

Flying Robots of Destruction

US Taking War to the Next Level

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The U.S. Air Force has unveiled a 25-year program for developing unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The document lays out a strategy for the project and lists the necessary technologies for this new field of aviation.

Military experts say UAVs will mainly carry air-to-air and air-to-surface guided missiles, as well as smart aviation bombs and cluster bombs, including submunitions with different guidance systems. In the future, new kinds of weapons systems may be installed on UAVs. Currently, work is focused on two areas: adapting available weapons for use on unmanned craft and developing new, specialized weapons.

During the NATO campaign in Yugoslavia, UAVs were employed only for reconnaissance purposes. In Afghanistan, however, troops used a strike craft called the Predator for the first time, detecting and destroying militant groups of various strengths, their bases and sites for launching unguided missiles.

The wide range of available guided weapons makes it possible for UAVs to carry out their missions alone or in conjunction with manned aviation. Because of the enormous payload carried by UAV craft, it is safe to assume that developers will continue to look for ways to make guided aviation weapons smaller.

Directed-energy weapons are also likely to be added to the traditional arsenal of weapons and electronic countermeasures already mounted on UAV craft.

The global spread of UAV technologies has encouraged many do-it-yourself projects using unclassified methods. So these weapons of the future could also be used by terrorists as a sort of kamikaze robots.

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