

REPRIEVE

SUBMISSIONS TO THE APPG INQUIRY INTO THE USE OF ARMED DRONES: WORKING WITH PARTNERS

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
I. UK COMPLICITY IN THE US DRONE PROGRAMME	4
A. British bases provide the US drone programme with intelligence and operational support	5
B. British “boots on the ground” help drone strikes find their targets	11
C. British pilots fly American drones	13
D. Britain’s legal basis for lethal operations has crept toward the US position	14
II. CONCLUSION	15
III. RECOMMENDATIONS	15
ANNEX A – GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS	17
ANNEX B – ANATOMY OF A US DRONE STRIKE	18

REPRIEVE

INTRODUCTION

Reprieve welcomes the APPG's inquiry into the British Government's work with partners in the use of armed drones. The inquiry comes at a pivotal moment for the US drone programme and Britain's participation.

As well as ramping up the number of drone strikes taken by US forces, President Trump has indicated a willingness to dramatically widen the scope of such operations, even calling for the killing of terror suspects' families. The UK's participation in the programme could lead to the unlawful killing of civilians. The UK needs appropriate safeguards to ensure that its intelligence is not misused to commit grave human rights abuses.

Unfortunately, UK policy and practice in this area is currently shrouded in secrecy, hindering efforts by Parliament and the public to ensure our overseas actions reflect our laws and values.

At the same time, the UK Government's newly disclosed legal rationale for participating in these activities leaves major questions unanswered.

This submission summarises the extent of the UK's involvement in the US drone programme; highlights areas where UK cooperation could risk enabling grave abuses; and makes practical policy recommendations to mitigate these risks.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission highlights four areas where UK involvement in the US drone programme warrants further parliamentary and public scrutiny:

- (i) **British bases provide the US drone programme with intelligence and operational support.** This section demonstrates that the UK is a key link in the US drone programme's "kill chain". It shows how UK sites are critical to the drone programme's infrastructure. It highlights how GCHQ helps locate targets for US drone strikes, and sets out the roles played by three separate UK military bases in targeting and assisting in these operations. It also shows how UK involvement goes beyond surveillance and directly enables lethal drone strikes.
- (ii) **British "boots on the ground" help drone strikes find their targets.** This section highlights how British personnel on the ground in countries like Yemen provide vital "human intelligence" to help the US target deadly strikes. It presents evidence that the US finds UK agents "highly cooperative" in carrying out such strikes, and describes the active role played by the British security services in mentoring US "targeting teams".
- (iii) **British pilots fly American drones.** This section outlines how UK officers within US military bases "sit in the same seats" as US pilots in carrying out lethal strikes. It also shows how these pilots may not be subject to the UK's rules of engagement when involved in such operations, instead abiding by the (far less stringent) US minimum standards. It also shows how there is little to no transparency about these pilots' operations, to the point where they may be actively involved in conflicts where the Parliament has explicitly ruled out UK involvement.
- (iv) **Britain's legal basis for lethal operations has crept toward the US position.** This section notes with concern that the UK's newly published legal rationale for the use of lethal action in non-war zones – announced in January 2017 shortly after President Trump's election – leaves major questions unanswered. It also notes how this rationale takes the UK's legal position closer to the US's controversial stance on the concept of "imminence".

The submission then lays out four key recommendations designed to ensure UK policy and practice complies with British laws and values:

- (v) **Publish the guidance provided to UK personnel involved in US drone strikes:** There is no reason why the Government should not publish the guidance used when providing intelligence and operational support to the US drone programme. Releasing this guidance would not reveal details of individual strikes. It would

REPRIEVE

allow greater clarity on UK activities and permit Parliament and the public to properly scrutinise Government action.

- (vi) **Establish proper systems of parliamentary and public scrutiny:** A sensible system should be established for MPs to hold the UK Government accountable for its involvement in the US drone programme. This should involve regular reports to Ministers before Parliament's Defence and Foreign Affairs Committees, both in person and in writing.
- (vii) **Confirm senior sign-off for targeting programmes:** Targeting programmes which present the risk that the UK could enable unlawful killing should require final "triple lock" sign off by the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, and Defence Secretary.
- (viii) **Fill the gaping holes in the UK's legal basis for lethal action in non-war zones:** The Attorney General should present a detailed clarification of the unresolved questions about the UK's legal basis and disclose the transparency and accountability mechanisms the UK has in place.

I. UK COMPLICITY IN THE US DRONE PROGRAMME

1. The US drone programme is an unaccountable, opaque, counter-productive global assassination programme. Conservative estimates indicate the programme has killed up to 800 civilians—far above the maximum of 116 casualties announced by the US Government in 2016.¹ Reprieve investigations reveal that for 41 people targeted by the programme, 1,147 individuals have been killed.² These include civilians, like the 76 children who were killed in Pakistan in an attempt to strike Al-Qaeda’s no.2 at the time, Ayman Al-Zawahiri.³
2. Reprieve investigations in Yemen reveal that the constant buzzing causes entire communities to suffer psychological trauma, such as post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴ Children in affected communities have said they prefer grey skies because it means the drones do not fly.⁵
3. During his election campaign, Donald Trump called for the death of the families of terror suspects.⁶ He is the only sitting President in the history of the United States to have advocated the use of torture—a crime under international law. His ill-fated raid on a village in Yemen in late January 2017 killed at least 23 civilians, in evidence that his disregard for the law has quickly translated into policy.⁷
4. Most recently, President Trump unilaterally declared parts of Yemen, “areas of active hostilities”, negating the meagre constraints the Obama administration placed on the programme.⁸ This change in policy has led to a drastic increase in the number of strikes, which have resulted in civilian deaths in Yemen including two children under the age of 15. In his first 78 days of being President, Trump has carried out over 70 strikes.⁹ If he continues at this pace he will have carried out over eight times more strikes than Obama in all of 2016.
12. The UK plays a key role in America’s secret strikes in countries with which it is not at war, such as Yemen and Pakistan. The UK’s main contribution is in providing intelligence used to identify and locate targets for a strike. Without such assistance, the US drone programme could not operate.
13. The UK shares troves of intelligence with the US and allows the US to use RAF bases on UK soil. GCHQ assigns targets to surveillance programmes used to support drone strikes. The UK runs intelligence operations on the ground in support of US drone strikes. UK personnel are embedded in the US military and have fired weapons from US drones.
14. In the 15 years since the first US drone strike, the UK has quietly aligned itself ever more closely with the US legal and policy position.¹⁰ The UK has recently announced that it interprets international law as allowing lethal action if a threat is “imminent” using the US definition of imminence. However, the legality of this position under international law and domestic UK law remains unclear. This means UK personnel are operating under a cloud of legal uncertainty.

