

By Róisín O'Shea

# Ukraine if you want to



Ukraine's Mariupol theatre: 300 died

*Ukraine is the victim of savage aggression; but so are many other countries from Iraq to Palestine to Yemen, though the truth is suppressed because the aggressor is not Russia but the US or its patsies*

**T**here is a terrible war raging in Ukraine. An OSCE report in mid July documented evidence of “clear patterns of serious violations of international humanitarian law attributed mostly to Russian forces”. It found there had been torture and ill-treatment, including conflict-related sexual violence.

But there are things happening all over the world that are just as horrific, whether because of the scale or because of the evil intent of an aggressor, or both, that go under-reported in our liberal US-centric media.

## Afghanistan

At 19 years, the US combat mission in Afghanistan which ended in ignominy last year was America's longest war. Afghanistan has gained an economic crisis, 220,000 dead, and near starvation for half of its population – including one million children. Current US sanctions on Afghanistan are poised to kill even more civilians than the war did: hospitals are running without medicines and the banking system has been paralysed so that aid must be trucked in from neighbouring countries.

## Yemen

The UN estimates that by the end of 2021, the seven-year conflict in Yemen had caused over 377,000 deaths, with 60% of them the result of hunger, lack of healthcare and unsafe water. More than 10,200 children are known to have been killed or wounded as a direct result of the fighting.



**Yemen: the US has supplied \$850m of weapons to a Saudi-led coalition, trained pilots and soldiers and even advised on the choice of targets, who are so often noncombatant that the UN has termed it a “systematic and deliberate” targeting of civilians.**



The conflict, now subject to a fragile ceasefire, is between the internationally recognised government, backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, and Houthi rebels supported by Iran. It would be impossible without US (and UK) support. The US has supplied \$850m of weapons, trained pilots and soldiers and even advised on the choice of targets, who are so often noncombatant that the UN has termed it a “systematic and deliberate” targeting of civilians. They have done everything except send ground troops – that is not a neutral position, it is the position of partners in war.

There seem to be no lines the US are unwilling to cross, even the weaponisation of aid. President Donald Trump’s designation of the Houthi as terrorists was a death sentence to the civilian population because it stopped aid from entering the country. Yemen imported 90% of its food before the war began, so the disappearance of aid has caused a predictable level of devastation. 80% of the population, 22 million people, depend on aid. President Joe Biden now wants to reinstate this designation.

## Iraq Invasion

The Iraq War (2003-2011), part of the ‘War on Terror’ killed up to one million people. Kofi Annan, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, called the invasion illegal under international law, as it violated the UN Charter, yet there was no investigation to assess whether war crimes had been committed. In 1991 during the Gulf War, the US Stealth-bombed Amiriyyah shelter in Iraq, killing 1500 civilians. Incinerated handprints of some victims remain fused to the concrete ceiling of the shelter to this day. Human Rights Watch claimed, “The United States’ failure to give a warning before proceeding with the disastrous attack on the Ameriyya shelter was a serious violation of the laws of war”. Yet no western media cried ‘war crimes’.

## More recently in Iraq and Syria

Following the capture of much of northern Iraq and eastern Syria by the so-called Islamic State – and atrocities committed by the terror group against local populations – an international Coalition led by the United States began military actions against Islamic State in 2014, in partnership with local forces. It has acknowledged killing at least 1,417 civilians in air strikes in Iraq and Syria since 2014. But monitoring group Airwars believes the actual figure is up to 13,244. A 2022 US military investigation found that troops did not violate the laws of war or deliberately cause civilian casualties in an air strike in Syria in 2019 that killed dozens of people. The probe was launched in response to a New York Times report which accused the military of a cover-up over the attack.

## Ethiopia

Researchers from Belgium’s Ghent University estimate as many as half a million people have

died so far in Ethiopia’s Civil War, described by the Washington Post as the world’s “deadliest war”: between 50,000 and 100,000 from the fighting, 150,000 to 200,000 from starvation and more than 100,000 from lack of medical attention. The conflict in Ethiopia has been falsely characterised as an oppressive government denying a marginalised community the right to an election. The narrative feeds into the stereotype of corrupt and incompetent African governments, a myth easily exposed if Ethiopian citizens and journalists were consulted by Western media.

The Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) is a small, elite group of ousted leaders trying to intimidate and overhaul a democratically elected government, forcing a leader on millions of compatriots. TPLF had their time: they were in power for 30 years but are supported by the US.

## Palestine

More than 260 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip during the May 2021 escalation of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Rocket attacks by Palestinian armed groups were met by a disproportionate Israeli response involving military attack from the air and the sea, in addition to shelling – in breach of the rules of war on self-defence. Numerous UN resolutions including UN Security Council resolutions in 1979, 1980, and 2016 and prevailing international opinion, hold that Israeli settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights are in violation of international law. But the US provides it with blind political and military support. In 2020, the US gave \$3.8bn (£2.7bn) in aid to Israel – part of a long-term, yearly commitment made under the Obama administration. Almost all of this aid was for military assistance and came as part of an agreement signed by former president Barack Obama in 2016 for \$38bn (26.8bn) in military aid over the decade 2017-2028.

## Somalia

According to Necrometrics, around 500,000 people have been killed in Somalia since the start of the civil war there in 1991. In June, the Norwegian Refugee Council declared the situation in the DRC as the world’s most neglected refugee crisis – for a second year running. At least five million people are internally displaced and one million more fleeing abroad, the aid group said.

In a recent poll conducted by the *Guardian*, nearly 80% of Britons were unaware of the malnutrition crisis in the Horn of Africa. (Only 9% were unaware of the war in Ukraine.)



The basis of this famine is three successive failed rain seasons, exacerbated by rising food prices and armed conflict in many of the affected countries. The war in Ukraine only stands to worsen the situation further, as it is a source of staples like wheat and sunflower oil.

20 million people across the Horn of Africa and 40% of the population of Somalia, the country most affected, are facing starvation. Michael D Higgins has referred to this famine as “the greatest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War”, and begged of Irish media not to avert their gaze.

## Myanmar

Myanmar’s military junta seized power in a coup in February 2021, ousting the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, and has since unleashed a campaign of brutal violence to suppress opposition.

A total of 14,847 people have been arrested since a military coup last year. 11,759 remain in detention, according to the advocacy group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) Burma. 76 prisoners have been sentenced to death since the coup, including two children and most recently two opposition activists were executed in late July, having been denied access to lawyers for their appeal.

## Perspective

Russia’s offensive in Ukraine, which has targeted civilians including in attacks on shelters and the attack on Mariupol hospital has justifiably been deemed war crimes by Western media and politicians and the International Criminal Court sent a 42-member team, the largest it has ever sent, to probe alleged war crimes in Ukraine. However, it is a blinding double standard that the US commits equal atrocities without so much as a slap on the wrist. The ICC has no remit over the US.

There is an unmistakable pattern of our media overlooking faraway conflicts or underplaying the role of US militarism in creating or sustaining them. We all respect the ubiquitous Ukrainian flag but who would even recognise an Iraqi, Syrian, Congolese, or Somali one? **LE**