

Britain's Drone War Arsenal

MoD media briefing on British drone operations

By [Global Research](#)

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The Ministry of Defence's 'Top Level Messages' briefing for January 2012 contains several items on recent UK drone operation and developments. While there are no new or dramatic revelations it's an interesting summary of the UK's current drone activities.

The UK Reaper Remotely Piloted Air System (RPAS) programme has now provided over 30,000 hours of high quality, persistent armed Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) support to UK and ISAF forces in Afghanistan.

Peter Luff MP, Minister of Defence Equipment, Support and Technology, announced in December that the MOD had placed a £40 million contract for aerospace research with BAE Systems. The four-year Future Combat Air System (FCAS) Focused Research contract aims to sustain and develop the UK's critical technology and skills in this field. It will inform the MOD's unmanned air system strategy over the coming decades to ensure that the best use is made of these new technologies.

The Hermes 450 unmanned air system has provided over 50,000 hours of support to UK Forces since it entered service in 2007.

On 6 December 2010, the Prime Minister announced that funding will be made available to enable further increases in the UK Reaper RPAS capability. RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire has been selected as the preferred location for the basing of a key element of this additional capability, the Ground Control Stations. The decision to base the Ground Control Stations at RAF Waddington was informed by the fact that the Station is the RAF's ISTAR Hub with the required flying supervisory chain of command. Work has already commenced at RAF Waddington in preparation for the stand up of XIII Squadron, the arrival of the UK Reaper Ground Control Stations and associated equipment in 2012.

At this stage there are no plans to base or fly UK Reaper aircraft in the UK as the aircraft are specifically required to be based in Afghanistan to support UK and Coalition Forces under Urgent Operational Requirement. However, in the future, as the Ground Control Stations will be based within the UK, RAF crews will be able to fly the UK Reaper aircraft remotely from the UK.

The MOD intends to begin relocating 39 Squadron from Creech Air Force Base (AFB), Nevada to RAF Waddington once XIII Squadron is operational. The relocation of 39 Squadron will be phased to ensure there is no disruption to UK Reaper support to current operations. While there are a range of benefits of being collocated with the USAF at Creech AFB, the manpower requirements of 2 squadrons (39 and XIII Squadrons) will require qualified crews to be available for additional tours of duty on Reaper to reduce.

While the MoD is briefing journalists with selected information about UK drone operations,

we'd really like them to answer our questions and Freedom of Information requests on the circumstances of the more than 200 UK drone strikes in Afghanistan.

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