

DRONES



Drones are only part of the problems of robotics. The federal government’s “national security” functions (the military and other agencies) and private industry are pushing hard to develop and use a variety of drones and other robotic technology, some of which are very scary. They tell the public only about some benign applications, but the things they don’t say are much more threatening and worrisome.

A whole new era: This is not merely a new issue. It is a new era in human history with a rapidly escalating robotic age in various forms. Drones are only one example of new “synthetic organisms” and life forms. Many projects are designed to be “dual-use” technologies with benign-sounding civilian applications and very nasty applications for military, surveillance and other oppressive purposes. Many are funded by DARPA, the Pentagon’s secretive wing for designing and funding cutting-edge weapons. Thousands of robotic military devices have already been deployed. We need to transcend the notion that civilian (big business) robotics are basically OK. Mini-drones are coming and will become as pervasive in our society as the synthetic chemicals released into the environment. Robotics, nanotechnology, “artificial intelligence,” and other cutting-edge technologies are merging. Where will this technology take us? Today the government uses them to track and kill al Qaeda’s members. Who will the government be tracking and killing tomorrow?

Boeing and many other contractors are involved in a great many locations throughout the U.S. Our region’s locations include the Seattle area, Joint Base Lewis-McChord south of Tacoma, the giant Yakima army base, and the Bingen WA and Hood River OR areas near the Columbia River. (Boeing has a major drone manufacturing plant in Bingen.) Boeing’s wholly-owned subsidiary, Insitu, (www.insitu.com) is manufacturing surveillance drones for the military. Many of the contractors and research/development/manufacturing sites around the U.S. are highly secretive. Boeing does “phantom” work by secretly distributing many employees working on this into many other locations that do other work, so even their co-workers don’t know that these employees are working on these “phantom” projects. The army’s Yakima base does a lot of drone work, but the base is so huge and secretive that people don’t know. Boeing is a major drone manufacturing presence in Bingen, WA.

Medea Benjamin says Israel is the #1 manufacturers of drones.

Mainstream media don’t say much about them, but information is available from other sources. Just like big business’s “greenwashing” propaganda to mislead the public into thinking the corporations are nice to the environment when really they are damaging the environment, the military industry does “peacewashing” to mislead the public into thinking that drones and robotics are more benign than they are. The public needs to know the truth. Now is the time for peace and justice activists to research the problems and make this a hot issue that will make the government and business accountable to us. Even if we can’t stop the bad technologies altogether, we could organize to limit them and prohibit the nastiest uses.

The term “Unmanned Aerial Vehicles” (UAV) is a term to use when searching the internet. It can find more information than searching for merely “drones.” A search for small UAV found this on Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miniature_UAV

Obama sends U.S. troops and drones to Africa. The U.S. government is expanding its endless war against militant extremism into Africa, where -- just like in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East -- the U.S.'s violent policies will do more harm than good. In mid-March 2013 President Obama announced that he dispatched 100 troops to support a new U.S. drone base in Niger, despite reports indicating that drones damage U.S. security interests. The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL, www.fcnl.org) reports that beginning in 2013, the U.S. Africa Command will deploy a 4,000-member brigade to train and equip security forces in 35 African countries, even though these activities have worsened instability in the past. The U.S. has already undertaken numerous drone strikes in Somalia and actively partners with governments and security forces that oppress and abuse their communities in the name of counterterrorism. FCNL urges people to contact our members of Congress and urge them to speak out against escalating violent policies that only make things worse. Encourage Congress to ask hard questions about current and potential U.S. military activities in Africa and to request a hearing to examine and slow down this slippery slope to militarism now, before U.S. policies do further damage. The hearing should invite testimony from FCNL and other experts who know how nonviolent solutions would be better than escalating military violence.

