Boeing Airborne Surveillance Testbed Tracks Missiles With New Seeker

The Boeing Airborne Surveillance Testbed (AST) aircraft, has completed a major milestone by successfully tracking two U.S. Navy missiles with the Navy's new Captive Carry SM-3 seeker built by Raytheon Missile Systems in Tucson, Ariz.

This infrared sensor, installed in the AST's cupola, is being tested in support of the Navy's Theater-Wide Missile program. Boeing is testing the SM-3 seeker subsystem to verify it can acquire and track representative theater ballistic missile targets. In the future, this advanced seeker will be integrated with the Navy's next generation of theater ballistic interceptor missiles.

Two target missiles were launched from the Kauai Test Facility in Hawaii with the sensor successfully acquiring and tracking the targets using missile tracks developed by range radar and transmitted to the AST. The AST aircraft used its primary sensor to collect data on both launches to validate the data captured by the SM-3 seeker and to assess the performance of the target vehicles.

"We are extremely pleased with what we learned from the Captive Carry seeker performance in tracking live targets. These test launches validate the Navy's "build-a-little, test-a-little" approach to reduce risks and costs for the AEGIS LEAP intercept missions for fiscal years 1999-2002," said Charlotte Lin, Boeing AST program manager.

The AST project is a technology demonstration program that supports development and evaluation of defensive systems to counter intercontinental and theater ballistic missiles and their warheads.

Under contract with the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command, the AST, a modified 767 with a large cupola housed above the fuselage, also carries a long-wavelength infrared sensor in the cupola's forward module. This primary sensor, which is sensitive enough to detect the heat of a human body at a distance of more than 1,000 miles, has demonstrated an unmatched capability to detect, track and discriminate rocket or missile targets from other components, debris and decoys.

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