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Pentagon spends billions developing space weapon against China, Iraq and Iran

By Global Research

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The Pentagon is spending billions of dollars on new forms of space warfare to counter the growing risk of missile attack from rogue states and the “satellite killer” capabilities of China.

Congress has allocated funds to develop futuristic weapons and intelligence systems that operate beyond the Earth’s atmosphere as America looks past Iraq and Afghanistan to the wars of the future.

The most ambitious project in a new $459 billion defence spending Bill is the Falcon, a reusable “hypersonic vehicle” that could fly at six times the speed of sound and deliver 12,000lb of bombs anywhere in the world within minutes.

The bombs’ destructive power would be multiplied by the Earth’s gravitational pull as they travelled at up to 25 times the speed of sound towards their target.

The cost of the vehicle has not been revealed, but a spokesman for the Pentagon‘s Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (Darpa) said a first test flight was scheduled for next year.

Loren Thompson, a leading defence analyst in Washington, said the focus of the project was attacking “time sensitive targets” in states such as North Korea and Iran, which have either developed nuclear weapons without international approval or are suspected of doing so, *telegraph.co.uk* reports.

“If we received intelligence that a strike was about to happen on South Korea, or on Israel, we would want to destroy that within minutes and not hours. But from most current US bases that is not feasible.

“With a hyper-sonic vehicle launching from the Middle East or Asia you could be over hostile territory within minutes,” he said. “It’s not just a question of can we destroy North Korean weapons, but can we get there quickly enough in the event of an imminent launch?”

As of early 2006, the the Falcon Hypersonic Technology Vehicle program planned an initial flight for a less than one-hour flight in September 2007 [later delayed]. The Falcon HTV-1 was to complete its inaugural voyage in the Pacific Ocean. Attaining Mach 19 speed, the glided air vehicle will briefly exit the Earth’s atmosphere and reenter flying between 19 and 28 miles above the planet’s surface. Demonstrating hypersonic glide technology and setting the stage for HTV-2 represent the primary focus of the lower risk, lower performance initial

flight. During the early part of the flight, it acts like a spacecraft. In the middle phase, the HTV reenters the atmosphere like the Space Shuttle, and in the latter stage, it flies like an aircraft.

For the second glided demonstration, scheduled for 2008 or 2009, the Falcon HTV-2 will feature a different structural design, enhanced controllability, and higher risk, performance factors during its high-speed journey. Like its predecessor, the system will reach Mach 22 speed, and then finish its one-hour plus mission in the Pacific Ocean. On the other hand, the third, and final, Falcon HTV, slated for flight in 2009, will be a departure from the previous two demonstrations. The reusable hypersonic glider will lift off from NASA's Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, Va., and then over an hour later, be recovered in the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, the HTV-3, flying at a maximum of Mach 10 speed, will be designed to achieve high aerodynamic efficiency and to validate external heat barrier panels that will be reusable.

Flight achieving hypersonic speed, ranging from 6,000 to 15,000 miles per hour (Mach 9 to Mach 22), and reaching altitudes between 100,000 to 150,000 feet, requires an airframe structure designed to survive intense heat and pressure. An important component of this critical technology, the all carbon aeroshell, must keep from being crushed or burned up in this environment. To keep the vehicle interior cool, an advanced multi-layer insulation is being created for long duration flights. In addition, researchers are designing tools for enhanced HTV navigation and maneuverability resulting in robust aerodynamic performance.

The program will also explore the initiation of an operational system. This will include completing the operational requirements documentation, studying least provocative basing alternatives, enhancing international transparency, and conducting effectiveness demonstrations and payload survivabilty assessments. Four Phase I contracts were awarded in November 2003, Other Transaction Agreements, with a duration of 6 months. A downselect between the four Phase I contractors occurred in August 2004 for Phase II with a single award using an Other Transaction Agreements contract vehicle planned through 2009. The follow-on PGS effort will begin with competitions in 2008, www.*globalsecurity.org* reports.
