

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION
RQ-1L “PREDATOR”, S/N 97-3031
UNDISCLOSED FORWARD OPERATING LOCATION
IN SUPPORT OF OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM
22 JANUARY 2002

On 22 January 2002, at 0355 local, an RQ-1L, Predator, S/N 97-3031, departed controlled flight and impacted the ground nine nautical miles from the end of the runway at a classified forward operating location in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

Mission planning and required briefings with all crew members were conducted on 22 January 2002. Aircraft preparations, preflight and engine start were uneventful. The mission was planned to include a hand-off of control of the airborne Predator aircraft between two separate Ground Control Stations using a lost link recovery orbit point. When accomplishing this “lost link” handover, the mishap crew did not accomplish checklist steps in the proper order, resulting in the Predator’s Stability Augmentation System and engine ignition being turned off immediately after enabling the Ku band satellite command link to the Predator. When the mishap aircraft received the commands to turn the SAS and the engine off, it entered an uncommanded dive. The mishap crew was not able to fully recover from the checklist deviation, ultimately causing the aircraft to impact the ground.

There were no injuries or fatalities from the accident. The aircraft was totally destroyed upon impact with the loss valued at \$3,251,400. There are no claims for damage to government or private property. There was one inquiry by the Associated Press regarding this mishap.

The primary cause of this mishap was the mishap crew’s failure to complete checklist items in the correct order.

Under 10 U.S.C. 2254(d), any opinion of the accident investigators as to the cause of, or the factors contributing to, the accident set forth in the accident investigation report may not be considered as evidence in any civil or criminal proceeding arising from an aircraft accident, nor may such information be considered an admission of liability by the United States or by any person referred to in those conclusions or statements.