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Spy drone loss deals blow to US security

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“There is the risk of compromise to a host of very sensitive intelligence capabilities possibly including hyperspectral imaging systems, specialized listening devices, nuclear particle 'sniffers' and communications encryption devices,” said David Goure, Vice President with the Lexington Institute.

The US RQ-170 Sentinel stealth aircraft was brought down with minimal damage by the Iranian Army's electronic warfare unit on Sunday, December 4, 2011, when flying over the northeastern Iran city of Kashmar, some 225 kilometers (140 miles) away from the Afghan border.

Goure added that even if the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) “was destroyed on impact with the ground, there will undoubtedly be recoverable parts.”

“Long-range UAVs are programmed to return to base if contact is lost with their controllers,” Goure added, thus dismissing the US claims that the drone had simply 'malfunctioned' or crashed in Iran.

“They are not supposed to fly around aimlessly or simply land. A platform as sensitive as the RQ-170 would have had such a 'carrier pigeon' program in its guidance computer and, under normal conditions, would have flown home.”

On December 6, two US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed to CNN that the drone was part of a CIA reconnaissance mission, involving the US intelligence community stationed in Afghanistan.

They claimed the reconnaissance capability of the RQ-170 Sentinel drone enabled it to gather information from inside Iran by flying along Afghanistan's border with the Islamic Republic.

The RQ-170 is an unmanned stealth aircraft designed and developed by the Lockheed Martin Company.

Iran has announced that it intends to carry out reverse engineering on the aircraft, which is similar in design to a US Air Force B2 stealth bomber.

Tehran says that the US drone spy mission was a “hostile act,” adding that it will lodge a complaint with the United Nations over the violation of its air sovereignty by the intelligence gathering aircraft.

Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations Mohammad Khazaei on December 8 called on the world body to condemn US aggressive moves against the Islamic Republic with respect to the reconnaissance drone that violated the Iranian airspace.

He made the plea in a letter sent to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, General Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz a-Nasser, and Vitaly Churkin, Russia's UN ambassador who holds the rotating Security Council presidency for December.

Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Ministry has summoned the Swiss ambassador, who represents US interests in the country, and the Afghan ambassador to condemn the US violation of Iranian airspace.