi-mission products; when they share their insights, we listen. Looking ahead, despite challenges, our operators will continue to use helicopters daily to benefit people worldwide. We are committed to supporting these essential platforms and developing new, boundary-pushing solutions that enhance their vital work.



# Above and beyond: helicopters in emergencies

When a crisis erupts, demanding immediate action and versatility, one asset consistently rises to the challenge: the helicopter. This feature article explores the indispensable role of Airbus rotorcraft in navigating the complexities of military operations and natural disasters. Their unique ability to deploy rapidly and operate in the most challenging terrain makes them the ultimate tool when lives hang in the balance.

From strategic interventions to vital humanitarian aid, helicopters consistently go above and beyond to provide crucial support to first responders in the most critical moments.

Articles: Belén Morant and Ben Peggie



# "Nothing can compare to a helicopter's capacity to make lifesaving interventions"

Airbus Helicopters' Head of Global Business, Olivier Michalon, discusses how vertical lift solutions are adapting to a world of increasing volatility and urgent humanitarian needs.



## HOW ARE HELICOPTERS AND UNCREWED AERIAL SYSTEMS (UAS) RESPONDING TO SOME OF THE CHALLENGES AND CRISES THAT WE ARE WITNESSING THROUGHOUT THE WORLD TODAY?

**Olivier Michalon:** At the moment, there are two trends on a global level: the geopolitical situation is becoming increasingly volatile and we are seeing conflicts in various places around the world. Recently, we've seen a sharp increase in demand for defence and security helicopters for all types of missions, from basic training to combat helicopters—the full spectrum. And today, as we have the largest helicopter range in the defence sector, we are essentially able to address almost the entire market. Unfortunately, at the same time, there are more natural disasters: fires, mudslides, massive floods – and again, it's happening all over the world and all year long. Nothing can really compare to a helicopter's capacity to make lifesaving interventions. Only helicopters can winch people out of immediate danger or drop bottled water and supplies to populations that are stranded and that could die of dehydration and hunger. We're seeing more forest fires and here too, helicopters play a vital role in water bombing missions. They can intervene faster, drop water, reload and drop water again—and this extra speed when time is critical is the added value of the helicopter. It is extremely flexible and can be quickly reconfigured between these various operations. Factor in the wide range of capabilities offered by UAS such as the VSR700, Flexrotor and small tactical UAS, Aliaca, and you can see that vertical lift solutions are already absolutely vital and that they will grow increasingly more so.

## DEFENCE AND SECURITY ARE CURRENTLY HOT TOPICS. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR AIRBUS HELICOPTERS?

**O.M.:** I believe that at Airbus Helicopters we are fairly well-prepared for these global developments because three years ago we started this transformation to really enhance our focus on military and parapublic markets. Over the last few years, we've increased the emphasis on being a more defence and security-minded company without forgetting the civil sector, of course, because we are the market leader and we want to maintain this leadership. The reason we did



that is because 80% of the growth potential in the years to come is going to be in defence and security. When we made that change, our analysis said that this period would cover the next five years. But in the meantime, the geopolitical situation has worsened. So maybe it's for the next 10 or 15 years. It's impossible to tell.

## HOW ARE GOVERNMENTS RESPONDING TO THESE TWIN CHALLENGES?

**O.M.:** Another important trend is that European governments are reasserting their strategic autonomy and self-reliance in order to create a safer world for their citizens. This is significant because it demands quick developments across the European defence and security ecosystem. Delivering what is necessary will require activity in a number of areas and, as a fundamentally European company, we recognise that we are an important part of this ecosystem and it is our ambition to play a leading role. Naturally, Airbus Helicopters already is a vital

actor in terms of ensuring the resilience and independence of supply chains. As a market leader of vertical lift solutions, we are constantly forging new partnerships and enhancing existing ones. This is vital for renewing the security infrastructure across the continent and even beyond. Of course, this rejuvenation is driving innovation, as European nations and governments further afield seek new technology that might give them a defensive edge. This is certainly evident in the acceleration of delivering crewed-uncrewed teaming, which is increasingly a priority due to its ability to multiply the effectiveness of both the UAS and crewed aircraft flying alongside them. This will have a huge impact on military especially, but also disaster relief operations. Our policy of continuous development means our research and technology strategy continues not only to deliver innovation after innovation, constantly creating more value for operators, but also means we are a source of jobs for highly skilled workers in Europe.

**1:** Olivier Michalon, Head of Global Business.

**2:** Super Pumas are a vital tool in combatting forest fires, which are on the rise.

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... HOW DOES AIRBUS HELICOPTERS' RANGE OF PRODUCTS AND SOLUTIONS SUPPORT OPERATORS WHO ARE INCREASINGLY FACING THESE GLOBAL CHALLENGES?

