



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

*POLOPS 10a
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Mr Chris Cole
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Our reference: 26112009-155918-002

Dear Mr Cole ,

Request for Information

Thank you for your correspondence dated 26 November 2009 regarding the number and use of British Reaper Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) which is considered to be a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. I am responding on behalf of the information holders.

You asked:

1) We would be very grateful if you would inform us of the number of Reaper Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) that the UK currently has in service and the number of Reapers currently on order from General Atomics or that the UK is planning to acquire over the next 12 months.

2) A FoI response dated 20th August 2008, published on the MoD website, states that Reaper UAVs have launched their weapons on seven occasions up until 19th July 2008. Can you confirm for us the number of times, since 19th July 2008 that British Reaper UAVs have launched their weapons and detail the circumstances surrounding the firing of weapons by British Reapers.

To answer your first query. As you may be aware the MQ-9 Reaper UAV is employed for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions. In total six Reaper UAVs have been ordered from the US Government. Of these four Reaper UAVs have been delivered into service, one of which was lost on operations in April 2008. The final two Reaper UAVs are due to be delivered in 2010.

To address your second query, as of 26 November 2009, RAF Reaper aircraft have flown over 6400 hours on ISR operations and released a total of 63 weapons. Although its primary role remains ISR, since May 2008 Reaper aircraft have also had the ability to employ air to ground weapons. However, Reaper is not an autonomous system and is unable to engage targets unless it is commanded to do so by the aircrew. The rules of engagement used for Reaper weapon releases are identical to those used for manned combat aircraft and strict measures are enforced to minimise the risk of collateral damage, including civilian casualties.

However, the information on the rules of engagement falls within the scope of a Freedom of Information qualified exemption. This is Section 26 Defence - Information that is likely to prejudice defence of the British Isles or any colony, or the capability, effectiveness, or security of the Armed Forces or any forces operating with them. To release this information could unnecessarily place UK and international forces in Afghanistan at additional risk and provide details to enemy forces on the limits on the use of kinetic force by UK and coalition personnel in Afghanistan.

If you are unhappy with this response or any part of our handling of your FOI requests then you may apply for an internal review by contacting the Director of Information Exploitation, 6th Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail: Info-XD@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within two calendar months of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you are still unhappy following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>.

Yours sincerely,

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