GlobalResearch
Center for Research on Globalization

As U.S. Steps-Up Drone Attacks, the Pentagon Goes on a Shopping Spree

By Tom Burghardt
Global Research, May 31, 2010
Antifascist Calling... 31 May 2010

Region: Asia, USA
Theme: US NATO War Agenda
In-depth Report: PAKISTAN

As legendary investigative journalist I. F. Stone reminded readers throughout his career: "All governments are run by liars and nothing they say should be believed."

With Stone's prescriptive warning in mind, the CIA, allegedly in retaliation for the failed May 1 Times Square bomb attempt, fired 18 missiles targeting militants in Pakistan's North Waziristan tribal area May 11, "killing at least 14 fighters and wounding 4," according to an unnamed "security official" cited by The New York Times.

In the area however, American claims are hotly disputed. Lahore's English-language daily The News reported that since January 1, the CIA has mounted "33 drone attacks in only four months of the current year compared to 47 reported in entire 2009."

Reporting on the ground, Javid Aziz Khan disclosed that while "some top militants were killed in the attacks," the overwhelming number of victims "remained innocent civilians." A sad and sorry tale unknown to most Americans, caught up in the riveting drama between "mean girl" Jill and "snarky" Bethenny on Bravo's The Real Housewives of New York City!

Despite cozy, some might say corrupt, relations between his administration and the oil industry responsible for the petroleum-fueled apocalypse in the Gulf of Mexico, one campaign promise that "change" president Obama has kept is his expansion of U.S.-led regional wars, bringing death, destruction and chaos to Pakistan, a nation that America famously claims as a close "friend and ally."

So warm and fuzzy are relations between the two nuclear-armed states that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently warned that Pakistan will face "severe consequences" should a successful attack on the U.S. mainland be linked to the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or other militants allied with the Afghan-Arab database of disposable Western intelligence assets known as al-Qaeda.

Since Clinton's belligerent threats earlier this month, The Washington Post reported May 29 that "the U.S. military is reviewing options for a unilateral strike in Pakistan in the event that a successful attack on American soil is traced to the country's tribal areas, according to senior military officials."

Anonymous officials "stressed that a U.S. reprisal would be contemplated only under extreme circumstances," according to a sanctioned leak to the Post, "such as a catastrophic attack that leaves President Obama convinced that the ongoing campaign of CIA drone strikes is insufficient."

However, Pakistan Body Count, a web site administered by computer scientist Zeeshan-ul-hassan Usmani, a fierce critic of CIA-Pentagon drone strikes and terrorist attacks launched by fascistic jihadi thugs, draws a direct correlation between America's robo-war and murderous strikes on civilians by crazed suicide fanbois.

"Whether it is a suicide bombing or an attack by a flying drone, for me it's the same, a Pakistani got killed," the web site declares right up front. And the grim evidence seems to bolster Usmani's analysis. In an e-mail to Wired, the computer specialist told journalist Noah Shachtman: "I highly doubt that U.S. drones are doing anything to stop suicide bombing, as it is evident from the data, the number of suicide bombing is almost directly proportional to the drones attacks. More drones, and we have more SB [suicide bomb] attack[s] in our country."

According to the web site, since 1995 suicide bombings by rightist miscreants, many of whom were "trained up fierce" by the CIA or by Pakistan's shadowy Inter Services Intelligence agency (ISI) during America's anti-Soviet jihad, accounted for 3,676 dead and some 9,289 injured civilians. Since 2004 when the tactic was first implemented, U.S. drone strikes have claimed 1,332 lives and injured 453 others.

Usmani's grim statistics reveal that only 2.5% of drone strikes have taken out al-Qaeda targets, but they have fueled sectarian killings and sown chaos across the region, an intended effect fully consonant with America's long range goal to secure access and control over the mineral and petrochemical wealth of the Eurasian heartland.

