



# Champions for Peace, or Champions for War?

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Western Media Approaches to the Wars in Iraq, Ukraine and Gaza

By Dr Lily Hamourtziadou

# IRAQ: Iraq Body Count

- **Contextualising** the dead: documenting civilian deaths in Iraq 2003–2023  
When it comes to recording deaths, the appropriate question is *who* died, not merely how many. Each of the 210,166 civilians whose deaths Iraq Body Count has documented from March 2003 to March 2023 had a name; each was an individual, a family member with a role in the community, a painful loss. The history of war is often told from the top down, analysing dilemmas facing presidents and prime ministers, charting strategies and tactics, triumphs and failures. Yet the one consequence of all wars is the abrupt ending of life *en masse*. Telling a story of war from the bottom up uncovers patterns of harm, lends weight to advocacy against the use of certain weapons or tactics, and illustrates how the acts of the powerful affect the powerless. Meticulous, ongoing casualty recording enables us to see wars through the lens of civilian suffering and loss.

[www.iraqbodycount.org](http://www.iraqbodycount.org)



# <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/incidents/a6384>

**Remembered**

“ She was uncomplicated. One of the stories I remember about her is from when she was in secondary school. One day the headmaster was hitting the students in punishment. She ran to the headmaster and told her, 'Don't hit them, they are still little, you can hit me instead'. She was a quiet girl, with a smile always on her face. As a teenager she didn't share her interests with us, but after her death, her teenage cousins told us that she liked to keep a diary and write poems. She wanted to grow up to be a doctor.

