

France begins deliberations on new aircraft carrier

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Technicians work near the propellers on the French nuclear aircraft carrier "Charles De Gaulle" that is in dry dock to undergo maintenance and repairs for eighteen months at the Naval base in Toulon, France, February 17, 2017. (REUTERS/File Photo)

Paris: France will make a decision on the replacement of its flagship aircraft carrier the Charles de Gaulle at the start of 2020, its armed forces minister said on Tuesday. The carrier has been in service since 2001 but Paris is looking to build a vessel that would take into consideration expected technological advances post-2030 and be capable of carrying a planned new Franco-German fighter jet.

"The Charles de Gaulle will need a successor," Florence Parly said in a speech at a defence exhibition in Paris. "The first step, which starts today, is the study phase to determine what and how we want our future aircraft carrier to be. We have given ourselves 18 months," she said.

Three other Western aircraft carriers have been built since the Charles de Gaulle was first deployed. The U.S. Navy's Gerald R. Ford and America, and the British Royal Navy's Queen Elizabeth, which cost about 3.1 billion pounds (\$4.03 billion). Parly said the study will assess the size requirements, propulsion options "both conventional and nuclear" and aircraft-launching capabilities.

A number of French defence firms, ranging from Rafale warplane maker Dassault to systems contractor Thales, are among companies involved in the study phase.

The French navy recently completed an 18-month mid-life upgrade of the Charles de Gaulle. Its most recent activity was as part of support operations against Islamic State militants in the Levant region and its battle group is due to return to sea in the first quarter of 2019.

- Reuters