Pristine War and Zero Casualties

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[*American Thinker*](https://mail.hrvoices.org/OWA/redir.aspx?C=WOFiCcd9GUeqPPgOqv-bzJhXz-KmjtIIGWILSsAGStlJ8TEHvwcGjbrn242wvJcXGP3zQUJ14l8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.americanthinker.com%2farticles%2f2015%2f07%2fpristine_war_and_zero_casualties.html)  
http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2015/07/pristine\_war\_and\_zero\_casualties.html

The president -- Commander in Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces -- does not have to be a military man. Or maybe *should* not be a military man; a civilian perspective on issues of war is essential. But that being so, the civilian CinC should be wary of inventing military doctrine.

President Obama had a brief -- and unusual -- visit to the Pentagon this week. Normally, he receives his national security briefings in the White House, but he had a message to deliver about America's war against ISIS. "Ideologies," he said, "are not [defeated with guns](https://mail.hrvoices.org/OWA/redir.aspx?C=WOFiCcd9GUeqPPgOqv-bzJhXz-KmjtIIGWILSsAGStlJ8TEHvwcGjbrn242wvJcXGP3zQUJ14l8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.realclearpolitics.com%2fvideo%2f2015%2f07%2f06%2fobama_on_isis_threat_ideologies_are_not_defeated_with_guns_they_are_defeated_by_better_ideas.html), they are defeated by better ideas."

It was an extraordinary and ill-informed insult in front of the uniformed commanders.

The American Republic was a better idea than continued rule by a dictator in London, but only the Continental Army made it a reality. The Emancipation Proclamation was surely a better idea than slavery, but President Lincoln essentially freed slaves over whom he had no control -- until Grant received Lee's surrender.

The reigning hateful ideologies of our time are strains of religious extremism coupled with nationalist irredentism. They are, in fact, no different than the religious and nationalist extremism that led to conflagration in the Balkans in the early part of the 20th Century. Serbs, Croats, Greeks, Albanians, Macedonians, Romanians, and others committed atrocities ISIS would recognize under an ideology -- "me and mine only" -- of which it would approve. (See Robert Kaplan's prescient [*Balkan Ghosts*](https://mail.hrvoices.org/OWA/redir.aspx?C=WOFiCcd9GUeqPPgOqv-bzJhXz-KmjtIIGWILSsAGStlJ8TEHvwcGjbrn242wvJcXGP3zQUJ14l8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.amazon.com%2fBalkan-Ghosts-Journey-Through-History%2fdp%2f0312424930) if you want the chilling details; and remember, you were warned about the abattoir.)

Only after WWII, with the territory under the heel of the Allied Powers and then the USSR, were the flames of the nationalist/religious idea tamped down -- though not extinguished. The brutal Balkan wars of the 1990s were the result of lifting the military hammer of the USSR and the death of Tito.

Nazi ideology had tremendous resonance in Europe. Our "better idea" didn't help until Eisenhower, Patton, and the Allies were living in Berlin. MacArthur de-deified the Japanese Emperor from Tokyo.

While the president left us to assume the "better idea" is the American vision of a liberal, democratic, free-market society beating out local hatreds, a second odd political/military theory has been explicitly spelled out.

War is, by its nature, ugly. There are some agreed-upon rules (sometimes honored in the breech) and there are some countries that make their own rules – higher or lower than international standards. Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey said Israel in the 2014 Gaza War went to "[extraordinary lengths](https://mail.hrvoices.org/OWA/redir.aspx?C=WOFiCcd9GUeqPPgOqv-bzJhXz-KmjtIIGWILSsAGStlJ8TEHvwcGjbrn242wvJcXGP3zQUJ14l8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.haaretz.com%2fnews%2fdiplomacy-defense%2f1.625194)" to protect the civilian population within which Hamas had hidden. So much so that he sent a senior American military delegation to learn from Israeli tactics.

The White House, which criticized Israel at that time for not being careful *enough*, appears to have set its own standard for the U.S. Air Force: zero civilian casualties.

