

Drones Flying Under the Radar

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By Tom Barry, [Truthout](#) | *News Analysis*



An undated handout photo of a US Air Force MQ-9 Reaper, a drone aircraft aimed with laser-guided munitions and Hellfire missiles. (Photo: Lt. Col. Leslie Pratt / US Air Force via The New York Times)

Drones are the future, especially in foreign wars, surveillance and law enforcement.

In all sizes, armed and unarmed, drones are proliferating at home and abroad. Some are loaded with missiles, others simply with Tasers, but all carry surveillance payloads.

These "eyes in the skies," also known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or Remotely Piloted Vehicles (RPA), may soon be inescapable. For the most part, however, drones fly outside the radar of public scrutiny, Congressional oversight or international control.

In the seven years that the CIA and US military have deployed killer drones, the US Congress has never once debated the new commitment to drone operations. Although the CIA and the US military now routinely direct intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) operations that enter foreign airspace, these interventions haven't been subject to serious Congressional review.

Drone operations often proceed without any authorization or knowledge of the intervened nations.

On the domestic front, local police and Homeland Security agents are also enthusiastically deploying drones for law enforcement and border security missions. At all levels, government in the United States is sidelining mounting civil rights, privacy and air safety concerns. The US Congress functions more as a booster for the drone industry than as a regulator.

In the United States, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) and the ACLU have brought a legal challenge to the "targeted killings" carried out by the CIA and the military's Joint Special Operations Command. "The executive branch is claiming the authority to target and kill any individual anywhere in the world – including American citizens – without any judicial process or oversight and without any transparency or accountability," Leili Kashani, CCR's advocacy program manager, told Truthout. "It is subverting the Constitution and international law in assuming the role of judge, jury and executioner."

Lately, other civil liberties groups, local and national, are also raising concerns about the lack of transparency, accountability and oversight over domestic drone deployment. Such groups include the [Center for Technology and Democracy](#), the [Electronic Policy Information Center](#) and the [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#).

Drone proliferation has sparked the creation of new organizations, such as the [International Center for Robotic Arms Controls](#), which are demanding global governance over international drone missions.

A stream of recent media reports about drone proliferation at home has sparked rising public interest and concern in the United States. The lack of attention by Congress to the drone-related privacy issues has precipitated a surge of citizen activism and nongovernmental organization advocacy – accompanied by a wave of alarmed blog postings and commentary.

The rising concerns in America about the implications of drone deployment parallels a more advanced public debate in Great Britain about the onset of the "surveillance society" and about the legal and human consequences of drone interventions in foreign nations.

One example of this new attention in the United States is the upcoming Drone Summit, which will bring a variety of civil libertarians, human rights activists, robotics technology experts and peace activists to Washington, DC, on April 28–29. The [Drone Summit](#) is jointly sponsored by the peace group CodePink and the legal advocacy organizations Reprieve (UK) and [Center for Constitutional Rights](#). Described as the "first international drone summit," the event will feature military experts and first-hand testimonies by victims of drone strikes in Pakistan.

Medea Benjamin, author of the forthcoming book "Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control," says that "our nation is leading the way toward a new form of warfare where pilots sitting on the ground thousands of miles away command drone strikes, where targets are– in military jargon– 'neutralized,' and where unintended victims are dismissed as 'collateral damage.'"

Yet, drones aren't only about war fighting and extrajudicial killings overseas. Drones are also being deployed domestically by border security and law enforcement agencies. Predator drones deployed by Customs and Border Protection search for immigrants and drugs on the northern and southern borders, while metropolitan police and county sheriffs are acquiring smaller drones to assist their SWAT operations.

Under industry pressure, the Federal Aviation Administration was mandated by new Congressional legislation to adopt procedures to open US domestic airspace to private and governmental drones by 2015 and to allow police to start flying lightweight, line-of-sight drones by this summer. The new law was a major success for the new House Unmanned System Caucus and for the Association of Unmanned Vehicles Systems International, a drone industry group that works closely with the House drone caucus.

The drone freedom law also served as a wake-up call for a US public, which has been largely oblivious to advance of drones as a surveillance and law-enforcement instrument. Benjamin, who founded CodePink, warns, "As drones become an increasingly preferred form of warfare and as their presence expands at home, it is time to educate ourselves, the US public and our policymakers about drone proliferation." For Benjamin, activism needs to complement education if drone proliferation is to be subjected to the necessary accountability, transparency and oversight. "As remotely controlled warfare and spying race forward," she says, "it is also time to organize to end current abuses and to prevent the potentially widespread misuse both overseas and here at home."

