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Airborne Laser Readied For Upcoming Ground and Flight Tests

On Saturday, October 16, 2004, the Airborne Laser (ABL) aircraft, designated YAL-1, was rolled out of its hangar at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., in preparation for the platform's return to flight testing in the upcoming weeks.

The ABL, a component in the Missile Defense Agency's plan to develop and field a "layered defense," is a revolutionary program using a megawatt, high-energy Chemical Oxygen Iodine Laser (COIL) on a Boeing 747-400F aircraft to detect, track and destroy a ballistic missile shortly after it is launched, called the "boost phase" of flight.

The upcoming flight trials will involve air-worthiness testing of recent modifications to the aircraft, and low-power ground tests including the integrated operations of the ABL's battle management and beam control/fire control segments.

Meanwhile, the ABL laser is undergoing segment testing in the ground-based Systems Integration Laboratory (SIL) before it is integrated on the aircraft for future weapons-level systems testing. Extensive work is ongoing for an upcoming "first light" of the ABL laser modules.



PHOTO CAPTION: The Airborne Laser (ABL), designated YAL-1, is moved from its hangar in preparation for a series of upcoming ground and flight tests.