

## **In 2024, let's say goodbye to war**

Dr Lily Hamourtziadou

Time after time, we see state aggression impacting the security of civilians much more than any acts committed by non-state actors. Since October 7, Israel has launched 2,000-pound bombs on densely populated neighbourhoods, dropping 6,000 bombs on Gaza in just the first week; in comparison, the US dropped a little over 7,300 bombs on Afghanistan in all of 2019 (Loveluck, George and Birnbaum, 2023). In the space of 2 months, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH), 17,000 Palestinian civilians were killed in Gaza, including 7,112 children. This means children account for 44% of fatalities in Gaza so far, as a result of Israel's Operation Swords of Iron. Action on Armed Violence's data shows that 4.4 children are harmed per injurious Israeli air strike in Gaza. So far, Operation Swords of Iron has seen the second highest rate of children harmed per injurious air strike, and the second highest percentage of children among the civilian fatalities after Operation Wall Guardian, in May 2021 (based on OHCHR data). Ground-launched attacks have shown an even higher rate of harm to children, with 9.6 children reported harmed per incident (Torelli, 2023).

When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 90% of casualties are civilians. In total, women and children account for 74% of fatalities in Operation Swords of Iron, at least so far. When compared to data from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights across three of Israel's most injurious previous operations in Gaza (Operation Pillar of Defense, November 2012; Operation Protective Edge, July-August 2014; and Operation Wall Guardian, May 2021), AOAV concludes that Operation Swords of Iron emerges as the Israeli operation with the second highest percentage of child casualties among civilian fatalities.

Operation Pillar of Defense: 101 civilian fatalities, 33 children (33%) among them.

Operation Protective Edge: 1,462 civilian fatalities, 551 children (38%) among them.

Operation Wall Guardian: 130 civilian fatalities, 67 children (52%) among them.

AOAV has recorded 623 Israeli air strikes in Gaza as part of Operation Swords of Iron (up to December 8th), which have resulted in 9,118 reported civilian casualties (6,400 killed, 2,718 injured). Of the 623 air strikes, 120 have resulted in 533 reported child casualties.

Two such victims were twins Ahmed and Asil Abu Asad, the youngest in their family, killed with their mother on October 21, 2023, in an Israeli airstrike. Two days before their deaths, Gaza Martyrs reports, Ahmed went to the barber and styled his hair, saying, "Even if I die, I want to look neat and good." Asil was a quiet, kind and gentle girl, who wished to study fashion design. Ahmed loved playing football and dreamed of becoming a football player. Their father encouraged them to study

for future success, however, he now regrets this... “I didn’t know that Ahmed wouldn’t grow up; I should have let him play as he always wanted (Gaza Martyrs twitter account, December 13, 2023).

Similar to Gaza, both in Iraq and in Ukraine there have been staggering numbers of civilian casualties, as the warring parties (a) did not put enough measures in place to provide protection for the civilians, (b) disregarded the safety of vulnerable groups, accepting that there would be ‘collateral damage’ in the pursuit of their goals, or (c) directly targeted them. The wars’ impact has been a lot wider though, affecting all areas of human security. The invasion and occupation of Iraq brought to the country some of the trappings of a liberal democracy – local and national multi-party elections and individual freedoms enshrined in a constitution – but did not ensure the rule of law. Instead, ‘a new ethno-sectarian power-sharing system provided opportunities for members of the country’s elite to capture the state and plunder its wealth, in many cases with impunity’ (Mansour, 2023). In this, they were aided by the legal system, which was under their control, even providing a means for some leaders to repress opponents and increase their own power. The irony, Mansour argues, was that Iraq had a system of governance designed to deliver accountability, but it was not effective. Contemporary accountability mechanisms in the Iraqi bureaucracy do not check members of Iraq’s post-2003 elite, many of whom have instead captured these mechanisms, which they then use to dominate the government and resist any genuine reform. ‘A similar dynamic hampers public accountability mechanisms (i.e., voting, media, civil society and protests), which instead are all too often taken over by members of the elite to dominate society and set the terms of the public discourse’ (Mansour, 2023).

Since the invasion, Iraq has been torn by civil war, terrorism, violations of its borders, attacks from neighbouring states and internal division. Its government is unable or unwilling to combat misuse of power or to bring perpetrators of severe human rights violations to justice. Human rights defenders, journalists, activists and ordinary citizens continue to suffer from an increased crackdown by the authorities on their right to freedom of opinion and expression. The Iraqi War Crimes Documentation Center and Alkarama documented the cases of 37 journalists and activists who were murdered October 1, 2019 – January 30, 2020 (Alkarama, 2022).

Increasingly, secret prisons are run by militias. Among those secret prisons are a prison in the Al-Buatha district of Al-Dora, south of Baghdad, which is under the control of the ‘Ashura Birigades’; a prison located in Al-Madaen and placed under the control of Hezbollah; and a prison in Al-Latifah, controlled by the Popular Mobilization. These secret prisons, and many others, are under the control of state-supported militias.

