TechNews

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SUBMISSIONS

TechNews is published on the Tuesday of each week of the academic year. Deadline for all submissions and announcements is 11:59 PM on the Friday prior to publication. Articles, photos, and illustrations must be submitted electronically to the TechNews website at technewsiit.com.

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Masses of spy drones set to swarm U.S. skies

By Mike Purdy

OPINION EDITOR & DISTRIBUTION MANAGER

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It was an ironic Valentine's Day for President Barack Obama as he signed new legislation which allows for an increased prevalence of spy drones in domestic airspace.

This is not quite the gift American citizens were looking for from their Commander in Chief, whose signature graced the FAA Reauthorization Act last Tuesday without hesitation.

FAA is an acronym for the Federal Aviation Administration, the U.S. airspace authority which celebrated the bill's passing after over five years of political contention.

The Reauthorization Act calls for \$63.6 billion in federal funding for FAA programs from 2012-2015, \$11 billion of which will go to the modernization of the nation's air traffic control system. Aside from infrastructural improvements, the bill also calls for hundreds of millions of these dollars to be allocated toward governmental spy drone testing and implementation – directly over our heads.

By 2015, it is expected that full-scale testing and licensing of commercial drones will occur, and that by 2020, more than 30,000 of these unmanned spy planes will patrol U.S. skies. These spy drones vary in size – from that of a

bird to a jet plane - and are controlled remotely to carry out precise, tactical, and malevolent missions.

This means that thousands of the same Predator drones used by the CIA to spy on and eradicate enemy forces in the Middle East can now be used, under law, on our own people. If that is not sufficient reason to be concerned for individual freedoms and to question the intent of governmental operations, then I don't know what is.

Hundreds of spy drone certificates (313 to be exact) were provided by the FAA to police and government agencies in 2011 alone. Although these planes do have the potential to serve some beneficial purposes, such as searchand-rescue and fire-fighting, one can't help but think that, with the majority of the drones in government hands, they will more than likely be used for shadier pursuits.

The Pentagon has claim to over 7,000 aerial drones, and has asked for \$5 billion for the 2012 spy-drone budget.

This technology has become entirely crucial to U.S. military strategy in the seemingly perpetual "War on Terror", helping drop targets like Osama Bin Laden and Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, but has also led to an increased disconnect between the American people and the war itself.

Operated like a video game with no

Americans directly at risk, spy drones have effectively drawn us into greater amounts of foreign conflicts. Apart from war efforts, drones are currently being used on the domestic front for border patrol operations and counternarcotic surveillance.

The spy drone industry is expanding rapidly, and it won't be long before American citizens gaze into the sky with certain apprehension as to whether or not the plane they see in the distance has a human pilot in the cockpit. As the issuing of spy drone certificates becomes increasingly expedited, federal and state agencies, including the massive Department of Homeland Security, will have immediate and unconstrained access to spy drone technology. Who knows what these spy drones will be capable of even within the next few years; it's a formidable thought.

In this Land of the Free, one can only hope that U.S. authority does not imitate the "Big Brother" concept which so many dystopian literature readers can associate with. If the federal government does not come to its wits about the negative implications of spy drone use, more citizens will catch wind of this tainted legislation and become aware of its drastic infringement of personal security and privacy. Surely when the "Occupy" movement regains momentum this spring, the FAA Reauthorization Act will be under some major heat from protestors.

Remembering Anthony Shadid

By Karl Rybaltowski

STAFF WRITER

In the flurry of news coverage of birth control and health care debates, of the European economic crisis and the GOP primaries, the tragic end of a truly inspiring career went relatively unnoticed. Anthony Shadid, foreign correspondent for papers such as the New York Times, Boston Globe and Associated Press, and winner of two Pulitzer prizes, passed away at the age of 43 in Syria this past week.

With his death, the world of journalism has lost one of its most influential and respected figures.

The turmoil in the nation of Syria caused a great deal of speculation over the nature of his passing, but it was ultimately revealed that he has passed away from a fatal asthma attack.

The circumstances of his time in Syria, however, exemplify the lengths Shadid went to in order to provide his particular brand of wellresearched and heavily contextual reporting. The Assad regime places very strict controls on any and all journalists within the country, depth for reports, or forces reliance on secondhand sources.

