

Press release, 27 May 2013

## **National Crime Agency may be flying surveillance drones in secret, says new report**

The National Crime Agency (NCA) may be secretly flying surveillance drones over the UK, according to a new report published today by the NGOs Statewatch and Drone Wars UK.

The report, *Back from the battlefield: domestic drones in the UK*, argues that the NCA's predecessor, the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), likely acquired drone technology from the company Selex ES in late 2010 after signing a contract worth just over £9 million.

The UK's regional police forces, on the other hand, appear to have relatively limited access to drone technology, despite numerous media articles in recent years raising the spectre of skies filled with police surveillance drones.

The report argues that it is essential for widespread debate, discussion and democratic decision-making on the issue of 'domestic' drones in order to establish acceptable limits on their deployment and use by both public authorities and private companies and individuals.

*Back from the battlefield* shows that:

- In December 2012 SOCA signed a £9 million contract for "managed air support services" with Selex ES, a firm that does not produce planes but does "offer a complete and independent understanding and development capability of UAS [Unmanned Aerial Systems]". This followed SOCA's July 2011 expression of interest in "a fully serviced, airborne, surveillance-ready platform for covert observation";
- SOCA's contract with Selex ES came at the same time as Britain's police forces began regularly employing "national security" exemptions when responding to Freedom of Information requests on drones, allowing them to neither confirm nor deny whether they held any information on drones if it was related to the Serious Organised Crime Agency; and
- 12 of the 50 police forces questioned for the report are known to have used drones in the last five years, although the extent to which they have done so differs widely with only Staffordshire and the PSNI making regular use of the technology.

Furthermore:

- At least £80 million of public money in UK and EU funding has gone towards the development of domestic drones or the technology and facilities necessary for their use;
- Kent Police, having previously been part of the failed 'South Coast Partnership' project with BAE Systems in 2010 that sought to deploy drones for border control and a wide variety of other purposes, is again involved in a project aimed at using drones for border control, critical infrastructure monitoring, and health and safety monitoring. Entitled '3i', 50% of the €3.7 million project is funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional Policy;
- The report argues that current legal and regulatory framework surrounding drone use by public authorities, private companies and individuals is insufficient to protect the public from the possibility of widespread and intrusive surveillance, and arguably requires wholesale revision.

The report is available online at <http://www.statewatch.org/backfromthebattlefield/>, along with a selection of source documents, responses to Freedom of Information requests, official reports and policy documents. Hard copies of the report are also available.

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