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Aero India: MBDA and Rafael plan missile test-firings

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MBDA and Rafael will undertake live missile-firings of their respective short-range air-to-air missile (SRAAM) offerings for the Indian Air Force's (IAF's) Sepecat Jaguar IS/IM upgrade programme before the end of the year, it was revealed on 9 February.

Showcasing their offerings at the Aero India airshow, both companies said that, with live-firings set to take place in the UK and Israel sometime in the latter half of 2011, they would first undertake a series of captive-carry trials of their missiles in India.

MBDA is to offer its Advanced Short-Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM), while Rafael has submitted its Python 5. Integrating their missiles onto the Jaguar will pose a unique challenge to both the European and Israeli manufacturers as it is the only combat aircraft in service to utilise an over-wing missile rail. One of the key issues to be overcome will be in ensuring that the missile has a suitably high 'off the rail' speed to ensure that, when fired, it safely clears the aircraft.

The Indian Ministry of Defence issued a request for proposals (RfP) in 2009 to replace the incumbent Matra BAE R550 Magic 1 SRAAMs, which are no longer in production. Although the exact number of SRAAMs to be procured has not been released, it is understood that the IAF will be looking to buy between 350 and 400.

Before they were retired from service, the UK Royal Air Force's Jaguar aircraft were equipped with Raytheon AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, which were also located on over-wing hardpoints. However, a Raytheon spokesperson told *Jane's* that the company did not respond to the Indian RfP with its latest-generation AIM-9X on account of "a government-to-government issue".