

Israeli Bombing of Gaza Ranks Among ‘Most Devastating’ in History

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“Gaza is one of the most intense civilian punishment campaigns in history,” said a U.S. military historian as Israel’s use of arms including 2,000-pound “bunker-buster” bombs pushed the Palestinian death toll over 20,000.

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As the Palestinian death toll from Israel’s 10-week annihilation of the Gaza Strip passed 20,000, warfare experts said this weekend that the retaliatory campaign ranks among the deadliest and most destructive in modern history.

Gaza health officials [said](#) Friday that 390 Palestinians were killed and 734 others wounded in the besieged strip over the previous 48 hours, driving the death toll from 77 days of near-relentless Israeli attacks to 20,057, with another 53,320 people injured. More than 6,000 women and over 8,000 children have been killed—approximately 70% of all fatalities.

That’s more than twice the number of civilians—and over 14 times as many children—as Russian forces have [killed](#) in Ukraine since February 2022.

Thousands more Palestinians are missing and feared buried beneath the rubble of the hundreds of thousands of buildings destroyed or damaged by Israeli bombardment.

“The scale of Palestinian civilian deaths in such a short period of time appears to be the highest such civilian casualty rate in the 21st century,” Michael Lynk, who served as the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories from 2016 to 2022, [told](#) *The Washington Post* on Saturday.

In 75 days, Israel killed 20,000 Palestinians and obliterated 308,000 homes in

Gaza. That's 70% of the residential buildings in Gaza.

To put it in perspective, it's as if over 100 million homes in the USA were destroyed.

This is beyond warfare; it's a deliberate genocide....
pic.twitter.com/qKopPpE0mX

— أدهم أبو سلمية Adham Abu Selmiya (@adham922) [December 22, 2023](#)

Robert Pape, a U.S. military historian and University of Chicago professor, [told](#) *The Associated Press* that

“Gaza is one of the most intense civilian punishment campaigns in history.”

“It now sits comfortably in the top quartile of the most devastating bombing campaigns ever,” he added.

By comparison, the 2017 U.S.-led coalition battle for Mosul, Iraq during the war against the so-called Islamic State—widely viewed as among the most intense urban assaults in recent decades—killed approximately 10,000 civilians, [around a third](#) of them from aerial bombardment.

Pape said that by some measures, Israel’s bombing of Gaza is surpassing the Allied “[terror bombing](#)” of German cities during World War II.

He noted that U.S. and U.K. airstrikes obliterated about 40-50% of the urban areas of the 51 German cities bombed between 1942-45, and that around 10% of all buildings in Germany were destroyed. In Gaza, approximately 1 in 3 buildings have been destroyed. In northern Gaza, over two-thirds of all buildings have been leveled.

“Gaza is now a different color from space. It’s a different texture,” Corey Scher, who studies natural disasters and wars using satellite remote sensing at the City University of New York’s Graduate Center, told the *AP*.

Parts of Gaza look like a wasteland from space: Before and after | AP News
<https://t.co/7r1p6lA67p>

— Gabriel San Román (@gsanroman2) [December 23, 2023](#)

Experts point to the types of munitions being used by Israeli forces as a major reason why so many Gazans are being killed and injured. These include U.S.-supplied 1,000-pound and 2,000-pound guided “bunker-buster” bombs, which Israel says are necessary to target Hamas’ underground tunnels.

These massive bombs turn “earth to liquid,” Marc Garlasco, a former Pentagon defense official and war crimes investigator for the United Nations, told the *AP*. “It pancakes entire buildings.”

Garlasco said that 2,000-pound bombs mean “instant death” for anyone within about 100

feet of the blast, with shrapnel posing a deadly danger for people up to 1,200 feet away.

Sometimes 2,000-pound bombs leave craters in the ground where they strike that are approximately 40ft in diameter. Leveraging this fact, we trained an object detection AI algorithm to find craters visible in satellite imagery of south Gaza pic.twitter.com/JjGdZsFBkl

— Ishaan Jhaveri (@ishaan_jhavs) [December 22, 2023](#)

In a separate interview with *CNN*, Gerlasco [said](#) that the intensity of Israel's bombardment of Gaza has "not been seen since [Vietnam](#)," when U.S. airstrikes killed up to hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. The U.S. [dropped more bombs](#) on tiny, non-belligerent Laos than all sides combined unleashed during World War II.

"You'd have to go back to the Vietnam War to make a comparison," Garlasco added. "Even in both Iraq wars, it was never that dense."

