



Use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems in Joint Operations with State, Local, and Tribal Partners

March 27, 2017

Fiscal Year 2017 Report to Congress



**Homeland
Security**

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Message from the Acting Deputy Commissioner of CBP

March 27, 2017

I am pleased to submit the following report, "Use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems in Joint Operations with State, Local, and Tribal Partners," prepared by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

This document has been compiled pursuant to direction in House Report 114-668 and in Senate Report 114-264 accompanying the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 appropriations actions in Congress.

Pursuant to congressional requirements, this report is being provided to the following Members of Congress:

The Honorable John R. Carter
Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Homeland Security

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact my office at (202) 344-2001 or the Department's Chief Financial Officer (Acting), Stacy Marcott, at (202) 447-5751.

Sincerely,



Randolph D. Alles
Acting Deputy Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection



Executive Summary

This report details CBP's Air and Marine Operations' (AMO) use of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) to conduct joint operations during FY 2016 with state, local, and tribal law enforcement entities. This report includes the number of times that AMO employed UAS in joint operations with state, local, and tribal partners; the geographical and environmental area in which these UAS operated; the purpose and justification for the UAS for these types of joint operations; and AMO's partners. This report also contains a table that reflects total flight hours, as well as several tables that provide information on AMO's geographical and environmental challenges in each operating area.



Use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems in Joint Operations with State, Local, and Tribal Partners

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I. Legislative Language

This document was compiled pursuant to direction in House Report 114-668 and in Senate Report 114-264 accompanying the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 appropriations actions in Congress.

House Report 114-668 states:

Many Americans worry that unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) can be used inappropriately to monitor, track, or surveil their movements without the benefit of a warrant. The Committee notes that DHS uses an oversight framework and procedures that ensure compliance with privacy and civil liberty laws and standards. Furthermore, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requirements and CBP policies and procedures limit UAS operations. To monitor compliance with these laws, the Committee expects DHS to track the number of times these systems are used along the border, in a maritime environment, or in support of state, local, and/or tribal law enforcement entities, and encourages DHS to make this information publicly available.

Senate Report 114-264 states:

In addition, the Committee directs the Department to report on the number of times that CBP UAS are used in response to a specific request to support State, local, and tribal law enforcement entities in the prior fiscal year.

II. Background

U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) unmanned aircraft system program contributes to each of Air and Marine Operations' (AMO) four operational core competencies: interdiction, investigation, domain awareness, and contingencies and national taskings. As illustrated in the *Air and Marine Operations Vision 2025*, these core competencies directly align with and contribute to CBP goals and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) missions.

Domain awareness is the observation of the operating domain (e.g., land or maritime) and understanding the baseline information associated with the domain. Domain awareness operations result in the detection of illegal activity along the border areas of the United States. AMO's domain awareness has improved vastly with the advent of the Vehicle and Dismount Exploitation Radar and SeaVue Radar systems. The UAS's high-endurance capability, coupled with an electro-optical/infrared camera and interchangeable radar payloads, allows CBP to detect and track illegal land and maritime cross-border activity. The UAS have the ability to transmit real-time information such as full-motion video and synthetic aperture radar cueing to a common operating picture, which is passed to ground agents for tactical response. This capability contributes to high domain awareness throughout any type of operation, enhancing mission execution, officer safety, and evidence collection.



The same UAS capabilities facilitate national and state contingency operations that include response to natural and manmade disasters, as well as other humanitarian operations.

CBP employs UAS in accordance with U.S. law and consistent with federal UAS surveillance operations directives. During FY 2016, CBP conducted 22 UAS flight operations in partnership with state, local, and tribal law enforcement entities. CBP's UAS operate within the guidance and airspace restrictions of the FAA to provide integrated and coordinated border interdiction in furtherance of DHS's homeland security mission, other law enforcement support, and humanitarian relief missions consistent with the prerogatives of DHS and CBP. AMO maintains historical records of all UAS operations in its auditable system of record, the Tasking, Operations, and Management Information System, for review and oversight. Records of CBP's UAS activity are available to the public through the Freedom of Information Act.

III. UAS Response to Requests for Support

A. Use of UAS in Joint Operations

AMO works with several interagency and intergovernmental task forces that coordinate routine operations with federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement entities. These operations are coordinated at the individual task forces and are routine to AMO's UAS operations. Operations along the southern border are coordinated by the DHS Joint Task Force-West (JTF-W), whereas northern border operations are coordinated primarily by AMO National Air Security Operations Center-Grand Forks (NASOC-GF) for state or local entities. AMO's partners can request additional assistance for operations that don't fall under routine patrols by submitting an aviation support request (ASR). Whether or not a partner needs to submit an ASR depends on the circumstances of the request. For instance, high-risk, planned law enforcement actions, such as serving warrants that may involve officer safety, necessitate an ASR to ensure that AMO provides the best asset available for the request. Routine support that can be conducted without impact to current operations or operations that already have been scheduled do not require an ASR and normally fall under the task forces. If there are exigent circumstances and AMO must launch immediately, then AMO will provide appropriate notification as soon as possible. AMO approves ASRs on a case-by-case basis to ensure the best use of the UAS or other AMO assets.

