

USAF reveals RQ-170 Sentinel is new stealth UAV

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US Air Force confirms 'Beast of Kandahar' drone

USAF Confirms Stealthy UAV Operations
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The U.S. Air Force has confirmed to Aviation Week the existence of the so-called "Beast of Kandahar" UAV, a stealth-like remotely piloted jet seen flying out of Afghanistan in late 2007.

The RQ-170 Sentinel, believed to be a tailless flying wing design with sensor pods faired into the upper surface of each wing, was developed by Lockheed Martin's Advanced Development Programs (ADP), better known as Skunk Works. An Air Force official revealed Dec. 4 that the service is "developing a stealthy unmanned aircraft system (UAS) to provide reconnaissance and surveillance support to forward deployed combat forces."

The UAV had been discussed on the Ares technology blog, as well as elsewhere online, but the USAF statement to Aviation Week was the first to detail the aircraft.

"The fielding of the RQ-170 aligns with Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates' request for increased intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support to the combatant commanders and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz's vision for an increased USAF reliance on unmanned aircraft," says the emailed statement.

The RQ-170 is flown by the 30th Reconnaissance Squadron at Tonopah Test Range, Nev. - home of the F-117 stealth fighter when the program's existence was secret - and falls under Air Combat Command's 432d Wing at Creech Air Force Base, Nev. At Kandahar, the Sentinel was seen operating out of General Atomics Aeronautical Systems' hangar.

The 30th RS was activated as part of the 57th Operations Group on Sept. 1, 2005, and a squadron patch was approved July 17, 2007. The activation - although not the full meaning of the event - was noted among those who watch for signs of activity in the classified world.

The RQ-170 designation is similar to that of the F-117 - a correct prefix, but out of sequence to avoid obvious guesses of a program's existence. Technically, the RQ designation denotes an unarmed aircraft rather than the MQ prefix applied to the armed Predator and Reaper UAVs. The USAF phrase, "Support to forward deployed combat forces," when combined with observed details, suggest a moderate degree of stealth (including a blunt leading edge, simple nozzle and overwing sensor pods) and that the Sentinel is a tactical, operations-oriented platform and not a strategic intelligence-gathering design.

Many questions remain about the aircraft's use. If it is a high-altitude aircraft it is painted an unusual color - medium grey overall, like Predator or Reaper, rather than the dark gray or overall black that provides the best concealment at very high altitudes. The wingspan appears to be about 65-ft., about the same as an MQ-9 Reaper. With only a few Internet images to judge from - all taken from the left side - the impression is of a deep, fat centerbody blended into the outer wings.

With its low-observable design, the aircraft might be useful for flying the borders of Iran and peering into China, India and Pakistan for useful data about missile tests, telemetry as well as gathering signals and multi-spectral intelligence.

http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/generic/story_generic.jsp?channel=defense&id=news/BEAST120409.xml&headline=USAF%20Confirms%20Stealthy%20UAV%20Operations

U.S. Air Force Reveals Operational Stealth UAV
Posted by David A. Fulghum at 12/4/2009 3:33 PM CST
David Fulghum and Bill Sweetman/Washington

The secret is out. The U.S. Air Force has confirmed the existence of the "Beast of Kandahar" UAV that was seen flying out of Afghanistan in late 2007. The jet aircraft — a tailless flying wing with sensor pods faired into the upper surface of each wing — is the RQ-170 Sentinel, developed by Lockheed Martin's Skunk Works. An Air Force official revealed to Aviation Week Friday afternoon that the service is "developing a stealthy unmanned aircraft system (UAS) to provide reconnaissance and surveillance support to forward deployed combat forces."

The USAF statement came after discussion of the UAV emerged here on Ares. "The fielding of the RQ-170 aligns with Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates' request for increased intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support to the Combatant Commanders and Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz's vision for an increased USAF reliance on unmanned aircraft," according to the statement.

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<http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/blogs/defense/index.jsp?plckController=Blog&plckBlogPage=BlogViewPost&newspaperUserId=27ec4a53-dcc8-42d0-bd3a-01329aef79a7&plckPostId=Blog:27ec4a53-dcc8-42d0-bd3a-01329aef79a7Post:649e3cf4-8c07-4739-82cf-322c6c56ccd5&plckScript=blogScript&plckElementId=blogDest>

USAF reveals RQ-170 Sentinel is new stealth UAV
 By Stephen Trimble

A stealthy unmanned aircraft system developed by Lockheed Martin's Skunk Works division has secretly joined the US Air Force inventory.

The USAF confirms that the RQ-170 Sentinel is in development, and is expected "to provide reconnaissance and surveillance support to forward-deployed combat forces", according to a statement released on 4 December.

The announcement comes after a series of images of a jet-powered, stealthy aircraft have appeared on the internet since last April, including a clear shot of the aircraft that circulated widely in early December.

