Missile That Brought Down Navy Global Hawk UAV Shot From Iranian Surface-to-Air System



A RQ-4A Block 10 Global Hawk UAV similar to the one that was shot down June 19 by Iranian forces. Northrup Grumman

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy RQ-4A Block 10 Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) shot down June 19 by Iranian forces was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile of indigenous Iranian design and manufacture.

The Global Hawk was downed by a missile system the Iranians call the Third of Khordad, which was first unveiled in Iran in 2014. The system's missile has a range of 75 kilometers and can intercept targets at an altitude of up to 81,000 feet, higher than the 60,000-foot ceiling of the Global Hawk.

One former Navy electronic countermeasures officer described the Third of Khordad as a knock-off of the Russian-designed BUK-M1 (NATO code name SA-11 Gadfly) missile system.

> *The incident occurred a few days after Iranian forces fired a missile at a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper UAV near the Strait of Hormuz and damaged two oil tankers with limpet mines.*

In a June 20 release, U.S. Central Command spokesman

Cmdr. Bill Urban said the RQ-4A was shot down “while operating in international airspace over the Strait of Hormuz at approximately 11:35 p.m. GMT on June 19, 2019. Iranian reports that the aircraft was over Iran are false. This was an unprovoked attack on a U.S. surveillance asset in international airspace.”

Iran claimed the UAV had violated Iranian airspace.

The incident occurred a few days after Iranian forces fired a missile at a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper UAV near the Strait of Hormuz and damaged two oil tankers with limpet mines. Last month, four tankers were damaged by explosives believed to be limpet mines.

The Northrop Grumman RQ-4A Block 10 Global Hawk high-altitude long-endurance (HALE) UAV also is known as the BAMS-D (Broad-Area Maritime Surveillance-Demonstration) system. Urban said the RQ-4A “provides real-time intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions over vast ocean and coastal regions.”

The Navy has deployed the RQ-4A to Southwest Asia since 2009 as a component of the Broad-Area Maritime Surveillance-Demonstration (BAMS-D) program. Five RQ-4As were acquired from the U.S. Air Force and were based at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland, and operated by a detachment of Patrol Reconnaissance Wing 11. The detachment keeps at least one RQ-4A in the rotation to a base in the Persian Gulf region. One was lost in a mishap in

Maryland in June 2012.

The Navy and Northrop Grumman have been developing a Global Hawk derivative, the MQ-4C Triton, to meet the Navy's HALE requirements. Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19 is scheduled to send a two-aircraft detachment to Guam this year for the Triton's Early Operational Capability deployment. The deployment had been delayed a year following the gear-up landing of one of the squadron's MQ-4Cs in September 2018.

According to news reports, one MQ-4C recently had been deployed to Southwest Asia as part of the U.S. buildup of forces in response to Iranian hostile acts. The deployment initially led to some erroneous reports that the downed UAV was an MQ-4C.