It was noticed on Capitol Hill that the number of air sorties against ISIS in Iraq and Syria is[very small](https://mail.hrvoices.org/OWA/redir.aspx?C=WOFiCcd9GUeqPPgOqv-bzJhXz-KmjtIIGWILSsAGStlJ8TEHvwcGjbrn242wvJcXGP3zQUJ14l8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fthehill.com%2fpolicy%2fdefense%2fpolicy-strategy%2f245932-us-aims-for-zero-civilian-casualties-in-war-vs-isis)compared to prior air campaigns in the region: 1,241 sorties a day during Operation Desert Storm; 691 a day in the first month of the Iraq War; and 86 a day during the opening phase of the Afghanistan War. The coalition is presently averaging 12 strike sorties a day. The reason, according to an Air Force official, is that, "there's a target of [zero civilian casualties](https://mail.hrvoices.org/OWA/redir.aspx?C=WOFiCcd9GUeqPPgOqv-bzJhXz-KmjtIIGWILSsAGStlJ8TEHvwcGjbrn242wvJcXGP3zQUJ14l8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fthehill.com%2fpolicy%2fdefense%2fpolicy-strategy%2f245932-us-aims-for-zero-civilian-casualties-in-war-vs-isis), so if there are civilian casualty concerns, we would continue to monitor a target or a potential target to see if there is a way to mitigate that."

It has been estimated the only 30 percent of American sorties drop their bombs; the rest abort.

Calling "zero casualties" the "new normal," LTG John Hesterman III, commander of the coalition air war said in a separate statement, "That's been true for about the last 10 years, by the way -- you know, based on the way we do conflict."

The result of "the way we do conflict" is that ISIS has had time to spread itself among the civilians of Iraq -- much like Hamas amid the civilians of Gaza. This reduces the likelihood of future sorties and reduces any fear ISIS might have had that we will conduct meaningful warfare. Under that circumstance, more civilians will die at the hands of ISIS than might have under carefully constructed American air strikes. And, like Israel's air strikes, they would have been carefully constructed, taking full account of the requirements of [military proportionality](https://mail.hrvoices.org/OWA/redir.aspx?C=WOFiCcd9GUeqPPgOqv-bzJhXz-KmjtIIGWILSsAGStlJ8TEHvwcGjbrn242wvJcXGP3zQUJ14l8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.jewishpolicycenter.org%2f5353%2fthe-doctrine-of-proportionality).

Air Force Col. Ed Thomas, spokesman for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff quite rightly notes, "[How we conduct ourselves](https://mail.hrvoices.org/OWA/redir.aspx?C=WOFiCcd9GUeqPPgOqv-bzJhXz-KmjtIIGWILSsAGStlJ8TEHvwcGjbrn242wvJcXGP3zQUJ14l8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fthehill.com%2fpolicy%2fdefense%2fpolicy-strategy%2f245932-us-aims-for-zero-civilian-casualties-in-war-vs-isis) in warfare against a terrorist enemy intermingled within the society that they have infiltrated will have profound impacts on the way in which the U.S. is viewed in the Middle East and in this campaign." But to the civilians begging for rescue, our self-imposed restraint assuages our conscience while consigning them longer to a ferocious foe.

In his Pentagon visit, the President did acknowledge that the U.S. "[lacks a complete strategy](https://mail.hrvoices.org/OWA/redir.aspx?C=WOFiCcd9GUeqPPgOqv-bzJhXz-KmjtIIGWILSsAGStlJ8TEHvwcGjbrn242wvJcXGP3zQUJ14l8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.cbc.ca%2fnews%2fworld%2fbarack-obama-says-isis-will-be-defeated-by-ideas-not-guns-1.3140231)" for defeating ISIS in Iraq or Syria. Perhaps as he searches for one he will come to understand that ending wars with victory on our side requires military force and – regrettably -- will include casualties. But the better ideas of man can't be implemented until the war is over.