

# The Cost of Precision Bombing

By James Hawkins

For the last twenty-three years U.S. Americans have been inundated by propaganda that precision bombing is an effective means of reducing civilian casualties. As a result of this push, there is a tendency to ignore long term ramifications of these bombings. The point ultimately is to stoke fear and inflict pain on civilians while claiming they were never targeted. The goal of this paper is to provide insight into the indirect consequences of precision bombing.

The myth of precision bombing does not come from the fact we miss our intended target, but from the belief that an explosion will only impact the immediate area of impact, individual, vehicle, or building. Billions are invested in reducing the impact to just the singular target, but what happens when the intelligence that declares a person, site, or thing a target is false or wrong? It is a myth because the human hand is far from precise.

Precision airstrikes are personal, especially targeted assassinations. Dossiers are written up on potential targets and the President must sign off on them. Every year the U.S. defense department under reports the number of civilians<sup>1</sup> killed by our airstrikes across Central Asia and Africa. Whether a strike is ‘successful’ or not there is a civilian cost when bombs are dropped in urban or densely packed areas<sup>2</sup>. Millions are spent to reduce “collateral” damage but when bombs are being dropped into cities there is risk for everyone. What is a blurb in the news to the average citizen in the United States? It is the death of a loved one, neighbor, or friend to someone in a country they probably cannot find on a map. It is a crime that our Presidents and, more broadly, country can freely launch these strikes around the world.

The United States Air Force and CIA’s drone programs’ wanton deployment across Central Asia and Africa has created an emboldening effect worldwide. NATO air forces intervened in the Libyan civil war, in support of anti-Gaddafi rebels. Turkey has been launching airstrikes in Syria and Iraq primarily targeting Kurdish and Kurdish aligned forces. Saudi Arabia made headlines for their bombings in Yemen for nearly a decade intervening in their civil war. We no longer live in an era of declared wars, but one of stronger and more technologically advanced forces striking out at disadvantaged populations without fear of reprisal.

America holds and exports that massive technological advantage, it is no coincidence that the countries that bomb their neighbors the most are buying American made bombs and

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<sup>1</sup> Khan, Azmat, and Ivor Prickett. “The Human Toll of America’s Air Wars.” The New York Times, December 20, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/19/magazine/victims-airstrikes-middle-east-civilians.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Magid, Pesha. “The U.S. Military Often Kills Civilians - and Rarely Offers Compensation.” The Intercept, October 14, 2021. <https://theintercept.com/2021/09/21/civilian-casualties-military-compensation/>.

equipment. The pouring of money into the military industrial complex from weapons sales then gets reinvested into research to make better weapons to be sold again. American citizens are primed to buy into the use of airstrikes. The United States government is keen to release favorable footage of airstrikes whether by drones, helicopters, or warplanes. The goal of divulging these videos is the following: to revel in our technological superiority, to dehumanize the victims, and to convince citizenry that precision bombing is the safe option. Every dead infantryman presents an issue for the government. The grief from that death extends from the soldier's comrades to family to friends, and so on. Therefore, the safe alternative is an airstrike, which at most it risks a crew of 5, after all. The risk is very minimal, as the targets at the receiving end often lack the means to defend themselves against American aircraft.

Another way to generate public support among civilian populace in the U.S. is the distribution of factories and manufacturing throughout the country. The companies that build our warplanes (Boeing and Lockheed for example) subcontract to other smaller companies for components and subsystems then assemble all the pieces together at their main factory. This ensures that if defense spending slows down it will impact people across the country regardless of political stance. The American economy is dependent on weapons sales and manufacturing, every hellfire missile (which costs \$71,000 to \$196,000<sup>3</sup> on average) represents thousands of jobs; microchips, engines, housing, and wires; all represent people who could become financially impacted if military spending is reduced.

American weapon manufacturing is invisible to a lot of people<sup>4</sup>. Too much stock is placed on the words of politicians, talking heads on the news, news articles, and even an assigned reading for a college course! The impression that no manufacturing jobs remain in the U.S. is common. However the truth is there are thousands of factories throughout the country. These factories produce the materials we need for the American war machine, to continue our global campaign of errant airstrikes. A worker who chooses not to participate in this system of endless war is left with poor job prospects that don't pay as well in the manufacturing industry while demanding the same attention to detail.

Airstrikes have become a commodity for the Executive branch of our government. We've been numb to them since 2001, but with Israel's brutal bombardment of Gaza and their insatiable hunger for U.S. manufactured ordnance, we are seeing more attention on the topic. As of this writing there has been seven months of air and artillery strikes from Israel into Gaza. It is difficult to

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<sup>3</sup> Writer, Staff. "Ultimate Guide on AGM-114 Hellfire Missiles: Capabilities and Cost." The Defense Post, March 30, 2021. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2021/03/22/agm-114-hellfire-missile/>.

<sup>4</sup> Patterson, Ransom. "Hard Skills vs. Soft Skills: Why You Need Both to Succeed." College Info Geek, March 26, 2019. <https://collegeinfo.geek.com/hard-vs-soft-skills/>.

quantify how much has truly been used against the Palestinian people, but the extent is such that people are comparing it to the carpet bombings of WWII. An inaccurate use of the term, but it is hard not compare them when you look at the volume of bombs dropped. In a carpet bombing one or multiple aircraft release large quantities of bombs in a single air mission. The bombings conducted by Israel have been done by light strike aircraft that at maximum carries anywhere from two to six bombs.

In the days following the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks, Israel dropped 6,000 bombs on targets in Gaza<sup>5</sup>. In less than a week Israel dropped more bombs than the United States dropped in both 2020 and 2021<sup>6</sup>. Israel has in its inventory 581 aircraft of those aircraft 218 are capable of ground attack. While not all these 218 aircraft are capable of flying missions at any one time, a disturbing picture emerges as these aircraft must make multiple trips to strike targets. In the steps from preflight to take off we see an inefficiency that exudes a malice rivaled only by carpet bombing and yet separated by the reality of what their aircraft can deliver. It is systematic in a truly horrifying way.

Months have passed, Israel's large bombing campaign has greatly benefitted American industry as Israel burned through their inventory. The U.S. government is eager to supply them<sup>7</sup> despite concerns it would eat into the stockpile the U.S. Military wanted to keep for potential peer to peer conflicts. The United States may be freely supplying Israel, but manufacturers aren't making the munitions for free. Every bomb dropped represents a contract, an order, and profit<sup>8</sup>. Separated by thousands of miles, and xenophobia, the victims of these bombs only represent

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<sup>5</sup> Kingsley, P. (2023, October 25). *Israel's strikes on Gaza are some of the most intense this century*. The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/25/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-airstrikes.html>

<sup>6</sup> Young, A. (2022, March 5). *The number of bombs dropped by the US in each of the last 15 years*. 24/7 Wall St. <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2022/03/05/the-number-of-weapons-the-us-released-every-year-since-2007/>

<sup>7</sup> “Gaza War: Where Does Israel Get Its Weapons?” BBC News. Accessed April 22, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68737412.amp>.

<sup>8</sup> Saul, D. (2023a, October 13). *U.S. defense stocks surge nearly \$30 billion after Hamas attack-don't count on it lasting, analysts say*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereksaul/2023/10/11/us-defense-stocks-surge-nearly-30-billion-after-hamas-attack-dont-count-on-it-lasting-analysts-say/?sh=3040d2b0100e>

money. Profit for the defense contractors, tax dollars expended to those concerned about government spending. We still practice human sacrifice in modern times, but through the dropping of bombs and for the benefit of western economies.

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