Boeing Selects Supplier for Super Hornet Block II Infrared Search and Track Capability

The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA] has selected Lockheed Martin's Missiles and Fire Control division to supply up to 150 Infrared Search and Track (IRST) systems for Super Hornet Block II aircraft. The selection of the Lockheed IRST system for this U.S. Navy program follows a rigorous and competitive request for information process.

"IRST is yet another addition to the Super Hornet Block II arsenal, and it will truly change the nature of the air-to-air fight," said Capt. Donald "BD" Gaddis, U.S. Navy F/A-18E/F and EA-18G program manager, PMA-265. "Sensor-fused data from IRST, AESA, ALR-67(v)3 digitally cued receiver and off board information will ensure the Super Hornet Block II dominates and survives against the most challenging air threats well past 2024."

Boeing expects to receive the initial IRST development contract from the Navy in the summer of 2008. The total contract value is expected to exceed $500 million through the development and production phases of the program.

"Integration of IRST significantly enhances the capability of the Super Hornet Block II by providing multi-spectral air-to-air targeting," said Bob Gower, vice president, Boeing F/A-18 programs. "IRST, a key component of the Super Hornet's 'Flight Plan,' will provide the warfighter with unprecedented on-board situational awareness and enhance the engagement range of modern high-performance air-to-air weapons."

The Flight Plan is a roadmap of planned capability enhancements that will allow the Super Hornet Block II to remain ahead of emerging threats, while addressing warfighting needs in an integrated, cost effective manner.

"The taxpayer is benefiting from Boeing's early selection of a supplier," added Gower. "Boeing and Lockheed Martin are partnering to invest more than $10 million to conduct a risk reduction demonstration, with U.S. Navy participation, prior to the start of the IRST development contract."

IRST is a passive, long-range sensor system that searches for and detects long-wave IR emissions within its field of view. It can track several targets simultaneously and provide an effective air-to-air targeting capability, even when facing advanced threats with radar jamming equipment.

Boeing will conduct a prototype flight demonstration in the first quarter of 2008, using a modified 480-gallon centerline fuel tank to house the IRST system. The modified fuel tank provides a cost effective, software-only integration approach, requiring no structural or wiring changes to the aircraft. This supports potential integration of IRST on existing and future F/A-18E/F/G aircraft.

The production system will contain more than 330 gallons of fuel in addition to providing the IRST capability. First production deliveries of IRST systems are expected in 2012, with initial operational capability anticipated in 2013.

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