

US Still Doesn't Dare Flying Spy Drones Over Black Sea

By [Drago Bosnic](#)

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It's been well over a month since [the Russian Aerospace Forces \(VKS\) Su-27SM3 masterfully downed a USAF MQ-9 "Reaper" drone](#) that was spying on regions in southern Russia. The incident occurred on March 14, when the US drone flew just 70 km off the coast of Crimea. At the time, the VKS noted that the MQ-9 had its transponders off while heading toward Russian airspace in what was a clear violation of the agreed protocols for avoiding escalation. At the time, the Pentagon insisted that the drone was "merely conducting routine operations in international airspace over the Black Sea and posed no threat to anyone". However, as it soon became clear, MQ-9 (presumably the latest Block 5 variant) was carrying out ISR (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance) over critically important Russian military infrastructure.

This was certainly a red line for Russia, as it's perfectly aware that the information acquired through ISR close to Russian airspace is shared directly with the Kiev regime, enabling precision strikes. At the time, top Russian officials such as Nikolai Patrushev, the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, stated that the incident proves the US is directly involved in the conflict. And indeed, this was certainly causing thousands of Russian military and civilian deaths even before February 24, 2022, because the Pentagon has been providing ISR to Kiev since 2014. Only a few days before the incident, the Neo-Nazi junta forces conducted numerous attacks on civilian settlements in the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, as well as the Zaporozhye and Kherson oblasts (regions), killing and/or injuring hundreds.

The US warhawks were furious at the Biden administration for "allowing the Russians to shoot down our drones". Some have even [called for the Pentagon to "respond in kind"](#). Thankfully, there are still high-ranking officers in the US military that are perfectly aware of [just how bad an idea that is, so these suicidal requests](#) were promptly denied. What's more, the latest reports indicate that Washington DC has not only drastically reduced the presence of its ISR platforms in areas close to Russia, but has even completely halted the flights of its

extremely expensive RQ-4 “Global Hawk” spy drones, [the data published by the Flightradar24 tracker website shows](#). According to its archive of tracks, the last time a US “Global Hawk” drone flew over the Black Sea was on March 21.

Since then, US drones based in Sicily haven’t approached even the Black Sea airspace, let alone the military installations in southern Russia. Before the start of Moscow’s counteroffensive against NATO aggression in Europe, the Pentagon flew approximately 10 ISR missions per month, spying on Russian troops in Crimea. During the March 21-April 20 period, US “Global Hawk” drones made only three flights from the airbase in Sicily, severely undermining the amount of real-time battlefield data they could provide to the Kiev regime. Worse yet, these missions were conducted from within Romanian airspace and at a distance of over 400 km from Crimea. This is beyond the range of “Global Hawk’s” systems, capable of receiving clear images of an area at a maximum range of 200 km.

“Following the incident with the American Reaper drone, which fell into the waters of the Black Sea on April 14, ‘Global Hawks’ made only two more flights over the Black Sea — on March 17 and March 21 — both at a range no closer than 140 kilometers from the southern coast of Crimea. Apparently, the US command considered further flights in this area impractical. On the one hand, the amount of information received by a drone at such a range is sharply reduced; on the other hand, after March 14, the American side faced the danger of losing such equipment, and a Global Hawk is several times more expensive than a Reaper and is loaded with the most advanced equipment,” [a military expert told Sputnik](#).

Indeed, the Northrop Grumman RQ-4 “Global Hawk” drones are among the most expensive hardware in the US military. The latest Block 40 variant costs over \$130 million apiece, a mind-boggling figure for a single drone. The aircraft is a HALE (high-altitude, long-endurance) ISR platform that provides direct support to US forces worldwide. It can fly for up to 36 hours at a range of up to 22,000 km, giving it an unprecedented loitering time and covering approximately 100,000 km² of any given surveyed area in a period of 24 hours. For reference, this is the size of South Korea or Iceland. RQ-4 “Global Hawk” is equipped with various ISR equipment such as radars, optical tracking systems and infrared sensors, all of which have been used extensively to spy on Russian forces in Ukraine.

Weapons such as the HIMARS (among others) are fed battlefield data directly from platforms such as the “Global Hawk”. This means that [hundreds of civilian deaths and injuries caused by the aforementioned US weapons](#) across the newly integrated Russian regions were entirely intentional, making them an unadulterated war crime. On the other hand, NATO ISR assets have also contributed to the vast majority of Russian military deaths, prolonging the conflict. The US and NATO don’t even need to fire a single bullet to kill Russian soldiers and civilians. However, while the Kiev regime forces are pulling the trigger, [it is the political West’s “eyes” that are targeting them and even issuing commands](#). Considering these facts, downing NATO’s ISR platforms most definitely saves thousands of lives.

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[Drago Bosnic](#) is an independent geopolitical and military analyst.

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