



Ministry
of Defence

J9 Secretariat
Permanent Joint Headquarters
(United Kingdom)
Northwood Headquarters
Sandy Lane
NORTHWOOD
Middlesex
HA6 3HP

Email: UKStratCom-PJHQ-J9-FOI-Mbx@mod.gov.uk

Ref: FOI2021/03698

27 April 2021

Mr Chris Cole
chris@dronewars.net

Dear Mr Cole,

We refer to your request dated 06 April 2021, which asked for the following information:

“1) For each month between January 2021 and March 2021 and broken down between i) Reaper and ii) Typhoon

- a) the total number of missions undertaken by these aircraft on Operation Shader;*
- b) the number of those missions entering Syria;*
- c) the number of those missions entering Iraq?*

2) For each month between January 2021 and March 2021, the number of sorties with weapons released by a) Reaper and b) Typhoon and broken down between Iraq and Syria?

3) For each month between January 2021 and March 2021, the number and type of weapons released by a) Reapers, and b) Typhoon, broken down between Iraq and Syria?

4) The number of UK weapon release events in a) Iraq and b) Syria per month from January 2021 and March 2021, broken down between Reaper and Typhoon?

5) Please can you tell me, for each month between January 2021 and March 2021, how many hours have UK a) Reaper and b) Typhoon flown on Operation Shader?

6) Please can you confirm if RAF Reapers flew operations outside of Operations Shader between January 2021 and March 2021? If so please can you let me know where these missions occurred? If this request is refused under S.26 and S.27 as previously, please can you let me know how many missions occurred in this timeframe without locational details as I cannot see how such details would cause prejudice under S.26 and S.27.

7) Finally, please can you confirm, as you have done previously (FOI2018/12155), the geographical location by region of the UK's Reaper fleet (i.e. the UK, the US or the Middle East)”

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

A search for the information requested has been completed by the Ministry of Defence and releasable data in answer to your questions 1-5 and 7 can be found at annex A.

The information you requested in your question 6 falls within the scope of the qualified exemption provided for at Sections 26 (Defence) of the FOIA and has therefore been withheld.

Section 26 is a qualified exemption and subject to a public interest test, which means that the information requested can only be withheld if the public interest in doing so outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

Section 26(1)(b) has been applied to question 6 regarding information on REAPER operations outside of SHADER as this information would put sensitive and protected individuals on operations at risk, providing the adversary with an advantage. The information would prejudice the future security of relevant forces by providing adversaries with greater understanding of the operational profile of REAPER.

Section 27 (International Relations) has also been applied, as established diplomatic relationships would be undermined, putting UK interests abroad at risk.

The balance of public interest was found to be in favour of withholding the information given that, overall, the public interest is best served in not releasing additional details that would prejudice the security of UK personnel serving abroad and which would provide advantage to our adversaries. For these reasons I have set the level of prejudice against release of the exempted information at the higher level of “would” rather than “would be likely to”. This balance remains in favour of withholding the information when the question is refined to the number of potential missions.

The data contained in this statement is believed to be complete and correct at the time of issue. The MOD operational activity databases are frequently reviewed, and any errors and omissions are corrected. It is therefore possible that future statements might not match this statement exactly. The MOD regrets any difficulty that this may cause but emphasises that our aim is to ensure that our records are as complete and correct as possible.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly 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. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely,

PJHQ J9 FOI Secretariat

Annex:

A. Operation SHADER Data Tables – January to March 2021

Annex A - Operation SHADER Data Tables – January to March 2021

1. For each month between January 2021 and March 2021 and broken down between i) Reaper and ii) Typhoon:

a. The total number of missions undertaken by these aircraft on Operation Shader.

