

MoD reported that British Reapers had undertaken 178 armed attacks in Afghanistan since 2008. The MoD was forced to admit for the first time in July 2011 that Afghan civilians had been killed in a British drone strike. They continue to maintain however that this was a one-off due to “intelligence failures on the ground.”

Watchkeeper

As well as armed drones, the UK has several types of surveillance and targeting drones, most notably Watchkeeper, a drone jointly produced by Israeli company Elbit and Thales UK. The UK is purchasing 54 Watchkeeper drones and ground stations at a cost of £860m. The first ten have been built in Israel and production will now be transferring to a specially built facility in Leicester at the Thales factory. Testing is taking place at Aberporth in Wales and Watchkeeper is due to enter service in December 2011.

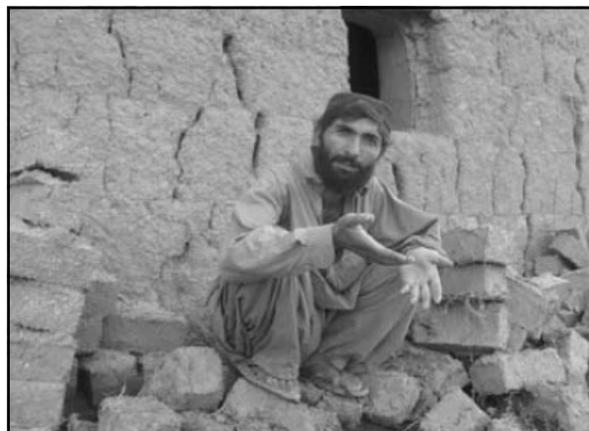
Increased Surveillance

Manufacturers are also looking for civilian uses for drones to expand their markets and this includes the use of drones for domestic surveillance. Drones will no doubt make possible the dramatic expansion of the surveillance state. With the convergence of other technologies it may even make possible machine recognition of faces, behaviours, and the monitoring of individual conversations. The sky, so to speak, is the limit.

For further information and regular comment on the use of drones see www.dronewars.net

Voice of the Victims

In June 2010, Shakeel Khan was sitting in his home in North Waziristan with his family when a drone missile struck: “I was resting with my parents in one room when it happened. God saved my parents and I, but my brother, his wife, and children were all killed.” The children were 5 and 3 years old. Khan says, “I must support my aged parents now but I earn a very little amount which can hardly meet our expenses. We don’t have enough to reconstruct our house and fear that the drones will strike us again. Shakeel Khan, interviewed by CIVIC 29th August 2010



Drone Campaign Network

The Drone Campaign Network (DCN) is a network of organisations, academics and individuals working together to share information and coordinate action in relation to military drones.

www.dronecampaignnetwork.org.uk



Stop the Drone Wars



Rise of the Drones

Over the past few years we have witnessed the increasing use of drones, to undertake armed attacks around the globe. Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Yemen and Somalia have all been subject to drone strikes by US or British drones controlled from many thousands of miles away. Gaza is also subjected to drone strikes from Israel. Although there are claims that the drone strikes are precise and accurate, there are many reports - particular from Pakistan where media are able to obtain first hand reports - of high numbers of civilian casualties.

Legal experts as well as peace and human rights organisations have expressed serious concerns about the growing use of armed drones - and even some within the British Ministry of Defence have

raised questions about the push towards greater autonomy for armed drones.

How Drones Work

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVS), commonly known as drones, are aircraft either controlled by 'pilots' from the ground or increasingly, autonomously following a pre-programmed mission. While there are dozens of different drones, they basically fall into two categories: those that are used for reconnaissance and surveillance purposes and those that are armed with missiles and bombs.

The use of drones has grown quickly in recent years because unlike manned aircraft they can stay aloft for many hours, they are much cheaper than military aircraft and they are flown remotely

so there is no danger to the flight crew. While the British and US Reaper and Predator drones are physically in Afghanistan and Iraq, they are controlled via satellite from Nellis and Creech USAF base outside Las Vegas, Nevada. British Reapers will be controlled from RAF Waddington in Lincs when RAF pilots move back from the US in 2012.

Ground crews launch drones near the conflict zone, then control is handed over to pilots sitting at video screens in specially designed trailers



in the Nevada desert. One person 'flies' the drone, another operates and monitors the cameras and sensors, while a third person is in contact with the "customers", ground troops and commanders in the war zone. While armed drones were first used in the Balkans war, their use has dramatically escalated in Afghanistan, Iraq and in the CIA's undeclared war in Pakistan. The US has two separate 'squadron' of armed drones - one run by the US Air Force and one run by the CIA. Former CIA Director (now US Defence Secretary) Leon Panetta called drones are "the only game in town."

Drones UK

The UK has several different types of armed and surveillance drones in Iraq and Afghanistan and others in the production or development stage.

The UK began using armed drones in Afghanistan in Oct 2007 after purchasing three Reapers from General Atomics in 2007 at a cost of £6m each. The MoD confirmed in June 2008 that a British Reaper UAV had fired its weapons for the first time, but refused to give any details. In July 2011 the UK



RAF pilot in Nevada controlling armed drone over Afghanistan