

THE NEW YORKER

THE WORLD OF SURVEILLANCE

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU

Should we worry about the rise of the drone?

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

MAY 14, 2012

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ABSTRACT: THE WORLD OF

SURVEILLANCE about drones. The prospect of unmanned flight has been around—depending on your definition—since Archytas of Tarentum reputedly designed a steam-powered mechanical pigeon, in the fourth century B.C., or since Nikola Tesla, in 1898, demonstrated a radio-controlled motorboat at an exposition in Madison Square Garden. By the sixties the Air Force was deploying unmanned reconnaissance jets over Southeast Asia. Still, it was the advent, in the mid-nineties, of the Global Positioning System, along with advances in microcomputing, that ushered in the possibility of automated unmanned flight. The Department of Defense, meanwhile, developed a keen interest. With the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and manhunts in places like Yemen, the military applications, and the corporations devoted to

serving them (Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman), came to dominate the skyscape. Many of these manufacturers had one client: the Department of Defense. In 2001, the military had just a few Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (U.A.V.s). Now it has more than ten thousand. Later this month, the F.A.A. will present a regulatory regimen enabling law-enforcement departments to fly small drones, and the military contractors will suddenly have some eighteen thousand potential new customers. As of now, only a tiny percentage of municipal and state police departments have any air presence, because most can't afford helicopters or planes. Small camera-loaded U.A.V.s are much cheaper. The public proposition, at this point, anyway, is not



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Nick Paumgarten, The World of Surveillance, “Here’s Looking at You,” *The New Yorker*, May 14, 2012, p. 46

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