Internationally, the simultaneously contentious and mutually self-serving relationship between the United States and Pakistan has lately been stuck at an impasse over routine US drone surveillance over that nation and killer drone strikes in Pakistani tribal areas. The Pakistani Parliament and public protests say the drone interventions must stop, while the Obama administration says that the UAV deployments must and will continue.

It wasn't until January of this year that the president even acknowledged the secret targeted killing missions of drones by the CIA when he insisted in the midst of rising concern of noncombatant (collateral damage) deaths that the overseas killer drones were on a "[very tight leash](#)."

"Under the Obama administration, drone strikes have escalated and expanded in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia," said Kashani. "In Pakistan alone, the Obama administration has launched six times as many drone strikes as the Bush administration, in fewer years in office, killing hundreds of innocent people and devastating families."

"Ultimately, efforts to end the expansion of US drone strikes and covert wars are not only a legal matter," Kashani said, "but a political and ethical one on which the viability of a livable future and meaningful democracy is based."

Although information is restricted and controlled, it does appear that noncombatant deaths by killer drone strikes are declining – although continuing. But security questions remain about the level of threats represented by combatants who are being targeted and constitutional questions persist about the legality of these extrajudicial killings.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may be winding down after nearly a decade. But the US military and the Obama administration are committed to the increased use of UAVs in intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and war fighting.

In January, [President Obama announced](#) a shift in US military strategy, including the shedding of "outdated Cold War systems" in favor of the high-tech instruments and conflicts of the future – including the aptly denominated "shadow wars." This evolution in military strategy, including the increased reliance on drones and special operations (and presumably a continuing pattern of extrajudicial killings by drone strikes around the globe) may, as its supporters contend, be exactly the course the US military needs to ensure national and global security. Whether strategically right or not, this is a shift that clearly calls out for the processes of moral, ethical and legal scrutiny at all levels of government – local, national and international.

The [crash](#) of the CIA's highly sophisticated – and extremely expensive (even its price tag is secret) – US stealth Sentinel drone in Iran last December proved another wake-up call about the risks of drone interventions. The US military, intelligence agencies and counterterrorist units may be the top dogs in the drone world now – but things change, blowback happens and drones have no national loyalty. Many close observers of drone proliferation point to near complete lack of governance structures, international conventions and adequate export controls to regulate drones.

Meanwhile, Iran is busy incorporating US drone technology into its own now-extensive drone program, and China has surged into the international drone market.

Understandably, this competition concerns the US drone industry – led by the major US military contractors, including Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, General Atomics, among others.

Currently the industry – with support of the Congressional caucus – is pressuring the administration to continue relaxing the export controls on US-made drone technology to ensure that the industry keeps its market share of the fastest growing military and aviation sector. As speakers at the annual Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International conference in February reminded industry representatives and the attending Congressional representatives, drone competition is sparking new markets for drone detection technology, defenses against enemy drones and electronic warfare instruments designed to break drone communications with their remote piloting.

"It is vital that the debate on drones is brought to American public since US drone policy is becoming vital part of US foreign policy in conflict zones," says Shahzad Akbar, attorney with [Reprieve](#) in London and with the Pakistani Foundation for Fundamental Rights. Akbar, who is listed as a summit speaker, says that a debate about drones needs to include all stakeholders, including the US public and that's a central objective of the planned drone summit in Washington, DC.

"Central to the debate are questions about the rights of individuals, whether as objects of surveillance or targets of killing machines," says Akbar. Essentially, we are asking to what degree "we [are] ready to allow government to "usurp the rights of individuals and under exactly what circumstances?" With respect to the objectives of the drone Summit, Akbar said that the summit's organizers are working to ensure that in the United States and in other drone-deploying countries they will subject their use to the "due-process rule of law" and to "proper judicial and democratic oversight."

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EMAIL THIS STORY TO A FRIEND

TOM BARRY

Tom Barry is a senior policy analyst at the Center for International Policy, where he directs the TransBorder project. Barry specializes in immigration policy, homeland security, border security and the outsourcing of national security. Barry's latest book is "[Border Wars](#)," forthcoming from MIT Press in September 2011. He blogs at borderlinesblog.blogspot.com.

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Tremblingdave

WOW!! I hope to high heaven that there are conscientious scientists working to neutralize this doomsday weapon for free people all over the world. This is a bit of fascist hell that has escaped notice of our dumbed down public, one that has come home to roost and terrorize. This one has to go down no matter who it carries with it - Obama, Rethuglicans, demonic elite, the entire f***ing military, whoever!!!