**O.M.:** The escalating dual challenges of hybrid warfare and accelerating climate disasters demand unparalleled versatility for assets serving defence and security operators. We expect to see an increase in hybrid conflicts, further blurring lines between military and civil threats, meaning nations need platforms capable of rapid, multi-mission deployment. Concurrently, the global surge in natural catastrophes – from wildfires to floods – necessitates immediate, effective humanitarian intervention. Our Airbus Helicopters range is explicitly designed to meet this critical need, offering inherently adaptable solutions that span both our crewed and uncrewed platforms. Take the Super Puma family for example, which truly exemplifies this multi-role capability. The H215 stands as a heavy-lift powerhouse vital for critical firefighting operations, proven by Greece signing a contract for eight of them, while the H225, recently ordered by Germany's Bundespolizei, excels in demanding law enforcement and security roles. Its H225M military variant further integrates advanced systems like HForce for sophisticated tactical



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operations, showcasing its seamless transition from civil security to defence. Similarly, the NH90, a cornerstone across every branch of the Spanish armed forces for military and search and rescue (SAR) missions, is also deployed for firefighting in Germany for the Bundeswehr, highlighting its capacity to fly both defence and disaster response missions. And the H145 truly embodies agility, capable of everything from light attack and tactical transport to life-saving helicopter emergency medical services (HEMS), police and critical SAR operations. Complementing this, our UAS such as the VSR700, Flexrotor and Airbus Defence and Space's Aliaca, offer critical force multiplication, providing persistent surveillance, reconnaissance and intelligence in both military contexts and for assessing disaster zones. This intrinsic multi-role capability across our fleet, both crewed and uncrewed, ensures that our customers are equipped with the flexibility and readiness to address any challenge, whether on the battlefield or in the face of a natural catastrophe. Ultimately, the opportunity to have highly versatile solutions that can individually perform many different missions is a great asset. Governmental agencies do not have to procure 30 helicopters when 16 can do the job. Then, when you consider the impact that can be achieved with increased connectivity and interoperability, you start to understand why these solutions are going to have such an important role in keeping citizens safe, in Europe and beyond.



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**3:** The VSR700 is ready to perform a variety of missions either as a standalone UAS or teamed with other assets.

**4:** The Flexrotor is versatile and reliable, allowing it to perform a range of military missions, as well as offering support to parapublic operations such as firefighting.

**5 & 6:** Hungary's H225M is equipped with Airbus' HForce weapons system, enabling sophisticated tactical operations.

**7:** The Japanese Coast Guard uses their H225 helicopters for search and rescue operations.



# Teaming up: innovation and collaboration at the heart of Airbus’ in-air teaming strategy

Enabling helicopters to perform missions in perfect harmony with uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) will multiply the capabilities of the assets, offering huge benefits for operators dealing with evolving environmental or military crises. Airbus Helicopters Head of UAS Business, Victor Gerin-Roze, shares Airbus’ vision for crewed-uncrewed teaming (CUC-T).



**1:** Victor Gerin-Roze, Head of UAS Business.

**2:** Connecting UAS and helicopters acts as a force multiplier.



## WHAT IS AIRBUS HELICOPTERS’ CUC-T STRATEGY?

**Victor Gerin-Roze:** CUC-T will be a capability-driven activity to enhance the effectiveness of our helicopters. Our plan is incremental with short- to long-term milestones. The idea is to go from teaming one drone and one helicopter, then, several drones (including Air-Launched Effects)\* and several helicopters. In the future, we’ll see some autonomous mission tasking or management of a swarm of drones with real-time manoeuvring of the teamed assets. Then there will likely be some aspects related to enhanced survivability of the system, with a set of drones deciding themselves how to operate and to protect the crewed assets—deploying themselves, detecting the threat and deploying countermeasures. It’s an exciting area of work; every discussion with military, parapublic and civil operators leads to the consideration of new use cases and concepts.

## LAST YEAR, AIRBUS HELICOPTERS WAS INVOLVED IN THE EUROPEAN MUSER PROJECT. WHAT DID WE LEARN?

**V.G-R.:** MUSER was a giant leap forward. It was the first time that we could experience this kind of teaming on such a scale and between our platforms and other products. One of the objectives was to develop a standardised communication protocol. This is what we need to work on at a European level. We were able to demonstrate up to what’s called Level of Interoperability 4, meaning that the drone was controlled from the helicopter. It was a live test of our capability and, importantly, proved that helicopters and UAS from different companies can work together integrated into a single CUC-T system. Being able to deliver this kind of sovereign European solution is even more vital today. It’s essential to pool

resources to ensure the interoperability between the different platforms or to be able to navigate challenges, whilst also fostering innovation and competition, all the while strengthening Europe’s industrial base.

## HOW IMPORTANT WILL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BE?

**V.G-R.:** AI is already being used, but looking further forward, it could provide the capability of doing collaborative decision-making, or at least support the crew’s decision-making—reducing workload and allowing the crew to focus on higher-level command and control functions. End users also want us to provide processed information; it’s already very complex to manage a mission from a helicopter, but if on top of that you have to manage the information coming from drones, it has to be pre-digested and AI can clearly help a lot. An example would be tasking ...

\*Air-Launched Effects (ALEs): Small, uncrewed aircraft (drones) deployed from a larger platform such as a helicopter or fixed-wing aircraft. ALEs extend the reach and capabilities of manned aircraft, performing tasks like reconnaissance, electronic warfare or communications relay, allowing the parent aircraft to operate more safely and effectively.



**3 & 4:** An H145 and VSR700 flying in tandem during 2024's MUSER project.

**5:** HTeaming, Airbus Helicopters' CUC-T solution, was unveiled at the Paris Air Show. The tablet provides helicopter crews with full control of UAS in flight.

a swarm of drones to do reconnaissance, by just selecting an area on the map. Then the drones organise themselves and decide the best approach to complete the objective. It's no longer the crew controlling each and every drone, it's the drones themselves deciding how to best perform the mission.

