

THE GROWING U.S. DRONE FLEET

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http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/the-growing-us-drone-fleet/2011/12/23/gIQA76faEP_graphic.html

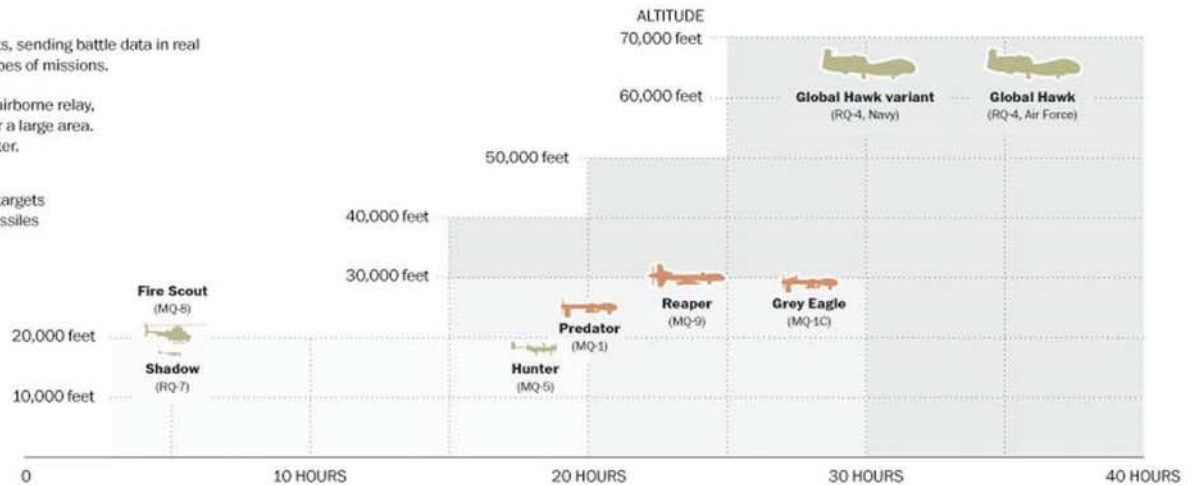
In the next decade, defense spending on known medium- and large-size drones will be nearly \$40 billion, increasing inventory by 35 percent. Ranging in size from a private aircraft to a commercial jet, nearly 800 of these bigger drones are operating around the world, observing, collecting data and in some cases attacking the enemy. The military also has thousands of mini-drones used for battlefield surveillance. Since 2001, the U.S. government is estimated to have killed more than 2,000 militants and civilians in drone attacks.

OPERATIONAL ROLES

All drones can detect and observe objects, sending battle data in real time, but some are designed for other types of missions.

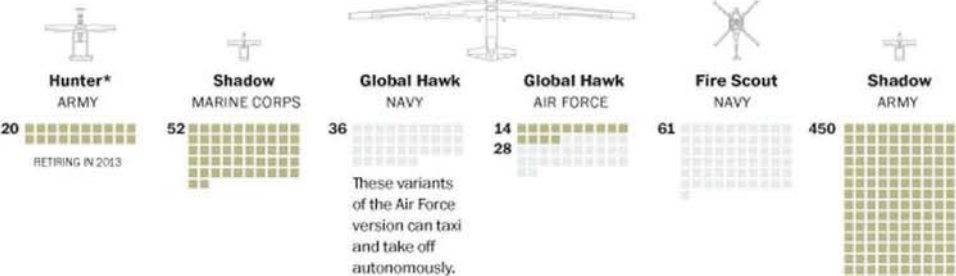
Electronic warfare: Can act as an airborne relay, allowing troops to communicate over a large area. Can eavesdrop on enemy radio chatter.

Light attack: Can fire upon ground targets with up to four 100-pound Hellfire missiles and/or two laser-guided bombs.



Electronic warfare and reconnaissance

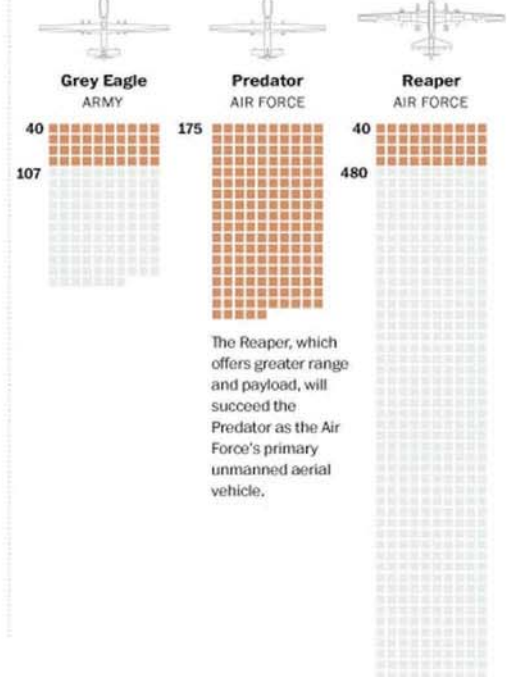
OPERATIONAL (Green) PLANNED PURCHASES (Grey)



These variants of the Air Force version can taxi and take off autonomously.

Light attack and reconnaissance

OPERATIONAL (Orange) PURCHASED (Grey)



The Reaper, which offers greater range and payload, will succeed the Predator as the Air Force's primary unmanned aerial vehicle.

Sentinel (RQ-170)
Little is known about this drone, which is used by the Air Force and CIA for sensitive surveillance missions. Photographs of the drone have been circulating since 2009. The Air Force acknowledged the existence of the drone, dubbed "the Beast of Kandahar," shortly after the photos surfaced. Iran claims to have captured one of the drones this month.



Iranian officials display a purported RQ-170 U.S. drone on state television.