

FAA Pays General Atomics \$1.5 Million to Fly Newest Military Killer/Surveillance Drone in U.S. Domestic Airspace

by *Barry Summers*, published on *CovertAction Magazine*, May 17, 2022

April 1st was a good news/bad news kind of day for U.S. military drone-maker General Atomics. First, it was reported that the government of Australia had revealed that they were canceling the planned purchase of 12 MQ-9B SkyGuardian drones, made by General Atomics (GA). Since the deal would have been worth a cool **one billion dollars** to GA, this was definitely the bad news.

Aussies 'secretly cancel' \$1.3B AUD drone deal; Nixing French subs may cost \$5B

"Basically we have a five-and-a-half billion dollar budget provision, including about \$3 billion spent to date, and potential costs within that envelope. So taxpayers will be up for five-and-a-half billion dollars and submarines that don't exist?" asked Sen. Penny Wong.

By COLIN CLARK on April 01, 2022 at 10:22 AM

Luckily, GA had a good news story in the works. And as luck would have it, it would run on the same day as the bad news story.

AI & Autonomy, Unmanned

GA-ASI's SkyGuardian UAS Completes Detect-and-Avoid Flights for the FAA

By [Jessica Reed](#) | April 1, 2022

Back in January, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) handed GA \$1.5 million to fly the 79-ft. 12,000 lbs SkyGuardian over North Dakota for 10 hours. (GA apparently didn't feel the need for a press release and the resulting news article until the

day *before* some bad news from down under was in the pipeline.)

The stated purpose of the FAA grant to GA was “to research Detect and Avoid (DAA) capabilities.” (DAA, the ability for an unmanned aircraft to ‘detect’ another aircraft, and ‘avoid’ it, is the Holy Grail of drone integration. “*Integration*” is the process of removing restrictions against drones operating in domestic U.S. airspace.)

That’s right—the FAA was PAYING a U.S. arms manufacturer \$1.5 million in public monies to demonstrate their newest military surveillance drone over domestic U.S. territory.

If this is all a surprise to you, you’re not alone. The program to integrate military drones into U.S. domestic airspace has been operating for 10 years. It involves various federal agencies—DoD, FAA, NASA, Commerce, Energy, DHS, etc. But it hasn’t been reported on in any major news venue since the day before the bill creating it was signed into law in 2012 by then-President Barack Obama.

Los Angeles Times

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Pentagon working with FAA to open U.S. airspace to combat drones

BY W.J. HENNIGAN, LOS ANGELES TIMES
FEB. 13, 2012 12 AM PT

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Of course, the military has been preparing to operate their drones in U.S. domestic airspace since long before that. Here, a U.S. Air Force officer briefs FAA officials on the plans to fly Reaper drones in-and-out of Hancock Field in Syracuse, all the way back in January of 2010.



[Source: 174attackwing.ang.af.mil]

And then, wouldn't you know, when the FAA designated six drone integration test sites around the country in 2014 (supposedly after a rigorous competition), one of them was based in New York state. And that USAF officer from 2010 was put on staff to direct the very operation that he had described nine years earlier. Here's a screengrab of his 2019 presentation on the operation (which has since disappeared from the NUAIR website.)



[Source: nuair.com]

Less than a year after THAT “*Success Story*” of Reapers flying over populated areas of New York, one of them crashed upon takeoff at the Syracuse-Hancock Int. Airport. The drone with up to two tons of aviation fuel went down mere seconds from a densely-populated residential and commercial part of Syracuse. It took almost a year before the Air Force released that information to the public.

Military, Hancock were wrong to keep Reaper drone crash a secret (Editorial)

Updated: Apr. 18, 2021, 7:30 a.m. | Published: Apr. 18, 2021, 7:30 a.m.



An MQ-9 Reaper drone operated by the NY Air National Guard's 174th Attack Wing is shown after crashing June 25, 2020 at Syracuse Hancock International Airport. U.S. Air Force photo

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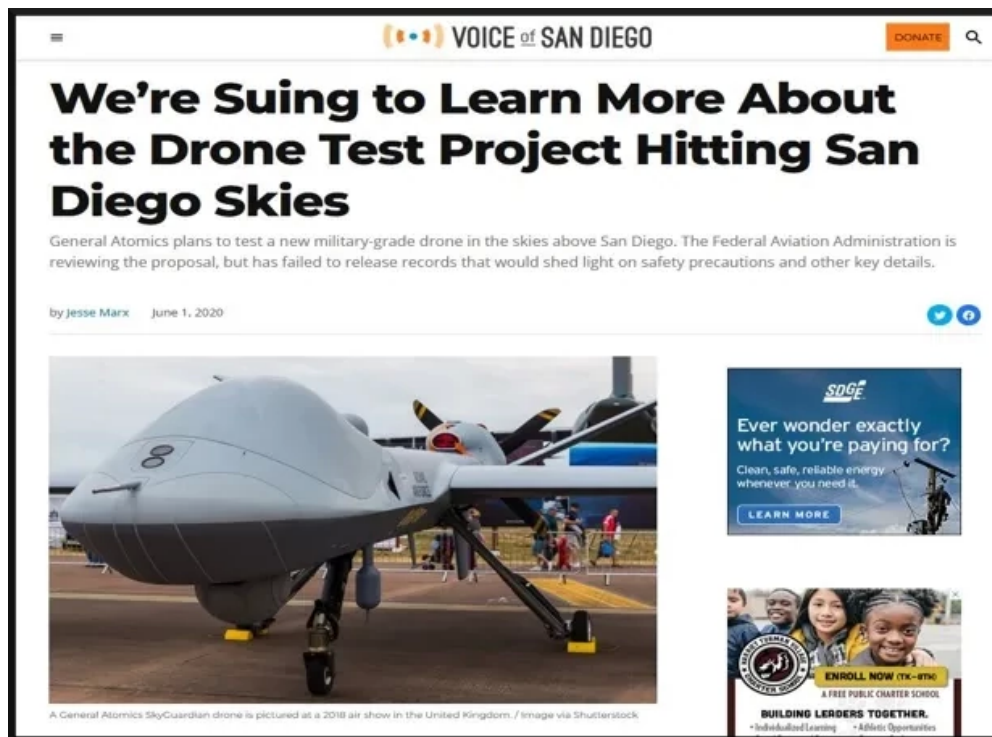
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[Source: [syracuse.com](https://www.syracuse.com)]

Why would they be so secretive about one of their drones nearly causing a catastrophe in a U.S. city? Maybe because it was the second Reaper crash in as many days. One had gone down somewhere in Africa just the day before, because of a maintenance problem GA had known about for months but hadn't fixed.

More likely, it might have been because at the time, GA was trying to fly the Reaper's big brother, the new MQ-9B SkyGuardian, over the City of San Diego, supposedly to demonstrate the commercial applications of large military-grade drones. Three weeks before the Syracuse crash, the Voice of San Diego had announced that they were suing the FAA and GA over the secrecy surrounding *that* attempt.



[Source: voiceofsandiego.org]

That proposed flight was eventually rejected by the professionals at FAA, but FAA leadership still fought tooth and nail in court to not reveal the reasons why. Whatever the reason, that rejection turns out to have been well-justified. GA was forced to take a consolation flight over the desert, and because the project was supported by NASA, they had to issue a report. That report clearly shows that the crucial DAA system (which Australia had said was the basis for choosing the MQ-9B), had failed repeatedly during the flight.

During the 9.5 hour flight, there were a few instances where the DAA traffic display experienced a brief (30-40 second) loss of data, then returned to normal operation. During these drops, TCAS alerts on the pilot's Head-up Display, including resolution advisories (RAs), remained operational. GA-ASI's investigation into the root cause concluded that these events were related to a brief data bandwidth conflict on the SATCOM downlink between the DAS-4 camera system and the DAA system, which has since been corrected by updating payload configuration settings to ensure DAA system messages remain prioritized during any unexpected data conflict situations. Section 2.1.4 below provides an overview of these observations and the results of the investigation.

Don't bother looking for that overview. Somehow, it never made it into the report...