**HOW WILL AIRBUS HELICOPTERS STAY AT THE FOREFRONT OF CUC-T?**

**V.G-R.:** We need to keep the ball rolling! It's really the kind of domain where we need to cooperate and gain as much experience as possible as quickly as possible—

especially in live operations. That's why we are accelerating our roadmap to deliver a crewed-uncrewed teaming tablet. CUC-T has emerged as a critical enabler, especially with the evolution that we see on the European defence landscape, with much more demand for agility, responsiveness, reduced development lead times and for being truly all-domain. CUC-T is not just adding a new product line. It's really to add a product which will enhance the rest of our products, multiplying their effectiveness. We are well positioned, but keeping our leading position in Europe starts with real operations.



**THE NEXT STEP IN CUC-T**

Unveiled just ahead of the Paris Air Show, Airbus Helicopters' HTeaming represents an important leap forward in its crewed-uncrewed teaming (CUC-T) strategy, transforming the vision of helicopter-drone collaboration into a tangible solution. HTeaming is a brand-new, modular system designed to give helicopter crews full control of uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) in flight. This innovative solution comes as a range of systems designed for deployment either as a standalone unit, or to be integrated into existing helicopter mission systems. The standalone HTeaming system, showcased at the Paris Air Show, features a user-friendly tablet with an enhanced human-machine interface, software to manage the UAS, a modem and four dedicated antennae for helicopter installation. Crucially, it's engineered for operation by a standard helicopter crew with a reduced workload, aligning with Airbus Helicopters' commitment to enhancing mission efficiency and safety. Flight trials are already well underway, including a successful test in May 2025 involving a Spanish Navy H135 helicopter and an Airbus Flexrotor UAS. More extensive trials are planned across various platforms in the coming months, demonstrating the system's broad applicability.





# The H145: flexibility for a world in flux

Responding to a variety of crises is a necessity for today's vertical lift solutions. With the H145's inherent versatility already setting it apart from its competitors, Head of Programme, Daniela Dudek, explains what is on the horizon for the market-leading helicopter.



Taking the reins of one of the world's most successful helicopter programmes might seem daunting. With the benefit of years of continuous development, it might appear there's little margin for evolution. Yet Dudek believes the H145's proven track record and the challenging global context clearly indicate both its enduring importance, while highlighting priorities for the future. "The H145 has proven itself a reliable aircraft," explains Dudek, stressing its relevance for operators facing multi-faceted challenges like natural disasters and other time-sensitive missions. "It is powerful, performs well in hot and high environments, it is readily available, can be operated swiftly and reconfigured quickly. This agility is highly appreciated by our customers today. My responsibility is to maintain this strong performance and enhance its mission capabilities in terms of management, connectivity, interoperability, militarisation and rescue. This will ensure its market success over the next decade."

## VERSATILE AND STILL EVOLVING

Environmental crises are not the only challenge. The threat of conflict is rising globally, making the H145M a sought-after asset for governments bolstering defence capabilities. "We can see that European nations are increasing spending in the military segment," says Dudek, noting that export markets outside the continent are also

emerging. With experts predicting an increased role for hybrid warfare, the H145M's ability to be swiftly adapted for diverse missions makes it particularly attractive to armed forces. Dudek highlights how this versatility, complemented by forthcoming innovations such as interoperability with uncrewed aerial systems, delivers an ideal product for the segment. "The Bundeswehr's order for up to 82 H145M LKH helicopters (Leichter Kampfhubschrauber, or light combat helicopter) proves our ability to rapidly deliver a light attack helicopter," she notes, "and demonstrates its readiness for a wide range of military missions, such as training, reconnaissance, special forces and light attack." Another capability-enhancing aspect for the military variant, according to Dudek, is the technology transfer from the parapublic sector. "We consider the Bavarian police's H145 to be the most advanced police helicopter. Many technologies and mission capabilities developed for law enforcement are being directly reused in the military market."

## MEETING DEMANDS IN A DEMANDING WORLD

With current global dynamics creating such high demand, Dudek states that being able to meet it is crucial. "The next focus is accelerating the ramp-up in industrial capabilities to deliver more helicopters. We must maintain the swift pace of a civil serial production programme while transitioning this capacity to the military market." As the H145 continues to evolve to meet ever-changing global needs, its blend of proven reliability and adaptable innovation ensures its continued leadership in critical vertical lift operations worldwide.

1: Daniela Dudek, Head of the H145 Programme.

2: In a context where the threat of hybrid warfare is increasing, the H145M's ability to be quickly adapted for a range of missions makes it highly attractive to armed forces.

3: An H145 camouflaged against some trees. The helicopter has proven itself to be reliable in the most critical missions.

4: The H145 is also a valuable tool for search and rescue and helicopter emergency medical service missions.

5: A German police H145. Dudek notes that technologies and mission capabilities developed for law enforcement are being directly reused in the military market.





# SAF Hélicoptères's rapid response: bringing relief to Mayotte

In mid-December 2024, Cyclone Chido unleashed its fury on Mayotte, a French overseas department located in the Mozambique Channel off Africa's east coast. The storm plunged 320,000 residents into darkness, leaving many without water and flattening the homes of countless families. The need for immediate aid and infrastructure restoration was critical.



1: Jean-Louis Camus, co-CEO of SAF Aerogroup.

2: SAF's Super Puma ready to be transported in the A400M.

3: A French military Super Puma being loaded onto an A400M. Many military helicopters have been transported by the A400M but SAF Hélicoptères's Mayotte relief mission was the first time for a civil helicopter.

