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We look at a damning new report that reveals how U.S.-led airstrikes against Islamic State militants in Iraq have killed far more civilians than officials have acknowledged. The coalition's own data shows 89 of its more than 14,000 airstrikes in Iraq have resulted in civilian deaths, or about one of every 157 strikes. But their on-the-ground investigation by The New York Times magazine found civilian deaths in "one out of every five" strikes. We are joined by the two reporters who co-authored this investigation titled "The Uncounted." Azmat Khan is an investigative journalist and a Future of War fellow at New America and Arizona State University; and Anand Gopal is a reporter and an assistant research professor at Arizona State University. A civilian survivor who lost his family and home to a 2015 U.S. airstrike in Mosul, Basim Razzo, also joins us from Erbil, Iraq.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: We are spending the hour looking at a *New York Times* investigation that reveals many of the American-led airstrikes against Islamic State militants actually killed civilians. One of the survivors the reporters interviewed, Basim Razzo, described a coalition airstrike on his home in Mosul, Iraq in 2015 in which his wife, daughter, brother, and nephew were killed. Video of the strike on his home shows a target hit with military precision.

AMY GOODMAN: Basim Razzo is just joining us, and you've heard a part of his story in our last segment as he speaks to us from Erbil, Iraq, via *Democracy Now!* video stream. And we're joined in our New York studio by the two reporters who co-authored the *New York Times* investigation headlined [The Uncounted](#) It was the cover of *The New York Times Magazine* this past Sunday.

Azmat Khan, investigative journalist and a Future of War fellow at New America and Arizona State University, and Anand Gopal, assistant research professor at Arizona State University, and the author of the book *No Good Men Among the Living*. Azmat Khan, talk about the U.S. figures for how many civilians have died, how many airstrikes, how many civilians killed, and then what you found.

AZMAT KHAN: So, the coalition, which is led by the United States, releases monthly civilian casualty figures. Our analysis of them shows that they have admitted to 466 Iraqi civilian deaths in 89 airstrikes. This is of more than 14,000 that they have carried out in Iraq, which is an incident rate of 0.6 percent. Less than one percent. What we found...

AMY GOODMAN: Less than 1 percent civilian killed.

AZMAT KHAN: Less than one percent, exactly—0.6 percent. What we found is that one in five airstrikes, or 31 times as high, resulted in civilian death.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And your analysis is based not obviously on all the 14,000, but you investigated about 103 separate incidents. Because 14,000 over roughly a four-year period, we're talking about 100 airstrikes a day on average that were occurring in Iraq in this war against ISIS.

AZMAT KHAN: Yeah. Many of these airstrikes took place near or around the time of liberation, but they were ongoing throughout. And so we saw an escalation around the time that Mosul or parts of Mosul were retaken. But you're basically looking at our sample, which was in East Mosul. It was in a neighborhood called Aden, a town that's—so and East Mosul is relatively an urban, densely packed neighborhood. Next, we had like a suburban municipality called Qayyarah. And after that, we had downtown Shura, which is probably a small settlement typical of many ISIS-held areas.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And in each of these 103 strikes, you actually went on the ground to interview people who were there at the time to find out what happened.

AZMAT KHAN: Exactly. So I've been to the site of every single one. We interviewed hundreds of survivors. We excavated the rubble. We looked for any presence of ISIS, whether that was in ISIS propaganda materials, weaponry. We analyzed bomb fragments. We analyzed satellite imagery before and after in order to assess the date ranges of when these airstrikes had happened. We also checked all of the civilian casualty allegations with local administrators, health officials, or law enforcement.

AMY GOODMAN: Anand Gopal, how does the U.S. military gather its numbers?

ANAND GOPAL: Most of these numbers come from internal reports by the U.S. military itself. For example, if they notice a mission irregularity, if let's say a pilot is dropping a bomb and all of the sudden a civilian vehicle appears after the bomb is dropped, they will report that to their superiors, and often times, they will investigate that.

