

Amnesty's Report on Violations Committed by Ukraine Military Directed against Civilians. Storm of Media Criticism

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Global Research, August 27, 2022

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

In-depth Report: [UKRAINE REPORT](#)

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There has been a lot of buzz about Amnesty International's recent report on the violations committed by the Ukrainian military in the war with Russia, although this was a balanced and cautious report indeed. The attacks against this human rights organization are far from innocent. Background and interpretation of this issue.

A remarkable report

On 4 August, Amnesty International released [a report](#) on how the Ukrainian army's combat tactics are endangering civilians, as it involves building bases and using weapons systems in densely populated residential areas, schools and hospitals.

Amnesty has written dozens of reports on the violations committed by the Russian army in this war. This time it holds the Ukrainian accountable. A report by [the UN](#) and also [Der Spiegel](#) had previously resulted in similar findings as AI.

The report is cautious. Russia is also being blamed. “The Ukrainian military's practice of locating military objectives within populated areas does not in any way justify indiscriminate Russian attacks.”



A butterfly mine. Source: [Twitter](#)

In this report, Amnesty only talks about the use of civilians as human shields. It does not mention the use of [cluster bombs](#)[1] or [butterfly mines](#),[2] the shelling of the Zaporizhzhia [nuclear power plant](#) or the [torture](#) of captured Russian soldiers.

Anyway, the report was a remarkable first. It was the [first time](#) a major Western human rights organization denounced the behavior of the Ukrainian military. Until then, there had only been convictions of the crimes committed by the Russian army.

Storm of criticism

The report was met with a [storm of criticism](#). Major media outlets such as [The Washington Post](#), [The Telegraph](#) or [Bloomberg](#) accused Amnesty of “victim blaming ” and acting as “useful idiots” in Putin’s favor. They talked about Amnesty’s “moral bankruptcy” and “anti-Western obsession”.

The Ukrainian government [reacted furiously](#). [President Zelensky](#) condemned the report in a speech to the nation, accusing Amnesty International of an “attempt to grant amnesty to the terrorist state and to shift the blame from the aggressor to the victim of aggression.”

[Kuleba](#), the foreign minister, tweeted that the report “distorts reality, draws a false moral equivalence between the aggressor and the victim, and boosts Russia’s disinformation efforts. This is fake ‘neutrality’, not truthfulness.”

Apparently [@amnesty](#) SG calls me a ‘mob’ and a ‘troll’, but this won’t stop me from saying that its report distorts reality, draws false moral equivalence between the aggressor and the victim, and boosts Russia’s disinformation efforts. This is fake “neutrality”, not truthfulness. <https://t.co/Kz2GBzSZr3>

The Ukrainian branch of Amnesty also strongly opposed the publication of the report. The section's director, [Oksana Pokalchuk](#), stated: "we did everything we could to prevent this report from going public".

As a result of the intense pressure, a few days after releasing the report, the human rights organization felt compelled [to apologize](#) for the "pain caused". "Amnesty International deeply regrets the distress and anger that our press release on the Ukrainian military's fighting tactics has caused."

The organization did, however, remain fully supportive of its findings. Earlier, CBS, one of the three largest commercial television networks in the US, had [partially removed](#) a documentary on arms deliveries to Ukraine after pressure from the government in Kiev. Amnesty did not succumb to the pressure exerted on the publication of its report.

Three generations of human rights

In order to discredit Amnesty, [some](#) go so far as to label it an organization of the extreme left. But that is absolutely not the case. To make this clear, we will first briefly discuss the different types of human rights.

There are [three types or generations](#) of human rights. The first generation are the so-called civil rights which relate to freedom and participation in political life. They were introduced after the French Revolution in 1789 and served to protect the emerging bourgeoisie from the omnipotence of king and nobility.

These rights include freedom of speech, equality before the law, freedom of religion, right to private property, right to a fair trial, right to privacy.

The rights of the second generation are social, economic and cultural. They are related to equality. They came about under the impetus of the emerging labor movement and socialist countries. With these rights, governments guarantee equal conditions and treatment to the civilian population.

These are rights to food, housing, education, health care, work, leisure, social security, fair pay, etc.

The third generation may be described as collective or peoples' rights. They became popular in the countries of the South during decolonization. These rights are about a just world order and must ensure that each country can pursue its own autonomous course.

These include the right to sovereignty, economic and social development, natural resources, cultural heritage, healthy environment and sustainability (for future generations).

Eurocentrism

Each of the three generations is important, but the elites in the West have managed to narrow the scope of thinking mainly to the first generation. If you want to maintain the gap between the rich and the poor, it is advantageous to disregard social and economic rights.

In order to maintain the domination of the North over the South, it is also useful not to talk about peoples' rights.

So, the focus is always on civil and political rights. Moreover, these are then applied à la carte. In the case of "friendly countries" such as Saudi Arabia or Israel, there is a great deal of turning a blind eye when these rights are flouted. "Non-friendly countries" such as Iran, Venezuela or China, on the other hand, are placed under a magnifying glass when it comes to those rights.

Once that dominant view of the West on human rights has become commonplace, it can be politically and ideologically weaponized. Through a human rights policy, the US and the West then try to give certain countries a negative image and isolate them diplomatically.

Especially since the advent of President Reagan in the 1980s, "the human rights campaign" has intensified considerably. In a *New York Times* op-ed entitled "Why We Must Support Human Rights", [John McCain](#), a prominent Republican senator, wrote:

"We are the chief architect and defender of an international order governed by rules derived from our political and economic values. We have grown vastly wealthier and more powerful under those rules. More of humanity than ever before lives in freedom and out of poverty because of those rules." You cannot make it any clearer than that.