Just days later, Jean-Louis Camus, co-CEO of SAF Aerogroup, received an urgent call from France's Direction Générale de la Sécurité Civile et de la Gestion des Crises (Department of Civil Security and Crisis Management). The expertise of SAF Hélicoptères (a division within SAF Aerogroup that focuses on aerial work and helicopter emergency medical services) was desperately needed to deliver vital supplies and begin the monumental task of rebuilding. This challenging mission not only highlighted aviation's essential role in times of crisis but also saw one of SAF's Super Pumas become the first civil helicopter ever transported by an A400M, a remarkable feat that enabled rapid response to a desperate situation.

## EXCEPTIONAL MISSIONS - WORLDWIDE

SAF Aerogroup's operational footprint is global, spanning Europe, Africa, the Indian Ocean and South America. Its core values and expertise remain consistent. Indeed, with a strong focus on helicopter emergency medical services (HEMS), mountain rescue, fighting forest fires and humanitarian or logistics missions, SAF were as prepared as it is possible to be for the challenging conditions of Mayotte. Add in the group's in-house light and heavy vertical lift expertise, maintenance capabilities and training centre and you can understand why its operational quality, efficiency and overall readiness are frequently sought by the Ministry of Interior and other governmental agencies. "We perform exceptional missions every day to help people and protect the environment," explains Camus. "And these are particularly complex missions. They require a 24/7 presence, an ability to take off 24 hours a day, day or night, all year round and possibly in harsh environments. We are obliged to take off within three to five minutes for each mission." Ensuring this presence depends on the work of the aforementioned in-house maintenance team, a team which – judging by its near 100% availability in France and over 95% availability commitment on coming missions in Greece – is doing sterling work.

## INCREASING PRESSURE

Camus points out some of the challenges that the SAF Hélicoptères team was operating under. "You can imagine the urgency of the situation, which creates a certain pressure," he states. "You can also understand the logistical complexity



of transporting a helicopter using an aircraft like the A400M, and then the local pressure because people are waiting for rescue and support." Only four days elapsed between SAF receiving the call on 24 December and the unprecedented event of a civil Super Puma being loaded onto the A400M. Perhaps nobody in the world is as well-placed to comment on this particular mix of civil and military for an operation as Camus, a man who has both flown the H215M Cougar for the French military and who was also responsible for designing the A400M cockpit during part of his career with Airbus. "The A400M was the only aircraft that could land in Mayotte right after the cyclone," says Camus. "It is a formidable aircraft. We coordinated our discussions with the Ministry of Interior and Civil Security and the Ministry of Armed Forces, and were supported by Airtelis (our partners in firefighting in France for the Sécurité Civile) for helicopter transport, to be able to effectively load the Super Puma into the A400M. This loading took place on 28 December, and then we departed for Djibouti and Mayotte. We reassembled the helicopter in Mayotte and began operations on 1 January." In addition to the Super Puma, the A400M brought everything the SAF crew ...







... would need to complete the various missions they would be flying. “We brought more than 10 tonnes of freight to the site,” explains Camus. “In particular, all the equipment that enables crews to be in full autonomy and that allowed the Super Puma to carry out all its missions: rescuing citizens, rebuilding work, carrying out emergency reconstruction, and in particular, clearing containers that had been blown away by the cyclone, which were threatening residents in the centre of town. Thanks to our high-precision lifting skills, we restored the telephone network by rebuilding telephone antennae, and we even carried out firefighting at the end of the mission. All the equipment which the H215 needed for this, was loaded onto the A400M for deployment.” The operation necessitated huge efforts from SAF’s crew in terms of preparing the H215 for transport, reassembling it and providing continuous support in challenging conditions throughout the operation. During their time in Mayotte, the crew had to be completely self-sufficient, sleeping under mosquito nets and eating rations on a tropical island that had just been devastated by a cyclone. The team also faced other numerous challenges operating in a disaster area, as Camus attests: “Our teams faced difficulties with meteorological conditions; the weather was extremely hot, extremely humid and we also experienced a storm after the cyclone

where we had to take refuge in the Comoros before returning to operate. There were also communication challenges. All telephone networks were down, and in such a complex operation, maintaining links [with other mission stakeholders] is crucial. The coordination was particularly key with the Sécurité Civile teams, who did a remarkable job on site, as well as with the Prefecture, the Gendarmerie and the Army, with whom we worked in complete coordination on site. Also, from a mechanical point of view, the helicopter was subjected to extreme conditions of temperature, a saline environment and so, mechanically, it was also a complicated job to carry out.”

**THE H215: AN EXCEPTIONAL MACHINE**

In the face of these myriad challenges, SAF’s Super Puma was a vital tool during their missions in Mayotte. Though Camus did not fly it during this deployment, his time flying it in the French army has left him with an enduring respect for the Cougar. “It’s an exceptional machine for several reasons,” he states, “The first is its ability to perform multiple missions, which makes it an ideal helicopter to use in the field. You saw in Mayotte; the entire range of missions could be carried out in one month. It is also an extremely high-performing machine in terms of power and endurance, and it is a particularly reliable machine.” Amongst the

various operations the H215 could perform is one in particular that SAF believes is absolutely critical during disaster relief missions—its rare high-precision lifting capability. “In addition to rescue operations, precision lifting allows us to drop a load without having to secure a football field, for example, because we operate with very long slings and are high enough to drop our loads anywhere, for instance, close to homes, without significant downwash on the ground. This capability allowed us to deliver food and water to any point on the island, in coordination with the Sécurité Civile. It also allowed us to rebuild the telephone network with the ability to lift and re-erect antennae. 80% of the telephone network was back in operation in two days. Our H215 was 100% available during this mission.” Having accomplished so much, it is no wonder that Camus is proud of the work that his crew and engineers performed to bring vital aid. “This mission demonstrated that, in coordination with the Sécurité Civile, we are capable of providing rescue and support anywhere in France, in Europe or in overseas territories with an exceptional transport capability, thanks to the A400M.” SAF Hélicoptères’s use of its Super Puma in Mayotte is the perfect proof of the value of versatile platforms to support local populations in the aftermath of a natural disaster. “In one month, we performed approximately 70 flight hours,” says Jean-Louis Camus. “It takes fifteen minutes for the Super Puma to cross the island of Mayotte, so you can imagine the number of missions we carried out there.”



