

Bipartisan Group in US Congress Promotes Drone Killings

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A large bipartisan group in Congress is promoting the building and use of drones, according to an investigative report published November 25 in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Houston Chronicle*.

The report was made public the same day that the *New York Times* reported that drone strikes ordered by President Obama have killed more than 2,500 people over the past four years, and that the Obama administration was moving ahead to codify and formalize the procedure for targeting individuals and groups for deadly violence by CIA and Pentagon drone operators.

The report by the Center for Responsive Politics and Hearst newspapers examined the flow of campaign contributions from corporations engaged in building and arming drones to Democratic and Republican congressmen and senators.

The biggest donors include General Atomics, which makes the Predator, the number one remote killer for the CIA and Pentagon; BAE Systems, which makes the Mantis and Taranis drones; Boeing Co., maker of the hydrogen-fueled Phantom Eye; Honeywell International, which makes the RQ-16 T-Hawk; Lockheed Martin, which makes the RQ-170 Sentinel; and Raytheon Co., maker of the Cobra.

More than \$8 million in campaign contributions from drone manufacturers and operators has flowed into the coffers of the 60 members of the House Unmanned Systems Caucus. The majority of the House members are from California, Texas, Virginia and New York, including the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Howard "Buck" McKeown, a California Republican, and Silvestre Reyes, a Texas Democrat who lost a primary election and leaves Congress at the end of the year.

The Senate group of drone promoters comprises eight members, including liberal Democrat Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, and is co-chaired by Democrat Joe Manchin of West Virginia.

The very existence of what the CRP/Hearst report calls the "drone caucus" is an indication of the profound degeneration of American democracy. It was not so long ago, in the 1970s, that leading Democrat Henry Jackson became notorious as the "senator from Boeing." Now an entire caucus has been formed of promoters of weapons of mass murder. What is next: The napalm caucus? The poison gas caucus?

According to the CRP/Hearst report, the principal activity of the "drone" caucus has been to promote the use of these weapons within the United States, including passage of the FAA Modernization and Reform Act, signed into law by President Obama on February 14, which

requires the FAA to complete the integration of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) into the national airspace by September 2015.

Drones have become big business for US police agencies, beginning with the federal Department of Homeland Security, which recently signed a \$443 million deal with General Atomics to increase its fleet of Predator drones—capable of firing missiles as well as surveillance—from 10 to 24.

The FAA projects that 30,000 drones could be flying in US airspace within 20 years, operated by local, state and national police and security agencies, as well as private corporations.

The US buildup has sparked a global arms race in drone building and deployment. More than 50 countries operate surveillance drones, and many of these are beginning to fit their drones with weapons.

According to a Pentagon study, enemy drones could be a “very serious threat” to US aircraft carriers and other large ships, and to “supply convoys and other combat support assets which have not had to deal with an airborne threat in generations.”

While the US has 8,000 drones deployed and plans to spend \$37 billion on drone warfare over the next eight years, a recent report by the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board noted with considerable worry, “For UAVs, the US currently has limited dedicated defensive capabilities other than fighters or surface-to-air missiles, giving the enemy a significant asymmetric cost advantage. ... The increasing worldwide focus on unmanned systems highlights how US military success has changed global strategic thinking and spurred a race for unmanned aircraft.”

For the time being, the US military-industrial complex holds the lead in the drone arms race, but the Pentagon study pointed to the “asymmetric cost advantage.” In other words, drones can be a cheap and cost-effective alternative for countries that cannot afford ICBMs and aircraft carriers.

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