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# Nothing monotonous about drones now

Erika Simpson, Special to QMI Agency  
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An off-duty U.S. intelligence agency employee who admitted to the Secret Service that he flew the drone that crashed inside the White House complex last week, had been drinking at an apartment nearby. It wasn't until the next morning when he awoke that he learned that in his drunken misadventure, his 60-by-60-centimetre drone had evaded White House radar that is supposed to warn of larger threats like manned airplanes and incoming missiles.

President Barack Obama pointed out the crash is part of a broader problem managing this new technology.

"I've actually asked the FAA and a number of agencies to examine how we are managing this new technology because the drone that landed at the White House you buy in Radio Shack," he told CNN's Fareed Zakaria. "You know that there are companies like Amazon that are talking about using small drones to deliver packages. We don't really have any regulatory structure at all for it."

If you can use Google maps, you can fly a drone.

Mexican drug cartels use drones to transport drugs and weapons into the U.S. A couple of weeks ago, a drone laden with crystal meth crashed into a supermarket in Tijuana, Mexico, because three kilograms of illegal narcotics was too much for it to carry.

The Aeryon Scout drone manufactured in Waterloo, Ont., made international headlines in 2011 when Libyan rebels purchased one for \$100,000 and used it to collect video intelligence of Moammar Gadhafi's compounds.

Unmanned drones can carry high-resolution still cameras, video cameras and thermal cameras, so they are useful for search and rescue operations — and for filming rock concerts from above, adding to the excitement of Digital Dreams and Veld fans in Toronto last summer.

Vehicles that operate in the air, without people on board to control them, can track wide, isolated expanses such as Canada's Arctic much less expensively than manned aircraft.

Drones can also stay in dangerous airspace longer than manned aircraft, so they were used at Japan's crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant to survey the damage.

Drones are reinventing how humanitarian aid is provide, but they are also deployed as weapons half a world away. Placard-carrying demonstrators opposed to pilots in air-conditioned offices killing people in Afghanistan and Iraq as if they are playing a video game regularly protest at Creech air force base in Nevada and the CIA headquarters.

In 2011, the Teal Group consultants estimated worldwide spending on unmanned aerial vehicles will nearly double over the next decade from \$5.9 billion to \$11.3 billion annually.

American defence contractor Northrop Grumman partnered with Diamond Aircraft in 2012 to make aerial surveillance aircraft in London, Ont.

From a cluster development perspective, more such military contracts could attract companies to the London-Waterloo region, which is fast becoming a defence procurement hotspot. Nobody so far is carrying a protest placard.

Have drones killed many people? It is difficult to find out.

Reportedly about two dozen senior followers of Osama bin Laden have been killed, leading al-Qaida to celebrate the martyrdom of its commanders and use drone footage to recruit more followers.

Over the last decade, there have been about 300 drone strikes outside the battlefields of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Of these, around 95% occurred in Pakistan, with the rest in Yemen and Somalia. Cumulatively more than 2,000 suspected militants and an unknown number of civilians have been killed.

Initially the U.S. government intended to use drones against highly valued targets, like key leaders of al-Qaida. But according to one expert writing in Foreign Policy, approximately 2% of the deaths caused by drones since 2004 are high-valued, while the remainder are lower-ranking operatives.

Obama admits "a lot of these strikes" have been in Pakistan's tribal areas, but who was targeted and under whose authority can only be guessed at.

According to Pervez Hoodbhoy, a renowned Pakistani scientist and peace activist, "tribal people with education" generally favour drone strikes, including those who have lost relatives, but uneducated people, who form the overwhelming majority, hate them.

He writes, "Damage assessment by drones is a free-for-all; you can believe what you want . . . Hit repeatedly by missile strikes, militants have migrated . . . Drones have prevented large formations of Taliban fighters from acting in concert. This sort of evidence suggests they are militarily significant — at least in a limited way."

The option of killing al-Qaida-, Taliban- or ISIS-inspired militants from the air without risking North American lives is one distinct benefit of drones. Given the militants' ruthless violence, drones are worth enduring international opprobrium for, although we too are blowing up innocent civilians.

But in future, without much stronger regulations of their use, this relatively simple technology could be turned against us. A

Iready University of Southampton engineers have used a laser 3-D printer to assemble by hand in minutes a nearly-silent drone. In 2010, Iran's then-president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad unveiled the "Ambassador of Death" drone.

Environmental activists have used drones to monitor Japanese whaling ships; soon Somali pirates could carry backpack-sized drones to track vulnerable ships.

South American drug-runners could monitor convoys carrying politicians susceptible to kidnapping. Or North Korean operatives could invade South Korean or Japanese airspace carrying anthrax.

Just as a drone patrolling the U.S.-Canada border recently helped locate cattle rustlers in North Dakota, organized criminals could use a drone to smuggle a radioactive dirty bomb across the U.S.-Canada border.

The emerging drone industry in Southwestern Ontario, North America and the world will need much heavier regulation and stronger export controls if in future we want to look up at our own skies without fear.

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