Boeing X-45A Aircraft Fly Together for First Time

Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., home of the U.S. Air Force Flight Test Center, where the sound barrier was broken on October 14, 1947 , hosted another aviation milestone on Sunday. The historic event took place as two Boeing [NYSE: BA] X-45A unmanned aircraft, under the control of a single pilot-operator, successfully operated together in a coordinated flight completing the first ever multiple air vehicle control flight demonstration.

The groundbreaking mission began when both Joint Unmanned Combat Air Systems (J-UCAS) X-45A technology demonstrators departed in succession from NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center at Edwards Air Force Base. After joining up over the test range, the air vehicles demonstrated coordinated operations by flying preset formations that involved autonomous maneuvering to hold their relative positions. The two X-45A aircraft were able to fly the same mission plan on their own which significantly reduced their pilot-operator's workload.

"Our X-45 team has demonstrated that a single pilot can manage multiple unmanned aircraft during all phases of a coordinated flight," said Darryl Davis, Boeing J-UCAS X-45 program manager, "This event is very significant because it is the first step in demonstrating the ability of this distributed weapons system to coordinate operations in a high-threat environment."

Once the demonstration was completed, both unmanned combat air vehicles (UCAVs) returned safely to the base, landed on a common runway and taxied to the shutdown location.

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; strike; electronic attack; and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

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