¹ <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2016-07-01/obama-drone-casualty-numbers-a-fraction-of-those-recorded-by-the-bureau>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/nov/24/-sp-us-drone-strikes-kill-1147>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.channel4.com/news/drone-attacks-traumatising-a-generation-of-children>

⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/10/saddest-words-congress-briefing-drone-strikes/354548/>

⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-reiterates-desire-to-murder-terrorists-families-a6912496.html>

⁷ <https://theintercept.com/2017/03/09/women-and-children-in-yemeni-village-recall-horror-of-trumps-highly-successful-seal-raid/>

⁸ https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/12/us/politics/trump-loosen-counterterrorism-rules.html?rref=collection%2Fnewseventcollection%2Fdonald-trump-white-house&_r=0. The Presidential Policy Guidance, which provides that there should be “near certainty” that the target of the strike is present and “near certainty” that there be no civilian casualties, only applies outside of areas of active hostilities.

⁹ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-yemen-strikes-idUKKBN1751XD?il=0>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/attorney-generals-speech-at-the-international-institute-for-strategic-studies>

15. Without transparency, the UK's position cannot be robustly tested to ensure it is compliant with UK law and the UK's international obligations. The UK needs to come clean on the extent of its involvement in the US drone programme and put in place sufficient safeguards to ensure its assistance is not misused.

A. British bases provide the US drone programme with intelligence and operational support

16. The US uses British intelligence and RAF bases to carry out drone strikes. The UK assigns targets to surveillance programmes used in support of drone strikes. The UK seems to be aware that its actions may lead to a drone strike.
17. Evidence of UK involvement in US drone strikes first came to light in 2010. Quoting anonymous sources, a *Sunday Times* piece claimed GCHQ was assisting the US in locating targets in Pakistan thanks to the agency's "better intercept network".¹¹ This claim led Noor Khan, who lost his father in a US drone strike on a tribal gathering in 2011, to issue a judicial review claim of the UK's policy of sharing intelligence with the US for use in drone strikes. Senior judges refused to decide the merits of Noor's case on grounds that to do so would offend the US.¹² Later revelations have confirmed that Noor and the UK public were right to be concerned about the UK's involvement in the drone programme.
18. According to UK documents seen by *The Guardian*, the UK has been working closely with the US on a programme called OVERHEAD, which collects intelligence from satellites, radio and phone communications.¹³ In an internal newsletter for GCHQ staff, OVERHEAD is credited with a strike that took place in Yemen on 30 March 2012, confirming the agency's involvement in that country. According to The Bureau of Investigative Journalism this strike injured six children. It does not appear that the GCHQ document informed staff that children were wounded in the strike. It seems the update only referred to two alleged militants being killed.
19. The article also refers to secret legal guidance from military lawyers from 2009. They advised GCHQ staff that sharing intelligence with the US that might lead to strikes in Pakistan may be unlawful because the US was operating under looser rules than the UK. However, it appears this advice was not followed. An internal GCHQ document from June 2009, indicates that the UK may have adopted the US legal position and viewed Pakistan to be an active war zone, contrary to widely accepted view that Pakistan was not a war zone. GCHQ seems to have taken this step without consulting or informing Parliament. This raises serious concerns that the UK is adopting legal positions and policies in secret without necessary Parliamentary oversight.
20. Another document, revealed to the public, indicates that GCHQ "initiated OH [OVERHEAD] tasking" to locate cell-phone towers in Yemen.¹⁴ The document further claims:

"Results have so far provided voice, SMS and at least one DNR hit. Collection has contributed highly to CT's [Counter-Terrorism] work on this target."

This document reveals two key aspects of the drone programme.

21. First, it confirms that OVERHEAD supports counter-terrorism actions in Yemen, one of the countries suffering from repeated drone strikes. This means OVERHEAD is one of the key programmes supporting drone strikes. Recently, President Trump has drastically ramped up the programme in the country, resulting in large numbers of civilian casualties. This raises serious and urgent questions about what safeguards are in place to ensure the UK is not contributing to civilian deaths in Yemen.

¹¹ http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/Defence/article353492.ece

¹² http://www.reprive.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2014_01_20_PUB-Noor-Khan-Court-of-Appeal-judgement.pdf

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/24/gchq-documents-raise-fresh-questions-over-uk-complicity-in-us-drone-strikes>

¹⁴ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089509/APPARITION-becomes-a-reality-new-corporate-VSAT.pdf>

REPRIEVE

22. Second, it highlights GCHQ's ability to use a programme that starts a chain reaction that can result in drone strikes. In light of *The Guardian's* reporting highlighted above, it is inconceivable that GCHQ is unaware that the intelligence provided in this way is being used to support drone strikes.
23. More generally, Snowden's disclosures have shed a light on the nature of the intelligence sharing relationship between the US and the UK. GCHQ collects more metadata—information about communications such as who when a call is placed, where and between which numbers—than the NSA.¹⁵ Former NSA Director Michael Hayden has candidly claimed the US kills “based on metadata.”¹⁶ Therefore, GCHQ's assistance feeds directly into the drone programme.
24. In addition to the above, the UK has allowed the US to use a number of bases on UK soil, including:
 - i. RAF Menwith Hill
 - ii. RAF Croughton
 - iii. RAF Molesworth

Each of these play a critical role in the US drone programme.

