UK Drone draws inspiration from Celtic mythology

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For proof that unmanned systems represent the future of warfare, check out BAE Systems' new Unmanned Combat Aircraft System (UCAS), Taranis [1]. Resembling something out of The Terminator, Taranis (named after the Celtic God of Thunder) is a sight to behold. It certainly passes the "fecalator [2]" test of weapons systems.

Though Taranis' exact capabilities are classified, the UCAS is designed to be an "unmanned, stealthy autonomous combat aircraft." Over one million man-hours were spent building the Taranis, and its sleek design actually contributes to its low-observability.

How cool is the Taranis? Purportedly, the UCAS will be able to strike targets "in another continent [3]." According to BAE's site, Taranis will be able to "hold an adversary at continuous risk of attack; to penetrate deep inside hostile territory, find a target, facilitate either kinetic or non kinetic influence upon it, assess the effect achieved, and provide intelligence back to commanders."

BAE Systems' Taranis Unmanned Combat Aircraft System (UCAS), named after the Celtic God of Thunder.

While the service ceiling, speed, and endurance are classified, we do know its approximate length and wingspan (39 ft and 32.8 ft, respectively). For reference, the MQ-9 Reaper [4] is 36 ft long, with a wingspan of 66 ft. Of course, the Reaper is anything but stealthy.

Though described as "autonomous", this isn't quite Skynet. Details were sparse, but Taranis won't exactly be given free reign on the battlefield. Accordingly, any systems based on this design will be "under the command of highly skilled ground based operators who will also be able to remotely pilot the aircraft."

According to Nigel Whitehead [5], Group Managing Director of BAE Systems' Programmes and Support business, Taranis "represents a significant step forward in this country's fast-jet capability. This technology is key to sustaining a strong industrial base and to maintain the UK's leading position as a centre for engineering excellence and innovation."

The Taranis "is a prelude to the next generation of fighting capability," he said [6].

The $200 million dollar project will commence flight testing in 2011.

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