

Israeli War Crimes and Propaganda Follow US Blueprint

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Global Research, November 14, 2023

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)
Theme: [Law and Justice, United Nations](#)
In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT, PALESTINE](#)

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We have both been reporting on and protesting against U.S. war crimes for many years, and against identical crimes committed by U.S. allies and proxies like Israel and Saudi Arabia: illegal uses of military force to try to remove enemy governments or "regimes"; hostile military occupations; disproportionate military violence justified by claims of "terrorism"; the bombing and killing of civilians; and the mass destruction of whole cities.

Most Americans share a general aversion to war, but tend to accept this militarized foreign policy because we are tragically susceptible to propaganda, the machinery of public manipulation that works hand in hand with the machinery of killing to justify otherwise unthinkable horrors.

This process of "manufacturing consent" works in a number of ways. One of the most effective forms of propaganda is silence, simply not telling us, and certainly not showing us, what war is really doing to the people whose homes and communities have been turned into America's latest battlefield.

The most devastating campaign the U.S. military has waged in recent years [dropped](#) over 100,000 bombs and missiles on [Mosul in Iraq](#), [Raqqah in Syria](#), and other areas occupied by ISIS or Da'esh. An Iraqi Kurdish intelligence report estimated that more than [40,000 civilians](#) were killed in Mosul, while Raqqah was even more totally [destroyed](#).



Mosul's historic Al-Nuri mosque in November 2015, left, and July 2017, right. (SATELLITE IMAGE ©2017 DIGITALGLOBE)

The shelling of Raqqa was the heaviest U.S. artillery bombardment since the Vietnam War, yet it was barely reported in the U.S. corporate media. A recent New York Times [article](#) about the traumatic brain injuries and PTSD suffered by U.S. artillerymen operating 155 mm howitzers, which each fired up to 10,000 shells into Raqqa, was appropriately titled A Secret War, Strange New Wounds and Silence from the Pentagon.

Shrouding such mass death and destruction in secrecy is a remarkable achievement. When British playwright Harold Pinter was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005, in the midst of the Iraq War, he titled his Nobel speech "Art, Truth and Politics," and used it to shine a light on this diabolical aspect of U.S. war-making.

After talking about the hundreds of thousands of killings in Indonesia, Greece, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Haiti, Turkey, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, Chile and Nicaragua, Pinter [asked](#):

"Did they take place? And are they in all cases attributable to US foreign policy? The answer is yes, they did take place and they are attributable to American foreign policy."

"But you wouldn't know it," he went on. "It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest. The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It's a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis."

But the wars and the killing go on, day after day, year after year, out of sight and out of mind for most Americans. Did you know that the United States and its allies have dropped

more than 350,000 bombs and missiles on 9 countries since 2001 (including [14,000](#) in the current war on Gaza)? That's an average of [44 airstrikes per day](#), day in, day out, for 22 years.

Israel, in its present war on Gaza, with [children](#) making up more than 40% of the more than 11,000 people killed to date, would surely like to mimic the extraordinary U.S. ability to hide its brutality. But despite Israel's efforts to impose a media blackout, the massacre is taking place in a small, enclosed, densely-populated urban area, often called an open-air prison, where the world can see a great deal more than usual of how it impacts real people.



Al Jazeera correspondent Wael El-Dahdouh cries as he holds one of his family members who were killed in an Israeli air strike on a building in Nuseirat, in the central Gaza Strip, on October 25, 2023. (Photo: Omar Ashtawy/APA Images)

Israel has killed a record number of [journalists](#) in Gaza, and this appears to be a deliberate strategy, as when U.S. forces [targeted](#) journalists in Iraq. But we are still seeing horrifying video and photos of daily new atrocities: dead and wounded children; hospitals struggling to treat the injured; and desperate people fleeing from one place to another through the rubble of their destroyed homes.

Another reason this war is not so well hidden is because Israel is waging it, not the United States. The U.S. is supplying most of the weapons, has sent aircraft carriers to the region, and [dispatched](#) U.S. Marine General James Glynn to provide tactical advice based on his experience conducting similar massacres in [Fallujah](#) and [Mosul](#) in Iraq. But Israeli leaders seem to have overestimated the extent to which the U.S. information warfare machine would shield them from public scrutiny and political accountability.

Unlike in Fallujah, Mosul and Raqqa, people all over the world are seeing video of the unfolding catastrophe on their computers, phones and TVs. Netanyahu, Biden and the

[corrupt](#) “defense analysts” on cable TV are no longer the ones creating the narrative, as they try to tack self-serving narratives onto the horrifying reality we can all see for ourselves.

With the reality of war and genocide staring the world in the face, people everywhere are challenging the impunity with which Israel is systematically violating international humanitarian law.

Michael Crowley and Edward Wong have [reported](#) in the New York Times that Israeli officials are defending their actions in Gaza by pointing to U.S. war crimes, insisting that they are simply interpreting the laws of war the same way that the United States has interpreted them in Iraq and other U.S. war zones. They compare Gaza to Fallujah, Mosul and even Hiroshima.

