Boeing X-45A Unmanned Aircraft Flies with T-33

Boeing [NYSE: BA] X-45A unmanned aircraft took a major step forward in aviation when it successfully communicated with a manned T-33 aircraft while in flight May 7 at NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center, Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

The Joint Unmanned Combat Air Systems (J-UCAS) X-45A technology demonstrator exchanged data with the other aircraft through a capability called Fighter Data Link, a secure communications link used to electronically transfer digital information. Operating at 14,000 ft and 228 mph, the X-45A and T-33 maneuvered around each other and ensured they could maintain a solid communications link.

"Our first efforts at cooperative flight between the X-45A and T-33 went extremely well," said Darryl Davis, Boeing Joint Unmanned Combat Air Systems X-45 Program Manager. "This test allows us to push ahead to a huge milestone in our program's history -- flying both X-45A unmanned aircraft at the same time in coordinated flight."

To achieve that goal, the program will soon fly the X-45A and T-33 with a ground operator managing both aircraft. The T-33 will be flown by on-board UCAS avionics that are coupled through an autopilot system. Following completion of that test series, a multiple-vehicle coordinated flight will take place this summer using both X-45A demonstrator aircraft.

The J-UCAS X-45 program is a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency/U.S. Air Force/U.S. Navy/Boeing effort to demonstrate the technical feasibility, military utility and operational value of an unmanned air combat system for both the Air Force and the Navy. Operational missions for the services may include suppression of enemy air defenses; deep strike; electronic attack, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

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