Next-Gen Killer Robots

Meanwhile back in the heimat, the CIA and Pentagon are planning a major expansion of the drone fleet. And with newer, faster and stealthier high-tech death machines ready to roll off the assembly lines of several giant defense corps, the prospect of fattening the bottom-line of well-heeled aerospace grifters and fighting and winning America's endless "War On Terror" must have Washington pols jumping for joy.

As Antifascist Calling reported earlier this month, General Atomics rolled-out their next generation killer robot, the Avenger, a jet powered drone the firm hopes will be in the running for a lucrative Air Force/CIA contract to build what the secret state has dubbed the MQ-X.

And with the Defense Department "reassessing its view of unmanned aerial vehicles," Defense Systems reported that the Pentagon is "deciding what the military needs from UAVs beyond their traditional use as a platform to gather intelligence and fire weapons."

Reporter Amber Corrin averred that next-gen SkyNet death bots "will need to take on additional duties including cargo transport, refueling and possible medical applications, and they will need to be interoperable with different platforms, users and military services."

Accordingly, "the military should concentrate on developing modular, plug-and-play aircraft built on standardized interfaces–one aircraft for multiple missions, similar frames for one platform," Col. Dale Fridley, director of the Air Force Unmanned Aerial Systems Task Force told the publication. The MQ-X, the follow-on to existing MQ-1 Predators and MQ-9 Reaper drones was hailed by Fridley as the "embodiment of the flight plan."

But during a period of profound economic crisis, the Defense Department is also exploring ways to arm smaller, and cheaper, drones for service in America's resource-grabbing wars and occupations.

Defense Industry Daily reported in April that while the U.S. Army's "RQ-7 Shadow battalion-level UAVs have seen their flight hours increase to up 8,000 per month in Iraq," the differences between the Army's workhorse drone and their larger cousins "is that the Shadow has been too small and light to be armed." Clearly a boo-hoo for battlespace commanders.

But "with ultra-small missiles still in development, and missions in Afghanistan occurring beyond artillery support range," the eyes-on-the-prize publication tells us that "arming the Army's Shadow UAVs has become an even more important objective."

Considering that the RQ-7 Shadow's average cost per unit is $500,000 and the price for one MQ-1 Predator is in the $5 million range, while the larger and bloodthirstier MQ-9 Reaper costs anywhere between $10-12 million depending on the estimate, the attraction for arming the little beast can't be lost on cost-conscious Pentagon accountants!

This would certainly be good news to beltway bandit AAI Corporation, a wholly-owned subsidiary of defense powerhouse Textron Systems Corporation, that builds the RQ-7. So serious has the Army become, envious perhaps of the sexy publicity generated by their CIA and Air Force rivals in the "compressing the kill chain" department, that the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command issued an April solicitation "on weapons systems ready for production and suitable for integration on the RQ-7B with POP 300D laser designator payload Shadow Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UASs)."

The RFI specifies that a "potential weapons systems must be ready to field within 12 months from the date of a potential contract award. The primary interest is in weapon systems approximately 25 lbs or less total system weight (to include munition, launcher, wiring, fire control interface, etc). The weapons system should be able to engage stationary and moving targets such as light vehicles and dismounted combatants in day and night conditions with low collateral damage when launched from a Shadow UAS flying at speeds of 60-70 knots and between 5,000 and 12,000 feet Above Ground Level (AGL)."

Judging by the reaction to the solicitation, firms such as Kollmorgen Corporation, Arete Associates, Aerovironment, Inc., General Dynamics, BEI Systems & Sensors Company and GE Aviation Systems LLC are falling over themselves as they lust after a piece of the Pentagon's lucrative Shadow weaponization contract.

But wait, there's more!

The nose-tweaking, British high-tech zine, The Register, reported May 11 that the Boeing Corporation, the CIA's torture-flight booking agents, "held a public unveiling of its 'Phantom Ray' jet-fighter sized robot stealth plane."

A product of the giant defense firm's "Phantom Works" advanced products division, a rival of Lockheed Martin's much-storied "Skunk Works, the Phantom Ray is heavily-based on a decades' worth of research by the U.S. Air Force and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) on the X-45C, a project "which envisaged the aircraft penetrating hostile airspace and preying on surface-to-air missile batteries," according to Space.com.

