Boeing SLAM-ER Successfully Demonstrates In-Flight Flex-Targeting

The U.S. Navy last week successfully demonstrated the Boeing [NYSE:BA] SLAM-ER missile in-flight flex-targeting, completing testing of the missile's new land midcourse update capability.

The flight test result allows for operational use of the SLAM-ER through field software uploads to missiles in the fleet. SLAM-ER is the first strike weapon that can be retargeted post-launch. Initial operational capability of the new software for the fleet is planned for January 2004. Sequence of test events were as follows:

- SLAM-ER launches from an F/A-18 on a predetermined flight path
- Seeker pointed at initial target
- Missile matches precisely on target and begins guiding to it using Automatic Target Acquisition (ATA) with General Pattern Matching (GPM)
- Mission control pilot assesses target already hit from missile video and ATA annotation (the target had been set on fire, simulating a previous hit)
- Mission control pilot sends new target coordinates several miles away and several thousand feet higher in altitude through the missile digital data link
- After mission control pilot conducts routine aimpoint refinements on the new flex target, the missile scores a perfect hit

"Now we are using the data link to really multiply weapon value," explained Jim O'Neill, general manager, Naval Weapons, for Boeing. "With real time flex-targeting, the Navy can actually do better than the goal of one missile per target by assigning single missiles to multiple targets, and then redirecting them in-flight to the highest priority nodes based on what the pilot sees on missile video."

"In Operation Iraqi Freedom, SLAM-ER's video link provided valuable bomb damage assessment to the mission planners," said Kurt Mizgate, SLAM-ER integrated product team leader, for Boeing. "The SLAM-ER pilots not only identified the true locations, they re-targeted the missiles using aimpoint refinement alone to hit those targets."

Operational flex-targeting demonstrated in this flight is an important step to the next challenge for SLAM-ER -- moving land targets. The SLAM-ER and F/A-18 development teams are currently making the final modifications to aircraft and missile software to allow SLAM-ER to hit moving land targets from standoff ranges. Captive tests conducted earlier this year verified that SLAM-ER can attack moving land targets with streaming midcourse updates from F/A-18 Multifunctional Information Distribution System (MIDS) using existing network rates and targeting sources, such as JSTARS and UAVs.

Produced by Boeing in St. Charles, Mo., SLAM-ER capability to hit moving ship targets with streaming midcourse updates became operational in the fleet last year. Next year, the Navy expects to complete free flight testing of the moving land target capability for operational release to the fleet in 2005.

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