

Britain's Reaper Drone Reconnaissance Missions in Iraq and Syria, Fired Strike Missiles

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Britain's Royal Air Force carried out 301 Reaper drone missions over Iraq between the start of UK operations against Isis last September and the end of March, firing a total of 102 Hellfire missiles on 87 separate occasions, [according to new Ministry of Defence figures](#).

The numbers were obtained by the Drone Wars UK organisation, which also reveals today that RAF Tornados carried out 115 strikes in Iraq during the same period.

The figures suggest most drone missions have been for reconnaissance flights – gathering intelligence about ISIS positions in Iraq. Of the 184 Reaper missions that took place in Iraq between January and March this year, only 32, or 17%, involved drones firing weapons. On those missions the drones fired two missiles on average.

Britain joined the US-led international coalition against ISIS after a vote in Parliament at the end of last September. RAF drones fired their first weapon over Iraq just weeks later in October.

The MoD does not reveal any further details about these missions, including who or what may have been targeted or casualty rates.

The RAF has long maintained that it uses Reaper drones primarily for reconnaissance and surveillance, and that it fires weapons only rarely. In total the RAF fired weapons from Tornado bombers and Reaper drones on 202 occasions between September and March. Of those, drones were responsible for 43% of the attacks, or 87. Tornados struck 115 times.

The UK is one of nine countries bombing Iraq. The others are the US, France, Belgium, Canada, Australia, Denmark, Jordan and the Netherlands. In total this coalition carried out approximately 2,154 air strikes between September and April, [according to the website Air Wars](#) which is tracking the bombing campaign.

The MoD figures obtained by Drone Wars UK today also show how many RAF drone missions have flown over sovereign Syrian airspace as part of the fight against ISIS.

All of these sorties have been purely for reconnaissance, according to the MoD, because the RAF [does not have Parliamentary permission](#) to engage its weapons in Syria.

The release of the figures came just days after Drone Wars's Chris Cole reflected on six months of UK drone strikes against ISIS in a recording of the Bureau's latest podcast.

Speaking to Owen Bennett-Jones before the MoD data release, Cole's assessment that there had been around 100 UK drone strikes in Iraq by early May tallied with the total arrived at using the official figures. He said both Tornados and Reapers have been hitting the same targets: ISIS positions, vehicles and checkpoints.

There is not enough information available to determine how many, if any, of the 350-400 civilians estimated to have been killed in airstrikes in Iraq and Syria were the result of British strikes, he added.

The Reapers have also flown 50 missions over Syria. The MoD has said that intelligence and surveillance from the Reaper missions is being passed on to the military coalition to undertake strikes, Cole said. He described the Government's claim that these missions did not amount to military action as "nonsense."

Cole also noted that since UK forces withdrew from Afghanistan last October, the MoD has appeared more willing to disclose information about British drone strikes there. Overall the MoD claims that there were only four civilian deaths in the roughly 400 drone strikes it carried out there, a casualty rate Cole described as "possible of course but... extremely unlikely."

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