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Unmanned aerial vehicles: Background and issues for Congress.

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Personal Author(s) : Geer, Harlan ; Bolkcom, Christopher

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Abstract : The war on terrorism has put a high premium on a primary mission of UAVs, intelligence gathering. Furthermore, the military effectiveness of UAVs in recent conflicts such as Iraq (1990) and Kosovo (1999) opened the eyes of many to both the advantages and

disadvantages provided by unmanned aircraft. Long relegated to the sidelines in military operations, UAVs are now making national headlines as they are used in ways normally reserved for manned aircraft. Conventional wisdom states that UAVs offer two main advantages over manned aircraft: they are considered more cost-effective, and they minimize the risk to a pilot's life. However, the current UAV accident rate (the rate at which the aircraft are lost or damaged) is 100 times that of manned aircraft. UAVs range from the size of an insect to that of a commercial airliner. DOD currently possesses five major UAVs: the Air Force's Predator and Global Hawk, the Navy and Marine Corps's Pioneer, and the Army's Hunter and Shadow. Other key UAV developmental efforts include the Air Force and Navy's unmanned combat air vehicle (UCAV), Navy's vertical takeoff and landing UAV (VTUAV), and the Broad Area Maritime Surveillance UAV (BAMS), and the Marine Corps's Dragon Eye and Dragon Warrior. The services continue to be innovative in their use of UAVs. Recent examples include arming UAVs (Predator, Hunter), using UAVs to extend the eyes of submarines, and teaming UAVs with strike aircraft and armed helicopters to improve targeting. Congressional considerations include the proper pace, scope, and management of DoD UAV procurement; appropriate investment priorities for UAVs versus manned aircraft; UAV future roles and applications; personnel issues; industrial base issues; and technology proliferation. This report will be updated as necessary.

Descriptors : *MILITARY OPERATIONS , *ACQUISITION , *COSTS , *DRONES , *INVESTMENTS , CONGRESS , UNMANNED , PERSONNEL RETENTION , DEFENSE INDUSTRY , INVENTORY , MISSIONS , MANAGEMENT , MILITARY AIRCRAFT , RECRUITING

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