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"Countries bombed: Obama 7, Bush 4"

— [Ryan Lizza](#) on Monday, September 22nd, 2014 in a
tweet



Lizza says Obama has bombed more nations than Bush

By [Jon Greenberg](#) on Thursday, September 25th, 2014 at 10:47 a.m.



The guided-missile destroyer USS Arleigh Burke (DDG 51) launches Tomahawk cruise missiles on Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2014, from the Red Sea against Islamic State group targets in Syria. (AP/U.S. Navy)

The irony of President Barack Obama, Nobel Prize winner and putative anti-war candidate, launching extensive airstrikes in Syria, quickly led to comparisons with his predecessor, President George W. Bush.

Ryan Lizza, Washington correspondent for the *New Yorker* summed it up in [one tweet](#).

"Countries bombed: Obama 7, Bush 4."

We asked Lizza for his list and he sent us this:

Bush: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Somalia.

Obama: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Syria.

As we fact-checked Lizza's statement, we found little reason to challenge the nations he named. If anything, he shortchanged both presidents.

There is no dispute whatsoever about airstrikes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. Bush launched wars in the first two countries and drone strikes in Pakistan have been in the news for a long time, with or without official acknowledgment. Airstrikes in those places continued under Obama.

Somalia falls largely in the same category as Pakistan. The [New York Times](#), [BBC News](#) and other news organizations reported airstrikes as early as 2007 against people linked to the al-Qaida network.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, a nonprofit news service based

at City University London, maintains a running list of U.S. military actions in a number of countries, including [Somalia](#) and [Yemen](#). The bureau annotates each incident with links to press reports. By its tally, American drone strikes against suspected terrorists in Somalia occurred under both Bush and Obama.

The same pattern holds in Yemen. [BBC News](#) and [Time](#) magazine reported a CIA-directed drone attack in Yemen in 2002. This would increase Bush's total to five countries, rather than the four Lizza cited. Lizza said he left Yemen off of Bush's list because it was a "one-off strike, rather than a more sustained bombing campaign. Probably deserves an asterisk."

The air attacks on Libya that helped topple Moammar Gadhafi in 2011 under Obama are well documented. In March 2011, the United States and British warships fired over 100 cruise missiles to destroy Libyan air defenses. And, of course, there's now Syria.

We might stop there but it is possible that the Philippines should be added to the rosters for both presidents.

The [New York Times](#) cites "three current and former intelligence officials" as saying that drones fired Hellfire missiles at a suspected militant camp in the Philippines in 2006. And Akbar Ahmed, a professor at the American University School of International Service, wrote on the [Brookings Institution](#) website that a similar attack took place in 2012.

If these reports are accurate, the totals for Bush and Obama would rise by one. The final, maximum number would be Bush 6: Obama 8.

PunditFact cannot confirm the authenticity of these reports.

This framework says little about the nature of each president's air campaigns. According to [Air Force data](#), the number of munitions dropped in Afghanistan and Iraq declined about 35 percent between 2007 under Bush and 2009 under Obama (adjusted for missing data in 2009). However in Afghanistan, the number of sorties with at least one weapon release and the number of munitions used rose in [2010 and 2011 before falling in 2012](#), according to Air Force data. The number of weapon releases fell greatly in 2013.

The country tally also tells us nothing about the general military strategy under each president. Bush initiated the war in Iraq, while Obama was elected on [the promise to end it](#).

Our ruling

Lizza said that Obama has bombed seven countries to Bush's four. Depending on your view of Bush's reported drone strike into Yemen, he may have slightly undercounted Bush's tally. Both presidents also may have bombed the Philippines.

But it's hard to fault Lizza for the numbers we use.

We rate his claim True.



About this statement:

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Sources:

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