US military admits civilian deaths in Mideast air war

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US airstrikes against targets in Iraq and Syria likely led to civilian deaths, US military officials with Central Command (CENTCOM) acknowledged Wednesday.

An internal investigation by CENTCOM into 18 cases of possible civilian deaths has already "dismissed" claims about civilian casualties resulting from 13 of the 18 strikes, yet five cases remain under investigation, according to the military. In an email to the *New York Times* from CENTCOM, a spokeswoman cited two cases specifically where civilian casualties "may have" occurred.

US warplanes have bombed 3,222 targets inside Iraq and Syria, according to an official Pentagon announcement Wednesday. "I'm confident that the destruction level is high," said Pentagon spokesman Army Colonel Steve Warren.

The official admissions cast further doubt on previous claims made by General James Terry, a top US commander in the new war, that the US raids did not produce any civilian casualties. "We have some great capability in terms of precision… I am tracking no civilian casualties," Terry claimed in mid-December.

The claims of the US military had already been challenged in October of last year when the Syrian Organization for Human Rights found that US airstrikes had killed at least 32 civilians.

The US air campaign, which is supported by a coalition of governments including Great Britain, France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Australia and Canada as well as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, UAE and Bahrain, began in August, and was expanded to target forces inside Syria in September.

In statements Tuesday, US Admiral John Kirby defended the dismissal of 13 possible cases of civilian casualties in US airstrikes without giving any concrete explanation.

Also Tuesday, Admiral Kirby announced that the US would begin new efforts to train fighting groups for the war against the Assad regime in Syria. The training will apparently be conducted from sites inside Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. US Special Forces General Michael Nagata is currently combing through existing Syrian rebel units in an effort to recruit fighters to the new training programs, according to the *Times*.

The Obama administration claims that the bombing campaign is intended to weaken and destroy the militant group Islamic State, which has taken control over portions of Iraq and Syria. Through this intervention, the US ruling elite is seeking to reassert its domination over Iraqi politics while preparing new efforts to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria.

Is it really possible that the US military could avoid causing civilian casualties while launching more than 3,200 strikes that, according to the Pentagon's own statistics, destroyed at least 980 buildings? When it comes to assessing the number of civilian deaths produced by the American war machine, it would be foolish to take the US military at its word.

During the current bombing of Iraq and Syria, the US military has generally launched strikes without forward-deployed spotters to visually assess targets beforehand. Instead, strikes have been directed by US and Iraqi troops stationed at command and control facilities in Baghdad and Irbil.

Despite the barrage of airstrikes, targeting IS-controlled oil refineries, tanks and vehicle convoys, IS still controls Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq.

For decades, the US government has consistently sought to conceal and downplay the true extent of the mass slaughter carried out by its military against populations overseas. Despite claims about "precision munitions," however, ample evidence shows that the US military has used its advanced weaponry to murder countless civilians in recent years through a steadily expanding global reign

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of terror across the Middle East and Africa.

One recent Human Rights Watch report found that fully 69 percent of the drone strike victims were civilians.

Reporting on a series of 13 drone strikes against the town of Miramshah in Northern Pakistan, the *New York Times* noted in 2013 that the attacks "mostly occur in densely populated neighborhoods."

The Pakistani government released statistics in 2009 showing that in the course of 44 drone strikes against targets in the tribal regions of the country, the US killed five intended targets and some 710 innocent civilians. In its effort to kill a single Taliban leader, the CIA launched 16 failed strikes, killing more than 300 civilians in the process, according to some reports.

Some 350 US drone strikes killed as many as 900 civilians in Pakistan during the years 2004-2013, according to a source cited by an Amnesty International report, "Will I be Next? US Drone Strikes in Pakistan."

The Amnesty report presented damning evidence that the US intentionally launches attacks when civilians are known to be present, including "double tap" follow-up strikes launched to kill rescue and recovery workers who have gathered to deal with the dead and the wounded from an initial strike.

Reports have shown that the US military and CIA possess their own "kill lists." Under the Obama administration, the adoption of the "Disposition Matrix"—a system for orchestrating and integrating the US government's worldwide assassination programs, reportedly designed largely by CIA Director John Brennan in his previous position as White House counterterrorism chief—has made extralegal murder a permanent and central function of the executive branch.

Far from seeking to avoid "civilian casualties," as the military leadership claims, the mass slaughter of noncombatants is one of the main goals of US imperialist policy. By continually demonstrating their readiness to kill civilians, US military planners and their employers at the Pentagon and on Wall Street aim to terrorize masses of people into submission to US imperialism.

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