

New York Times reveals Israeli extermination order authorizing killing 20 civilians for each “combatant”

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On Thursday, the *New York Times* published a detailed account reporting the existence of official Israeli military documents authorizing the killing of 20 non-combatants in every attack on a single presumed Hamas supporter, with the ratio in some cases reaching 100 to one.

The report makes clear that Israel has waged its war on Gaza as a war of extermination, with the killing of the civilian population through aerial bombardment a goal co-equal with the massacre of those who have taken up arms against the Israeli occupation.

The *Times* reported that within hours of the beginning of the October 7 attack, the IDF issued an unprecedented order authorizing the effectively unrestricted bombardment of civilian areas of Gaza.

“In each strike, the order said, officers had the authority to risk killing up to 20 civilians,” the *Times* wrote.

The order authorized the IDF to target figures vaguely associated with Hamas while they were at home with their families, creating the conditions for the systematic and deliberate massacre of entire households. “It meant, for example, that the military could target rank-and-file militants as they were at home surrounded by relatives and neighbors.”

The *Times* added that “senior commanders approved strikes on Hamas leaders that they knew would each endanger more than 100 noncombatants—crossing an extraordinary threshold for a contemporary Western military.”

What becomes clear in the *Times*’ account is that the “system” and “rules of engagement” used in “pre-emptive strikes” targeting suspected Hamas sympathizers were nothing more than a cover for a

blanket bombardment of Gaza with massive block-buster bombs, aimed at killing as many people as possible and destroying as much of Gaza as possible.

The aim of this massacre was an ethnically cleansed Gaza, to be permanently annexed, occupied and settled by Israel, as a part of what Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu called the “new Middle East,” under the direct hegemony and domination of the imperialist powers via their Israeli vassal state.

The fact that this mass extermination campaign continues to this day was shown by the murder Thursday of five journalists in an airstrike, bringing the total number of journalists killed in Gaza since October 2023 to 201.

To date, 45,361 Palestinians have been killed in Israel’s assault on Gaza that began on October 7, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry. But this figure does not account for the vast number of people who have died from the deliberate starvation of the population of Gaza by Israel or the destruction of its healthcare system. The total could be 186,000 or more, according to *The Lancet* in July.

The report by the *Times* constitutes a semi-official acknowledgement by the US government of the existence of the extermination order, largely from the standpoint of damage control. Much of the story was previously reported by +972 Magazine, an independent Israeli-Palestinian publication, but the *Times* report is the first time that a major US media source has claimed to have seen the document authorizing the killing of 20 civilians for every combatant.

The Israeli strikes were carried out with no warnings, often on the basis of a system called “Lavender” that used artificial intelligence to target entire apartment

buildings and their residents for destruction without any warning and in some cases without human oversight.

The order issued on October 7 was followed by another, issued on October 8, which, according to the *Times*, declared, “Strikes on military targets in Gaza ... were permitted to cumulatively endanger up to 500 civilians each day.”

In an extraordinary passage, the *Times* wrote that “A scholar at West Point consulted by the *Times*, Prof. Michael N. Schmitt, said it risked being construed by mid-ranking officers as a quota that they had to reach.” Regardless, the *Times* wrote, the “quota” was removed just days later, and there were multiple days in which more than 500 deaths were reported in Gaza.

During the first two days of the war, the *Times* reported in an earlier article, “90 percent of the munitions Israel dropped in Gaza were satellite-guided bombs of 1,000 to 2,000 pounds.”

US officials have repeatedly stated that they have encouraged Israeli leaders to use lower-yield munitions. But these public statements are belied by the fact that, according to a July report by Reuters, the US sent Israel 14,000 2,000-pound bombs between October and July, more than any other type of munition.

The existence of this order helps explain the findings of a report by the United Nations Human Rights Office published in November that concluded that 70 percent of civilian deaths in Gaza since October were women and children, with children under 18 making up by far the highest portion of fatalities.

Throughout the genocide, the Biden administration has sought to promote the claim that Israel, despite at times being overzealous in the use of weapons, does not intend to either exterminate the people of Gaza or forcibly displace them.

The reality is, however, that the documents the *New York Times* has verified would have been immediately available to the US intelligence agencies within a matter of days of their circulation. US President Joe Biden would have been briefed on them ahead of his trip to Israel in October 2023, where he pledged the total support of the US government to the genocide.

While the Israeli assault on Gaza sets a mark for rapid extermination that is without precedent in a US-sponsored war of the 21st century, the United States has been waging war throughout the Middle East since the proclamation of the “war on terror,” using many of

the methods being used by Israel. In 2013, a study published in the medical journal *PLOS Medicine* concluded that the US invasion of Iraq led to the deaths of half a million people or more between 2003 and 2011, with 70 percent being killed in violent attacks.

Since 2001, the United States has carried out a staggering 100,000 airstrikes throughout the world, including in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Somalia. During the Obama administration, US drone assassinations were given a shocking regularity in the president’s “terror Tuesday” meetings, in which he personally selected targets for illegal murder, picked from an Orwellian “disposition matrix” of targets.

No comparable up-to-date study has been made of the death tolls of these wars, but if the methods applied to Iraq in 2013 were used in these countries, the death toll is likely to be in the millions.

The systematic use of extrajudicial murder over the past quarter-century by the United States is the answer to the White House’s claims that it is urging Israel to show “restraint.”

Rather, Israel, using weapons and intelligence provided by the United States, is only perfecting and institutionalizing the methods used by the United States during the “war on terror.” And Israel’s crimes will only set the precedent for the further use of mass killing against densely populated urban areas, both around the world and within the United States itself.

The complicity of the imperialist powers in the Gaza genocide stands as an indictment of the entire capitalist system, which is systematically normalizing genocide—the highest form of social barbarism—in the defense of the interests of the parasitic capitalist financial oligarchy.



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