

Key Instances of US Involvement in Mass Violence against Civilians since 1953

Prepared by Adam Jones

“... Aiding and abetting murder ... is committing murder.”
– President George W. Bush, 20 September 2001

The table presented below supports the statement in chapter 12 of my textbook, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*: “In examining *international* involvement in mass violence and atrocity, there is little doubt that the most consistently and aggressively violent country over the last half-century is also the world’s leading liberal democracy. ... No power approaches the United States when it comes to instigation of, and complicity in, conflicts and atrocities worldwide.”

The list is far from exhaustive. It focuses only on the most destructive instances of mass violence (over 10,000 civilians killed), and the clearest cases of US involvement. For further details, see the bibliography in the [Introduction](#) to Adam Jones, ed., *Genocide, War Crimes & the West: History and Complicity* (London: Zed Books, 2004). See also the (inevitably widely varying) casualty estimates in [“Death Tolls for the Man-made Megadeaths of the Twentieth Century.”](#) compiled by Matthew White.

Note also that this table does not include instances of structural and economic violence. By virtue of its global hegemonic status, the US has played the leading role in establishing the economic mechanisms and institutions that govern the destinies of the “Third World.” These mechanisms include the neoliberal economic prescriptions and “structural adjustment” policies that have wreaked immense human destruction in numerous societies over the last three decades. There is a clear case to be made for US complicity and/or direction in these cases, but this is not reflected in the table.

**Table:
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Mass Violence against Civilians since 1953**

Country	Time Period	Nature of US Involvement in Mass Violence	Estimated Civilian Death Toll
Iran	1953-1979	Covert destabilization and overthrow of democratically-elected government (1953); installation of dictatorship; overt and covert provision of arms, training, economic aid, and diplomatic support.	15,000-20,000
Guatemala	1954-1985	Covert destabilization and overthrow of democratically-elected government (1954); installation of military dictatorship; overt and covert provision of arms, counterinsurgency training, economic aid, and diplomatic support.	Approx. 10,000 (1966-68); approx. 150,000 (1978-85)
Haiti	1957-1986; 1990-1994	Military, economic, and diplomatic support for Duvalier dictatorship (1957-86); support for FRAPH paramilitary movement (1990-94)	30,000-60,000 (Duvalier period); 5,000 (1991-1994)
Indochina (South and North Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos)	1962-1975	Invasion and military occupation of South Vietnam (1965-73); massive bombing and chemical defoliation of rural areas and civilian or dual-use infrastructure; installation and support of dictatorial governments; massive military, economic, diplomatic support to South Vietnamese and Cambodian dictatorships.	Vietnam (South and North): 1,000,000-2,000,000 (including those killed after the war by unexploded munitions and the effects of chemical poisoning) Cambodia: 100,000-150,000 (bombing campaign) Laos: 50,000-100,000 (bombing campaign)
Indonesia	1965-1967	Covert destabilization of government leading to installation of military dictatorship (1965); overt and covert provision of arms, training, economic aid, and diplomatic support.	500,000-1,000,000

East Pakistan (Bangladesh)	1971	Military, economic, and diplomatic support for West Pakistan military before and during Bangladesh War of Independence	500,000-3,000,000
East Timor	1975-1999	Diplomatic support for Indonesian invasion (1975); overt and covert provision of arms, training, economic aid, and diplomatic support for Indonesian regime (see also above).	150,000-200,000
Angola	1975-1976; 1985-1989	Organization, financing, and training of UNITA guerrilla force (with South Africa).	100,000-200,000
Mozambique	1975-1988	Organization, financing, and training of RENAMO guerrilla movement through to 1988 (with South Africa).	100,000 civilians killed outright; perhaps 300-400,000 starved during this period.
El Salvador	1979-1990	Overt and covert provision of arms, training, economic aid, and diplomatic support.	50,000-75,000
Nicaragua	1979-1988	Sponsorship and direction of terrorist forces (the <i>Contras</i>) seeking to overthrow Sandinista government; sabotage of civilian infrastructure.	15,000-20,000
Iraq	1990-2006	Largescale bombing of urban areas and civilian or dual-use infrastructure (1991); direct military invasion (1991, 2003) and occupation (2003); imposition and enforcement of economic sanctions (1990-2003).	500,000-1,000,000 from 1990-2003, mostly resulting from economic sanctions and destruction of civilian infrastructure (water, sewage, electricity, etc.); approx. 655,000 dead from 2003-2006 "as a consequence" of the US-led invasion (<i>Lancet</i> study, 2006; unknown how many of the victims were civilians).

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