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In Syria, Civilian Lives Don't Matter

Leila Al Shami

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Since Trump came to power there has been a marked escalation of the US intervention in Syria, supposedly to defeat ISIS.

The US already has hundreds of Special Operations forces fighting on the ground alongside the Syrian Democratic Forces and has backed them with hundreds of airstrikes. Now a marine artillery unit has been deployed to Syria to support the battle to take Raqqa and the US is planning on sending in more ground troops.

Since the beginning of this year there have been daily reports of civilians killed during US airstrikes on Syrian villages and towns. Some have resulted in large-scale massacres. On 16 March more than 40 civilians were killed, including children, and over 100 injured in the village of Al Jina, near Aleppo, when a US airstrike struck the Omar ibn al-Khattab mosque as people gathered for evening prayer.

The US initially denied the attack targeted a mosque, claiming it killed Al Qaeda militants in a meeting. This claim was backed up by a Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman. "We

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don't have any doubts that the US airstrikes targeted terrorists," said Maria Zakharova.

Activists and people on the ground refuted these claims as the White Helmets civil defense volunteers worked round the clock to pull victims from the rubble. Open source investigators at Bellingcat confirmed the site of the attack was indeed a mosque and posted pictures of remnants of US missiles.

A few days later, on 22 March, a US airstrike hit a school in Mansoura, Raqqa. Up to 100 families displaced from Aleppo were sheltering in the school at the time. Over 150 people were reportedly killed, mainly women and children.

The civilian casualties of Trump's War on Terror are not confined to Syria. In Iraq the US is allying with Iraqi and Kurdish militia to push ISIS out of Mosul. Last week a US airstrike hit three buildings massacring over 200 civilians. Many remained trapped under the rubble for days with no hope of rescue. In Yemen, in January, a botched US raid to target Al Qaeda militants resulted in the death of dozens of civilians in a village in Al Bayda. Earlier this month, a US Apache helicopter killed at least 42 Somali refugees when it attacked a boat off the coast of Yemen. The US is intervening in Yemen in support of the Saudi Coalition, itself responsible for war crimes.

As Trump ratchets up the war against ISIS there are reports that his administration is seeking to modify the current rules of engagement, possibly to include lower thresholds for civilian casualties. Certainly the victims of this War on Terror far exceed the number of victims caused by terrorism itself.

According to Airwars, which is monitoring the anti-ISIS coalition's airstrikes in both Syria and Iraq, 370 civilians were killed in the first week of March alone. Airwars also states that January was the deadliest month for civilians in Syria and Iraq since the Coalition airstrikes began, with a 68 per cent increase in strikes since December. Active members of the coalition also include the UK, Belgium, France, Denmark and Australia. Yet

the US alone carried out 502 strikes in Syria in January, with 11 carried out by other members. In total, since the coalition intervened in Syria and Iraq, the number of civilians killed is 2,715, the result of 72,771 bombs and missiles dropped. US officials have further admitted to using depleted-uranium munitions, which can cause cancer and severe birth defects for generations to come.

The most notable aspect of this large scale massacre of civilians is the deadly silence of the world community. The 'anti-war left' only seems to be agitated by hypothetical interventions which may target the tyrant Bashar Al Assad, rather than real interventions which are destroying the lives of thousands of innocents. Assad, responsible for the vast majority of civilian deaths in Syria, for running industrial-scale torture centres, and gassing families to death in their sleep, is presented as the saviour for the ills he has caused, whilst his opponents are painted in their entirety as militant jihadists.

This 'left' has whole-heartedly adopted the 'War on Terror' narrative, first promoted by Assad himself, in a way which puts neo-cons to shame. It isn't surprising that the world often sees Syrian refugees as potential terrorists when such pundits claim the same, impeding solidarity with these victims of state terror. Some of these so-called 'progressives' would rather spend their time slandering the aid workers who rescue the victims rather than denouncing the US's war crimes and imperial forays. Some of the same people promoted Trump's candidacy for the President as the supposedly 'anti-interventionist' option.

'The US is attacking ISIS strongholds,' the media likes to tell us. Yet tens of thousands of civilians remain trapped in Raqqa under brutal ISIS occupation. Around 400,000 are under siege in Mosul, among a few thousand ISIS militants, and food and water supplies are running out. Not only are they at risk of bombs ripping their lives apart, many fear retribution from incoming militias who may see civilians as ISIS sympathizers.

Terrorism will not be defeated by foreign bombs. Every civilian killed creates only more anger, pain and despair and feeds the narrative that groups such as ISIS wish to promote. Numerous countries are now intervening in the Syrian battleground, contributing to the whole-scale slaughter. Anti-war activists should be calling on *all* foreign forces to leave and holding the perpetrators of war crimes to account.