



Written by [John Larabell](#) on November 9, 2012

Iran Warplane Fired at U.S. Drone

Pentagon Press Secretary George Little announced Thursday that a U.S. Predator drone was attacked by Iranian aircraft while flying over international territory in the Persian Gulf on November 1. In a speech to Pentagon press reporters, [Little stated](#):

I can confirm that on November 1, at approximately 4:50 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time, an unarmed, unmanned MQ-1 U.S. military aircraft conducting routine surveillance over the Arabian [Persian] Gulf, was intercepted by an Iranian SU-25 Frog-foot aircraft and was fired upon with guns.... The incident occurred over international waters, approximately 16 nautical miles off of the Iranian coastline. The MQ-1 was not hit, and returned to its base safely.



While providing few details of the alleged attack, [Little continued](#):

The aircraft, once it came under fire at approximately the 16 nautical mile range, moved further out. The Iranian aircraft continued to pursue the MQ-1 for some period of time before letting it return to base.... We believe they fired at least twice and made at least two passes.

Three senior military officials, speaking to CNN on condition of anonymity, [gave more details](#) of the incident:

Two of the officials said the fighter jets belonged to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps force, which has been more confrontational than regular Iranian military forces. At least two bursts of gunfire came from the Su-25s' cannons, they said. The drone started to move away, but the Iranian aircraft chased it, doing aerial loops around it before breaking away and returning to Iran. The drone's still and video cameras captured the incident, showing the two Su-25s approaching and firing their onboard guns, the officials said.

The Iranian pilots continued to fire shots that went beneath the Predator but never hit it, according to the officials. U.S. military intelligence analysts are still not sure if the Iranian pilots simply were unable to hit the drone because of a lack of combat skill, or if they deliberately missed and didn't intend to bring it down. But as one of the officials said, "It doesn't matter; they fired on us."

Iran's [territorial waters](#) extend 12 nautical miles from the Iranian coast, so if, as the Pentagon alleged, the attack took place 16 nautical miles from the Iranian coastline, this would have been outside Iran's territory. Little also [insisted](#) that the drone never flew into Iranian territory:

Our aircraft was never in Iranian airspace. It was always flying in international airspace. The internationally recognized territorial limit is 12 nautical miles off the coast, and we never entered



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the 12 nautical-mile limit.

Predictably, Iran offered a different version of events. According to the semi-official Fars News Agency, Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi stated Friday:

Last week an unidentified aircraft entered the airspace over Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf, which was forced to flee due to the prompt, smart and decisive action of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Armed forces. The Islamic Republic of Iran is vigilantly and precisely monitoring all moves and provides decisive, necessary and prompt response with efficient power.

Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces for Cultural Affairs and Defense Publicity Brigadier General Massoud Jazayeri told Fars that "the defenders of the Islamic Republic of Iran give decisive response to any aerial, ground or sea aggression. If any kind of alien flying object wants to enter our country's airspace, our armed forces will confront it."

Clearly both sides are accusing the other of being the aggressor in this incident. Also curious is the fact that, while the attack took place on November 1, it was not reported until two days after the U.S. presidential election. This was likely done to avoid a potentially embarrassing situation for the Obama administration.

This latest confrontation will no doubt serve to further increase tensions between the United States and Iran, which are already strained over the issue of Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program and the accompanying economic sanctions imposed by Western governments on Iran. In fact, when asked if this attack could be considered an "act of war," [Little responded](#):

I'm not going to get into legal labels. The reality is that we have a wide range of options, as I said before, to protect our assets and our forces in the region and we'll do so when necessary. We have communicated to the Iranians that we will continue to conduct surveillance flights over international waters, over the Arabian Gulf, consistent with longstanding practice.

Considering that [Iran-U.S. relations](#) have been strained for the last several decades and in light of the [widely reported "covert war"](#) being waged between the two nations over the past few years, this new event comes as no surprise. While media pundits and professional policymakers debate whether or not America should use military force to disable Iran's nuclear program, they usually ignore the constitutionality of such an interventionist foreign policy — under the U.S. Constitution only the Congress may declare war.

Americans need to educate their fellow citizens on these issues, and work toward electing more constitutionally minded representatives at the local, state, and federal level.

Photo of U.S. MQ-1 Predator drone



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