NORTHROP RECEIVES $3.2BN TO SUPPORT USAF GLOBAL HAWK

News / Manufacturer

The US Air Force has awarded **Northrop Grumman** a **$3.2 billion** contract to sustain and modernise all variants of the RQ-4 Global Hawk unmanned air vehicle.

Northrop will support the development, modernisation, retrofit and sustainment of all of the **USAF**'s RQ-4s until 30 September 2025, with orders to be made by 30 September 2020.

The **Global Hawk** will eventually be the sole provider of high-altitude, long-endurance surveillance for the air force, replacing the manned Lockheed Martin U-2.

The USAF has pushed back the U-2's planned retirement from 2016 until 2019, giving it more time to upgrade the Global Hawk before finally retiring the ageing type. It is not clear, however, which modernisation activities will be covered under the $3.2 billion contract.

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US Air Force

Proposed future modernisation efforts for the Global Hawk include a universal payload adaptor, which would carry various sensors imported from the U-2, including the United Technologies Aerospace Systems (UTAS) optical bar camera and SYERS-2C radar.

A co-operative research and development agreement for the payload adapter was signed on 14 July with the USAF which will lead to a demonstration, expected to take place with a UTAS MS-177 multispectral sensor.

The USAF's Scientific Advisory Board also suggested in August that the RQ-4 could be upgraded with technology such as radar warning receivers, and have new weapons integrated, to provide

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more capability. The board says that adding readily-available sensors, weapons, and threat detection and countermeasures equipment to the RQ-4 – plus the General Atomics Aeronautical Systems MQ-9 Reaper – could provide better situational awareness and enable the aircraft to be deployed on more risky operations in future.

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