

# Spy Drones Becoming Pervasive **INSIDE** America

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

AP [noted](#) last year:

Unmanned aircraft have proved their usefulness and reliability in the war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq. Now the pressure's on to allow them in the skies over the United States.

The Federal Aviation Administration has been asked to issue flying rights for a range of pilotless planes to carry out civilian and law-enforcement functions but has been hesitant to act.

The Washington Post [reported](#) in January:

The operation outside Austin presaged what could prove to be one of the most far-reaching and potentially controversial uses of drones: as a new and relatively cheap surveillance tool in domestic law enforcement.

For now, the use of drones for high-risk operations is exceedingly rare. The Federal Aviation Administration - which controls the national airspace - requires the few police departments with drones to seek emergency authorization if they want to deploy one in an actual operation. Because of concerns about safety, it only occasionally grants permission.

But by 2013, the FAA expects to have formulated new rules that would allow police across the country to routinely fly lightweight, unarmed drones up to 400 feet above the ground - high enough for them to be largely invisible eyes in the sky.

Such technology could allow police to record the activities of the public below with high-resolution, infrared and thermal-imaging cameras.

One manufacturer already advertises one of its small systems as ideal for "urban monitoring." The military, often a first user of technologies that migrate to civilian life, is about to deploy a system in Afghanistan that will be able [to scan an area the size of a small town](#). And the most sophisticated robotics use artificial intelligence to seek out and record certain kinds of suspicious activity.

But when drones come to perch in numbers over American communities, they will drive fresh debates about the boundaries of privacy. The sheer power of some of the cameras that can be mounted on them is likely to bring fresh search-and-seizure cases before the courts, and concern about the technology's potential misuse could unsettle the public.

"Drones raise the prospect of much more pervasive surveillance," said Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst with the American Civil Liberties Union's

Speech, Privacy and Technology Project. “We are not against them, absolutely. They can be a valuable tool in certain kinds of operations. But what we don’t want to see is their pervasive use to watch over the American people.”

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In a 1986 Supreme Court case, justices were asked whether a police department violated constitutional protections against illegal search and seizure after it flew a small plane above the back yard of a man suspected of growing marijuana. The court ruled that “the Fourth Amendment simply does not require the police traveling in the public airways at this altitude to obtain a warrant in order to observe what is visible to the naked eye.”

In a 2001 case, however, also involving a search for marijuana, the court was more skeptical of police tactics. It ruled that an Oregon police department conducted an illegal search when it used a thermal imaging device to detect heat coming from the home of an man suspected of growing marijuana indoors. [Don’t worry, though. Yesterday, the Supreme Court [ruled](#) 8-1 that the police can bust down a door and enter your property without a warrant if they smell marijuana or hear sounds that are suggestive of destruction of evidence. The case revolved around the warrantless search of an apartment in Kentucky, Lexington. Bye-bye 4th Amendment.]

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When KPRC-TV in Houston, which is owned by The Washington Post Co., discovered a secret drone air show for dozens of officers at a remote location 70 miles from Houston, police officials were forced to call a hasty news conference to explain their interest in the technology.

A senior officer in Houston then mentioned to reporters that drones might ultimately be used for recording traffic violations.

Wired [pointed out](#) in February:

Campers may soon be able to regularly see something bigger and badder when climbing the High Peaks: [Reaper drones flown by the New York Air National Guard’s 174th Fighter Wing based in Syracuse, New York.](#)

And drones aren’t just buzzing over the Adirondacks. The proposal to begin training missions there is part of a bigger push to build a drone infrastructure for flying missions throughout the United States. So new drone bases are being built. The FAA is setting aside airspace for drone flights.

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The latest example is the [amendment proposed](#) by Senators Charles Schumer (D-New York) and Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) to the “FAA Air Transportation Modernization and Safety Act” (S.223) that would increase the number of “National Airspace System” test sites from four to ten. At least one of these sites would have to include a “significant portion” of public land.

The Adirondacks, in Schumer’s home state, clearly fit this bill. And not surprisingly, there is also [a proposal to use the Juniper Military Area, located in Wyden’s home state of Oregon, as another drone test area.](#)

But Schumer and Wyden are, if anything, playing catch-up in a race that has already seen the establishment of unmanned aerial vehicle test and training sites at [Grand Forks Air Force Base in Grand Forks, North Dakota](#); [the National](#)

[Air Intelligence Center in Springfield, Ohio](#); [Langley AFB in Hampton, Virginia](#); [Ellsworth AFB in Rapid City, South Dakota](#); [Mountain Home AFB in Mountain Home, Idaho](#); and [Whiteman AFB in Knob Noster, Missouri](#). Thanks to President Teddy Roosevelt and the establishment of the National Parks system, we can probably expect that the other 42 states not already mentioned will be competing to serve up some of their public land as drone proving grounds.

In addition to test and training sites, Federal education and stimulus money is being used to create nonmilitary drone education programs. The [Department of Aviation](#) at the [University of North Dakota](#), located in Grand Forks and the [operator of the test and training site at Grand Forks AFB](#), now offers the first [Bachelors of Science program in Unmanned Aircraft Systems Operations](#). The [Aviation Maintenance Technology program](#) at [Northland Community and Technical College](#), located in Thief River Falls, Minnesota just 40 miles east of Grand Forks, will soon offer courses in the [repair of UAVs](#).

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Although it is hard to predict where the drone infrastructure will grow, if other defense contracting projects are a reliable guide, the drone-ification of America will probably continue until there is a drone aerodrome in every state ...

Indeed, the CBC notes that drones will start flying coast to coast:

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var VideoID = "14512"; var Width = 425; var Height = 344;
```

Given that the national security apparatus has been hijacked to [serve the needs of big business](#) and to [crush dissent](#), it's not far-fetched to think that information gained from drones will be used for purposes that are not necessarily in the best interests of the American people.

And as I [noted](#) earlier today, the U.S. is allowing military operations within the United States.

Remember also that Obama has [authorized "targeted assassinations" against U.S. citizens](#).

And when John Yoo was asked last year whether drones could kill people within the United States, he replied yes – if we were in a time of war:

Of course, since the U.S. has declared a [perpetual war](#) (and see [this](#)), drones will always be in fashion.

And remember that [Department of Defense training manuals](#) consider protest to be "low-level terrorism". And see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#). And an [FBI memo](#) also labels peace protesters as "terrorists".

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