

MQ-4C Triton

In December 2020, the Navy restructured the MQ-4C program to enable the delivery of incremental capabilities in support of the EP-3E retirement. The Navy intends to field the first increment, designed to deliver signals intelligence (SIGINT) capability, as an initial operational capability. The contractor and developmental test schedules have little margin for contingencies prior to operational testing and the fielding decision.



System Description

The MQ-4C Triton is a high-altitude, long-endurance intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance unmanned aircraft intended to support global naval operations by collecting, processing, and distributing target track data, signals intelligence, and imagery intelligence data to fleet tactical operation centers and intelligence exploitation sites. Commanders will employ the MQ-4C to provide persistent maritime surveillance to detect, classify, identify, track, and assess maritime and littoral targets in support of surface warfare, intelligence operations, strike warfare, maritime interdiction, amphibious warfare, homeland defense, and search and rescue missions.

Program

The MQ-4C Triton is an Acquisition Category IC program and a critical component of the Navy's Maritime Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Targeting (MISR&T) transition plan to retire the EP-3E Aries II aircraft in accordance with the requirements in Section 112 of the FY11 National Defense Authorization Act. DOT&E approved Revision D of the Test and Evaluation Master Plan (TEMP) in January 2017.

The Navy restructured the program into an incremental development approach. The first increment is designed to deliver SIGINT capability sufficient to support the MISR&T transition plan. The Navy intends to field this increment as an initial operational capability. Updates to the Acquisition Program Baseline, Acquisition Strategy, Capability Development Document, and TEMP are ongoing.

Major Contractor

Northrop Grumman Aerospace Systems, Battle Management and Engagement Systems Division – Rancho Bernardo, California.

Test Adequacy

The program started developmental flight test using a prototype, initial operational capability configuration in July 2021. The current schedule for the contractor and developmental test program provides little margin for discovery and correction of deficiencies before operational testing.

Performance

Not enough data are currently available to provide a preliminary assessment of the MQ-4C operational effectiveness, suitability, and survivability.

Recommendation

1. The Navy should restore more margin in the developmental test schedule to allow for the discovery and correction of deficiencies prior to operational testing.