With all that failure, General Atomics and the federal government are still moving ahead with plans to open U.S. domestic airspace to routine operation of military

surveillance drones. In fact, GA is already previewing the opportunity (to commercial AND government customers) to **lease** their drones for surveillance flights in domestic or international airspace. They're even considering a *"pay by the hour" scenario*.

The Leasing page on the General Atomics website ends with this odd signoff: *"-ISR/24/7/365-"*.

"Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year." Over the United States... Coming soon?

Saudi Bombings Kill Scores of Civilians—including Children—in Yemen

by Andrea Germanos, published on Common Dreams, January 21, 2022

A series of Saudi-led airstrikes were blamed Friday for killing scores of people in Yemen as civilians, including children, continue to suffer deadly consequences of the U.S.-backed conflict that has lasted for years.

Overnight bombings included one that targeted a prison holding mostly migrants in the northern city of Sa'ada, an area described as being under the control of Houthi forces.

"It is impossible to know how many people have been killed. It seems to have been a horrific act of violence," said Ahmed

Mahat, MSF's (Doctors Without Borders) head of mission in Yemen.

A hospital in the city *"has received 138 wounded and 70 dead"* and is *"so overwhelmed that they can't take any more patients,"* MSF said.

News update from #Yemen:

Last night Sa'ada City Remand Prison was hit by what was reported to be an air strike from the Saudi-led Coalition. Al-Gumhourriyeh Hospital in the city has received 138 wounded and 70 dead. They are so overwhelmed that they can't take any more patients.

– MSF International (@MSF) January 21, 2022

Facilities used for detention in Sa'ada, #Yemen, were hit early this morning, killing and injuring over a hundred detainees.

Emergency workers were searching for victims amidst the rubble. pic.twitter.com/CdT8qe7wEF

– ICRC (@ICRC) January 21, 2022

Strikes also hit further south in the port city of Hodeida. According to *Agence France-Presse*:

"Video footage showed bodies in the rubble and dazed survivors after an air attack from the Saudi Arabia-led pro-government coalition took out a telecommunications hub. Yemen suffered a nationwide internet blackout, a web monitor said."

The humanitarian group Save the Children said that at least three children, as well as more than 60 adults, were reported killed by the series of strikes, though the number of

confirmed casualties would likely rise.

The children killed as a result of the Hodeidah strike had been playing on a nearby football field, the group said.

"Children are bearing the brunt of this crisis," said Gillian Moyes, the group's country director in Yemen.

"They are being killed and maimed, watching as their schools and hospitals are being destroyed, and denied access to basic lifesaving services," she said. "They are asking us: Does it matter if I die?"

"The initial casualties report from Sa'ada is horrifying," Moyes added. "Migrants seeking better lives for themselves and their families, Yemeni civilians injured by the dozens, is a picture we never hoped to wake up to in Yemen."

In the U.S., the Biden administration—like previous administrations—has faced calls to stop supplying Saudi Arabia with weapons and other support being used to wage the bombing campaign on Yemen that's estimated to have killed over 300,000 Yemenis since 2015 and unleashed what the United Nations called the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

In *The New Republic* earlier this month, the Quincy Institute's Trita Parsi and Annelle Sheline wrote:

Despite Biden's promise to end the war in Yemen and his pledge to make the Saudis *"pay the price, and make them in fact the pariah that they are,"* he has fallen back into America's hegemonic role in the Middle East: taking sides, making America a party to conflicts, and selling more weapons—U.S. interest, peace, stability, and human rights be damned.

Responding to news of the overnight airstrikes, journalist Spencer Ackerman tweeted:

"America is complicit in this, as it has been complicit in every Saudi or UAE airstrike of this horrific war that Biden and his senior officials once promised to end. I hope they see these children when they sleep at night."

The International Committee of the Red Cross sounded alarm about the recent intensification of violence in Yemen.

"It is essential that we protect the lives of people in armed conflict. The human toll that we witness in Yemen is unacceptable,"

Fabrizio Carboni, ICRC's regional director for the Near and Middle East, said in a statement Thursday.

"Civilians living in densely populated areas have been exposed to increased attacks," he continued, "causing death and injury and deepening the psychological trauma among the affected communities after seven years of war."

The deadly strikes came after a Tuesday statement from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights also expressing concern about the uptick in violence in Yemen.

"In recent days," said spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani, "there have been dozens of airstrikes and artillery strikes launched by the parties with seemingly little regard for civilians."

"The fighting has damaged civilian objects and critical infrastructure, including telecommunication towers and water reservoirs, as well as hospitals in Sana'a and Taizz. With frontlines shifting rapidly over large areas, civilians are also exposed to the constant threat of landmines," she said.

"As has been shown time and time again," added Shamdasani, "there is no military solution to the conflict in Yemen."

****Featured Image:** Yemenis inspect the scene of aerial attacks said to be carried out by aircraft of the coalition led by Saudi Arabia on January 18, 2022 in Sana'a, Yemen. (Photo: Mohammed Hamoud/Getty Images) Cropped*

Andrea Germanos is a senior editor and staff writer at Common Dreams. She can be reached on twitter at @andreagermanos and by email: andrea@commondreams.org

U.S. Drastically Undercounted Civilian Deaths Due To Airstrike, Finds Investigation

by Countercurrents Collective, published on Countercurrents, December 20, 2021

Nice quick summary of what is in the report. We should all read it. [jb]

The U.S. military drastically undercounted civilian deaths caused by airstrikes in the Middle East since 2014, according to a New York Times investigation published Saturday.

The New York Times reviewed a hidden Pentagon archive comprised of the military's confidential assessments of over 1,300 reports of civilian casualties in airstrikes, and found, "since 2014, the American air war has been plagued by deeply flawed intelligence, rushed and imprecise targeting and the

deaths of thousands of civilians, many of them children. There was and a lack of accountability for wrongdoing.

While the official military count says 1,417 civilians have been killed in Iraq and Syria, the investigation found many more civilian deaths, citing multiple examples, though it did not provide an exact count.

The New York Times found examples of the U.S. forces not disclosing the mistaken killing of civilians during airstrikes. In 2017, a family of four in a car that were fleeing West Mosul, Iraq, and three other civilians were killed after the vehicle was mistaken as a car bomb.

Last month, The Times revealed that military leaders hid a 2019 airstrike in Syria where as many as 64 civilians were killed.

Earlier this year, a report compiled by an independent monitoring group found that the U.S. airstrikes have killed as many as 48,000 civilians since the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The New York Times report (What to Know About the Civilian Casualty Files, by Michael Levenson) said:

“In the years since American boots on the ground gave way to a war of airstrikes in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, the U.S. military has made a central promise: that precision bombs and drones would kill enemies while minimizing the risks to civilians.

“Recent investigations by The New York Times have undercut that promise. In September, The Times reported that a drone strike in Kabul, Afghanistan, which U.S. officials said had destroyed a vehicle laden with bombs, had instead killed 10 members of a family. Last month, The Times reported that dozens of civilians had been killed in a 2019 bombing in Syria that the military had hidden from public view.

“Now, a Times investigation has found that these were not outliers but rather the regular casualties of a transformed way of war gone wrong.”

It said:

“In addition to reviewing the military’s assessments of reports of civilian casualties – obtained through Freedom of Information requests and lawsuits against the Defense Department and U.S. Central Command – The Times visited nearly 100 casualty sites in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan and interviewed scores of surviving residents and current and former U.S. officials.”

Following are key takeaways from Part 1 of the investigation:

Civilian Deaths Have Been Drastically Undercounted

According to the military’s count, 1,417 civilians have died in airstrikes in the campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria; since 2018 in Afghanistan, U.S. air operations have killed at least 188 civilians. But The New York Times found that the civilian death toll was significantly higher. Discrepancies arose in case after case – none more stark than a 2016 bombing in the Syrian hamlet of Tokhar.

U.S. Special Operations forces hit what they believed were three ISIS “*staging areas*,” confident they were killing scores of ISIS fighters. A military investigation concluded that seven to 24 civilians “*intermixed with the fighters*” might have died. But, The Times found, the targeted buildings were houses where families had sought refuge. More than 120 civilians were killed.

In 1,311 Reports, One ‘Possible Violation’

The Pentagon has also failed to uphold pledges of transparency and accountability.

