

Air

Navy Drone, BAMS-D, Crashes; Northrop To Unveil Newer Model On Thursday



By Richard Whittle and Colin Clark



UPDATED: BAMS-D Crashes, Burns. No Injuries.

PATUXENT RIVER NAVAL AIR STATION: One of the Navy's Global Hawks crashed and burned during testing about 22 miles from here Monday.

The U. S. Coast Guard responded and set up a perimeter around the

wreckage of the drone, which the Navy calls BAMS-D, for Broad Area Maritime Surveillance-Demonstrator. The Navy said "cleanup of the site is underway [and] Navy officials are investigating the cause of the crash." It's important to note that BAMS-D is not exactly the same aircraft as the more advanced BAMS, which Northrop Grumman Corp. plans to unveil on Thursday in California. The airframe of the new BAMS has been considerably reinforced. Its sensors and much of its software are different. [ABOVE updated Monday at 8:45 pm.]

An impressively large hangar is rising here to house a familiar-looking, yet in some respects revolutionary, version of a drone Northrop Grumman Corp. is to unveil to the world this Thursday. Northrop's MQ-4C has the same sweeping, 130.9-foot wingspan and whale-nosed silhouette as the unmanned aircraft whose airframe it uses, the Air Force's RQ-4 Global Hawk. The Navy's version, however, incorporates many new features – including two radars with rare capabilities – and goes by the name BAMS, which stands for Broad Area Maritime Surveillance. "The air vehicle is based on the RQ-4B, the Block 20, 30, 40 versions of Global Hawk, but that's where the similarities end," said Stephen Chadwick, who directs development of BAMS's advanced technologies for the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR). "The truck looks the same, but we made a lot of changes to meet the maritime mission."

Despite its "M" designator, which stands for "multimission," BAMS carries no weapons. It's also very different from the Block 30 Global Hawk, an RQ-4 version the Air Force has proposed to scrap, saying the venerable U-2 -- a manned spy plane scheduled for retirement -- can do the Block 30's intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) missions more cheaply. (Northrop and other Block 30 advocates

dispute the Air Force's cost calculations, and some suspect "white scarf syndrome" – an inherent reverence for manned aircraft over drones within a service run by pilots – is at work. Congress is also balking.)