Occasionally, they get reports from outside sources, from the media, from Airwars, which is a great organization that tracks these things. But they tend, more often than not, to actually discount those reports, and it is their own internal reports they take the most seriously, which is why the number is so low—466 civilians killed in 14,000 airstrikes.

If that was true, it would make it the most precise air war in the history of humanity. But it's because the threshold for what qualifies as evidence for being a civilian is extremely, extremely high. So in practice, people like Basim are in fact guilty until proven innocent.

AMY GOODMAN: So is Basim included in this count of civilians? Even the far lower count that the U.S. military has?

ANAND GOPAL: Well, initially, he wasn't. And a large part of our investigation was to press that point. His family members were not counted. They were listed as ISIS, basically. After the airstrike on his house, the coalition put up a video of the strike claiming that it was an IED factory, car bomb factory, essentially. And so you could have gone on YouTube and found the video of the bombing that destroyed his family for over a year.

And it was only after we found this and sort of showed this to the coalition that they kind of took it off YouTube. And eventually, after a long process of hundreds of emails and back and forth, did they admit that they killed his family and that they were civilians, and they were eventually added to the count. Today they are part of the count, but they had not been for many years.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Now, this issue of the preciseness of these strikes, which the military is always touting that they hit exactly what they're looking for—your report suggests that the problem is not so much in the munitions themselves, but in the intelligence of what are the targets that they actually strike. That it's faulty intelligence. Can you talk about that?

ANAND GOPAL: Well, that's right. And in fact, talking about precision in some ways is a slight of hand, because—and in fact, it is true they are very precise. They hit exactly what they intend to hit. The question is, what do they think they're hitting? And the intelligence is often so poor.

And again, it goes back to this issue of Iraqis having to prove that they are not ISIS, which is the opposite of what we would think. We would think that the coalition would do the work to find out whether somebody is a member of ISIS or not. Essentially, they assume people are ISIS until proven otherwise. And that's what leads to this extremely high count.

AMY GOODMAN: Basim Razzo, I wanted to go back to you. Now you are in Erbil. Your home is in Mosul. You went to Western Michigan University in Michigan, here in the United States?

BASIM RAZZO: Yes, I was at Western Michigan. I graduated in 1988 in a degree with industrial engineering—B.Sc.

AMY GOODMAN: And you traveled with your wife in a sort of love journey across the country?

BASIM RAZZO: Yeah, that was in 1982 when she joined me. We went for like a honeymoon for about 40 days around the United States in my car.

AMY GOODMAN: So you moved home to Mosul. Your family was killed in 2015. And what has been your interaction with the U.S. military?

BASIM RAZZO: Well, first, when I was in Turkey for my operation, I received a text on my Viber from the American Embassy in Baghdad saying that would like to contact me. I texted them back. I told them I was in Turkey and I will get in touch with them as soon as I am back in Baghdad. I returned late, about December. And then I texted them and then they gave me an appointment to meet with them in February. That is when I visited the American consulate in Baghdad.

And I have gathered some report. I wrote down the report. I gathered some pictures. Some aerial shots of my farm. And then I went to the embassy. I submitted the report to them. The woman who interviewed me, she told me that they would have to make sure that my allegations were right, and that they will pass my information to the DOD for verification. And then I never heard from them for like two months.

I emailed them back, and the lady said, “We still had not heard anything from them.” And nothing for months until about like five or six months later, I emailed them a letter, and it was returned, saying the mailbox is full. That is when I started doubting—that something is going on. And then that’s when I really met Azmat, and then things starting rolling from there.

AMY GOODMAN: The reporter who did this amazing piece, along with Anand Gopal for *The New York Times*

. So can you describe your meeting, when you went to the U.S. Embassy in—was it Baghdad? Tell us what you were demanding and what it was that they gave you.

BASIM RAZZO: OK. When I submitted my report, she looked at it and then she went inside into a room and she came back like 15 minutes later. In my report, I had demanded that first and most important thing to me was for them to state clearly that this bombing is a mistake. This is just to clear my name, and so I can no longer be afraid to go back to Mosul. Because at that time, I was labeled as ISIS. My second demand was for them to compensate me for the losses of my family. I demanded compensation for my injury. I had lost my job because of my injury. So this was basically my demands in my report that I submitted.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And what was their response?