**4:** SAF’s H215 was 100% available during the Mayotte relief effort, which is not unusual for the group. In Africa, in the most difficult conditions, SAF’s fleet flies 70 hours per month per aircraft on humanitarian missions for the World Food Programme.

**5:** SAF’s precision lifting work with the Super Puma was essential to restoring power to Mayotte.

**6 & 7:** The SAF Hélicoptères team at work in Mayotte.



# Three armed forces – one weapon system

Following the recent delivery of two NH90 helicopters to the Spanish Navy in May, all three branches of the Spanish Armed Forces – the Army, the Air and Space Force, and now the Navy – have NH90s in their fleets. This is the first time that the three military branches have shared the same weapon system. We asked users to share their experiences so far.



The first NH90 in the Standard 3 configuration was delivered to the Spanish Air and Space Force in December 2024. This delivery, part of the second batch of a contract signed in 2018, marked the starting point for broader efforts to renew and expand the capabilities of the Spanish Armed Forces. Standard 3 includes major protection upgrades, including Mode 5 IFF capability and directional infrared countermeasures (DIRCM), as well as more advanced communications and enhanced operational safety. Major Cristina Pampliega, Commander of the 803<sup>rd</sup> Squadron of the 48th Wing of the Spanish Air Force, welcomed the arrival of the NH90, referring to it as “the future” and calling it “a hugely important generational leap and a profound change that we are excited to be part of.” “The Spanish Navy has now taken delivery of its first two NH90s. The 14<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Squadron – created one year earlier with the specific remit of operating the NH90 MSPT variant – had already completed the necessary training in Albacete to prepare for the arrival of the helicopters. “The 60 members of the squadron were as excited as I was when the NH90 helicopters were delivered. We had made extensive preparations and were eager to proceed to the next phase. The Naval Station Rota facilities were ready to accommodate the aircraft, which will be used to carry out troop transport missions and special operations. All in all, we will receive three NH90 helicopters in 2025 and then complete our quota in 2026 with four additional units,” says Frigate Captain Javier Moreno, Commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Squadron, which forms part of the Navy’s aircraft fleet.

## FRONT-LINE ROLE IN FLOOD RELIEF

When severe flooding hit Valencia in October 2024, the Spanish Armed Forces’ NH90 helicopters played a crucial role in providing assistance. Major Cristina Pampliega recalls the extraordinary technical and human challenges they confronted on the mission: “The day after the floods, we already had an aircraft in Valencia. Our initial priorities were searching for potential victims and flying logistics missions to deliver water and to transport personnel and operational equipment. As the days passed, our role shifted towards reconnaissance



**1:** NH90s are serving every branch of the Spanish Armed Forces. Here the Army, Navy and Air Force NH90s are side by side.

**2:** Left to right: Frigate Captain Javier Moreno, Commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Squadron; Fernando Lombo, Managing Director for Airbus Helicopters in Spain; Fernando Mostaza, Flight Test Pilot for Airbus Helicopters in Spain; Lieutenant Colonel of Cavalry, Iñaki Ochoa; Major Cristina Pampliega, Commander of the 803<sup>rd</sup> Squadron of the 48<sup>th</sup> Wing of the Spanish Air Force.

of specific zones, including urban areas and the Poyo ravine. We provided essential support in determining where efforts should be directed and identifying the best ways of repairing dams and restoring other infrastructure. It was a tough mission for the crew because it was all so close to home.” The Spanish Army also played a key role with the deployment of its own NH90s – nicknamed ‘Sarrios’ – to the region. Lieutenant Colonel of Cavalry, Iñaki Ochoa, former member of the 3rd Manoeuvre Helicopter Battalion (BHELMA III), recalls:

“Our first task was to rescue people and get them to safety; that was the priority in those initial stages. From the third day onwards, our focus shifted towards transporting personnel and equipment to hard-to-reach areas and carrying out reconnaissance missions to assess damaged infrastructure.” Their efforts were hugely appreciated, as Ochoa attests: “You could see in people’s eyes how grateful they were that we were there. Every little bit of help is welcome when you’re caught up in a disaster of that scale.”

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innovation and strategic autonomy at a national level. Spain makes a vital industrial contribution to the global NH90 fleet, manufacturing all front and centre fuselages and handling pre-assembly work. Currently, around 200 people are employed on NH90-related activities at Airbus Helicopters in Spain, split between Getafe and Albacete, and covering engineering, programmes, MRO and aerostructures. The future of the NH90 programme in Spain is assured. On 13 May 2025, the Spanish Ministry of Defence and Airbus Helicopters signed a framework agreement for the Spanish National Helicopter Plan, which foresees a further expansion of NH90 fleets. Spain's NH90 programme clearly has a bright future ahead.

**6 & 7:** The MSPT variant of the NH90 is specifically designed to meet the rigorous operational requirements of the Spanish Navy for amphibious tactical transport.