Until now, only a handful of the assessments have been made public. None included a finding of wrongdoing or disciplinary action. Only one cited a *“possible violation”* of the rules of engagement – a breach in the procedure for identifying a target. Fewer than a dozen condolence payments were made, even though injured survivors often required costly medical care. The records show little effort by the military to identify patterns of failure or lessons learned.

In many instances, the command that had approved a strike was responsible for examining it, often using incorrect or incomplete evidence. In only one case did investigators visit the site of a strike. In only two did they interview survivors or witnesses.

Taken together, the 5,400 pages of records point to an institutional acceptance of civilian casualties. In the logic of the military, a strike was justifiable as long as the expected risk to civilians had been properly weighed against the military gain, and it had been approved up the chain of command.

Over 50,000 Airstrikes, Most Not Planned in Advance

America’s new way of war took shape after the 2009 surge of U.S. forces into Afghanistan. By the end of 2014, President Barack Obama declared America’s ground war essentially done, shifting the military’s mission to mostly air support and advice for Afghan forces battling the Taliban. At roughly the same time, he authorized a campaign of airstrikes against ISIS targets and in support of allied forces in Iraq and Syria.

At an ever-quickenning pace over the next five years, and as the administration of Obama gave way to that of Donald Trump, U.S. forces executed more than 50,000 airstrikes in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

When the wars intensified, the authority to approve strikes was pushed further down the chain of command, even as an

overwhelming majority of strikes were carried out in the heat of war, and not planned far in advance.

Biases and Blind Spots Created Danger

The records suggest that civilian deaths were often the result of "*confirmation bias*," or the tendency to find and interpret information in a way that confirms preexisting beliefs. People rushing to a bombing site were assumed to be ISIS fighters, not civilian rescuers. Men on motorcycles, thought to be moving "*in formation*," displaying the "*signature*" of an imminent attack, were just men on motorcycles.

Cultural blind spots also left innocent civilians vulnerable to attack. The military judged, for example, that there was "*no civilian presence*" in a house where families were napping during the days of the Ramadan fast or sheltering from the heat or intense fighting.

Breakdowns In Technology And Surveillance

For all their promise of pinpoint accuracy, at times U.S. weapons simply missed. In 2016, the military reported that it had killed Neil Prakash, a notorious Australian ISIS recruiter, in a strike on a house in East Mosul. Four civilians died in the strike, according to the Pentagon. Months later, Prakash was arrested crossing from Syria into Turkey.

Poor or insufficient surveillance footage often contributed to deadly targeting failures. Afterward, it also hamstrung efforts to examine strikes. Of the 1,311 reports examined by The Times, the military had deemed 216 allegations "*credible*." Reports of civilian casualties were often dismissed because video showed no bodies in the rubble, yet the footage was often too brief to make a reliable determination.

Sometimes, only seconds' worth of footage was taken before a strike, hardly enough for investigators to assess civilians'

presence. In some other cases, there was no footage at all for review, which became the basis for rejecting the allegation. That was often because of *"equipment error,"* because no aircraft had *"observed or recorded the strike,"* or because the unit could not or would not find the footage or had not preserved it as required.

Failure To Account For Secondary Explosions

A target such as a weapons cache or power station came with the potential for secondary explosions, which often reached far beyond the expected blast radius. These accounted for nearly one-third of all civilian casualties acknowledged by the military and half of all civilian deaths and injuries at the sites visited by The Times.

A June 2015 strike on a car-bomb factory in Hawija, Iraq, is among the deadliest examples. In plans for the nighttime attack, the nearest *"collateral concern"* was assessed to be a *"shed."* But apartment buildings ringed the site, and dozens of displaced families, unable to afford rent, had also been squatting in abandoned buildings close by. According to the military investigation, as many as 70 civilians were killed that night.

In response to questions from The Times, Capt. Bill Urban, the spokesperson for the U.S. Central Command, said that *"even with the best technology in the world, mistakes do happen, whether based on incomplete information or misinterpretation of the information available. And we try to learn from those mistakes."* He added, *"We work diligently to avoid such harm. We investigate each credible instance. And we regret each loss of innocent life."*

Countercurrents Collective are a group of writers in India who support and manage the Countercurrents.org blog which has been doing a great job for more than a decade.

The drone defense dilemma: How unmanned aircraft are redrawing battle lines

by *Tom Kington*, published on *Defense News*, February 14, 2021

ROME – First there was the video from Libya of a Turkish drone destroying a Russian Pantsir missile defense system.

Next came the veteran S-300 air defense system – also Russian – being taken out in Nagorno-Karabakh by an Israeli-built Harop loitering munition.

In the conflicts in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh last year, unmanned platforms often made short work of the ground-based systems designed to neutralize them, paving the way for easy attacks on vulnerable troops.

What is more, experts say, is that the balance of power between drones and air defense systems is shaping up to be a key to global wars in the near future.

“Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh and also Syria have just showed us that if a fielded force cannot protect its airspace, then the large scale use of UAVs can make life extremely dangerous,”

said Justin Bronk, an air force research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in England.

Turkey’s Bayraktar TB2 armed drone grabbed the headlines during the Libya conflict last year, which saw Turkey deploy the platform to defend the U.N.-backed Tripoli government against strongman Khalifa Hifter, who relied on Russian

Pantsir systems.

Able to fire their Roketsan munitions from outside the range of the Russian systems, the TB2s scored hits, helping stop Hifter's advance.

"Turkey also sent in engineers who improved the software of the drones on the fly, while there was no similar learning curve with the Chinese UAVs operated by the UAE to assist Hifter,"

said Jalel Harchaoui at the Switzerland-based Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

"The bold and effective use of TB2s in Nagorno-Karabakh in October was made possible by the previous success in Libya," he added.

An enclave belonging to Azerbaijan but governed by breakaway ethnic Armenians, Nagorno-Karabakh has been a flashpoint between Azerbaijan and Armenia for years. It exploded in a brief and bloody war between September and November.

Turkey, which backed Azerbaijan, reportedly sent in UAV trainers ahead of the conflict. TB2s alongside Israeli loitering munitions were soon racking up successes, with Dutch warfare research group Oryx reporting 134 Armenian tanks destroyed compared to 22 lost by Azerbaijan.

"Turkey built up its UAV expertise after leasing Israeli UAVs, then put that expertise to use building its own after frustrations over the limits placed on its use of the Israeli systems," Bronk said. "The TB2 has a similar aerodynamic profile to the Heron, while the Turkish Anka UAV is similar to the Hermes 450."

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Manufacturer Bayraktar has sold the TB2 to Qatar and Ukraine, while Serbia is eyeing a purchase, raising the TB2's profile as a competitor to the Chinese Wing Loong II, 50 of which have been exported.

"China and Turkey are vying for sales, which begs the question: Why doesn't Russia have the equivalent of a TB2 to sell? I am very surprised they are almost absent in this market," Harchaoui said.

The drone's contribution to the hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh came with a price, as Canada suspended arms exports to Turkey amid claims the TB2 contained Canadian parts, while a U.K. firm supplying parts to the drone also canceled its contract.

A number of nations, including the U.K., are meanwhile beefing up their defenses for ground forces, said Bronk.

"In light of this threat, the British Army has recently ordered a short/medium-range [surface-to-air missile] system called Sky Sabre. If deployed forward in significant numbers, it should dramatically reduce the Army's vulnerability to both surveillance and attack by hostile UAVs in situations where friendly air cover is unavailable," he said.

Drones are not, however, invulnerable, he added.

"U.S. and British Reapers and Predators in Syria had lots of problems with Russian electronic warfare. Since the Reaper can be targeted, you can imagine that less sophisticated platforms can be more easily affected," he said.

Bronk expects that more militaries will spend more money on air defense to balance out the drone threat – "particularly countries which don't have strong air forces."

“One option is the Russian SA-17 system, which has a 75-kilometer range compared to the 10 kilometers of TB2 missiles, or the cheaper and more contained SA-15 with a 10-kilometer range. Western products include the [National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System] NASAMS, which already helps to defend Washington, D.C., with a roughly 15-kilometer range and the NASAMS 2 with a 30- to 40-kilometer range,” he said.

