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# Airbus Achieves First Autonomous H145 Flight in Texas

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Airbus completed the first autonomous flight of its H145 helicopter using Shield AI's Hivemind autonomy software, marking a key milestone in unmanned rotorcraft development. The flight took place in Grand Prairie, Texas, in June, with a safety pilot on board. The mission is part of the U.S. Marine Corps' Aerial Logistics Connector (ALC) program, which aims to deploy an autonomous helicopter capable of ship-to-shore logistics by 2029.

The test demonstrated the integration of Shield AI's Hivemind framework, which provides advanced artificial intelligence for autonomous flight. Airbus U.S. Space & Defense CEO Rob Geckle described the milestone as a significant step toward expanding unmanned mission capabilities for the Marine Corps. "We are bringing together the best across industry to deliver an aircraft that changes how unmanned operations can support missions across a wide range of logistics," Geckle said.

Airbus has been exploring uncrewed operations with the H145 since 2013. The company first announced plans to participate in the ALC program in 2024, aiming to develop an unmanned variant of the H145-based UH-72 Lakota utility helicopter. The twin-engine UH-72A currently serves as a primary training helicopter for the U.S. Army and supports utility missions for the Army National Guard, including disaster response. A newer five-bladed UH-72B model also fulfills similar roles.

The uncrewed variant, designated MQ-72C, relies on Hivemind to achieve fully autonomous operations. Shield AI's software is already used in advanced military experiments, including autonomous dogfighting tests with Lockheed Martin F-16s, where it demonstrated the ability to adapt and develop new tactics in flight.

"Hivemind was built to enable adaptable, intelligent flight across a wide range of aircraft," said Shield AI CEO Gary Steele. "This milestone shows how quickly capable teams can leverage that foundation."

Future MQ-72C models will feature extensive modifications, replacing the cockpit with a cargo compartment and adding rear and nose cargo access doors. Airbus has already completed two demonstration events with the U.S. Marine Corps and the Naval Air Systems Command to validate the helicopter's flight performance and cargo capabilities, with particular attention to operations in the Indo-Pacific region.

Carl Forsling, director of business strategy for Airbus U.S. Space & Defense, expressed confidence in meeting the 2029 ALC timeline. "We are confident we'll deliver a fieldable product by the end of ALC and potentially transition into either a program of record or rapid fielding initiative," Forsling said.

The Hivemind software will be paired with a new fly-by-wire flight-control system, enhancing the helicopter's existing automation. Features will include autonomous takeoffs

and landings, obstacle avoidance, and real-time assessment of landing zones, significantly expanding operational capabilities beyond traditional autopilot functions.

While the ALC program is the current focus, Airbus anticipates that the MQ-72C could attract interest from other U.S. military branches and international partners. Forsling noted the long-term goal of multiple design variants capable of optionally piloted and fully autonomous flight profiles.

Competitors in the ALC program include Near Earth Autonomy with Honeywell, which is modifying the Leonardo Helicopters AW139, and Sikorsky, which has developed an Optionally Piloted Vehicle variant of the UH-60 Black Hawk, achieving its first fully autonomous flight in 2022.