

A-Z of Drones 2015. Israeli Drones, the “Killer Robots” Campaign, Obama’s Promises

Part Two

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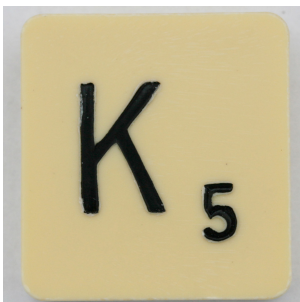
Theme: [Military and WMD, US NATO War Agenda](#)

Part 2 of 3. Read [part 1](#) and [part 3](#).

Reported [Israeli drone strikes](#) in Syria and [Sudan](#) received scant attention as Israel simply refuse to acknowledge such operations. [India](#) abandoned development of its [indigenous Nishant](#) drone and turned its sights on [procuring armed drones from Israel](#) while [Italy](#) received permission from the US to arm its Reaper drones. The Pentagon’s [Inspector General](#) launched an investigation into allegations that military officials have skewed intelligence reports to provide more positive accounts of the progress of the campaign against ISIS. Some suggested that documents have subsequently been [destroyed](#) seemingly as part of a cover up.



US officials confirmed in September that [Joint Special Operations Command \(JSOC\)](#) in conjunction with the CIA are conducting drone operations aimed at killing ‘high value targets’ in Syria. 21-year old British hacker [Junaid Hussain](#) was said to be one of the first targeted. Mohammed Emwazi, the British ISIS militant known as [Jihadi John](#), was also killed in a US drone strike in the centre of Raqqa in November. Despite strong lobbying from Republicans, [Jordan](#) was refused permission to purchase US drones – Israel has stepped in to [supply](#) them instead.



The ‘[Killer Robots](#)’ campaign continues its efforts to ensure a preventative ban on the development of autonomous weapon systems. While US and UK diplomats insist that such weapons are not being pursued, simultaneously military officials argue that drones, “[particularly autonomous ones](#),” have to be “the new normal.” Officials

repeatedly refuse to disclose where British drones are currently based in the Middle East although several reports – and satellite photos – suggest they are at the Ali Al Salem air base in [Kuwait](#).



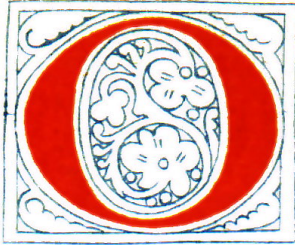
Both the [Israeli military](#) and US Special Forces operated drones over [Lebanon](#) during the year while US drones also deployed to [Latvia](#) as part of a ‘European Reassurance Initiative’. Drone industry [lobbyists](#) were as active as ever behind the scenes aiming to ‘relax’ controls on drone exports while also [challenging](#) restrictions on drones flying in domestic civil airspace. Although US drones have been flying some surveillance missions over [Libya](#) (and apparently [crashing](#)) such operations are likely to increase during 2016



Hollywood’s discovery of the drone wars has resulted in several [movies](#) including Ethan Hawk in ‘Good Kill’ and Helen Mirren and Alan Rickman in the forthcoming ‘Eye in the Sky. Many more are apparently in the pipeline. Michael Fallon, the British Defence Secretary changed the [methodology](#) for calculating British drone and air strikes during the year, leading to ‘less’ strikes on paper, if not on the ground. Leaked NSA documents showed clear links between the North Yorkshire US spy base, [Menwith Hill](#), and US drone strikes in Yemen.



[Nigeria’s](#) acquisition of Chinese armed drones was a complete surprise and clearly showed the global spread of drones, with The [Netherlands](#) being one of a number of European countries gaining US approval to purchase Reaper drones. [Naming](#) continues to be an issue for the industry with the UK choosing to re-christen the Predator B (Reaper) drone as the more soothing and acceptable ‘Protector drone’. The preposterously named European combat drone prototype, [nEURon](#), continued its test programme during the year with test flights in Italy and Sweden.



A number of commentators highlighted that President [Obama's](#) much promised [openness](#) on US drone strikes outside of conflict zones has failed to materialise. In fact there has probably been even less [oversight](#) of the targeted killing strikes within Iraq and Syria. Authors [George RR Martin](#) and [Will Self](#) as well as retired General Stanley McChrystal were among a diverse and growing number of people voicing [opposition](#) to the way that drones are lowering the threshold for war.



The [pressure](#) on [pilots](#) due to the ever-increasing demand for drones was a regular new item during the year. In December the USAF announced changes that will now see [enlisted personnel](#) (and not just officers) fly drones – surveillance flights at first but this will also likely change. [Police](#) use of drones has taken a significant step forward in 2015 with [many local forces](#) announcing they are to trial the use of drones. At the same time, the number of drone incidents being reported to the police has [rocketed](#). [Protests](#) at drone bases and factories continued during the year with [Creech](#) in Nevada and [Waddington](#) in the UK being a key focus of attention.

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