

US AIR WARS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

NYT report exposes failures

Pentagon documents reveal thousands of civilians killed in 'deeply flawed' precision strikes

AFP, Washington

Newly obtained Pentagon documents show that the US air wars in the Middle East have been marked by "deeply flawed intelligence" and resulted in thousands of civilian deaths, including many children, the New York Times reported Saturday.

It said a trove of confidential documents covering more than 1,300 reports of civilian casualties undercuts the government's portrayal of a war fought with precision bombs.

Pledges of transparency and accountability, it said, had regularly fallen short.

"Not a single record provided includes a finding of wrongdoing or disciplinary action," the paper reported in what it said was the first of a two-part series.

While several of the cases mentioned by the Times have been previously reported, it said its investigation showed that the number of civilian deaths had been "drastically undercounted," by at least several hundred.

Among three cases cited was a July 19, 2016 bombing by US special forces of what were believed to be three Islamic State group staging areas in northern Syria. Initial reports were of 85 fighters killed. Instead, the dead were 120 farmers and



A man cries while carrying his daughter after a US-led airstrike during a battle in Mosul, Iraq. Picture taken on March 4, 2017.

PHOTO: REUTERS

other villagers.

Another example was a November 2015 attack in Ramadi, Iraq after a man was seen dragging "an unknown heavy object" into an Islamic State position. The "object," a review found, was a child, who died in the strike.

Poor or inadequate surveillance footage often contributed to deadly targeting

failures, the report said.

Many civilian survivors of US attacks, the report says, were left with disabilities requiring expensive treatment, but condolence payments numbered fewer than a dozen.

Asked for comment, Captain Bill Urban, spokesman for the US Central Command, told the Times that "even with the best

technology in the world, mistakes do happen, whether based on incomplete information or misinterpretation of the information available. And we try to learn from those mistakes."

The US air campaign in the Middle East grew rapidly in the final years of former president Barack Obama's administration, as public support waned for the seemingly endless ground wars.

Obama said the new approach, often using unmanned aircraft controlled from far away, represented "the most precise air campaign in history," able to keep civilian deaths to a minimum.

But over a five-year period, US forces executed more than 50,000 airstrikes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, the report said, with much less than the advertised precision.

Before launching air strikes, the military must navigate elaborate protocols to estimate and minimize civilian deaths.

But there are several ways available intelligence can mislead, fall short, or at times lead to disastrous errors.

For example, the Times said, video shot from the air does not show people in buildings, under foliage or under tarpaulins or aluminum covers. And available data can be misinterpreted, as when people running to a fresh bombing site are assumed to be militants, not would-be rescuers.

SUPER TYPHOON RAI

Death toll rises to 108 in Philippines

AFP, Manila

More than 100 people have been killed in the strongest typhoon to hit the Philippines this year, official tallies showed yesterday, as efforts to deliver water and food to devastated islands ramped up.

More than 300,000 people fled their homes and beachfront resorts as Typhoon Rai ravaged the southern and central regions of the archipelago.

The storm knocked out communications and electricity in many areas, ripped off roofs, damaged hospitals, toppled concrete power poles and flooded villages.

Arthur Yap, governor of the popular tourist destination Bohol, said on his official Facebook page that mayors on the devastated island had so far reported 72 deaths in their towns.

Ten people also died on the Dinagat Islands, provincial information officer Jeffrey Crisostomo told AFP.

That took the overall number of reported deaths to 108, according to the latest official figures, making it one of the deadliest typhoons to hit the country in years.

But the toll was likely to rise as disaster agencies assessed the full extent of the storm's aftermath across the vast archipelago. Thousands of military, police, coast guard and fire personnel are being deployed to assist in search and rescue efforts in the worst-affected areas.

Rai smashed into the country Thursday as a super typhoon packing wind speeds of 195 kilometres per hour.

The Philippines -- ranked among the globe's most vulnerable nations to the impacts of climate change -- is hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons every year, which typically wipe out harvests, homes and infrastructure in already impoverished areas.

MORE NEWS



Floods in Malaysia displace more than 30,000 people

More than 30,000 people were evacuated from their homes in Malaysia on Sunday as the country battles some of its worst flooding in years. The tropical Southeast Asian nation often sees stormy monsoon seasons towards the end of the year, with flooding regularly prompting mass evacuations. Downpours since Friday have caused rivers to overflow, submerging many urban areas and cutting off major roads, leaving thousands of motorists stranded. A government website showed water exceeding dangerous levels in six central and northeastern states yesterday afternoon.

