

US Drone Strikes “Outside War Zones” in Somalia, Yemen: Why Trump’s Actions Have Put Civilians at More Risk

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Global Research, April 03, 2019
Reprieve

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Military](#) and [WMD](#)

Yesterday, President Trump [scrapped](#) an Obama-era regulation forcing the government to publicly report the number of civilians killed in US drone strikes outside war zones. The National Security Council dismissed the regulation as an annoying bit of paperwork, describing it as a [“superfluous reporting requirement”](#).

The move is just one more in a long line of steps President Trump has taken to move America’s drone programme back into the shadows where there is no accountability to the public or to victims. While the President has been tweeting his every thought to the world, behind the scenes he has quietly [expanded](#) America’s counterterrorism operations overseas, [eliminated safeguards intended to protect civilians](#) and rolled back what little transparency existed.

“Trump removed the requirement that strikes target only high-value terrorists who pose a continuing and imminent threat to the US”

Within a year of President Trump coming into office, US drone strikes in Yemen tripled in his first two years, while those in Somalia increased substantially. Large parts of both these countries were declared “areas of active hostilities,” loosening protections for civilians.

At the same time, Trump [removed the requirement](#) that strikes target only “high-value terrorists” who pose a “continuing and imminent” threat to the US. Instead, the target list was expanded to include “foot soldiers...with no special skills or leadership roles.”

In other words: kill as many as you can, rank or responsibility be damned.

For those innocent people, and the thousands of others who have been wrongly harmed by US drone strikes, the requirement that the US publicly disclose the civilian casualty count was anything but “superfluous”. Those numbers were at least some small, though imperfect, signal from the most powerful nation on earth that it was willing to not just acknowledge its mistakes, but to try and stop them happening again.

Through our work investigating these strikes, Reprieve has seen the devastating toll America’s drone killings have wreaked on the individuals behind the numbers. People like [Faisal bin ali Jaber](#), whose brother-in-law, Salem was killed in a drone strike in Yemen

just days after preaching against al-Qaeda. For years, Faisal has fought for one thing – a simple acknowledgement that Salem was innocent and that the US made a mistake.

Faisal has been offered secret bags of cash as an apology, but has refused. Bags of cash aren't accountability – all he and his family want is an apology. They also want to stop others suffering the same fate as them. With this in mind, Faisal, with the help of ECCHR and Reprieve, will be in court next Thursday in Germany arguing about the role Ramstein Airbase plays in the US drone programme. The court will consider, among other things, whether President Trump's continued efforts to erode transparency and safeguards should be factored into the German Government's responsibility to protect people's right to life.

Back in 2016, President Obama passed the Executive Order requiring reporting of civilian casualties. The accompanying [statement](#) acknowledged that "if we cannot explain our efforts clearly and publicly...we erode the legitimacy of our actions...and undermine accountability in our own government."

President Trump's latest move has done just that. Faisal once [said](#), "a mere body count is not the end of the story," – but without it, the story cannot even begin.

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