

# The Washington Post

## With Air Force's Gorgon Drone 'we can see everything'

Washington Post Staff Writers

By Ellen Nakashima and Craig Whitlock

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In ancient times, Gorgon was a mythical Greek creature whose unblinking eyes turned to stone those who beheld them. In modern times, Gorgon may be one of the military's most valuable new tools.

This winter, the Air Force is set to deploy to Afghanistan what it says is a revolutionary airborne surveillance system called Gorgon Stare, which will be able to transmit live video images of physical movement across an entire town.

The system, made up of nine video cameras mounted on a remotely piloted aircraft, can transmit live images to soldiers on the ground or to analysts tracking enemy movements. It can send up to 65 different images to different users; by contrast, Air Force drones today shoot video from a single camera over a "soda straw" area the size of a building or two.

With the new tool, analysts will no longer have to guess where to point the camera, said Maj. Gen. James O. Poss, the Air Force's assistant deputy chief of staff for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. "Gorgon Stare will be looking at a whole city, so there will be no way for the adversary to know what we're looking at, and we can see everything."

Questions persist, however, about whether the military has the capability to sift through huge quantities of imagery quickly enough to convey useful data to troops in the field.

Officials also acknowledge that Gorgon Stare is of limited value unless they can match it with improved human intelligence - eyewitness reports of who is doing what on the ground.

The Air Force is exponentially increasing surveillance across Afghanistan. The monthly number of unmanned and manned aircraft surveillance sorties has more than doubled since last January, and quadrupled since the beginning of 2009.

Indeed, officials say, they cannot keep pace with the demand.

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"I have yet to go a week in my job here without having a request for more Air Force surveillance out there," Poss said.

But adding Gorgon Stare will also generate oceans of more data to process.

"Today an analyst sits there and stares at Death TV for hours on end, trying to find the single target or see something move," Gen. James E. Cartwright, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at a conference in New Orleans in November. "It's just a waste of manpower."

The hunger for these high-tech tools was evident at the conference, where officials told several thousand industry and intelligence officials they had to move "at the speed of war." Cartwright pressed for solutions, even partial ones, in a year or less.

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