Man beaten to death for 'sacrilege' at Golden Temple

A man was beaten to death in India for allegedly trying to commit an act of sacrilege at the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine of the Sikh faith. Local media reported that the unidentified man jumped over a railing into the temple's inner sanctum during Saturday evening prayers in the northern city of Amritsar. Broadcaster NDTV said the man tried to grab a sword kept in front of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book, when he was stopped by worshippers and later beaten to death. Defence of the Guru Granth Sahib and Sikh shrines against desecration is a highly sensitive issue for the community. Former Indian PM Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984 after she ordered a brutal army assault on the Golden Temple to flush out separatists.

Thailand sends refugees back to Myanmar as clashes continue

Thailand has sent over 600 Myanmar refugees who fled fighting between the military and ethnic rebels back across the border, according to a senior Thai official. Some of the refugees who reached northwest Thailand's Tak province told Reuters before they went back over the frontier yesterday morning that they had volunteered to return. Yesterday afternoon, Reuters reporters on the Thai side of the frontier were hearing continuous gunfire. Human Rights Watch's deputy Asia director, Phil Robertson, urged Thailand not to rush refugees back to Myanmar.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Embattled UK PM suffers another blow

After by-poll defeat and party MPs revolt, Johnson's Brexit minister David Frost quits

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was left reeling yesterday after his Brexit minister resigned, ending a difficult week during which his Conservative party suffered a humiliating defeat in a local by-election and his own MPs rebelled over new coronavirus curbs.

David Frost, a trusted ally of the prime minister and former Brexit negotiator, sent his resignation letter late Saturday following reports that he was to leave his cabinet post in January.

"It is disappointing that this plan has become public this evening and in the circumstances I think it is right for me to write to step down with immediate effect," he said in the letter, published by Johnson's Downing Street office.

Frost told Johnson he had "concerns about the current direction of travel" regarding coronavirus regulations and tax rises.

Johnson responded that he was "very sorry" to receive the resignation, "given everything you have achieved and contributed to this government". The Mail on Sunday had that Frost handed in his resignation a week ago, but had been persuaded to stay on until the New Year.

Johnson is already reeling from a rebellion by 100 of his MPs in a parliamentary vote over coronavirus measures and the stunning loss of a 23,000-majority seat in a by-election.

That was partly blamed on a slew of reports that his staff and aides had held parties last Christmas despite virus restrictions in place at the time. The by-election loss for Johnson's Conservatives intensified speculation of a leadership challenge.

Frost recently came second in a poll of most popular ministers held by ConservativeHome, an influential blog read by the grassroots Tories who could end up deciding Johnson's replacement.

The deputy leader of the main opposition Labour party Angela Rayner said the resignation demonstrated "a government in total chaos."

The series of crises engulfing Johnson have seen him garner increasingly negative coverage in Britain's right-wing press that is usually favourable to his leadership and his party.

The Daily Telegraph, the newspaper where Johnson used to work as a correspondent and columnist, called Frost's resignation "courageous" and a "turning point in the history of this administration" in an editorial reacting to his departure.



In this file photo taken on December 30, 2020, the then UK chief trade negotiator David Frost looks on as Johnson signs the 'Brexit trade deal' between the UK and the EU at 10 Downing Street in London.

PHOTO: AFP



People queue to enter a passport office at a checkpoint in Kabul yesterday after Afghanistan's Taliban authorities said they will resume issuing passports. Many began their wait the previous night and most stood patiently in single file for their passports-- some desperate to leave the country for medical treatment, others to escape the Islamists' renewed rule.

PHOTO: REUTERS

OIC MEET ON AFGHANISTAN

Don't punish civilians

Urges Pakistan as it warns of 'grave consequences' for international community from 'complete economic meltdown' in the country

AFP, ISLAMABAD

Pakistan yesterday urged international community not to mix Afghanistan's 40 million civilians with the Taliban and warned of "grave consequences" for the region if Afghanistan's economic meltdown continued.

Speaking at the opening of a special meeting of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Islamabad, Pakistan foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said the deepening crisis could bring mass hunger, a flood of refugees and a rise in extremism.

