Navy’s RQ-4A BAMS-D UAVs End 13-Year Mideast Deployment



The Broad Area Maritime Surveillance Demonstrator returned from 5th Fleet to Patuxent River, Maryland, June 17 after accruing more than 42,500 flight hours and over 2,000 oversea missions during a 13-year deployment. *NORTHROP GRUMMAN*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Navy has brought home from the Middle East its last deployed RQ-4A Global Hawk Broad-Area Maritime Surveillance — Demonstrator (BAMS-D) unmanned aerial vehicle, culminating a 13-year span of operations that began as a six-month experiment.

According to a June 22 release from the Naval Air Systems Command, the RQ-4A returned to its home base, Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland, from the U.S. 5th Fleet area of responsibility on June 17.

The Navy had deployed the RQ-4A to Southwest Asia since 2009 as a component of the BAMS-D program. Five Block 10 RQ-4As were acquired from the U.S. Air Force and were based at Patuxent River and operated in sequence over the years by detachments of Patrol Reconnaissance Wings 5, 2, and 11. The

detachment kept 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. Another was shot down June 19, 2019, in an unprovoked attack in international airspace over the Strait of Hormuz by an Iranian surface-to-air missile.

“BAMS-D has been a singular force multiplier for 5th Fleet and U.S. Central Command and has provided invaluable insights into the use of unmanned air systems as part of an overall concept of operations for naval ISR,” said Dave Seagle, BAMS-D deputy program manager, who has led the program since its inception, in the release.

BAMS-D provided more than 50% of maritime intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance in theater accruing over 42,500 flight hours in 2,069 overseas missions, the Navy said.

“By 2013, BAMS-D had ramped up its capabilities to 15 24-hour missions every month, supplementing its first deployed aircraft with a second aircraft,” Seagle said. “Through the next nine years, BAMS-D provided uninterrupted operations and collected almost 1.4 million ISR scenes, highlighted over 11,500 targets of interest and provided the fleet with over 15,000 tactical reports, becoming an indispensable asset for the warfighter. One of many notable achievements occurred as recently as August 2021 when BAMS-D provided ISR coverage to non-combatant evacuation operations during the U.S. drawdown in Afghanistan.

“Despite the aging of the system and limited spares available, BAMS-D’s incredible operations and maintenance team achieved an overall mission availability rate of 96%, with more than 94% of scheduled missions completed,” he said.

The BAMS-D Integrated Sensor Suite featured electro-optical/infrared, synthetic aperture radar, ground moving target indicator and wide-area search modes retained from the

Air Force production system. To improve performance in the maritime environment, LR-100 electronic surveillance sensors, Automatic Identification System receiver, inverse synthetic-aperture radar, and maritime search and maritime moving target indicator radar modes were integrated into the demonstrator system. The ground segment consisted of three launch and recovery elements, two mission control elements and a Navy-designed tactical auxiliary ground station.

In the Navy’s 2022 budget request, divestment of the RQ-4A Global Hawk Broad-Area Maritime Surveillance-Demonstrator UAV had been planned for acceleration from 2023 to 2022, with the savings invested in higher priorities.

The BAMS-D is being replaced by a Global hawk derivative, the MQ-4C Triton, which has been deployed to the Western Pacific in an Early Operational Capability deployment. The Triton with an upgraded sensor capability will be deployed in 2023.