*As told by her father Wail Mwafaq Mosa Tabra to IBC, 4th July 2021.*

Age	14
Sex	Female
Nationality	Iraqi

*Recorded in IBC incident [a6384](#)*

*Location: Al-Ishaqi, south of Tikrit*

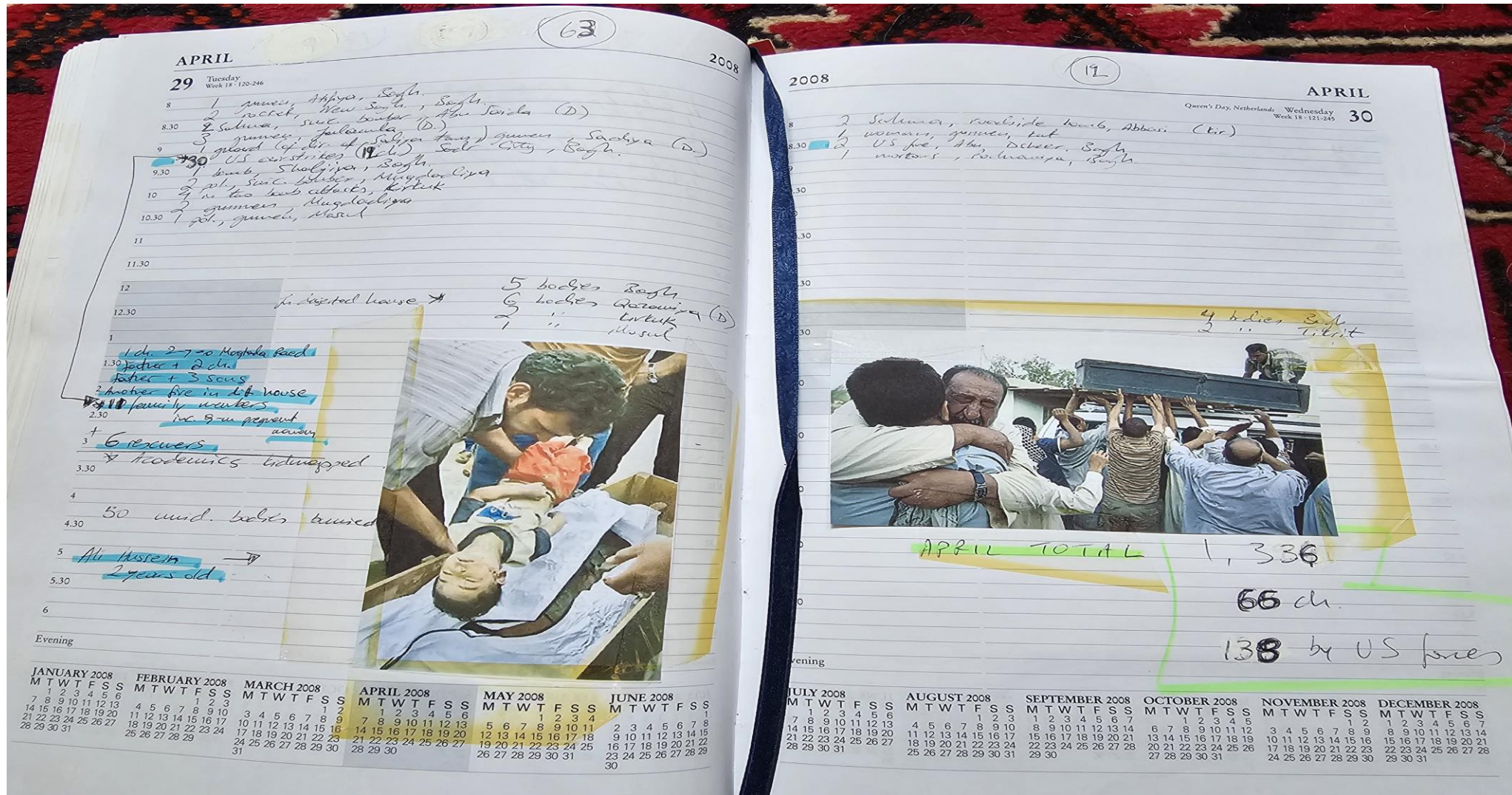
*Date: 31 March 2003 - 1 April 2003*



# Operation 'Shock and Awe' CNN and ITN

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yr-LaMhvro>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8KimNtB9HI>

# A casualty recorder's notebooks...



- *'An old man approached, disoriented and alone, faltering forward with his cane after three warning shots. Finally, US weapons fired a burst and he fell dead,'* read Ellen Knickmeyer's report for the Associated Press, on 8 April 2003, titled 'Marines triumph, mourn' (cited in *A Dossier On Civilian Casualties 2003-2005* [https://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/reference/pdf/a\\_dossier\\_of\\_civilian\\_casualties\\_2003-2005.pdf](https://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/reference/pdf/a_dossier_of_civilian_casualties_2003-2005.pdf)).
- The old man was Iraqi and his country, Iraq, had been invaded and at war for 3 weeks. The killing was recorded and documented in a public database by Iraq Body Count (IBC): it was incident x045 <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/incidents/x045>. The old man died with 14 others in an incident that was reported by journalists writing for the Associated Press, Le Monde, CBC and other Western media. A New York Times article on April 11 even provided details of 2 of the other victims: brothers Wadhar and Bashar Handi, owners of a tannery.

Between March 2003 and March 2005 IBC recorded the deaths of 24,864 civilians, based on reports by journalists, by also and primarily-mortuary officials and medics.

Primary Source	Number of deaths reported
Mortuaries	8,913
Medics	4,846
Iraqi officials	4,376
Eyewitnesses	3,794
Police	3,588
Relatives	2,780
US-Coalition	2,423
Journalists	1,976
NGOs	732
Friends/Associates	596
Other	196



