

# The A-Z of Drones 2013

## Part One

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[DroneWars.net](#)

# a

It was good to see large numbers turn out at a big protest at Parc [Aberporth](#), the drone test centre in West Wales, in September as the owners announced a big expansion. It was even better to see Yemeni journalist [Abdulelah Haider Shaye](#) released from prison even though he is still under virtual house arrest. Phase two of the UK government-industry programme, [ASTRAEA](#), which aims to open up UK airspace to civil drones, came to an end this year. While the drone lobby is keeping up the pressure the public remain extremely sceptical. News that British drones may be heading to [Africa](#) came as a big surprise, and will no doubt be a focus of campaigning in the coming year.

# B

[BAE Systems](#) continues to be very coy about its Taranis drone development, hinting that it has had its first flight - without providing any evidence. The British [Brimstone](#) missile began tests to incorporate it into the Reaper drone under the US [Big Safari](#) programme. Britain's [Black Hornet](#) mini-drone got the star treatment this year after being promoted by the MoD. Less popular with MoD media office was Reprieve's revelation that [BT](#) had installed a cable between Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti and US base 'RAF' Croughton near Oxford.



**Children** continued to be among the civilian casualties from US drone strikes in Pakistan. Despite this, for some in the US, it's **China's** development of drones that we are supposed to see as threat to peace and security. The lack of **Congressional oversight over CIA use of drones** continues despite the best efforts of the ACLU and others. The drone lobby continue to push the opening of the skies to the **civil use of drones** despite many drone **crashes**. Whistleblower **Chelsea Manning** was sentenced to 35 years in prison - without her we would know even less than we do about drones.



Further so-called **double-tap** drone strikes were reported this year even though UN Special rapporteur and many others dubbed them as clear war crimes. Jeremy Scahill and Rick Rowley's movie **Dirty Wars** was released to huge acclaim while drones dominated at this year's London **DSEI arms fair**. The **Dutch air force** joined the UK, France and Italy in procuring Reaper drones from the US while James Bridle's **Dronestagram** continues to document the locations of US drone strikes.



Israel reportedly carried out a drone strike in **Egypt** for the first time this year, while **Elbit Systems** continues to develop and export its drones. In Germany the cancellation of the **Euro Hawk drone** - at a cost of 500 million Euros - was a huge scandal that almost brought down the government. Meanwhile Germany was one of seven countries that formed a **European Drones Club**, with the aim of developing a future European drone. A debate on the **ethics of drone warfare** at the Oxford Union this year was a particular highlight for us (especially as we were on the winning side!)

# F

**France** joined the growing list of countries operating US Reaper drones, but there appeared to be little progress on any Anglo-French drone. The revelation that the **FBI** has been using drones since 2006 surprised many but compared to the shocking NSA surveillance disclosures, drew little media attention. Also gaining almost no media coverage was the news that 21 Predator drone crew face **fraud charges** over expenses claims. Speculation over the **future use** of drones continues to generate column inches.

# G

Reprieve's legal action over **GCHQ's** role in providing intelligence to the US for drone strikes in Pakistan continued, with the case reaching the Appeals Court in London in December. Reaper and Predator drone manufacturer **General Atomics**, proved it had a sense of humour by arguing that its products should not be called drones as they have a "proven beneficial role in humanitarian crises." Meanwhile the company's **Gray Eagle** drone, a souped-up version in use with US special forces, continues to (ahem) fly off the shelves. Much less funny is how Israeli drones continue to haunt **Gaza** and traumatise Palestinians throughout the year.

# H

The continued vulnerability of drones to **hacking** was brought home to many with the release of SkyJack - a drone that takes control of other drones - in December. Eight major **human rights** groups have written twice to President Obama this year condemning the US use of drones for targeted killings. The death of Pakistan Taliban leader **Hakimullah Mehsud** in a US drone strike was said to be the end of the nascent peace process. Also brought to an ignominious end in 2013 was the Global Observer **Hydrogen drone** which, perhaps unsurprisingly, simply no one wanted.

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