Peter Roberts, the director of military sciences at the Royal United Services Institute, said the world is waking up to the reality of modern warfare.

“For a while there was the romantic view that either drones or tanks or missiles would win wars on their own,” he said. “There is no silver bullet on the battlefield, and this is an era which is rediscovering that.”

Roberts added that urban warfare is also undergoing a revival, as is the art of deception in war.

“Whether it’s the Russians in Ukraine or the Iranians, the use of decoys is back – something we once knew about, then forgot in the 1990s.”

The world is also returning to an era of proxy wars, he said, from Libya to Nagorno-Karabakh to Yemen.

“That means wars fought on the edge of great powers using mercenaries and sponsored guerilla groups and insurgents,” he said. “It also means more sophisticated weapons in the hands of smaller, nonstate groups like the Houthis in Yemen using cruise and ballistic missiles and drones. It is potentially very nasty.”

***Featured Image:** An Israeli Heron-TP unmanned aircraft sits on

the tarmac during the April 2018 Berlin Air Show. (Sebastian Sprenger/Staff)

“Worse than a Crime”: Pentagon Inspector finds Kabul Drone Strike Killing 10 not a Violation of Law (!)

by Juan Cole, published on Informed Comment, November 6, 2021

Ann Arbor (Informed Comment) – Paul Handley of AFP reports that the US Air Force Inspector General, Lieutenant General Sami Said, found that a drone strike that mistakenly killed 10 civilian non-combatants, including 7 children, in Afghanistan on August 29 violated no laws, including the law of war.

When Napoleon had the royalist Duc d'Enghein assassinated in 1804, Talleyrand is said to have observed, *“It was worse than a crime, it was a mistake.”*

The same sentiment, whether originally expressed by Talleyrand or someone else, seems to apply here.

One of the reasons that the United States refuses to join the International Criminal Court at the Hague is that Washington does not want such assessments to be double-checked in an impartial tribunal.

aid worker while trying to target terrorists. They seem to have had some (bad) human intelligence, but I suspect that some of the mistakes were from relying too much on signals intelligence.

But if you started charging military personnel with criminal negligence for what they call “*collateral damage*,” you’d empty out the Pentagon and make war impossible. In many ways the entire Iraq War was criminal negligence on the part of the Bush administration.

The August 29 mistake cost the United States enormously in public opinion in the region. Even the mainstream Turkish paper Haberturk ran a column speaking of how cruel the Americans had been to dismember their own aid worker in this way, which also expressed skepticism that the US would take in very many Afghan refugees (what with us being such cruel people). This, according to BBC Monitoring.

The Iranian press maintained that the Pentagon would never even have admitted that the Kabul strike was an error if it had not been for a detailed *New York Times* investigation. They are deeply skeptical of US military intentions in the Middle East to begin with, but this strike made us look sinister and incompetent all at once.

Since the US government has started relying so much on drone strikes, as it has reduced its military footprint in the Greater Middle East, we need to know that the drones are hitting legitimate targets. If the drone operators can’t do better than this, we should cease using the things.

***Featured Image:** *Relatives and neighbors of the Ahmadi family gathered around the incinerated husk of a vehicle hit by a U.S. drone strike in Kabul, Afghanistan on August 30, 2021. (Photo: Marcus Yam/Los Angeles Times)*

Juan Cole is the founder and chief editor of *Informed Comment*. He is Richard P. Mitchell Professor of History at the University of Michigan. He is author of, among many other books, *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace amid the Clash of Empires* and *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Follow him on Twitter at @jricole or the Informed Comment Facebook Page

A Rogue Killer Drone ‘Hunted Down’ a Human Target Without Being Instructed To, UN Report Says

by **Joshua Zitser**, published on **Business Insider**, May 30, 2021

Editor's Note: In full disclosure, I think this is an interesting story, but I'm not sure I buy it as stated. For one thing, it isn't clear why the drone was armed and flying without a target. Also, it isn't clear whether the target was on the same side as the drone or was an opponent in the war. Even so, this is a problem with piloted drones as well. The intention of the pilot or whomever released the drone is often implemented in a way that is not reliable. I also think this kind of story distracts from the main story, which is that no drone, not even a remotely piloted one, can be safely armed. [jb]

A “lethal” weaponized drone “hunted down a human target” without being told to, likely for the first time, according to

a UN report seen by the New Scientist.

In the March 2020 incident, a Kargu-2 quadcopter autonomously attacked a person during a conflict between Libyan government forces and a breakaway military faction, led by the Libyan National Army's Khalifa Haftar, the Daily Star reported.

The Turkish-built Kargu-2, a deadly attack drone designed for asymmetric warfare and anti-terrorist operations, targeted one of Haftar's soldiers while he tried to retreat, according to the paper.

The drone, which can be directed to detonate on impact, was operating in a *“‘highly effective’ autonomous mode that required no human controller,”* the New York Post reported.

“The lethal autonomous weapons systems were programmed to attack targets without requiring data connectivity between the operator and the munition: in effect, a true ‘fire, forget and find’ capability,”

the report from the UN Security Council's panel of experts on Libya said.

This is likely the first time drones have attacked humans without instructions to do so, Zak Kallenborn, a national-security consultant who specializes in unmanned systems and drones, confirmed in the report.

Kallenborn has concerns about the future of autonomous drones. *“How brittle is the object recognition system?”* he said in the report. *“How often does it misidentify targets?”*

Jack Watling, a researcher on land warfare at the Royal United Services Institute, told the New Scientist that the incident demonstrates the *“urgent and important”* need to discuss the potential regulation of autonomous weapons.

Human Rights Watch has called for an end to so-called *“killer*

robots” and is campaigning for a “preemptive ban on the development, production, and use of fully autonomous weapons,” according to a report by the nonprofit.

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****Featured Image:*** *Stock photo of a drone flying. Getty Images*

Droning On: Assassins-in-Chief and Their Brood

by Tom Englehardt, published on TomDispatch, September 28, 2021

What a way to end a war! Apologies all around! We’re so damn sorry – or actually, maybe not!

I’m thinking, of course, about CENTCOM commander General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr.’s belated apology for the drone assassination of seven children as the last act, or perhaps final war crime, in this country’s 20-year-long Afghan nightmare.

Where to begin (or end, for that matter) when considering that never-ending conflict, which seems – for Americans, anyway – finally to be over? After all these years, don’t ask me.

Hey, one thing seems clear to me, though: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley undoubtedly didn't apologize for that last Hellfire missile attack – he, in fact, originally labeled it a “righteous strike” – or the endless civilian deaths caused by American air power, because he's had so many other things on his mind in these years. As a start, he was far too preoccupied calling his Beijing opposite, General Li Zuocheng, to warn him that the president of the United States, one Donald Trump, might have the urge to start a war with China before leaving office.

Actually, had Milley called me instead, I would have assured him that I believed The Donald then incapable of doing anything other than watching Fox News, going bonkers over the election, and possibly launching an attack (nuclear or otherwise) on Joe Biden and the Democrats, no less Congress – remember January 6th! – or even his own vice president, Mike Pence, for certifying the vote. Maybe, in fact, Milley should have skipped the Chinese entirely and called Republican Representatives Liz Cheney and Anthony Gonzalez to warn them that, sooner or later, the president might go nuclear on them.

Of course, in our increasingly mad, mad world, who really knows anymore?

I do know one thing, however, mostly because I wrote it so long ago and it stuck in my mind (even if in no one else's): ever since the presidency of George W. Bush, who reportedly kept “his own personal scorecard” in a White House desk drawer of drone-killed or to-be-killed “terrorists,” every American president has been an *assassin-in-chief*. No question about it, Joe Biden is, too. I don't know why the label never caught on. After all, assassination, once officially an illegal act for a president, is now, by definition, simply part of the job – and the end of the Afghan War will do nothing to stop that.

