Boeing Begins Upgrade Of NATO AWACS Aircraft

Boeing [NYSE: BA] has begun upgrading the first NATO Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft as part of the NATO Mid-Term Modernization Program.

Under the $450 million mid-term engineering, manufacturing and development (EMD) contract, Boeing will integrate major system-related enhancements to computers, displays, communications navigation and target identification.

The upgrade will be performed in Wichita, Kan., and Seattle. Installation and checkout are scheduled to be completed by next summer, with qualification testing complete by spring of 2001.

Retrofit of the entire fleet of 17 aircraft will be implemented during a follow-on contract.

"These upgrades will significantly enhance the capability of the NATO AWACS system, allowing it to perform its current and future missions with greater effectiveness and efficiency," said Kathryn Whiting, Boeing NATO AWACS program manager.

The enhancements include:

- Installing state-of-the-art, flat-panel situation displays with a Windows-like environment to support the interaction between operators and sensor systems, increasing the operator's efficiency and situational awareness. Multi-Sensor Integration will merge all information about a specific target into a single computer track -- which shows a target's direction and speed -- improving the reliability and accuracy of the tracking process and target identification.
- Replacing the mission computing system with an open-system architecture, which will support cost-effective, future insertion of commercial hardware and software.
- Installing digital communications systems to improve crew access to available radio links and provide automatic record and replay of communication and display data. Satellite communications will be integrated into the mission system, offering improved over-the horizon communication via satellite links.
- Adding broad-spectrum VHF radios that will support increased operations with European nations' air and ground forces. Improved identification capability will provide compatibility with emerging international air traffic control systems.
- Upgrading aircraft navigation by taking advantage of the new Global Positioning System.

The E-3 AWACS fills the needs of both airborne surveillance, and command control communications functions for NATO air and maritime forces. An "eye in the sky," AWACS has a 360-degree view of the horizon, and can track air and sea targets simultaneously.

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