1. RAF Menwith Hill

25. RAF Menwith Hill plays a key role in the “kill chain”, by providing crucial intelligence that tell the drones where to strike.
26. Within RAF Menwith Hill, the NSA and GCHQ have developed a number of programmes used to locate potential targets for drone strikes. These programmes, code-named GHOSTHUNTER and APPARITION, all fulfil the same purpose: to provide drones with the location of potential targets. According to a number of documents, GCHQ is permitted to use these programmes to assign surveillance targets. Documents also reveal UK personnel are closely integrated into NSA operations on UK territory. This means they may start a chain reaction that could result in a drone strike.
 - (a) UK personnel
27. Documents released by *The Intercept* indicate that RAF Menwith Hill hosts an NSA presence. A PowerPoint slide detailing the location of the NSA's Foreign Satellite Interception (“FORNSAT”) operations lists a site in Harrogate as US facility code-named MOONPENNY.¹⁷ Another document identifies the facility in Harrogate as RAF Menwith Hill.¹⁸
28. According to another document disclosed by *The Intercept* “S2E has not considered whether it would be advisable for 2P integrees at MHS to have NOFORN access for these missions.”¹⁹ S2E is the NSA team with responsibility for the Middle-East and Africa.²⁰ 2P is a reference to “Second Party” signals intelligence partners, and includes the UK.²¹ This document suggests that UK personnel may be integrated in the NSA operation at Menwith Hill. Both NSA and GCHQ personnel operate a number of surveillance programmes at Menwith Hill that are used to locate targets for drone strikes.

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/21/gchq-cables-secret-world-communications-nsa>

¹⁶ <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2014/05/10/we-kill-people-based-metadata/>

¹⁷ <https://edwardsnowden.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/fornsat.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089521/Menwith-satellite-classification-guide.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089493/MHS-Databases-as-of-14-Aug-2008.pdf>

²⁰ https://robert.sesek.com/2014/10/nsa_s_eci_compartments.html

²¹ <https://search.edwardsnowden.com/docs/FY2013ForeignPartnerReview2014-05-13nsadocs>

REPRIEVE

(b) GHOSTHUNTER and APPARITION

29. An internal US document, dated 11 September 2008, refers to a programme code-named GHOSTHUNTER. Developed at Menwith Hill, it is a “a tool that enabled a significant number of capture-kill operations against terrorists.”²² Reporting from *The Intercept* provides details of one such operation.
30. In 2007 intelligence gathered through GHOSTHUNTER was provided to “a secretive special operations unit known as Task Force 11-9, which would have been equipped to conduct a covert raid to kill or capture” the target based in Lebanon.²³ In addition, *The Intercept* has released an NSA document—shared with the UK—that demonstrates how GHOSHUNTER is used in practice.²⁴
31. According to the document, Menwith Hill provided “locational information” after a request received from another NSA facility. It indicates that Menwith Hill “was tipped with a Priority-2 High Value Target (HVT) location request from the Network Analysis Center.” GHOSTHUNTER then located the specific terminal and an operation was launched.
32. The document also indicates that the US raided one location and did not find the target, pointing to the inherent unreliability in this kind of intelligence. Had the US bombed the location it would have missed the target and instead killed individuals who may have been innocent. In countries such as Yemen and Pakistan the US does not have the authority or capacity to conduct raids. Bombing is the preferred option. The risk of killing civilians is therefore far greater.
33. GHOSTHUNTER was a prototype that allowed for the development of another programme called APPARITION. The latter was used to target satellite terminals “believed to be servicing Internet cafés used by high-value counterterrorism (CT) targets” in a number of countries including Pakistan, the country most affected by the US drone programme.²⁵
34. According to a document GCHQ authored in September 2009, information collected through GHOSTHUNTER is used for direct operations.²⁶ The highest priority information is for

“**actionable** requests [...] when the decision has been made between the Network Analysis Centre (NAC) at NSA in liaison with Task Force commanders in-theatre (usually covert) to apprehend a specific target” (emphasis in original).²⁷
35. The cooperation between the NSA and an unnamed Task Force on the ground shows that GHOSTHUNTER is not merely a surveillance tool. It is used to carry out operations. The reference to apprehending a target elides the full extent to which the programme used.
36. Firstly, it is US policy that if a capture cannot be carried out, a killing is legitimate and lawful.²⁸ Therefore if the US decides that a target cannot be captured after GCHQ has tasked it through GHOSTHUNTER, that target will be killed.
37. Second, as highlighted above, GHOSTHUNTER was used in “kill” operations against alleged terrorist targets. Evidence demonstrates that UK forces have used the programme to guide drones to their targets.
38. An extract from a report indicates that following a request by UK Special Forces in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, GHOSTHUNTER was used to locate a specific satellite terminal. Within an hour of the intelligence being collected “British forces in Afghanistan dispatched an MQ-9 Reaper (Predator-B) to the location provided by MHS.”²⁹ This demonstrates that GHOSTHUNTER may be used in support of drone

²² <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089509/APPARITION-becomes-a-reality-new-corporate-VSAT.pdf>

²³ <https://theintercept.com/2016/09/06/nsa-menwith-hill-targeted-killing-surveillance/>

²⁴ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089506/SIGINT-target-package-leads-to-USMC-capture-of.pdf>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089492/Ghosthunter-tasking-process.pdf>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ https://www.justice.gov/oip/foia-library/procedures_for_approving_direct_action_against_terrorist_targets/download

²⁹ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089520/UK-special-forces-Reaper-drone-Jan-Feb-2012.pdf>

REPRIEVE

operations. As such, UK involvement does not limit itself to assisting in surveillance. It is providing intelligence that allows drones to locate and go after their targets.

