



American scientists have drawn up plans for a new generation of nuclear-powered drones capable of flying over remote regions of the world for months on end without refuelling.

The blueprints for the new drones, which have been developed by Sandia National Laboratories – the US government's principal nuclear research and development agency – and defence contractor Northrop Grumman, were designed to increase flying time "from days to months" while making more power available for operating equipment, according to a project summary published by Sandia.

"It's pretty terrifying prospect," said Chris Coles of Drone Wars UK, which campaigns against the increasing use of drones for both military and civilian purposes. "Drones are much less safe than other aircraft and tend to crash a lot. There is a major push by this industry to increase the use of drones and both the public and government are struggling to keep up with the implications."

The highly sensitive research into what is termed "ultra-persistence technologies" set out to solve three problems associated with drones: insufficient "hang time" over a potential target; lack of power for running sophisticated surveillance and weapons systems; and lack of communications capacity.

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