



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on July 14, 2012

U.S. Drone Manufacturers Contribute Millions to Congressional Campaigns

President Obama's drone fever is contagious and is spreading worldwide, and the American industries that build the drones are slaving over the chance to supply the demand.

Christopher Ames, the director of international strategy development for Pentagon contractor General Atomics Aeronautical, was almost gleeful in [his statement to Reuters](#) regarding the opening of a potentially lucrative overseas market for his company's remote control killing machines.



"There has been very considerable international interest," he told Reuters. "There have been countries that for a long time have been asking for Predator... (the export variant) opens up those markets to us."

Ames would not disclose which countries were expressing the most interest in acquiring his company's drones, but he did confirm that Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia "were all areas of considerable buyer interest."

Diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks reveals that several regimes, including those in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, have tried to secure contracts to purchase armed drones from American providers but have thus far been unsuccessful.

In fairness, General Atomics isn't the only American defense contractor anxious to peddle the Predator-style drones to other eager governments. Northrop Grumman and other companies continue to lobby Congress and the White House to ease export restrictions on drone sales. Such wide open sales could, of course, result in the drones ultimately ending up in the hands of regimes that would use the devices to harm American interests around the globe — Iran, for example.

The prohibition currently in place was established in 1987. As [an article on AllGov.com reports](#):

In 1987, the Reagan administration joined other democracies (but not Israel) in signing an agreement that prohibited the sale of unmanned aircraft that carry 1,102 pounds for more than 186 miles at a time. Because UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] below this size are allowed, some manufacturers have begun to get around the restrictions by building smaller drones.

Manufacturers aren't happy having to adhere to these Reagan-era restrictions. Wes Bush, Northrop's president and CEO, argues that "export restrictions are hurting this industry in America without making us any safer."

What is certain is that additional arms sales will not make us safer, either. Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, [told the Los Angeles Times](#) that making larger and deadlier drones could make starting wars much easier and cheaper for governments currently considering such operations.



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“The proliferation of this technology will mark a major shift in the way wars are waged,” Kimball said. “We’re talking about very sophisticated war machines here. We need to be very careful about who gets this technology. It could come back to hurt us.”

Not accustomed to not getting their way, drone manufacturers know that the way to a congressman’s heart is through his wallet.

Chances are readers have never heard of the [Unmanned Systems Caucus](#).

The relationship between drone makers and lawmakers was [recently reported by an Arizona radio station](#):

The drone caucus — like the technology it promotes — is becoming increasingly important in the nation’s capitol as the government looks to unmanned vehicles to help save money on defense, better patrol the country’s borders and provide a new tool to U.S. law enforcement agencies and civilians.

“It’s definitely a powerful caucus,” said Alex Bronstein-Moffly, an analyst with First Street Research Group, a D.C.-based company that analyzes lobbying data.

“It’s probably up there in the more powerful caucuses that sort of is not talked about.” And, he says, caucus members are well placed to influence government spending and regulations.

Congressman Howard P. “Buck” McKeon (R-Calif.) is the co-chair of the caucus. Notably, McKeon also serves as the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

It is noteworthy that the caucus includes eight members of the House Committee on Appropriations, the body that has substantial control over the federal government’s purse strings.

Many of the drone caucus members are supported financially by the industry they endorse. [According to Bronstein-Moffly’s data](#), the 58 drone caucus members received a total of \$2.3 million in contributions from political action committees affiliated with drone manufacturers since 2011.

Furthermore, 21 members of the drone caucus represent border states. These congressmen received about \$1 million in deposits to their campaign coffers from top large drone makers in the 2010 and 2012 election cycles, according to information reported by the Center for Responsive Politics and analyzed by Fronteras Desk and Investigative Newsource.

For example, General Atomics is among the top three all-time campaign contributors to California Congressmen Brian Bilbray, Ken Calvert, Jerry Lewis, and McKeon.

In 2010 and 2012, General Atomics’ PAC has paid out over \$140,000 in donations to drone caucus members representing states located on the border with Mexico.

A PAC largely financed by Northrop Grumman contributed about \$150,000 to 16 congressmen in the drone caucus who represent districts in California, Texas, Arizona, and Nevada.

No wonder these companies are champing at the bit to grease the skids for the removal of obstacles to their overseas sales plans. In [a recently published study](#), the Teal Group estimates that UAV spending will almost double over the next decade from current worldwide UAV expenditures of \$6.6 billion annually to \$11.4 billion, totaling just over \$89 billion in the next 10 years.

“The UAV market will continue to be strong despite cuts in defense spending,” said Philip Finnegan, Teal Group’s director of corporate analysis and an author of the study. “UAVs have proved their value in



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Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan and will continue to be a high priority for militaries in the United States and worldwide.”

The millions spent by these drone manufacturers to federal legislators seem to be influencing the White House, as well. President Obama has already announced his plan to supply missiles that will arm the drones already sold to Italy.

[According to a story printed by Reuters](#), the Obama administration will proceed with the implementation of its projected sale of American-made drones to Italy. Italy will then join the United Kingdom in deploying the remote control weapons loaded with “laser-guided bombs and Hellfire missiles.”

Until the sale of the weaponry is complete, Italy’s reported arsenal of six Reaper drones sits unarmed and thus useless to the president and his global allies who remain committed to avoiding the tedium of trials of those suspected of threatening international security.

The cost of mounting these sophisticated weapons to the Italian drones runs about \$17 million, money that can then be redistributed into accounts funding the cost of policing the globe and protecting the “homeland.”

Now that the National Defense Authorization Act has designated the United States as an active theatre in the interminable War on Terror, it’s about time Europe be officially tagged, as well. The sale of drone weapons to Italy (and previously to Britain) is likely just the first of many such deadly deals to be made with other regimes clamoring to join the clique of countries with the capacity to eliminate enemies with the push of a button.

While it is the policy of the State Department to not comment on proposed sales of U.S. military hardware until formal notifications have been completed, one State Department official [quoted by Reuters](#) described his position on the greater good served by increasing the size of the global drone market:

“The transfer of U.S. defense articles and service to allies like Italy enables us to work together more effectively to meet shared security challenges,” said the official, who declined to be named.

Yes, security. It is the freedom and civil liberties of Americans that is the now common sacrificial lamb tied to the altar of security and corporate bottom lines. The Constitution is shredded and used as kindling in the fires that consume the blood offering. When safety is “secured,” due process and other judicial protections are then stripped and prepped for the surrender to the gods of globalism and big business.

Photo of Predator drone: AP Images



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