A Boeing press release states that after "only two years of development" (not counting of course, DARPA's taxpayer-supplied boodle) the Phantom Ray "combines survivability with a powerful arsenal of new capabilities."

Dennis Muilenburg, president and CEO of Boeing Defense, Space & Security, told the assembled throngs in St. Louis who witnessed the unveiling, "Phantom Ray offers a host of options for our customers as a test bed for advanced technologies, including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; suppression of enemy air defenses; electronic attack and autonomous aerial refueling–the possibilities are nearly endless."

The Register's Lewis Page however was less than enthused by the flackery. Indeed, the former Royal Naval officer isn't one to mince words, writing "the US and its Western allies already have far more sophisticated air power than they actually need, and that in fact a long break before the next generation of aerial killware might be in order."

But hey, with billions in potential dollars fluttering around Boeing like moths to a flame, never mind that "the machine will not, in fact, provide any actual national security benefit" Page opines, "but rather the pale ghost of such: specifically a 'specter of security'."

Not to be outdone however, Northrop Grumman, the manufacturer of the cost-overrun plagued RQ-4 Global Hawk surveillance drone, recently rolled-out a fighter-sized UAV, the X-47B.

A carrier-based behemoth with a 62-foot wingspan that weighs 45,000 pounds at takeoff, the firm is producing the platform for the U.S. Navy. Popular Mechanics reported in 2009 that the X-47B "would be a technological step forward–besides carrying stealth features, it is supposed to have the ability to execute some maneuvers, such as refueling in midflight, autonomously."

Needless to say, Navy "dominance" doesn't come cheap. Northrop Grumman informs us that the "six-year $635.8 million contract calls for the development of two X-47B fighter-sized, long-range, high endurance aircraft designated the X-47B. Test activities are in progress that will lead to completion of the Navy's carrier launch and recovery objectives by 2013. Successful at-sea trials will set the stage for potential follow-on acquisition programs."

Northrop's offering in the hot robot kill-machine market was spawned by DARPA's Joint Unmanned Combat Air Systems (J-UCAS) program which was terminated in 2006. The program, as with other spooky DARPA offerings, was "transitioned" to the Joint Program Office at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, the home of the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL).

As a side note, the AFRL successfully launched Boeing Corp's X-51 Waverider on May 26, a hypersonic ramjet-powered vehicle that was accelerated to Mach 5 or 3585 MPH over the Pacific. Hypersonic craft and conventionally-armed ballistic missiles are intended as key components of the Pentagon's mad "Prompt Global Strike" program to "put steel on target" in under an hour. The new weapons systems are touted as a means for our "change" president to "greatly diminish America's reliance on its nuclear arsenal," The New York Times duly reported, faithfully regurgitating White House talking points.

According to a blurb on Northrop Grumman's web site, the X-47B "will be a transformational, carrier-capable, multi-mission, unmanned combat air vehicle. Strike

fighter-sized, it is a survivable, long range, high endurance and persistent platform capable of a variety of missions including Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, and Time Sensitive Targeting/Strike."

As currently envisaged by the Navy, should tests pan out, the vehicle would potentially be another "first" for a forward looking Empire such as ours: a fully autonomous killer robot capable of conducting its "mission" deploying live weapons and foregoing the need to communicate with either drone pilots or supervisors. Carrier trials are slated to begin in 2011. A corporate Data Sheet informs us that the X-47B will fly at 40,000 feet, with a range of 2,100 nautical miles, have an air speed described as "high subsonic" with weapons bays loaded with 4,500 pounds of ordnance.

As the bodies continue piling up, and more and more "hajis" learn to "hate us for our freedom," rest assured, corporate America is doing everything in their power to keep us safe!

The original source of this article is Antifascist Calling...
Copyright © Tom Burghardt, Antifascist Calling..., 2010

Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: Tom Burghardt
http://antifascist-calling.blogspot.com/

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca