

Largest “State User” of Explosive Weapons against Civilians, And the Winner is... Israel

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Israel was the single largest user of explosive weapons among international states in 2014 as a result of its war on Gaza, a London-based NGO said this week, providing further testimony to its devastating use of force on the coastal territory last summer.

In a [report](#) entitled ‘Explosive States: Monitoring explosive violence in 2014,’ Action on Armed Violence said that Gaza — together with Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, and Pakistan — saw one of the highest number of global casualties from explosive weapons as a result of Israel’s use of military force during Operation Protective Edge.

The majority of the 2,200 Palestinian victims during the war - including 500 children — were killed by explosive weaponry, with 53 percent killed by aerial weapons such as bombs, missiles or airstrikes and 47 percent by ground or naval artillery shelling, AOAV said.

Gaza accounted for a staggering 35 percent of global fatalities from aerial explosives and experienced the largest increase in civilian deaths from explosive weaponry in 2014 — in line with a five percent rise in total casualties worldwide.

Syria topped the list for aerial explosive fatalities, accounting for 43 percent of global deaths.



A Palestinian boy walks past the rubble of his family’s former home destroyed by Israel.(AFP/Thomas Coex)

Israel launched over 6,000 airstrikes and fired 50,000 artillery shells into the densely populated coastal territory during the war, representing a 533 percent [increase](#) from artillery use in Operation Cast Lead and averaging 680 shells fired into Gaza each day of the conflict.

The statistics reinforce findings from the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza war, which on Monday decried the “huge firepower” used in Gaza which caused unprecedented “devastation and human suffering.”

Rob Perkins, a senior weapons researcher at AOAV, told Ma’an that Gaza experienced the

third highest number of civilian casualties from explosive violence in 2014 - surpassed only by Iraq and Syria.

“The operation in Gaza was characterized by the use of heavy explosive weapons, like massive aircraft bombs, or unguided artillery shell. These weapons affect a wide area, and after the extent to which these weapons were used in populated areas of Gaza, it is no surprise to see it so high in the table.”



Palestinian children walk along the rubble of houses in Gaza City destroyed by Israeli shelling during 50-day war in the summer of 2014, on June 22, 2015.(AFP)

Children bear the brunt of explosive violence

The 50-day conflict in Gaza killed 539 children and injured 2,956, most of whom are now struggling with trauma and life-long disabilities, according to the UN children’s agency UNICEF.

Of the 28 different countries and territories where child fatalities from explosive weapons were reported, 40 percent were killed or injured in Gaza, the largest proportion in any international conflict zone ahead of Syria at 25 percent, AOA V said.

Aerial explosives, such as airstrikes, were particularly dangerous for children during the war, with AOA V recording 166 separate incidents where children were killed or injured by explosive weapons within their family homes.

In one such [incident](#) on July 29, Israel’s air force dropped a 2,000 pound aerial bomb on a three-story apartment block in Khan Younis, killing 18 children. There were a total of 33 fatalities in the bombing, which flattened the a-Dali building.

Israel’s devastating use of force during the military operation meant that it was the individual state actor which caused the most reported civilian casualties from explosive weaponry in 2014, with Israeli attacks accounting for 44 percent of all global incidents of explosive violence.

Over 84 percent of those attacks were reported in places where civilians were concentrated, far higher than the global average of 61 percent.

“On average, AOA V recorded nine civilian deaths and injuries per explosive weapons attack in Gaza,” researcher Rob Perkins said.

Although lower than rates in Iraq and Syria - two countries mired in brutal, intractable civil wars - Perkins says the high toll is suggestive of “how dangerous these weapons are even when aimed at a specific target.”

A UN inquiry found that the Israeli military was responsible for seven attacks on UN schools in Gaza that were used as shelters during the 2014 war.

In one incident on July 30, Israeli forces fired at least ten 155mm artillery shells near a

UNRWA school for girls in Jabaliya which had been sheltering hundreds of displaced Palestinians.

Dozens of people, including children, were killed in the attack, with UNRWA [calling](#) it a “source of universal shame” that “children were killed as they slept next to their parents on the floor of a classroom in a UN designated shelter.”

Perkins says that the use of powerful, imprecise and high impact explosive weaponry in densely populated areas means it is inevitable civilians will be killed in the crossfire.

“AOAV agrees with the UN’s Commission of Inquiry when it said that the use of artillery with wide-area effects is not appropriate in densely-populated areas,” he said.

“Sadly this is what we saw last year in Gaza.”

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