

500 Days of British Drone Attacks in Iraq and Syria, “Against ISIS” or “Against Civilians”?

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Global Research, March 07, 2016

[Drone Wars UK](#) 4 March 2016

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Military and WMD](#), [Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#), [SYRIA](#)

Overall this indicates that one-third of British air strikes against ISIS have been carried out by drones, however this masks a very recent change. For the 12 months from November 2014 (when first UK drone strike against ISIS took place) until 31 October 2015, UK Reaper drones carried out 49% of strikes (191) while UK Tornados carried out 51% of strikes (202).

UK drone and air strikes in Iraq and Syria Nov 14-Feb 16

	Nov 14 – Oct 15 (12 Months)	Nov 15 – Feb 16 (4 Months)	Total (16 months)
Reaper strikes	191	76	267
Reaper monthly average strikes	16	19	17
% of British strikes by Reaper	49%	19%	34%
Tornado strikes	202	197	399
Tornado monthly average strikes	17	49	25
% of British strikes by Tornado	51%	49%	50%
Typhoon strikes	0	130	130
Typhoon monthly average strikes	0	32	32
% of British strikes by Typhoon	0%	32%	16%

Figures from MoD updates on UK airstrikes

In the four months since October 2015, when additional British Tornados and Typhoon aircraft were deployed and there was a [surge](#) of strikes in Iraq around Ramadi and Mosul, Reapers have carried out 76 strikes (19%), Tornados 197 (49%) and Typhoons 130 (32%).

So while it may look as though the use of British drones to carry out strikes has declined, in fact the monthly average of British drone strikes has actually increased in that four month period from 16 per month to 19 per month (see table). There are also signs that the ‘surge’ in strikes by Tornados and Typhoons in Dec 15/Jan 16 has diminished.

Strikes in Syria

British air strikes since Parliamentary vote on 2 Dec 2015	
Reaper strikes in Syria	17
Tornado/Typhoon strikes in Syria	37
Total strikes in Syria	54
Total UK strikes (since vote)	338
% of UK strikes in Syria	16%

Figures from MoD updates on UK airstrikes

According to the MoD updates (up 1 March 2016) there have been 54 British air strikes in Syria out of a total of 338 UK strikes since the December 2nd vote to extend military action into Syria. Despite David Cameron's insistence that the UK had to ["crush the head of the snake"](#) by bombing in Syria and Michael Fallon's argument that it was ["morally indefensible"](#) not to bomb in Syria, just 16% of British air strikes have taken place there in the three months since the vote.

This is likely due to the fact that finding targets for strikes - when the US and others have already been bombing for more than a year - would be very difficult, as [was clear for some time](#) before the vote. About half of the 50 or so British strikes in Syria have been against oil infrastructure - or engineering vehicles to fix damaged oil infrastructure - with the rest against ISIL positions, checkpoints and fighters.

Civilian Casualties

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) continues to insist that there is [no evidence that any civilian has been killed or even injured](#) in the 500 days of UK drone operations - or indeed in the 800 air strikes in which more than 1,000 weapons have been fired by British drones and aircraft.

Airwars, the independent group which monitors air strikes in Iraq and Syria argues there is [fair evidence of between 918 and 1,278 civilian non-combatants killed](#) in 144 separate incidents. The organisation recently wrote to the MoD about 8 British strikes that took place in December 2015 after [cross-referencing of reported civilian casualty incidents with UK airstrikes had indicated possible concerns](#). The MoD responded that [no British aircraft were involved in the strikes](#) in which civilians were reportedly killed.

Despite the British insistence of zero civilian casualties, and US statements that only around 20 civilians are ["likely to have been killed"](#), hundreds of civilian on the ground have been killed and injured in Coalition air strikes. A browse through [the names, photographs, videos and details](#) of civilian casualty reports compiled by Airwars during 2015 should give serious pause for thought to those all too ready to accept official claims.

Drones and Perpetual War

While today marks 500 days of British drone operations in Iraq and Syria, the UK's drones were deployed [directly](#) from operation in Afghanistan. In fact Britain's Reaper drones have been engaged in permanent military operations now [since October 2007](#), almost eight-and-a-half years. And there appears to be little sign of British drone operations coming to an end any time soon, in fact just the opposite.

Last autumn David Cameron announced his intention to [double](#) the UK's drone fleet again (renaming the Predators as 'Protectors') as well as purchasing the extremely long endurance [Zephyr drones](#). And yesterday David Cameron announced [£750m of further funding for the Future Combat Air System](#), a joint UK-French combat drone demonstrator programme.

It has long been argued that the remote, so-called 'risk-free' nature of drone warfare will lead to a [permanent state of war](#). Today's milestone seems to be just another step on that long journey.

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