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Aerospace Companies Come To Mexico

By Robert W. Moorman
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By anyone's standards, Mexico is a major player in the worldwide aerospace industry. In a relatively short time, this country of 113 million people has gone from a minor parts supplier to partner of several large aviation companies by consolidating its aerospace sector and constantly being on the lookout for new business.

Mexico has recorded growth of almost 20% annually in the last seven years, according to the Ministry of Economy. The ministry's "Strategic Program of the Aerospace Industry 2010-2020" projects exports of \$12.26 billion in 2012, with a 14% average annual growth rate.

Airbus, Bombardier and seven other OEMs have production facilities in Mexico, and the country is ranked the sixth-largest supplier of aeronautical products to the European Union and ninth to the U.S.

New business keeps coming to Mexico. At Farnborough, J. J. Churchill, a parts manufacturer, will announce plans to invest GBP5 million (\$8 million) in Guaymas, in the state of Sonora, to create an engine parts facility for Rolls-Royce in the U.S. and Canada.

Latecoere Group, a maker of aerostructures and wiring systems for aircraft, will announce plans for a new production facility in Hermosillo, Sonora, with production planned for the second half of 2012. Based on projected delivery rates announced by aircraft manufacturers, the site is expected to employ some 400 people by 2015.

In June, GE Aviation Systems and Embraer announced growth plans for their Mexican operations.

GE announced for the first time that Mexican engineers would participate in the design of air traffic and energy distribution systems, along with landing gear and fault testing design equipment. With these plans, the GE Advanced Engineering Center will grow from 1,400 engineers to 1,600, with 200 of those devoted exclusively to new development.

Embraer and Zodiac Aerospace announced an agreement this summer to manufacture cabin interior parts for the 170/190 family of commercial jets. The facility will be located in Mexico and reinforces a longtime partnership between the two companies.

Earlier this year, Turbomeca, a Safran company, announced the creation of Turbomeca Mexico, in the federal capital of Mexico, known as Federal District – DF. The operation will support users of Turbomeca engines in Mexico, Central America, Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador and Venezuela. At present, Safran has nine companies and more than 3,000 employees in Mexico.

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Aerospace Companies Come To Mexico (continued)

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Labinal, another Safran company specializing in electrical wiring systems, is opening a new \$10 million plant in Chihuahua sometime this year. "With this expansion, Labinal's plant in Chihuahua will become the largest of our plants," says Safran CEO Marc Ventre in the latest issue of MexicoNow.

Dutch company Fokker Technologies, which designs landing gears and electrical systems for the aerospace and defense industry, is starting operations in Chihuahua this year with an initial investment of \$15 million. "Announcements like this one are proof that Mexico is consolidating its position as the aerospace cluster of the future, due to its great labor and specialized workers," says Hans B uthker, president and COO of Fokker Technologies.

Mexico's strategic geographic location and competitive labor rates have always made the country attractive for aircraft manufacturers, MROs and other industry concerns. But its growing popularity and credibility as an aerospace partner are being helped in part by recent business-related developments.

With the creation of an efficient export control system, Mexico was admitted in late January into the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA). The WA comprises a group of more than 40 countries that include dual technologies in their industrial processes and exports. Since Mexico's admission into the WA, the country has achieved "new capabilities of market attraction and development," says Mario A. Gonz lez, investment officer for ProM xico, the country's economic development organization.

Efforts are currently under way with the major industry players to create the Integral Aviation Systems Center in Mexico, which among other duties, would help manage maintenance on mature fleets of engine and fuselages.

Work is also being done to attract young people to the aerospace business and related fields in Mexico. At present, there are more than 745,000 university students enrolled in engineering and technology programs in Mexico. Some 115,000 students graduate every year from engineering and technology programs in Mexico, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography and the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions.

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