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## Are We Gods?

By Nicholas Kramer

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This holiday season, as you walk through a public area (any mall, grocery, or restaurant will do), start counting the people you see. Look in their faces, listen to their conversations, and try to appreciate each of them not just as strangers, but as fellow human beings. When you get to 40 (making sure to include at least 29 women and children), consider that this is the minimum number of civilians whose lives were brought to violent ends by U.S./NATO bombs during the recent military intervention in Libya, [according to \*The New York Times\*](#). Keep counting until you get to “perhaps more than 70” and consider that these 30-plus people represent the margin of error in the *Times* analysis; this uncertainty about even the number of completely innocent people we have killed is a reality of “humanitarian” war, in which we drop hundreds of thousands of pounds of high explosives from the skies upon the people we are “helping” below.

Of course, this estimated civilian death toll doesn’t take into account the innocent people killed by other forces in the Libyan conflict, which was an inevitable result of turning an entire country into a war zone. Nor does it reflect the deaths of the actual combatants, who should be neither ignored nor forgotten; just ask the parents of any American soldier killed in one of our many wars. In fact, ask any parent, period. When you think about the volume of love, sweat, and tears that go into raising a child, it is almost unfathomable to think that *any* life can just be snuffed out. Even more astonishing is the fact that each human life is quite literally the product of the entire history of the human race. When any person is killed, a direct line going back to the very first human that walked the earth is erased from our future. We will never know the artists, poets, and peacemakers who have never lived because their parents were killed in senseless wars.

In any case, even if we limit ourselves to just those poor souls who qualify as “innocent civilians” killed directly by the U.S. military, ask yourself if you would be willing to condemn those 40 to 70 (or more) people to death in the name of “the greater good.” Now consider whether you’d be willing to murder each and every one of them in the name of a “humanitarian” military intervention in a country such as Libya. Although I wish that these questions were merely rhetorical, I know that some people truly believe that human lives can be expended on the chessboard of “international relations.” I am not one of them.

If looking a few dozen condemned people in the face doesn’t faze you, imagine walking or driving through Kansas City, Kan., Syracuse, N.Y., or Rockford, Ill. ([population sizes available here](#)), and knowing that every single man, woman, and child living in one of those cities represents a person who is now dead as a result of the recently “ended” U.S. war in Iraq. Now consider that this number (150,726 human beings) is the *lowest* credible estimate of war-related deaths. Imagine instead, at the high end of the [statistical spectrum](#), that the city of San Jose, Calif. (the 10th largest city in America, with a population of just under a million people), were filled with nothing but corpses; this begins to approach the 1,033,000 people who may have died unnecessarily in America’s war on Iraq.

Alternatively, if numbers alone are too abstract, consider the “litany of horrors” described by Kelley Vlahos in a [piece](#) on the birth defects among the children of Fallujah: “babies born with two heads, one eye in the middle of the face, missing limbs, too many limbs, brain damage, cardiac defects, abnormally large heads, eyeless, missing genitalia, riddled with tumors.” Reportedly, in 2010, congenital malformations were observed in 15% of all births in Fallujah, compared to 3% in the United States. Vlahos describes some of the possible causes of these horrors, including the American military’s use of depleted-uranium-tipped weapons and toxic plumes from burning waste on U.S. bases. The war will never end for the people of that destroyed and contaminated city of [326,471](#) people.

Regarding Libya, many commentators have celebrated the “success” of the so-called humanitarian mission there. Most of the media moved on from Libya alongside the American fighter jets, although [NPR recently covered](#) the danger inherent in a country now rife with guns and short on rule-of-law. In a major hospital in Tripoli, for instance, men with guns regularly roam the halls threatening doctors and patients alike, including in the middle of surgery. The International Crisis Group estimates there are now 125,000 armed militia members in Libya. Only time will tell how well this success story holds together. Similarly, regarding the withdrawal of most U.S. troops from Iraq, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta [recently said](#), “As difficult as [the Iraq war] was ... I think the price has been worth it, to establish a stable government in a very important region of the world.”

Setting aside the sheer arrogance and insensitivity of this statement, it is worth asking if we are even capable of determining what price is worth hundreds of thousands of human lives (in Iraq) or the deaths of dozens of innocent civilians (in Libya)? Are we gods with the moral authority to determine who will live and who will die? If not, then what business do we have proclaiming what is “worth” the deaths of people halfway around the world? More importantly, what business do we have killing (or causing the deaths of) those people in the first place? New Year’s

is a traditionally a time for reflection; I hope that each of us will consider these questions and ask ourselves what kind of people we want to be.