



Ministry
of Defence

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Ref: FOI2014/02902

18 July 2014

Dear

Thank you for your email of 20 June 2014 requesting the following information:

“Under the Freedom of Information Act, I would like to know the number of drones strikes carried out by UK armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. I would also like details of the number of enemy combatants and civilians killed in the attacks”

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that some information in scope of your request is held.

The information you have requested can be found below.

Answering your questions in turn:

1. *‘I would like to know the number of drones strikes carried out by UK armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan’.*

There were no UK Armed Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) operated in Iraq.

Reaper is the UK's only armed RPAS and is only operated in support of UK and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) ground forces in Afghanistan. It is predominantly used for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance tasks, providing vital intelligence in support of our ground commanders, enabling them to stay one step ahead of the enemy. Reaper is far from unmanned; it is operated by highly trained, qualified and professional military pilots.

Reaper has been armed with precision-guided weapons since 24 May 2008, providing an offensive capability if needed. It does not have the capability to fire weapons autonomously and can only fire its weapons when commanded to do so by the aircrew. Targets are always positively identified as legitimate military objectives, and strikes are prosecuted in

accordance with the Law of Armed Conflict and UK Rules of Engagement. The same strict Rules of Engagement that govern the use of conventional military aircraft also apply to RPAS.

Between 24 May 2008 and 31 May 2014 inclusive, the UK has flown 4490 Reaper sorties in Afghanistan and 474 weapons have been released.

2. *'I would also like details of the number of enemy combatants and civilians killed in the attacks.'*

The Ministry of Defence does not hold a comprehensive record of figures for insurgent 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 RPAS strike. This incident occurred prior to the commencement of Reaper RPAS operations from RAF Waddington. 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. In line with current ISAF procedures, an ISAF investigation was conducted to establish if any lessons could be learned or if any errors in operational procedures could be identified. The report concluded that the actions of the Reaper RPAS crew had been in accordance with extant procedures and rules of engagement.

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, 1st 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,

PJHQ J8 FOI Secretariat