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Under Obama, an emerging global apparatus for drone killing



U.S. Air Force/GETTY IMAGES - A crew chief from the 46th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron completes post-flight inspections of the RQ-1 Predator after one of its sorties in Balad Air Base, Iraq. The RQ-1 is a medium-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle.

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“What this does is it takes a lot of Americans out of harm’s way . . . without having to send in a special ops team or drop a 500-pound bomb,” Feinstein said in an interview in which she was careful to avoid explicit confirmation that the programs exist. “But I worry about how this develops. I’m worried because of what increased technology will make it capable of doing.”

Another reason for the lack of extensive debate is secrecy. The White House has refused to divulge details about the structure of the drone program or, with rare exceptions, who has been killed. White House and CIA officials declined to speak for attribution for this article.

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The emergence of hunter-killer and surveillance drones as revolutionary new weapons in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in counterterrorism operations in places such as Pakistan and

Drone war’s evolution

Inside the White House, according to officials who would discuss the drone program only on the condition of anonymity, the drone is seen as a critical tool whose evolution was accelerating even before Obama was elected. Senior administration officials said the escalating number of strikes has created a perception that the drone is driving counterterrorism policy, when the reverse is true.

“People think we start with the drone and go from there, but that’s not it at all,” said a senior administration official involved with the program. “We’re not constructing a campaign around the drone. We’re not seeking to create some worldwide basing network so we have drone capabilities in every corner of the globe.”

Nevertheless, for a president who campaigned against the alleged counterterrorism excesses of his predecessor, Obama has emphatically embraced the post-Sept. 11 era’s signature counterterrorism tool.

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Yemen, has spawned a multibillion-dollar industry.

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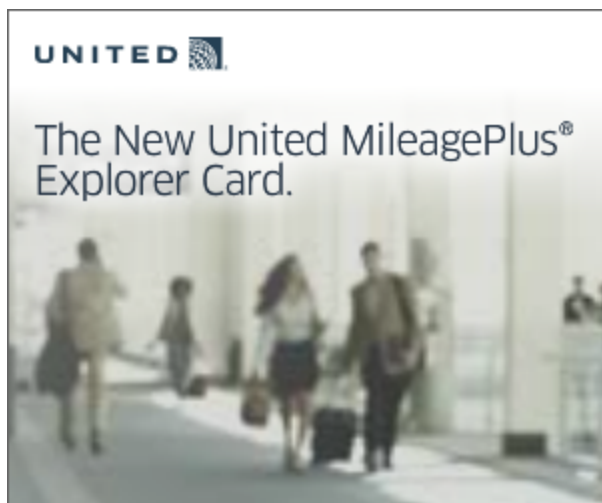
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When Obama was sworn into office in 2009, the nation's clandestine drone war was confined to a single country, Pakistan, where 44 strikes over five years had left about 400 people dead, according to the New America Foundation. The number of strikes has since soared to nearly 240, and the number of those killed, according to conservative estimates, has more than quadrupled.

The number of strikes in Pakistan has declined this year, partly because the CIA has occasionally suspended them to ease tensions at moments of crisis. One lull followed the arrest of an American agency contractor who killed two Pakistani men; another came after the U.S. commando raid that killed bin Laden. The CIA's most recent period of restraint followed U.S. military airstrikes last month that inadvertently killed 24 Pakistani soldiers along the Afghan border. At the same time, U.S. officials have said that the number of "high-value" al-Qaeda targets in Pakistan has dwindled to

two.

Administration officials said the expansion of the program under Obama has largely been driven by the timeline of the drone's development. Remotely piloted aircraft were used during the Clinton and Bush administrations, but only in recent years have they become advanced and abundant enough to be deployed on such a large scale.

The number of drone aircraft has exploded in the past three years. A recent study by the Congressional Budget Office counted 775 Predators, Reapers and other medium- and long-range drones in the U.S. inventory, with hundreds more in the pipeline.

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MayorEd wrote:

3:24 AM PST

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jralger wrote:

2:59 AM PST

Of course, you realize that the similarities between this network of drones and the possibility of it's origination on 9/11 is nothing more than fighting fire with fire, right ?

For all we are doing here is taking their idea of droned hits of the World Trade Center and Pentagon and applying it, globally.

So much for this idea being developed in someone's garage, in the U.S.

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ticked wrote:

2:34 AM PST

Drones and mercenaries are immoral and unethicalthe US uses both extensively....

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