

## Drones

Drones range from tiny drones to Sentinels and Avengers; from 15 ounces to 34,000 pounds.

Large military drones are launched and landed by aircrews, but they are controlled by pilots and sensor operators from places like Nevada, California, and North Dakota. Military drones can also be monitored by private security contractors stateside.

A recent McClatchy report revealed that it takes nearly 170 people to keep a single Predator drone in the air for 24 hours.



A Colorado deputy prepares to use a Draganflyer X6 drone to pursue a suspect with a knife. These drones can be purchased on ebay.

"The aerial disasters described draw attention not only to the technical limitations of drone warfare, but to larger conceptual flaws inherent in such operations."

Drone missions have many moving parts and much can go wrong.

Electronic failure, break downs, wrecks, escape human control and oversight, accidental triggering of self-destruction, pilot error, bad weather, mechanical failure, faulty instrument readings, a crack in the crankshaft, ...

Vulnerabilities include: insurgents hacking drone video feeds, a virulent computer virus infecting the Air Force's unmanned fleet, large percentages of drone pilots suffering from "high operational stress," friendly fire incidents, crashes, and drone-hijacking.

In 2001, Air Force Predator drones flew 7,500 hours.  
By the close of 2010, over 70,000 hours.

Crashes have also become more frequent.

In 2001, just two Air Force drones were destroyed in accidents.

In 2008, eight drones fell from the sky.

In 2011, the number reached 13. (Accident rates are, however, dropping according to an Air Force report relying on figures from 2009.)

70-plus accidents have been recorded in Air Force accident investigation documents, but they represent only drone crashes resulting in the loss of an aircraft or property damage of \$2 million or more. Many other drone mishaps have not been included in the Air Force statistics. Examples include:

- a haywire MQ-9 Reaper drone that had to be shot out of the Afghan skies by a fighter jet in 2009
- a remotely-operated Navy helicopter that went down in Libya in June, 2011
- an unmanned aerial vehicle whose camera was reportedly taken by Afghan insurgents after a crash in August 2011
- an advanced RQ-170 Sentinel lost during a spy mission in Iran in December 2011

- and the recent crash of an MQ-9 Reaper in the Seychelles Islands.

A Predator drone costs \$4,000,000.

Drones are currently used by the U.S. military in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Yemen, Djibouti, Somalia, ... and in the United States: the borders of Mexico and Canada... , **and domestically** in Washington, Texas, North Dakota, Colorado, ... Predators are flown "in many areas around the country, not only for federal operators, but also for state and local law enforcement and emergency responders in times of crisis."

Flying out of earshot and out of sight, a Predator B can watch a target for 20 hours nonstop, far longer than any police helicopter or manned aircraft.

Personnel watching computer monitors in distant locations have repeatedly failed to discriminate between armed combatants and innocent civilians.

Drones are unable to see and avoid other aircraft.

The Miami-Dade Police Department has been licensed to operate drones up to 200 feet in the air, but currently the drone must remain within 1,000 feet of the operator.

For now, the use of drones for high-risk operations inside the United States is exceedingly rare. The Federal Aviation Administration - which controls the national airspace - requires the few police departments with drones to seek emergency authorization if they want to deploy one in an actual operation. But by 2013, the FAA expects to have formulated new rules that would allow police across the country to routinely fly lightweight, unarmed drones up to 400 feet above the ground. Congress passed a bill to proliferate drone use inside the US airspace. The FAA says we will be up to 30,000 drones domestically by 2020.



Pictured are (front to back, left to right) RQ-11A Raven, Evolution, Dragon Eye, NASA FLIC, Arcturus T-15, Skylark, Tern, RQ-2B Pioneer, and Neptune.

In addition, drone warfare seems to be creating a sinister system of embedded economic incentives that may lead to increasing casualty figures on the ground. "In some targeting programs, staffers have review quotas—that is, they must review a certain number of possible targets per given length of time," The Atlantic's Joshua Foust recently wrote of the private contractors involved in the process. "Because they are contractors," he explains, "their continued employment depends on their ability to satisfy the stated performance metrics. So they have a financial incentive to make life-or-death decisions about possible kill targets just to stay employed. This should be an intolerable situation, but because the system lacks transparency or outside review it is almost impossible to monitor or alter."

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Sources: The Washington Post, USA Today, Mother Jones, Christian Science Monitor, Nick Turse, officer.com, ebay.

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AWARE, the Anti-War, Anti-Racism Effort meets every Sunday at 5pm at McKinley Foundation on the corner of Daniel and 5<sup>th</sup> Street in Champaign, Illinois.