

## BEALE GROUNDS GLOBAL HAWK

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The Air Force has stopped Global Hawk flights from Beale Air Force Base after pilots briefly lost contact with the unmanned aircraft during its first operational flight mission over the United States, a base spokesman said Wednesday.

The communication glitch occurred Nov. 21, said Capt. Mike Andrews, spokesman for the 9th Reconnaissance Wing at Beale.

Investigators from the Federal Aviation Administration and Air Combat Command are determined to find and address the problem so flights can resume, he said.

"Safety and program security remain our top priorities, which is why the Air Force is working closely with FAA to help identify concerns and provide corrective actions to ensure this doesn't happen again," Andrews said.

Beale pilots who operated the aircraft during the flight lost contact with the plane for about one minute. Pilots re-established communication with the aircraft and safely landed the plane shortly after, Andrews said.

During the malfunction, the plane did exactly what it should have done - climbed to a preprogrammed altitude, Andrews said.

Beale pilots constantly stay in contact with the FAA and immediately informed them of the situation, Andrews said.

Andrews didn't know how long the flight suspension will last. "We're not sure," he said. "It's difficult to put out a timeline."

The suspension affects only the Global Hawks at Beale, not those deployed worldwide in operational combat missions.

"We're still flying over Iraq and Afghanistan," Andrews said.

The suspension will also not interfere with Beale's mission of processing and distributing



Jesse Drury/Appeal-Democrat  
A Global Hawk touches down at Beale Air Force Base after a training run in November.

intelligence collected by Global Hawks and other aircraft overseas.

Aerospace Daily & Defense Report first reported the problem Wednesday.

The Global Hawk is an unmanned aircraft that gathers a variety of intelligence through different sensors loaded onto the aircraft. The plane can fly for as long as 30 hours without refueling.

Depending on the plane, they range from \$31 million to \$40 million each, Andrews said.

The aircraft in question is newest of two stationed at Beale and arrived in early November. The other plane arrived in October 2004 and is used for training.