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Dear Mr Cole

Thank you for your letter of 12 February to Philip Hammond MP about the operation of Remotely Piloted Air Systems (RPAS). Your letter has been passed to Air Command to reply.

I can confirm that only UK personnel have operated UK Reaper RPAS outside of the launch and recovery element. This is also true for occasions when the UK has utilised a USAF Reaper RPAS; UK pilots will have flown the entire mission. I stress that USAF personnel have not operated UK Reaper RPAS on operations outside of the Launch and Recovery element.

The UK Reaper RPAS weapon release figures previously provided include missions involving UK-owned RPAS and UK use of US-owned RPAS. UK pilots are subject to UK rules of engagement for all weapon releases when operating a UK or US platform.

In your letter you expressed concern about a response by Philip Hammond MP on Monday 10 February during a debate in the House of Commons on Afghanistan and that it contradicted a written reply by Anna Soubry MP to a Parliamentary Question. The following explains how the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) tasks Reaper RPAS operations which will put Mr Hammond's reply in context. All UK Reaper RPAS missions in Afghanistan are flown in support of ISAF. ISAF Reaper RPAS missions are tasked from a combined pool of available assets from both the UK and US Reaper RPAS Squadrons. In the event of no UK Reaper RPAS being available to the UK, the UK can use a USAF Reaper RPAS for a UK-tasked mission and it will be flown by UK crews



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I hope this explains the position.

Yours sincerely

[Original signed]

Elaine Kerr
DRes Sec 3



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