I first labeled our future presidents that way in 2012, after the *New York Times* reported that Barack Obama was attending

“Terror Tuesday” meetings at the White House where names were regularly being added to a “kill list” of people to be droned off this planet. The first such Obama assassination, as Jo Becker and Scott Shane wrote at the time, would, prophetically enough, kill “not only its intended target, but also two neighboring families, and [leave] behind a trail of cluster bombs that subsequently killed more innocents.” Sound faintly familiar so many years later when U.S. drones and other aircraft have reportedly knocked off at least 22,000 civilians across the Greater Middle East and Africa?

Killers on the Loose

OMG, apologies all around! There I go, in such an all-American fashion, droning on and on.

Still, it’s hard to stop, since it’s obvious that presidential drone assassinations will go on and on, too. Just think about the thrill of what, in the wake of Afghanistan, Joe Biden has started to call “over-the-horizon capabilities” (of the very sort that killed those seven kids in Kabul). In fact, it seems possible that this country’s forever wars of the last two decades will now morph into forever drone wars. That, in turn, means that our 20-year war of terror (which we always claimed was a war *on* terror) will undoubtedly continue into the unknown future. After all, in the last two decades, Washington’s done a remarkable job of preparing the way for such strikes, at least if you’re talking about ensuring that extreme Islamist terror groups would spread ever more widely across ever larger parts of this increasingly shambolic planet.

Here’s the thing, though: if, in 2021, you want to talk about assassins-in-chief who never feel the urge to apologize while putting so many in peril, you don’t have to head over the horizon at all. Take my word for it. You need look no further than former president Donald Trump or, at a state level, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Texas Governor Greg Abbott,

among others, or simply most Republican politicians these days. Once you refocus on them, you're no longer talking about drone-killing foreign terrorists (or foreign children), you're talking about the former president (or governor or senator or congressional representative or state legislator) assassinating American citizens. When it comes to being that kind of assassin, by promoting unmasking, super-spreader events (including unmasked school attendance), and opposition to vaccine mandates, among other things, you're speaking of the murder of innocents right here in the U.S. of A.

Do you even remember how President Trump, returning from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center after his own case of Covid-19 had been treated, stepped out onto a White House balcony to rip off his mask in front of every camera in town? With 690,000 Americans now dead from the pandemic (and possibly so many more), one thing is clear: the simplest of precautions would have radically cut those numbers.

And if you don't mind my droning on yet more about that crew of assassins (and you might throw in, among others, West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin who, in 2020, made \$491,949 from his stock holdings in the West Virginia coal brokerage firm he founded years ago), what about all the politicians who have promoted the heating of this planet to what could someday be the boiling point? After all, if you happen to be on the West Coast, where the fire season no longer seems to end and "heat domes" are a new reality, or in large parts of the country still experiencing a megadrought of the sort never seen before in U.S. history, you'd have to say that we're already living in the Pyrocene Age. And I'm not even referring to the recent U.N. report suggesting that, if things don't change quickly enough, the temperature of this planet might rise 2.7 degrees Celsius (4.86 degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of this century. That would, of course, produce an all-too-literal hell on Earth (and mind you, such scientific predictions about climate change have often proven underestimates).

The U.S. left Afghanistan in a scene so chaotic that it captured media attention for days, but don't for a moment imagine that such a sense of chaos was left behind at Kabul airport. After all, it's clear enough that we now live in a world and a country in increasing disarray.

Of the two great imperial powers of the last century, the USSR and the U.S., one is long gone and the other in growing disrepair, not just abroad but at home as well. This country seems to be heading, however slowly, for the exit (even as its president continues to proclaim that "America is back!"). And don't count on a "rising China" to solve this planet's problems either. It is, after all, by far the greatest greenhouse gas emitter of our moment and guaranteed to suffer its own version of chaos in the years to come.

Downhill All the Way?

I mean, I'm 77 years old (and feeling older all the time) and yet, in the worst sense possible, I'm living in a new world as a pandemic rages across America and climate change continues to show off its all-too-visibly grim wonders. Just go to the *New York Times* website any day of the week and look at its global map of Covid-19 "hotspots." What you'll find is that the country our leaders have long loved to hail as the most extraordinary, indispensable, and powerful on the planet is now eternally an extreme pandemic "hot spot." How extraordinary when you consider its wealth, its access to vaccines and masks, and its theoretical ability to organize itself! But give some credit where it's due. America's assassins have been remarkably hard at work not just in Afghanistan or Iraq or Somalia, but right here at home.

In those distant lands, we eternally used Hellfire missiles to kill women and children. But when you fight such wars forever and a day abroad, it turns out that their spirit comes home in a hellfire-ish sort of way. And indeed, those forever wars certainly did come home with Donald Trump, whose accession to

the White House would have been unimaginable without them. The result: the U.S. is not only an eternal global hotspot for Covid-19 (more than 2,000 deaths a day recently), but increasingly a madhouse of assassins of every sort, including Republican politicians determined to take out the American democratic system as we knew it, voting law by voting law, state by Republican-controlled state. And that madness, while connected to Trump, QAnon, the anti-vaxxers, and the like, is also deeply connected to how this country decided to respond to the tragedy of 9/11 – by launching those wars that America's generals and the military-industrial complex fought so disastrously but oh-so-profitably all these years.

By now, this country is almost unimaginable without its drone assassins and the conflicts that have gone with them, especially the one that began it all in Afghanistan. In the wake of that war (though don't hold your breath for the next time an American drone takes after some terrorist there and once again kills a bunch of innocents), the Biden administration has moved on to far more peaceful activities. I'm thinking, for instance, of the way it's guaranteed the Australians nuclear submarines and the U.S. military, with a mere 750 military bases around the planet, will, in return, get a couple of more such bases in that distant land.

Hey, the French were pissed (for all the wrong reasons) and even withdrew their ambassador from Washington, feeling that Joe Biden and crew had no right to screw up their own arms deals with Australia. The Chinese were disturbed for most of the right reasons (and undoubtedly a few wrong ones as well), as they thought about yet another set of undetectable nuclear subs in the waters off the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait.

So it goes, as officials in Washington seem incapable of not having war of one sort or another, hot or cold, on the brain. And keep in mind that I haven't even begun to describe our deathly new reality, not in a country where the Delta strain

of Covid-19 has run wild, especially in states headed by gubernatorial assassins. Meanwhile, too much of the rest of the world remains an unvaccinated hothouse for potentially new strains of a pandemic that may be with us, if you don't mind such a mixed metaphor, until hell freezes over.

But you know all this! You've long sensed it. You're living it! Who isn't?

Still, since I'm at it, let me just quote myself (the very definition of droning on) from that article I wrote a decade ago on the president as assassin-in-chief:

"But – though it's increasingly heretical to say this – the perils facing Americans, including relatively modest dangers from terrorism, aren't the worst things on our planet. Electing an assassin-in-chief, no matter who you vote for, is worse. Pretending that the Church of St. Drone offers any kind of reasonable or even practical solutions on this planet of ours, is worse yet. And even worse, once such a process begins, it's bound to be downhill all the way."

In 2012, the phrase "over the horizon" hadn't yet become presidential, but "downhill all the way" seems like a reasonable enough substitute. And how sad it is, since other, better futures are genuinely imaginable. Just mask up and give it some thought.

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Tom Engelhardt created and runs the website *TomDispatch.com*. He is also a co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of a highly praised history of American triumphalism in the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. A fellow of the Type Media Center, his sixth and latest book is *A Nation Unmade by War*.

The Names You Will Never Know

by **Nick Turse**, published on **Counterpunch**, September 26, 2021

...and the ones you will know because you will see them below. I have decided to make this piece a memorial to the members of the Ahmadi family murdered by a U.S. Drone strike as U.S. troops left Afghanistan in disgrace. You will find their pictures throughout this post. [jb]



Ahmadi Family from NY Times Video

As a parting shot, on its way out of Afghanistan, the United States military launched a drone attack that the Pentagon called a “*righteous strike*.” The final missile fired during 20 years of occupation, that August 29th airstrike averted an Islamic State car-bomb attack on the last American troops at Kabul’s airport. At least, that’s what the Pentagon told the world.

