Weaponized Drones used for Law Enforcement across America: How Your Town Can Stop Drones

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war is a crime

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Local resolutions have helped advance many issues, including war opposition, when they've been passed in large numbers. When we passed a resolution in Charlottesville, Va., last year opposing any attack on Iran, I heard from numerous cities that wanted to do the same. As far as I know, none did. I heard back from some that they'd been told it was anti-Semitic to oppose a U.S. attack on Iran. I didn't have an answer to that — not a printable one anyway.

When Charlottesville passed a resolution against drones in February of this year, I heard from people all over the country again. Since that time, to my knowledge, one little town in Minnesota called St. Bonifacius has passed something, while dozens and dozens have tried and failed. The problem seems to be that drones can have good uses as well as bad. Of course, that's grounds for halting the lawless and reckless spread of drones until we can figure out any ways in which their good use can be compatible with our Constitutional rights. But that would make too much sense. When there's money to be made, technology to be played with, and terrorists to destroy our freedoms if we don't hurry up and destroy them first, the American way is full steam ahead. But I actually think I might have at least a partial answer this time.

There are two separable issues to be addresses in anti-drone resolutions and ordinances and laws and treaties. One is weaponization. The other is surveillance. I'm not aware of anyone yet having any difficulty getting their local officials to oppose weaponized drones. Most are unaware that some U.S. localities already have drones armed with rubber bullets and tear gas. Most consider it a crazy idea — as they should. But it is an idea that should be addressed, because it is not science fiction; it is a dystopia that is already upon us. Getting localities in the United States to oppose the use of weaponized drones in their skies should be easy. Having thus established that our towns can address the problem of drones, we could come back and deal with the complex matter of surveillance.

The best solution on surveillance may be the one produced by the Rutherford Institute and embodied in the Charlottesville resolution. There is nothing in that resolution that prevents a drone from delivering your coffee or checking out a forest fire. I wish there were, but there actually isn't. While I'd like stronger resolutions, I think at this point the movement would benefit from passing any resolutions at all. And I think the way to make it simpler, clearer, and extremely easy would be to ask our local representatives to simply oppose *weaponized* drones.

Ideally, of course, I'd like to see cities and counties join [the movement to ban weaponized drones from the world](#). Such a resolution might read:

Weaponized drones (or unmanned aerial vehicles) — including those carrying lethal weapons such as hellfire missiles, and those carrying non-lethal weapons such as tear gas or rubber bullets — are no more acceptable than chemical weapons or land mines. Whether these drones are controlled by pilots or act autonomously, whether they are publicly or privately owned, they can have no place in a civilized world and should be banned. The City of _____ urges the State of _____, the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. State Department to pursue state, national, and international prohibitions on the development, ownership, or use of weaponized drones.

The trouble with this, of course, is that most of your city council members approve of murdering foreigners with drones. Thus it becomes a harder measure to pass. What we want, therefore, is something that does not conflict with the resolution above but addresses itself to local, state, or U.S. skies. To ease passage most swiftly, we want local resolutions that don't commit localities to anything, but simply make recommendations to states and the federal government. However, I suspect that — as in Charlottesville — a statement of local policy will not be a deal breaker. Here's a version of the Charlottesville resolution stripped down to the weaponized drone issue alone (just delete the last 14 words to commit your city to nothing):

NOW, THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the City Council of _____ calls on the United States Congress and the State of _____ to adopt legislation precluding the domestic use of drones equipped with anti-personnel devices, meaning any projectile, chemical, electrical, directed-energy (visible or invisible), or other device designed to harm, incapacitate, or otherwise negatively impact a human being; and pledges to abstain from similar uses with city-owned, leased, or borrowed drones.

Opponents of this resolution will be, and should be denounced for being, supporters of putting weaponized drones in our skies. Supporters can remain technology lovers. They can continue to believe every move we make should be videotaped by Big Brother. They can plow right ahead with their brilliant idea for replacing the pizza guy with a drone. But they will be taking a stand on a popular issue that has no opposition. There is no organized popular movement in your town in support of putting weaponized drones in the sky. There's not even a concerted effort by police, or even by the drone profiteers. They can make big bucks off surveillance. They can fill the skies with drones first. The weapons can largely come later. They are not prepared for us to build a movement against weaponized drones and then turn our focus toward the lesser offense of spying. And by us I mean essentially everyone. Libertarians and leftists are in agreement on this, and so is everybody else.

So, you can build public pressure. It's not hard. In Charlottesville, we brought a crowd of people to two consecutive city council meetings and dominated the public speaking period.

You should watch the videos of the [January 22nd and February 4th meetings here](#). We published [a column](#) in the newspaper making the case, including the case that it is proper for cities to speak up on national issues. We organized an event in front of City Hall on the day before the vote. We displayed a giant model drone produced by New York anti-drone activist [Nick Mottern](#). Our little stunt produced coverage on the [two](#) television [channels](#) and in the [newspaper](#). I asked people to commit to attending the meeting on a FaceBook [page](#). And when I spoke in the packed meeting, I asked those in agreement to stand. Most of the

room stood.

We presented a [weak resolution](#) at the first meeting, which put the issue on the agenda. We then proposed a [stronger one](#), which one of the best city council members put into the official agenda for the second meeting. At the second meeting, the council members negotiated a compromise. You might want to try that approach, which we stumbled into unplanned.

You can also lay the groundwork. We invited Ann Wright and Medea Benjamin and Nick Mottern and Kathy Kelly and other great speakers to Charlottesville in the months leading up to this resolution effort. This was not part of a plan, but we knew that it never hurts to educate people about their government's crimes. If you [sign the international petition to ban weaponized drones from the world](#), you'll see a list of organizations at the bottom. Those are the places to go for resources, speakers, props, reports, flyers, and books that can help you in this effort. You can also print out a mammoth list of signatures on the petition to impress your elected officials. Or you can gather signatures locally and add them.

It's time we made things nice and simple. Are we in favor of killer flying robots over our homes and schools, or are we not?

Once we've given the obvious answer, maybe we'll start asking each other whether we really think Pakistanis disagree.

David Swanson's books include "[War Is A Lie](#)." He blogs at http://davidswanson.org and http://warisacrime.org and works for http://rootsaction.org. He hosts [Talk Nation Radio](#). Follow him on Twitter: [@davidcnswanson](#) and [FaceBook](#).

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