

UAV losses heavy in Afghanistan

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The Ministry of Defence has admitted to losing 27 Desert Hawk unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over the last year in Afghanistan.

The UAVs, which cost around \$300,000 a piece are used for surveillance operations and do not carry weapon payloads. Each UAV is armed with video and infrared surveillance equipment that assists British forces in locating enemy positions and securing their own.

Defence Secretary Des Browne attributed the high number of losses to the heavy workload the Desert Hawks have been asked to undertake in the Afghan theatre. It is unclear how many of the UAVs were lost due to mechanical failure or hostile fire.

In a statement Browne attempted to reassure MPs that the MoD was aiming to correct the heavy losses of the Desert Hawks, which totalled \$8,100,000 (£4,090,000) in equipment losses last year.

"We continue to refine our operational procedures to minimise the loss rate," Browne said.

The Desert Hawk, also known as the Force Protection Airbourne Surveillance System, is manufactured by Lockheed Martin. It is unique in that it is launched with a bungee cord-sling shot like device. The UAV can fly at altitudes of up to 500 feet and at speeds of up to 57mph. It is controlled from a ground station with a laptop.