




Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on October 23, 2017

More Civilians Killed by U.S. in 7 Months Than in Previous 8 Years

During Donald Trump's first seven months as president of the United States, more civilians have been killed overseas by U.S. foreign interventionism than during the entire eight-year period his predecessor was in the White House. 

This ramping up of the "collateral" death toll cannot be dismissed as a tragic, unintentional consequence of the "war against terror," if Trump is to be taken at his word. During [an appearance](#) on Fox News' Channel's *Fox and Friends* morning show on December 2, 2015, candidate Trump said:

The other thing with the terrorists is you have to take out their families, when you get these terrorists, you have to take out their families. They care about their lives, don't kid yourself. When they say they don't care about their lives, you have to take out their families.

[An article](#) written by Steven Feldstein of Boise State University, citing a study by the monitoring group Airwars, notes that the frequency at which families are being taken out has increased, just as Trump promised. The Airwars report, Feldstein writes, "point to another stunning trend — the 'frequent killing of entire families in likely coalition airstrikes.' In May, for example, such actions led to the deaths of at least 57 women and 52 children in Iraq and Syria."

Families aren't the only target of the Trump-ordered drone war, however. Again, from Feldstein's summary of the Airwars report:

The first seven months of the Trump administration have already resulted in more civilian deaths than under the entirety of the Obama administration. Airwars reports that under Obama's leadership, the fight against IS led to approximately 2,300 to 3,400 civilian deaths. Through the first seven months of the Trump administration, they estimate that coalition air strikes have killed between 2,800 and 4,500 civilians.

Rachel Blevins, [writing for the Ron Paul Liberty Report](#), provides another precis of the Airwars findings. "The alarmingly high civilian death toll has continued to build up over the months. For example, from May 23 to June 23 of this year, at least 472 civilians were killed by U.S. airstrikes. That is significantly more than the 459 civilians who have been killed by terrorist attacks in Europe — in the last 12 years," she writes in her article of October 18.

The increase in the civilian death toll is a result not only of extending the "war on terror" to the families of those deemed to be terrorists by the administration, but also to another campaign promise fulfilled by President Trump, that of giving military commanders greater control over combat missions.

At [a press conference in April](#), President Trump defined his definition of his constitutional role as commander-in-chief of the armed services. "What I do is I authorize my military," Trump said. "We have the greatest military in the world, and they've done the job, as usual. We have given them total authorization, and that's what they're doing."

This is contrary to the understanding our Founding Fathers had of the importance of civilian control over the military. As James Madison explained in his "Helvidius No. 1" of August 24, 1793:



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Those who are to conduct a war cannot in the nature of things, be proper or safe judges, whether a war ought to be commenced, continued, or concluded. They are barred from the latter functions by a great principle in free government, analogous to that which separates the sword from the purse, or the power of executing from the power of enacting laws.

Thomas Jefferson, in his first inaugural address echoed his long-time friend and ally, stating:

The supremacy of the civil over the military authority I deem [one of] the essential principles of our Government, and consequently [one of] those which ought to shape its administration.

So President Trump is overseeing not only the transfer of the control of the military to the warfighters, but the result — increased innocent suffering — is predictable to those who know history.

Our Founding Fathers knew their history and knew not only the dangers of war. Again, from James Madison:

Of all the enemies to public liberty war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes; and armies, and debts, and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few. In war, too, the discretionary power of the Executive is extended; its influence in dealing out offices, honors, and emoluments is multiplied; and all the means of seducing the minds, are added to those of subduing the force, of the people. The same malignant aspect in republicanism may be traced in the inequality of fortunes, and the opportunities of fraud, growing out of a state of war, and in the degeneracy of manners and of morals engendered by both. No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.

Finally, of all the books read by our Founding Fathers, Hugo Grotius's *The Rights of War and Peace* ranks as the [15th most often cited](#).

In his seminal work, Grotius set out the rules history handed down regarding the distinction of a just war from an unjust war. "To justify taking up Arms in our own Defence [sic], there ought to be a Necessity for so doing, which there is not, unless we are sure, with a moral Certainty, that he has not only Forces sufficient, but a full Intention to injure us," Grotius writes in Book II of *The Rights of War and Peace*.

Another author on the list of those most often referred to by the Founding Generation is William Shakespeare. In his *Henry V*, Shakespeare paints a somber picture of the accountability of those who send soldiers — their own and those of an enemy — to their graves.

But if the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make; when all those legs and arms and heads, chopped off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day, and cry all, 'We died at such a place;' some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afeard there are few die well that die in a battle; for how can they charitably dispose of any thing when blood is their argument? Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the king that led them to it, whom to disobey were against all proportion of subjection.

We see, then, why our Founders believed that war was a last result: because they believed that as Christians they would be judged according to their actions and that the killing of another human being was forbidden by God. Thus, in order to avoid accountability for murder, one must have a "moral certainty" that he was justified by God in taking from another the gift of life. Otherwise, as Shakespeare



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explains, there will be a “heavy reckoning” and a “black matter” awaiting those who shed innocent blood.

As the number of people killed in the name of the government of the United States continues to crescendo, perhaps we would be wise to remember the wise words that guided our Founding Fathers and take time to make sure that we are morally certain that the killings are necessary.

Photo of U.S. destroyer firing tomahawk missile into Syria: AP Images



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