Within two weeks, a *New York Times* investigation would dismantle that official narrative. Seven days later, even the Pentagon admitted it. Instead of killing an ISIS suicide

bomber, the United States had slaughtered 10 civilians: Zemari Ahmadi, a longtime worker for a U.S. aid group; three of his children, Zamir, 20, Faisal, 16, and Farzad, 10; Ahmadi's cousin Naser, 30; three children of Ahmadi's brother Romal, Arwin, 7, Benyamin, 6, and Hayat, 2; and two 3-year-old girls, Malika and Somaya.



Zemari Ahmadi, U.S. employed aid worker in Kabul who was murdered with many family members by a U.S. drone strike as the U.S.,. exited the country.

The names of the dead from the Kabul strike are as important as they are rare. So many civilians have been obliterated, incinerated, or – as in the August 29th attack – “*shredded*” in America's forever wars. Who in the United States remembers them? Who here ever knew of them in the first place? Twenty years after 9/11, with the Afghan War declared over, combat in Iraq set to conclude, and President Joe Biden announcing the end of “*an era of major military operations to remake other countries,*” who will give their deaths another thought?

Americans have been killing civilians since before there was a United States. At home and abroad, civilians – Pequots,

African Americans, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Filipinos, Haitians, Japanese, Germans, Koreans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Afghans, Iraqis, Syrians, Yemenis, and Somalis, among others – have been shot, burned, and bombed to death. The slaughter at Sand Creek, the Bud Dajomassacre, the firebombing of Dresden, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the My Lai massacre – the United States has done what it can to sweep it all under the rugthrough denial, cover-ups, and the most effective means of all: forgetting.

There's little hope of Americans ever truly coming to terms with the Pequot or Haitian or Vietnamese blood on their hands. But before the forever wars slip from the news and the dead slide into the memory hole that holds several centuries worth of corpses, it's worth spending a few minutes thinking about Zemari Ahmadi, Benyamin, Hayat, Malika, Somaya, and all the civilians who were going about their lives until the U.S. military ended them.

Names Remembered and Names Forgotten

Over the last 20 years, the United States has conducted more than 93,300 air strikes – in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen – that killed between 22,679 and 48,308 civilians, according to figures recently released by Airwars, a U.K.-based airstrike monitoring group. The total number of civilians who have died from direct violence in America's wars since 9/11 tops out at 364,000 to 387,000, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project.

Who were those nearly 400,000 people?

There's Malana. In 2019, at age 25, she had just given birth to a son, when her health began to deteriorate. Her relatives were driving her to a clinic in Afghanistan's Khost Province when their vehicle was attacked by a U.S. drone, killing Malana and four others.

And Gul Mudin. He was wounded by a grenade and shot with a

rifle, one of at least three civilians murdered by a U.S. Army “kill team” in Kandahar Province in 2010.

Then there was Gulalai, one of seven people, including three women – two of them pregnant – who were shot and killed in a February 12, 2010, raid by Special Operations forces in Afghanistan’s Paktia Province.

And the four members of the Razzo family – Mayada, Tuqa, Mohannad, and Najib– killed in a September 20, 2015, airstrike in Mosul, Iraq.

And there were the eight men, three women, and four children – Abdul Rashid as well as Abdul Rahman, Asadullah, Hayatullah, Mohamadullah, Osman, Tahira, Nadia, Khatima, Jundullah, Soheil, Amir, and two men, ages 25 and 36 respectively, named Abdul Waheed – who were killed in a September 7, 2013, drone strike on Rashid’s red Toyota pickup in Afghanistan.

Then there were 22-year-old Lul Dahir Mohamed and her four-year-old daughter, Mariam Shilo Muse, who were killed in an April 1, 2018, airstrike in Somalia.

And between 2013 and 2020, in seven separate U.S. attacks in Yemen – six drone strikes and one raid – 36 members of the al Ameri and al Taisy families were slaughtered.



Zamir Ahmadi, age 20,
Zemari's eldest son.

Those names we know. Or knew, if only barely and fleetingly. Then there are the countless anonymous victims like the three civilians in a blue Kia van killed by Marines in Iraq in 2003. *"Two bodies were slumped over in the front seats; they were men in street clothes and had no weapons that I could see. In the back seat, a woman in a black chador had fallen to the floor; she was dead, too,"* wrote Peter Maass in the *New York Times Magazine* in 2003. Years later, at the *Intercept*, he painted an even more vivid picture of the *"blue van, with its tires shot out and its windows shattered by bullets, its interior stained with blood and smelling of death, with flies feasting on already-rotting flesh."*

Those three civilians in Iraq were all too typical of the many anonymous dead of this country's forever wars – the man shot for carrying a flashlight in an *"offensive"* manner; the children killed by an *"errant"* rocket; the man slain by *"warning shots"*; the three women and one man *"machine-gunned"* to death; and the men, women and children reduced to *"charred meat"* in an American bombing.

Who were the 11 Afghans – four of them children – who died in a 2004 helicopter attack, or the *"dozen or more"* civilians

killed in 2010 during a nighttime raid by U.S. troops in that same country? And what about those 30 pine-nut farm workers slaughtered a year later by a drone strike there? And what were the names of Mohanned Tadfi's mother, brother, sister-in-law, and seven nieces and nephews killed in the U.S. bombing that flattened the city of Raqqa, Syria, in 2017?



Faisal Ahmadi, age 16

Often, the U.S. military had no idea whom they were killing. This country frequently carried out *"signature strikes"* that executed unknown people due to suspicious behavior. So often, Americans killed such individuals for little or no reason – like holding a weapon in places where, as in this country, firearms were ubiquitous – and then counted them as enemy dead. An investigation by *Connecting Vets* found that during a 2019 air campaign in Afghanistan's Helmand province, for example, the threshold for an attack *"could be met by as little as a person using or even touching a radio"* or if an Afghan carrying *"commercially bought two-way radios stepped into a home, the entire building would sometimes be leveled by a drone strike."*

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Farzad Ahmadi, age 10

Even if targeting was ordinarily more accurate than during Operation Haymaker, U.S. policy has consistently adhered to the dictum that *"military-age males"* killed in airstrikes should automatically be classified as combatants unless proven innocent. In addition to killing people for spurious reasons, the U.S. also opted for allies who would prove at least as bad as, if not worse than, those they were fighting. For two decades, such American-taxpayer-funded warlords and militiamen murdered, raped, or shook-down the very people this country was supposedly protecting. And, of course, no one knows the names of all those killed by such allies who were being advised, trained, armed, and funded by the United States.

Who, for instance, were the two men tied to the rear fender of a Toyota pickup truck in southeastern Afghanistan in 2012 by members of an Afghan militia backed by U.S. Special Operations forces? They were, wrote reporter Anand Gopal, dragged *"along six miles of rock-studded road"* until they were dead. Then their *"bodies were left decomposing for days, a warning to anyone who thought of disobeying Azizullah,"* the U.S.-allied local commander.

Or what about the 12 boys gunned down by CIA-backed militiamen at a madrassa in the Afghan village of Omar Khail? Or the six boys similarly slain at a school in nearby Dadow Khail? Or any

of the dead from 10 raids in 2018 and 2019 by that same militia, which summarily executed at least 51 civilians, including boys as young as eight years old, few of whom, wrote reporter Andrew Quilty, appeared *“to have had any formal relationship with the Taliban”*?

How many reporters’ notebooks are filled with the unpublished names of just such victims? Or counts of those killed? Or the stories of their deaths? And how many of those who were murdered never received even a mention in an article anywhere?

Last year, I wrote 4,500 words for the *New York Times Magazine* about the deteriorating situation in Burkina Faso. As I noted then, that nation was one of the largest recipients of American security aid in West Africa, even though the State Department admitted that U.S.-backed forces were implicated in a litany of human-rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings.



Benjamin, age 6 and
Arwin., age 7

What never made it into the piece was any mention of three men who were executed in two separate attacks. On May 22, 2019, uniformed Burkinabe troops arrived in the village of Konga and took two brothers, aged 38 and 25, away in the middle of the

night. The next day, a relative found them on the side of the road, bound and executed. Most of the family fled the area. *"The Army came back a week later,"* a relative told me. *"My uncle was the only one in our family who stayed. He was shot in broad daylight."* Such deaths are ubiquitous but aren't even factored into the 360,000-plus civilian deaths counted by the *Costs of War* project, which offers no estimate for those killed in America's "smaller war zones."

