

Unveiled Documents Expose Countless Civilian Deaths and War Crimes Committed by US

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Since the early 2000’s, drone use in warfare became more prominent in US military planning and engagement. Successive US presidents, particularly Barack Obama, promised that the use of all-seeing drones and precision bombs would reduce civilian casualties. However, documents unveiled by the New York Times show flawed intelligence, faulty targeting, years of civilian deaths, and perhaps most disturbingly, scant accountability.

The [New York Times](#) shockingly outlines various cases of civilians in the Middle East, including children, being killed by US drone strikes with no repercussions for the war crime. The cases they outline were drawn from a hidden Pentagon archive of American airstrikes in the Middle East since 2014, i.e., since the US campaign against ISIS began.

The trove of documents revealed that by the US military’s own assessments, there were more than 1,300 reports of civilian casualties by American airstrikes. The author of the article, Azmat Khan, said that the unveiled documents “lays bare how the air war has been marked by deeply flawed intelligence, rushed and often imprecise targeting, and the deaths of thousands of civilians, many of them children, a sharp contrast to the American government’s image of war waged by all-seeing drones and precision bombs.”

She added that “despite the Pentagon’s highly codified system for examining civilian casualties, pledges of transparency and accountability have given way to opacity and impunity.” Khan also explained how despite the 1,300 reports of civilian casualties, “only [in] a handful of cases were the assessments made public” and “not a single record provided includes a finding of wrongdoing or disciplinary action.”

Despite thousands of people devastated by reckless American airstrikes, including survivors being left with horrific disabilities and expensive medical bills, less than a dozen of condolence payments were made to victims. This is an unsurprising outcome considering that the efforts to identify root causes or lessons learned from intelligence failures are rare.

Obama called the strikes against ISIS as “the most precise air campaign in history” and lauded it as being more protective for troops and civilians alike. However, this belief was contradicted by Captain Bill Urban, the spokesman for the US Central Command. In responding to questions from The Times, he said that “even with the best technology in the world, mistakes do happen, whether based on incomplete information or misinterpretation of the information available.”

Although he claimed that the US tries to learn “from those mistakes”, “[...] works diligently to avoid such harm” and “investigate each credible instance,” the evidence proves otherwise as the hidden documents show civilians regularly as collateral victims.

The Times, as Khan says, “did what military officials admit they have not done: analyzed the casualty assessments in aggregate to discern patterns of failed intelligence, decision-making and execution.” The investigation found that although it is impossible to determine the full civilian death toll from US strikes, it is certainly far higher than the 1,417 victims that the Pentagon actually admits to.

The London-based newspaper found that many civilian casualties had been summarily discounted, on-the-ground reporting involving a sampling of credible cases were dismissed, and lessons rarely learned.

It is unsurprising that lessons were not learned when chat logs accompanying some assessments revealed that American soldiers treated drone strikes as if they were playing video games. In one recorded case, American soldiers expressed glee over getting to fire in an area ostensibly “poppin” with ISIS fighters — without spotting the children in their midst. By removing soldiers from the ground and putting them behind a computer monitor, it not only reduces on-the-ground intelligence, but also desensitizes soldiers to the social and familial effects that their criminal actions have on ordinary civilians.

Captain Urban attempts to downplay this desensitization by saying that drone operators often “do not have the luxury of time” and that “the fog of war can lead to decisions that tragically result in civilian harm.”

However, in another recorded case in Mosul in 2016, three civilians were killed in a US-approved strike because they had decided to save more-precise weapons for other imminent strikes. In fact, The Times analysis found that civilians were frequently killed in airstrikes that were planned well in advance. This makes a mockery of Captain Urban’s claims that there are “collateral scans”. Disturbingly, some of these “collateral scans” were found to be only 11 seconds long.

Such lazy intelligence gathering has resulted in schools, bakeries and hospitals in Syria and Iraq being hit by targeted strikes, especially after they were removed from the “no-strike” list. For all the benevolence that the US espouses, especially in its “humanitarian interventions” (as it advertises its occupations of Syria and Iraq), its use of drones is really something incredible – operators treating strikes like playing video games, thousands of innocent civilians (including children) being exterminated, and no recourse or responsibility to face.

Effectively no courts, no judges and no prosecution for some of the worst war crimes perpetrated in modern history.

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