39. A later document, updated in 2011, indicates that both GHOSTHUNTER and APPARITION are used within RAF Menwith Hill.³⁰ The document, created by GCHQ as the “STRAP 1” classification and the footer demonstrate, indicates

“GHOSTHUNTER (located at MHS [Menwith Hill Station] and SOUNDER [a GCHQ station in Cyprus³¹] is used primarily for higher priority tasking”.³²

40. On the other hand, APPARITION is used for “target development and survey work”.³³ APPARITION operates from two sites in the UK: Menwith Hill and Bude, near Cornwall. These, along with two others outside of the UK, are “the lead collection and processing centres for a number of other collection/acquisition sites”.
41. This demonstrates that UK facilities, whether in the UK or Cyprus, are key to the proper functioning of GHOSTHUNTER and APPARITION. They are part of a network where intelligence is collected, processed and used in support of drone strikes, proving GCHQ’s pivotal role in the process of a drone strike.
42. GCHQ has created guides for its officers on how to use APPARITION and GHOSTHUNTER.³⁴ This reveals that GCHQ is able to use programmes that—according to the US Government—enabled a “significant number of capture-kill operations against [alleged] terrorists” and had authority to assign targets for searching and location.
43. In addition it is clear that the UK has intimate knowledge of how the US prioritises targets. A GCHQ document sets three levels of priority for assigning targets to GHOSTHUNTER and APPARITION.³⁵ One of the lower priorities (“Strategic Geo Support”) indicates that a request for location “is not issued via SOCOM [US Special Operations Command]”.
44. This indicates that SOCOM—the US command responsible for JSOC which carries out some strikes in Yemen—does not usually put in such a request through the lowest priority. The inference, therefore, is that SOCOM uses higher priorities for target tasking. The fact such granular detail appears in a UK document reflects the UK’s intimate knowledge of the US drone programme and how surveillance programmes are used to support it.

(c) GHOSTWolf and other geolocation techniques

45. In addition to GHOSTHUNTER and APPARITION, Menwith Hill appears to house an unnamed technique that is key to locating targets for drone strikes in Yemen. An internal US document, shared with the UK, titled “New Technique Geolocates Targets Active at Yemeni Cafes”, describes a new technique:

“to geolocate targets who are active at internet cafés in Yemen: combine HUMINT [human intelligence] information with networking protocols and passive SIGINT [signals intelligence] collection to obtain target geolocations.”³⁶

46. According to the document, the method came about through collaboration between personnel at Menwith Hill and others within the US counter-terror infrastructure. This includes personnel working on a programme called GHOSTWolf, which

³⁰ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089491/Apparition-Ghosthunter-tasking-info.pdf>

³¹ <https://edwardsnowden.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/cyprus-gchq.pdf> and <https://edwardsnowden.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/fornsat.pdf>

³² <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089491/Apparition-Ghosthunter-tasking-info.pdf>

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089492/Ghosthunter-tasking-process.pdf> and <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089491/Apparition-Ghosthunter-tasking-info.pdf>

³⁵ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089491/Apparition-Ghosthunter-tasking-info.pdf>

³⁶ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3089514/New-technique-geolocates-targets-active-at.pdf>

REPRIEVE

“supports efforts to capture or eliminate key nodes in terrorist networks. GHOSTWolf focuses primarily on providing actionable geolocation intelligence derived from SIGINT to customers and their operational components.”

GHOSTWolf’s focus on “efforts to capture or eliminate” alleged members of terrorist organisations demonstrates that this new technique for geolocation was in part developed with the US assassination programme in mind.

47. The technique is said to have been developed in “late 2009” and resulted in “many targets” having been located to internet cafes, “including targets tasked by several offices at NSA and GCHQ.”³⁷ One of the NSA offices listed in footnote one of the document is “CT”, which is the abbreviation for counter-terrorism, cementing the technique’s role in facilitating drone strikes. The reference to GCHQ in this document, proves the UK is assigning targets to a programme that plays a key role in supporting drone strikes.

48. The document adds:

“the technique enables the identification of tasked and hot-listed targets active at almost 40 different geolocated internet cafés in Sana'a and Shabwah, Yemen.”

49. Shabwah is a province in Yemen that has been affected US drone bombings, some of which have killed civilians. In 2011, a US drone strike targeted Ibrahim al Banna, an alleged member of Al-Qaeda.³⁸ Al Banna was not present and instead the drone killed a 16-year old American citizen.³⁹ In January 2017, the US Treasury placed Al-Banna on a sanctions list, indicating he is still alive five years after the strike.⁴⁰ This strike highlights the unreliability of the intelligence used to carry out strikes.

2. RAF Croughton

50. RAF Croughton is connected to the US’ main drone base in Africa, from which drones strike Yemen and Somalia.

51. RAF Croughton is a base in the UK used by the US that is connected to Camp Lemonnier, a US base in Djibouti which houses drones that bomb Yemen. RAF Croughton is located in Northamptonshire, and since January 1951 has served as a US Air Force communications base. It currently processes approximately one third of all US military communications in Europe.⁴¹ It provides “global strike operations.”⁴² *The Independent* reported that RAF Croughton was at the centre of allegations that the UK had helped spy on Germany’s leader, Angela Merkel.⁴³ The base is a key hub in the US’ global intelligence web.

52. Camp Lemonnier is a United States Naval Expeditionary Base located in Djibouti. It has been described by *The Economist* as “the most important base for drone operations outside the war zone of Afghanistan”, from where Predator drones take off “round the clock” on missions in nearby Yemen and Somalia.⁴⁴

53. On 26 September 2012, the US Defense Information Systems Agency (“DISA”) awarded BT a contract for the supply of an “STM-16 [a fibre-optic communications system] from RAF Croughton, UK to Camp Lemonnier, DJ”.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-airstrike-that-killed-american-teen-in-yemen-raises-legal-ethical-questions/2011/10/20/gIQAdvUY7L_story.html?utm_term=.67d7fa355e6c

³⁹ <https://theintercept.com/2017/01/05/alleged-target-of-drone-strike-that-killed-american-teenager-is-alive-according-to-state-department/>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ <http://usmilitary.about.com/od/airforcebaseprofiles/ss/Croughton.htm>

⁴² <http://www.501csw.usafe.af.mil/units/croughton>

⁴³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/exclusive-raf-croughton-base-sent-secrets-from-merkel-s-phone-straight-to-the-cia-8923401.html>

⁴⁴ <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21565614-america-uses-drones-lot-secret-and-largely-unencumbered-declared-rules-worries>

REPRIEVE

54. Further contract documents, obtained by Reprieve pursuant to a Freedom of Information request to DISA, explain that the purpose of the Contract is the “provision of permanent circuit” with the vendor to provide “extension of telecommunications service”. The “Circuit Demand” states that the “telecommunications provider service shall use different facilities, route, and submarine cable system, terrestrial fiber and path”. The services are required to be provided from 26 October 2012, to continue until 14 October 2017. STM-16 is a fibre-optic communication standard, enabling the passing of information between two points. The “termination locations” are RAF Croughton and Camp Lemonnier.
55. Subsequently, *Computer Weekly* revealed that the “UK connection is part of a US military network that is used to target drone strikes”.⁴⁵ This investigation further indicates:

