

Over 450 civilians killed by US-led air strikes in Iraq and Syria

Will Morrow
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A report released Monday by a group of journalists reveals that at least 459 civilians, and likely far more, were killed in airstrikes between August 2014 and July 2015 as part of the US-led war in Iraq and Syria.

The report, published by *airwars.org*, came as the Obama administration yesterday announced a major escalation of US airstrikes in Syria. Obama provided a blanket authorisation for US forces to bomb any target—including Syrian government forces—which supposedly come into conflict with a small brigade of US mercenaries in the country. The decision marks a major escalation in the US-led war for regime-change against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and ensures that the civilian death toll from the imperialist intervention in the region will dramatically accelerate (see: “Obama authorises escalation of US war against Syria”).

In the period covered by the report, the US and its allies carried out almost 5,000 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, releasing around 17,000 bombs and missiles and destroying 2,000 buildings.

Airwars.org compiled its report through a careful examination of media coverage and statements released by a wide array of organisations both inside Syria and Iraq and internationally. These were then cross-referenced with statements by US Central Command (CENTCOM) and the other allies involved in the bombing campaign.

Even after this heavy filtering process, the group identified at least 52 separate incidents in which between 459 and 591 civilians had been killed, including women and over 100 children—an average of roughly ten people per incident. Of these, between 233 and 732 were killed in Iraq, and between 226 and 354 in Syria.

These figures, however, include only those cases

involving reports from “two or more generally credible sources (often with biographical, photographic or video evidence),” with “confirmed coalition strikes in the near vicinity for that date.” When including reports of civilians killed which received less coverage, or which were not corroborated with coalition airstrikes, the report’s estimated death toll rises to 1,086.

As is clear from the report itself, the real figure is undoubtedly far higher because the US and its allies deliberately cover up and deny revelations of civilians killed in their bombing operations.

This is underscored by one particularly egregious example. On December 28, 2014, a coalition airstrike destroyed a building in the Aleppo suburb of Al Bab in Syria allegedly being used by ISIS forces as a temporary prison. The attack killed at least 58 civilians, including at least four women and a number of teenagers. The use of the building as a prison for civilians had been widely reported prior to the attack.

For two weeks after this criminal act, the US and its allies concealed the fact that they had carried out any airstrikes in Al Bab that evening. Only after “repeated inquiries” by the McClatchy news service did a spokesman for CENTCOM concede that a bombing in Al Bab took place on that day.

In contrast to the minimum death toll of 459 civilians, for which the *airwars.org* report found strong evidence, the official position of the Obama administration and the US military is the patently false figure of two civilians killed in total in Syria, and none at all in Iraq. The report notes that “on other occasions the Coalition has failed to identify strikes on a particular town or city, only for individual allies to then report such an attack.”

The determination of the Obama administration and its allies to suppress evidence of civilian deaths reveals

their fear of mass opposition within their own populations to the war, and their understanding that such evidence explodes the fraudulent “humanitarian” lies used to justify it—that it is aimed at combating ISIS.

The report is designed to be read in conjunction with an ever-expanding online database, which includes all reports of civilians killed by airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, along with any available biographical information of the victims, including photographs and videos.

Taken together, the material adds to the ever-growing mountain of prima facie evidence to be used in a future war crimes tribunal against those responsible for the planning, launching and justification of the illegal war in Iraq and Syria. These include the Obama administration and the participating allied governments of Britain, Australia, Canada, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan and Bahrain.

While the report only includes figures until the end of June, it notes that July 2015 “emerged as the most intensive month yet of Coalition bombings with 371 strikes reported in Syria alone. Civilian casualty claims also peaked, with 14 new alleged events reported for Syria and eight for Iraq—a new and grim record.”

In the single worst incident, 70 civilians were killed in an airstrike on the Iraqi town of Hawijah in early June. In addition, the report points to numerous “mass casualty events” in Syria. On the first night of the bombing of Syria, on September 23, 2014, US aircraft killed up to 15 civilians in the village of Kafar Daryan. On April 30, another airstrike killed 64 civilians at Ber Mahli. In just three separate incidents, 106 civilian victims have so far been publicly named, including 38 children.

In another detailed incident, an airstrike in the Al Hassakah governorate in Syria killed Ibrahim al-Mussul, a shepherd in his late 60s, along with his two daughters, Jozah (27) and Zahra (25). Separately on April 4, an airstrike in Fadhiliya, Iraq killed eight-year-old Danya Laith Hazem and her four family members.

The material contained in the report is all the more damning in that it has not been produced by opponents of the war. The journalist group makes clear it does not oppose the war in Iraq and Syria, but is concerned that “the Coalition’s near-total denial of having caused civilian casualties continues to damage its own credibility.”

Accepting the fraudulent justifications for the war, the report makes entirely cosmetic recommendations, calling on the different coalition partners to improve their monitoring and reporting of civilian casualties.

In reality, the mass murder of civilians in Iraq and Syria is not an aberration or unfortunate by-product of the war, but flows logically from the criminal and neo-colonial character of the imperialist intervention, which is aimed at ensuring the US domination over the energy-rich and geo-strategically vital region.



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