General Atomics Begins SeaGuardian Validation Flights in Japan

The General Atomics Aeronautical Systems MQ-9B SeaGuardian remotely piloted aerial system. GA-ASI

HACHINOHE, AOMORI PREFECTURE, Japan — General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. (GA-ASI) kicked off a series of validation flights on Oct. 15 for Japan Coast Guard (JCG) in Hachinohe, Aomori Prefecture, Japan. GA-ASI is working with Asia Air Survey (AAS) in Japan to conduct the flights.

"We appreciate Asia Air Survey's support in demonstrating how the MQ-9B SeaGuardian RPAS [remotely piloted aerial system] can provide affordable, long-endurance airborne surveillance of Japan's maritime domain," said Linden Blue, chief executive officer, GA-ASI. "The system's ability to correlate multiple sensor feeds and identify vessel anomalies provides effective, persistent maritime situational awareness."

The SeaGuardian flights will validate the wide-area maritime surveillance capabilities of RPAS for carrying out JCG's missions, from search and rescue to maritime law enforcement. These flights follow successful "legacy" MQ-9 maritime patrol demonstrations in the Korea Strait in 2018 and the Aegean Sea in 2019. The Hachinohe operation features the MQ-9B configuration, capable of all-weather operations in civil national and international airspace.

The SeaGuardian RPAS features a multi-mode maritime surface-search radar with Inverse Synthetic Aperture Radar (ISAR) imaging mode, an Automatic Identification System (AIS) receiver, a High-Definition — Full-Motion Video sensor equipped with optical and infrared cameras. This sensor suite, augmented by automatic track correlation and anomaly-detection

algorithms, enables real-time detection and identification of surface vessels over thousands of square nautical miles.

GA-ASI’s MQ-9B is revolutionizing the long-endurance RPAS market by providing all-weather capability and compliance with STANAG-4671 (NATO airworthiness standard for UAVs). These features, along with an operationally proven collision-avoidance radar, enables flexible operations in civil airspace.