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## Drone that crashed in Iran was on CIA recon mission, officials say

December 06, 2011 | By Barbara Starr, CNN Pentagon Correspondent

A U.S. stealth drone that crashed in Iran last week was part of a CIA reconnaissance mission which involved both the intelligence community and military personnel stationed in Afghanistan, two U.S. officials confirmed to CNN Tuesday.

A senior U.S. official with direct access to the assessment about what happened to the drone said it was tasked to fly over western Afghanistan and look for insurgent activity, with no directive to either fly into Iran or spy on Iran from Afghan airspace.

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U.S. responds to Iranian drone claims

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A U.S. satellite quickly pinpointed the downed drone, which apparently sustained significant damage, the senior official said.

"The Iranians have a pile of rubble and are trying to figure what they have and what to do with it," the senior U.S. official said. The drone crashed solely because its guidance system failed, the official said.

Officials confirmed to CNN it was an RQ-170 drone that was lost.

Another U.S. official confirmed that when the drone crashed, the United States briefly considered all potential options for retrieving the aircraft or bombing the wreckage, but those ideas were quickly discarded as impractical.

The officials have direct knowledge of the events, but spoke on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the intelligence matters. CIA officials have declined to comment.

Indications of the intelligence community's involvement in the drone incident emerged over the weekend, when NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan issued a statement saying, "The UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) to which the Iranians are referring may be a U.S. unarmed reconnaissance aircraft that had been flying a mission over western Afghanistan late last week. The operators of the UAV lost control of the aircraft and had been working to determine its status."

Several coalition officials said at the time they had no direct knowledge of the incident and they were essentially ordered to put out this statement. It's significant that the statement only says "operators" of the UAV, without saying which part of the military or U.S. government might have been operating it, one coalition official said.

U.S. officials are discounting the Iranian claim that they shot the drone down. The United States continues to say the crew of the UAV lost flight control and the drone then entered Iranian airspace.

American officials over the years have been adamant that U.S. assets do not fly over Iranian air space.

The RQ-170 Sentinel is a stealth drone developed by Lockheed Martin for the Air Force to help provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

Iranian media reported that the RQ-170 was slightly damaged and in the hands of Iranian forces.

"Armed forces with a dominant control over the country's borders managed to identify and down the invading plane," reported Iran's official news agency, the Islamic Republic News Agency.

An unnamed Iranian military official called it a "clear example of aggression" and added that Iran is "fully ready to counter any aggression," the report said.

In July, Iran's military made a similar claim, saying it downed a U.S. "spy drone" flying near its Fordo nuclear enrichment plant in Qom province. But Iran backtracked on the statement a few days later, saying the incident was actually part of a training exercise.

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