



Ministry of Defence

Air Command Secretariat
Spitfire Block
Headquarters Air Command
Royal Air Force
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP14 4UE

Ref. 2016/7474

[REDACTED]

22 August 2016

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email of 29 July 2016 asking for details of Reaper sorties. Specifically, you asked:

As part of a response to a Parliamentary Written Answer [Ref: 167364] [5 Sept 2013 : Column 481W] you provided details of (i) the number of drone sorties flown in Afghanistan and the number of those sorties that saw the deployment of a weapon or weapons.

Could you provide me with answers to those two questions for each of the years from 2008 to 2015 inclusive and include (iii) any estimate the MoD holds as to the number of casualties resulting from those drone strikes in each year.

In addition could you answer exactly the same three questions, covering the same time period for any other country where MoD drones have been deployed and fired weapons since 2008.

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). We have now completed a search of our paper and electronic records for the information you requested and I can confirm that some information within the scope of your request is held.

The number of Reaper sorties, weapon releases and enemy combatant casualties is given at the attached Annex. Information on enemy combatant casualties including killed or wounded are based on mission reports and weapon system video. It is not possible to guarantee the figures as ground examination is not practical due to the nature of operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Additionally, whilst the data is believed to be complete and correct, it is subject to review and errors and omissions may be corrected at a future date.

The MOD does not hold a comprehensive record of figures for insurgents or civilian casualties in Afghanistan because of the immense difficulty and risks that would be involved in collecting robust data. There is only one incident where civilian casualties are known to have resulted from a UK Reaper Remotely Piloted Air System (RPAS) strike. On 25 March 2011, an attack on two pick-up trucks resulted in the destruction of a significant quantity of explosives and the death of two insurgents, but sadly, four Afghanistan civilians were also killed. The incident was fully investigated by ISAF and it was concluded that the Reaper

RPAS crew had operated in accordance with extant procedures and rules of engagement. Based on careful battle damage assessment, we have no evidence of civilian casualties as a result of UK airstrikes in Iraq or Syria since operations began in 2014 and 2015 respectively.

Under Section 16 (Advice and assistance) of the Act, you may wish to note that the Reaper is the UK's only armed RPAS which is operated by highly-trained Royal Air Force personnel. Reaper does not have the capability to fire weapons autonomously and can only fire its weapons when commanded to by the fully trained and qualified aircrew. The same strict rules of engagement that govern the use of conventional military aircraft also apply to Reaper. All weapons deployed by the RAF aircraft are used in strict accordance with the Law of Armed Conflict and rigorous Rules of Engagement incorporating estimates to minimise the chance of civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. You may also wish to note that Reaper sorties over Syria will have flown through Iraqi airspace so will be included in figures for both countries.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 2nd Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.gov.uk>.

Yours sincerely


Secretariat 3a1
Air Command

Annex A to FOI 2016/07474

Year	Afghanistan		Iraq			Syria		
	Reaper Sorties	Reaper Weapon Release Events	Reaper Sorties	Reaper Weapon Release Events	Estimated Enemy Killed or Wounded	Reaper Sorties	Reaper Weapon Release Events	Estimated Enemy Killed or Wounded
2008	296	14	-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	431	33	-	-	-	-	-	-
2010	758	51	-	-	-	-	-	-
2011	901	74	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	895	91	-	-	-	-	-	-
2013	897	72	-	-	-	-	-	-
2014	1039	44	111	38	62	10	0	-
2015	-	-	900	273	346	261	1	1
Total	5217	379	1011	311	408	271	1	1