

The Future of Security: Drones?

Written by Marco Attard
01. 07. 2019

You might have heard of Amazon plans to use drones for deliveries, but a recently granted patent reveals how the online retailer turned industry giant also has ambitions to offer drones as "surveillance as a service."



Originally filed in June 2015 before becoming public four years later, the "Image Creation Using Geo-Fence Data" patent describes how "an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) may perform a surveillance action at a property of an authorised party." To do so, the UAV (aka drone) defines the property in question within a geo-fence, a virtual perimeter or boundary around a real-world piece of geography.

The patent gives few other details as to how such a service would operate. It does state customers could have drones visit their property on an hourly, daily or weekly basis, while the drones would carry night vision cameras and microphones to further expand sensing capabilities. On the privacy front, Amazon promises the drones will only be able to capture images within the specific geo-fence, possibly obscuring or outright removing images outside of the specific boundary.

As one might imagine, Amazon is not the only company with plans for drone-based security-- San Francisco-based startup Sunflower Labs is working on a security system bringing together motion detectors, drone and a smartphone app. Set for a 2020 launch, the Sunflower system uses sensor-laden "Sunflower" sidewalk lights to detect possible intruders. The sunflower sensors send alerts to the "Hive," a base station holding a "Bee" drone. Should the Hive detect a malicious intruder it sends the Bee to investigate, with AI ensuring it navigates around obstacles.

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Of course, the success of such systems depends whether it will be even legal to operate them in the first place. Last month the European Commission (EC) adopted legislation demanding operators of all drones, regardless of weight, register with national authorities, with different categories of drone having to follow appropriate regulations. Member states can also define "no-fly zones" over sensitive areas such as airfields or city centres through satellite geo-location.

Go [Image Creation Using Geo-Fence Data Patent](#)

Go [Sunflower Labs](#)

Go [EC Adopts Rules on Operating Drones](#)