

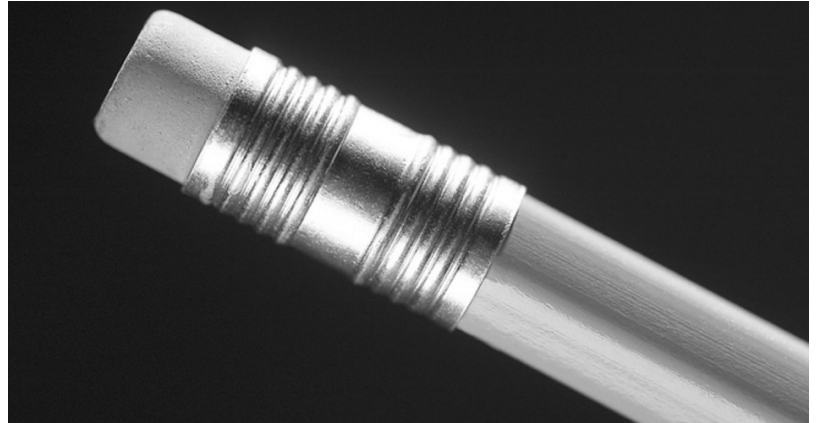


Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on March 13, 2013

Air Force Removes Drone Strike Data From Report

It appears that Senator Rand Paul's (R-Ky.) [13-hour filibuster](#) shone a bit too much light on the drone issue.

On Sunday, the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), which oversees the war in Afghanistan, [issued a statement](#) announcing that it would no longer be providing information about the number of airstrikes conducted by drones in that country.



Previously, in its monthly report on air activity conducted by the United States in Afghanistan, the Air Force would include a box that revealed data relating to the number of drone strikes carried out that month. After last week's announcement, however, the drone strike tally will be included in the overall number of air strikes and will not be reported separately.

Down the memory hole go the drone data.

In the press release announcing the change, CENTCOM claimed that the drones actually fired missiles during only three percent of their missions and that by reporting on the drone strikes in a separate category, analysis was becoming "disproportionately focused" on the contribution to the "War on Terror" by the unmanned aerial vehicles (drones). Most sorties, the statement reported, were for intelligence gathering and surveillance only.

The [Air Force Times reported](#) the decision in a story published on March 8:

Last October, Air Force Central Command started tallying weapons releases from RPAs [drones], broken down into monthly updates. At the time, AFCENT spokeswoman Capt. Kim Bender said the numbers would be put out every month as part of a service effort to "provide more detailed information on RPA ops in Afghanistan."

The Air Force maintained that policy for the statistics reports for November, December and January. But the February numbers, released March 7, contained empty space where the box of RPA statistics had previously been.

Additionally, monthly reports hosted on the Air Force website have had the RPA data removed — and recently.

When contacted by *The New American*, neither the Air Force nor CENTCOM had any comment on the decision. The *Air Force Times* reported that "Defense Department spokesman Cmdr. Bill Speaks said the department was not involved in the decision to remove the statistics."

The Air Force is free to refuse to report the number of airstrikes carried out by drone, but that doesn't erase the fact that the toll of innocent victims continues to increase.

Just how many civilians have been killed in the thousands of U.S. drone strikes is unknown. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) told a Rotary Club group last month that [4,700 people have been killed by drone](#) in the "War on Terror." "Sometimes you hit innocent people, and I hate that, but we're at war, and we've taken out some very senior members of Al-Qaeda," Graham said.



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Although admittedly unofficial, Graham's estimate was the first time a number has put on the body count from the now decade-long drone program.

To date, neither the Obama administration nor the Pentagon has released an official number of victims of drone strikes. This silence hasn't kept private organizations from making such .

The London-based [Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#), for example, estimates that between 3,072 and 4,756 people have been killed by drone in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.

The Washington-based [New America Foundation](#) reports that the United States has carried out 350 drone attacks since 2004, the majority of which have been ordered by President Barack Obama since taking office in 2009. As for the death toll from this program, the foundation puts the range between 1,963 and 3,293, with at least 261 civilians among that number.

As Senator Paul's filibuster exposed, however, President Obama not only believes he has the authority to use drones to target and kill Americans — even inside the United States — but he believes he doesn't owe an accounting to anyone of where he gets that power or how he uses it.

If the president is this dismissive of the due process rights of Americans, it is easy to see why the Air Force feels no compulsion to count the deadly drone strikes or the number of bodies left in their wake overseas.

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