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... OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT

The NH90 has also proven its robustness on missions outside Spanish territory. The international deployment in Mali posed some major challenges, but the helicopters performed exceptionally well, says Lieutenant Colonel Ochoa: "Like any first-time overseas deployment, it required extensive preparation and logistical planning. But once we arrived, the helicopters performed superbly, especially considering the country's extreme climate. Mali has two seasons – wet and dry – each challenging in its own way. During the wet season we were constantly flying through storms, but the helicopter did a fantastic job thanks to its weather radar. The challenge in the dry season was the dust, which is one of the toughest environments for a helicopter to deal with, but even then, we achieved a very high level of operational readiness."

ASSURED FUTURE

The impact of Spain's NH90 programme extends far beyond the country's military capabilities, offering tangible benefits in employment,



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**3 & 4:** NH90s delivered vital supplies following the devastating floods in Spain.

**5:** The Spanish Air Force's NH90, the first-ever to be delivered with Standard 3, ready for take-off.



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# The essential role of multi-mission helicopters in responding to crises

A rationalised fleet combined with uncrewed aerial systems means agility in maintenance, supply chain management, pilot training and operational costs. The future defence helicopter can be deployed to any kind of military and parapublic mission that can occur in a hybrid battlespace.



**Disaster relief**

**Uncrewed aerial systems**

For cargo transport in hostile environments

**Parapublic**

**MEDEVAC or combat search and rescue**

**Troop transport, fire support and special operations**

**Crewed-uncrewed teaming**

Extended surveillance capabilities

**COMMAND CENTRE**

**MAINTENANCE BASE**



# Golden hour; Golden Gate.





# A MILESTONE TO CELEBRATE

As the world’s largest helicopter lessor and with its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary fast approaching, Milestone Aviation Group has lots to celebrate. Success in an evolving industry driven by innovation and shifting market demands does not arrive by accident and CCO, Sebastien Moulin, explains why the success of lessors logically depends on the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs).

Article: Ben Peggie

“Anyone can buy helicopters—that’s the easiest part of the job,” notes Moulin. “However, the hardest part is to be able to put the assets on lease and to earn stable revenue from them. And of course, selling them at the right price—this is where the expertise lies.” To navigate this, a lessor’s strategy demands meticulous aircraft selection, requiring deep insight into market trends and foresight into how rotorcraft will perform across diverse mission sets over the lifespan of the asset.

STRATEGIC PORTFOLIO PLANNING

Lessors must ensure their portfolio aligns with enduring demands from the energy sector and growing mission-critical services like emergency medical services (EMS), search and rescue (SAR) and aerial firefighting. This careful selection is paramount for managing asset risk and ensuring long-term value. Milestone’s confidence in Airbus Helicopters products, representing around a third of its fleet, directly reflects this philosophy. The H160 is anticipated to secure greater market share in the medium segment



due to its performance. The H175 continues to prove its value in demanding offshore energy operations across the North Sea, Brazil and Australia. The versatile H225, with its proven capabilities, is successfully deployed across utility and SAR roles and is coming back in the offshore energy segment for some long-range missions. This strategic alignment ensures Milestone’s new deliveries directly address specific market needs, reinforcing supply-demand balance across the industry.

LESSORS AND OEMs: A VITAL PARTNERSHIP

Helicopter leasing offers operators a strategic, flexible approach to fleet management. Moulin explains that this model provides crucial financial agility. Instead of significant upfront capital expenditure, operators can secure 100% financing for advanced aircraft. This enables fleets to scale to meet new demands or adjust to changing requirements. “The real benefit we deliver is the flexibility to access assets without deploying capital in advance, thus alleviating the financial burden from the lessee, as well as the ability to return assets when contracts conclude,” Moulin states. This accelerates integration of new, more efficient rotorcraft technologies,



ensuring operators remain competitive. Milestone emphasises the need for a financially disciplined approach that focuses on sustainable growth, beneficial to the industry. Moulin underscores this shared responsibility for market health: “We feel like that’s the role we have for the whole industry as well. OEMs are producing new aircraft. We want to make sure we don’t fund an oversupply in this market.” Airbus Helicopters, as an OEM, brings essential product development, robust entry into service support and crucial certification processes. Moulin highlights this interdependence: “We cannot achieve anything without the OEM. Their role is to manufacture the finest product possible and navigate the entry into service.” Milestone’s early investment in platforms like the H160 demonstrates confidence in Airbus Helicopters’ innovation. In turn, OEMs provide lessors with long-term product support, upgrades and retrofitting capabilities vital for maintaining asset value and ensuring aircraft remain adaptable. As Moulin affirms, “An asset that is going to be retrofittable and where you can upgrade and improve the asset, this is how to ensure that we can make the return on the aircraft.” This continuous collaboration ensures significant investment yields sustained returns for all stakeholders.



**1:** Sebastien Moulin, CCO of Milestone Aviation.  
**2:** The Milestone Aviation team in front of its brand-new H160.  
**3:** The H225 remains an attractive platform for lessors like Milestone Aviation.



# BUILT FOR THE WILD: THE H125'S POWER IN TEXAS

The Texas Parks and Wildlife department (TPWD) performs an array of missions across the state's expansive and varied geography. Pilot Brandon Rose believes the H125 is the perfect fit for their operations as it has the power to deliver.

