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UN notes a sharp increase in US drone strikes in Afghanistan

February 20, 2013



United Nations Assistance mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) following a report announced US drone strikes in Afghanistan rose sharply last year with 506 weapons were released by drones in 2012, compared with 294 the previous year.

The increase was a sign that drones are taking a greater role as Americans try to streamline the fight against insurgents while preparing to withdraw combat forces in less than two years.

According to UNAMA five incidents resulted in casualties with 16 civilians killed and three wounded, up from just one incident in 2011.

The US air force central command also recorded an increase, giving the numbers of weapons released by drones as 243 in 2009, 277 in 2010, 294 in 2011 and 494 in 2012, The Associated Press reported.

In the meantime Peter Singer of the Washington-based Brookings Institution noted that the drone program in Afghanistan is run by the Pentagon, and therefore is more transparent than the CIA drone counter-terrorism program in Pakistan.

The U.N. figures were released as part of its annual report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan. Overall, the full-year toll of civilian deaths in 2012 declined to 2,754, a 12 percent decrease from 3,131 in the same period a year earlier. It was the first time in six years that the civilian death toll dropped.