

**Statement of John F. Tierney
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives**

Hearing on “Rise of the Drones: Unmanned Systems and the Future of War”

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Good morning. Our hearing today introduces a new topic to the Subcommittee: the rise of unmanned systems, and their implications for U.S. national security.

Over the last decade, the number of unmanned systems and their applications has grown rapidly. So too has the number of operational, political, and legal questions associated with this technology.

The growing demand for and reliance on unmanned systems has serious implications, both on and off the battlefield. As the United States is engaged in two wars abroad, unmanned systems, particularly unmanned aerial vehicles, have become a centerpiece of that war effort. In recent years, the Department of Defense’s UAV inventory has rapidly grown in size, from 167 in 2002 to over seven thousand today. Last year, for the first time, the U.S. Air Force trained more unmanned pilots than traditional fighter pilots.

Some express no doubt that unmanned systems have been a boost to U.S. war efforts in the Middle East and South Asia. CIA Director Leon Panetta said last May that “drone strikes are the only game in town in terms of confronting or trying to disrupt the al Qaeda leadership.” Media reports over the last year that the top two leaders of the Pakistani Taliban were killed by drone strikes also support this argument.

But some critics argue that drone strikes are unethical at best and counter-productive at worst. They point to the reportedly high rate of civilian casualties, which has been calculated by the *New American Foundation* to be around 32 percent, and argue that the strikes do more to stoke anti-Americanism than they do to weaken our enemies. A quick skim of any Pakistani newspaper provides some evidence to support this theory. This is particularly relevant in the era of counter-insurgency doctrine, a central tenet of which is, ‘first, do no harm.’

It also may be the case that we are fighting wars with modern technology under an antiquated set of laws. For example, if the United States uses unmanned weapons systems, does that require an official declaration of war or an authorization for the use of force?

Do the Geneva Conventions – written in 1949 – govern the prosecution of an unmanned war?

Who is considered a lawful combatant in unmanned war – the Air Force pilot flying a Predator from thousands of miles away in Nevada, or the civilian contractor servicing it in on an airstrip in Afghanistan?

If unmanned systems are changing the way that we train our military personnel, so too should they change the way that we respond to the stress of combat. We already know that unmanned pilots are showing signs of equal or greater stress from combat compared to traditional pilots. The stress of fighting a war thousands of miles away, then minutes later joining your family at the dinner table presents mental health challenges that we must address.

On the domestic front, manufacturers have already developed a number of unmanned commercial products, and are likely to find more applications for this technology in the future. From vacuum cleaners to crop dusters, traditional items that require manual operation are rapidly being rendered obsolete by unmanned technology. UAVs are now being used for environmental monitoring, particularly in hard to reach places like the North Pole. Last fall, the University of North Dakota chartered a four-year degree program in UAV piloting.

These trends are already forcing us to ask new questions about domestic airspace regulation: who is allowed to own unmanned systems, and where they are allowed to operate them? Additionally, as more law enforcement and border security services come to use unmanned systems, important questions continue to emerge about the protection of privacy.

As this technology develops and becomes more commercially available, we must implement adequate measures to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands. At least 40 other countries are currently developed unmanned systems technology – including Iran, Russia, and China.

We already know that during the Israel-Lebanon war in 2006, Hezbollah deployed three surveillance UAVs that it acquired from Iran. A recent Air Force study concluded that a UAV is an ideal platform for a chemical or biological terrorist attack. As Peter Singer, one of our witnesses today, wrote recently in *Newsweek*, “for less than \$50,000, a few amateurs could shut down Manhattan.”

We must ensure that the appropriate government agencies are coordinating their efforts to prevent this technology from proliferating and falling into the wrong hands, and also to ensure that we have adequate homeland security measures to respond to these threats.

Finally, as this new technology continues to develop, we must ensure that there are adequate measures in place to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse in the acquisition process. A 2009 study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the author of

which we will hear from today, reported significant cost growth, schedule delays, and performance shortfalls in DOD's UAV acquisition process. This analysis raises serious concerns, and I look forward to learning more on this from both the GAO and DOD witnesses before us.

These are some of the questions that we will begin to answer in this hearing. Surely we will not conclude this conversation in one afternoon, but I hope that this hearing serves as a thorough introduction to the topic, for the purpose of educating and informing our Members, as well as the American public.