Next generation military drones researched

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The military's next generation of airborne drones will be able to silently dive between buildings, zoom under overpasses and land on apartment balconies.

At least, those are the goals University of Florida engineers say they are working toward.

Funded by the U.S. Air Force and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, aerospace engineers have built prototypes of 6-inch- to 2-foot-long drones capable of squeezing in and out of tight spots in cities, in a manner similar to tiny stunt planes.

Their secret: seagull-inspired wings can morph during flight, transforming the planes' stability and agility at the touch of a button on the operator's remote control.

The Air Force's Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle and other military drones have been key to military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. But those drones, which take surveillance images and sometimes also fire missiles, are designed to soar high above the ground.

The UF planes are intended to have added capabilities, such as landing in tight spots and, equipped with sensors, to fly close to buildings searing for biological and chemical weapons.

University researchers reportedly have authored nine academic papers on the research.

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