

U.S. Drone Forced Down in Black Sea Was Gathering Intelligence for Ukrainian Forces. Scott Ritter

Former UN Weapons Inspector Reports

By [Jeremy Kuzmarov](#) and [Scott Ritter](#)

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In a ["2-minute topic"](#) posted on Twitter, former UN weapons inspector [Scott Ritter](#) reported that the U.S. MQ-9 drone that was forced down into the Black Sea on March 14 was not innocently transiting international airspace when it was intercepted by two Russian Su-27 fighters. Rather, it was on an intelligence-gathering mission, peering into Crimea, to gather electronic intelligence on Russian air defenses, communications and other activities of interest.

Russian Su-27 Collision with MQ-9



Source: [businessinsider.com](https://www.businessinsider.com)

The incident marked the [first time](#) Russian and U.S. military aircraft have come into direct physical contact since Russia [launched its invasion of Ukraine](#) just over a year ago and is likely to increase tensions between the two nations, with the U.S. calling Russia's actions "reckless, environmentally unsound and unprofessional."

My latest 2 minute topic: pic.twitter.com/nT1VCKgvu6

— Scott Ritter (@RealScottRitter) [March 17, 2023](#)

Ritter said that it was clear the U.S. drone was collecting intelligence because of the existence of a signals intelligence pod placed under its wing.

Agile Condor™ technology is capable of being flown on remotely piloted aircraft in a pod-based enclosure and enables on-board, high-performance embedded computing to derive real-time, actionable intelligence. [Source: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)]

That a U.S. drone was collecting intelligence was not by itself such a big deal, as so-called "Great Powers" routinely do this, but this case is different because the U.S. is sharing the intelligence it gathers with Ukraine, "which uses this information to target Russia."

That is, information used for strikes on targets "where Russian soldiers are killed or wounded and Russian equipment is destroyed or damaged."

“This makes the United States an active participant in the conflict, and the MQ-9 Reaper drone loses all protections,” Ritter went on. “So what Russia did is give the operators of the MQ-9 Reaper drone every chance to withdraw—19 times the Russian fighters flew past the drone, trying to convince the operators to leave the area. When that didn’t work, they used tactics that date back to the Cold War, dumping fuel on the airframe to disrupt its operations and if necessary, as was the case here, bring it down.

“This was an unfortunate incident. It cost the United States a \$32 million aircraft. But we can’t allow this situation to spin out of control,” Ritter concluded.

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Featured image: U.S. Air Force MQ-9 camera footage of the Russian Su-27 Black Sea intercept on March 14. [Source: edition.cnn.com]

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