# After 2010...

- Press and media reports relied on primary sources on the ground in Iraq for their data, and police became increasingly significant as primary sources. Iraqis were the ones who most clearly articulated their experience of war to the world. All these sources enabled IBC casualty recorders to extract incident data (date, time, place, target, number of killed and injured, weapons used, perpetrators, media sources, primary witnesses) and personal data (name, age, gender, marital status, parental status, occupation) for the next 20 years.
- Reporting on casualties by Western media **dwindled after 2010**, when UK and US troops withdrew from Iraq, only to **rise during the ISIS occupation years, 2014-2017**. After reporting on ISIS atrocities, Western media left it to Middle Eastern journalists, medics and police officers to provide testimony and report the daily killings.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
2003	3	2	3962	3472	545	597	646	833	566	515	487	524	12,152
2004	610	663	1004	1303	655	910	834	878	1042	1033	1676	1129	11,737
2005	1222	1297	905	1145	1396	1347	1536	2352	1444	1311	1487	1141	16,583
2006	1546	1579	1957	1805	2279	2594	3298	2865	2567	3041	3095	2900	29,526
2007	3035	2680	2728	2573	2854	2219	2702	2483	1391	1326	1124	997	26,112
2008	861	1093	1669	1317	915	755	640	704	612	594	540	586	10,286
2009	372	409	438	590	428	564	431	653	352	441	226	478	5,382
2010	267	305	336	385	387	385	488	520	254	315	307	218	4,167
2011	389	254	311	289	381	386	308	401	397	366	288	392	4,162
2012	531	356	377	392	304	529	469	422	400	290	253	299	4,622
2013	357	360	403	545	888	659	1145	1013	1306	1180	870	1126	9,852
2014	1097	972	1029	1037	1100	4088	1580	3340	1474	1738	1436	1327	20,218
2015	1490	1625	1105	2013	1295	1355	1845	1991	1445	1297	1021	1096	17,578
2016	1374	1258	1459	1192	1276	1405	1280	1375	935	1970	1738	1131	16,393
2017	1119	982	1918	1816	1871	1858	1498	597	490	397	346	291	13,183
2018	474	410	402	303	229	209	230	201	241	305	160	155	3,319
2019	323	271	123	140	167	130	145	93	151	361	274	215	2,393
2020	114	148	73	52	74	64	49	82	54	70	74	54	908
2021	64	56	49	66	49	46	87	60	41	65	23	63	669
2022	62	46	42	31	82	44	67	80	68	63	65	90	740
2023	56	52	76	86	46	28	30	29	38	34	34	28	537

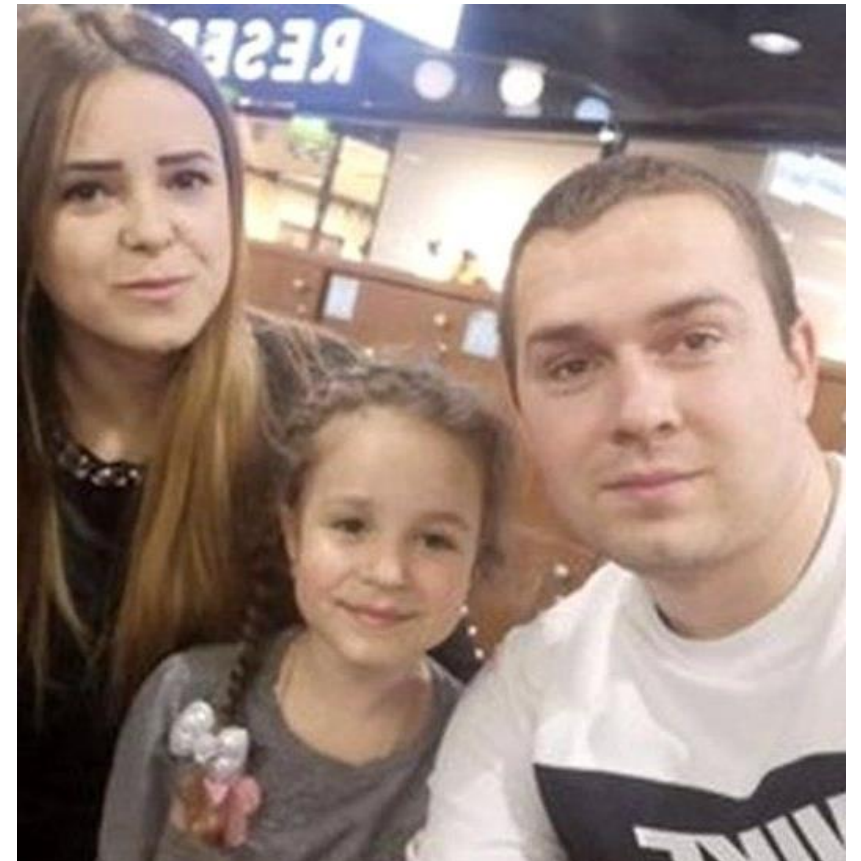
# Ukraine

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- **Ukraine war: 'Russian soldiers killed my family while they fled'**
  - 4 March 2022

