

US plans to expand border drone use

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What are being depicted as emergency funds to solve the “humanitarian crisis” of 57,000 unaccompanied immigrant children escaping gang violence and poverty in Central America are being exploited to further militarize the United States southern border. The entire political establishment and the corporate media are seeking to deny the children existing due process rights in a bid to deport them as soon as possible.

Josh Earnest, Obama’s spokesman, told White House reporters on Tuesday that the children who managed to reach the US “will not be welcomed to this country with open arms.”

The \$3.7 billion emergency fund being requested by Obama will allocate \$39 million for the expansion of aerial surveillance along the border, including through unmanned aircraft operations. The funds will pay for an additional 16,526 drone and manned aircraft flight hours and 16 added crews to handle the extra hours.

The intensification of aerial surveillance along the border has found bipartisan support. Texas Governor Rick Perry has openly called for the support and expansion of drones along the border. In an interview with ABC’s *This Week*, Perry stated, “We’re asking for the FAA to allow for drones to be used.” Perry has also requested the deployment of 1,000 National Guard troops along the southern border. The governor has already authorized the Texas Department of Public Safety to conduct further border security operations, at the cost of \$1.3 million per week.

During his recent trip to Texas, Obama met with Perry to discuss the militarization of the border. At the time, he said he had “not ruled out such measures” and that there existed no “philosophical objection” to the deployment of the National Guard and more Predator surveillance drones to monitor the border.

The support for further militarization of the border is also expressed in a letter from Obama to Republican House Speaker John Boehner, “This funding would

support a sustained border security surge through enhanced domestic enforcement, including air surveillance.”

Customs and Border Protection (CBP), a branch of Homeland Security, patrols the nearly 6,000 miles along the Mexican and Canadian border, as well as 2,000 miles of coastal water surrounding the Florida Peninsula and Puerto Rico, with their primary mission stated as to prevent terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the United States.

Currently, the CBP has a fleet of 10 unarmed Predator B Drones, which are nearly identical to the Reapers used by US Air Force to carry out drone strikes and assassinations. Over the last year, the CBP logged a total of 5,100 flight hours, and it spent \$55.3 million for aircraft operations between 2006 and 2011.

The CBP and the military are the only agencies permitted by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to fly unmanned aircrafts within the US. Because of this, the CBP has “loaned” its drones to conduct operations on behalf of other agencies.

According to a 2012 lawsuit filed by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a civil liberties group, from 2010 to 2012 the CBP conducted 700 covert drone operations on behalf of federal, state and local police agencies.

The EFF also stated in their lawsuit that in 2010 alone, the CBP carried out 76 drone missions for other agencies. That number quadrupled by 2011. These agencies include: the FBI, ICE, DEA, US Marshals, Coast Guard, Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the North Dakota Army National Guard, the Texas Department of Public Safety, and many others.

The CBP drones, according to the EFF, are equipped with a highly sophisticated sensor system, Vehicle and Dismount Exploitation Radar (VADER), which is able

to detect individuals from a height of 25,000 feet. These sensors were initially designed for military use in the Afghanistan war. That such military weapons are being used against the US population is an indictment of the ruling establishment's contempt for basic constitutional rights.

While the CBP has never denied carrying out unmanned aerial operations for other agencies, they have yet to comment on the nature of these missions.

The loaning of drones to other agencies became public last year, when FBI Director Robert Mueller acknowledged in Congressional testimony the use of these aerial drones for surveillance purposes within the United States on behalf of his agency. Mueller's admission was the first time that the FBI has publicly recognized its use of remotely piloted aircraft within the US.

In an attempt to downplay the significance of these revelations, Mueller claimed, "[Drones are] very seldom used and generally used in a particular incident when you need the capability." He failed to clarify what these "particular incident(s)" are. Throughout his testimony, Mueller continued the same empty claims made by the Obama administration to defend the unconstitutional spying.

The lethal use of drones has seen a surge since Obama's inauguration, with 122 strikes in Pakistan in 2010 alone. On September 30, 2011, the Obama administration assassinated US citizen and Islamic cleric Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen with a drone strike, which was followed by the drone assassination of Awlaki's 16-year-old son.

The deployment of drones along the border is a reactionary measure aimed not only at militarizing the border, but at spying on American citizens. In anticipation of growing social upheavals, the ruling elite is scapegoating the influx of immigrant children in order to advance the relentless militarization of daily life in America.



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