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British Drone Strikes in Afghanistan by Province. Evidence of War Crimes

By Chris Cole

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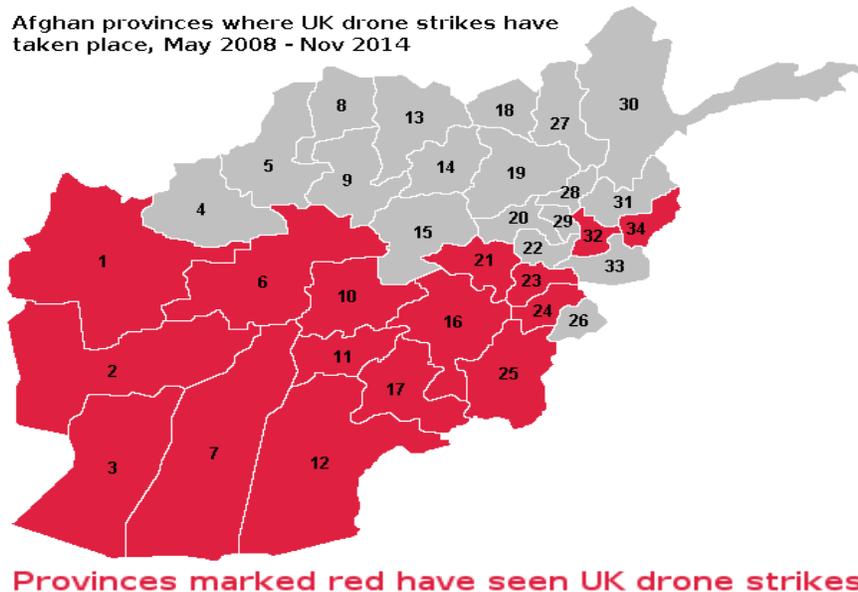


More than three years after first submitting a Freedom of Information request, the UK Ministry of Defence has finally told us in which Afghan provinces UK drones strikes took place.

Although there is no detail on the number of strikes within each province, the MoD reveals that UK drones strikes occurred in 16 out of Afghan's 33 provinces between May 2008 and November 2014. Full statistical details of UK drone operations in Afghanistan compiled from

Freedom of Information requests and other public information is available here. The MoD stresses that the final UK drone mission in Afghanistan was completed on 15 November 2014.

The geographical distribution of the UK strikes is wider than we suspected – covering the whole southern half of Afghanistan as well as Eastern provinces. For the vast majority of the time there were five or less Reapers being flown. It was only in July 2014, just four months before the last UK drone flight, that the additional five Reapers, ordered in December 2010, came into operation.



Province	Map #	Province	Map #	Province	Map #
Badakhshan	30	Jowzjan	8	Nuristan	31
Badghis	4	Kabul	22	Paktia	24
Baghlan	19	Kandahar	12	Paktika	25
Balkh	13	Kapisa	29	Panjshir	28
Bamyan	15	Khost	26	Parwan	20
Daykundi	10	Kunar	34	Samangan	14
Farah	2	Kunduz	18	Sar-e Pol	9
Faryab	5	Laghman	32	Takhar	27
Ghazni	16	Logar	23	Urozgan	11
Ghor	6	Maidan Wardak	21	Zabul	17
Helmand	7	Nangarhar	33		
Herat	1	Nimruz	3		

Given the relatively small number of UK armed drones that were in operation, compared to the much larger US drone fleet, we expected that the UK’s Reaper missions would be either totally or mainly within Helmand Province where UK forces were deployed. As ministers have repeatedly insisted, UK armed Reapers are a “force protection capability.” We certainly did not expect to see, for instance, UK Reapers had undertaken strikes in provinces adjacent to Waziristan, scene of much covert US drone activity.

We asked Chris Woods, who has tracked US drone activity for many years and is the author of Sudden Justice, a new book on the drone wars to be released later this month, what he thought of this new information. Chris told us:

“Britain’s Reapers were not just tasked to British areas of responsibility but were available for missions across ISAF’s entire area of command. So it’s perhaps not surprising to see that the Reapers operated in practically every province in which there were heavy concentrations of Taliban. That said it’s particularly interesting to see that the RAF’s Reapers were operating so close to Waziristan at times – since strikes in those regions of Afghanistan have always been attributed to the US until now.”

To be clear the UK have always insisted that (up until were deployed to the Middle East for operation in Iraq and Syria) UK Reapers only operated in support of coalition ground forces in Afghanistan.

We will continue to pursue further information on the day-to-day use of armed drones in order to get a better understanding of how these weapon systems are changing the nature of warfare.