

By Caroline Cameron, Great North News Services
AIRCRAFT over Afghanistan will be controlled from the UK for the first time after it was announced that a new Reaper Squadron will form at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire. Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Dalton announced that the Squadron number will transfer to a second Reaper Squadron next year. The remotely piloted aircraft will continue to be based in Afghanistan. He said bringing Reaper mission control to the UK would "make more efficient and effective use of our resources in exploiting this growing capability and enable the operation of significantly more Combat Intelligence Surveillance Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance aircraft over Afghanistan 24 hours a day".
Meanwhile, Pakistan's Interior Minister Rehman Malik has said anti-terrorist operations must respect the country's sovereignty as lawmakers condemned the US raid that killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and missile attacks in tribal areas. "The U.S. should listen to the voice of the people of Pakistan and stop drone attacks," Malik said in Karachi, according to the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan. "We have to work together, even with our neighbors. Aggression in any shape will not be tolerated," he said.
So far this month, other Drone Wars related activity includes:
May 16 - French order DRAC uavs
French MoD placed an order for 135 extra DRAC uavs with EADS-Cassidian for delivery between this summer and 2013. Value said to be very considerable, contract includes two land stations.
May 16 - US predators kill 10 'militants' in Mir Ali
US Predators struck yet again in Pakistan's Taliban-controlled tribal agency of North Waziristan, killing 10 more "militants". The US launched five strikes in the tribal areas since al-Qaeda emir Osama bin Laden was killed during a covert US raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan, far from the tribal areas.
May 13 - US Predators strike again in North Waziristan
US Predators struck yet again in Pakistan's Taliban-controlled tribal agencies, killing four "militants" in North Waziristan. The attack was the fourth in Pakistan's tribal agencies in eight days, and the fourth since US commandos killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden during a raid in the city of Abbottabad.
The Long War Journal said the US military launched only two strikes in April and seven in March, in both North Waziristan and South Waziristan. Roggio, the managing editor of The Long War Journal, told CNN that there have been drone-strike pauses during spring months in the past, but he said the latest lull came during problems between the United States and Pakistan. He cited the disagreements over the case of Raymond Davis, the CIA contractor who had been incarcerated and later released after allegedly shooting and killing two Pakistanis, and Pakistani rage about a couple of the drone strikes. But Roggio said he believes the dynamics have changed after bin Laden was killed May 2 in a hideout in the Pakistani military garrison town of Abbottabad. He said there's a lot of U.S. impatience with the Pakistanis and that's "no big secret after the bin Laden raid."
"It's clear now they are just gonna keep doing it," he said, referring to the drone strikes.
May 12 - US Predators strike in al-Qaeda haven of Datta Khel
The US carried out its third Predator airstrike in Pakistan's Taliban-controlled tribal agencies in seven days, killing up to eight "militants" in an attack in North Waziristan. The attack took place in an area that has served as a command and control hub for al-Qaeda's global and regional operations.
May 10 - US Predators kill four in South Waziristan strike
The US carried out its second Predator airstrike in Pakistan's Taliban-controlled tribal agencies in five days, killing four "militants" in an in South Waziristan, the Long War Journal reported. The attack took place in an area controlled by a Taliban leader who has admitted to also serving as a senior leader in al-Qaeda.
May 6 - 13 'militants' killed in North Waziristan strike
Unmanned US strike aircraft killed 13

"militants" in an attack in an area of Pakistan's tribal agency of North Waziristan that is known to shelter al Qaeda's top leaders, according to the Long War Journal. The strike was the first in two weeks, and the first since US commandos penetrated deep into Pakistan to kill al Qaeda's top leader Osama bin Laden.

May 5 - Three militants dead after Nissab airstrike

A Hellfire missile fired from a U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) struck a vehicle in the town of Nissab in Yemen's restive Shabwa province. The airstrike reportedly resulted in the deaths of two Yemeni members of the Yemen-based al Qaeda franchise group in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and injured a third AQAP militant. Subsequent media reports indicated that the strike had targeted Anwar al-Awlaki, a US-born member of AQAP, but had failed to kill him.

And finally . . . Mark Thompson's recent blog on Time.com made for interesting reading on the average age of Taliban commanders.

So interesting, it's worth running in its entirety here:

The US military has shied away from body counts of enemy killed since the numbers proved near worthless in Vietnam. But they're apparently using birthday counts as a yardstick for measuring progress in Afghanistan. Marine Major Gen. Richard Mills, who just returned from a year-long tour in the country's violent Helmand Province, cited a couple such numbers Wednesday during a talk at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington.

"When we got there, it was estimated the average regimental or battalion commander -- whatever you want to call him -- in the insurgency was about 35 years old," he said, referring to units of about 500 men. "When we left, he was 23. Why? Because the rest of them are dead. What does that mean? It means they're promoting younger and younger men -- less-experienced men -- into greater responsibility, and that's a weakness."

Math isn't my strong suit, but this suggests by this time next year the average Taliban commander in southern Afghanistan will be 11.