

2018: a year of explosive violence

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In 2018, Action on Armed Violence recorded **32,102 deaths and injuries** from the use of explosive weapons around the world, as reported in English language media. Civilians continued to bear the burden of this harm, accounting for **70%** (or 22,335) of these casualties. Of those civilian casualties 43% (9,615) were killed, while 57% (12,720) were injured by explosive weapons. This compares to 16,289 civilians killed (51%) and 15,615 injured (49%) in 2017.

For the eighth consecutive year, when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, over 90% of those killed and injured were civilians. This compares to 20% in other areas. Such a pattern of harm makes it abundantly clear; when explosive weapons are used in populated areas, civilians are disproportionately impacted. Correspondingly, when fewer attacks occur in populated areas, civilian casualties decline.

Total casualties

Year	Civilians killed	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
2017	16289	31904	11068	42972
2018	9615	22335	9767	32102
Total	25904	54239	20835	75074

Whilst the number of civilian casualties recorded in 2018 constitutes a 30% fall compared to 2017 (when 31,904 were recorded), some countries continued to see significant rises in harm. Notably, increases were seen in Afghanistan (a 37% rise, from 3,119 civilian casualties in 2017 to 4,260 in 2018), Yemen (an 8% rise, from 1,670 to 1,807), India (a 21% increase from 267 to 322), and Libya (with 140% from 163 to 392). Ethiopia, Gaza, Iran, Mali, Philippines and Indonesia also saw a growth in civilian harm from explosive weapons.

Afghanistan

Year	No. of incidents	Civilians killed	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
2017	299	1092	3119	2540	5659
2018	477	1488	4260	3128	7388
Total	776	2580	7379	5668	13047

Yemen

Year	No. of incidents	Civilians killed	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
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2017	203	999	1670	499	2169
2018	227	941	1807	523	2330
Total	430	1940	3477	1022	4499

Libya

Year	No. of incidents	Civilians killed	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
2017	16	40	163	116	279
2018	42	90	392	73	465
Total	58	130	555	189	744

India

Year	No. of incidents	Civilians killed	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
2017	139	40	267	269	536
2018	179	64	322	320	642
Total	318	104	589	589	1178

One of the largest rises occurred in Afghanistan, where ISIS' presence continued to increase, it appears with fighters fleeing Syria and Iraq turning their violence onto Afghani civilians. Civilian casualties from ISIS' use of explosive weapons in the country rose by 90% compared to the year before (from 676 in 2017 to 1,285 last year). In total, 4,260 civilian casualties were recorded in Afghanistan from explosive weapons, accounting for 58% of total casualties (7,388) from 477 incidents of explosive violence. This was the highest number of civilian casualties recorded in Afghanistan since the monitor began in October 2010.

Afghanistan

Year	No. of incidents	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
2011	572	2802	1800	4602
2012	464	2338	1411	3749
2013	311	1704	1104	2808
2014	213	1850	807	2657
2015	138	2029	685	2714
2016	198	2199	1896	4095
2017	299	3119	2540	5659
2018	477	4260	3128	7388
Total	2672	20301	13371	33672

Last year, 78% (3,328) of civilian casualties in Afghanistan were caused by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) – and, notably, 61% (2,616) were by suicide attacks. Afghanistan also saw an 87% rise (from 238 to 463) in civilian casualties from airstrikes, most notably owing to the fact that the United States conducted a greater numbers of attacks targeting the increased militant presence.

In Yemen, AOAV recorded 2,330 casualties from 227 incidents of explosive violence – of which, civilians accounted for 78% (1,807) of total casualties. Of the civilian casualties recorded in Yemen, state actors were responsible for 86% (1,551), with the Saudi-led coalition responsible for the vast majority (85% of total civilian casualties), with a 9% rise in civilian casualties from the Saudi-led coalition (from 1,414 civilian casualties in 2017, to 1,535 last year).

Whilst Syria remained the country worst impacted by explosive weapons last year, civilian casualties decreased by a quarter in 2018, compared to the previous year (from 13,062 in 2017 to 9,587 last year). This comes despite seeing the highest levels of civilian casualties from explosive violence ever recorded in Syria in February and March 2018, when Syrian and Russian forces carried out an extensive bombardment of Eastern Ghouta. Civilian casualties, however, declined over the rest of 2018.

Syria monthly casualties 2018:

Year	No. of incidents	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
2018				
Jan	181	1073	203	1276
Feb	154	2498	211	2709
Mar	169	1893	150	2043
Apr	108	998	158	1156
May	89	371	111	482
Jun	99	551	246	797
Jul	78	880	225	1105
Aug	54	177	189	366
Sep	95	125	290	415
Oct	73	268	183	451
Nov	79	543	294	837
Dec	45	210	165	375

Despite this, whilst the number of civilian casualties caused by most actors in Syria decreased over the course of the year, the numbers of civilians killed and injured in US-led coalition airstrikes saw an alarming escalation during the final months of 2018 – harm that was responsible for the majority of casualties (65% or 663) in Syria during that 3-month period. Though, despite this blip, civilian harm from US-led coalition airstrikes in Syria fell

by 50% in 2018 compared to the previous year (from 1,970 civilian casualties in 2017 to 940 last year). Overall, 2018 proved to be the second-worst year for civilian harm from US-led coalition airstrikes in the country since the conflict began.

Overall, AOVAV recorded 12,012 casualties from 1,224 incidents of explosive violence in Syria – of which, civilians accounted for 80% (9,587) of total casualties.

