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Israel Killed and Injured More Civilians with Explosive Weapons than Any Other State in 2014

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Damage caused by Israeli explosives remains visible in this mosque and many other buildings in Gaza. Mohammed Asad/APA images.

Israel killed and injured more civilians with explosive weapons than any other state in the world in 2014 due to its military assault on Gaza. This is according to a new report by Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), an organization that tracks the global impact of explosive weapons on civilians.

The report defines explosive weapons as "munitions such as air-dropped bombs, mortars, improvised explosive devices and artillery shells" which cause "deaths, injuries and damage by projecting explosive blast, heat and often fragmentation around a point of detonation."

While both state and non-state groups contributed to civilian casualties in 2014, states were responsible for 28 percent of civilian injuries and deaths, a sharp 17 percent rise from the previous year. This was due in large part to Israel's military assault on Gaza, which accounted for 44 percent of all explosive violence in 2014.

Figure 4 **Biggest state users of explosive weapons in 2014**

	States	
1	Israel	44% of incidents
2	Syria	16%
3	Iraq	10%
4	Pakistan	8%
5	Ukraine	5%
6	US	3%

(Source: Action on Armed Violence)

Bolstering previous human rights assessments that have accused Israel of war crimes, the AOAV report sheds further light on the degree of firepower the residents of Gaza were subjected to last summer.

Dubbed Operation Protective Edge, Israel's 51-day bombing campaign killed 2,251 Palestinians and injured another 11,000, according to UN figures. The vast majority of those killed (1,462) were civilians, including 551 children, making Gaza the third most dangerous place in the world to be a civilian in 2014, according to AOAV.

As a result, Palestinians in Gaza made up 43 percent of global civilian casualties from artillery shelling, 35 percent of civilian casualties from aerial bombings and 40 percent of worldwide child casualties from explosive violence in 2014.

After the dust settled, bomb disposal experts estimated that Israel dropped the equivalent of six atomic bombs on Gaza.

In 2014, Gaza accounted for the third highest number of civilian casualties from explosive violence globally, exceeding civilian death and injury in Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Ukraine.

Figure 2 **Most affected countries and territories in 2014**

Position	Country/ Territory	Civilian casualties	All casualties	Number of recorded incidents	Average civilian casualties per incident	Percentage of casualties who were civilians	Global ranking in 2013
1	Iraq	10,735	13,364	610	18	80%	1
2	Syria	6,247	7,705	354	18	81%	2
3	Gaza	3,813	4,022	416	9	95%	32
4	Nigeria	2,407	2,477	49	49	97%	16
5	Pakistan	2,211	3,903	321	7	57%	3
6	Afghanistan	1,850	2,657	213	9	70%	4
7	Ukraine	1,428	1,848	155	9	77%	New
8	Lebanon	484	607	42	12	80%	5
9	Yemen	482	857	46	10	56%	8
10	India	340	446	81	4	76%	6
11	Libya	306	549	36	9	56%	9
12	Somalia	287	620	44	7	46%	7
13	Thailand	273	300	32	9	91%	15
14	Kenya	259	265	18	14	98%	20
15	Philippines	247	327	42	6	76%	14

(Source: Action on Armed Violence)

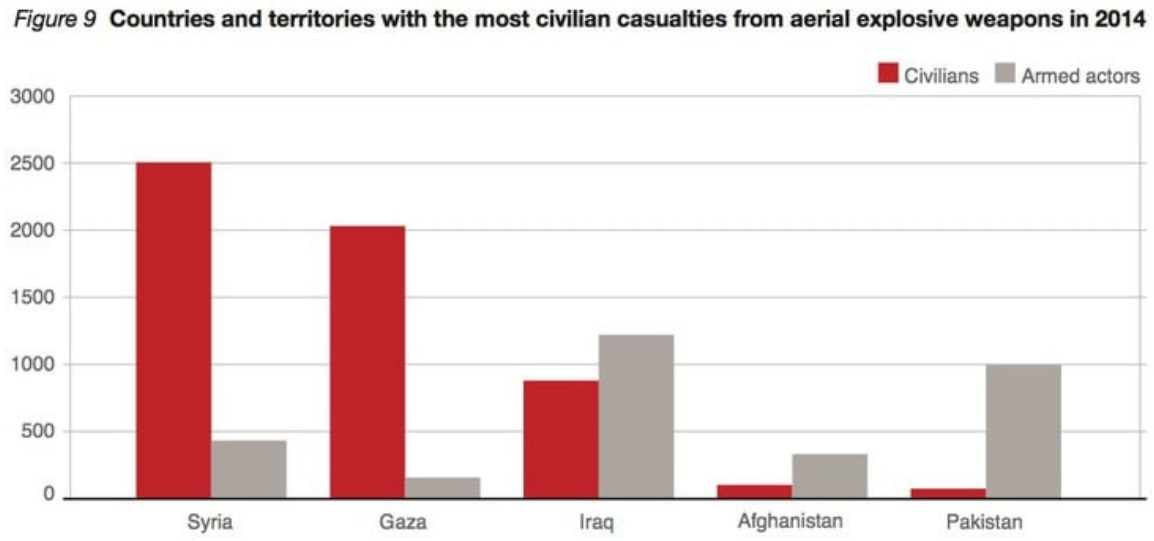
Of the 4,022 injuries and deaths from explosive violence AOAV recorded in Gaza, 3,813 were civilians.