“BT's 2012 contract to make the UK connection coincided with Camp Lemonnier being upgraded from an operations outpost for US Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) – what used to be known as the war on terror – to an officially designated military base.
56. DISA specified the BT line would be terminated with "DISN" connectors and a specific sort of encryption device called a KG-340. KG-340 encryptors would make the UK connection operate at the top-secret level of classified communications needed for these purposes. The KG-340 was built to specifications of the US National Security Agency (NSA) and uses NSA algorithms, according to details published by SafeNET, which originally manufactured the device.”
57. BT sought to avoid responsibility by claiming it is not aware what the link is used for and that it could be used for anodyne communications such as checking e-mails. Day-to-day telecommunications at Camp Lemonnier have been provided by a local Djiboutian phone company, Djibouti Teleco since 4 February 2011.⁴⁶ This means BT was aware that the link would be used to transfer highly classified information that forms “core communications backbone used by drone operations.”
58. Reprieve raised these issues with the National Contact Point (“NCP”), a UK Government body tasked with overseeing business compliance with human rights guidance.⁴⁷ However, Reprieve’s complaints were rejected on the grounds that they did not show a “specific link” between BT’s services and the strikes in Yemen. In order to show such a link, Reprieve would have had to obtain highly classified documents from the US and UK governments as well as further contractual documentation from BT. The NCP set an impossibly high standard of proof, and its Steering Committee criticised it for doing so. The burden of transparency is on governments and their complicit businesses, not on human rights charities.

3. RAF Molesworth

59. RAF Molesworth houses intelligence personnel who analyse intelligence coming from drone video feeds. It is a US facility in the UK located just over 30 miles from Cambridge. Evidence from multiple job advertisements demonstrate that the facility is used for intelligence analysis.
60. Reprieve investigations indicate that

“Job adverts and CVs identified from publicly-available sources show that the US Air Force has employed a “MQ-9 REAPER [drone] ISR Mission Intelligence Coordinator” at RAF Molesworth in Cambridgeshire ; while a Private Military Contractor (PMC) has advertised for an “All Source Analyst – Targeting” to work at the same base.”⁴⁸
61. A third job advert from contractor Leidos—a US defence contractor⁴⁹—for someone to provide “FMV [full motion video] intelligence analysis in support of USAFRICOM...and Special Operations Command Africa,” at

⁴⁵ <http://www.computerweekly.com/news/2240219969/UK-telecoms-infrastructure-used-to-support-controversial-US-drone-operations>

⁴⁶ Kristine M. Sturkie, “NEXCOM Provides Internet Service to Military Members at Camp Lemonnier”, America’s Navy (8 February 2011) http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=58448

⁴⁷ Copy of complaint held on file at Reprieve.

⁴⁸ <http://www.reprieve.org.uk/press/uk-bases-used-targeting-secret-us-drone-war-documents-indicate/>

⁴⁹ <https://www.leidos.com/about/mission>

Molesworth.⁵⁰ AFRICOM is the US military command with geographic responsibility for Somalia and Libya, two countries struck by the US covert drone war.

62. According to *The Guardian*, the “CV of a US military analyst, uploaded to a recruitment site, states that he was an MQ-9 Reaper ISR Mission Intelligence Coordinator at Molesworth.”⁵¹ *The Guardian* adds

“Molesworth has also been recruiting “full motion video analysts” to study footage taken by drones and other surveillance craft in order to identify potential targets. The consultancy giant Booz Allen Hamilton is advertising for a “maritime multi-level targeting analyst” at the same base. The job involves providing “comprehensive assessments... of intelligence data” to “support the client targeting cycle in order to answer intelligence questions and provide recommendations for further action or collection.”⁵²

63. Another recent advertisement on Booz Allen Hamilton’s website specifies a Cambridge, UK-based analyst to

“Serve as a targeting analyst responsible for conducting thorough analysis on traditional and non-traditional targets for the purposes of creating electronic target folders for nation state and non-state actor systems within the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) Area of Operations (AOR).”⁵³

4. Conclusion

64. UK Government assertions that US drones are not flown from the UK miss the point.⁵⁴ As highlighted above a number of RAF bases play crucial roles in the programme, by housing surveillance programmes used in support of drone operations or linking bases used for strikes. These are activities carried out on sovereign British soil, presumably with the UK Government’s approval. The implications are significant for two reasons.

65. First, it means that vast intelligence sharing with the US and the use of UK bases is done in the knowledge that they support US drone strikes in countries such as Yemen and Somalia. The UK is a willing and knowing partner in such operations. Second, they demonstrate that the UK has the capacity to instigate drone strikes by tasking targets to the various surveillance programmes used to locate targets. The UK can start a chain reaction that may result in innocent civilians being killed in Yemen or Pakistan.

B. British “boots on the ground” help drone strikes find their targets

66. British personnel develop human intelligence sources used in support of drone strikes. They mentor partner security forces to identify and locate targets.
67. An in-depth investigation by *VICE News* uncovered evidence that UK personnel were on the ground in Yemen, selecting targets, directing drone strikes and training their Yemeni counterparts. As an example of the importance of Britain’s role, *VICE News* dissected a strike in May 2012 that led to the death of a civilian.
68. According to *VICE News* an agent working for the UK’s Secret Intelligence Service (“SIS”)—colloquially known as MI6—was key to the May 2012 strike. The agent provided crucial information that allowed the CIA to track the target’s vehicle and launch the strike that killed a civilian bystander, Nasser Salim Lakdim.⁵⁵ *VICE News* sources this claim to a former senior CIA official with responsibility strikes in Yemen.⁵⁶ The former official adds that the strike would not have been possible without SIS assistance. According to “Mustafa Alani, a director at the Gulf Research Institute, who has close ties to the Saudi Interior Ministry”, this same agent was crucial to eight other strikes.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ <http://www.reprive.org.uk/press/uk-bases-used-targeting-secret-us-drone-war-documents-indicate/>