Sum of mission count (total):		Aircraft Type		Grand Total
Year	Month	(i) Reaper	(ii) Typhoon	
2021	January	48	44	92
	February	35	47	82
	March	40	47	87
Grand Total:		123	138	261

b. The number of missions entering Syria

Sum of mission count (total):		Aircraft Type		Grand Total
Year	Month	(i) Reaper	(ii) Typhoon	
2021	January	-	31	31
	February	12	36	48
	March	12	44	56
Grand Total:		24	111	135

c. The number of missions entering Iraq

Sum of mission count (total):		Aircraft Type		Grand Total
Year	Month	(i) Reaper	(ii) Typhoon	
2021	January	48	13	61
	February	23	11	34
	March	28	3	31
Grand Total:		99	27	126

The Air & Space Warfare Centre (ASWC) records are focused on sorties flown and weapons released. The ASWC does not record all cases of entry into Syrian airspace by RAF Reaper and Typhoon aircraft. For Reaper, all missions recorded as entering Syrian airspace will have transited through (and possibly operated in) Iraq due to the basing location of this platform. For Typhoon ASWC records some Syrian airspace entry cases and these might be for (a) transit to Iraqi airspace or (b) to reach their area of operation in Syria. The ASWC records all cases of weapon release in Iraq and Syria so any sortie/mission involving weapon release in Syria will be recorded as having entered Syrian airspace.

The second table lists all recorded cases of Syrian airspace entry cases (transit through Syria to Iraqi airspace and operating in Syrian airspace). The remainder of the missions flown are listed as limited to Iraqi airspace (third table). Some of these might have transited Syrian airspace to reach Iraqi airspace but we have no record of it. Weapon release locations are invariably recorded, i.e. all weapons releases in Iraq and Syria are specifically recorded as such.

2. For each month between January 2021 and March 2021, the number of sorties with weapons released by a) Reaper and b) Typhoon and broken down between Iraq and Syria?

a. Iraq

Sum of mission count (total):		Aircraft Type		Grand Total
Year	Month	(a) Reaper	(b) Typhoon	
2021	January	0	2	2
	February	0	2	2
	March	0	19	19
Grand Total:		0	23	23

b. Syria – Nil recorded

3. For each month between January 2021 and March 2021, the number and type of weapons released by a) Reapers, and b) Typhoon, broken down between Iraq and Syria?

a. Iraq

Number of Weapons Released:		Aircraft Type		Grand Total
Year	Month	(a) Typhoon		
		Storm Shadow	PWIV	
2021	January	0	4	4
	February	0	8	8
	March	10	42	52
Grand Total:		10	54	64

b. Syria – Nil recorded

4. The number of UK weapon release events in a) Iraq and b) Syria per month from January 2021 and March 2021, broken down between Reaper and Typhoon?

a. Iraq

Number of Weapon Release Events:		Aircraft Type		Grand Total
Year	Month	Typhoon		
		Storm Shadow	PWIV	
2021	January	0	2	2
	February	0	8	8
	March	10	28	38

Grand Total:	10	38	48
--------------	----	----	----

b. Syria – Nil recorded

5. Please can you tell me, for each month between January 2021 and March 2021, how many hours have UK a) Reaper and b) Typhoon flown on Operation Shader?

Flying hours by aircraft type (rounded to the nearest hour)		Aircraft type:		Grand Total
Year	Month	(a) Reaper	(b) Typhoon	
2021	January	673	528	1201
	February	468	569	1037
	March	490	568	1058
Grand Total:		1631	1665	3296

The variance in Reaper flying hours is due to aircraft serviceability, crew availability, and weather.

6. Please can you confirm if RAF Reapers flew operations outside of Operations Shader between January 2021 and March 2021? If so please can you let me know where these missions occurred? If this request is refused under S.26 and S.27 as previously, please can you let me know how many missions occurred in this timeframe without locational details as I cannot see how such details would cause prejudice under S.26 and S.27.

Following a public interest test, details of sorties flown outside of Operation SHADER is withheld under FOI Exemption Section 26 (Defence). If released, the information would put sensitive and protected individuals on operations at risk, providing the adversary with an advantage. The information is also withheld under Section 27 (International Relations) as established diplomatic relationships would be undermined, putting UK interests abroad at risk. This balance remains in favour of withholding the information when the question is refined to the number of potential missions.

7. Finally, please can you confirm, as you have done previously (FOI2018/12155), the geographical location by region of the UK's Reaper fleet (i.e. the UK, the US or the Middle East)

The UK Reaper fleet is currently based in the Middle East region.