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US military removes data on Afghanistan drone strikes

March 10, 2013

U.S. military on Sunday announced it had removed data about air strikes carried out by unmanned planes in Afghanistan from its monthly air power summaries.

According to a statement released by US Central Command, the data had been removed because it was “disproportionately focused” on the use of weapons by the remotely piloted aircraft as it was published only when strikes were carried out – which happened during only 3 percent of sorties. Most missions were for reconnaissance, it said.

Last October, the Air Force began releasing the monthly totals of strikes in Afghanistan in an effort to give the public more information on its overseas operations. But the move appears to have been reversed.

The February numbers released March 7th just contain empty boxes for the drone strike data, and all of the previous data has also been deleted from older press releases on the site.

Drone warfare has become increasingly important to the U.S. military in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as a way to collect intelligence and conduct airstrikes without risking American lives.

According to the Daily Mail In 2009, 257 drone strikes were conducted in Afghanistan. That number climbed slightly to 277 in 2010 and there was a small bump up in 2011 to 294, though the data can change due to recalculation.

Come 2012 drone strikes became more frequent, climbing to 494 as the tactic became a more important part of the U.S. strategy since President Obama said he hopes to cut the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan by half in 2014. That would be an estimated reduction of 34,000 U.S. military personnel.

Civilian casualties from drone strikes have raised ethical concerns and angered local populations, creating tension between the United States and Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Last month, a United Nations report that the number of drone strikes increased 72 percent in 2012, and last week Senator Rand Paul filibustered John Brennan's CIA confirmation for 12 hours to draw attention to US drone policy.