⁵¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/29/drones-us-kill-chain-raf-britain>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ <http://www.jobs.net/jobs/booz-allen-hamilton/en-us/job/United-Kingdom/Analyst/J3G5T364PQBH7L3R8NT/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2014-07-02c.202451.h&s=%22Menwith+Hill%22#g202451.q0>

⁵⁵ <https://news.vice.com/article/britains-covert-war-in-yemen-a-vice-news-investigation>

⁵⁶ <https://news.vice.com/article/britains-covert-war-in-yemen-a-vice-news-investigation>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

69. The involvement of an SIS agent in at least nine strikes in Yemen, demonstrates Britain’s deep involvement in America’s secret war in the country. Numerous sources in the *VICE News* piece, describe UK assistance as essential to strikes in Yemen. The former CIA official referred to above stated that the “actionable intelligence” came from the UK. The piece explains that:

“Networks of human intelligence – sources on the ground – were therefore invaluable in locating targets, and this is where the British came in. [...] The Americans valued Britain’s connections and networks of human intelligence.”

An SIS agent identified the target of the drone strike carried out on 30 March 2012, which injured six children.⁵⁸ This strike was referenced in an internal GCHQ newsletter.⁵⁹ A former CIA officer said “[t]he sharing there was very, very extensive... particularly with the Brits. There was very clear coordination and cooperation.”⁶⁰

70. Stephen Seche, former US ambassador to Yemen from 2007 to 2010, revealed that the US had a list of individuals they were targeting. According to *VICE News* “British sources fed into the hunt for targets”. Seche described UK officers as “very collaborative”.
71. UK personnel also closely co-operated with Yemen’s National Security Bureau (“NSB”). The NSB is a Yemeni intelligence service that signs off on strikes proposed by the CIA. UK personnel worked in a joint operations room with the NSB.⁶¹ Personnel included two Special Forces soldiers from the Special Reconnaissance Regiment (“SRR”) soldiers seconded⁶² to SIS and three SIS officers.⁶³ Ali al-Ahmadi, who was head of the NSB from 2012 to 2015 specifically pointed to SIS assistance in mentoring their targeting teams as critical to the success of operations.⁶⁴
72. According to *VICE News*, US use of signature strikes—based on alleged suspicious behaviour—caused disquiet among US officials and allies. In or around 2012, the MOD withdrew support for signature strikes, concerned that the looser criteria for strikes would fail to comply with UK law and policy. But SIS did not cease cooperating. SIS and MOD personnel seconded to SIS remained involved in strikes despite ongoing US use of signature strikes.⁶⁵
73. For years, the UK Government has denied that the UK was involved in drone strikes in Yemen. This penetrating investigation by *VICE News* demonstrates the UK is one of those countries. More recently the FCO appears to have officially confirmed at least part of the story *VICE News* has set out.
74. Responding to a PQ, Parliamentary under-secretary for the FCO Tobias Ellwood MP stated

“Although we have temporarily suspended counter-terrorism capacity building with the Yemeni authorities, we continue to work with regional and international partners to tackle the threat posed by terrorist organisations including AQAP. For operational reasons we cannot comment in detail on this activity.”⁶⁶

75. Ellwood claims that the UK Government was previously involved in “counter-terrorism capacity building”. This may be seen as confirmation of the NSB training described by *VICE News*. In the context of US drone strikes in Yemen, continuing to “work with regional and international partners” is official acknowledgment that the UK plays a role in the US drone programme.

⁵⁸ <https://news.vice.com/article/cash-candy-and-collateral-damage-an-anatomy-of-a-cia-mi6-drone-assassination-1>

⁵⁹ See above

⁶⁰ <https://news.vice.com/article/cash-candy-and-collateral-damage-an-anatomy-of-a-cia-mi6-drone-assassination-1>

⁶¹ <https://news.vice.com/article/britains-covert-war-in-yemen-a-vice-news-investigation>

⁶² Reprieve understands that personnel seconded from the MOD are not considered to be MOD employees. Instead, they are employees of whichever entity they are seconded to (e.g. another government department, foreign state or private company)

⁶³ <https://news.vice.com/article/britains-covert-war-in-yemen-a-vice-news-investigation>

⁶⁴ <https://news.vice.com/article/exclusive-how-the-uk-secretly-helped-direct-lethal-us-drone-strikes-in-yemen>

⁶⁵ <https://news.vice.com/article/britains-covert-war-in-yemen-a-vice-news-investigation>

⁶⁶ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-01-20/61033/>

C. British pilots fly American drones

76. The UK shares personnel with the US. UK personnel are assigned to US units that carry out drone strikes in Pakistan. It is not clear whether the UK Government has oversight of their actions.
77. Embedded personnel have been used to take military action in contravention of explicit Parliamentary prohibition. In summer 2015, Reprieve uncovered evidence that RAF personnel were embedded with US units striking Syria, despite Parliament voting against military action in the country.⁶⁷ The Government claims that such personnel “operate as if they were the host nation’s personnel, under that nation’s chain of command”.⁶⁸ This means UK personnel may be following US rules of engagement and policies while embedded.
78. Reprieve has obtained a copy of a memorandum of understanding between UK and US forces that sets out the roles and missions available to RAF personnel at the US Air Force base in Creech, Nevada. Creech is a US base where drone operations are conducted.⁶⁹
79. The memo states that “the total of UK personnel eligible to fill positions within the 432nd wing will be 66.” The 432nd Wing is based at Creech and operates drones in Afghanistan, alongside other secretive US Air Force units taking strikes over Pakistan.⁷⁰ The document covers a vacancy for a pilot to fly a Predator drone and for seven sensor operators, who engage in surveillance and identifying potential targets, and for 14 pilots for Reaper drones and 14 sensor operators. The postings were for up to three years. The figure of 66 is a maximum and the numbers have fluctuated since 2008, with only a small number there at present.
80. The memo describes the duties of an RAF pilot with the 432nd as: conducts “worldwide operations” that include reconnaissance and
- “determines viable targets and strikes those targets in conjunction with the combined air operations centre rules of engagement but always adhering to the legal framework for the operation in question”.⁷¹
81. This means that embedded RAF pilots are in the same seat as US pilots: they determine whether a strike can take place and press the button when the order is given. This practice coincides, in part, with what is known about UK drone operations in Afghanistan.
82. In an answer to a PQ, Armed Forces minister Mark Francois confirmed that RAF personnel have operated US drones in Afghanistan:
- “The UK Reaper Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) weapon release figures previously provided include missions involving UK-owned remotely piloted aircraft and UK use of US-owned remotely piloted aircraft. RAF personnel are subject to UK rules of engagement for all weapon releases when operating a UK or a US platform.”⁷²
83. As such, the UK has used US drones to carry out strikes in Afghanistan. The tribal areas of Pakistan—where covert US drone strikes take place—share a porous border with Afghanistan. It is not clear on what basis RAF personnel have used US drones in Afghanistan. The fact such strikes are carried out in accordance with UK rules of engagement indicates they are not carried out by embedded personnel. This suggests these pilots are not embedded in line with the MOU above. This raises serious questions as to whether UK

