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The future of the RAF [1]

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The US forces are now equipped with a wide and increasingly versatile portfolio of long-range and local ?unmanned aerial vehicles? (UAVs). The long-range versions are controlled from Creech airforce base near Las Vegas. The best known is the Predator which can carry one Hellfire missile. It is being replaced by the MQ-9 Reaper which can carry 14 Hellfire missiles.

The RQ-4A Global Hawk travels at around 400 mph a day and a half at 65,000 feet. Its radar, infrared and optical sensors an scan a decent sized country in a day.

The planned stealth UCAS-D will be able to carry a missile payload up to 2,000 pounds, plus an extra 2,500 pounds externally when stealth is not required.

Moving now to local UAV systems, the CQ-10 Snow Goose uses a textile, parafoil-wing for urgent supplies to Special Forces operating in unfriendly territory. It can be launched from the ground. The Battle hog 150 is a vertical takeoff UAV for ground support. Flying at over 300 mph with a payload of 500 pounds, armaments will include Hellfire missiles, rocket pods and 7.62mm guns.

The list goes on but the issue for the forthcoming defence review is that the military use of air space is going through a revolution akin to the arrival of the tank a century ago. We should not be discussing how many Euro-fighters we need but whether we need them at all.

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