

# The Metastaticizing US Military Drone Program

*This post by Judy Bello is cross-posted from The Deconstructed Globe*

It was never in doubt that the US has expanded its military drone program continuously, at least since 2001, and continues to do so. Not only have the numbers of active, armed Predators and Reapers increased, but continuing research and development have yielded larger, faster drones capable of carrying more armaments, better video feeds, and more security. Smaller drones that can go unnoticed with the capacity to obtain visual or audio information, or deliver a small weapon, say a poison dart are also under intensive development..

Additionally, military industrial complex has worked, at least since I last went to a trade show 7 years ago, on technologies to create fleets of drones with a central command or lead drone (with redundancies that make it replaceable in real time from within the grouping) that act together like a flock of birds. This technology will provide automated networking for information sharing and coverage of specified areas with a group of drones, small or large.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, which has a comprehensive section investigating the use of military drones, has reported on the expanding use of Predators and Reaper drones for months. A number of new military drones are about to come on line, and the number in use will increase. Within the last few days, numerous mainstream venues have published articles on this subject. In an article on the World Socialist Web Site, Niles Williams quotes the following information from the latest article on the subject in the Wall Street Journal:

*... the number of daily flights will increase by 50 percent from the current 61 to as many as 90 a day by 2019.*

*... drone killing and spying operations will be expanded to include missions carried out by the Army, Special Operations Command as well as government contractors.*

*... expansion of the drone program will be directed at improving surveillance and intelligence gathering operations in Ukraine, Iraq, Syria, the South China Sea and North Africa.*

*The growth of the fleet and the number of flights will also be accompanied by a growth of the program's capacity for carrying out killings via airstrikes.*

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I saw this coming a couple of years ago while the US was pulling a temporary veil over the drone program following prominent criticisms from international Human Rights NGOs and a critical report by a specially appointed United Nations Rapporteur, all of which raised serious questions about the legality and morality of the program.. For a while, there were less Hellfire missile strikes reported and the conversation turned to the possibilities of Amazon drone delivery and random Octocopter sitings. Domestic activism focused on attempts to bar drones from the airspace of local communities. Meanwhile, the plotters were in the War Room plotting and the factories at BAE, Lockheed Martin, Honeywell and General Atomics.

Today I received a request to comment on some excellent questions about the planned escalation of the U.S. military drone program, which spurred me to do a little writing on the subject. These are serious questions, important questions, but in the current climate of military dominance, they struck me as strangely absurd. As such, I found myself compelled to

answer them as you can see below.

### **What do I think about the Pentagon's decision to expand this program?**

Most likely there is a plan to offset any global economic setbacks with brute force and a monopoly on certain types of information useful for terrorizing populations that don't have access to resources while blackmailing governments that are a threat to U.S. hegemony and bribing those that need a little help holding power. This is nothing new in the most general sense. More immediately, a global network of military drones conducting reconnaissance and able to strike at any time might reflect an attempt to create a global fait accompli. An automated network of control deployed over international waters and disputed territories around the globe, deployed before anyone has the capacity to block it, would make it possible to use military might to enforce U.S. hegemony around the globe as a policing action.

Plans utilizing a combination of special ops and drones are not easily adapted to any goal other than assassination and possibly 'herding' – in other words, moving populations on the ground using coordinated threats. This is important because dominance is assumed rather than acquired (say, by treaty or by war). I.E. this is not a plan to win a war. Drones are uniquely adapted for policing. The neocons (and their neoliberal cousins) are once again dreaming big! They want to skip the war and assume control – they see it as their destiny.

### **Is this increase necessary for US national security?**

Of course this expansion isn't necessary for U.S. national security, unless of course, you view the U.S. nation as spanning the globe. It might decrease U.S. national security in a world where computer technology is essentially impossible to fully secure.

## **What does this decision indicate?**

This decision indicates increased impunity on the part of the largest and most widely engaged military on the face of the earth. It also indicates a pattern of increasing reliance on technology supplanting human interaction and intelligence.

It might indicate that the U.S. government and its corporate masters are getting ready to go for the gold. Chaos is spreading through the global economy for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that an artificial system of continual growth within a closed system (like the earth) is impossible. The hegemony of the dollar is now threatened by reckless attempts to resolve inconsistencies in the system through monetization and by emancipatory initiatives taken by other nations through external multilateral trade agreements grounded in local currencies. Diplomatic initiatives to rope U.S. allies into coercive treaties like the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) are meeting significant resistance. Meanwhile, these guys aren't going to live forever so if they want to rule the world they will have to move soon.

