

The American Cult of Bombing and Endless War

Below is a very brief excerpt from a much longer article by William J. Astore, a retired lieutenant colonel (USAF) and professor of history. See <https://portside.org/2019-06-04/american-cult-bombing-and-endless-war> for the full text.

From Syria to Yemen in the Middle East, Libya to Somalia in Africa, Afghanistan to Pakistan in South Asia, an American aerial curtain has descended across a huge swath of the planet. Its stated purpose: combatting terrorism. Its primary method: constant surveillance and bombing -- and yet more bombing. Its political benefit: minimizing the number of U.S. "boots on the ground" and so American casualties in the never-ending war on terror, as well as any public outcry about Washington's many conflicts. Its economic benefit: plenty of high-profit business for weapons makers for whom the president can now declare a national security emergency whenever he likes and so sell their warplanes and munitions to preferred dictatorships in the Middle East (no congressional approval required). Its reality for various foreign peoples: a steady diet of "Made in USA" bombs and missiles bursting here, there, and everywhere...

...You might even say that, in the twenty-first century, the bomb and missile count replaced the Vietnam-era body count as a metric of (false) progress. Using data supplied by the U.S. military, the Council on Foreign Relations estimated that the U.S. dropped at least 26,172 bombs in seven countries in 2016, the bulk of them in Iraq and Syria. Against Raqqa alone, ISIS's "capital," the U.S. and its allies dropped more than 20,000 bombs in 2017, reducing that provincial Syrian city to literal rubble. Combined with artillery fire, the bombing of Raqqa killed more than 1,600 civilians, according to Amnesty International...

Since Donald Trump has become president, after claiming that he would get us out of our various never-ending wars, U.S. bombing has surged, not only against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq but in Afghanistan as well. It has driven up the civilian death toll there even as "friendly" Afghan forces are

sometimes mistaken for the enemy and killed, too. Air strikes from Somalia to Yemen have also been on the rise under Trump, while civilian casualties due to U.S. bombing continue to be underreported in the American media and downplayed by the Trump administration...

No matter how much it's advertised as "precise," "discriminate," and "measured," bombing (or using missiles like the Tomahawk) rarely is. The deaths of innocents are guaranteed. Air power and those deaths are joined at the hip, while such killings only generate anger and blowback, thereby prolonging the wars they are meant to end.... Pounding peasants from two miles up is not exactly an ideal way to occupy the moral high ground in war....

Who doesn't know the old riddle: If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound? Here's a twenty-first-century air power variant on it: If foreign children die from American bombs but no U.S. media outlets report their deaths, will anyone grieve? Far too often, the answer here in the U.S. is no and so our wars go on into an endless future of global destruction...

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