

On the next page : A round-up of recent news of developments in and strikes by unmanned vehicles by Elayne Jude of Great North News Services.

The Guardian revealed that the RAF has begun remotely operating its Reaper UACVs from RAF Waddington, in Lincolnshire. Around 400 peace campaigners gathered outside the base a few days later, to protest against armed drones being operated from Britain to conduct missions in Afghanistan.

The Lebanese newspaper Daily Star reported that the U.S. Navy began testing two new aerial tools borrowed from the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq, to detect, track and videotape drug smugglers in action.

One of the devices on display aboard the High Speed Vessel Swift is a balloon-like craft known as an aerostat. The other tool is a type of drone that can be launched by hand from the deck.

Together, the tools on test expand the ability of the Navy and Coast Guard personnel on board to extend their scope, according to officials from both military branches, and contractors hoping to sell the devices to the U.S. government.

Tolo News reported that Washington and London will keep their drones to support Afghan security forces post 2014, according to NATO's air force General Jake Polumbo. "It will take time for the Afghan air force to end up as a full operational capability as we call it FOC, and that will take into the end of 2016 timeframe at best, and we understand that. That is exactly how we have partnered with the Afghan security forces, in particular the air force, is to be committed to that duration, to bring on these aircrafts, these training mechanisms, and the like." The US general added that there are currently 6,000 for the Afghan air force, yet only one percent of them are capable of carrying out air operations.

Afghan defence ministry, on the other hand, suggested that dialogues on post-2014 drones for Afghan air force are on-going between Kabul and Washington. "There are matters that are related to agreements by the Afghan government. On issues related to after 2014, and activities, and other related issues, the government is discussing," said General Zahir Azimi,

spokesman for the Afghan defence ministry.

NATO has around 300 trainers for Afghan air force.

Latest reported strikes :

April 14 - North Waziristan. Four "militants" were killed in a strike in Datta Khel in the Taliban-controlled tribal agency of North Waziristan, the first reported by the US in Pakistan in 23 days.

A pair of missiles were fired at a compound in Datta Khel. The compound caught fire and the bodies of those killed were badly burned. The exact target of the strike was not disclosed. No senior al Qaeda or Taliban commanders or operatives are reported to have been killed.

The last strike, which also occurred in Datta Khel, took place on March 21. The US has launched just 12 drone strikes in Pakistan so far this year, according to data compiled by The Long War Journal.

April 17 - South Waziristan. Five "militants" were killed in a strike today in South Waziristan.

A pair of missiles were fired at a base of the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan. Five were killed and two wounded. The base, located in the village of Sararogha, was destroyed. One of the dead has been tentatively identified as Abu Ubaydah Abdullah al Adam, a senior al Qaeda intelligence chief.

Sararogha has been a stronghold of the al Qaeda-linked Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan (TTP). Waliur Rehman, the head of TTP, is said to have directed operations from the village.

A peace agreement between the Pakistani military and Baitullah Mehsud, the founder of the TTP, was signed in the village in 2005. The Sararogha Accord called for the military and the Taliban to end attacks on each other. The Taliban were not required to reject al Qaeda or to

stop sheltering its personnel, nor to lay down their arms. The truce endured until the TTP formed in 2007 and declared war against the state.

The strike is the first in South Waziristan since February 8.

April 17 - Yemen. Two strikes were launched against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in a remote area in central Yemen, the first since the end of January.

Two separate targets were attacked in the Oussab al Ali area, a mountainous region straddling the three provinces of central Damar, southern Ibb and eastern Hodeida.

The first strike killed four AQAP fighters as they were driving a vehicle. The second strike killed Hamed Radman, described as an "influential al Qaeda member" who "played a role in recruitment." A Yemeni witness said drones were deployed over the village where Radman was killed for three days before striking.

These strikes are the first reported in Yemen since Jan. 23, when six AQAP fighters were killed in an attack in Sana'a province.

April 21 - Yemen. Two AQAP operatives were killed in the third strike recorded in Yemen in the past six days. Several missiles were launched at a compound in the Wadi Abida area of Marib province.

Two Yemeni troops and another AQAP fighter were killed during clashes that followed. A cache of weapons was reportedly found at the site. No senior AQAP operatives or leaders are reported to have been killed in today's strike.

Over the past 10 months, the US has begun to target AQAP outside of Abyan and Shabwah provinces in the south. Out of 28 strikes against AQAP since the beginning of June 2012 only four have struck in Abyan and Shabwah. The other 24 strikes have targeted the provinces of

Aden, Al Baydah, Al Jawf, Hadramout, Marib, Saada, and Sana'a. Of the 18 strikes conducted between January 2012 and the end of May, 10 occurred in Abyan and Shabwah.

April 25 off the coast of Israel. The Israeli Air Force (IAF) intercepted a UAV which Israel says belonged to Hezbollah and took off from Lebanon. The drone was intercepted over the Mediterranean Sea, 5 nautical miles west of Haifa and at an altitude of 6,000 ft.