Shadid decided to go into Syria through work with groups of smugglers, entering the country through a poorly-guarded border with Turkey, in order to write his stories.

Anthony Shadid pursued the story of Syria's

worsening instability in an uncompromising way, despite the additional danger of traveling as an incognito journalist in a country rife with government-sponsored violence (and the risk to his personal health that accompanied this clandestine method of reporting).

This was hardly the only danger he'd run into during his time as a foreign correspondent. He had to scramble to hide his equipment when his offices were raided by Hosni Mubarak's thugs in Egypt during the Arab Spring, and about a decade ago was shot and wounded while in the West Bank. He faced danger regularly, but none could argue with the quality of his reporting, or his hard work in contextualizing and finding the complications in what all too often were presented as cut-and-dry stories on the Middle East.

My own personal introduction to his work was his coverage of the American invasion of Iraq and the ensuing nation-building efforts. As early as 2004, Shadid was covering the roots of sectarian strife in the country and the US military's inability (or lack of will) in dealing with it.

Two things struck me about the work which tends to deprive them of a great deal of he did – one then, and one in retrospect. At the time, it was stunning to see the quality of reporting that arises from extensive background work.

> Compared to the clipped AP snippets that seemed to be issuing forth on a regular basis, Shadid's articles were prosaic, deep, complex, and contextual. They made historical

connections that I rarely saw journalists attempt (though, to be fair, I was a mere high school student, so I hadn't been exposed to the full canon of journalistic classics), and there was an overwhelming emphasis on collecting the opinions of regular individuals over authority figures.

Looking back, I realized that by doing all of the above – paying close attention to popular attitudes, looking into context and history - in his reporting, Shadid identified a bitter, dangerous and tragic conflict that ended up defining most of the conflict in Iraq, which we have euphemistically termed "sectarian strife." But he did so well before this became the major talking point for the government and a focus for journalists.

And in the way he delved into the complex roots and dynamics of such a conflict, he awakened my own interest in politics, world events, and journalism.

Moreover, it was my introduction to how complex the world can be, and how dangerous excessive reductionism can be, whether we speak of Middle Eastern revolutions or engineering design.

So while I want to let IIT know about the loss of one of the world's most influential journalists of the decade (if not longer), I also want to pay my respects to an individual whose work shaped my own perspective. Here's to a paragon of not only journalism, but critical thought.

Government policy, religion spark contraception debate

By Laura Casas Gurri

TECHNEWS WRITER

Currently, the national contraceptive policy has ignited a debate that is causing some controversy.

The government of Barack Obama wants to promote a new law to enhance the basic health insurance for workers by making insurance companies cover contraceptives. The government believes this measure is necessary to reduce diseases and unwanted pregnancies within the population.

But, where is the debate? Some of the companies are obliged to pay; but those companies, groups, and charities who are against this legislation are those with a primarily Catholic ideology.

The Pope's church and these companies are against the use of contraceptive methods. Thus, they are forced to pay for a service which they are totally against.

Is such reform really necessary? Does the government have the power to force companies to pay extra money for these services? Historically, the American government seems that it has given freedom to companies to implement their own policies, while it has dedicated little protection to workers. But it seems this system works and works well.

From a worker's perspective, better health coverage allows them access to a better health plan. Also, if they use contraceptives, they will save money since they will no longer have to pay for it. But if the government begins to apply such interventionist measures, where does the government portend to go? This is a very legitimate question that people should ask.

I do not believe religion has to be the focus of the whole affair. The right question would be if society itself needs this kind of coverage. We are in a country where a worker cannot be discriminated against by gender, race, or religion.

Therefore, if a person is working for a company with a Catholic ideology and has other beliefs and wants to use contraceptive methods, then by future law, he or she has to be covered no matter what the company's philosophy is.

I also believe that the employees have more rights to decide about their health than the company itself. If someone is Catholic and believes in what this religion preaches, they should have the entitlement to decide whether or not take part in this basic service.

There are more questions that should be answered, and many that can take this topic further than a religious issue. After all, in the United States there are several religions that coexist together, each with its own unique culture which sometimes differs from what the government or an institution can or should regulate.