The use of such heavy ordnance in close proximity to critical civilian infrastructure like hospitals has alarmed observers.

"What we have been witnessing is a campaign that was planned, it was a plan, definitely, to close down all the hospitals in the north," Léo Cans, head of mission for Palestine with Doctors Without Borders, told the *Post*.

The Israeli army published footage of them bombing an entire neighbourhood in Gaza.

Satellite images from the first month of the conflict reveal over 500 impact craters, each with a diameter exceeding 12 meters, consistent with the marks left by 2,000-pound bombs pic.twitter.com/ihH3XJByEA

— Middle East Eye (@MiddleEastEye) [December 23, 2023](#)

[Aided](#) by AI-based target selection systems, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) commanders are approving bombings they know will cause large numbers of civilian casualties. In a bid to assassinate a single Hamas commander, the IDF [dropped](#) at least two 2,000-pound bombs on the densely populated Jabalia refugee camp on October 31, killing more than 120 civilians.

Although the United States—which has [killed](#) more foreign civilians this century than any other armed force in the world—provides Israel with thousands of 1,000 and 2,000-pound bombs, its own military avoids using such massive ordnance in civilian areas due to the devastation they cause.

"It certainly appears that [Israel's] tolerance for civilian harm compared to expected operational benefits is significantly different than what we would accept as the U.S.," Larry Lewis, research director at the Center for Naval Analyses and a former U.S. State Department senior adviser on civilian harm, [told CNN](#).

That includes the [risk](#) of killing Israel's own citizens and others held hostage by Hamas in Gaza.

Another Israeli who was released from captivity in Gaza says she thought she would be killed by Israeli bombing, not by Hamas.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu lies to the public and says more bombing will compel Hamas to release captives. pic.twitter.com/B1ikrp6dk8

— Dan Cohen (@dancohen3000) [December 22, 2023](#)

Lewis added that the Jabalia strike was “something we would never see the U.S. doing.”

That isn't entirely true; during the 1991 Gulf War the U.S. [dropped](#) a pair of 2,000-pound Raytheon GBU-27 Paveway III laser-guided bombs on the Amiriyah air raid shelter in Baghdad, killing at least 408 Iraqi civilians in one of the deadliest single airstrikes in modern history. U.S. officials claimed they thought the shelter, which was used during the Iraq-Iran war, was no longer a civilian facility.

“The use of 2,000-pound bombs in an area as densely populated as Gaza means it will take decades for communities to recover,” John Chappell, advocacy and legal fellow at the Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group Center for Civilians in Conflict, [told](#) CNN.

Even more concerning for some experts is Israel's use of unguided, or “dumb” bombs, against civilian targets in Gaza.

While IDF spokesman Daniel Hagari said that “we choose the right munition for each target so it doesn't cause unnecessary damage,” the death and destruction in Gaza—and Israeli officials' own words—tell an entirely different story.

Early in the war, Hagari [declared](#) that “Gaza will never return to what it was,” clarifying that “the emphasis is on damage and not on accuracy.”

Meanwhile, numerous Israeli officials advocated the complete destruction of Gaza, with more than a few government figures—including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Cabinet members—making statements supporting genocide against the Palestinian people.

Good summary of main statements from Israeli officials on Gaza pic.twitter.com/HmVR9kJqZy

— Bruno Maçães (@MacaesBruno) [November 9, 2023](#)

U.S. President Joe Biden—who has affirmed his “unwavering” support for Israel and is [seeking](#) \$14.3 billion in additional military aid for the country, which already gets almost \$4 billion annually from Washington—has [implored](#) Israeli leaders to stop the “indiscriminate” bombing of Gaza, even as his administration [thwarts](#) international cease-fire efforts and restocks the IDF's arsenal.

Chappell stressed that

“the devastation that we’ve seen for communities in Gaza is, unfortunately, co-signed by the United States.”

“Too much of it is carried out by bombs that were made in the United States,” he added.

Ahmed Abofoul—a Gaza-born, Netherlands-based attorney with the Palestinian human rights organization Al-Haq who has lost 60 of his relatives to Israeli bombing— [said](#) in Friday interview with *Democracy Now!* that “the American government is complicit in this genocide.”

“There is blood of Palestinian children on their hands,” he added. [Biden] said Israel is engaged in indiscriminate bombing. This is a war crime. So, the question is: Why do you then send weapons to Israel? The position of the U.S. is quite hypocritical.”

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