

All five NATO RQ-4D Phoenix drones are on station at Sigonella, Sicily



One of five NATO RQ-4D aircraft called “Phoenix” presented in the hangar on Sigonella airbase in Italy. The remotely piloted aircrafts are part of the Alliance Ground Surveillance System that 15 NATO Allies have acquired together. NATO / OR7 Pia Dunkel, German army

NATO now has all five NATO RQ-4D Phoenix unmanned Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) aircraft at the Main Operating Base at Sigonella, Sicily.

AGS is based on the Northrop Grumman RQ-4 Global Hawk wide-area surveillance drone and the [MQ-4C Triton](#) maritime surveillance platform. Northrop Grumman is the prime contractor for AGS and leads an industry team comprised of Leonardo, Airbus, and Kongsberg and other defense companies from all of the procuring nations participating in the AGS program.

The first AGS arrived a year ago. The first test and training flight of the unmanned aircraft by NATO AGS Force pilots was conducted on 4 June 2020. The final AGS landed at Sigonella yesterday (Nov. 12, 2020).

Northrop Grumman ferried the aircraft to Sigonella via a non-stop transatlantic flight. The aircraft departed on Wednesday, Nov. 11 from Palmdale, California and landed nearly 20 hours later on Nov. 12 at Sigonella, near the Italian city of Catania on the island of Sicily.

According to a NATO statement, “The five drones will support NATO operations by monitoring the ground and providing situational awareness, also known as Joint Intelligence,

Surveillance and Reconnaissance, or JISR. This gives decision makers an increased tactical awareness of what's happening on the ground, in the air and at sea, allowing accurate decision making based on real time-shared information."

The AGS RQ-4D Phoenix is a remotely piloted surveillance aircraft developed with contributions from 15 NATO Allies: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United States. Intelligence data gathered by the AGS system – which also includes associated command and control ground stations – will be available to all NATO Allies.

The 30 NATO nations have ships, battalions and aircraft, funded and maintained by the nations themselves. But there are some capabilities that are owned by NATO, itself. It amounts to less than 1% in investment money, and includes programs like the NATO AWACs (Airborne Warning and Control System) and AGS, which are owned by NATO itself.

According to a statement from Northrop Grumman, NATO AGS is a system of systems comprised of aircraft, ground and support segments. Work remains to complete handover of the AGS System to the NATO AGS Force (NAGSF), the statement said.

"Once the NATO AGS system achieves handover, NATO commanders will have greater flexibility and redundancy to support the mission of protecting ground troops, civilian populations and international borders in peacetime and times of conflict as well as humanitarian missions during natural disasters," said Jane Bishop, vice president and general manager, autonomous systems, Northrop Grumman.