Boeing X-45A Unmanned Aircraft Taxi Together; Ready for Multi-Vehicle Flight

Two Boeing [NYSE: BA] X-45A unmanned aircraft taxied together recently when they moved under their own power in a coordinated ground operation at NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center, Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

A single pilot-operator controlled both of the Joint Unmanned Combat Air Systems (J-UCAS) X-45A technology air vehicles as they demonstrated a series of maneuvers, including 90-degree turns and turnarounds, at speeds of up to 20 knots. The two X-45 aircraft autonomously maintained their positions relative to each other through an inter-vehicle communication link.

"This taxi exercise was crucial in our path towards flying the X-45 aircraft in coordinated flight this summer," said Darryl Davis, Boeing Joint Unmanned Combat Air Systems X-45 program manager. "Our test team even introduced several failure modes and the air vehicles responded autonomously by ensuring proper separation was maintained."

The next major milestone for the program will be the demonstration of multiple-vehicle coordinated flight using both X-45A demonstrator aircraft. The X-45C, a much larger version of the A model, is being built by Boeing in St. Louis, with its first flight scheduled for mid-2006.

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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For further information:
Bill Barksdale
Boeing Air Force Systems
office: (314) 232-0860
mobile: (314) 707-3294
william.a.barksdale@boeing.com