But it was not immediately clear whether the aircraft shown in pictures and the RQ-170 are the same. Besides describing the RQ-170 as stealthy, the USAF released no further technical information about its new UAV, or any photos.

<http://www.flightglobal.com/articles/2009/12/07/335875/usaf-reveals-rq-170-sentinel-is-new-stealth-uav.html>

US Air Force confirms 'Beast of Kandahar' drone

US Air Force – The US Air Force on Tuesday confirmed for the first time that it is flying a stealth unmanned aircraft …
Tue Dec 8, 4:28 pm ET

WASHINGTON (AFP) – The US Air Force on Tuesday confirmed for the first time that it is flying a stealth unmanned aircraft known as the "Beast of Kandahar," a drone spotted in photos and shrouded in secrecy.

The RQ-170 Sentinel is being developed by Lockheed Martin and is designed "to provide reconnaissance and surveillance support to forward deployed combat forces," the air force said in a brief statement.

The "RQ" prefix for the aircraft indicates an unarmed drone, unlike the "MQ" designation used for Predator and Reaper aircraft equipped with missiles and precision-guided bombs.

Aviation experts dubbed the drone the "Beast of Kandahar" after photographs emerged earlier this year showing the mysterious aircraft in southern Afghanistan in 2007.

The image suggested a drone with a radar-evading stealth-like design, resembling a smaller version of a B-2 bomber.

A blog in the French newspaper Liberation published another photo this week, feeding speculation among aviation watchers about the classified drone.

The air force said the aircraft came out of Lockheed Martin's "Skunk Works," also known as Advanced Development Programs, in California -- the home of sophisticated and often secret defense projects including the U-2 spy plane, the F-22 fighter jet and the F-117 Nighthawk.

The photo of the drone in Afghanistan has raised questions about why the United States would be operating a stealth unmanned aircraft in a country where insurgents have no radar systems, prompting speculation Washington was using the drones for possible spying missions in neighboring Iran or Pakistan.

The Sentinel was believed to have a flying wing design with no tail and with sensors built into the top side of each wing, according to published photos.

The RQ-170 is in line with Defense Secretary Robert Gates' request for more intelligence and surveillance resources and with the Air Force chief of staff's plans to expand the fleet of unmanned aircraft, the air force said.

The new drone is flown by the 30th Reconnaissance Squadron out of Tonopah Test Range in Nevada, which is under Air Combat Command's 432nd Wing at Creech Air Base, also in Nevada.

The United States has carried out an extensive bombing campaign against Al-Qaeda figures in Pakistan using the Predator and larger Reaper drones.

Robots or "unmanned systems" in the air and on the ground are now deployed by the thousands in Iraq and Afghanistan, spying from the sky for hours on end, searching for booby-traps and firing lethal missiles without putting US soldiers at risk.

http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20091208/pl_afp/usaviationmilitarydrones_20091208212912

New unmanned US stealth jet based in Afghanistan gathers data in Iran
Debkafile

US Air Force spokesmen confirmed this week that the hitherto secret unmanned, high-altitude stealth jet, the "Beast of Kandahar," was present at the big US air base of Bagram, in Afghanistan. Photos of the Beast on the Bagram tarmac - outside its regular base at Kandahar near the Iranian and Pakistani borders - appeared in various Internet sites this week.

Designated RQ-170 Sentinel, it is the first jet drone ever developed for military use. France's EURO Demonstrator is a similar project which will be ready for test flights only in another two years.

Little is known about the Sentinel, which was manufactured by Lockheed Martin's Advanced Development Program. USAF spokesmen disclosed only that its new deployment responded to secretary of defense Robert Gates' request for increased intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support for combatant commanders in Afghanistan.

According to DEBKAFfile's military and intelligence sources, Washington had a reason for letting the Beast surface at this time in the form of a published photograph and a note about its ability to fly over the borders of Iran, China, India and

Pakistan for collecting "useful data about missile tests, telemetry, signals and multi-spectral intelligence. The disclosure came on the heels of Iran's big air defense exercise for guarding its nuclear sites which ended in the third week of November; it appears to be a message to Tehran that all its war games, especially in intelligence and electronic warfare, were pointless since its skies are wide open to American drone activity against which Iran has no recourse.

Some of the Web sites, including the veteran Aviation Week, speculate about the Sentinel's configuration and features from the published image, describing it as "a tailless flying wing design" with sensor pods built into the upper surface of each wing.

Its designation denotes an unarmed drone rather than the armed Predator UAV which has been used to fire missiles at terrorist sites on the Pakistan-Afghan border. But this assumption is open to question in view of the impression of "a deep, fat center-body" which could house a bomb or missile bay.

Furthermore, its is painted medium grey like the Predator or Reaper, rather than the dark gray or overall black that would provide better concealment at high altitudes.

Both these features suggest the mysterious Beast of Kandahar may have secret functions other than pure reconnaissance.

<http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=6409>