Article: Ben Peggie

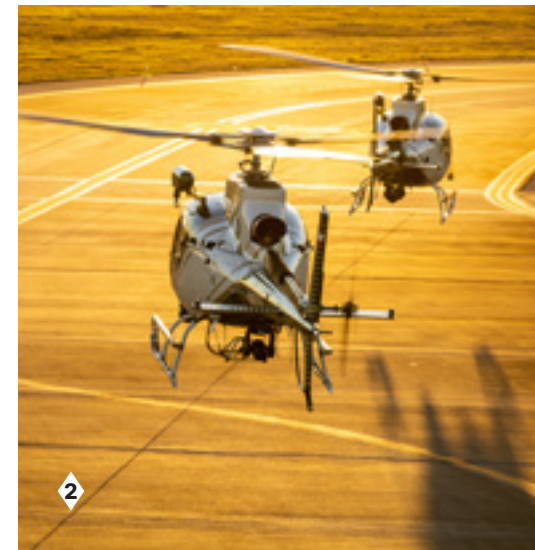
"The Parks and Wildlife Code says that we have jurisdiction wherever wildlife may range or stray," says Brandon Rose. "We have authority on land, both private or public, across the state to manage that conservation." Texas is a pretty big place so that is a massive area to cover; the team therefore relies on fixed-wing aircraft, uncrewed aerial systems and two H125 helicopters.

## A LITTLE BIT OF EVERYTHING

It isn't only the jurisdiction which is varied. Rose's team is responsible for a huge range of operations. "Our primary mission is conservation law enforcement," explains Rose. "We're out there patrolling for road hunters and all kinds

of conservation violations, from environmental crimes to wildlife patrols. We also play a big part in search and rescue (SAR) for the state of Texas. Both of our helicopters are hoist-equipped and we have used them on flooding missions. We recently just got into aerial firefighting with the helicopters, and both are capable of doing that with the Bambi Bucket. Aerial operations for TPWD also includes using aircraft for wildlife surveys. This could involve working with biologists as they count mule deer in West Texas or in the panhandle as they survey pronghorn antelope." That's not all though, as the department also offers support to law enforcement and scientific research missions. "We do general law enforcement and a lot of

1: The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's two H125 helicopters.



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assisting other agencies in the state that don't have their own aircraft," Rose says. "We also patrol: we have a joint agreement with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to fly river surveys around the state where we're looking for violations on the river beds, for example."

## RELIABLE IN CRITICAL SITUATIONS

With such a variety of missions, which are often literally life or death, TPWD needs their helicopters to be available for anything at any time. "I'd say for just about everything we do, we try to be really ready to go," agrees Rose. "To prepare for a flood-response SAR mission, that's going to take a little bit of preparation: taking out backseats, bringing in rescue equipment and so on. We try to be versatile and able to respond to anything as quick as we can." In addition to diverse geography, Texas has also faced threats from a variety of natural disasters. This past year, the department completed its first fire mission and expects to do more fire mitigation work in the future. "We've used it for the wildfires in Texas that we have, using it for waterbombing, to look out for burning homes or people trapped in the fire areas," says Rose. "I used the H125 during Hurricane Harvey and rescued 11 people from their rooftops and the flooding. I mean, you name it: missing children, missing elderly people. We've used it for a little bit of everything."

## KEEP ON HOISTING

The department only recently added the second H125 to their fleet and, according to Rose, opting to stick with this helicopter was not a difficult decision: "Based on performance



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and what we needed it to do, the missions we fly and the fact that we couldn't hoist out of the other helicopter under consideration, it was a no-brainer. We needed to keep hoisting in an H125." Rose believes the H125 is the perfect helicopter for the range of missions and the range of geographical challenges. "Texas contains a huge, broad range of habitats and terrains," he states. "From the gulf coast to the pines in East Texas to the mountains in West Texas and in the summer heat and the high altitudes of the mountains, when you're in a canyon flying a wildlife survey, you need the power. I would say the H125 has done really well at giving us the power we need in the state. The avionics all make sense where they're positioned, the visibility is great and it's got more power than anything I've flown."

2: From patrolling for road hunters and conservation violations to search and rescue, the Texas Parks and Wildlife's H125s are required for a wide range of missions.

3: 2024 saw the department perform its first-ever firefighting missions.

4: Brandon Rose, Texas Parks and Wildlife pilot, rescued 11 people during Hurricane Harvey.



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# FIVE-BLADED H145 TOUCHES DOWN IN WEST AFRICA

Since early 2025, an H145 has been operating offshore missions in Ivory Coast with operator IAS. And this is just the start of the story: the five-bladed H145's versatility and performance suggest a promising future across Africa.

Article: Alexandre Marchand

A quick clarification: There's IAS the group (International Aircraft Services), which comprises various companies operating helicopters and/or fixed-wing aircraft. Then there's IAS the company, a part of the eponymous group, which has been operating in Ivory Coast since 2002.

## FIVE BLADES: MULTI-MISSION

"The arrival of this aircraft in Ivory Coast is directly linked to the operations of the Italian operator ENI," emphasises Hugues Moreau, the group's CEO. "Following the discovery of a major oil field, we secured the contract to support offshore operations by proposing the H145." The aircraft has joined a fleet of several Dauphin helicopters already based in Abidjan, performing a wide range of

missions including offshore transport, VIP services and medical evacuations. The H145 arrived in early 2025 after a five-day ferry flight. Piloting the aircraft were two pilots trained at Kopter Safety in Finland. IAS now has five H145-qualified pilots.

## COST EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT AND READY TO FLY

Alexandra Rotaru, Commercial Director, highlights that "ENI's choice of this helicopter was notably driven by its lower carbon footprint compared to competitor aircraft. The H145 is qualified to use sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), and it's also more cost-effective to operate, more efficient and requires less maintenance. In short, it offers superior competitiveness."