BASIM RAZZO: Well, it took them months and months to—if it wasn't for Azmat's pushing—and then they offered me—first they admitted that the bombing was done by mistake. But this took months and months of emails back and forth. They still have not provided me with a clear letter saying that the bombing was done by mistake.

And then they gave me an appointment to meet in Erbil, to offer me a payment they call [inaudible] payment. When I met with them at Erbil airport, this lady lawyer, she expressed her sorrow and deepest sympathy to my accident. She said, "We are sorry. We know the bombing was done by mistake."

And I, for the second time and third time, I asked her, I said, "Listen, I need an explicit letter from you saying that the bombing was done by mistake." She said, "OK, I promise I will get you this letter." And then they offered me the payment of \$15,000 as a compensation for the death of my wife and my daughter, which I immediately declined. And she said "I'm sorry, sir, this is the most that we can do [and we are tapped off?]."

And then I asked her for one more request. My farm has been ransacked by government officials. I cannot say who because there were so many government agencies that entered Mosul and liberated Mosul, being the Army, the federal units, the Hashd. I don't know. But they entered my farm and they have ransacked it and have stolen so many things. And I said, "Listen, lady, I need you to help me get the word to whoever is in charge of that area that stop anybody from entering the premises."

And she also promised she will get in touch through the American forces with the local commanders to stop anybody from entering. But this has not happened. Actually, until about three weeks ago, they have entered the premises again and they have stolen more material from storage that we have. So they have not offered me anything until now.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: I wanted to ask Azmat Khan—this is a family that is a professional family, well educated, was relatively middle-class. And there are many others who are victims who are not so fortunate and don't have the ability to really confront the coalition. You talk about one case in April of 2015 where 18 civilians were killed and where the coalition is still saying there's insufficient evidence that any civilians were killed in that attack. What is happening with all of these other cases?

AZMAT KHAN: Right. That particular incident was an electrical substation in East Mosul, for which there was ample evidence of online. When I went on the ground and interviewed people, dozens of people, they said, “Just go online. You’ll find the videos.” And I did.

They showed children who were maimed and hurt. Some of their legs were blown off.

These young, young children, boys and girls—there is no doubt about whether or not they are civilians. And so this was readily available to the coalition, but in the coalition’s own assessment of this incident, they concluded there was insufficient evidence.

Now, to speak to this excellent point about how so many survivors that I have met really don’t have the resources or access or networks in the way that Basim did, to, for example, arrange an appointment at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, what I found repeatedly were people who couldn’t even afford to rebuild their homes. Some people who couldn’t afford to even seek necessary medical treatment.

One family in Mosul had three injured. They lost eight individuals in an airstrike last November in East Mosul. What they told me was that “we are still injured.” And the women took me to a room in the back and one woman revealed her headscarf and pulled open a cap and you could actually see the skull on her—you could see the skull visible from the top. Another woman, her hand...

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: She had had no medical treatment since...

AZMAT KHAN: She had had no medical treatment. They needed really expensive surgeries. And ultimately what we did is we provided all of the coordinates of these airstrikes to both the coalition and to the U.S. Air Force after we had visited the base in Qatar, where many of these aircraft take off from. What they told us in the case of, for example, the incident I just described to you with these injured women who could not afford medical treatment, was in that case, they had conducted an airstrike just meters away on that day.

So this is very likely a coalition airstrike.

And these individuals, who often don't even have cell phones that are working all of the time, have very little means and access. And we have now turned over all of those allegations that were close to where the coalition reported coordinates to us. And we are waiting to hear a response to them about whether or not they are even going to investigate them.

AMY GOODMAN: And Azmat, when Basim went to the U.S. lawyer and he laid out all he had lost—this is outside of the agony of the loss of his family—his wife and daughter, his nephew, deeply close to him, and his brother next door—talked about what the houses were worth. He owns a downtown building in Mosul, said something like \$500,000. And then they said altogether, \$15,000 if he signs on the dotted line. How common is this? I mean, he is talking about, even this wouldn't have happened—though he has not gotten a letter that he is not part of ISIS, even if they say it to him privately. How typical is this?

