

The Profits Behind Drone Warfare

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The use of drones, or unmanned ariel vehicles (UAVs), to murder men, women, and children around the world, including American citizens, continues to be a secretive and highly controversial issue in the U.S. Despite the abundance of articles denouncing the immorality and illegality of the use of drones under international law, few have examined the profit motivations behind the continuous use of drones, under the pretext of the 'War on Terror', around the world by U.S. imperialism.

The manufacture and maintenance of UAVs as well as the systems used in UAV warfare are highly profitable to private corporations and are much less risky for their political representatives than conventional warfare, which has frequently been used to transfer public money into the private hands of the ruling class. UAVs offer the advantage to corporations of continuing to profit from a permanent war economy during capitalist crises and to corporate political representatives by eliminating the media backlash caused by soldiers killed in action.

Modern UAV warfare was pioneered by Israel in its 1982 invasion of Lebanon, where it used UAVs to monitor troop movements and more recently to intimidate and control Palestinians in Gaza, and Israel continues to have a controlling share in the UAV market around the world, responsible for 41% of the UAVs exported worldwide between 2001 and 2011. [1]

However UAVs have expanded far beyond Israel, with many Western weapons manufacturers taking a slice of the market for themselves. The largest corporations that manufacture UAVs or UAV technology, both Western and non-Western, are Boeing, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc., Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, AeroVironment Inc., Prox Dynamics AS, Denel Dynamics, SAIC, Israel Aerospace Industries, and Textron Inc. [2]

To fully understand how much money is being funneled into UAV warfare it is necessary to understand the costs of UAVs. The infamous 'Predator Drone' that President Obama loves so much he makes provocative jokes about is manufactured by General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. for the United States Air Force for \$4.5 million each. Predator UAVs have been used in combat in the Balkans, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Pakistan, Yemen, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. The missile often attached to Predator UAVs, the Hellfire missile, manufactured by Lockheed Martin, costs on average around \$110, 000 each. If we use statistics collected by various non-profit organizations, the almost 400 UAV strikes in Pakistan alone have cost \$33 million to \$44 million and killed between 2, 000 and 3, 000 people. The cost of flying time for both the Predator UAVs and the Predator's successor, the Reaper, a \$12 million UAV, is \$2, 500 to \$3, 500 per flight hour. General Atomics had a revenue of almost \$700 million in 2012. On average, the U.S. spends \$4.8 billion on UAVs and UAV technology, and it is expected to spend \$23.9 billion in the next five years. [3] [4]

The market for UAVs in the U.S. is not strictly for the military; internal U.S. departments such as the Department for Homeland Security and police services are increasingly using UAVs. Homeland Security has spent more than \$200 million on UAVs to patrol the U.S.-Mexican border to prevent undocumented immigrants from entering the U.S. and to fight the 'War on Drugs.' [5]

Outside of the U.S. the UAV market is still highly profitable for corporations. The U.K. military spent \$30 million on UAVs from the Norwegian manufacturer Prox Dynamics AS; Northrop Grumman, an American corporation, sold \$1.2 billion in UAVs to South Korea; and General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. sold \$197 million worth of UAVs to the United Arab Emirates.

In fact UAVs have become so profitable that some corporations, such as Textron Inc., have started to develop unmanned underwater vehicles to be used by navies.

War is a highly profitable investment for corporations, especially in times of capitalist economic crises, therefore any examination of the illegality and immorality of imperialist military activities should start with an examination of the capitalist system itself.

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Notes

[1] http://www.salon.com/2012/05/15/israels_drone_dominance/

[2] <http://www.ibtimes.com/12-companies-will-conquer-drone-market-2014-2015-1534360>

[3] <http://robotenomics.com/2014/01/07/us-military-to-spend-23-9-billion-on-drones-and-unmanned-systems/>

[4] <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/03/drones-explained>

[5] <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/03/28/dron-m28.html>

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