

US bombing kills 11 civilians in Mosul as Washington lifts restraints on Pentagon

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A US airstrike claimed the lives of at least 11 civilians in the besieged northern Iraqi city of Mosul on Sunday, according to Iraqi security officials.

In addition to the dead, including women and children, another four civilians were wounded in the bombing.

“A suspected coalition plane struck a mobile target, which left 11 civilians dead and injured four others,” a security source told Turkey’s state-run Anadolu Agency. The brief description suggests that the US warplane struck a vehicle loaded with civilians attempting to flee the fighting.

The densely populated area of western Mosul has been under constant attack since mid-February when Iraqi forces—including army troops, police, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, Sunni tribesmen and Shia militias—began operations aimed at retaking that part of the city from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which routed government forces and took control of Mosul in June of 2014.

The US-backed offensive is steadily reducing much of Mosul to rubble and there are clear indications that the Pentagon has given the green light for airstrikes that inevitably result in the killing of unarmed men, women and children.

The British-based monitoring group Airwars issued a recent report estimating that up to 370 civilians were killed in 11 separate bombing raids carried out by US and allied warplanes in the first six days of this month alone. The airstrikes have not only continued, but intensified since then.

The British daily *Telegraph* provided a graphic account of the carnage unleashed upon one neighborhood in western Mosul.

“Samood is a hellish landscape,” the paper reports. “Every third house seems to either bear the scars of a

fierce firefight or is completely leveled. Burned-out husks of cars and the rubble from razed houses block most of the neighbourhood’s streets.”

Yusuf Ahmed, a 47-year-old resident of Mosul, told the *Telegraph* how his brother, sister-in-law and their two daughters were killed by US bombs as they huddled in the basement of their home in the next neighborhood over.

“They dropped leaflets over the city telling us not to worry about the strikes, saying that they were extremely precise and would not hurt the civilians,” he said. “Now it feels like the coalition is killing more people than Isil [ISIS].”

Ahmed estimated that at least 300 people had been killed in US-backed siege of Samood and his late brother’s neighborhood of al-Mansour alone.

Hashem Abdullah, another resident of Samood, told the *Telegraph* how a US warplane targeted a house opposite his own where ISIS members held meetings. At the moment an ISIS member walked out the door, the plane struck. “The fighter was only injured, but 11 members of one family in the house next door were instantly killed,” he said.

The murderous conditions in western Mosul have forced over 18,000 people to flee their homes in the last week alone. The total number displaced from the city as a whole since the US-backed forces first began their assault on eastern Mosul last October now stands at 293,000.

An estimated half a million people remain trapped within the city facing not only US bombs and missiles, but also lack of drinking water along with scarce food and other essential supplies.

The assault on Mosul is part of a broader US escalation in Iraq and Syria and, indeed, throughout the region. The Pentagon has recently doubled the number

of troops it has deployed in Syria in preparation for a similar bloody assault on the city of Raqqa and in an attempt to prevent an all-out war between Washington's NATO ally, Turkey, and the Kurdish YPG militia, which functions as the Pentagon's main proxy ground force in Syria.

Meanwhile, in Yemen, US warplanes carried out more airstrikes during the first week of March than during any single year under the Obama administration.

According to *Foreign Policy*, in 2016 the Pentagon prepared plans for stepped up operations in Yemen against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which has been greatly strengthened by the US-backed war being waged by Saudi Arabia to restore its puppet government to power there.

"The Obama administration handed over plans for a stepped-up campaign to the incoming Trump team in January." *Foreign Policy* reports, "There has been an immediate change in the tempo of operations. This reflects the new administration's apparent preference for prompt military action over policy deliberations, and a more dominant role for the military in decision-making."

"By default, everything is going to be quicker from flash to bang than it was during the Obama presidency," a former Pentagon official told *Foreign Policy*.

The wave of US airstrikes in Yemen was preceded by the abortive January 29 special forces commando assault on a Yemeni village that saw dozens of civilians massacred, a Navy Seal killed and several others wounded and a \$75 million aircraft abandoned.

Meanwhile, the *New York Times* reports that the Trump administration is seeking to brush aside limited restrictions placed on US military operations by the Obama White House for the ostensible purpose of limiting civilian casualties. These procedures were put in place in an attempt to assuage mass popular outrage over drone assassinations and massacres carried out in Yemen, Pakistan and elsewhere.

Under these rules, the military was supposedly required to establish that those targeted for killing represented a threat to the US citizens and that any proposed operation would include a "near certainty" of no civilian deaths. Numerous strikes carried out by the US military violated these formal restrictions. Now, it appears, even the pretense is being waived.

~~Time~~ According to Trump, he has signed a Pentagon request to designate three Yemeni provinces as "areas of active hostilities" and is about to grant similar approval in relation to Somalia. This is not unprecedented, as the Obama administration did the same thing in relation to Libya last August when the Pentagon launched a series of 495 airstrikes against the city of Sirt, which was under the control of ISIS. It did so as well last year in Somalia, after US troops were sent in to train Somali and African Union forces.

By declaring these areas effective war zones, the White House is lifting any requirement that attacks be vetted by national security officials in Washington and allows for any civilian casualties that can be justified as "proportionate."

The shift in relation to these policies stems in part from the Trump administration's executive order calling for the Pentagon to submit a strategy for escalating the US "war on terror." That order called for the plan to include "recommended changes to any United States rules of engagement and other United States policy restrictions that exceed the requirements of international law regarding the use of force."

The Pentagon submitted its recommendations at the end of last month, and all the indications are that they will entail a major increase in bloodletting by the US military in the Middle East, Africa and beyond.



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