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Israel's Elbit wins US security contract

By YAAKOV KATZ



A consortium led by Boeing, the second-largest US defense contractor, and including Israel's Elbit Systems has won the first piece of a \$2 billion government contract to develop and provide new technological means to secure the US borders and curb illegal immigration, officials said Thursday.

The contract, valued at \$80 million, is the first part of a multibillion-dollar Homeland Security Department plan to help secure US borders with Mexico and Canada. The final bill's total is unknown, a department official said, because it hinges largely on whether Congress will approve spending about \$1 billion to build a fence on the Mexican border. Until then, the contract will be given to Boeing in phases, the department official said.

Chicago-based Boeing was among several major defense companies competing for the job. While other companies' proposals relied more heavily on using flying drones to patrol the border, Boeing focused on a network of 1,800 high-tech towers, equipped with cameras and motion detectors that could feed live information to Border Patrol agents.

Elbit serves as a member of the consortium through Kollsman Inc., its US subsidiary. Kollsman's expertise in Homeland Security includes the integration and development of innovative electro-optical systems for surveillance and tracking, optical fiber technology for security, video communication and control systems alongside image-processing and smart systems for electronic fences.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAVs) of the Hermes family of UAVs and the Skylark man-packed UAV, which are used for military and homeland security applications, are also part of the capabilities Kollsman brought to the consortium.

"US citizens and the federal government are very concerned about vulnerabilities on the porous US northern and southern borders," said Elbit Systems of America President & CEO Tim Taylor. "The strategic and technological strengths we bring to the Boeing team will help restore the safety and security that Americans have known for so long."

The contract, part of the Secure Border Initiative, is the government's latest attempt to use advanced technology to solve the illegal immigration problem, which lawmakers have called a national security issue and which has given new attention in light of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

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Homeland Security gave companies chasing the contract - including Lockheed Martin Corp. and Northrop Grumman Corp. - freedom to come up with their own ideas for how best to apply new and developing technologies to the problem.

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AP contributed to the report.



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