

From American Drone Supremacy to Drone Multipolarity

The era of American drone supremacy is fading – but the threat of drone multipolarity is real – and potentially endless

By [Global Research News](#)

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So writes [Edward Luce in the FT](#). He points out that there is no treaty governing the use of military drones as for the use of nuclear weapons.

We summarise with added links to Rand Corporation and Stimson Centre.

For almost ten years the Central Intelligence Agency has been able to strike targets with impunity. At the moment, Barack Obama orders drone assassinations without having to admit it, or explain himself to anyone. Hundreds of militants have been killed in Pakistan, Yemen, and elsewhere. But hundreds more civilians, perhaps thousands, have also been accidentally killed.

However, though America has only deemed the UK fit to buy their UAVs, others, including Iran, whose drones patrol the same Iraqi skies as their US counterparts, have reverse engineered the unmanned aerial vehicle with relative ease.

China is exporting drones. Last month Saudi Arabia became its first big customer. Within five years, many countries, some of them highly unsavoury, will possess military drones, according to [the Rand Corporation](#). Luce continues:

“Imagine if China decided to take out Uighur separatists in Afghanistan or further afield. Like al-Qaeda, China’s Uighur minority poses a threat to the Chinese homeland. Like al-Qaeda they resort to terrorism”.

On what grounds could Washington complain? It would be ill-placed to object.

He reflects that the US emulates the hypocritical parent: do as I say not as I do and that the US would not tolerate another country operating with the same scope and secrecy;

“As set out last week by the [Stimson Centre](#), a security think-tank, China’s president would refuse to acknowledge the strikes on grounds of national security, just like Mr Obama. The same would apply to Vladimir Putin if he ordered drone strikes in eastern Ukraine. And so on. The threat of drone multipolarity is real – and potentially endless. Yet America’s moral suasion would be worthless. Likewise, Washington would have scant legal grounds to object. America’s instinct is to claim a US exception for drones. Much the same argument is used for the International Criminal Court, whose strictures apply to soldiers everywhere except American ones. Because the US is democratic and

universal, it alone can be trusted to operate drones responsibility” - **not an argument many would accept.**

Luce forecasts:

“Before Mr Obama leaves office, he will put drones on a firmer legal footing. As Stimson and others recommend, control over drones is likely to shift from the CIA, which is secretive, to the Pentagon, which is less so. Mr Obama is also likely to set up an independent panel to oversee the US president’s use of drones. He may even promise to acknowledge each strike and publish details about what happened, civilian deaths included. That too, is seen as an important plank in putting drones on a legal footing. Transparency is the order of the day. Whether it will be enough to constrain others is an open question”.

Note his important but casual side reference: “As a weapon against terrorists, drones are no panacea. By engendering impotent fear, they breed the kind of resentment that recruits terrorists”.

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