⁶⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/11745689/British-pilots-in-air-strikes-against-Isil-in-Syria-live.html>; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/11747373/Syria-air-strikes-Britain-will-continue-targeting-Isil-despite-lack-of-Parliamentary-approval.html>

⁶⁸ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/11745689/British-pilots-in-air-strikes-against-Isil-in-Syria-live.html>

⁶⁹ <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-drone-pilots-20150617-story.html>

⁷⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/14/cia-drones-pakistan-us-air-force-documentary>

⁷¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jul/22/raf-personnel-assigned-us-unit-carrying-out-drone-strikes-reprieve-charity>

⁷²

https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140224/text/140224w0002.htm#140224w0002.htm_wqn92

REPRIEVE

operated drones may have carried out strikes across the border, in Pakistan. Greater clarity is required on the issue.

84. In response to another FOI request, the MoD confirmed that at least 2 UK personnel were “embedded” with the USAF’s 432nd Wing, based out of Creech.⁷³ For the period “summer 2015”, 65 UK personnel were based out of Creech AB as part of the RAF’s 39 Squadron; for the equivalent period in 2014, 79 UK personnel served at Creech. It has also been confirmed elsewhere that these personnel include those involved in the piloting of drone missions.⁷⁴
85. Further, UK troops have been stationed at Camp Lemonnier, the US base in Djibouti used to carry out drone strikes in Yemen and Somalia. Three UK personnel were stationed there in 2014.⁷⁵ Recently, the Government revealed the UK has a Planning Officer and an Intelligence Officer based in Djibouti.⁷⁶ The presence of these officers, suggests the UK plays an active role in planning US military operations in Somalia.
86. The use of embedded personnel spreads the UK Government footprint to controversial military operations around the world, including covert US drone strikes. However, there is limited transparency and no oversight of the activities carried out by embedded personnel. In December 2015, the Defence Secretary stated that 94 UK service persons were “embedded” in “Coalition HQs”, without specifying how many such coalitions existed and what countries form part of these coalitions.⁷⁷ Such answers are symptomatic of the Government’s disclosure of partial information that does not allow Parliament to exercise its constitutional oversight function.

D. Britain’s legal basis for lethal operations has crept toward the US position

87. The operational alignment described above was matched by a gradual but secret acceptance of the US policy and legal rationale.
88. In November 2014, former head of GCHQ David Omand—supported by the APPG on Drones and Michael Clarke, chair of this inquiry—pressed the Government to publicly release guidance applying to UK intelligence personnel when sharing intelligence used for drone strikes.⁷⁸ The guidance is not officially acknowledged but is believed to allow UK to share intelligence with the US in a manner compliant with UK law.⁷⁹ The existence of the guidance confirms that the UK plays a key role in the US drone programme.
89. But as long as this guidance stays secret, Parliament is stripped of its oversight role. Flaws in secret policies, such as the UK’s guidance on torture, are often revealed once the policies are made public. As the former independent reviewer of counter-terrorism legislation said, in relation to policies on the interception of legally privileged communications:

“Procedures which have never seen the light of day sometimes turn out to need improvement when they are exposed to it.”⁸⁰

90. Both the UK’s guidance on torture and guidance on intercepting lawyer-client calls were forced into public light after litigation brought by Reprieve. They were revealed to be deeply flawed and in need of reform.
91. In September 2015, then Prime Minister announced that the UK had carried out its first drone strike in Syria—a country in which the UK was not at war. Cameron described the strike as a “new departure”. He

⁷³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/462375/20150908-UK_Personnel_stationed_Creech_Air_Force_Base.pdf

⁷⁴ <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2014-04-29b.195004.h&s=%28Remotely+Piloted+Air+System%29+2013-12-30..2014-08-12+section%3Awrans#g195004.q0>

⁷⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/12/uk-troops-us-base-djibouti-drones-yemen-mod-reveals>

⁷⁶ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-03-09/67275/>

⁷⁷ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/pdf/Commons/2015-12-17>

⁷⁸ <http://im.ft-static.com/content/images/38d6c1ca-7581-11e4-a1a9-00144feabdc0.pdf>

⁷⁹ <https://www.ft.com/content/c9a38848-73ea-11e4-92bc-00144feabdc0>

⁸⁰ <https://terrorismlegislationreviewer.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IPR-Report-Print-Version.pdf>
para. 10.4

claimed that the Government would not hesitate to carry out such a strike in countries where Parliament has not approved military action such as Syria or Libya. His announcement was the first indication that the UK had adopted the US policy of using lethal force against alleged threats to national security in countries in which it is not at war.

