

A Century of US Drone Crashes

Detailed Data Regarding Drone Crashes

By [Drone Wars UK](#)

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[Drone Wars UK](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

This week the USAF released [an accident investigation report into the crash of a US Predator drone in Afghanistan](#) in April 2012. This crash brings the number of drone crashes in our updated database to 100 ([see full database here](#)) and so we thought it a good time to do some data crunching.

Our database primarily contains details of crashes of Class 2 and Class 3 UAVs (i.e. medium and large drones – [see here for explanation of drone class and size](#)) since January 2007. However there are a few occasions when small drone crashes have been included for some notable reasons (i.e. crashed with another aircraft). We continue to maintain this database as, although safety and reliability is a key issue in the growing use of unmanned aerial vehicles, nobody appears to be publicly compiling drone crash information. We are not claiming that our database is complete. Given the secretive nature of drone operations and development, it is highly likely that other drone crashes have occurred and not been publicly reported.

So far this year we have recorded 14 crashes involving 15 drones (yep, [one crash involved two drones colliding](#)). However it should be noted that one key source for our data – the [USAF Aerospace Mishap Website](#) – has not been updated since December 2011 and this may well have impacted upon the figures (see Table 1: Drone Crashes by Year).

Year	Crashes	Type of UAV	Where
2012 (Till 1st Sep)	14	3 Predators 1 Gray Eagle 7 Unknown 1 BAMS (Global Hawk) 1 Schiebel S-100 1 Searcher 1 Heron	2 US 1 Lebanon 5 Afghanistan 2 Pakistan 1 South Korea 1 India 1 Somalia 1 Israel
2011	25	12 Predators 3 Reapers 2 Unknown 1 Sentinel 2 Heron 1 Pterodactyl 1 Global Hawk 1 Shadow 1 DARPA HTV 1 Global Observer	9 Afghanistan 1 Seychelles 1 Iran 2 Turkey 5 US 4 Djibouti 1 Yemen 1 Pakistan 1 China
2010	19	11 Predators 1 Orbiter 3 Unknown 1 Skylark 1 Reaper 1 A160T 1 Heron	7 US 7 Afghanistan 1 Palestine 1 Iraq 1 Canada 1 Pakistan 1 Italy
2009	21	11 Predator 1 Hunter 1 Luna 1 Unknown (Predator?) 3 Reaper 1 Gnat 1 Unknown (Falco?) 1 Spewer 1 Hermes	13 Afghanistan 1 Wales 4 Iraq 3 US
2008	13	9 Predators 1 Reaper 2 Spewer 1 Unknown	8 Iraq 5 Afghanistan
2007	8	7 Predator 1 A160T	5 Iraq 1 Afghanistan 1 US 1 ?

Table 1: Drone Crashes by Year

Unsurprisingly the largest number of crashes in our database (40) have occurred in Afghanistan (see Table 2: Drone Crashes by Country). Of these, 29 have been USAF drones, 5 have been acknowledged by NATO ISAF but no further details have given; while 3 have been Canadian with one each lost by UK, German and Australia (see Table 3: Drone Crashes in Afghanistan).

	Country	Drone crashes since 2007
1.	Afghanistan	40
2.	Iraq	18
3.	USA	18
4.	Djibouti	4
5.	Pakistan	4
6.	Turkey	2
7.	Canada	1
8.	China	1
9.	India	1
10.	Iran	1
11.	Israel	1
12.	Italy	1
13.	Lebanon	1
14.	Palestine	1
15.	Seychelles	1
16.	Somalia	1
17.	South Korea	1
18.	Wales	1
19.	Yemen	1
20.	?	1
Total		100

Table 2: Drone Crash by Country

It may surprise some to find that as many drones – 18 – have crashed in the US since January 2007 as in Iraq. In 2010 alone, seven drones crashed in the US – one was a small [Mexican surveillance drone that crashed into a house in Texas](#), the other 6 crashed during military training flights or military company test flights. Given the fact that earlier this year the US government mandated that US skies should be opened up to civil drones by 2015, this figure is only likely to increase. No drone crashes have been reported in Iraq since 2010.

The next countries with the highest level of drone crashes on their territory is Pakistan and Djibouti, both with four drone crashes since 2007. Two of the drones that crashed in Pakistan were operated by the Pakistan military (probably [Jasoos](#), but not confirmed) with the other two crashes reported by Pakistan military and intelligence officials to be US drones. It is certainly possible that other US drones have crashed in Pakistan and not been reported. One entry on the USAF Aerospace Mishaps website in August 2007 records the crash of a Predator drone being operated by US Special Forces but gives no more details.

Drone Crashes in Afghanistan	
US	29
Unknown ISAF	5
Canada	3
Australia	1
Germany	1
UK	1
Total	40

Table 3: Drone Crashes in Afghanistan

Four US Predator drones have crashed in Djibouti, all in 2011. Djibouti is reported to be the main base from where US drone attacks in Yemen are launched. In Feb 2011, AFP reported a US drone crash in Yemen itself. According to the report, [Predator drone wreckage was recovered by the local police but then hijacked by Al-Qaeda gunmen](#).

Drones just don't crash in war zones, as our data shows . India, Italy, South Korea, Wales and China have also seen such crashes, signifying the growing proliferation of such technology. The crash in South Korea, for example, killed [a Finnish engineer, working for an Austrian company demonstrating a drone to the South Korean military](#).

However the data also shows that two countries continue to dominate the production and export of drones: USA and Israel (see Table 4: Drone Crashes by Manufacturer). Out of the 101 drones that have crashed, 71 were known to have been US drones and 9 were known to have been Israeli.

Both in US and in Europe corporate interests continue to pressurize governments to open up civilian airspace to unmanned systems. Without a real improvement in reliability and safety however, legislators should remain sceptical, else we really will be living in the Century of drone crashes.

Manufacturer	Drone	Number crashed	Manufacturing country
General Atomics	Predator	53	USA
General Atomics	Reaper	8	USA
Israel Aerospace Industries	Heron	4	Israel
SAGEM	Sperwer	3	France
Northrop Grumman	Global Hawk / BAMS	2	USA
Boeing	A 160	2	USA
General Atomics	Gray Eagle	1	USA
Schiebel	Schiebel S-100	1	Austria
Israel Aerospace Industries	Searcher II	1	Israel
Lockheed Martin	Sentinel	1	USA
Chengdu Aircraft Industry	Pterodactyl	1	China
AAI	Shadow	1	USA
DARPA	DARPA HTV	1	USA
Aerovironment	Global Observer	1	USA
Aeronautics Defense Systems	Orbiter	1	Israel
Elbit Systems	Skylark	1	Israel
Israel Aerospace Industries	Hunter	1	Israel
EMT Penzburg	Luna	1	Germany
General Atomics	Gnat	1	US
Elbit Systems	Hermes	1	Israel
	Unknown	15	

Table 4: Drone Crash by Manufacturer

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