

Up to 48,000 Civilians Killed by US Drone and Airstrikes During “War on Terror”

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At least 22,000 civilians, and as many as 48,000, have been killed by U.S. drone and airstrikes since the so-called “*War on Terror*” began in 2001 following the 9/11 terrorist attacks that killed nearly 3,000 Americans. The U.S. military admits to almost 100,000 strikes since 2001, meaning that up to half of the drone and airstrikes conducted could have resulted in a civilian being killed according to the data collated by the monitoring group Airwars.

Although it was Republican President George W. Bush who led the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, it was actually under his successor, Democrat Barack Obama, that the U.S. military rapidly increased the use of drone and airstrikes. Obama embraced the U.S. drone programme, resulting in more strikes in his first year as president than Bush during his entire presidency. Obama’s drone strikes did not only target Iraq and Afghanistan, but also Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and other terrorist hotspots.

Before and after entering the White House, former President Donald Trump was a vocal critic of endless U.S. wars in the Middle East, effectively the policies of Bush and Obama. Although Trump inherited what the media dubbed as the “*Drone War*,” it was actually under his presidency that accountability was ditched as he imposed a new ruling that it was no longer required for the head of the CIA to release annual summaries of U.S. drone strikes and assess how many people died as a result.

In fact, drone strikes actually increased under Trump. Obama blew Bush's record for drone strikes, but Trump easily outdid his predecessor. As reported by the BBC, according to UK-based think-tank Bureau of Investigative Journalism, there were 2,243 drone strikes in the first two years of the Trump presidency. This is compared with the 1,878 in Obama's eight years in office. Effectively, this demonstrates that drone strikes have been favored by Washington, increasing with every new president – whether Republican or Democrat.

However, of the 91,340 strikes carried out by the U.S. since 2001, only a small proportion were from drones, with the majority coming from more deadlier fighter jets. Airwars calculated that *“US actions likely killed at least 22,679 civilians, with that number potentially as high as 48,308”*.

Since the so-called War on Terror began, the deadliest year for civilian victims of U.S. airstrikes was 2003, the year the U.S. invaded Iraq and deposed long-time ruler Saddam Hussein. In that year, 5,529 civilians were killed by U.S. airstrikes. The next deadliest year for civilians was in 2017, the peak of the U.S.-led Coalition bombing campaign against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq – 4,931 civilians were killed.

It is noteworthy that U.S. airstrikes against the Islamic State were insignificant until Russia's intervention in Syria began in September 2015. The only exception to the U.S. seriously trying to target the Islamic State before the Russian intervention was during the Siege of Kobane.

The U.S. began to significantly increase its airstrikes against the terrorist organization after being exposed for being ineffective as it took only a matter of weeks for Russia to destroy the Islamic State's oil trade with Turkey by targeting convoys and oil facilities. However, the increase in airstrikes after being embarrassed by Russia only led to the next deadliest year for civilians facing U.S. airstrikes. In 2017, up to 19,623 civilians were killed by the U.S.-led

coalition bombing campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

What is most disturbing though is that the Pentagon itself does not know how many civilians have been killed since their so-called War on Terror began. An email reply to Airwars from the Pentagon's Central Command (Centcom) said: "*The information you request is not immediately on hand in our office as it spans between multiple operations/campaigns within a span of between 18 and 20 years.*" There is little doubt that the near 100,000 airstrikes conducted by the U.S. since 2001 has brought tragedy across the world, with as many as 48,308 civilians killed and untold damages to infrastructure.

Current U.S. President Joe Biden promised to end the "*forever wars,*" and this is seen with the rapid withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Biden has also reduced the U.S.' reliance on airstrikes whilst a review of drone policy is underway. However, despite these withdrawals and reviews, tens of thousands of dead innocent civilians cannot be brought back after two decades of indiscriminate American strikes.

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