## **What does the past expansion indicate?**

The past expansion of military drone activity indicates a period of development and testing of a new technology and the unveiling of a new paradigm for world domination.

**The advantages and disadvantages** of this strategy tend to be relative to the observer. From the ground and from the perspective of other independent states, one would think that just the intention behind of this kind of policy is rather threatening. It is a threat to the rule of law, to national sovereignty and democratic aspirations, and to the security of ordinary people on the ground everywhere. On the other hand, since it is not a plan to win a war how should the sovereign nations of the world respond? Might they go to war against the largest most broadly based military power in the world? They

are already forced to defend themselves in a number of regional disturbances. Can they use economic independence to secure their sovereignty against this threat?

This is a plan to hold ground, to control resources and to manage those who might interfere. Because it isn't yet fully operational, they have options. They could try to join the force and secure their future through collaboration. (notably, Israel and Saudi Arabia) They might begin to build regional economic networks and collaborate among themselves to build an empowered political network to resist this intrusion through a variety of diplomatic and other means. (China, Russia) Individuals can go mad with rage or defiance and join any one of a number of active organizations that provide opportunities for self empowerment through notably regressive and barbaric actions on the ground. (ISIS, al Qaeda) They get a lot of good press for this kind of activity and if you were not a thinking person you might assume that you can rule the world without air power.

From the U.S. perspective, the military will not save money because so many people are involved in the process, technicians, observers, pilots, with managers and decision makers at many levels similar to corporate decision making procedures. But, as long as the cash is flowing there is profit to be made. This kind of process is messy and slightly randomized so that the job gets done with a lot of spillover and wasted resources. Like machine generated software, it may work (do something) but the logic isn't clean and there is a lot of redundancy making it difficult for humans to decipher. As in other processes borrowed from the corporate sphere, there is a goal to take human intelligence out of the picture and use social processes to make individuals redundant. This keeps them from getting in the way. It also lowers the unique significance of individual workers at all levels and disperses responsibility among individuals so there is no where for the proverbial 'buck' to stop.

Drones are slow and fragile compared to war planes. But, if you aren't in a war and you are targeting people and things on the ground, no problem. Individual drones are much cheaper than war planes, and don't require an on-board pilot, so they are relatively disposable. It is the process that is expensive, and that is not vulnerable at the site of the action.

There are some disadvantages inherent in a technical solution based on computers and data transmission. These activities are not innately secure. Currently, the U.S. is utilizing this feature of computer/internet technology to brazenly spy on anyone and everyone. But, there are brilliant hackers and security experts in the field who might, due to national loyalty, moral judgement or the sheer joy of the chase, cause some serious problems for this system, or in fact, co-opt it completely to own purpose. When decision makers are reliant on a technology they don't fully understand, there are risks. The use of mercenaries creates risks.

**What are the possible consequences of this drastic expansion of the drone program?**

**The probable consequences are:**

- a lowering of the mean status of military recruits with more and more jobs filled by non-commissioned personnel sitting in trailers, computer labs and fabric demarcated cubicles staring at computer screens and taking orders from managerial specialists who show up on video feeds.
- Drone pilot teams become glorified line workers whose purpose is to kill other people,
- Lots of dead and traumatized innocents around the globe
- U.S. citizens living in the homeland find themselves under the same kind of drone surveillance and risk of targeted killing as people around the world;.

**Some possible consequences are**

- a world dominated by a network of US military drones of all sizes and shapes making resistance, if not 'futile', certainly very dangerous.
- other countries of the world finally rise up to set international standards of behavior that are appropriate for human survival.
- Ongoing processes like the shift of the global economy away from the dollar, global warming and other effects of pollution and tampering with natural processes for corporate profit make unipolar drone policing moot;
- World War III triggered by global efforts to retain national sovereignty,

**Is there another way to get the intelligence these drones will provide?**

You must be kidding! We have satellites overhead nearly everywhere nearly all the time. In fact, the drones depend on these satellites for orientation and communications. We should have informants on the ground. if we don't it is due to a unique combination of arrogance and cultural ignorance commonly known as *American exceptionalism*.

Meanwhile, killing suspects and anyone else in the neighborhood is against US Law, International Law and morality, Flying armed drones on Russia and China's borders sets up an accident waiting to happen. So, whatever the intent of these actions is, there ought to be a better way. Diplomacy comes to mind. But, that isn't the strong suit in the US *Game of Thrones*.