The problem grows nationwide, but Seattle and Virginia are striking back: The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is vigorously pushing drones at national, state and local levels. The ACLU reports, "The use of unmanned aircraft to spy on Americans is a growing national problem. Drones are already cheap and readily available on the market, and now the federal government is calling on the Federal Aviation Administration to open domestic airspace to drones by 2015." But when an enormous number of people attended a public hearing in Seattle to oppose letting Seattle police use drones, Seattle's mayor was convinced and sent the drones back. Virginia's state legislature passed a bill in February 2013 to delay drones' use there for two years to allow time for studying privacy protection. (Virginia's governor had not yet acted when this newsletter article was written.) Here in Washington State, two bills in the 2013 legislative session (HB 1771 and SB 5782) would have established standards for the use of public unmanned aircraft systems. Hearings were held, but the bills did not make enough progress before a "cut-off" day, so they are considered dead for this legislative session, but public pressure could revive them for the 2014 session. Also, the ACLU of Washington urges people to sign a petition to Governor Inslee, urging him to protect us from drones, despite Boeing's vigorous lobbying. See <https://www.aclu.org/secure/dont-let-boeing-block-reasonable-rules-for-drones?etname=2013-03-07+Boeing+Petition&etjid=738777>

Congresswoman Barbara Lee and others ask Obama information about his drone policy. On March 11, 2013, U.S. Representative Barbara Lee and seven other members of Congress sent President Obama a letter requesting the full, unclassified release of information surrounding the Administration's drone policy. "The executive branch's claim of authority to deprive citizens of life, and to do so without explaining the legal bases for doing so, sets a dangerous precedent and is a model of behavior that the United States would not want other nations to emulate." They want more congressional oversight "to protect the checks and balances that are at the heart of our democracy." The letter objects to "[a]n unbounded geographic scope; unidentified 'high-level' officials with authority to approve kill-lists; a vaguely defined definition of whether a capture is 'feasible,'" and "an overly broad definition of the phrase 'imminent threat,' which re-defines the word in a way that strays significantly from its traditional and legal meaning."

U.S. Senate bill S. 505 would prohibit drone strikes in the United States. U.S. Senators Ted Cruz and Rand Paul introduced S. 505 to prohibit drone strikes in the United States. If this bill is passed into law, it would mark the first time that Congress has acted to limit the "war without borders" created by the Authorization for the Use of Military Force in 2001 after the 9/11 attacks. At long last, the "global war on terror" would have a boundary. Passage of the bill would create a precedent: Congress can act to limit the endless war. This information comes from Just Foreign Policy (www.justforeignpolicy.org), a reliable source of foreign policy information. They urge people to e-mail their House and Senate members about this through www.justforeignpolicy.org/act/s505

Amnesty International urges people to send an e-mail to President Obama in order to stop unlawful killings: <http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/ActionItem.aspx?c=6oJCLQPAJiJUG&b=6645049&aid=519442&msource=W1303EASHR1>

The Network to Stop Drone Surveillance and Warfare includes a number of groups including the national Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). The Network calls for a variety of outreach and nonviolent actions throughout April, including protests in mid-April, to publicly oppose the use of drones in the US and in other countries. Info: www.knowdrones.com and www.droneswatch.org and <http://nodronesnetwork.blogspot.com> Other resources

include the Global Network Against Nuclear Weapons and Power in Space (www.space4peace.org). Another resource is the San Diego Coalition for Peace and Justice (www.sdcpi.org). More resources include:

<http://forusa.org/groups/campaigns/no-fly-zone-for-armed-spy-drones>

<http://droneswatch.org/2012/07/29/a-call-from-the-faith-based-community-to-stop-drone-killings/#more-667>

<http://paxchristiusa.org/2012/08/14/drones-waging-peace-at-the-drone-convention/>

<http://vcnv.org/project/drone-warfare-awareness>

<http://www.paxchristimetrodc.org/2012/06/05/prayer-service-to-end-the-use-of-lethal-drones>

The Defending Dissent Foundation offers some relevant information at this link:

http://org2.democracyinaction.org/o/5492/t/0/blastContent.jsp?email_blast_KEY=1236048

Here is a short satirical article

[http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/borowitzreport/2013/03/poll-majority-of-americans-opposed-to-being-killed-by-drone.html?mbid=nl_Borowitz%20\(90\)](http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/borowitzreport/2013/03/poll-majority-of-americans-opposed-to-being-killed-by-drone.html?mbid=nl_Borowitz%20(90))

A Northwest regional network of people organizing against drones formed in February 2013. A good contact person for this is Marion Ward, mjward333@q.com She recommends keeping up-to-date by visiting

www.knowdrones.org and www.droneswatch.org