

THE LESSON TRUMP HAS (THUS FAR) NOT TAUGHT US: CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

I have a confession.

There's something I like about the Trump Administration.

It's the way that his unpopularity taints long-standing policies or practices or beliefs, making people aware of and opposed to them in a way they weren't when the same policies or beliefs were widely held under George Bush or Barack Obama. Many, though not all, of these policies or beliefs were embraced unquestioningly by centrists or even avowed leftists.

I've been keeping a running list in my mind, which I'll begin to lay out here (I guess I'll update it as I remember more).

- Expansive surveillance
- The presumption of regularity, by which courts and the public assume the Executive Branch operates in good faith and from evidence
- Denigration of immigrants
- Denigration of Muslims
- Denigration health insurance

As an example, Obama deported a huge number of people. But now that Trump has expanded that same practice, it has been made visible and delegitimized.

In short, Trump has made things that should always have been criticized are now being far more widely so.

But there's one thing that Trump has escalated that has thus far – with the singular exception of the botched raid on Yemen – escaped widespread condemnation: the bombing of civilians. There was the Al Jineh mosque on March 16, a school sheltering families in Raqqa on March 21, and this strike last week in Mosul, not to mention continued Saudi attacks in Yemen that the US facilitates.

Again, I'm not saying such civilian strikes didn't happen under Obama. And it's not clear whether this spate of civilian bombings arises from a change in the rule of engagement put in place in December, the influence of James Mattis, or Trump's announced review of rules of engagement. But civilians are dying.

And for the most part, unlike all the other horrible things happening under President Trump, they're getting little notice and condemnation in the US.

Update: This NYT story on the Mosul strike says that the increased civilian casualties do reflect a change in rules of engagement put in place under Trump.