

Boom in journalist drone use flies into legal obstacles

March 8 2015, by Remi Banet And Tupac Pointu



A drone flies at 'Drone-Days', the first fair on drones in Belgium, at Tour and Taxi in Brussels, on March 7, 2015

Flying over the flaming barricades of the Maidan protests in Kiev, the camps of Auschwitz or hurtling down a ski slope—drones have become a vital tool for cameramen, but they are increasingly running into legal and practical obstacles.

Many [news networks](#) such as the BBC, Russia Today and France's TF1 have bought their own drones in recent years and trained their cameramen to become remote-control pilots.

"We've used them all over the world, from Togo, for a report about the Aral Sea, to the Brazilian rain forests," said Thomas Hannen, a producer at the BBC World Service.

Simple to use and able to capture views way out of the reach of traditional technology, drones are also increasingly affordable, with basic models starting at just a few hundred euros (dollars).

That compares with shelling out some 20,000 euros a day to get helicopter shots, said Pierre Fourtillan, head of Aliothcam, a French business that specialises in aerial photography.

Although some shots are still better achieved with a cameraman in a helicopter, drones provide some novel options.

"We can kiss the rooftops and sides of buildings," enthused Nicolas Charbonneau, an assistant director at TF1.

Storms, avalanches and traffic jams have all become filmable in a way that would have been impossible just a few years ago, he added, and the station is keen to use them more for extreme sports.

Drones have also made it easier to cover hard news topics.



Al-Jazeera journalists were arrested for flying a drone in Paris' Bois de Boulogne park on the western edge of the French capital

"They enable us to tell stories that would be out of reach, particularly when there are safety concerns, for example in war zones or natural disasters," said Lizzie Phelan, a journalist at Russia Today, which made pioneering use of drones to cover the Ferguson riots in the United States last year.

Tightening up the rules

But there are limits, particularly as the spike in their use makes

governments jittery about the security implications.

France and Spain already have strict laws banning their use over populated and high-security areas without special permission.

Three BBC journalists were arrested in Switzerland in February after flying a drone over a restricted zone.

Three more from Al-Jazeera were detained for an unauthorised flight over a Paris park last month.

The US is struggling to come up with clear rules.



A small drone hovers in the sky on February 1, 2014 during a meet-up of the DC Area Drone User Group

California passed a law in September preventing paparazzi from using drones, after celebrities such as Miley Cyrus raised concerns about drones hovering over her home.

Such restrictions are not seen as a great loss by all paparazzi, however.

"On a drone, you can only put a wide-angle lens," said Sebastien Valiela, whose photos last year revealed President Francois Hollande's affair with actress Julie Gayet.

"You need to be within a few metres of the people to get a usable picture. You get spotted."

Valiela did buy a drone, and tried to use it last year for the marriage in France of Kim Kardashian and Kanye West.

"But when I saw how the place was set up, I decided to take a helicopter instead," he said.

After that, he sold his [drone](#).

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