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The US State of War – July 2017

Nicholas Davies

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The US bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria is now the heaviest since the bombing of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in the 1960s-70s, with 84,000 bombs and missiles dropped between 2014 and the end of May 2017. That is nearly triple the 29,200 bombs and missiles dropped on Iraq in the "Shock and Awe" campaign of 2003.

The Obama administration escalated the bombing campaign last October, as the U.S.-Iraqi assault on Mosul began, dropping 12,290 bombs and missiles between October and the end of January when President Obama left office. The Trump administration has further escalated the campaign, dropping another 14,965 bombs and missiles since February 1st. May saw the heaviest bombing yet, with 4,374 bombs and missiles dropped.

The U.K.-based Airwars.org monitoring group has compiled reports of between 12,000 and 18,000 civilians killed by nearly three years of U.S.-led bombing in Iraq and Syria. These reports can only be the tip of the iceberg, and the true number of civilians killed could well be more than 100,000, based on typical ratios between reported deaths and actual deaths in previous war-zones.

As the US and its allies closed in on Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, and as US forces now occupy eight military bases in Syria, Islamic State and its allies have struck back in Manchester

and London; occupied Marawi, a city of 200,000 in the Philippines; and exploded a huge truck bomb inside the fortifications of the "Green Zone" in Kabul, Afghanistan.

What began in 2001 as a misdirected use of military force to punish a group of formerly U.S.-backed jihadis in Afghanistan for the crimes of September 11th has escalated into a global asymmetric war. Every country destroyed or destabilized by US military action is now a breeding ground for terrorism. It would be foolish to believe that this cannot get much, much worse, as long as both sides continue to justify their own escalations of violence as responses to the violence of their enemies, instead of trying to de-escalate the now global violence and chaos.

There are once again 10,000 US troops in Afghanistan, up from 8,500 in April, with reports that four thousand more may be deployed soon. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been killed in 15 years of war, but the Taliban now control more of the country than at any time since the US invasion in 2001.

The US is giving vital support to the Saudi-led war in Yemen, supporting a blockade of Yemeni ports and providing intelligence and in-air refueling to the Saudi and allied warplanes that have been bombing Yemen since 2015. UN reports of 10,000 civilians killed are surely only a fraction of the true numbers killed, and thousands more have died from disease and hunger.

Now Yemen is facing a humanitarian crisis and a raging cholera epidemic due to lack of clean water or medicine caused by the bombing and the blockade. The UN is warning that millions of Yemenis could die of famine and disease. A Senate bill to restrict some US arms sales to Saudi Arabia was defeated by 53 votes (48 Republicans and 5 Democrats) to 47 in June.

Closer to home, US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) recently hosted a conference with the presidents of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador in Miami. This signaled a further militarization of the US war on drugs in Central America and efforts to limit immigration from those countries, even as a report by State and Justice Department inspector generals held State Department and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents responsible for the killing of four innocent civilians (one man, two women and a 14-year-old boy) by machine-gun fire from a State Department helicopter near Ahuas in Honduras in 2012.

The inspector generals' report found that DEA officials repeatedly lied to Congress about this incident, pretending the Hondurans were killed in a shoot-out with drug traffickers, raising serious doubts about accountability for escalating US paramilitary operations in Central America.

Right wing opposition protests in Venezuela have turned more violent, with 99 people killed since April, as the protests have failed to mobilize enough popular support to topple the leftist government of Nicolas Maduro. The US supports the opposition and has led diplomatic efforts to force the government to resign, so there is a danger that this could escalate into a US-backed civil war.

Meanwhile in Colombia, right wing death squads are once again operating in areas where the FARC has disarmed, killing and threatening people to drive them off land coveted by wealthy landowners.

Looming over our increasingly war-torn world are renewed US threats of military action against North Korea and Iran, both of which have more robust defenses than any that US forces have encountered since the American War in Vietnam. Rising tensions with Russia and China risk even greater, even existential dangers, as symbolized by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists' Doomsday Clock, whose hands now stand at 2-1/2 minutes to midnight.

Although our post-9/11 wars have probably killed at least 2 million people in the countries we have attacked, occupied or destabilized, US forces have suffered historically low numbers of casualties in these operations. There is a real danger that this has given US political and military leaders, and to some extent the American public, a false sense of the scale of US casualties and other serious consequences we should look forward to as our leaders escalate our current wars, issue new threats against Iran and North Korea, and stoke rising tensions with Russia and China.

This is the state of war in the United States in July 2017.