

## Contractors fly drones for US and UK military

A Nouse investigation has found BAE, York drone research sponsor, to be employing private, civilian contractors to fly drones for military operations in Afghanistan



By [Josh Boswell](#), Deputy Editor (2012/13)  
Tuesday 5 March 2013



US Marines with a drone flown by BAE employees. Credit: US Navy

A *Nouse* investigation has found BAE, York drone research sponsor to be employing private, civilian contractors to fly drones for military operations in Afghanistan.

BAE employees stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan operate the Manta and Silver Fox drones on missions for the US military.

However, documents obtained by Nouse from the US Office of Federal Procurement Policy state the Air Force must “prohibit mission performance by contractor personnel” of small unmanned vehicles.

The 2011 policy letter states contractor-operated drone missions could be against current policy as they “involve situations with a foreseeable likelihood that an intelligence mission could quickly erupt into combat operations.”

Though unarmed, BAE’s small contractor-flown drones support US military operations on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions.

These White House documents also said if the Air Force continues its former practice of using contractor-operated medium and large-sized drones in warzones, then it “very likely violates” US Defence Department instructions.

Above: the White House paper

A paper written in the same year by Captain Keric Clanahan of the US Air Force Judge Advocate General's Corps, with help from pilots of unmanned drones, claims this is the case.

The US Air Force "has greatly depended on contractors to maintain these medium and large category UAS, to operate aircraft on missions, and to perform intelligence data and video analysis", wrote Clanahan.

For example, employees of defence company AAI fly its Shadow drone for the US military.



The Shadow is significantly larger than current BAE-operated drones, fitting in the Medium size category.

In August 2011, the Marine Corps received clearance to arm Shadow drones. AAI was awarded \$10m in a contract for this in December 2011, and have since confirmed that Shadow drones carry weapons. Contractors would thus be unable to fly armed drones under US laws.

Steven Reid, AAI's vice president for unmanned aircraft systems, said in a 2010 interview that about 60 AAI workers fly eight Shadow UAVs under the direction of an Army commander.



Steven Reid, AAI  
Vice-President for  
Unmanned  
Aircraft Systems

He said, "The Army didn't have sufficient soldiers to man the equipment in theater, so we do the manning.

"We're not over there let loose. We're following orders."

In his paper, Captain Clanahan said the rapid expansion of US drone use has led to the need for more contractors to fly them, with research showing 1200 per cent growth in US drone missions in less than 10 years.

Above: Captain Clanahan's paper

Last year the US navy awarded an \$873m contract for a group of private arms firms to fly drones.

Mike Shutty, the US Navy officer in charge of the program, said that contractor owned and operated contracts are "much faster than trying to do some kind of a program of record".

He said these contracts instead are "the way to go", as "It takes quite a long time to get through a program of record because you have very strict acquisition policies that you have to follow."



An AAI Arcturus T-10 drone, armed with a 10-pound bomb

Concerns were raised in a Pentagon Defense Science Board Report from July last year that UAVs had been "rushed into combat", and that "Transition of autonomous systems to the field requires better preparation".

Nouse can reveal that this month, in the UK, a £30m contract for "contractor-owned, contractor-operated" drones for the Royal Navy will be awarded to defence contractors.

QinetiQ, a funder of the University and drone manufacturer, has been invited to bid for this contract. A company spokesman said QinetiQ was considering its position.

The contract is an "urgent operational requirement" for privately-flown drones to accompany fighter jets on missions launched from the sea off Navy frigates.



The Hermes 450 is flown by Thales employees in Afghanistan for the UK military

The UK military currently uses defence company Thales to help fly unarmed Hermes drones in Afghanistan, as part of a £181m contract.

An inquiry to the MoD by Nouse revealed a curious relationship between Thales and the MoD. During missions, privately-contracted pilots control the drones for takeoff, hand it over to British military personnel for the flight, and then take control again for landing.



Recently released figures show that since 2007, from a batch of 12 Hermes drones commissioned by the UK government, 11 have crashed.

Chris Cole, Director of research institute Drone Wars UK, said, "We know much more about the so-called secretive CIA drone strikes than we do about the British Military's drone strikes. I think that there is much more of a culture of secrecy here in the UK, particularly around the MoD.

"There are practically the same amount of British drone strikes in Afghanistan as there are US strikes in Pakistan, yet many, many people say to me they're surprised, they didn't know we did drone strikes."

Above: A paper by Drone Wars founder Chris Cole



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## 6 comments

Custard Cream

5 Mar '13 at 11:33 am

EMBED ALL THE DOCUMENTZ

[Report](#)

What a load of crock

5 Mar '13 at 1:29 pm

@Custard Cream:

Embedding loads of documents and video clips makes your (hilariously one-sided, poorly researched) viewpoint seem more valid. Right?

[Report](#)

Custard Cream

5 Mar '13 at 7:23 pm

That's what I heard, yeah.

[▲ Report](#)

Samuel R. Kephart

7 Mar '13 at 5:54 am

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssoOASanKao>

Published Feb 2013

Emmy-winning journalist, Shad Olson, explores the controversy over U.S. drone policy, both at home and abroad.

While technological sky supremacy gives America strategic superiority on the battlefield, the prospect of drone proliferation over U.S. cities is causing concern about loss of privacy, an end to Habeas Corpus and judicial due process and the destruction of Constitutional rights.

South Dakota U.S. Senator John Thune and former U.S. Senate candidate, Sam Kephart share their views about the consequences of domestic drone deployment in the fight against terrorism.

[▲ Report](#)

Campaign for freedom from coherent narrative

8 Mar '13 at 9:31 pm

A brilliant article! Fantastic! Lots of sentences, cunningly arranged into paragraphs, and occasionally secreting some facts, droning on and on (sorry) without actually articulating which precise issue it really wants to highlight is just journalistic genius. Its rambling is directly in line with the primary strategic objective of my organisation: to support the appearance of sentences of varying lengths (and indeed sequences of them) in media articles and passing it all off as journalism.

So British contractors are increasingly involved in 'curious' flying arrangements of these things. SO WHAT? What's next week's headline? Got it: Civilian farmers identified as ultimate source of potatoes eaten by UK military personnel (an investigation by NOUSE has revealed).

As it happens, and despite the response above, I actually believe there are serious issues to be addressed both in the context of drone usage in UK operations overseas, and for the use of (unarmed) drones and similar equipments in civilian contexts.

The article, frankly, is a shoddy piece of journalism. I don't even object to this sort of thing appearing in NOUSE. Label it "Opinion Piece", or similar. Just don't try to pass it off as journalism.

[▲ Report](#)

Phil

18 Mar '13 at 4:22 pm

The University of York should borrow a drone off BAE to settle the Roses tournament once and for all. I'd like to see the Lancaster University rugby team try to take on a hellfire missile.

[▲ Report](#)

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