

# About Armed Drones

## What are drones?

Drones are aircraft without pilots on board. They might be large or tiny, and they can be controlled from thousands of miles away. Drones are being used more and more. You might have seen toy drones. They are used for lots of things like weather forecasts and making deliveries, but the armed forces use them to fight wars.

“Armed” drones can be used to carry and fire weapons- missiles and bombs- at people on the ground. These are being used more and more.

## Who has armed drones?

In 2015, the United Kingdom has 10 armed “Reaper” drones which were bought from the United States of America, and plans to get more. The USA itself has many more than 200 “Reaper” and “Predator” drones.

Royal Air Force drones are controlled from RAF Waddington and Creech Air Force Base, Nevada, USA. Drone strikes have also been used by Israel in Gaza and Lebanon. RAF pilots have flown armed drones in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq and Syria. The USA’s drones are also being used in Yemen and Pakistan.

## Why do countries use armed drones?

Drones can be used to fight war with no risks. There are no soldiers or ‘boots on the ground’- the pilot is safe thousands of miles away in an air-conditioned room.

The UK and the USA say they use drones for “counter-terrorism”, killing terrorists around the world from groups like al-Qaeda or Islamic State.

Drones are supposed to make pinpoint air strikes to kill enemies without hurting ordinary civilians. But “civilians” and “militants” can get mixed up- can you tell from up in the sky who’s who? The UK and the USA do not give out all the information about whom they have killed, where, when or why. In countries like Afghanistan, people feel angry and afraid about drones. Drones can stay up for hours, never getting tired. A strike could come at any time. For the children and adults going about their lives, this threat is always in the back of their minds. Clear blue skies are particularly feared as that is when drone strikes are most likely.

## Drone Facts

- There are lots of types of drones. The ones used to attack people are called “Predator” and “Reaper”.
- The UK has 10 armed “Reaper” drones (2015)
- Drones can hover overhead for over 14 hours without being seen or heard by people on the ground.
- Reaper drones can fly up to 50,000 feet high, making them invisible from the ground.
- One Hell Fire Missile from a drone could kill everyone within a 30 metre wide circle.
- UK Reaper drones have fired Hellfire missiles 459 times at Afghanistan
- The best weather for drones is a clear blue sky because they can see more clearly
- Drones sometimes kill civilians as well as the people they are aiming at. Between 400 and 950 civilians have been killed in Pakistan alone.

## Word Bank

**Drone** –remote controlled aircraft with no people on board. They’re sometimes called Remotely Piloted Air Systems (RPAS) or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)

**Armed drone** – these are drones that carry bombs and missiles.

**Militants** –people who use violence for their cause.

**Terrorists** – these are a type of militant that targets civilians to cause fear.

**Counter-terrorism** – describes the ways people try to stop “terrorists”

**Combatant** – someone from either side who is taking part in the fighting

**Civilians**- or non-combatants are people who are not involved in fighting the war, though they might get swept up in the violence.