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## Northrop Seeks Easing Of Export Controls On Drones

By By Andrea Shalal-Esa (Reuters)



April 30, 2012

The United States risks losing its current competitive edge in the unmanned aircraft market unless Washington acts soon to ease tough restrictions on their export for commercial use, the chief executive of Northrop Grumman said on Friday.

Wes Bush, chairman and chief executive of the leading U.S. unmanned vehicle maker, lauded the Pentagon's recommendation last week to ease export restrictions on satellite technology, and said similar reforms were needed for unmanned vehicles.

He said U.S. export controls on satellites and components had spurred other countries to develop their own technologies, resulting in significant job and revenues losses in the U.S. industry, while shaving its share of the global satellite market from 75 percent to 25 percent.

U.S. executives have long pressed for relaxation of tough export controls on unmanned vehicles, but their concerns have grown more acute as companies step up international sales efforts to offset sharp declines in U.S. defense spending.

Bush told industry executives at the Aero Club of Washington that a similar situation could develop in the growing global unmanned aircraft market, which some experts have estimated to be worth \$94 billion.

"The export restrictions that we are facing today are hurting this industry and America without making us any safer," Bush told the group. "They could cause the U.S. to relinquish its lead in these technologies to other nations based on their ability to meet global demand."

He also urged Congress to act quickly to implement the Pentagon's recommendations on easing export controls on satellites, although he said the long-awaited reforms came long after the "horse left the barn."

Bush, whose company builds the high-altitude, unmanned Global Hawk spy plane, a maritime version called Broad Area Maritime Surveillance or BAMS, and an unmanned helicopter called Fire Scout, said the United States was on the cusp of a new "golden age" of unmanned aircraft.

He said the recent law reauthorizing the Federal Aviation Administration marked a major milestone for the industry because it mandated the integration of unmanned aerial systems into the U.S. civil airspace no later than September 2015, replacing the current "extraordinarily onerous" restrictions on their use.

But he said there was still hard work ahead to assure the American public about the safety and utility of such aircraft, which could help monitor oil pipelines and railways, aid in natural disasters, and even gauge the moisture level in agricultural fields. Privacy concerns would also have to be addressed, he said.

U.S. companies dominate the current market, which is mainly focused on military aircraft, but it is difficult for them to sell their planes to other countries due to export restrictions, while other countries, unhampered by such rules, are ready and eager to rush in, Bush said.

"Today, the U.S. is struggling to sell unmanned aircraft to our allies while other nations are prepared to jump into this marketplace with both feet," he said. "I don't think we should kid ourselves about that."

More than 50 countries had already purchased surveillance aircraft, and the rush was clearly on to match U.S. capabilities, Bush said, adding, "We don't have a monopoly on good ideas."

Without quick action to ease export restrictions on U.S. companies that make unmanned aircraft systems, other countries would soon have a "clear advantage" in the market, he said.

Bush told defense analysts earlier this week that Northrop still believed there was a "robust" market for unmanned aerial vehicles, adding that he was happy with the breadth and capabilities of the company's portfolio of unmanned aircraft.

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