



Fact Sheet on Global Hawk UAV

Prepared by Senator Kent Conrad

The RQ-4 Global Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) is a high altitude, long-range aerial reconnaissance system that provides battlefield commanders with high-resolution, near-real-time imagery. It can survey large geographic areas with pinpoint accuracy over long periods of time, giving the military the most current intelligence about enemy location, resources and personnel.

Designed and built by Northrop Grumman, the Global Hawk can fly at altitudes as high as 65,000 feet, at a speed of about 400 miles per hour, with a range of 12,000 nautical miles. During a typical mission, the aircraft can fly 1,200 miles to an area of interest and loiter over the location for 24 hours. Its high-resolution sensors – including infrared and electro-optical systems and cloud-penetrating aperture radar – can survey an area of 40,000 square nautical miles, about the size of Illinois.

Using advanced navigation and flight control technology, the Global Hawk can literally fly itself. Once mission parameters are programmed into the UAV, it can autonomously taxi, take off, fly, conduct surveillance operations, communicate data to ground forces, return to base and land. Ground-based operators monitor the Global Hawks status and can change navigation and sensor plans during flight as necessary.

Global Hawk vehicles have been deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom, where they have flown over 60 missions and 1,200 combat hours to date. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, Global Hawks flew just 3 percent of the imagery intelligence missions, but located 55 percent of time-sensitive air defense targets. The aircraft were also responsible for identifying 40 percent of Iraqi armored forces, leading the military to credit the Global Hawk for the accelerated defeat of Iraq's Republican Guard.

The Global Hawk costs \$55 million per unit, plus an additional \$15 million for each ground station (one ground station is needed for every four aircraft). The Pentagon plans to buy five Global Hawks in fiscal year 2006 and an additional 31 between fiscal years 2007 to 2011.

Northrop Grumman is currently building the follow-on generation Global Hawk, the RQ-4B, which has a longer wingspan, larger fuselage, and can carry a heavier payload. Three RQ-4Bs will be delivered to the Air Force in 2006.