Where to situate Amnesty International?

Like most other Western human rights organizations, Amnesty focuses primarily on first-generation human rights. In doing so, it adopts the dominant narrative and therefore often plays into the hands of Western interests.

In the US, there has long been [a revolving door](#) between the staffs of prominent human rights groups and the government. In Europe, this may be less the case, but it is an undeniable factor. In addition, the pressure from large donors, who favor the dominant narrative, should not be underestimated.

Traditionally, Amnesty has ignored the power structures that maintain Western domination over the rest of humanity. Actions by leftist governments trying to stop violent counter-revolutions are put on a par with those of ruthless imperialist states persecuting minorities.

In Bolivia, after a military coup in 2019, Jeanine Anez was appointed president by the military. Her government was guilty of brutal repression against popular resistance. The decision of the newly elected government to prosecute her for a large number of massacres was considered by [Amnesty International](#) to be a "pattern of bias in in the system of justice".

The [Morning Star](#) notes that this is not evidence of bias but is the result of an "individualist approach that ignores the power relations that define exploitation, oppression, resistance and revolt".

That is why Amnesty could not accept Nelson Mandela as a "prisoner of conscience". In the eyes of AI, armed revolutionary struggle is the same as armed state repression.

It is also why Amnesty gives more weight to the arrest of a [media tycoon in Hong Kong](#) than to the eradication of absolute poverty among hundreds of millions of people in China.

Same story regarding Cuba. The [2021 Amnesty report](#) focuses on some dissidents and the fact that some hospitals were overwhelmed by the influx of Covid patients at one point. It does not say a word about the murderous blockade that keeps the country in an economic stranglehold.

After a breakdown at a Cuban company that produces oxygen, there was an acute shortage of oxygen to ventilate critically ill Covid patients. The [US blockade prevented](#) the urgent purchase of oxygen. As a result, hundreds of Cuban patients died unnecessarily. The report does not mention this at all.

Amnesty also cannot avoid playing out human rights à la carte with regard to friendly and unfriendly nations. For example, it considers Russian dissident Navalny a prisoner of conscience, [but not the whistleblowers](#) Assange, Snowden or Chelsea Manning.[3]

Beyond self-censorship

So, there is a lot to be said about Amnesty's approach. Their politics cannot possibly be called leftist, but that does not prevent us from defending the organization against attacks from the right. Indeed, with their attacks, right-wing forces seek to silence any dissenting voice.

They also try to promote a Hollywood version of the world, in which the West are the good guys who can do no wrong and the opponents are the bad guys who act wrongly by definition.

Of course, under the governments of 'our' adversaries, whether Putin, Assad, Gaddafi or the Taliban, war crimes have been committed. "But the focus on those crimes is all too often an excuse to avoid addressing western war crimes, thereby enabling agendas that advance the interests of the West's war industries", as journalist and author [Jonathan Cook](#) said.

The coverage of the war in Ukraine and the human rights situation is viewed almost entirely through the lenses of Western political priorities. Even the author of the Amnesty report, which we have discussed here, admits that "the level of self-censorship on this issue [Ukrainian war crimes] has been pretty extraordinary".

This Amnesty report breaks with the one-sidedness. The reason why a highly respected Western non-governmental organization is breaching the wall of self-censorship may be twofold.

First of all, doubts are growing both among a part of the establishment and among the population about the West's bellicose approach to this war. With the upcoming energy crisis in the winter, this kind of doubt will increase significantly. By extension, the view is slowly growing that in addition to the criminal behavior of the Russian army, the criminal behavior of the Ukrainian army can [no longer be tolerated](#) either.

These doubts are undoubtedly also felt within the organization of AI itself. Some of its supporters, and perhaps its staff, will not have found it okay for the organization to focus unilaterally on Russia's crimes.

Amnesty mainly uses the first type of human rights and does not usually distance itself from the Western approach. But that need not be a fatality. On the Palestinian issue, there has been a lot of grassroots pressure within the organization, with results. AI released a

landmark report naming Israel as an [Apartheid State](#). That would be worth repeating.

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Marc Vandepitte is a regular contributor to Global Research.

Sources

[Amnesty's not on the left. So why the Ukraine backlash?](#)

[Consider Amnesty's message, don't shoot the messenger](#)

[Why is Amnesty apologising for telling the truth about Ukrainian war crimes?](#)

[Amnesty International report exposes Ukraine's violations of international law, deliberate use of civilians as human shields](#)

[An unpleasant truth for Ukrainians is coming to light](#)

Notes

[1] A cluster bomb is a bomb that contains a large number of smaller bombs, called submunitions. When a cluster bomb is used, the bomb opens in mid-air and then scatters dozens or even hundreds of submunitions over an area up to several soccer fields in size.

[2] A butterfly mine is a type of landmine dispersed from the air. The blast charge is small, intended to injure persons, not kill them. The name 'butterfly' refers to its wing-like shape. Its aerodynamic properties promote dispersal over a large area when butterfly bombs are dropped as cluster bombs. A butterfly mine mutilates the victim who comes into contact with it.

[3] [Chelsea E. Manning](#) was an American soldier in Iraq. On WikiLeaks, she leaked a video recording of a US helicopter attack in Baghdad. She was convicted but released early after being pardoned by Barack Obama. Yet from March 2019 to March 2020, she was detained again for refusing to testify in a case against WikiLeaks and Julian Assange.

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