

Opinion

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America dropped 26,171 bombs in 2016. What a bloody end to Obama's reign

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According to new figures, the US dropped nearly three bombs every hour, 24 hours a day. Dare we think how Donald Trump will continue this legacy?

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Most Americans would probably be astounded to realize that the president who has been painted by Washington pundits as a reluctant warrior has actually been a hawk. The Iran nuclear deal, a herculean achievement, and the opening of diplomatic relations with Cuba unfortunately stand alone as President Obama's successful uses of diplomacy over hostility.

While candidate Obama came to office pledging to end George W Bush's wars, he leaves office having been at war longer than any president in US history. He is also the only president to serve two complete terms with the nation at war.

President Obama did reduce the number of US soldiers fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, but he dramatically expanded the air wars and the use of special operations forces around the globe. In 2016, US special operators could be found in 70% of the world's nations, 138 countries - [a staggering jump of 130%](#) since the days of the Bush administration.

Looking back at President Obama's legacy, the Council on Foreign Relation's Micah Zenko added up the defense department's data on airstrikes and made a startling [revelation](#): in 2016 alone, the Obama administration dropped at least 26,171 bombs. This means that every day last year, the US military blasted combatants or civilians overseas with 72 bombs; that's three bombs every hour, 24 hours a day.

While most of these air attacks were in Syria and Iraq, US bombs also rained down on people in Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan. That's seven majority-Muslim countries.

One bombing technique that President Obama championed is drone strikes. As drone-warrior-in-chief, he spread the use of drones outside the declared battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq, mainly to Pakistan and Yemen. Obama authorized over 10 times

more drone strikes than George W Bush, and automatically painted all males of military age in these regions as [combatants](#), making them fair game for remote controlled killing.

President Obama has claimed that his overseas military adventures are legal under the 2001 and 2003 authorizations for the use of military force passed by Congress to go after al-Qaida. But today's wars have little or nothing to do with those who attacked the United States on September 11, 2001.

The twisted legal architecture the [Obama administration](#) has constructed to justify its interventions, especially extrajudicial drone killings with no geographic restrictions, will now be transferred into the erratic hands of Donald Trump.

What does the administration have to show for eight years of fighting on so many fronts? Terrorism has spread, no wars have been "won" and the Middle East is consumed by more chaos and divisions than when candidate Barack Obama declared his opposition to the invasion of Iraq.

While the switch from US troops on the ground to airstrikes and special forces has saved US lives, untold numbers of foreign lives have been snuffed out. We have no idea how many civilians have been killed in the massive bombings in Iraq and Syria, where the US military is often pursuing Isis in the middle of urban neighborhoods. We only sporadically hear about civilian killings in Afghanistan, such as the tragic bombing of the Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz that left 42 dead and 37 wounded.

Pushed to release information about civilian deaths in drone strikes, in July 2016 the US government made the absurd claim it had killed, at most, 116 civilians in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and Libya between 2009 and 2015. Journalists and human rights advocates said the numbers were ridiculously low and unverifiable, given that no names, dates, locations or others details were released. The London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism, which has tracked drone strikes for years, [said the true figure](#) was six times higher.

Given that drones account for only a small portion of the munitions dropped in the past eight years, the numbers of civilians killed by Obama's bombs could be in the thousands. But we can't know for sure as the administration, and the mainstream media, has been virtually silent about the civilian toll of the administration's failed interventions.

In May 2013, I interrupted President Obama during his foreign policy address at the National Defense University. I had just returned from visiting the families of innocent people killed by US drone attacks in Yemen and Pakistan, including the [Rehman children](#) who saw their grandmother blown to bits while in the field picking okra.

Speaking out on behalf of grieving families whose losses have never been acknowledged by the US government, I asked President Obama to apologize to them. As I was being dragged out, President Obama said: "The voice of that woman is worth paying attention to."

Too bad he never did.

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