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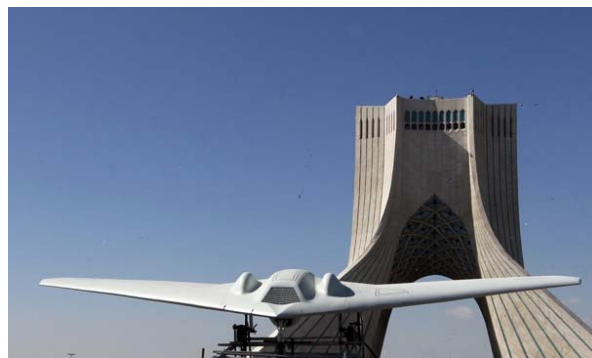
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Posted at 03:18 PM ET, 02/21/2012

Drone journalism, businesses and policing — the pilotless aircraft could soon fill U.S. skies

By [Elizabeth Flock](#)

The U.S. is ramping up its drone campaign in Afghanistan, Pakistan and soon... America.



A U.S. drone captured by Iran, on display next to the Azadi Tower in Tehran in early February. (ATTA KENARE - AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

In January, the FAA proposed new rules for the use of domestic drones, to implemented by 2015. The agency is being pressured to create new rules in part by the Pentagon, who warns that as two wars wind down, the nearly 7,500 robotic aircraft overseas need a place to come home to. But journalists and businesses also say they could make good use of the drones, and policemen have already starting using them.

The number of drones estimated to be in domestic operation by 2020: 30,000, [according to the F.A.A.](#)

While U.S. citizens may have concerns about the privacy problems domestic drones could pose, a recent Stanford Law Review [essay](#) argued that contemporary privacy law won't be able to do much to stop them.

So when those thousands of drones do arrive — in 2015 or before here's how they might be used:

Journalism

Drone journalism started in earnest after a Polish activist flew a drone over riot police lines in Warsaw to record a violent demonstration. The incredible footage soon went viral.

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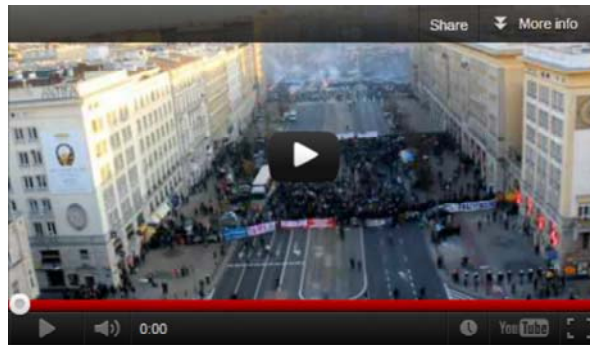
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That same month, University of Nebraska journalism academic Matt Waite founded the [Drone Journalism Lab](#), a project to investigate the viability of pilotless aircraft media. The lab's site calls drones "an ideal platform for journalism." Australia apparently agrees, with some news agencies in the country already using them for investigations, ABC News in Australia [reported Tuesday](#).

It's "a possibility some see as positively Orwellian, but others... see as an opportunity," [wrote The Post's Melissa Bell](#).

Businesses

The FAA currently allows only university researchers or government agencies to fly drones over U.S. soil, having issued 300 permits so far.

But recommendations for rules on commercial use could come out as soon as this spring, Omaha TV station [KETV reports](#). The rules could benefit farmers who'd like to assess crop damage after a storm, or real estate agents who want an overhead snapshot of the home they're trying to sell.

Police

In December, many Americans were shocked to read that police in North Dakota had made arrests of U.S. citizens during the summer with the help of a Predator spy drone. The aircraft had circled a 3,000-acre plot, tracked down the suspects and ultimately helped police to arrest them.

The Post's [Peter Finn reported](#) at the time that unmanned aircraft are also already patrolling the border with Mexico, "searching for missing persons over difficult terrain, flying into hurricanes to collect weather data, photographing traffic accident scenes and tracking the spread of forest fires." It's easy to see how those functions could benefit police throughout the United States.

This week, Iowa and Nebraska law agencies reaffirmed that they are [considering acquiring drones](#), a technology they say would be relatively cheap and highly effective.

The future

With domestic drones, of course, come worries about the boundaries of privacy.

"Drones raise the prospect of much more pervasive surveillance," Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst with the American Civil Liberties Union's Speech, Privacy and Technology Project, told Finn. "We are not against them, absolutely. They can be a valuable tool in certain kinds of operations. But what we don't want to see is their pervasive use to watch over the American people."

What would constant drone surveillance look like? A [video](#) from the GRASP Lab at the University of Pennsylvania, showing a "swarm of nano quadrotors," gives some idea.

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