AZMAT KHAN: So this is one of two condolence payment offers that have been offered in this entire anti-ISIS air war. So since August 2014, and some 27,000 airstrikes in both Iraq and Syria, this is one of two offers. This is the only offer that was made for a civilian death. The other offer that was made was for damage to a car in a separate airstrike, but not for a civilian. And so Basim has...

AMY GOODMAN: How much has been allocated?

AZMAT KHAN: So, every year, for the last two years, Congress has authorized \$5 million dollars in funds to be used for payments like these. There have only been two offers made.

Basim is the only offer for a civilian death that has been made during that time. And in this case, the \$15,000, just to give you a sense, it was his wife and daughter only—that is even higher than what they ordinarily offer, which is usually capped at \$2,500 per death.

AMY GOODMAN: Did it have something to do with you being there?

AZMAT KHAN: Anand was actually in the meeting with them.

AMY GOODMAN: Anand, describe that meeting and your participation in it.

ANAND GOPAL: Yeah. I went with Basim to the meeting at the Erbil airport, and we didn't exactly know how much they would offer, although we expected that it's not going to be high. And in the meeting, the JAG officials explained that the offer they were going to make wasn't an offer of compensation, but of condolence.

And it was an important difference, because the U.S. military is not in the business of compensating civilians who have lost things. Because of course, the problem is, from their perspective, if they feel that they start compensating people for what they have lost, then they're going to start having to pay out hundreds of millions of dollars, and it would impede their very ability to wage a war. So instead, it is an offer of condolence, ultimately with the idea of not having Iraqis upset at them. That's the purpose here.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And what has been the reaction by the U.S. military, by the coalition, since your article came out?

ANAND GOPAL: Well, almost nothing, actually. We have been waiting to hear something from them. We gave them all of our essential findings way before the article was published—three or four weeks before—and asked them for comment on each specific individual allegation that was made in the piece. And we haven't heard a thing.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: But an on-the-ground investigation by *The New York Times Magazine* titled

[The Uncounted](#)

found the actual civilian death toll is much higher than the U.S. is admitting. In fact, the report reveals that as many as one in five coalition airstrikes on ISIS targets in Iraq resulted in civilian deaths.

The reporters write, “To understand how radically different our assessment is from the coalition’s own, consider this: According to the coalition’s available data, 89 of its more than 14,000 airstrikes in Iraq have resulted in civilian deaths, or about one of every 157 strikes. The rate we found on the ground—one out of every five—is 31 times as high.” For more, we’re joined by the two reporters who co-authored this investigation titled [The Uncounted](#).

Azmat Khan is an investigative journalist and a Future of War fellow at New America and Arizona State University. And Anand Gopal is an assistant research professor at Arizona State University and the author of *No Good Men Among the Living*. Also with us is Basim Razzo in Erbil, Iraq, via *Democracy Now!* video stream.

Basim Razzo, I’d like to begin with you. In our headlines today, we talked about—and I understand that he is in the dark right now because the electricity has gone out in his city. But his line is still working with us. I would like to ask you—in our headlines, we reported that the United States is going to end up spending trillions of dollars just in interest over the next decades on all of the military, the interventions in Iraq and Syria. I am wondering, when you hear this enormous amount of funds and yet you find that you are one of the few people, civilians, who suffered from a U.S. airstrike that has actually been offered any kind of payment, your reaction when you hear these enormous sums spent, and yet so little that the United States is setting aside for the victims of its mistaken attacks.

AMY GOODMAN: I think his light has just come on.

BASIM RAZZO: Yes, it just came on. Well, really, it is very upsetting because, actually, the first time I heard that the civilian life of an Iraqi killed was \$2,500, which was really, really upsetting, I felt it was degrading. And I talked to one person—I said, “How would you feel, like if you are in an airplane accident in the United States, and you lost somebody you love, and the airline will give you \$2,500 for it?” He said, “I would be outraged.” I said, “How do you think I feel? My wife, daughter, brother, and nephew were killed by an airstrike, and they were innocent civilians, and now they offered me \$15,000 for two people.” I was outraged really by this amount. Very, very upset.