In Ukraine, according to the Small Arms Survey (Hideg, 2023):

- Between 2010 and the end of the 2014–15 phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war, lethal criminal violence in Ukraine increased by nearly 50%. This raises the possibility of an even steeper future increase in violent crime resulting from the current full-scale war.

- Trust in the police has declined since winter 2022–23, and approximately 14% of Ukrainian civilians now carry some form of weapon for self-defence, which is more than a twofold increase from 2019 and more than a threefold increase from 2011.
- The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine initially led to a slight decrease in firearms kept in households as civilians and weapons were mobilized for the war effort. As of summer 2023, household ownership levels have gone back up.

Approximately 17.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the UNHCR, and over 5 million people are internally displaced. More than 6.2 million refugees from Ukraine have been reported globally, as of July 2023 (UNHCR, 2023). Particularly vulnerable groups include older and disabled people who may be unable to flee from high-risk areas. Women and children (approximately 90% of civilians fleeing the war) are at risk of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

Meanwhile, weapons and ammunition are flooding into Ukraine. The full list is 20 pages long so far, but this is an indication of the level of military ‘support’ Ukraine received in just 1 month in 2023. The full updated list can be found at [Forum on the Arms Trade](#).

On December 4, Rheinmetall announced it would supply Ukraine with tens of thousands of additional 155mm artillery shells worth €142 million. The United Kingdom also transferred a shipment of Martlet multi-purpose guided missiles to combat Russian drones.

On December 3, Ukraine signed a contract with Huta Stalowa Wola SA, a defence company based in Poland, for the production of 56 additional AHS Krab self-propelled howitzers.

On December 2, Germany updated its list of aid supplied to Ukraine with 3,840 155mm shells, 250 tool kits with blasting material, 2 patrol vehicles, 1 mobile antenna, 25 laser range finders, 5 drone detection systems, 4 HX-81 & 4 semi-trailers, 8 Zetros trucks, and 3 vehicles of various types. Rheinmetall confirmed plans to open a plant in Ukraine to produce Fuchs 6x6 armoured vehicles and KF41 Lynx Infantry Fighting Vehicles (IFVs) in 2024.

On November 30, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence reported that France had agreed to increase the supply of large-caliber ammunition to Ukraine in 2024. Canada transferred more than 9 million rounds of ammunition and 11,000 assault rifles.

On November 22, the United States donated eight armoured full-size pick-ups trucks of the BR6 protection class TOYOTA HILUX to Ukraine. The Parliament of Bulgaria ratified an agreement on the transfer of armoured personnel carriers, (likely ~100 BTR-60s), and other weapons to Ukraine. Germany also updated its list of aid delivered to Ukraine with 20 Marder infantry fighting vehicles, 2,380 155mm shells, one WISENT 1 mine clearing tank, 2428 crypto phones, 2 8x8 HX81 and 2 semi-trailers, 9 other vehicles. Lithuania sent a new aid package to Ukraine, containing 3 million rounds of 7.62x51mm ammo, and remote detonation systems.

On November 21, Germany announced a new €1.3 billion aid package for Ukraine entailing 4 IRIS-T air defence systems, 20,000 155mm shells, anti-tank mines, surveillance drones and detection systems, and other weapons.

On November 20, Germany transferred long-range Titan Falcon UAVs to Ukraine. These drones were printed on a 3D printer and have a range of 400km. The United States also announced a new security assistance package from DoD inventories valued at \$100 million. It included Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, one High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and additional ammunition, 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds, TOW missiles, Javelin and AT-4 anti-armour systems, over 3 million rounds of small arms ammunition, and demolitions munitions for obstacle clearing.

On November 17, Finland announced its 20th military assistance package of undisclosed defence materials for Ukraine, valued at €100 million. The Netherlands also pledged €2.5 billion in assistance to Ukraine for 2024, consisting of air defence materials, ammunition, maintenance of previously delivered systems, cybersecurity improvements, training for soldiers, and more.

On November 16, the United States announced that in addition to training, it would be providing spare parts for Ukraine's F-16 fighter jets.

On November 14, Germany updated its list of aid delivered to Ukraine with 10 Leopard 1A5 tanks, 14 Bandvagn 206 vehicles, 5 ATTC Warthog ambulances, 1020 155mm shells, 1 WISENT 1 mine clearing vehicle, 10 VECTOR drones, 10,000 safety glasses, 14 GO12 radars, 3 border patrol vehicles, 4 HX81 trucks and 4 semi-trailers, 16 Zetro trucks, 3 minibuses, 13 MAN TGS trucks, 1.4 million rounds for small arms.

On November 13, it was reported that the United States had bought 60 Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns from Jordan for €110 million to be sent to Ukraine.

On November 7, the Netherlands sent five F-16A/B block 20 MLU fighter jets to Romania to train Ukrainian pilots. These had undergone modernization and received new avionics, including the replacement of radar equipment.

On November 6, Ukraine signed a €36 million contract with Verney-Carron, a subsidiary of the French defence company Cybergun, for the supply of 10,000 assault rifles, 400 grenade launchers, and 2000 precision rifles.