[13 hours ago](#) [2 Likes](#)

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PHILOMENAGLENN

@Ma_Kettle my neighbör's ex-Wife mâkes \$82 every hoür òn the lâptòp. She hâs been ùneMpLoyed for 7 months bùt lâst Month her pây was \$21653 jùst working òn the lâptop for a few hõurs. Read mörë òn this Wèb sité.. <http://v.ahoo.it/pM/wz>

[11 hours ago](#) [in reply to Tremblingdave](#)

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Vardette

As if drones were not enough - Somehow they overlooked that they over looked and that is the NRA- last year 31,244 people died from guns in the US of A. Much more then anyone from another country. But no one wants to spy on them.

And here as tens of millions are homeless, jobless, go with health care, food cutting services in states etc... they are spending tens of billions to spy on us as we become ever more impoverished.

But now to top off our police state is the strip search anyone for any reason decision!

We are shaken to the bone regarding the Supreme Courts ruling that anyone can be strip searched for any reason! HOW DARE THEY!

It is clear that the Supreme Court does not have the well being of the people in mind. Abuse of this law has already taken place. An innocent black man was stripped searched because of a traffic violation that he already paid and had proof.

It didn't take long did it.

Saw this letter in the Times today, responding to Maureen Dowd's column yesterday: historyl ession Norwalk, CT

This strip search decision poses a threat to every single American, but it poses a particular threat to the female population of our country. Women and girls are much more likely to be stopped and strip searched for the sexual charge it will give male cops, and now no one can stop them. Not long ago, on Long Island, cops were stopping women driving alone at night, threatening them with tickets and arrest, and then telling them they could avoid this in exchange for stripping and/or sexual favors. At the time their conduct was illegal. Now police have free reign. With one decision this corrupt, partisan court has turned America into a police state. That is the brutal truth. And while I dislike comparisons to Nazism, because they are too often used inappropriately, unfettered police power (SS/SA) was one of the primary ways Hitler consolidated his power. A read of William Shirer's "Berlin Diary" will confirm this. Now I worry about my daughter every time she leaves her home. I fear for myself, and for all women stepping outside their homes and schools. This is not paranoia. This is a reasonable response to the facts of the decision. What does strike me as -- insane-- is that these five justices don't ever seem to think the decision might come back to bite them, when one of their children is a victim of it. This decision needs to be erased by a new law, and these justices need to be removed from the highest court. They have raped all of us and destroyed our fundamental liberty.

EVERYONE SHOULD CALL THEIR REP AND DEMAND THAT THIS DECISION BE STRICKEN!
202-224-3121 ASK THEM IF THEY SUPPORT THIS DECISION AND IF THEY DO VOTE THEM OUT!

8 hours ago 1 Like

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



Vanessa Mann

By relying on the use of drones the US is setting a bad example to the world... I think it's pretty obvious that if Pakistan were to launch a drone attack in the US, the Americans wouldn't hesitate in the slightly to respond to this 'act of war'...

11 hours ago 1 Like

[Like](#) [Reply](#)

**aarky**

In Ft Smith, Arkansas, They downsized the Air National Guard from a squadron of F-16's and replaced them with three A-10 Warthogs tank killer planes. The new proposal will get rid of the A-10's by transferring them back to the Active Air Force. So guess what the Air National Guard wants to replace the A-10's with? DRONES!!

[9 hours ago](#)[Like](#) [Reply](#)**Clackamas**

Good article, informative and comprehensive. And well written. More journalism like this please.

Drones should simply not exist. Some technology, regardless of any theoretically beneficial use which may be imagined for it, e.g. nuclear technology, is bound to be primarily destructive, given human beings as we are, and to present intolerable risks not only to our bodies but also to important values - in the case of drones, civil liberties and human rights. Once certain technological implements are introduced into the world, no amount of "accountability" or "oversight," all but meaningless words today, will prevent this outcome. This is a variation of course on "We do not ride upon the railroad, it rides upon us." But Thoreau was right. So was the Unabomber, to the extent of his endorsement of the same proposition. The contrary, that technology is neutral, and can be used by us for good or ill, is so naive at this point as to be ludicrous.

[10 hours ago](#)[Like](#) [Reply](#)**olenska**

NATIONAL PETITION TO PASS THE DUE PROCESS GUARANTEE ACT AND REPEAL THE NDAA

We need one million signatures to sway members of Congress.. It is an election year, so this might do it. Here is the petition. Please circulate it. Many thanks

<http://signon.org/sign/pass-th...>

[11 hours ago](#)[Like](#) [Reply](#)**Mamayi**

Private drones by 2015? For those that have everything, something new to want.

