

# *U.S. Air Force Hiring Civilian Pilots to Fly Military Drones*

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Washington, November 28 (RHC)-- The U.S. Air Force has hired civilian defense contractors to fly combat drones--a move some critics say is illegal. The Air Force hired the pilots to operate Q-9 Reaper drones to help track suspected militants and other targets all over the world, according to the Los Angeles Times.

The contractors are part of a small, 3-year-old company called Aviation Unmanned and General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc., a much larger firm based in San Diego, which is also the only supplier of armed drones to the Pentagon.

A redacted Air Force document which approves the secret contract with Aviation Unmanned notes that the "lack of appropriately cleared and currently qualified MQ-9 pilots is a major concern."

The five-page document, dated August 24, says the company will provide pilots and sensor operators for government-owned Reapers to help respond to "recent increased terrorist activities."

The move to hire civilians for military purposes is part of a previously undisclosed expansion in the privatization of Air Force operations.

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