

## Drones Over America: Tyranny at Home

Written by John W. Whitehead  
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*"A standing military force, with an overgrown Executive will not long be safe companions to liberty. The means of defence against foreign danger, have been always the instruments of tyranny at home." - James Madison*

The U.S. government has a history of commandeering military technology for use against Americans. We saw this happen with tear gas, Tasers, and sound cannons, all of which were first used on the battlefield before being deployed against civilians at home. Now the drones - pilotless, remote-controlled aircraft that have been used in Iraq and Afghanistan - are coming home to roost.

Drones, a \$2-billion cornerstone of the Obama administration's war efforts, have increasingly found favor with both military and-law enforcement officials. "The more we have used them," stated Defense Secretary Robert Gates, "the more we have identified their potential in a broader and broader set of circumstances."

Now the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is facing mounting pressure from state governments and localities to issue flying rights for a range of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to carry out civilian and law-enforcement activities. As the Associated Press reports, "Tornado researchers want to send them into storms to gather data. Energy companies want to use them to monitor pipelines. State police hope to send them up to capture images of speeding cars' license plates. Local police envision using them to track fleeing suspects." Unfortunately, to a drone, everyone is a suspect because drone technology makes no distinction between the law-abiding individual and the suspect. Everyone gets monitored, photographed, tracked, and targeted.

The FAA, citing concerns over the need to regulate air traffic and establish anti-collision rules for the aircrafts and their operators, has thus far been reluctant to grant broad approval for the use of UAVs in American airspace. However, unbeknownst to most Americans, remote-controlled aircraft have been employed domestically for years now. They were first used as a national-security tool for patrolling America's borders and then as a means of monitoring citizens. For example, back in 2006, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department was testing out a SkySeer drone for use in police work. With a 6.5-foot wingspan, the lightweight SkySeer can be folded up like a kite and stored in a shoulder pack. At 250 feet, it can barely be seen with the naked eye.

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As another news story that same year reported: "One North Carolina county is using a UAV equipped with low-light and infrared cameras to keep watch on its citizens. The aircraft has been dispatched to monitor gatherings of motorcycle riders at the Gaston County fairgrounds from just a few hundred feet in the air - close enough to identify faces - and many more uses, such as the aerial detection of marijuana fields, are planned." In 2007, insect-like drones were seen hovering over political rallies in New York and Washington, seemingly spying on protesters. An eyewitness reported that the drones "looked kind of like dragonflies or little helicopters."

Drone technology has advanced dramatically in the ensuing years, with surveillance drones getting smaller, more sophisticated, and more lethal with each evolution. Modeling their prototype for a single-winged rotorcraft on the maple seed's unique design, aerospace-engineering students at the University of Maryland have created the world's smallest controllable surveillance drones, capable of hovering to record conversations or movements of citizens.

Thus far, the domestic use of drones has been primarily for surveillance purposes and, as far as we know, has been limited in scope. Eventually, however, police departments and intelligence agencies will make drones a routine part of their operations. However, you can be sure they won't limit themselves to just surveillance.

Police today use whatever tools are at their disposal in order to anticipate and forestall crime. This means employing technology to attain total control. Technology, which functions without discrimination because it exists without discrimination, tends to be applied everywhere it can be applied. Thus, the logical aim of technologically equipped police who operate as technicians must be control, containment, and eventually restriction of freedom.

In this way, under the guise of keeping Americans safe and controlled, airborne drones will have to be equipped with an assortment of lethal and nonlethal weapons in order to effectuate control of citizens on the ground. The arsenal of nonlethal weapons will likely include Long Range Acoustic Devices (LRADs), which are used to break up protests or riots by sending a piercing sound into crowds and can cause serious hearing damage; high-intensity strobe lights, which can cause dizziness, disorientation, and loss of balance and make it virtually impossible to run away; and Tasers, which administer a powerful electric shock.

Since June 2001, more than 350 people - including women, children and elderly individuals -

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have died in the U.S. after being shocked with "nonlethal" Tasers. "Imagine how incidents would skyrocket," notes Paul Joseph Watson for PrisonPlanet.com, "once the personal element of using a Taser is removed and they are strapped to marauding surveillance drones, eliminating any responsibility for deaths and injuries that occur.

"Also available to police," writes Watson, "will be a drone that can fire tear gas as well as rubber pellets to disperse anyone still living under the delusion that they were born in a democratic country." In fact, the French company Tecknisolar Seni has built a drone armed with a double-barreled 44-millimeter Flash-Ball gun. The one-kilo Flash-Ball resembles a large-caliber handgun and fires so-called nonlethal rounds, including tear gas and rubber impact rounds to bring down a suspect. Despite being labeled a "nonlethal weapon," this, too, is not without its dangers. As David Hambling writes for *Wired News*, "Like other impact rounds, the Flash-Ball is meant to be aimed at the body - firing from a remote, flying platform is likely to increase the risk of head injury."

One thing is clear: While the idea of airborne drones policing America's streets may seem far-fetched, like something out of a sci-fi movie, it is no longer in the realm of the impossible. Now, it's just a matter of how soon you can expect them to be patrolling your own neighborhood. The crucial question, however, is whether Americans will be able to limit the government's use of such surveillance tools or whether we will be caught in an electronic nightmare from which there is no escape.

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