Syria:

Year	No. of incidents	Civilians killed	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
2017	1750	8463	13062	2257	15319
2018	1224	5486	9587	2425	12012
Total	2974	13949	22649	4682	27331

Countries that saw significant decreases in civilian harm from explosive violence included Somalia (with a 48% decrease in civilian casualties from 1,582 to 825), Pakistan (a 46% decrease from 2,255 to 1,215), and Iraq (a decrease of 77% from 6,571 to 1,508). This fall in civilian harm in Iraq largely reflects a loss of territory suffered by ISIS and their subsequent ability to carry out attacks – a continuing trend from mid-2017. Such levels of civilian harm in Iraq are, hearteningly, the lowest recorded in the country by this monitor, which began in October 2010. Iraq saw 2,510 casualties from 487 incidents of explosive violence, with civilians accounting for 60% (1,508) of casualties.

Iraq

Year	No. of incidents	Civilians killed	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
2017	640	3290	6571	2325	8896
2018	487	326	1508	1002	2510
Total	1127	3616	8079	3327	11406

Pakistan, too, saw the lowest levels of casualties recorded by AOVAV. In total, 1,583 casualties were recorded in 171 incidents of explosive violence – civilians accounted for 77% (1,215) of the casualties.

Pakistan

Year	No. of incidents	Civilians killed	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
2017	197	473	2255	328	2583
2018	171	361	1215	368	1583
Total	368	834	3470	696	4166

Despite such positive news, globally once again IEDs caused more civilian harm than any other type of explosive weapon. These improvised weapons were responsible for 42% (9,366) of civilian casualties from all explosive harm, while airstrikes caused 32% (7,195) of

harm, ground-launched weapons 15% (3,159), and attacks using multiple explosive weapon types 9% (2,036).

All three of the main weapon types – IED, air-launched and ground-launched – saw a fall in casualties, compared to the previous year. Civilian casualties from air-launched explosive weapons fell by 50% (from 14,342 to 7,195), from ground-launched they fell by 10% (from 3,813 to 3,444), and from IEDs by 21% (from 11,791 to 9,366).

The number of armed actor casualties from IEDs saw a marginal increase of 8% (from 2,933 to 3,159). Civilian casualties from incidents caused by mines and multiple explosive types also saw slight increases. Civilian casualties from mines increased by 25% (from 228 to 285) and from multiple types increased 23% (from 1,649 to 2,036). Many of the high casualty incidents recorded with launch method as “multiple types” are those that occurred in Eastern Ghouta during February and March with both airstrikes and shelling used.

Launch method/ Year	No. of incidents	Civilians killed	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
Air-launched					
2017	1646	9495	14342	6457	20799
2018	980	4360	7195	5028	12223
Ground-launched					
2017	950	1720	3813	1019	4832
2018	911	1232	3444	1080	4524
IED					
2017	1058	4104	11791	2933	14724
2018	1329	2833	9366	3159	12525

Civilians accounted for 59% (7,195) of total casualties from airstrikes last year (12,223). From ground-launched, civilians accounted for 76% (3,444) of total casualties (4,524), and from IEDs, civilians accounted for 75% (9,366 of 12,525).

2018 also saw a decrease in attacks recorded in populated areas. The total number of attacks in populated areas fell by 26% compared to the previous year (from 2,601 to 1,928) and, as a percentage of total incidents (explosive weapon use in populated areas compared to lesser populated areas), dropped from 68% in 2017 to 56% in 2018.

Year/ Populated area?	No. of incidents	Total civilian casualties	Total armed actor and security personnel casualties	Total casualties
2017	3825	31904	11068	42972
Not reported as pop.	1224	2091	8435	10526
Populated area	2601	29813	2633	32446

2018	3459	22335	9767	32102
Not reported as pop.	1531	1951	7603	9554
Populated area	1928	20384	2164	22548

KEY FINDINGS

- AOA V recorded 32,102 deaths and injuries by explosive weapons in 3,459 incidents in 2018. Of these, 22,335 were civilians – 70%.
- When explosive weapons were used in populated areas, **90%** of those killed and injured were civilians. This compares to 20% in other areas.
- Civilian deaths and injuries in populated areas represented **91%** of all reported civilian deaths and injuries.
- Overall, reported casualties from explosive violence are decreasing, with a 30% fall in civilian casualties.
- Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, and Pakistan saw the highest number of civilian deaths and injuries in 2018.
- Seven countries and territories saw over 500 civilian deaths and injuries in 2018.
- Syria saw over 12,000 deaths and injuries – of which 80% were civilians.
- Some of the most impacted countries saw a significant rise in civilian deaths and injuries as a result of explosive weapons compared to the year before: Afghanistan (37%); Yemen (8%); India (21%); and Libya (140%).
- Incidents were recorded in 64 countries and territories around the world; five more than in 2017.

NOTES

- Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) is a London-based charity that has a central mission: to carry out research and advocacy in order to reduce the incidence and impact of global armed violence. We seek to strengthen international laws and standards on the availability and use of conventional and improvised weapons, to build recognition of the rights of victims and survivors of armed violence, and to research the root causes and consequences of armed violence in affected countries.
- AOA V is a founding member of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), a coalition of NGOs working to prevent the suffering caused by explosive weapons. UK based organisations Oxfam International and Save the Children are also members.
- For more information on this report, please contact Iain Overton, AOA V's Executive Director on +44 (0) 7984 645 145 or at ioverton@aoav.org.uk.
- Full details of this report will be published in March 2019.

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