Oleg (R) with his wife, Irina, and their six-year-old daughter, Sofia

**A family trying to flee Russian attacks was deliberately targeted by Russian soldiers at a checkpoint in southern Ukraine, relatives say. Five people were killed.** As Russian forces launched their attack on Ukraine, the Fedko family made a desperate attempt to flee their city of Kherson, in the country's south, to join relatives in a village where they felt they would be safe. Oleg, who is a police officer, had to stay as his department was on full war alert. His father came to take Irina, Oleg's wife, and the couple's two children, six-year-old Sofia and Ivan, who was not even two months old, to his house in Vesele. Shortly after they arrived, Russian forces entered the village. Electricity and water supplies were cut off. Worried they would be caught up in the fighting, the family decided to flee, again, this time to the village of Nova Kakhovka, where other relatives lived. They were now a bigger group, divided in two cars. One carried Oleg's aunt, uncle and cousins. In the second were his parents, wife and children. Their journey would see them driving along a dam, which was already under Russian control, to cross the Dnipro river, which cuts through Ukraine dividing the country in two. The first car had passed through a checkpoint manned by Russian soldiers, but they had lost sight of the other vehicle.



# Continued

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- Oleg's parents were also killed while trying to reach Nova Kakhovka

Denis, Oleg's brother, was monitoring their moves by phone from Cherkasy, in central Ukraine. At 17:13, he called his mother. "I told them: 'Go to Odesa, I have a flat there for you'." At that moment, he told me, he heard his mother scream: "Oh my God, it's a child, how can you do that". His sister-in-law, he said, was also screaming. "Then I heard the sound of shooting," he said. "The car stopped and I heard the opened door beeping. I heard the baby cry. He cried, cried, cried. Then I heard [more] gunshots. "Irina said she begged the soldiers to let her and Oleksandr, her husband, go to the car. "I said there were children there," she told me. Two soldiers went to the car. Oleksandr followed them. The car, he said, was pierced through with bullets. "The front, the back and both sides had bullet holes." Ivan was pulled out by one of the soldiers. He was crying. "I told them [Sofia] was also there and ran towards the car. Sofia was in the back seat," Oleksandr said. "I looked at her and there was a hole in her chest". The three adults - Oleg's parents and his wife - had been killed. Sofia was still alive. Ivan had now gone silent. Irina and Oleksandr brought the children to their car and rushed to a hospital in Nova Kakhovka. But the doctors there could not save them. Ivan, it turned out, had also been shot. "He was shot in the ear, and the bullet went through the back of his head. His face was clean but the back of his head was covered with blood. But he was still alive and crying," Oleksandr said.

The Russian military only allowed the family to retrieve the bodies of the adults the following day. The doctor who inspected the bodies told them that they all died from multiple gunshot wounds.



