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The mini Orbiter, the UAV that apparently crashed in El Paso. (Pic: ADS)

So—here's a first. On Tuesday, a wayward unmanned aerial vehicle crashed in a residential area of El Paso, Texas, about a half mile inside the U.S. border. It landed in a backyard apparently, and no one was hurt and no property was damaged.

Thing is, however, it turns out that the UAV is owned by the government of Mexico, and while details are sketchy, it appears that it strayed over the border Tuesday afternoon before finding the ground. The *El Paso Times* reports this morning that the UAV is an "Orbiter" developed by the Israeli company, Aeronautics Defense Systems.

In February 2009, Aeronautics Defense Systems Ltd., announced that it had signed a \$22 million contract with Mexico's federal police to provide UAVs, though how many were ordered, and how many were delivered, is unclear. The *El Paso Times* says that the UAV was returned to Mexican officials, and that local El Paso police were told to stay away from the crash site as Border Patrol and other federal agencies dealt with the situation. "Neither Department of Homeland Security or U.S. Border Patrol official would say why the drone was returned to Mexico before investigators with the National Transportation Safety Board could inspect it," the report says.

According to the Aeronautics Defense Systems Web site, the Orbiter can reach an altitude of 18,000 ft., is capable of speeds up to 70 knots, has a 3-4 hour endurance and can carry a payload of only 3.3 lbs.

It's no surprise that Mexican law enforcement would want to fly UAVs near El Paso, since the city sits just over the border from Ciudad Juarez, the teeming Mexican city that has seen over 3,000 murders in 2010, and which has become a violent focal point for the war between rival drug cartels battling it out over smuggling routes into the United States. Over 30,000 Mexicans have been killed in drug-related violence since 2006.

Earlier this week, an American Border patrol agent was killed in Arizona, and there has been speculation that he was killed by rounds from an AK-47, which seriously ups the ante on what border agents might expect to confront.

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