Boeing Achieves First Submerged Unmanned Undersea Vehicle Recovery by a Submarine

The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA] has successfully demonstrated for the first time that an unmanned undersea vehicle (UUV) can be recovered by an underway submerged submarine, opening up new possibilities for advanced naval operations.

During recent tests, a U.S. Navy attack submarine launched the AN/BLQ-11 UUV from one of its torpedo tubes. The vehicle, formerly called the Long-term Mine Reconnaissance System (LMRS), then returned to the vessel, where the system's robotic arm retrieved it into the submarine.

"With this recent success, Boeing has taken another important step in UUV development by demonstrating that the unmanned vehicle can return to the submarine and be recovered by a robotic arm," said Dan Jones, director of Boeing Advanced Information Systems, a division of Boeing Space and Intelligence Systems. "This milestone represents a critical next step for the U.S. Navy and opens the door for a whole new set of advanced submarine missions."

The at-sea UUV tests follow earlier assessments during which Boeing and the Navy proved that the UUV could successfully home and dock with the system's robotic arm, while the submarine was underway.

This milestone was achieved with a U.S. Navy attack submarine on its first attempt and repeated two days later on the second attempt. The AN/BLQ-11 system demonstrated all of the elements required for a complete UUV launch and recovery evolution. The U.S. Navy then secured from testing after having met all test objectives in half the allotted time.

AN/BLQ-11 also performed several complex vehicle maneuvers during the tests, including station keeping and so-called "shadow submarine" during which the system operates underwater alongside the host submarine. Vehicle and system performance, deemed solid and predictable throughout the event, support the Navy's decision to pursue 21-inch diameter submarine-deployed UUVs.

The U.S. Navy's Unmanned Undersea Vehicle program office selected Boeing in 1999 to work on the LMRS program, today called the AN/BLQ-11 system. The AN/BLQ-11 is designed to launch from the host submarine's torpedo tube to survey, detect and gather data on underwater threats such as mines that could pose significant risk to sailors. After completing its mission, the vehicle homes and docks with a robotic arm that extends from another of the host submarine's torpedo tubes for recovery back through the launch tube. The system allows operators to retrieve data from the vehicle and prepare it for re-launch.

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