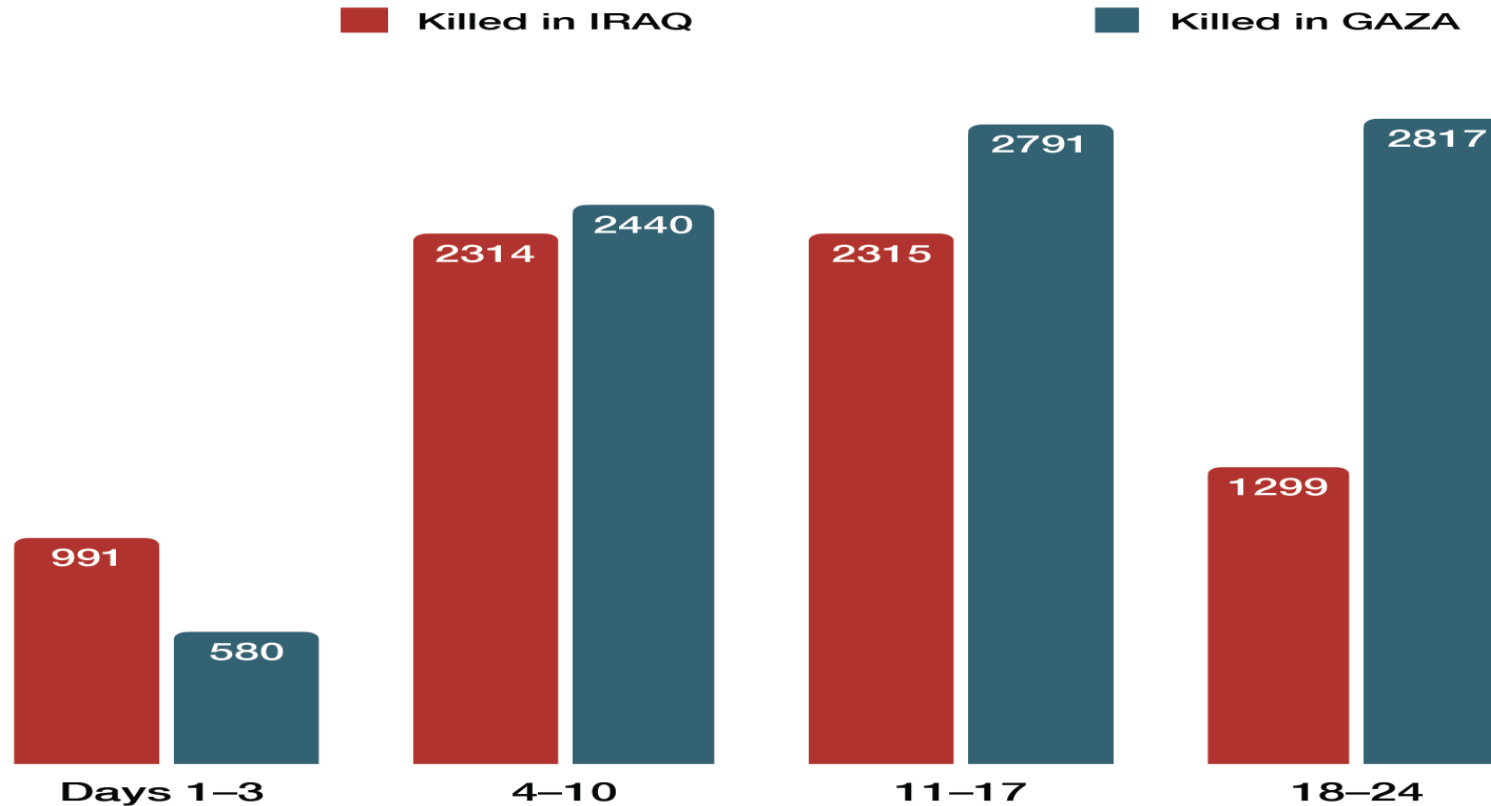


# Concluded

- The International Criminal Court (ICC) said evidence was being collected on alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by Russia in Ukraine. And the UN Human Rights Council voted to establish a commission to investigate alleged human rights violations by Russia in the war.
- Russian soldiers are now digging trenches and strengthening their positions in Nova Kakhovka and nearby villages. The local population live in constant fear. "I wasn't scared before," Irina said. "But I'm scared now."
- "There were some Russian soldiers near a pharmacy today. They were checking people's phones and their pockets. And they pointed their guns at them. We got in the car and drove away," Irina said in tears.
- Oleg continues with his work with the police department, despite the loss of his wife and children. "He's doing everything to protect our citizens," Denis said. "But his pain of failing to protect his own family while defending the nation is unimaginable."