92. In response to the Government's announcement and its refusal to be transparent, Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights ("JCHR") initiated an inquiry. The JCHR confirmed that the UK has a policy of using lethal force outside of armed conflicts for counter-terrorism purposes.⁸¹ The JCHR criticised the Government for the lack of legal certainty on the policy. It raised serious concerns that such uncertainty risked placing Ministers and UK personnel at risk of criminal prosecution.⁸²
93. In January 2017, the Attorney-General published the legal rationale underpinning the UK's policy.⁸³ He cited an academic paper written by Daniel Bethlehem, former FCO legal adviser, arguing that the definition of "imminence" under international law should change. This is the same paper the US Government relies on to justify its strikes.⁸⁴ The Attorney-General indicates that this has been the interpretation of successive UK governments, suggesting the alignment with the US position may have pre-dated 2017.
94. According to the UK Government, there is no need for "specific evidence" of an alleged threat to determine whether it is imminent. This flies in the face of the common sense understanding of the term "imminent", which requires some indication of when a threat will materialise. This position has not been robustly tested in court or elsewhere. It upends over 150 years of interpretation of the test set out in the *Caroline* case.
95. According to the *Caroline* case, use of lethal force in self-defence is only lawful if

"the necessity of that self-defence is instant, overwhelming, and leaving no choice of means, and no moment of deliberation"⁸⁵
96. This definition is a far cry from the US and UK interpretations. It makes clear that force is only lawful if used in response to a threat that will materialise in the near future. In line with this interpretation, creating a list of individuals to be killed would be unlawful because it demonstrates that the use of force left the Government with a "moment of deliberation".
97. In addition, the Attorney-General has failed to set out what measures are in place to protect civilians and what accountability mechanisms to redress wrongs. UK policy remains flawed and of questionable legality.

II. CONCLUSION

98. With Donald Trump at the helm of the US drone programme, it is more dangerous than ever. Trump's first raid was a disastrous misadventure. He has carried out far more strikes than Obama in 2016, some of them killing civilians.
99. The UK continues to be involved in this programme. Yet Parliament and the public cannot be reassured the Government is acting in line with the law and British values. The Government must come clean on the full extent of its involvement in the US drone programme to allow for scrutiny of its actions.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the MOD

- Disclose guidance provided to personnel involved in drone strikes
- Disclose guidance provided to embeds and secondees

⁸¹ <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201516/jtselect/jtrights/574/574.pdf>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/attorney-generals-speech-at-the-international-institute-for-strategic-studies>

⁸⁴ http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/sections/news/020413_DOJ_White_Paper.pdf

⁸⁵ http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/br-1842d.asp

REPRIEVE

- Clarify and update oversight of US bases in the UK, and UK role in the operations of those bases
- Disclose safeguards put in place to protect civilians
- Disclose what policies are in place to provide accountability for the deaths of innocent people

To GCHQ

- Disclose guidance provided to GCHQ officers involved in drone strikes
- Disclose safeguards to ensure that UK intelligence does not result in civilian casualties
- Conduct prompt and effective investigations when allegations of civilian casualties are raised
- Publish the results of such investigations
- Tasking targets to programmes to surveillance programmes used in support of drone strikes should have final sign-off by Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary and Prime Minister
- The Foreign Secretary should report to the House of Commons every 6 months the number of targets tasked to surveillance programmes used in support of drone strikes as well as the countries in which these targets live

REPRIEVE

ANNEX A – GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Geolocation: the process of identifying the physical location of a target

GHOSTHUNTER, APPARITION: joint US-UK programmes used in support of drone strikes to locate targets

JSOC: Joint Special Operations Command, a US Special Operations force that carries out strikes in Yemen and Somalia

OVERHEAD: joint US-UK programme used in support of drone strikes seemingly to locate phone usage and cell-phone towers

SOCOM: US Special Operations Command, which has oversight of JSOC

Tasking: assigning a target to a surveillance programme

ANNEX B – ANATOMY OF A US DRONE STRIKE

Excessive secrecy and a lack of transparency make it difficult to be certain how a US drone strike unfolds. Investigations by journalists and NGOs, litigation, disclosures from whistle-blowers and leaks from the US and UK governments have shed some light on the process.

The US conducts two types of strikes in non-war zones. First, the US uses strikes against individuals. Under Obama, targets were approved for killing by the President on what was known as “Terror Tuesday.”⁸⁶ Targets are selected by US agencies and are proposed up the chain of command, which culminates with the President. Strikes are taken either by the Central Intelligence Agency (“CIA”) or Joint Special Operations Command (“JSOC”), which is a subset of the Special Operations Command or SOCOM. Once a target was approved, US forces then have 60 days to kill him.⁸⁷ With the election of President Trump, it is not clear how much of this process remains in place.

Second, the US carries out “signature strikes”. These strikes are carried out based on alleged suspicious behaviour rather than on identification of the target or targets as alleged members of a terrorist group. A former US ambassador to Pakistan acknowledged that “any male between 20 and 40” was liable to be targeted.⁸⁸ In such strikes, the US does not know whom it is targeting.⁸⁹

The intelligence source for finding a target will differ according to the type of strike. A signature strike can, for example, come from observing a particular location for a prolonged period. A strike against a named target can, as set out below, either come from their identification by a human source or location through electronic means. It is in the intelligence gathering process that the UK plays a key role.

A number of US agencies are involved in the targeting process. Edward Snowden’s revelations have shed a light on the key role the National Security Agency (“NSA”) plays in US drone strikes.⁹⁰ The NSA deploys its unprecedented electronic spying capabilities in order to locate targets who are then killed by drones. This is accomplished by various means, such as hacking electronic devices and intercepting telephone conversations.

Once a target has been identified and approved for killing, drones take off from bases in Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Djibouti and Saudi Arabia. They are piloted from various bases in the US, such as Creech Air Force Base, Nevada or Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico. Orders for the drones are relayed to Ramstein, a US base in Germany. Ramstein is key to the drone programme as it allows orders sent from the US to be sent to the drone flying over countries such as Yemen and Pakistan.⁹¹

The US flies two types of drones in non-war zones: the Predator and the Reaper. Though the drones fly too high for the naked eye to see, the buzzing of drones overhead strikes terror in the communities affected by strikes.

⁸⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/14/obama-secret-kill-list-disposition-matrix>

⁸⁷ <https://theintercept.com/drone-papers/the-kill-chain/>

⁸⁸ http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/11/20/a-former-ambassador-to-pakistan-speaks-out.html?via=FB_Page&source=HuffPoFacebook

⁸⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/24/world/asia/drone-strikes-reveal-uncomfortable-truth-us-is-often-unsure-about-who-will-die.html>

⁹⁰ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/documents-reveal-nsas-extensive-involvement-in-targeted-killing-program/2013/10/16/29775278-3674-11e3-8a0e-4e2cf80831fc_story.html?utm_term=.9ff145970479

⁹¹ <https://theintercept.com/2015/04/17/ramstein/>