In FY 2016, AMO deployed the UAS for surveillance, detection, and investigation operations with state, local, and tribal partners from two locations: NASOC-GF in North Dakota and National Air Security Operations Center – Sierra Vista (NASOC-SV) in Arizona.

AMO flew 157.8 hours for state, local, and tribal joint operations during FY 2016. This represents approximately 3 percent of the 5,540 hours of total UAS flight time during this period. Table 1 depicts flight hours for FY 2016.

1. Number of Flights

In FY 2016, AMO conducted 22 flights for state, local, and tribal operations. The vast majority of the flights were Reconnaissance, Surveillance, Target, and Acquisition flights.

Table 1	
Flights Involving State, Local, and Tribal Partners from FY 2016	
AMO Operating Location	Number of Flights
NASOC-GF	19
NASOC-SV	3

2. Types of Flights

Of the 22 flights conducted, 19 were law enforcement operations, 2 were search and rescue, and 1 was for disaster preparedness.

B. State, Local, and Tribal Partners

The following tables show AMO's UAS operations that benefited state, local, and tribal partners, as well as federal partners participating in a joint task force.

Table 2			
UAS Operations			
State, Local, or Tribal Partner	Federal Requestor	Dates¹	Purpose
West Central Minnesota Drug and Violent Crime Task Force	Minnesota Drug and Violent Crime Task Force	April 9, 2016	Law enforcement operations
Pima County Sheriff's Department	JTF-W (Arizona)	April 13, 2016	Search and rescue
Pima County Sheriff's Department	JTF-W (Arizona)	April 14, 2016	Search and rescue
Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation Police Department	JTF-W (Arizona)	May 2, 2016	Law enforcement operations
Various state and local law enforcement agencies	Bureau of Indian Affairs	June 10, 2016	Law enforcement operations

¹ Dates refer to periods during which AMO flew the UAS in joint operations.

Table 2			
UAS Operations			
State, Local, or Tribal Partner	Federal Requestor	Dates¹	Purpose
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	AMO for Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	July 22, 2016	Disaster preparedness
Various state and local law enforcement agencies	U.S. Border Patrol (Alpena Michigan Operation)	August 9, 2016	Law enforcement operations
State law enforcement agencies	U.S. Border Patrol (Alpena Michigan Operation)	August 15, 2016	Law enforcement operations
State law enforcement agencies	U.S. Border Patrol (Alpena Michigan Operation)	August 16, 2016	Law enforcement operations
Bismarck Task Force	U.S. Border Patrol (JTF)	August 22 to September 30, 2016 (13 flights)	Law enforcement operations

C. Geographical Locations and Operating Environments

AMO bases and conducts UAS flight operations from three locations and utilizes a fourth location, National Air Security Operations Center – Jacksonville, for aircrew flying via satellite link. Weather in all locations poses significant challenges to operating the UAS. During FY 2016, the UAS had a 61-percent mission completion rate, with weather as the primary reason for cancellation.

Table 3	
National Air Security Operations Center – Grand Forks (North Dakota)	
Area of Responsibility	Northern border of North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Washington State, Michigan, and Minnesota. Aircrews provide daily satellite linked flight operations to the southern border.

Mission Focus	Smuggling and other illegal activities by transnational criminal organizations (TCO) on the northern and southern borders; special investigative missions; and natural disasters.
Weather and Environmental Challenges	Weather consists of long, cold, and snowy winters and is very humid during the summer. Significant winds exceed aircraft operating limits.

Table 4	
National Air Security Operations Center – Corpus Christi (Texas)	
Area of Responsibility	Texas, maritime Source, Transit, and Arrival Zones.
Mission Focus	Smuggling and other illegal activities by TCOs, primarily on the southern border; special investigative missions; and natural disasters. Lead deployment site. Conducts annual deployments of the Guardian (Predator maritime variant) to the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific Source and Transit Zones.
Weather and Environmental Challenges	Weather consists of long, hot summer months. Significant winds, convective weather (summer), and fog (winter months) exceed aircraft operating limits.

Table 5	
National Air Security Operations Center – Sierra Vista (Arizona)	
Area of Responsibility	Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, and Eastern Pacific.
Mission Focus	Smuggling and other illegal activities by TCOs, primarily on the southern border; special investigative missions; and natural disasters.
Weather and Environmental Challenges	Other than during summer, weather is dry, with very little humidity. Summers are hot and can bring consistent and torrential downpours. Significant winds (winter and summer) exceed aircraft operating limits.

IV. Significant UAS Incidents

There were no significant UAS incidents from October 1, 2015, to September 30, 2016.

V. Conclusion

AMO flies tens of thousands of hours each year, primarily focused on its own core competencies of interdiction, investigation, domain awareness, and contingencies and national taskings. As a member of a number of national and statewide task forces, AMO contributes capabilities that many federal, state, local, and tribal partners do not have. AMO will continue working with its partners to further the priorities outlined by the Secretary and the Commissioner.

VI. Appendix – List of Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
AMO	Air and Marine Operations
ASR	Aviation Support Request
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FY	Fiscal Year
JTF	Joint Task Force
JTF-W	Joint Task Force - West
NASOC-GF	National Air Security Operations Center – Grand Forks
NASOC-SV	National Air Security Operations Center – Sierra Vista
TCO	Transnational Criminal Organization
UAS	Unmanned Aircraft System(s)