[12 hours ago](#)[Like](#) [Reply](#)**Ma_Kettle**

The U.S. military is already flying drones over American soil. The Navy has co-opted vast "operations areas" over EVERY U.S. coastline, including the Gulf of Mexico, Alaska, the east and west coasts, and from Los Angeles to Hawaii and the Marianas Islands; according to their own environmental impact

statements they have been flying drones in these areas, and in the Pacific Northwest from the coast all the way to Idaho. Furthermore, the Navy already has a large restricted air space dedicated to drone testing from Boardman to Umatilla, Oregon (home of the army's largest chemical weapons depot, a disaster waiting for a drone accident). Folks on the west coast have been yelling blue murder about this for at least three years but no legislator or major media have listened.

[14 hours ago](#)

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Whitedove2525

As I stated SPECIFICALLY to one of the "leaders" here in this area: WE ARE SURELY NOT AFRAID OF YOU OR YOUR TEENY TINY TERRORISTS YOU WANT TO MAKE UP TO MAKE FOLKS FEAR YOU! and then I started jumping for joy cuz they KNOW folks; they understand PERFECTLY that if they CANNOT GET YOU INTO FEAR they can do NOTHING?

I just start LAUGHING AT THEM! let me tell you all a secret; when you are NOT IN DECPETION they can do NOTHING! and these "big bad leaders" of theirs: LEAN THEIR HEADS AGAINST THE WALL & THEY START TO BAWL!

in front of all the peoples in their cars, and all those in the grocery stores, I started dancing for sheer utter joy saying Thank You, JESUS!

cuz of course, he (one of theirs) kept trying to say "SOMEONE MIGHT BE WATCHING"; they KNOW my name folks; they KNOW my address; one of theirs has been parked in an RV behind the fence of my back yard for probably at least a year now; and they SEE me dancing, singing, and praising GOD!

they shudder to even SEE me walking by one of their "banks" inside of a store; cuz THEY KNOW WHO I AM! they SHUDDER to see me coming in one of THEIR CORPORATIONS; and TELLING THEIR CLERKS etc ISN'T IT NICE THAT WE THE PEOPLE HAVE A TRUE GOVERNMENT NOW INSTEAD OF ALL THIS FICTICIOUS NONSENSE YOU HAVE ALL BEEN HAVING GOING ON? RIGHT IN THE CROWDED GROCERY STORES: I LOUDLY LET EVERYONE KNOW OF THEIR FICTICIOUS BANKS< THEIR FICTICIOUS MONEY< THEIR FICTICIOUS LEGAL SYSTEM: THEIR FICTICIOUS MEDIA; etc etc etc etc etc;

SO I SHOULD BE AFRAID OF DRONES? ?????? PLEASE!

GO GET A BRAIN SCAN!

1 single angel Passover

1 single angel killed 495, 000 coming against HIS PEOPLE

JERICO;

YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH PEOPLE AND GUESS WHAT? THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE!

FOR ALL YOUR SO CALLED "SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENT" which is so obsolete it is from the DARK AGES PEOPLE!

DO YOU BE KNOWING HOW TO BE FIGHTING HOLY ANGELS? LET ME ANSWER THIS QUESTION FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD: NO! they do not! NOR do they KNOW how to FIGHT ANYONE ON THIS PLANET WHO KNOWS AND OPERATES IN TRUTH!

FEAR NOT OH YOU PEOPLE OF THE EARTH! If you have EARS TO HEAR; the MOST INCREDIBLY BEAUTIFUL MUSIC HAS BEEN PLAYING LOUDLY TRYING TO GET THRU TO YOUR SPIRITS; to FEAR NOT!