"We cannot ignore the danger of complete economic meltdown," he told the gathering, which also included Taliban foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi alongside delegates from the United States, China, Russia, the European Union and UN.

He also urged world leaders to find ways to engage with the country's Taliban leaders to help prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

The meeting is the biggest conference on Afghanistan since the US-backed government fell in August and the Taliban returned to power.

Since then, billions of dollars in aid and assets have been frozen by the international community, and the nation is in the middle of a bitter

winter.

The United Nations has repeatedly warned that Afghanistan is on the brink of the world's worst humanitarian emergency with a

recognised the Taliban government and diplomats face the delicate task of channelling aid to the stricken Afghan economy without propping up the hardline Islamists.



I speak to the United States specifically that they must delink the Afghanistan government from the 40 million Afghan citizens. ... Every country is different... every society's idea of human rights is different.

PAKISTAN PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN

combined food, fuel and cash crisis. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said the world needed to separate the Taliban from ordinary Afghans.

"I speak to the United States specifically that they must delink the Afghanistan government from the 40 million Afghan citizens," he said, "even if they have been in conflict with the Taliban for 20 years."

He also urged caution in linking recognition of the new government to Western ideals of human rights.

"Every country is different... every society's idea of human rights is different," he said. No nation has yet formally

Nearly all the opening speakers made mention of the Taliban's need to protect the rights of minorities and allow women and girls access to work and education.

Although the Taliban have promised a lighter version of the hardline rule that characterised their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001, women are largely excluded from government employment, and secondary schools for girls have mostly remained shuttered.

The OIC meeting was not expected to give the new Taliban government the formal international recognition it desperately craves.

'My vote won't mean anything'

Voters shun polling stations as Hong Kong elites pick new 'patriots only' legislature

AFP, Hong Kong

Turnout was looking muted yesterday as Hong Kongers cast ballots for city lawmakers under Beijing's new "patriots only" rules which drastically reduce the number of directly elected seats and control who can run for office.

It is the first legislature poll under the new political blueprint China imposed on Hong Kong in response to massive and often violent pro-democracy protests two years ago.

All candidates have been vetted for their patriotism and political loyalty to China and only 20 of the 90 legislature seats are being directly elected.

The largest chunk of seats -- 40 -- are being picked by a committee of 1,500 staunch Beijing loyalists. The remaining 30 are chosen by reliably pro-Beijing committees that represent special-interest and industry groups.

Ten hours after polling stations opened, 1.1 million people had cast a vote, around 25 percent of the electorate.

Daniel So, a 65-year-old who works in technology, was among the first queuing at a polling centre in the wealthy Mid-Levels district.

"The young people are not so interested in this election because they are misled by foreign politicians and media," he told AFP. "China is doing so great now."

The city's biggest pro-democracy parties have put forward no candidates and a growing number of Hong Kong activists abroad have openly advocated a boycott.

As Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam arrived to cast her vote, three protesters from the pro-democracy League of Social Democrats party chanted: "I want genuine universal suffrage."

An accountant in her 20s, who gave her name as Loy, said she had no plans to use her ballot. "My vote won't mean anything because ultimately it's Beijing's people winning," she told AFP.

Lam has sought to manage expectations, telling state media last week that a low turnout could indicate "the government is doing well and its credibility is high".

Sunday's election has received vocal backing from Beijing, which sees the new system as a way to root out "anti-China" elements and restore order in a legislature freed from a disruptive opposition.

Critics counter that China has all but banned opposition politics in a city that once boasted a rambunctious political scene.

Quote of the day



We have to talk with each other, which means discussing the proposals that Russia has put forward. That is right and important. But it cannot be that Russia dictates to Nato partners how they position themselves.

GERMAN DEFENCE MINISTER CHRISTINE LAMBRECHT

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Soydabad, Sirajganj.

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e-Tender Notice

The following e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd):

Sl. No.	Tender ID	Brief Description of Tender	Publication Date	Last Selling Date & Time	Opening Date
1	637367	Procurement of Pumps & Other Auxiliaries	12-Dec-2021	02-Jan-2022 15:00 PM	04-Jan-2022
2	637153	Supply of different types of valves	14-Dec-2021	11-Jan-2022 14:30 PM	12-Jan-2022

This is an online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and e-GP Help Desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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