



One-page briefing on drones (compiled 31.01.13)

UN action on drones

Ben Emmerson QC, a British lawyer working as the UN's special rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights, is leading an investigative unit probing the legality of drone attacks that have resulted in civilian casualties.

- The investigation is looking at strikes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, the Palestinian territories and Somalia.
- Some US drone strikes in Pakistan may amount to war crimes, Emmerson has warned
- Emmerson has described the USA's 'global war' paradigm as justification for strikes in areas not recognised by the UN as being in international conflict as 'indefensible'
- Emmerson has recommended that users of targeted killing technology should be required to subject themselves, in the case of each and every death, to impartial investigation
- Since each strike is visually recorded, Emmerson has suggested that videos be passed to independent assessors
- The inquiry will report to the UN General Assembly in the latter half of 2013

USA drone activity

- Between 2004 and 2013, CIA drone attacks in Pakistan killed up to 3,461 people - up to 891 of them civilians, [according to research by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#).
- The number of US drone strikes has increased dramatically since Barack Obama came to power

UK drone activity

- MoD figures from May 2012 state that UK drones had flown a total of 34,750 hours and fired 281 missiles and laser-guided bombs
- The UK's Reaper drones in Afghanistan are piloted by 39 Squadron RAF from the Creech Air Force Base in Nevada, USA.
- Each Reaper is navigated by a 3 man team consisting of a qualified pilot, sensor operator and mission intelligence coordinator (MIC).
- In November 2012 it was announced that the UK is to double its quantity of Reapers deployed in Afghanistan to a total of 10.
- The five new Reapers will be flown by pilots based at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire. It is thought that these five drones began operations towards the end of 2012 and would be the first time drones have been controlled from terminals in Britain
- UK Ministers are under pressure to reveal whether they share British intelligence with the US to help CIA-operated drones to kill terror suspects in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia
- The MOD released a concept note on its use of drones in March 2011: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/33711/20110505JDN_211_UAS_v2U.pdf

Commons Defence Select Committee

- In November 2012 the Times newspaper reported that the Commons Defence Select Committee (chaired by James Arbuthnot MP) is to investigate the deployment of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in Afghanistan as part of a two-year inquiry into the use of lethal force
- It is important the Defence Select Committee and the public can scrutinise all of the UK's 350 (as of Nov 2012) drone strikes, including the circumstances surrounding the launch of weapons and resulting casualty figures
- Philip Alston, former UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial killing, said that Britain could help bring greater transparency to the US use of drones: "If the British government is forced to be more transparent and more forthcoming, that puts pressure on its allies, and public opinion, certainly in USA will see that what they currently assume to be the reasonable norm is not,"