

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq and Syria: The Dirty Consequences of Our “Clean Wars”

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[Drone Wars UK](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Five years ago the suggestion that within a decade drone strikes would be taking place on a regular basis in multiple countries with little notice by the mainstream media or the general public seemed far-fetched to many. Today, with drone strikes being undertaken in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq and Syria, and no doubt [Libya again too soon](#) (and not to forget the regular sporadic bursts of Israeli strikes in Gaza) such a prediction looks a lot more likely, if not a certainty.

Continuing daily ‘precise’ airstrikes by US, UK and other nations against ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria are currently almost invisible in the news media except for a few stories representing carefully controlled DoD and MoD press statements. Meanwhile the US continues to [increase its military forces in the area](#) with A-10 aircraft and further Reaper drones being deployed from Afghanistan. The UK is also likely to have deployed further Reaper drones from Afghanistan but [insists that it can’t reveal](#) such information. [Iran is now also flying drones and aged aircraft over Iraq and has also undertaken airstrikes](#), although the US insists that it is not doing so in co-ordination with the US and its coalition. [Expert commentators say](#) however there must be some communication to enable such flights to take place or else it would be “suicidal.”

Investigative Journalist Chris Woods, who continues to [monitor and detail airstrikes taking place in Iraq and Syria](#), wrote this week about the [denial on the civilian casualties caused by airstrikes](#). He reports that at least 100 non-combatants may have been killed in the airstrikes since the start of the operation and writes:

Centcom’s continuing [assertion](#) that it has “no operational reporting or intelligence” confirming civilian deaths in Iraq and Syria, despite more than 1,000 airstrikes to date, is therefore unlikely to be accurate. Indeed, NATO was later forced to retract similar claims at the end of the 2011 Libyan air war after [investigations found](#) that dozens of civilians had in fact died in allied airstrikes.

Woods also makes the point that with so many separate countries undertaking airstrikes, operating by different rules of engagement and refusing to give locations and times of strikes, it is almost impossible for relatives of civilians killed in such strikes to report the details or to seek compensation for their loss.

The fact that [only 25% of airstrikes in Iraq and 5% of airstrikes in Syria are pre-planned](#), with the vast majority being undertaken by aircraft and drones ‘on the fly’ (i.e. when a ‘target of opportunity’ is spotted) will no doubt impact on the number of civilian casualties killed in

this air war.

Meanwhile US drone strikes will continue in Afghanistan in 2015 after [President Obama “shifted” his position and expanded the proposed US security mission in Afghanistan](#) following the signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement. Rather than just undertaking a training and support role as previously announced, US forces will now carry out direct missions against the Taliban and other militant groups. A senior American military officer told [New York Times](#) that “in light of Mr. Obama’s decision, the Air Force expects to use F-16 fighters, B-1B bombers and Predator and Reaper drones to go after the Taliban in 2015.”

The Pakistan press also report that according to a ‘highly credible source’ the [US intends to step up targeted drone strikes in Afghanistan against named Pakistan Taliban leaders](#) Mullah Fazlullah, Maulvi Faqir Muhammad and Mangal Bagh Afridi. Such targeted strikes have already begun according to [Reuters](#) with a strike on November 24 hitting a house where Pakistani Taliban leader Mullah Fazlullah had stayed the night before. Rather than killing Fazlullah it killed two lower level Taliban operatives.

Such drone targeted killings however have a devastating impact on civilians as a new document from Reprieve shows. The report, ‘[You Never Die Twice](#)’ reveals the dirty secret of just how many people – including in some cases children – are killed each time the US attempts to assassinate a ‘high value target.’ [Key findings](#) of the report include:

- In Pakistan, 24 men were reported as killed or targeted multiple times. Missed strikes on these men killed 874 people, including 142 children.
- In Yemen, 17 men were reported killed or targeted multiple times. Missile strikes on these men killed 273 others and accounted for almost half of all confirmed civilian casualties and 100% of all recorded child deaths.
- In targeting Ayman al Zawahiri, the CIA killed 76 children and 29 adults. They failed twice, and Ayman al Zawahiri is reportedly still alive.
- It took the US six attempts to kill Qari Hussain, a Pakistani target. During these attempts, 128 people were killed, including 13 children.
- Each assassination target on the US government’s so-called Kill List ‘died’ on average more than three times before their actual death

Such shocking information highlights the need for at the very least transparency and accountability from countries using drones and other aircraft to undertake airstrikes, and indeed to thoroughly investigate reports of civilian casualties as a [new report from Open Society Foundations urges](#).

But it should also be clear by now that we must begin to stop seeing these deaths as ‘accidents’. Such tragedies are the perfectly foreseeable consequences of undertaking military airstrikes and we only [make further such deaths possible when we describe them as ‘accidents’ or ‘mistakes’](#).

The narrative of ‘precision strikes’ alongside the remoteness of the operations and lack of media scrutiny allows us if we do not look too closely to believe that such war is clean, surgical and even humane. The view of those on the receiving end must be very different.

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