From VOA Learning English, this is the Technology Report in Special English.

China said last week that it had considered launching a drone strike against a major Burmese drug trafficker wanted in the killings of 13 Chinese sailors.

China's top drug official, Liu Yuejin, said the plan was to bomb the drug lord's hideout in northeastern Burma using unmanned aircraft.

The official said the drone strike idea was eventually passed over in order to capture Naw Kham alive. He was captured last April in a joint operation with Laos.

The comments by the official are a sign of China's increasing development of unmanned aerial technology. They also suggest that China is seriously considering drone attacks outside its borders.

Peter Dutton is with the United States Naval War College. He says China is moving away from its earlier policy of non-interference in international affairs.

"This is a new change. This is China behaving more actively in the international sphere to protect its interests beyond its borders than it had in the past."

For years, the United States has led the global drone market. It is known to use UAV, or unmanned aerial vehicle, strikes against foreign targets.

In recent years, China has greatly improved its drone technology. It showed off many of its new models at recent air shows in the country. One of the drones reaches distances of over 3,200 kilometers.

The country is also modernizing its global navigation system to compete with those of the United States, Russia and Europe.

The United States has justified drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia by saying their governments have been unwilling or unable to suppress the threats from the individuals targeted.

American University law professor Stephen Vladeck says Washington needs to be much more specific about its conditions for using armed UAVs.

"Part of the problem is that because the U.S. government is engaged in what seems like so many drone strikes, and has not exactly been forthcoming about the criteria it uses, it's possible for countries like China to point at the U.S. example and say, 'if they're doing it, so can we.'"

The United States exports unmanned aircraft to only a few of its closest allies. China is now seen as an increasingly reliable and cheap supplier. Several countries have bought or built their own UAVs, mostly for surveillance. Professor Vladeck finds this concerning.

"The problem is that this technology is becoming so widely available and so cheap, that I think it is only a matter of time before countries with far smaller militaries, countries with far less responsible regimes, are in a position where they want to use these technologies as well."