**Bu
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We live in a world filled with monuments celebrating lives and deaths, trailblazers and memorable events, heroes and villains. They run the gamut from civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., and Women's Rights Pioneers to the chieftains of the American Confederacy and Belgium's King Leopold.

In the United States, there's no shortage of memorials and monuments commemorating America's wars and fallen soldiers. One of the most poignant lists the names of the American military dead of the Vietnam War. Initially derided by hawkish veterans and conservatives as a *"black gash of shame"* and a *"nihilistic slab,"* it's now one of the most celebrated monuments in Washington, D.C. More than 58,000 men and women are represented on the visually arresting black granite walls of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Vietnam itself has no shortage of monuments of its own. Many are Soviet-style memorials to those who died defeating the United States and reuniting their country. Others are seldom-

seen, tiny memorials to massacres perpetrated by the Americans and their allies. No one knows how many similar cenotaphs exist in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and other forever-war countries, but in 2017, journalist Emran Feroz found just such a memorial in Afghanistan's Wardak Province – a remembrance of five civilians slain in drone strikes during 2013 and 2014.



Hayat, age 2, Somaya, age 3,
Malika, age 3

There have been other attempts to memorialize the civilian dead of the forever wars from art installations to innovative visual protests to virtual commemorations. In 2018, after then-President Trump signed a bill approving the construction of a Global War on Terrorism Memorial, Peter Maass proposed, even if only half-seriously, that the bullet-riddled blue Kia van he saw in Iraq should be placed on a pedestal on the National Mall. *"If we start building monuments that focus our attention on the pitiless killing of civilians in our wars,"* he wrote, *"maybe we would have fewer wars to fight and less reason to build these monuments."*

A blue Kia on the National Mall would be a good starting point. But if we're ever to grasp the meaning of the post-9/11 wars and all the conflicts that set the stage for them, however, we may need a wall as well – one that starts at the Kia and heads west. It would, of course, be immense. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial spans a total of 400 feet. The

celebrated Vietnam War photographer Philip Jones Griffiths observed that a wall for the Vietnamese dead, counting combatants, of the American War would be nine miles long.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is arrayed in a unique chronological format, but the Civilian Deaths Memorial could begin with anyone. The last civilians killed by the United States as part of its 2001 to 2021 Afghan War – Zemari Ahmadi, Zamir, Faisal, Farzad, Naser, Arwin, Benyamin, Hayat, Malika, and Somaya – could lead it off. Then maybe Abdul Rashid and the 14 passengers from his red pick-up truck. Then Malana, Gul Mudin, Gul Rahim, Gulalai, Mayada, Tuqa, Mohannad, Najib, Lul Dahir Mohamed, and Mariam Shilo Muse. Then maybe Ngo Thi Sau, Cao Muoi, Cao Thi Thong, Tran Cong Chau Em, Nguyen Thi Nhi, Cao Thi Tu, Le Thi Chuyen, Dang Thi Doi, Ngo Thi Chiec, Tran Thi Song, Nguyen Thi Mot, Nguyen Thi Hai, Nguyen Thi Ba, Nguyen Thi Bon, Ho Thi Tho, Vo Thi Hoan, Pham Thi Sau, Dinh Van Xuan, Dinh Van Ba, Tran Cong Viet, Nguyen Thi Nham, Ngo Quang Duong, Duong Thi Hien, Pham Thi Kha, Huynh Van Binh, Huynh Thi Bay, Huynh Thi Ty, Le Van Van, Le Thi Trinh, Le Thi Duong, and Le Vo Danh and her unborn child, all slaughtered in the tiny South Vietnamese village of Phi Phu by U.S. troops (without any of the attention accorded to the My Lai massacre). They could be followed by the names of, or placeholders for, the remaining two million Vietnamese civilian dead and by countless Cambodians, Laotians, Afghans, Iraqis, Somalis, and Yemenis.



Naser Ahmadi, aged 30, cousin of Zemari Ahmadi had hoped to be resettled as a refugee in the U.S.

The Civilian Wall could be built in a zig-zag fashion across the country with the land in its way – homes and businesses, parks and roadways – seized by eminent domain, making Americans care about civilian deaths in ways that news articles never could. When you lose your home to a slab of granite that reads “Pequot adult, Pequot adult, Pequot child...” 500 times, you may actually take notice. When you hear about renewed attacks in Iraq or drone strikes in Somalia or a Navy SEAL raid gone awry in Yemen and worry that the path of the wall might soon turn toward your town, you’re likely to pay far more attention to America’s conflicts abroad.

Obviously, a westward-traveling wall memorializing civilian carnage is a non-starter in this country, but the next time you hear some fleeting murmur about a family wiped out by a drone strike or read a passing news story about killings by a U.S.-backed militia, think about that imaginary wall and how, in a just world, it might be headed in your direction. In the meantime, perhaps the best we can hope for is Maass’s proposal for that blue Kia on the Mall. Perhaps it could be accompanied by the inscription found on a granite slab at the Heidefriedhof, a cemetery in Dresden, Germany, the site of a

mass grave for civilians killed in a 1945 U.S. and British fire-bombing. It begins: *"How many died? Who knows the number?"*

***Featured Image:** *Americans join Pakistani people to protest drone warfare in the streets of Islamabad, 2012*

Nick Turse is the associate editor of TomDispatch.com and the winner of a 2009 Ridenhour Prize for Reportorial Distinction as well as a James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism. His work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, the Nation, In These Times, and regularly at TomDispatch. Turse is currently a fellow at New York University's Center for the United States and the Cold War. A paperback edition of his book *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (Metropolitan Books) was published earlier this year. His website is NickTurse.com.

This column was distributed by TomDispatch.

Demand for 'Moratorium on Drone Warfare' Follows Latest US Killing of Afghan Civilians

by Jake Johnson, published on Common Dreams, August 30, 2021

The largest Muslim civil rights organization in the United States demanded Monday that the Biden administration immediately put in place a *"moratorium on drone warfare"* after

the U.S. killed at least 10 Afghan civilians—including half a dozen children—with an airstrike in Kabul over the weekend.

“Enough is enough,” Edward Ahmed Mitchell, national deputy director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), said in a statement.

“For more than ten years, our government’s drone strikes have killed thousands of innocent people in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and elsewhere in the Muslim world—destroying family homes, wedding parties, and even funeral processions. The civilian casualties in Kabul are simply the latest victims of this misused technology.”

Mitchell said the Biden administration should impose a temporary moratorium on the U.S. drone program—which is largely shrouded in secrecy—*“until the government establishes strict oversight rules that would prevent these tragedies by severely limiting and transparently accounting for our military’s use of drone warfare.”*

According to press reports and accounts from relatives and witnesses, the 10 people reportedly killed by the U.S. airstrike in Kabul on Sunday were all members of a single extended family—and at least three of the child victims were girls just two years old or younger.

“This is the latest in 20 years of innocent lives taken and children orphaned in Afghanistan and covert drone warfare around the world,”

Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) said Monday.

“Impunity for these attacks continues to create a never-

ending cycle of violence and retribution. Where should these victims go to seek justice?"

The Biden administration has yet to take responsibility for killing the civilians with its drone strike, which purportedly targeted an explosive-laden vehicle that the U.S. military claims ISIS-K was planning to use in another attack on Kabul's international airport.

"The U.S. went into Afghanistan seeking revenge and bombing civilians,"

Medea Benjamin, co-founder of the anti-war group CodePink, tweeted Monday.

"Twenty years later, the U.S. is leaving Afghanistan seeking revenge and bombing civilians."

Maj. Gen. Hank Taylor, deputy director of the U.S. Joint Staff for Regional Operations, said during a press briefing on Monday that the Pentagon is "aware" of reports of civilian deaths in Kabul and that an investigation is underway.

In a statement, Amnesty International USA executive director Paul O'Brien said that the Biden administration "has a responsibility to the families of those killed to name the dead, acknowledge its actions, investigate, and provide reparations."

The Pentagon is notorious for dramatically undercounting the number of civilians killed in U.S. military operations overseas. And when the U.S. government does admit to killing civilians, it often refuses to provide any compensation to the victims' families.

