

Targeting Capability a Priority for Navy's Triton UAV



By [Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor](#)

ARLINGTON, Va. – Equipping the Navy's MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) with a targeting capability is a priority that would enhance the system's capabilities to support distributed maritime operations, the UAV's builder said.

The MQ-4C with the multi-intelligence Integrated Functional Capability 4 (IFC-4) achieved Initial Operational Capability (IOC) earlier this month when Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19 (VUP-19) deployed a detachment to Guam to establish an orbit. The squadron had deployed a two-aircraft detachment to Guam in 2020 for Early Operational Capability (EOC) with the IFC-3 configuration.

Rho Cauley Bruner, Northrop Grumman's Triton program director, said in an interview with Seapower that her program office is now "fully immersed in delivering [the IFC-4] configuration" in both retrofits to earlier-produced Tritons and "now we're at that stage in the production line where we're building the IFC-4 configuration from the ground up."

"As we look to the future, one of the things that's really important to us is to have the system be as readily modifiable to accommodate threats as they develop and technologies as they mature, so, in partnership with the U.S. Navy, we continue to execute our strategy for advanced development," Bruner said. "That would enable advanced capabilities

insertion and mission expansion to keep pace with the threat.

Triton sensors and other mission systems were deployed on a surrogate aircraft—a flying test bed—for targeting missions during Exercise Northern Edge.

“The goal of that was to demonstrate persistent long-range targeting capability,” Bruner said. “That demo was done around the Gulf of Alaska and really did demonstrate that Triton has incredible potential to enhance that Distributed Maritime Operations concept that has been evolving over the last several years.

“Adding the targeting capability to Triton [is] going to be a priority for our customer,” she said.

The Navy’s program of record currently is 27 MQ-4Cs, including the three development aircraft (including one formerly owned by Northrop Grumman for development), the two initial IFC-3 EOC aircraft, and 22 production versions. Australia, a key partner in the Triton program, is procuring four Tritons for the Royal Australian Air Force.

Bruner said that “we believe that six to seven Tritons would be optimal to help Australia conduct surveillance in its areas of interest.”

The U.S. Navy plans to establish three orbits with its Triton UAV force and establish a second squadron, VUP-11, in fiscal 2026.