This means that civilians comprised an alarming 95 percent of those killed or maimed by explosives in Gaza, placing Israel in the same league as the militant group Boko Haram, whose deadly suicide and IED (improvised explosive device) attacks resulted in a 97 percent civilian casualty rate in Nigeria. By comparison, the rate of civilian casualties in Syria,

to which Israel often refers to deflect from its own atrocities, was 81 percent.

Such findings contradict Israeli proclamations that it does more than any other force on earth to avoid civilian casualties.

Israel was responsible for more than one third, or 35 percent, of civilians hit by air-launched explosives, Syria for 43 percent and Iraq for 8 percent, leading to a nearly threefold global rise in civilian casualties from aerial explosives in 2014.



(Source: Action on Armed Violence)

Israel launched more than 6,000 airstrikes in Gaza, which caused 53 percent of Gaza's civilian casualties, according to AOAV. The other 47 percent were killed or injured by ground and naval shelling.

Furthermore, the report found that 43 percent of Israeli air attacks were launched by drones, accounting for 29 percent of Gaza's civilian casualties.

An investigation by the Associated Press generated similar results, finding that over half of civilians killed in Gaza died in Israeli airstrikes on their homes, "including 19 babies and 108 preschoolers between the ages of one and five."

Aerial explosives were particularly detrimental to children around the world, "with 44 percent of all deaths and injuries being reported as caused by air launched weapons," the AOAV report states, citing as an example the 29 July air assault on an apartment building in Khan Younis that killed 18 children and critically injured another four as they sheltered with their families.

A study by Defense for Children International-Palestine found that 225 Palestinian children were killed in Israeli airstrikes "while they were in their own homes or seeking shelter, often as they sat down to eat with their families, played or slept." Another 164 children were "directly targeted and unlawfully killed" by Israeli drone strikes on their homes and in the street as they attempted to flee to safety.

Indeed, Israel proved itself to be a world leader at killing and maiming children with explosives. Of the total child casualties from explosive violence in 2014, 40 percent were in Gaza and 25 percent were in Syria, revealed AOAV.

Artillery shelling

Though Israel possesses a high tech arsenal of precision-guided weapons, it pounded the densely populated Gaza Strip with 34,000 unguided shells, including 19,000 high-explosive artillery shells. As a result, Palestinians in Gaza made up 43 percent of global civilian casualties from artillery shelling.

Israel fired these weapons indiscriminately into Gaza's densely populated neighborhoods.

On 19 and 20 July, Israel battered the neighborhood of Shujaiya with 7,000 high explosive shells, firing 4,800 shells within a seven-hour period. The extent of the indiscriminate shelling, which killed at least 55 people, including 19 children and 14 women, was so unprecedented, senior US military officers who participated in the US destruction of Iraq were reportedly left "stunned."

While the AOAV report attributes high civilian casualties by states to the targeting of groups and individuals in populated areas, it should be noted that statements by Israeli military leaders demonstrate a calculated military strategy that deliberately and systematically targets civilians and civilian infrastructure.

As a recent investigation by the UN Human Rights Council observed, Israel's widespread attacks on civilians in Gaza "may have constituted military tactics reflective of a broader policy, approved at least tacitly by decision-makers at the highest levels of the government of Israel."

Still, Israeli officials and their American benefactors are adamant that Israel is an enlightened democracy surrounded by a hostile sea of ruthless Arab dictators and marauding terrorist groups. However, the reality in Gaza suggests Israeli leaders have far more in common with the figures they detest than they would care to admit.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration has approved a $1.9 billion weapons package to Benjamin Netanyahu's government, essentially guaranteeing Israel's capacity to reenact its 2014 attack against the people of Gaza. At this point, it's simply a matter of when.

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