AMY GOODMAN: Anand Gopal, can you talk about the effect of this on Iraq? The far more—far greater number of civilians killed than the U.S. is willing to admit, as it says it is routing out ISIS, the so-called Islamic State?

ANAND GOPAL: Yeah. The U.S. has effectively defeated ISIS, but at the cost of destroying whole cities and leaving thousands, if not tens of thousands, of families completely broken. Mosul is an example in which at least half of the city of Mosul is nearly in rubble. And these are not accidents in the sense that we would normally think about it.

These are policy decisions. For instance, in Mosul, the city of Mosul was surrounded and civilians and ISIS fighters were not allowed to leave the city in an exit corridor, which was one of the conditions which induced ISIS to take civilians hostage and led to extraordinary numbers of civilian casualties.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And Azmat, you had mentioned that your study area was East Mosul, but really some of the worst damage was in West Mosul, and you think that the casualty figures may actually be much higher than even your study shows?

AZMAT KHAN: Yes. Not just because we didn't include West Mosul, but also because these airstrikes that we were serving—the 103 in that sample—occurred before a rule change that stated last December, under President Obama, that authorized more ground commanders, to be able to call in and approve airstrikes. And many believe that this was one of the reasons why we saw a spike in civilian casualties from these airstrikes.

But I also want to point out what we found to be a lack of ability to investigate properly by the coalition. What we found repeatedly during the course of our investigation is not just that they were not necessarily locating evidence or verifying evidence for allegations, but also that they sometimes lacked the information to even determine sometimes whether an airstrike was a coalition airstrike or their own.

In the 103 coordinates, and even more than that, that we passed on, we were told sometimes, "Listen, this particular airstrike was not us. It is unlikely to be us. The nearest airstrike we carried out was as far as 600 meters away." But then we would find coalition videos uploaded by the coalition itself showing those airstrikes in the places that we had pinpointed, or in that area.

And when we followed up about it, we were told “We can only tell you what the log shows.” And we had this happen on several occasions. And what it shows you is that their logs are incomplete or what they’re searching is incomplete. And the number one reason that they cite when they deny a civilian casualty allegation is that they have no record of a coalition airstrike taking place in a geographic area. And that casts doubt on their credibility investigations so far.

AMY GOODMAN: Have they taken down all these YouTube videos?

AZMAT KHAN: They took down videos from YouTube. These videos still—and to distinguish, they still exist on other military websites, but YouTube was the one place where people could comment.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: So in other words, to follow up on this, what you’re suggesting is that the actual record keeping, the logs of where the attacks occurred, are sometimes incorrect, which could either mean, one, just sloppy log keeping by the soldiers involved, or deliberate reports of the wrong coordinates for an attack?

AZMAT KHAN: It really is troubling that these records were not kept in a way that was conducive to accurately investigating or investigating properly, because what we were told when I visited Qatar and I went to the Combined Air Operations Center, is that “We have 100 percent authority over where we drop our weapons. We know exactly where they are landing.” And that turned out in some cases not to be true.

AMY GOODMAN: The U.S. military says it is the most precise war and targeting that they have ever engaged in. We only have a minute, and we want to give that minute to the focus of your story, though you tell many. As we talk about what has happened to Basim Razzo, your final comment, your message to the world?

BASIM RAZZO: Well, I want to add just one more thing in this one minute. Just like Azmat said, because there was no exit corridor for ISIS, they were forced to stay in the city and fight. And the excessive use of force, because some—probably one member of ISIS would be on top of a roof of a building—just remember, Azmat, the guy we met from [inaudible] family. There were two numbers of

ISIS

on his roof, and the whole house was bombed. This was excessive use of force.

My friends in Mosul told me of really precision bombing on small cars and only the car will be hit. But when you want to kill one person, you demolish a whole house? This is really terrible. I'm sorry for all the loss that has happened. I really would like the Americans to restudy their strategy of using this precision [inaudible].