News Release

Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency
3701 North Fairfax Drive
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UNMANNED COMBAT AIR VEHICLE COMPLETES FIRST FLIGHT

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)/U.S. Air Force/Boeing X-45A Unmanned Combat Air Vehicle (UCAV) technology demonstration aircraft completed its first flight on May 22. The 14-minute flight is a key first step to provide a transformational combat capability for the Air Force later this decade.

X-45A flew at NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center on Edwards Air Force Base in Calif., reaching an airspeed of 195 knots and altitude of 7,500 feet. Flight characteristics and basic aspects of aircraft operations, particularly the command and control link between the aircraft and mission-control station, were successfully demonstrated. The research programs conducted under a partnership between Air Force Research Laboratory and DARPA produced the unique set of technologies that led to this historic flight.

Col. Michael Leahy, USAF, DARPA's program manager for UCAV, explained the significance of the flight.

"This flight represents a significant jump in our quest to mature the technologies, processes and system attributes required to integrate UCAVs into the future Air Force," Leahy said. "UCAVs will effectively and affordably perform extremely hazardous missions such as the suppression of enemy air defenses while greatly reducing the risk our aircrews have to face."

Later this year, a second X-45A will begin flying, leading to the start of multi-aircraft flight-test demonstrations next year. Those coordinated flight tests are the technical heart of the program and the key to unlocking the transformational potential of this revolutionary weapon system. Further testing will continue to explore the boundaries of intelligent unmanned combat operations, culminating in FY 2006 with UCAVs and manned aircraft operating together during an exercise.

The X-45A aircraft is an initial demonstrator for the UCAV system, which is on a seamless path toward an operational system for the Air Force. The next step on this path is the X-45B, which is currently being designed. The X-45B will be larger and more capable than its predecessor, and incorporate low-observable technologies. The X-45B will be a fieldable prototype aircraft that will lay the foundation for an initial operational system towards the end of this decade.

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Media with questions, please contact Jan Walker, (703) 696-2404, or jwalker@darpa.mil. Additional information and photos of the flight are available via the Web (www.darpa.mil/ucav). A telephone press conference with Col. Leahy is planned for 12:00 noon Eastern Time on May 23. Interested media should call the teleconference number, (719) 867-0700, by 11:55 a.m. Eastern Time.