



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on February 13, 2013

Will LAPD Use DHS Drones to Track and Kill Christopher Dorner?

Drones will reportedly soon be launched by a frustrated Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to locate Christopher Dorner, the ex-LAPD officer who allegedly shot three of his former comrades, leaving one dead.

As the search for Dorner [expands to Mexico](#), the LAPD continues receiving thousands of reports of alleged sightings in the LA area, prompting the reports of the impending deployment drones.



A “manifesto” allegedly written by Dorner and published online, lauds President Obama for his work and advocates for greater gun control.

The New American’s Alex Newman provides [a synopsis of the story so far](#):

In his rambling manifesto, Dorner, who also served as a Navy reservist, identified several employees of the LAPD whom he promised to kill for alleged corruption, cover ups, and racism. Their families are also targets, the statement explained. “Unfortunately, this is a necessary evil that I do not enjoy but must partake and complete for substantial change to occur within the LAPD and reclaim my name,” he said in the manifesto.

According to news reports, Dorner originally released his screed on Facebook, explaining that his murderous rampage was the result of rampant corruption and racism within the LAPD, where he worked until being terminated several years ago. In the text, now widely published online, the suspect wrote that he was fired from his job for reporting a well-connected superior officer who allegedly used excessive force during an arrest. Authorities have not confirmed or denied the details.

While not discounting his having fled to Mexico, authorities reportedly believe that Dorner is hiding out somewhere in the San Bernadino mountains outside of Los Angeles.

The burned out shell of his pickup truck was found near Big Bear, a popular resort in the area.

A senior police source quoted by [the U.K. paper Express said](#): “The thermal imaging cameras the drones use may be our only hope of finding him. On the ground, it’s like looking for a needle in a haystack.”

The *Express* also reports that when asked directly if drones have already been deployed, Riverside Police Chief Sergio Diaz, who is jointly leading the task force, said: “We are using all the tools at our disposal.”

Reports also indicate that Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) spokesman Ralph DeSio, neither confirmed nor denied that the federal government had loaned one of its many drones stationed at area Air Force bases to local law enforcement. “This agency has been at the forefront of domestic use of drones by law enforcement. That’s all I can say at the moment,” DeSio reportedly stated.

Although there are [questions as to the accuracy](#) of details of the story in the *Express*, there is



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undeniable precedent for CBP (and its parent agency, the Department of Homeland Security) letting police borrow drones from its massive fleet.

[Beginning in 2006](#), the U.S. Custom and Border Patrol began purchasing (as yet) unarmed Predator drones to purportedly aid in securing America's southern border. According to a report written by the DHS inspector general, as of the end of 2012, CBP has 12 of these aircraft in its arsenal with a total cost to taxpayers of nearly \$200 million.

Inexplicably, the CBP took delivery of two drones in 2011 and 2012 despite the inspector general's statement that "CBP had not adequately planned resources needed to support its current unmanned aircraft inventory."

So, since they weren't using the drones they already bought, why not buy more?

Although that spendthrift attitude is typical of government agency budgeting, perhaps the purchase of Predators is motivated by a goal a bit more sinister than either DHS or the Obama administration is willing to admit.

These other purposes are hinted at in the DHS report. The tasks being performed by the CBP drones extend well beyond the patrolling of the border and into many other areas, a situation described by one reporter as "mission creep." Here is a brief catalog of some of the ways CBP is farming out its drone fleet.

CBP Predators have been used to conduct missions for the following federal and state government agencies: U.S. Secret Service, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); Bureau of Land Management; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Department of Defense; Texas Rangers; U.S. Forest Service; and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Regarding ICE's use of the CBP drone, the inspector general's report indicates that the aircraft "provided surveillance over a suspected smuggler's tunnel, which yielded information that, according to an ICE representative, would have required many cars and agents to obtain." Yes, without the loan-a-drone program, the ICE surveillance mission would have required "many cars and agents," as well as a warrant. With a drone, the government doesn't need no stinkin' warrant.

Some media outlets are beginning to question whether the story in the *Express* is as accurate as it seems.

[Slate, for example](#), quotes DHS spokesman William Brooks as saying that "CBP UAS [Unmanned Aerial Systems] are not flying in support of the search."

The online magazine also quotes Federal Aviation Administration spokeswoman Laura Brown's statement that "no agency has asked us to issue a certificate of authorization for operating UAS as part of this search." Slate also cites Brown saying that the use of a drone to search for Dorner "would require an emergency authorization, and one has (so far) not been issued."

In a call by *The New American* to the LAPD, a spokesman refused to comment on the tactics being used to hunt for the fugitive.

There is one element of the story that the *Express* (and other news organs who repeated it) definitely got wrong.

In its report, the *Express* claimed that Dorner would be the "first human target for remotely-controlled



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airborne drones on US soil.”

Whether law enforcement is using unmanned aerial vehicles to search for Dorner or not, he would not be the first American citizen to be tracked by a government-owned, local-police-piloted drone.

In June 2011, North Dakota resident Rodney Brossart earned that distinction when he was arrested by local law enforcement with the help of a drone owned by a federal agency. Police launched this loaner after Brossart held the police at bay for over 16 hours.

Brossart’s run-in with law enforcement began after six cows found their way onto his property (about 3,000 acres near Lakota, North Dakota), and he refused to turn them over to officers. In fact, according to several sources, Brossart and a few family members ran police off his farm at the point of a gun. Naturally, police weren’t pleased with Brossart’s brand of hospitality, so they returned with a warrant, a SWAT team, and a determination to apprehend Brossart and the cows.

A standoff ensued, and the Grand Forks police SWAT team made a call to Grand Forks Air Force Base, home to one of the Department of Homeland Security’s squadron of Predator drones. No sooner did the call come in than the drone was airborne, and Brossart’s precise location was pinpointed with laser-guided accuracy. The machine-gun toting SWAT officers rushed in, tased, and then arrested Brossart on various charges, including terrorizing a sheriff.

Whether police are using drones to find Dorner or not, the important issue is that these potentially lethal devices should not be used to kill him. Despite the evidence against him and the zeal with which he is being hunted by his former colleagues, Dorner is, as is anyone accused of criminal activity, innocent until proven guilty by a jury of his peers. Should an armed drone piloted by police (or anyone) track, target, and kill Christopher Dorner, the Constitution will be the collateral damage.

Photo of a surveillance drone during a demonstration in Redlands, Calif., in 2006: AP Images

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