THIS is a GOD THING which means it is a GOOD THING; and the FIRST RULE IN WAR IS TO

ESTABLISH LAW; which is WHAT I HAVE DONE; which is the ONLY ONE ON THIS PLANET THAT IS FIXED, STABLE: LIKE THE WORD OF THE LORD IS!
 & THIS I COULD DO AS A HUMAN, BECAUSE I SAW, REALIZED AND UNDERSTOOD WHAT THEY HAVE ALL BEEN DOING!
 THERE IS LAW THAT THE ONLY FOOD THAT CAN BE SOLD IN THE USA OR GLOBALLY: WHICH MEANS ANYWHERE ON THIS PLANET EARTH: IS THAT WHICH IS HEALTHY & NUTRICIOUS!
 THAT LAW IS BACKED BY HE WHO BE HOLY HOLY HOLY; HE WHOSE NAME BE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY!
 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? THAT HEAVEN IS COMING TO THIS PLANET WITH TRUE GOVERNMENT WITH TRUE LAWS THAT IS SET UP FOR THE PEOPLES ON THIS PLANET!
 SO, if you THINK that you have to be "in fear" because of "drones" or anything else: DON'T!
 Do not be needing no drone to know MY name; MY address; MY phone #;
 so WHY BE IN FEAR OF DRONES?
 KNOW WHAT THEY CAN DO IF YOU ARE NOT IN FEAR? NOTHING!
 ABSOLUTELY POSITIVELY NOT ONE SINGLE SOLITARY THING!
 WHAT TIME IS IT PEOPLE? the TIME of DECEPTION is DONE! and the OPPRESSION OF THE PEOPLE ON THIS PLANET IS OVER WITH!

[18 hours ago](#)

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Mike Strong

The monitors must be out to lunch on Whitedove who posts repeated nonsense on multiple stories, often duplicating the same incomprehensible nonsense. I've decided Whitedove2525 is either:

- 1) disruptive troll
- 2) on drugs
- 3) off his/her meds
- 4) truly mental with disrupted thought patterns and badly needs to be told
- 5) just a copy and paste bot designed for mechanical disruption
- 6) or just make up your own.

[12 hours ago](#) [in reply to Whitedove2525](#)

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Al Krauss

Does anyone monitor this site? The holy holy big caps post degrades everything that might be considered seriously here. But for the "grace of whatever gawd ah-mighty", this could be either left or right wing, and for sure, not centered. It flutters in the breeze of windy nonsense, just waiting for a bad bee to sting it (robotic, of course)

[14 hours ago](#) [in reply to Whitedove2525](#)

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Nophah Kingweigh

Is there a living soul remaining on this planet who can give me one good reason to vote again FOR Obama (as opposed to voting against some equally evil republitude)? Obama has actually enabled and perpetuated the very worst practices of the Bush crime family. And I'm supposed to swallow the line that "he's better than the alternative"?

George Carlin had it right when he suggested that the act of voting merely encourages our criminal leaders. I'm sick of enabling the misbehavior of elected officials; and I am seriously asking myself "why even bother to vote?"

[19 hours ago](#)

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



Mike

I have to agree, Obama is a gigantic disappointment. Write in Ron Paul in the election.

[17 hours ago](#) [in reply to Nophah Kingweigh](#) [1 Like](#)

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



Donotfallforit

Does anyone realize Ron Paul is doing the same campaigning on change that Obama did in 2008. Don't fall for it. Ron Paul will turn his back on any promises he is making just like Obama did. Ron Paul is Obama 2008. Republicans and Democrats cannot be trusted. Just accept this is a game that democrats and republicans are playing on the american people.

[13 hours ago](#) [in reply to Mike](#)

[Like](#)



Nsolan

If we have any chance at all it's Ron Paul a constitional supporter...If he's not on your ticket; WRITE HIM IN!

[14 hours ago](#) [in reply to Nophah Kingweigh](#)

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



Jo6pac

Vote Green

[17 hours ago](#) [in reply to Nophah Kingweigh](#)

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



Mike

Skynet anyone?

[19 hours ago](#)

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



tomdoff

The future of drones is what should concern US. Right now the rumors are rampant that the CIA, DHS, and NYPD have asked for bids on the new sub-miniaturized solar-powered drone program, which proposes that drones the size of a house fly, which can fly indefinitely, so that they do not pause and chance being swatted, be produced by the millions. These drones would, at least initially in Phase I, have only full video and audio surveillance capabilities, with assassination and/or nuclear strike functions to be incorporated in Phase II.

The three main bidders, Boeing, Raytheon, and IAI (Israel Aerospace Industries), are expected to submit their proposals by July 4th, together with plans to distribute and insert their new Fly-Spies in all individual households across the US. The system is to commence by concentrating on potential terrorist 'hot-spots', NYC, LA, Miami, Chicago, D.C., and to complete household installations in lesser terrorist strongholds such as Boise, Fresno, the Hamptons, Martha's Vineyard, Green Bay and Cucamonga by no later than July 2016, prior to the end of Obama's presidency, and before the commencement of the second Clinton administration.

[20 hours ago](#)

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