

General Atomics Plan Flights of Its New Drone in UK - Safety Fears Rerouted Previous Flights in the US

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[Drone Wars UK](#)

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General Atomics is to bring [a company-owned SkyGuardian drone to the UK](#) in the summer to undertake “a series of operational capability demonstrations” for the UK and other NATO members. The RAF’s soon to be acquired Protector drone is a version of the SkyGuardian with a range of UK modifications. The aircraft is being shipped into the UK rather than flying in (possibly due to the [controversy around a previous flight to the UK](#)) and will be based at RAF Waddington.

Similar demonstration flights, planned by the company to fly over San Diego last year, [did not go ahead](#) apparently after objections on safety grounds from airspace regulators. The flights took place instead well away from populated areas in the desert between Palmdale, California, and Yuma, Arizona.

RAF Waddington, on the edge of Lincoln, is surrounded by houses, a school and local businesses. Recent public polling carried out for UK Drone Watch found that [67% of the public were worried about the safety implication of large drones flying in the UK](#), with 70% agreeing that such flights should be kept to segregated airspace.

The company says flights of the aircraft are planned to showcase its maritime capability and the drone will also participate in the UK’s [Joint Warrior Exercise](#) planned for May and late September over Scotland and the North Sea. A [press release](#) also reported that:

SkyGuardian flights will further develop GA-ASI’s revolutionary Detect and Avoid capability, which will enable Protector to fly in unsegregated UK airspace. It will also assist RAF Waddington, the future home of the RAF Protector fleet, to best prepare to integrate the new aircraft into its daily operations.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) is pushing hard for the UK’s Protector drone to be able to fly unsegregated (that is without restriction) in UK airspace. However, airspace regulator, the Civil Airspace Authority (CAA) have previously [been unconvinced](#) about the safety of electronic ‘detect and avoid’ technology which is meant to replicate the safety role played by an on-board pilot.

The CAA has, however, come under pressure to accept the technology in order to allow drones to be able to fly 'beyond visual line of sight'. The former head of the Royal Air Force, Sir Stephen Hillier, was [appointed Chair of the CAA](#) in August 2020. General Atomics are liable to make billions of dollars from sales of their new drones if they can get approval for them to fly in unsegregated civilian airspace.

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