“Grey Eagle” UAS to deploy to Afghanistan

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Weaponized versions of the MQ-1C “Grey Eagle” Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) will begin deploying to Afghanistan [1] in the fall. Formerly known as the Sky Warrior, Grey Eagle is the Army’s answer to the Predator.

In recent tests at the National Training Center, the Grey Eagle’s on-board laser designator performed flawlessly. Six of six hellfire missiles hit their targets.

“Prior to that we had also tested the Hellfire integration at China Lake back in the fall of 2009,” said Col. Greg Gonzalez, program manager for Army UAS. “At that time, we had nine out of 10 hits and the tenth one that we did miss was an extremely difficult shot of a target moving directly below the aircraft, moving in a parallel... a perpendicular shot.”

General Atomics’ MQ-1C Grey Eagle will soon deploy to Afghanistan.

The Grey Eagle UAS reflects the divergent operating cultures of the Army and the Air Force—starting with the UAS term itself (the Air Force prefers “RPV”, or Remotely Piloted Vehicle).

The Army also operates all its UAS in-theater, while the Air Force flies its RPVs remotely (hence the acronym). But the biggest difference lies in who’s allowed to pilot the unmanned systems—the Army has Enlisted aviators, while the Air Force only uses Officers. With the renewed emphasis on unmanned systems, the Air Force faces a huge shortage of qualified RPV pilots.

At present, the Grey Eagle is the Army’s only weaponized UAS, and according to Col. Robert Sova, capability manager for UAS, he doesn’t see that capability expanding anytime soon.

(Additional reporting by J.D. Leipold [2])

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[1] http://www.army.mil/-news/2010/09/03/44688-grey-eagle-weaponized-uas-

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