

US Hopes to 'contain' China with mini-drones

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After the recent capture of a 'sophisticated' UAV Drone over Iran we can safely assume that China and Russia are now in possession of the latest drone stealth technology. The intended deployment of this type of aircraft over China by Pentagon dunces no longer poses any major threat; in fact it is probably welcomed, as understood stealth technology allows easy targeting of this type of aircraft.



In today's world it is simply impossible for any one nation to gain global superiority for any extended period -- a lesson the US is very slow to learn but learn it must.

America missed the opportunity to contain Russia and China a decade past -- attempting to do so now by remote control mini-drones is the height of folly, but folly is no stranger to Washington.

Be cognizant of the reality behind the following Japan Times story:

U.S. turns to drones to counter China

by Michael Richardson

SINGAPORE — A recent offer by the Seychelles to refuel and replenish Chinese naval ships on anti-piracy patrols in the northwest Indian Ocean was seen as the latest sign of China's expanding naval power.

But it obscured an even more significant development: U.S. deployment of a mini-air force of long-range, remotely-piloted aircraft from a network of airfields in the Seychelles, the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to track and if necessary attack suspected terrorists on land and pirates at sea.

Victoria, capital of the Seychelle islands, is 1,480 km east of the southern tip of lawless Somalia. There and in Yemen, on the north side of the Gulf of Aden, local al-Qaida affiliates have sprung to prominence, potentially posing a wider terrorist threat.

At the same time, Somali pirates have been disrupting international shipping in the northwest Indian Ocean.

Use of the civilian airport in Victoria by several U.S. Reaper drones underscores a development that is changing the nature of military and intelligence operations in many Asia-Pacific countries as well as the West. Reapers can fly nearly 1,850 km from base, conduct their mission and return home. If armed, they can unleash Hellfire missiles as well as guided 227-kg bombs, although endurance is shortened if the weapons load is heavy.

Increasing reliance on drones indicates that the future of airpower is likely to be largely unmanned, as governments seek to reduce combat casualties and remove as many of their expensive manned warships and aircraft as possible from hostile range.

In the Pacific, China is honing a strategy involving high-speed missiles, stealthy submarines, and anti-satellite and cyber attacks to prevent opposing aircraft carriers and their naval escorts from operating in a crisis anywhere near the Chinese mainland or offshore islands claimed by Beijing.

The U.S. military has become so concerned at China's rapidly growing arsenal of anti-access and area-denial weapons that just over two years ago it authorized the navy and air force to collaborate on ways to off-set the Chinese challenge to America's capacity to project power and sustain its alliances and military partnerships in Asia.

In a 2010 report, Dr. Andrew Krepinevich, president of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in Washington, wrote that with the spread of advanced technologies and their exploitation by other countries, especially China and to a lesser extent Iran, U.S. ability to "preserve military access to two key areas of vital interest, the Western Pacific and the Persian Gulf, is being increasingly challenged."

To move out of harm's way, the United States aims to deploy sea-based drones on its aircraft carriers in the Pacific by 2018. "They will play an integral part in our future operations in this region," according to Vice Admiral Scott Van Buskirk, commander of the U.S. 7th Fleet in the Pacific and Indian oceans. "Carrier-based unmanned aircraft systems have tremendous potential, especially in increasing the range and persistence of our intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations, as well as our ability to strike targets quickly."

At present, jet fighters and bombers on U.S. carriers must take off within 800 km of their target, leaving the carriers within range of land-based missiles and combat aircraft. However, the new generation of sea-based drones being developed by the U.S. could operate as far as 2,500 km from the carrier, putting the ships out of range.

U.S. deployment of land-based drones has expanded rapidly in the past few years. Widely used in Iraq and Afghanistan, they have also been flown extensively over Pakistan in the hunt for militants, despite periodic protests from the government.

In fact the U.S. is now training more pilots to operate drones than to fly conventional fighters and bombers. Most of these pilots will work from bases in the continental U.S., often half a world away from the places where their planes are active.

America currently has a big lead in the number and sophistication of drones, and the sensors and weapons they carry. An estimated 7,000 drones are in service. Most are unarmed.

Although the biggest, such as Global Hawk, can easily fly across the Pacific and remain aloft for days, many are small and can be hand-launched to provide troops with instant video imagery of the battlefield, day or night. The U.S. Army is already buying 1,300 radio-controlled Raven planes each year. They are the size of a large model aircraft.

The California company that makes them has also started mass production of a new tube-launched, man-portable drone for the U.S. Army. In addition to surveillance, it will also work as an explosive-packed kamikaze missile that can be armed and locked on target by the controller to attack dug-in or fortified infantry positions, enemy missile teams and mortar emplacements.

As electronic systems for small drones are miniaturized and improved, production costs are falling and capabilities increasing. Ravens currently cost around \$56,000 each. By contrast, the U.S. Predator drone, widely used for surveillance and attack in Afghanistan and Pakistan, costs at least \$5 million, and another \$5,000 an hour to fly. The Predator is about the size of a piloted light aircraft.

So far, as many as 50 countries have bought or built drones, mainly for surveillance. The Australian government plans to buy up to seven high-altitude, long-endurance Global Hawks from the U.S. at an estimated cost of up to AU\$2 billion. The opposition wants to increase the number to 15. Japan and South Korea are also talking to the Pentagon about possible bulk buys of Global Hawks.

Israel and China are actively developing and marketing drones, while Russia, Iran, India and Pakistan have similar plans.

Critics contend that drone proliferation may lead to unauthorized operation in foreign airspace, mounting civilian casualties and collateral damage, strained inter-state relations, and eventually result in the technology falling into the hands of terrorists. But despite possible risks, drones seem set to play an expanding military and intelligence role.

One firm that tracks defense and aerospace markets says global spending on research and procurement of drones over the next decade is expected to amount of more than \$94 billion, including \$9 billion on remotely piloted combat planes.

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