

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

Clara Weiss  
5 August 2022

The human rights organization Amnesty International released a report Thursday showing that “Ukrainian forces have put civilians in harm’s way by establishing bases and operating weapons systems in populated residential areas, including in schools and hospitals.”

Amnesty International’s findings corroborate an earlier report by the United Nations which also provided evidence that the Ukrainian army has been using civilians as human shields in the conflict. Both of these recent reports come on top of extensive documentation of war crimes committed by the Ukrainian army and its neo-fascist paramilitary forces, particularly against Russian prisoners of war.

Written in cautious language, Amnesty International’s report is a damning exposure of the criminal character of the imperialist proxy war in Ukraine in which the civilian population is but a pawn for the imperialist powers and their lackeys in the Ukrainian oligarchy and military.

As one resident of the city of Bakhmut told Amnesty International, “We have no say in what the military does, but we pay the price.”

The report was compiled by researchers investigating Russian strikes in the Kharkiv, Donbas and Mykolaiv regions between April and July. In the words of Amnesty International’s Secretary General Agnès Callamard, “We have documented a pattern of Ukrainian forces putting civilians at risk and violating the laws of war when they operate in populated areas.”

This pattern includes the use of hospitals as de facto military bases—a clear violation of international law—which Amnesty International has confirmed for five locations. According to the report, “In two towns, dozens of soldiers were resting, milling about, and eating meals in hospitals. In another town, soldiers were firing from near the hospital.”

The report also found that the Ukrainian army “has routinely set up bases in schools in towns and villages in Donbas and in the Mykolaiv area.” While not entirely prohibited by international law, the use of schools and

residential buildings by the military is only deemed legitimate when the army has no other options. Moreover, the military is obliged to do everything in its power to minimize civilian casualties, including through evacuations and by giving effective warnings of attacks that might endanger civilians.

However, the researchers found evidence that Ukrainian forces had launched “strikes from within populated residential areas as well as basing themselves in civilian buildings” that were, in most of the documented cases, kilometers away from the actual front lines. According to Amnesty, there were “viable alternatives ... that would not endanger civilians.” Moreover, the organization was “not aware” that the armed forces had asked or assisted civilians to evacuate nearby buildings, which constitutes a failure to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians.

The report noted, “At 22 out of 29 schools visited, Amnesty International researchers either found soldiers using the premises or found evidence of current or prior military activity—including the presence of military fatigues, discarded munitions, army ration packets and military vehicles.”

The report continues, “In a town east of Odesa, Amnesty International witnessed a broad pattern of Ukrainian soldiers using civilian areas for lodging and as staging areas, including basing armoured vehicles under trees in purely residential neighbourhoods, and using two schools located in densely populated residential areas. Russian strikes near the schools killed and injured several civilians between April and late June—including a child and an older woman killed in a rocket attack on their home on 28 June.”

The response by the Ukrainian government to the report has been nothing short of hysterical. Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky denounced the report in an address to the nation, claiming that it turned the “victim” into the “aggressor.” Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba fumed on Twitter that the report “distorts reality, draws false

moral equivalence between the aggressor and the victim, and boosts Russia's disinformation efforts."

In reality, Amnesty International denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the report but insisted that this "does not exempt the Ukrainian military from respecting international humanitarian law." The report also stresses that the violations of international law by the Ukrainian army "in no way justify Russia's indiscriminate attacks."

It should also be noted that the overwhelming majority of the organization's reports on the war so far have focused almost exclusively on war crimes by Russia, and Amnesty International itself is by no means an impartial observer. Most notoriously, it restored the "prisoner of conscience" status for the right-wing Russian anti-Putin critic Alexei Navalny, an avowed racist, after coming under intense political pressure last year.

Significantly, the Ukraine office of the organization vehemently opposed the publication of the report. Its head, Oksana Pokalchuk, declared, "We did everything we could to prevent this report from going public."

The fact that Amnesty International ended up releasing the report despite serious internal divisions and immense political pressure indicates that the real situation on the ground in Ukraine is, if anything, far more disturbing than even what this report suggests. It should also be noted that the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, which has played a prominent role in the anti-Russia war propaganda in Europe, admitted in a report on Friday, rather grudgingly, that its own reporters had made similar findings as Amnesty International and that the conduct of the Ukrainian military "raises legitimate questions."

The hysterical response by the Ukrainian government points to extreme nervousness on the part of the Ukrainian oligarchy and its imperialist backers about the political implications of the report. The testimonies cited by Ukrainian civilians indicates that there is significant anger about the country's military conduct and growing popular opposition to the war in Ukraine itself.

Above all, however, the report exposes the criminal character of the war and deals a major blow to the relentless war propaganda in the media.

Day in and day out, the working class in Europe and the US is being bombarded with news about alleged Russian war crimes, while neo-fascist paramilitaries like the Azov Battalion are praised by the Associated Press and the *New York Times* for their "bravery." The entire edifice of this imperialist war propaganda has been based on the lie that the invasion of Ukraine by Russia was entirely unprovoked and that all the death and destruction in this war are to be blamed entirely on Moscow.

Yet the Amnesty International report leaves no doubt that,

whatever the war crimes by the Russian army—and there is no question that such crimes have been committed—a significant number of the civilian casualties of this war, which now number over 5,000 dead and over 7,000 wounded, were caused by the conduct of the Ukrainian military.

Moreover, anyone reading the report must ask the question: Why does the Ukrainian military behave in such a way? If there was any truth to the claim that this war was about the defense of "democracy" and the "rights" of the Ukrainian population, such conduct would either not take place at all or be immediately condemned by the Ukrainian government and its General Staff.

The reality is that the US, which has deliberately provoked this war after laying waste to half a dozen societies in the Middle East and North Africa, and the Ukrainian oligarchy could care less about the millions of lives now being destroyed and the thousands killed in the war against Russia.

In a rare moment of truth, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov recently described his country as a "testing ground" for Western arms manufacturers, which have reaped major profits from the tens of billions of dollars in money for weapons that NATO has pumped into the Ukrainian military.

The real aim of the war, which was deliberately provoked by NATO, is to bleed Russia dry. The strategy is to pump Ukraine full with advanced missiles and weapons in order to engineer a military defeat with horrific losses in the hope that this would precipitate a major domestic crisis, which can facilitate the ongoing regime change operation by the imperialist powers.

From the standpoint of Washington and the other imperialist powers, the war in Ukraine is but the opening shot in a new scramble to carve up Russia and China in a new redivision of the world. With the relentless anti-Russian war propaganda and the glorification of the supposedly heroic martyrs of the Ukrainian army, world public opinion is to be prepared for a far bigger war that threatens a nuclear catastrophe. The Amnesty International report has dealt a significant blow to this sinister propaganda effort.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**