"The United States has been killing civilians in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and Somalia for years, under the guise of

the so-called 'war on terror,' with impunity,"

said O'Brien.

"For two decades, the United States has carried out strikes with no accountability to the public for how many civilians were killed."

The latest airstrike in Kabul, O'Brien argued, could be

"a glimpse into the future U.S. involvement in Afghanistan if the Biden administration pushes ahead with an 'over the horizon' counter-terrorism program that does not prioritize civilian protection."

Earlier this year, the Biden administration quietly implemented temporary restrictions on drone strikes outside of "conventional battlefield zones" such as Afghanistan. But such limits did not stop U.S. military's Africa Command (AFRICOM) from launching a lethal drone strike in Somalia in July, the first attack on that country of Joe Biden's presidency.

As the withdrawal of U.S. troops continues apace ahead of the August 31 exit deadline, it appears that Biden is prepared to keep carrying out drone strikes in Afghanistan in the future. In a statement Friday after the U.S. launched a drone strike targeting two "planners and facilitators" of the deadly attack on Kabul's airport, Biden declared, "This strike was not the last."

***Featured Image:** *Relatives and neighbors of the Ahmadi family gathered around the incinerated husk of a vehicle hit by a U.S. drone strike in Kabul, Afghanistan on August 30, 2021. (Photo: Marcus Yam/Los Angeles Times)*

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Biden Acknowledges ‘Over the Horizon’ Air Attacks Planned Against Taliban

by Nick Mottern, published on Common Dreams, July 5, 2021

On July 2, fleeing questions from reporters about U.S. plans in Afghanistan, President Joe Biden sought refuge behind the July 4th Independence Day holiday, yet obliquely acknowledged that the U.S. will use some level of “over the horizon” air attacks to prevent the Taliban from taking power, attacks that will include drones and manned aircraft, possibly even B-52s.

Here is a portion of President Biden’s remarkable exchange with the press, which occurred at the close of his comments on the June, 2021 jobs report:

Q Are you worried that the Afghan government might fall? I mean, we are hearing about how the Taliban is taking more and more districts.

-THE PRESIDENT: Look, we were in that war for 20 years. Twenty years. And I think – I met with the Afghan government here in the White House, in the Oval. I think they have the capacity to be able to sustain the government. There are going to have to be, down the road, more negotiations, I suspect. But I am – I am concerned that they deal with the internal issues that they have to be able to generate the kind of support they need nationwide to maintain the government.

Q A follow on that thought on Afghanistan

-THE PRESIDENT: *I want to talk about happy things, man.*

Q *If there is evidence that Kabul is threatened, which some of the intelligence reports have suggested it could be in six months or thereabout, do you think you've got the capability to help provide any kind of air support, military support to them to keep the capital safe, even if the U.S. troops are obviously fully out by that time?*

-THE PRESIDENT: *We have worked out an over-the-horizon capacity that we can be value added, but the Afghans are going to have to be able to do it themselves with the Air Force they have, which we're helping them maintain.*

Q *Sir, on Afghanistan*

-THE PRESIDENT: *I'm not going to answer any more quick question on Afghanistan.*

Q *Are you concerned*

-THE PRESIDENT: *Look, it's Fourth of July.*

When the president refers to "over-the-horizon capacity that we can be value added" he is referring to a plan, that appears might cost \$10 billion, to fly drones and manned attack aircraft from bases as far away as Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait to assist the current Afghan central government in defending itself against the Taliban.

His statement is the first acknowledgement that the "over-the-horizon" air operations, that reportedly may rely very heavily on drone assassination and drone targeting for manned aircraft, will be directed at the Taliban. In Congressional testimony in June, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that "over-the-horizon" operations would focus on "elements that can possibly conduct attacks against our homeland", suggesting Al Qaeda and ISIS as targets but not foreclosing attacks against the Taliban.

The president's remarks about *"over the horizon"* as *"value added"* flowing into *"but the Afghans are going to have to be able to do it themselves with the Air Force they have"* is reminiscent of former President Richard Nixon's attempt to argue that the puppet government of Viet Nam was developing the power to defend itself, attempting to cover U.S. tracks out of the horribly disastrous U.S. colonization project in Viet Nam.

"Our air strikes have been essential in protecting our own remaining forces and in assisting the South Vietnamese in their efforts to protect their homes and their country from a Communist takeover,"

Nixon said in a 1972 speech to the nation.

The apparent U.S. decision to continue to assist the Afghan central government from the air comes in company with a *New York Times* report saying that President Biden has placed *"temporary limits on counterterrorism drone strikes and commando raids outside conventional battlefield zones like Afghanistan and Syria, and it has begun a broad review of whether to tighten Trump-era rules for such operations, according to officials."*

A similar report in *Foreign Affairs* says that there has been an apparent reduction in U.S. drone attacks, and details elements of a *"bigger rethink"* process that the Biden administration is said to be going through to limit civilian deaths and reevaluate how the U.S. should respond to *"the overseas terrorist threat."* A goal of the administration, the report says, is to end the U.S. *"forever"* wars.

It must also be said, however, that these reports indicate that President Biden fully intends to continue the U.S. drone assassination/pre-emptive killing policy of Bush, Obama and Trump, possibly with more care for civilian casualties but in defiance of international principles of war, as outlined on

BanKillerDrones.org, that would rule out the use of weaponized drones and military drone surveillance altogether whether inside or outside a recognized combat zone.

It appears that the reformist talk from Biden officials, much of it unattributed and therefore having no accountability, is intended to divert and placate those of us citizens who are revulsed by continuing drone atrocities, such as those leading 113 peace, justice and humanitarian organizations who signed a letter demanding *"an end to the unlawful program of lethal strikes outside any recognized battlefield, including through the use of drones."* Apart from the view, noted above, that drone attacks and surveillance are illegal anywhere, we have the question of the U.S. having turned the entire world into a potential *"recognized battlefield"* .

Even though U.S. ground forces have largely left Afghanistan, it is clear that the Biden administration considers Afghanistan a legitimate battlefield for U.S. air forces.

In President Biden's *"value added"* remark, one can see a clear message: regardless of talk of a more humanitarian policy of drone killing and ending *"forever"* wars, the president has decided that prolonged civil war in Afghanistan is in the interest of the U.S. Possibly this is because continued turmoil in Afghanistan will be unsettling and preoccupying to her neighbors, Iran, Pakistan, Russia and China. Possibly it is because a civil war will make it easier for corporations and banks to exploit Afghanistan's mineral, fossil fuel and opium wealth.

Certainly, continued U.S. air assaults in Afghanistan will generate money for U.S. military contractors.

With continuing U.S. air and commando attacks, Afghanistan can turn into a Libya, a divided, stalemated, suffering, bleeding country, where Turkey, Russia and China test their weapons and seek advantage.

Indeed, the U.S. is negotiating with Turkey, over the objection of the Taliban, to maintain “security” at the Kabul International Airport. Undoubtedly, the Turkish political/military/ corporate elite, who have their own expansionary ambitions, will use its drones, among them the semi-autonomous Kargu 2, to try to hold the airport and surrounding territory.

The Black Alliance for Peace released a statement on June 25, opposing “any effort to prolong the U.S. war on the Afghan people, including efforts to keep the United States engaged in any form in Afghanistan.” The statement expressed concern for “the continued operation of U.S. special forces and mercenaries (or contractors) in Afghanistan, as well as U.S.-pledged support for Turkish military defense of Kabul International Airport, a site that has continued to be a major U.S. military stronghold to support its imperial presence.”

President Biden would do well to heed this statement, along with a petition to him, circulated by BanKillerDrones.org, urging no further U.S. air attacks against the Afghan people.

Now that Independence Day has passed, perhaps the president will be more willing to answer questions about the real goals of “over the horizon.”

***Featured Image:** U.S. Army 3rd Infantry Task Force 3-7 soldiers ride atop an armored vehicle during a training exercise near the Iraqi border March 13, 2003 in northern Kuwait. U.S and British forces within the region continue to poise for a possible strike on Iraq. (Photo: Scott Nelson/Getty Images)

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