Boeing Begins Production Retrofit on NATO AWACS Fleet

Major mission system enhancements are being installed on the first of 17 NATO AWACS aircraft as part of the $1.32 billion Mid-Term Modernization program.

EADS, as subcontractor to Boeing [NYSE: BA], is performing the work in Manching, Germany. It's expected to be completed in Nov. 2006 with the entire fleet scheduled to be upgraded in 2008. Boeing also will upgrade the two NATO AWACS mission simulators into the mid-term configuration.

"When deploying assets into harms way, information becomes a critical need," said Mark Ellis, Boeing NATO AWACS program manager. "This is one of many enhancements supporting the NATO Rapid Response Force such as added communications with ground troops and voice and data satellite communications to reach back to the ground centers. All of these communications are managed through a digital communications distribution system on board the AWACS."

This highly flexible mission system provides NATO AWACS aircraft with the ability to receive modified mission orders digitally from a remote location after a mission is underway and electronically integrate the new orders into the mission computing system. A multi sensor integrator provides an improved recognized air and surface picture with the integration of data from various sensors, as well as from other sources, and an increased capacity in the number of targets it can track.

Ellis says the capability means increased interoperability with more assets including other AWACS or Airborne Early Warning and Control fleets, ground stations, fighter aircraft, UAVs, ships and satellites and is combined with an updated Identification Friend or Foe system.

Production retrofit follows an operational and test and evaluation program in Europe earlier this year when NATO crews assessed the capability of the improved mission system. The enhancements include:

- New work-station consoles with flat-panel situation displays comparable to Windows
- A mission computing system with an open architecture allowing cost-effective future upgrades to the hardware and software.
- Multi-Sensor Integration to improve the reliability and accuracy of the tracking process and target identification;
- 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 a wider range of improved over-the horizon communication via satellite links;
- Upgraded aircraft navigation that takes advantage of the new Global Positioning System;
- Broad-spectrum VHF radios to support increased operations with Eastern European nations' air and ground forces.

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