



Four Million Muslims Killed in US-NATO Wars: Should We Call It Genocide?

Harkening back to the Japanese interment camps of WWII, some Americans are now calling for Muslims to be placed in camps or even openly calling for genocide against the 1.6 billion practitioners of the faith.

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Image: Afghan villagers sit near the bodies of children who they said were killed during a NATO air strike in the Kunar province of Afghanistan. April 7, 2013. (Reuters)

Note: Following the recent US House of Representatives vote to declare that ISIS is committing genocide in Iraq and Syria, we bring to the attention of our readers this article originally published in August 2015.

It may never be possible to know the true death toll of the modern Western wars on the Middle East, but that figure could be 4 million or higher. Since the vast majority of those killed were of Arab descent, and mostly Muslim, when would it be fair to accuse the United States and its allies of genocide?

A March report by [Physicians for Social Responsibility](#) calculates the body count of the Iraq War at around 1.3 million, and possibly as many as 2 million. However, [the numbers of those killed in Middle Eastern wars](#) could be much higher. [The actual death toll could reach as high as 4 million](#) if one includes not just those killed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also the victims of the sanctions against Iraq, which left about 1.7 million more dead, half of them children, according to figures from the United Nations.

Raphael Lemkin and the definition of genocide

The term “genocide” did not exist prior to 1943, when it was coined by a Polish-Jewish lawyer named Raphael Lemkin. Lemkin created the word by combining the Greek root “geno,” which means people or tribe, with “-cide,” derived from the Latin word for killing.

The Nuremberg trials, in which top Nazi officials were prosecuted for crimes against humanity, began in 1945 and were based around Lemkin’s idea of genocide. By the following year, it was becoming international law, [according to United to End Genocide](#):

“In 1946, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution that ‘affirmed’ that genocide was a crime under international law, but did not provide a legal definition of the crime.”

With support from representatives of the U.S., Lemkin presented the first draft of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide to the United Nations. The General Assembly adopted the convention in 1948, although it would take three more years for enough countries to sign the convention, allowing it to be ratified.

According to this convention, genocide is defined as:

“...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Under the convention, genocide is not merely defined as a deliberate act of killing, but can include a broad range of other harmful activities:

“Deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to destroy a group includes the deliberate deprivation of resources needed for the group’s physical survival, such as clean water, food, clothing, shelter or medical services. Deprivation of the means to sustain life can be imposed through confiscation of harvests, blockade of foodstuffs, detention in camps, forcible relocation or expulsion into deserts.”

It can also include forced sterilization, forced abortion, prevention of marriage or the transfer of children out of their families. In 2008, the U.N. expanded the definition to acknowledge that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide.”

A Middle Eastern genocide

A key phrase in the convention on genocide is “acts committed with intent to destroy.” While the facts back up a massive death toll in Arab and Muslim lives, it might be more difficult to argue that the actions were carried out with the deliberate intent to destroy “a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.”

The authors of the convention were aware, however, that few of those who commit genocide are so bold as to put their policies in writing as brazenly as the Nazis did. Yet, as [Genocide Watch](#) noted in 2002: “Intent can be proven directly from statements or orders. But more often, it must be inferred from a systematic pattern of coordinated acts.”

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush employed a curious and

controversial choice of words in one of his first speeches. He alarmed some by [referencing historic, religious conflicts](#), as The Wall Street Journal staff writers Peter Waldman and Hugh Pope noted:

“President Bush vowed ... to ‘rid the world of evil-doers,’ then cautioned: ‘This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while.’

Crusade? In strict usage, the word describes the Christian military expeditions a millennium ago to capture the Holy Land from Muslims. But in much of the Islamic world, where history and religion suffuse daily life in ways unfathomable to most Americans, it is shorthand for something else: a cultural and economic Western invasion that, Muslims fear, could subjugate them and desecrate Islam.”

In the wars that followed in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. not only killed millions, but systematically destroyed the infrastructure necessary for healthy, prosperous life in those countries, then [used rebuilding efforts as opportunities for profit](#), rather than to benefit the occupied populations. To further add to the genocidal pattern of behavior, there is ample evidence of torture and [persistent rumors of sexual assault from the aftermath of Iraq’s fall](#). It appears likely the U.S. has contributed to further destabilization and death in the region by [supporting the rise of the self-declared Islamic State of Iraq and Syria](#) by arming rebel groups on all sides of the conflict.

After 9/11, the U.S. declared a global “War on Terror,” ensuring an endless cycle of destabilization and wars in the Middle East in the process. The vast majority of the victims of these wars, and of ISIS, are Muslims. In this context, many Americans are embracing Bush’s controversial language of religious warfare, [calling for Muslims to be placed in camps](#) or even [openly calling for genocide](#).

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