

Cameroon's Bastion APCs now in action

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The Cameroonian Rapid Intervention Battalions (BIR) are now fielding Mack Defense Bastion armoured personnel carriers (APCs), *Jane's* confirmed during a visit to the BIR base at Salak, the headquarters of Operation Alpha, the elite force's deployment in the Far North Region.



A BIR Bastion in Cameroon's Far North Region in April. (Erwan de Cherisey)

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The vehicles were built by the French company ACMAT – which is a subsidiary of Arqus (formerly Renault Trucks Defense) and, like Mack Defense, part of the Volvo Group – under an order announced in 2015 by the US Department of Defense (DoD) for 62 vehicles.

The DoD originally stated that the recipients would be Cameroon, Ethiopia, Somalia, Tunisia, and Uganda, but an industry source told *Jane's* that Kenya would receive 12, but none would be delivered to Somali or Ethiopian forces. The source said 31 have been delivered to Uganda and four to Tunisia.

The BIR received 15 Bastions in late 2017 and deployed them to the Far North for operations against the militant group known as Boko Haram, a BIR officer told *Jane's*. The vehicles are known as Cyclones in BIR service.

An industry executive told *Jane's* the vehicles delivered to Cameroon are modified Bastions with the raised roof of the Fortress (formerly known as the Bastion HM) and a higher level of protection than the standard Bastion. They have heavier bullet-resistant windows and add-on armour mounted on both sides of the hull, making them heavier than the 12 tonne standard Bastion, but they retain the standard 180 hp engine.

Few details were provided about the vehicle's performance, but the BIR officer noted that the Bastion has good mobility, especially when compared with the heavier General Dynamics Peace Keeping Security Vehicle (PKSV) that the BIR also uses.

BIR personnel praised the exceptional robustness and very high resistance to mines and improvised explosive devices of the PKSVs that were donated by the United States in 2015 and 2016.

The BIR also received two Oshkosh FMTV A1P2 6x6 trucks from the United States in April, the BIR officer said. The FMTVs are equipped with an LTAS B-Kit armoured cab and are being used for logistics.

They were delivered under a USD378 million contract that the DoD awarded to Oshkosh in 2016. The order covered 1,543 FMTVs for Cameroon, Iraq, and Somalia, but did not say how many each country would receive.

The BIR's Rapid Intervention Airmobile Group (GIRAM) also acquired a single Beechcraft Super King Air 350 transport aircraft in November 2017. This is currently based in Yaoundé and used for liaison duties, a GIRAM officer said.

This article, first published on 6 June 2018, is subject to a correction and has been amended.

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| The delivery of more US-donated vehicles shows Washington's continued commitment to supporting the Cameroonian military, especially the BIR. Indeed, a US military detachment is presently deployed in the Far North and regularly interacts with BIR forces. Additional equipment donations are expected in the future and could include more PKSVs. |