On November 3, the United States announced a \$125 million drawdown in security assistance from DoD inventories, as well as \$300 million in Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) funds to strengthen Ukraine's air defences. These commitments include laser-guided munitions to counter Unmanned Aerial Systems, munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds, TOW missiles, Javelin and AT-4 anti-armor systems, more than 3 million rounds of small arms ammunition and grenades, demolitions munitions for obstacle clearing, M18A1 Claymore anti-personnel munitions, 12 trucks to transport heavy equipment, cold weather gear, spare parts, maintenance, and other field equipment. The Netherlands also pledged €500 million in ammunition to Ukraine.

Ukraine relies almost entirely on an endless stream of equipment and munitions flowing into the country from its partners worth tens of billions of dollars since 2022. On the margins of the NATO summit in Vilnius in July 2023, the leaders of the G7 nations and the EU signed a joint declaration of support for Ukraine, based on which 'the signatories must elaborate concrete long-term commitments, including on equipment transfers, military training, intelligence cooperation, and economic support' (Bondar, 2023).

The war in Ukraine has renewed the AI arms race, a race in lethal autonomous weapons, that the war on terror generated, once again creating moral and legal issues around responsibility, accountability, control, fairness and safety. Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS) alter the nature of warfare, putting in question the humanity of our societies. AWS lack compassion and make life and death decisions in blatant disrespect of human dignity, based on algorithms, daily risking the lives of protected persons. These assassination systems destabilise nations, enable ethnic cleansing by selectively killing particular ethnic group, and do not fit IHL principles. They lead to the exacerbation of regional and international security dilemmas through arms races and the lowering of the threshold for the use of force. Killing remotely has a serious effect on war termination: it makes it much easier to start as well as to continue wars.

Ukraine's military has a great demand for drones, especially those that are affordable, swift, and lightweight. The Ministry of Digital Transformation launched Army of Drones, a collaborative project involving the General Staff of the Armed Forces, the State Special Communications Service, and the fundraising platform UNITED24. The project aims to provide the army with 200,000 drones. 'To achieve this objective, Ukraine is actively promoting domestic production by offering incentives and seeking to nurture the unmanned aviation sector. Army of Drones has entered into approximately 80 contracts with Ukrainian manufacturers' (Bondar, 2023). There has been a significant increase from 30 manufacturers engaged in drone production at the onset of the full-scale invasion, to 200 two years on. Ukrainian production is evolving and advancing to include new naval drones, AI-based

reconnaissance drones and loitering munitions. The Ukrainian government has committed to the development of an indigenous drone sector by earmarking approximately UAH 43 billion (around \$1.2 billion) for the expansion and enhancement of Army of Drones. The government has also established Brave1, a coordination platform designed to facilitate collaboration among defence industry stakeholders and to provide organisational, informational and financial support for private defence tech projects. 'The Minister of Digital Transformation announced that Ukrainian developers have secured grants exceeding \$1,000,000 on the platform. A total of 583 projects were submitted to Brave1, and 305 have already passed the defense examination' (Bondar, 2023). Nineteen ongoing projects worth \$315,000 span areas such as drones, robotic systems, electronic warfare, AI tools, cybersecurity, communications, and information security management systems.

The war in Ukraine and the War on Terror show that drones play an increasingly prominent role in modern warfare. 'On any single day, up to 20 Russian drones can fly over Yevhen Shovkovplyas's front-line position in Ukraine, and his aging battery of Soviet-era anti-aircraft guns has to stop them', write MacDonald and Sivorka (2023). 'Day and night,' write Schechter and Simmons, 'a sound echoes above Khan Younis, the largest city in southern Gaza. The noise isn't the detonation of a bomb dropped by an Israeli jet. It's the low hum of Israeli drones circling overhead. "They never leave the sky," Tareq Hajjaj, a freelance Palestinian journalist, said' (Schechter and Simmons, 2023).

In Afghanistan, 9, 10 and even 11 years after the invasion, UK Special Forces were still killing civilians during night raids. The Independent Inquiry Relating to Afghanistan in 2023 heard, for example, that on 29 November 2010 the SAS had killed Mohammed Ibrahim (55); on 7 February 2011 they killed Sami Ullah (14), Nisah Ahmad (18), Saifullah (22), Izatullah (42), Shamshullah (33) and Haji Wasir (38); on 9 February 2011 they killed Sayeed Mohammed (35), Noor Mohammed (34), Ahmad Shah (32), Abdul Zaheer (23), Mohammed Taher (15) and Ahmad (46); the youngest victims were killed on 6 August 2012. They were Hussain Uzbekzai (24), Ruqia Mullah Muhammad Haleem (24), Mohammad Wali (26), Mohammed Juma (28), Fazel Mohammed (18), Naik Mohammed (16), Mohammed Tayeb (14) and Ahmed Shah (12).

In Ukraine, victims include 16-year-old Daria Asiamochkina and her 10-year-old brother Maksym. Both died on 21 July, 2023 in Donetsk, when the Russian army shelled their village with artillery (Memorial Platform, July 29, 2023).

21st century wars continue to claim lives, and their impact can be witnessed even decades after they were launched. In the new year, let's say goodbye to war.

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