But copying U.S. war crimes is precisely what makes Israel’s actions illegal. And it is the world’s failure to hold the United States accountable that has emboldened Israel to believe it too can kill with impunity.

The United States systematically violates the UN Charter’s prohibition against the threat or use of force, manufacturing political justifications to suit each case and using its Security Council veto to evade international accountability. Its military lawyers employ unique, exceptional interpretations of the Fourth Geneva Convention, under which the universal protections the Convention guarantees to civilians are treated as secondary to U.S. military objectives.

The United States fiercely resists the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), to ensure that its exceptional interpretations of international law are never subjected to impartial judicial scrutiny.

When the United States did allow the ICJ to rule on its war against Nicaragua in 1986, the ICJ ruled that its deployment of the “Contras” to invade and attack Nicaragua and its mining of Nicaragua’s ports were [acts of aggression](#) in violation of international law, and ordered the United States to pay war reparations to Nicaragua. When the United States declared that it would no longer recognize the jurisdiction of the ICJ and failed to pay up, Nicaragua asked the UN Security Council to enforce the reparations, but the U.S. vetoed the resolution.

Atrocities like Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the bombing of German and Japanese cities to “unhouse” the civilian population, as Winston Churchill called it, together with the horrors of Germany’s Nazi holocaust, led to the adoption of the new Fourth Geneva Convention in 1949, to protect civilians in war zones and under military occupation.

On the 50th anniversary of the Convention in 1999, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which is responsible for monitoring international compliance with the Geneva Conventions, conducted a survey to see how well people in different countries understood the protections the Convention provides.

They surveyed people in twelve countries that had been victims of war, in four countries (France, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S.) that are permanent members of the UN Security Council, and in Switzerland where the ICRC is based. The ICRC published the [results of the survey](#) in 2000, in a report titled, *People on War – Civilians in the Line of Fire*.

The survey asked people to choose between a correct understanding of the Convention’s

civilian protections and a watered-down interpretation of them that closely resembles that of U.S. and Israeli military lawyers.

The correct understanding was defined by a statement that combatants “must attack only other combatants and leave civilians alone.” The weaker, incorrect statement was that “combatants should avoid civilians as much as possible” as they conduct military operations.

Between 72% and 77% of the people in the other UNSC countries and Switzerland agreed with the correct statement, but the United States was an outlier, with only 52% agreeing. In fact 42% of Americans agreed with the weaker statement, twice as many as in the other countries. There were similar disparities between the United States and the others on questions about torture and the treatment of prisoners of war.

In U.S.-occupied Iraq, the United States’ exceptionally weak interpretations of the Geneva Conventions led to endless disputes with the ICRC and the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which issued damning quarterly human rights reports. UNAMI consistently maintained that U.S. airstrikes in densely populated civilian areas were violations of international law.

For instance, its human rights report for the 2nd quarter of 2007 [documented](#) UNAMI’s investigations of 15 incidents in which U.S. occupation forces killed 103 Iraqi civilians, including 27 killed in airstrikes in Khalidiya, near Ramadi, on April 3rd, and 7 children killed in a helicopter attack on an elementary school in Diyala province on May 8th.

UNAMI demanded that “all credible allegations of unlawful killings by MNF (Multi-National Force) forces be thoroughly, promptly and impartially investigated, and appropriate action taken against military personnel found to have used excessive or indiscriminate force.”

A footnote explained,

“Customary international humanitarian law demands that, as much as possible, military objectives must not be located within areas densely populated by civilians. The presence of individual combatants among a great number of civilians does not alter the civilian character of an area.”

UNAMI also rejected U.S. claims that its widespread killing of civilians was the result of the Iraqi Resistance using civilians as “human shields,” another U.S. propaganda trope that Israel is mimicking today. Israeli accusations of human shielding are even more absurd in the densely populated, confined space of Gaza, where the whole world can see that it is Israel that is placing civilians in the line of fire as they desperately seek safety from Israeli bombardment.

Calls for a ceasefire in Gaza are echoing around the world: through the halls of the United Nations; from the governments of traditional [U.S. allies](#) like France, Spain and Norway; from a [newly united](#) front of previously divided Middle Eastern leaders; and in the streets of London and Washington. The world is withdrawing its consent for a genocidal “two-state solution” in which Israel and the United States are the only two states that can settle the fate of Palestine.

If U.S. and Israeli leaders are hoping that they can squeak through this crisis, and that the public’s habitually short attention span will wash away the world’s horror at the crimes we

are all witnessing, that may be yet another serious misjudgment. As Hannah Arendt [wrote](#) in 1950 in the preface to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

“We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain.”

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Featured image: Girl holds improvised white flag, to tell Israel to respect Geneva Conventions and spare her fleeing family. Photo credit: Yasser Qudih

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