

STATE, LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL

Drones Come Home

Kim Dixon, staff writer

As part of the War on Terrorism, the United States military and the C.I.A. have used unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, for reconnaissance missions and to eliminate targeted Taliban and al-Qaeda militants in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. In a February 11, 2013 article in Time, Lev Grossman reports that the Pentagon now has 7,500 drones in its fleet. Like something out of a science fiction movie, these robotic vehicles are armed with weapons and are operated remotely. They can also fly autonomously based on pre-programmed flight plans. As Grossman put it, drones “represent a revolution in the idea of what combat is: with drones the U.S. can exert force not only instantly but undeterred by the risk of incurring American casualties or massive logistical bills, and without the terrestrial baggage of geography.”

But what happens when drones become available for domestic use? President Obama has given the Federal Aviation Administration a September 2015 deadline to open the nation’s airspace to drone traffic. According to a February 15th Los Angeles Times article by Brian Bennett and Joel Rubin, the FAA has estimated that within 5 years of the deadline, as many as 10,000 drones could be overhead. They also reported that the FAA had issued 1,428 permits to domestic drone operators since 2007, with 327 listed as still active. The FAA has solicited proposals to create six drone-testing sites.

State and local law enforcement agencies are likely to be the largest customers, using drones to study crime scenes, for search and rescue missions, to track suspects, and to assist in investigations. Grossman reports that the state of Washington wants to try using drones for avalanche control, the U.S. Department of Energy would take air samples, and The Forest Service wants to use drones to help locate and fight fires. U.S. Customs and Border Protection has

been using Predator drones to monitor the Mexican border since 2005. They currently have 10 and have requested 14 more.

“Drones can carry high-resolution video cameras, infrared sensors, license plate readers, listening devices

and other high-tech gear,” say Bennett and Rubin. And that could be a real problem. Legislation has not been passed to determine what information agencies can and cannot gather using drones or whether operators may be held liable for criminal trespassing, stalking or harassment. Grossman argues, however, that “There are certainly precedents: the Supreme Court

has ruled that the police can, under the Fourth Amendment, fly an airplane over your fenced backyard and check out whether you’re growing pot back there. It’s not a giant leap to imagine them flying a drone instead.”

Catherine Crump, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union, believes “Americans have the right to know if and how the government is using drones to spy on them.” The ACLU has called for updating laws to protect privacy.

As Grossman says, “Americans are great and heedless adopters of new technologies, and few technologies are as seductive, promise so much at so little political and financial and human cost . . . They give us tremendous new powers, and they seem to ask very little of us in return . . . Drones don’t just give us power, they tempt us to use it.”

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Russian Meteorite Mystery

Moique Kriesman, staff writer

Several meteorites crashed to the earth on Friday, February 15th at 9:20 AM. A large meteorite fell near the Russian town of Chelyabinsk (a city with a population of approximately a million people), several fragments fell into a frozen lake, and several more fell in Kazakhstan. The Russian Academy of Sciences reports that the largest meteorite was estimated to be about 10 tons.

It travelled at a speed of at least 33,000 mph and created an explosion equal to about 300,000 tons of TNT. Phil Black reports in February 15th CNN article that over 3,000 buildings were damaged and over 1,000 people were hurt.

Black also reports that many people in Russia caught the meteor on camera as it shot across the sky. It is common for Russian citizens to install dash

cameras in their cars for fear of being pulled over by corrupt police. The meteorite hit at about 9:20 AM when many people were driving, so it was a well-filmed event.

CBS News reports that over 1 million square feet of glass was shattered in the city of Chelyabinsk. In such a cold climate, living without a window can be very dangerous.

“The windows breaking were from the disintegrating rocks. The pressure waves the rocks produced pushed the air molecules into the windows. The air molecules pushing against the window at great speeds caused the windows to break. If a window was strong enough to withstand the shock wave then the window would oscillate, however this was not the case because windows used in regular construction are not extremely durable. There is a theoretical scenario that if the pressure inside the building were large enough

that it could counteract the pressure produced by the shock wave, then the window would not have broken and stayed stable, but it’s not realistic because humans could not live in an environment of that high of pressure. These pressure waves (or you can say shock waves) were traveling at such high speeds that windows were pushed into the houses and buildings. This is similar to what happened with the atomic bombs and those shock waves flattening out structures.” SAID BY WHO??

The RIA Novosti, a Russian news agency, reports that some people in Chelyabinsk smashed their own



Meteorite Landing photo via baltimoresun.com

windows, hoping to be reimbursed by the government.

The RIA Novosti also reports that Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, a nationalist leader, blames

America for

the meteorite strike. He claims,

“It’s not meteors falling. It’s the test of a new weapon by the Americans.”

The incident has sparked a call for a more thorough monitoring system of meteors, but NASA spokesman Steve Cole says that meteoroids like the one that fell near Chelyabinsk are small, difficult to spot, and provide little warning.

STAFF

HERALD@EMAIL.MEREDITH.EDU

Editor: Amy Hruby — **Assistant Editors:** Jessica Feltner, Cody Jeffery — **Advisor:** Dr. Rebecca Duncan
Staff Writers: Lizzie Wood, Helen Kenney, Marzia Nawrozi, Monique Kreisman, Sarah Haseeb, Shanna Alley, Maitlyn Healey, Emma Johnson, Abigail Gupton, AJ Thompson, Hannah Thornton

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