# Gaza: October 7-October 26 2023

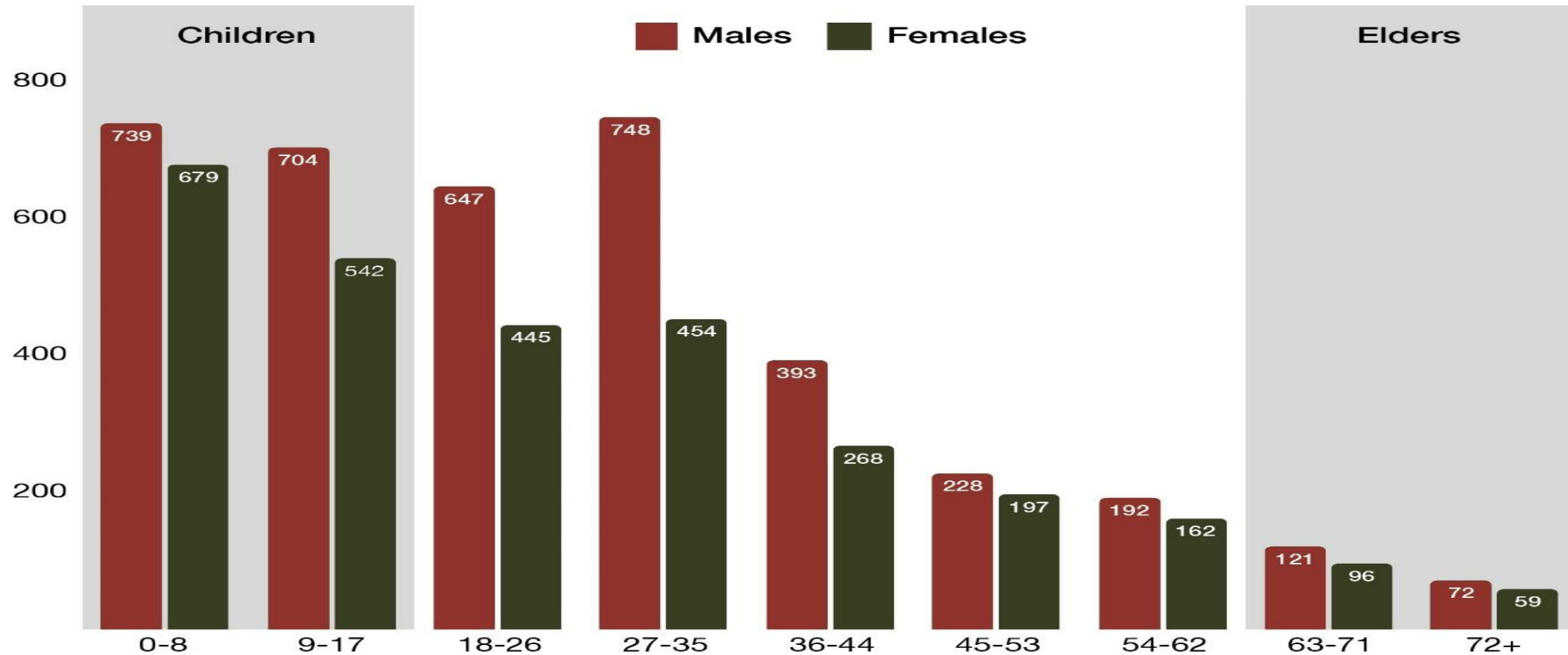
First weeks of civilian deaths in Iraq (2003) and Gaza (2023) compared by day number.



Civilian deaths during the 2003 Iraq invasion are from [iraqbodycount.org/database](http://iraqbodycount.org/database) and based predominantly on figures from hospitals and morgues reported to press and media.

Numbers of killed in Gaza are from the Gaza Ministry of Health, as reported daily by UNRWA [unrwa.org/resources/reports](http://unrwa.org/resources/reports) and OCHA [ochaopt.org](http://ochaopt.org).

# Grouped by age and gender



Persons killed between 7 Oct–26 Oct 2023 grouped by age and gender.  
Data from Gaza Ministry of Health

*‘The Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza released a list of 6,747 people it said had been killed in Israel’s relentless bombardment of the Palestinian territory in retaliation for the Hamas-led raid on Oct. 7 that killed more than 1,200 people in Israel’* reported the New York Times...

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/26/world/middleeast/gaza-death-toll-israel.html#:~:text=The%20Hamas%20run%20Health%20Ministry,than%201%2C400%20people%20in%20Israel>. US President Biden expressed ‘no confidence’ in those numbers...

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/biden-says-he-has-no-confidence-palestinian-death-count-2023-10-26/> .

From the very first casualty report, Western press and politicians would include variations of this caveat: *Hamas-run, Hamas-reported, Hamas-led*. Recently, the BBC highlighted the heartbreaking death of 6-year-old Hind Rajab, killed fleeing with family members and the ambulance crew that responded. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68261286> .



‘Hind Rajab, 6, found dead in Gaza days after phone calls for help’, February 10, 2024

- **A six-year-old girl who went missing in Gaza City last month has been found dead, along with several of her relatives and two paramedics who tried to save her.**
- Hind Rajab was fleeing the city with her aunt, uncle and three cousins when the car they were travelling in appears to have come face to face with Israeli tanks, and come under fire.
- Audio recordings of calls between Hind and emergency call operators suggest that the six-year-old was the only one left alive in the car, hiding from Israeli forces among the bodies of her relatives.
- [Her pleas for someone to rescue her](#) ended when the phone line was cut amid the sound of more gunfire.
- Paramedics from the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) managed on Saturday to reach the area, which had previously been closed off as an active combat zone.
- They found the black Kia car Hind had been travelling in - its windscreen and dashboard smashed to pieces, bullet holes scattered across the side.