## A FLEET AND FUTURE PLANS

The IAS Group currently operates a 100% Airbus Helicopters fleet, comprising seven Dauphin, two Ecureuil B2, and one H145. At least four additional Dauphin helicopters, including N3+ models, are expected to join the fleet within the next two years. This fleet development is underpinned by solid technical capabilities, as IAS has been an Airbus Helicopters Service Centre for the Dauphin and Ecureuil fleets for 14 years, and will very soon be for the H145. This growth is further supported by a systematic focus on local recruitment, involving the development of an air professions academy in Abidjan for roles from mechanics to pilots.



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Its primary mission involves transport to offshore energy platforms, located only about 50 NM from the coast. This relative proximity allows the H145 to be utilised to its maximum capacity, carrying two pilots and eight passengers, plus their luggage. When required, the helicopter can be fitted with a winch or stretcher for the medical evacuation of pre-stabilised patients. It is, of course, instrument flight rules (IFR) certified and capable of operating in all weather conditions.

## AN UNDENIABLE SUCCESS

"Our aircraft is operational six days a week, performing one to four rotations daily," says Hugues Moreau. "Flights are made to production platforms, facilities for exploratory drilling and supply vessels. In total, hundreds of people rely on the helicopter's mobility day and night." And that's how the H145, with its maintenance covered by a pay by the hour (PBH) contract with Airbus Helicopters, accumulates 50 to 80 flight hours each month. The success is undeniable. Having proven itself in Ivory Coast, the H145 would readily prove useful in any other geographical area. "Certainly, we acquired it to honour the contract with ENI, but we'd have no difficulty redeploying it elsewhere within our operations," explains Alexandra Rotaru. This observation perfectly aligns with IAS's ambitions, which extend far beyond Ivory Coast, aiming for gradual expansion across the entirety of West Africa. "One of our objectives for the coming months is to introduce a second H145 into the region," acknowledges Hugues Moreau.

1: The first five-bladed H145 ever to fly in Africa.

2: Hugues Moreau, CEO of IAS.

3: A scale model of IAS's H145. IAS will take delivery of a second H145 in the coming months.



# A 400M/H 225M: A WINNING DUO

In the Atlas Mountains of North Africa, small wild cats known as caracals can be found roaming freely. In the sky above them, Atlas and Caracal might also be seen together, but for very different reasons...

Article: Emmanuel Huberdeau

Atlas is the name given by the French Air and Space Force to the A400M heavy transport aircraft, while Caracal refers to the H225M, an 11-tonne helicopter. Both are multi-role aircraft developed by Airbus. Since the A400M's in-flight refuelling capability was approved for the French Air Force in early 2025, the two aircraft have become fully compatible. The H225M, the only helicopter with in-flight refuelling capabilities in the French Armed Forces, can now fully benefit from this partnership.

## DESIGNED FOR THE MOST DEMANDING MISSIONS

The H225M is one of the most versatile helicopters in the world, designed for the most demanding

missions, including special operations and search and rescue in combat zones. One of its strengths is its range, which can exceed 1,000 km under normal conditions. With in-flight refuelling, the H225M can go even further, with flights lasting over 10 hours. The French Air and Space Force has repeatedly demonstrated the potential of in-flight refuelling, both in operations and on exercise. The A400M has also proven its worth many times in operations and on exercise on every continent with the French Armed Forces: transporting troops and equipment, performing parachute drops, medical evacuations and evacuations of citizens. Its list of capabilities is long, but until recently there was still one left to validate; the Air and Space Force's A400Ms

have been refuelling fighter jets for several years, but their ability to refuel helicopters had not yet been tested by the French Armed Forces. That milestone has now been achieved.

## A REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT

Airbus had already demonstrated the A400M's ability to refuel helicopters in flight. Still, moving from an industrial qualification to a military qualification can take several months or even years. For the French Air Force, this process began in June 2023 with preliminary tests carried out by the Air Warfare Centre (Centre d'Expertise Aérienne Militaire) and the French Defence procurement Agency (DGA). Two further test campaigns followed in February and March 2024. In early 2025, the capability was deemed fully mature, and the Air and Space Force is now authorised to refuel its H225M Caracal helicopters in flight from its A400Ms in operations. France will eventually have five helicopter refuelling kits that can be adapted for the A400M. "Giving the A400M this capability was a remarkable achievement," explains Lieutenant Colonel Nicolas, A400M officer for the French Air and Space Force. "Imagine an aircraft with a maximum weight of 140 tonnes flying close to its stall speed of 110 knots so that it can match a helicopter's speed." According to the Air Force pilot, it is the A400M's excellent electronic flight controls that make this feat possible. Airbus had to update the A400M's flight control systems to adapt them to this very specific flight regime. The refuelling pods and handles were also specially adapted for helicopters. With the A400M and H225M, the French Air and Space Force has projection capabilities that are virtually unmatched worldwide. This is all the more impressive given that the H225M can be loaded onto the A400M and deployed anywhere in the world in a matter of hours. The Air Force can therefore quickly deploy both aircraft to carry out operations deep behind enemy lines, whether that involves deploying commandos or recovering ejected pilots. These capabilities far exceed what was predicted in theory, as was clearly demonstrated very recently during Exercise Athena, which took place from 12 to 23 May 2025 and saw the winning A400M Atlas - H225M Caracal duo in action for the first time in such an exercise.





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