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# Air Force to convert 30 F-16 jet fighters to target drones in \$34.4 million order to Boeing

March 30, 2016

By John Keller

Editor

**EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla., 30 March 2016.** Military avionics experts at the Boeing Co. will convert 30 retired U.S. Air Force Lockheed Martin F-16 jet fighters into sophisticated manned and unmanned target [drones](#) under terms of a \$34.4 million order announced Monday.

Officials of the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., are awarding a contract modification the Boeing Defense, Space & Security segment in St. Louis to handle the conversion of 30 F-16 fighters into [unmanned](#) QF-16 full-scale aerial targets (FSATs).

Boeing won a \$28.5 million contract in March 2015 to convert 25 retired F-16 fighters in QF-16 target drones. Monday's order exercises an option on that contract.

The Air Force has used converted jet fighters as target drones for decades, beginning in the 1960s when the Air Force converted 24 Lockheed F-104 Starfighter jets into target drones.

Other U.S. jet fighters, including the F-100, F-102, F-106, and F-4, have become target drones. Air Force experts use converted jet fighters as target drones to test sophisticated missiles and electronic warfare systems.

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Although some of these retired jet fighter target drones are destroyed during weapons tests, often the drones rely on onboard sensors to calculate the point of missile detonations to record "kills" without destroying the target aircraft.

Monday's order represents lot 4 of the Air Force's planned QF-16 target drone buy. These aircraft are replacing the Air Force's fleet of QF-4 target drones, which are converted McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom jet fighters, which were phased out of active service in the 1980s.

The newer QF-16s are bringing a new level of sophistication to U.S. supersonic target drone capability. The F-16 is a fourth-generation fighter, and brings new challenges for weapons testing over the third-generation F-4.

Boeing started converting F-16s into the first QF-16 drones in 2010. Company experts strip down retired F-16 fighters to remove unnecessary parts like the jet's 20-millimeter cannon and APG-66/68 radar. Boeing alters the aircraft to fly unmanned or with human pilots.

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Boeing also installs a flight termination system that can destroy the drone if it goes out of control, command telemetry systems so operators can control the drone can be controlled from the ground, a scoring system to gauge the accuracy of air-to-air missiles fired at the drone, as well as avionics packages to enable these plans to fly unmanned.

This lot-4 F-16 conversion will bring the QF-16 fleet to 106. Air Force leaders are expected to buy a total of 120 QF-16 target drones through 2019. Optionally Air Force leaders are considering buying a total of 210 QF-16 through 2022. The fleet should last until 2025.

threat to military capability and innovation

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The first manned QF-16 flight was in May 2012, and the plane's first unmanned flight was in September 2013. On Monday's contract, Boeing will do the work at Cecil Field in Jacksonville, Fla., and should be finished by April 2018.

For more information contact Boeing Defense, Space & Security online at [www.boeing.com/defense](http://www.boeing.com/defense), or the Air Force Air Force Life Cycle Management Center at [www.wpafb.af.mil](http://www.wpafb.af.mil).



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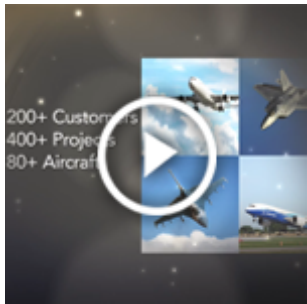
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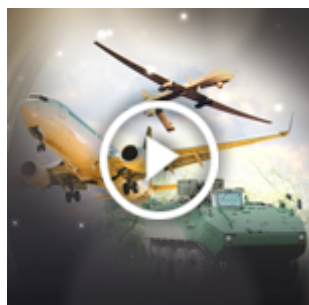
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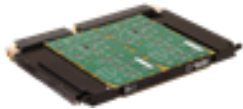


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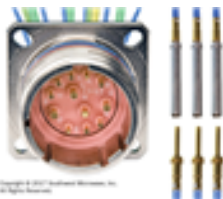
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