# Continued

- One paramedic told journalists that Hind was among the six bodies found inside the car, all of which showed signs of gunfire and shelling. A few metres away were the remains of another vehicle - completely burnt out, its engine spilling onto the ground. This, the Red Crescent says, is the ambulance sent to fetch Hind. Its crew - Yusuf al-Zeino and Ahmed al-Madhoun - were killed when the ambulance was bombed by Israeli forces, the organisation says.
- In a statement, the PRCs accused Israel of deliberately targeting the ambulance, as soon as it arrived at the scene on 29 January. "The [Israeli] occupation deliberately targeted the Red Crescent crew despite obtaining prior coordination to allow the ambulance to arrive at the scene to rescue the child Hind," it said. The PRCs told the BBC that it had taken several hours to coordinate access with the Israeli army, in order to send paramedics to Hind.

# Continued

- "We got the coordination, we got the green light," PRCS spokeswoman, Nibal Farsakh, told me earlier this week. "On arrival, [the crew] confirmed that they could see the car where Hind was trapped, and they could see her. The last thing we heard is continuous gunfire."
- Recordings of Hind's conversations with call operators - shared publicly by the Red Crescent - sparked a campaign to find out what had happened to her.
- Hind's mother told us - before her body was discovered - that she was waiting for her daughter "any moment, any second".
- She called on the Red Crescent to publish the details of its coordination with the Israeli army.
- The rules of war say medical personnel must be protected and not targeted in a conflict, and that injured people must be given the medical care they need - to the fullest practical extent and with the least possible delay.

# Continued





Concluded

Israel has previously accused  
 Hamas of using ambulances to  
 transport its weapons and fighters.

# Reporting

- Since the Ministry of Health document, there has been no shortage of sources of information on casualties. Data and photos (submitted by family members and people who knew the victims) are provided daily by [@Gaza\\_Shaheed](#) and [@GazaMartyrs](#) on twitter, as well as [shireen.ps](#) and [airwars.org](#). IBC created a spreadsheet linking to and detailing online photographic tributes to 1,198 people killed Oct 7, 2023 - Feb 2, 2024 [bit.ly/ibc4gaza](#).
- On social media, we find more detailed accounts, identifying, contextualising and memorialising each death, like those of 5 children killed with their mother, provided by Gaza Shaheed:
  - *Martyrs, child angels: Hassan Mohamed Salah, 10 years old, Ismail Mohamed Salah, 9 years old, Hanan Mohamed Salah, 5 years old, Majd Mohamed Salah, 3 years old, Lian Mohamed Salah, one and a half years old. Five young children, less than ten years old. Innocent children who excel in their studies. Obedient, polite, well behaved. The five siblings loved each other very much and were always with each other until they left this life together. Their mother was very interested in raising them in the best possible way, until their mother left with them (translated from Arabic by Google).*
  - [https://twitter.com/Gaza\\_Shaheed/status/1744256649458491851](https://twitter.com/Gaza_Shaheed/status/1744256649458491851)
- Each child is pictured smiling.

# Tribute to the children of Gaza

This video shows, along with their name and age, some of the many children killed since Oct 7 in Gaza, drawing on pictorial tributes from their friends and family—the deeply felt public memorials depicting each child in the way that those who knew, loved and cared for them wanted them remembered.

Produced by @iraqbodycount Feb 2024

In solidarity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgMOgqbpu8w>

# Champions for War: in Ukraine, in Gaza and in Iraq.

The coverage of -allegedly- much-needed, urgent Western resistance against Russia's aggression in Ukraine quickly became the main theme of Western broadcasts in 2022. The character of the coverage showed that how a war is covered, whether civilians are seen as victims/heroes or as collateral damage, whether refugees are deemed worthy of support or suspect, and whether the victims of aggression are judged as deserving of assistance, depends on the racial background of its subjects.

At the same time, while heavily immersed in the 'cult of Western values', Western media displayed a complete lack of concern for people's rights to freedom, sovereignty, equality and justice, when it came to Israel's war on Gaza, termed 'Israel's war on Hamas'. Since the start of the latest Israeli assault on Palestinians -one of the swiftest ethnic cleansing efforts in history – Western media have published unsubstantiated claims, provided justification for Israel's war crimes and refrained from reporting the heartbreaking human toll, in a textbook case of 'coloniser's journalism', similar to what we have been seeing in the coverage of the Iraq wars since 2003.

BBC project 'Jihadism: Tracking a month of deadly attacks',  
December 2014.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-30080914>