

NGO Monitor

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Human Rights Watch:
A Comparative Analysis of Activities in the Middle East
2002-2004

Revised: June 30, 2005 (Based on research by Noah Liben)

In this analysis, the degree to which HRW addressed the activities of a number of major countries in the region is analyzed using a common quantitative methodology, as explained, highlighting the extreme emphasis on critical assessments of Israel. In addition, we compare the language of reports in a twelve-month sample period, noting the repetition of certain key terms with respect to Israel (i.e., "violation of international law") and the relative absence of such terms in HRW's activities on the Palestinian Authority, Syria, and elsewhere. The third section analyzes the content of photographs selected to appear on HRW's website, demonstrating the use of images in the extreme and disproportionate level of attacks on Israel. We note that all of the material in this analysis is fully sourced, and can be easily verified and extended to other periods and countries.

1) Comparative Analysis of HRW Documents

Explanation of the Methodology: HRW produces and distributes 10 types of documents that assess the human rights record of various countries and governments. Based upon the relative resources required to produce each type of activity, as well as the relative significance of their impact, NGO-Monitor has developed a rating system by which to measure, assess, and compare HRW's reporting on countries in the Middle East.

Rating/Scale of Importance (from greater to lesser):

- 10) Special Focus**
- 9) Multi Country Report,**
- 8) Report,**
- 7) Background Briefing,**
- 6) Campaign Document,**
- 5) Commentary,**
- 4) Press Release,**
- 3) Graphic/Video,**
- 2) Testimony/Oral Statement,**
- 1) Letter**

For the purposes of analytical comparison, we assigned each category the value based on this relative rating. By multiplying each value by the number of such items in a given time period, we arrive at a relevance scale of HRW's activity in addressing the various countries in the region.

For example, if HRW produced 2 Special Focus documents on Country X in 2003 (20 points), and 2 Multi Country Report documents (18 points), HRW's actions regarding Country X would receive a rating of 38. A higher rating reflects greater HRW focus on the country; a lower rating means a lower priority and degree of involvement.

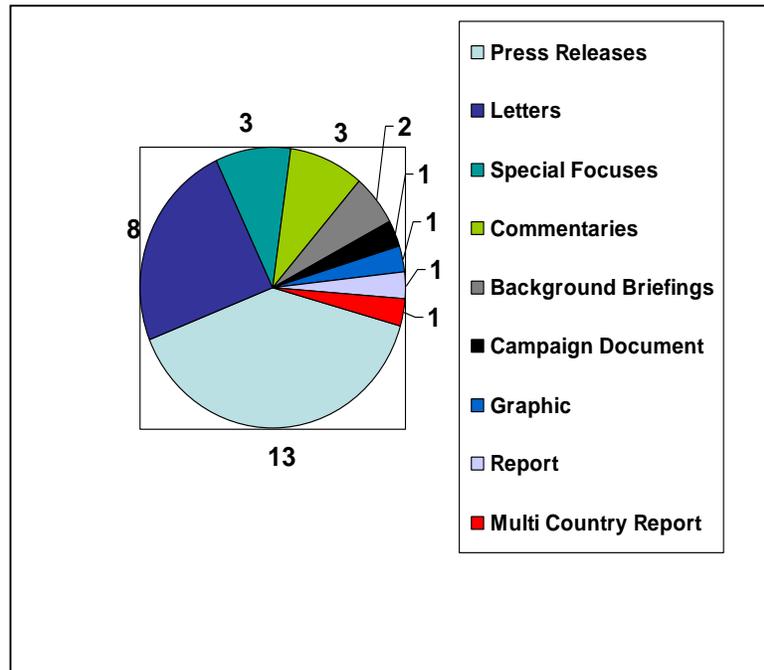
The scale chosen is subjective, and different scales will lead to somewhat different relative divisions, but are unlikely to change the overall conclusion.

Israel: In 2004, HRW produced 33 separate documents relating primarily to Israel and the West Bank¹ (<http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=isrlpa>), as well the annual Human Rights Overview Report on Israel / Occupied Palestinian Territories (<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/13/isrlpa9806.htm>).

These included: 13 Press Releases, 8 Letters, 3 Special Focuses, 3 Commentaries, 2 Background Briefings, 1 Campaign Document, 1 Graphic, 1 Report, 1 Multi Country Report

¹ HRW uses the contentious term "Occupied Palestinian Territories", rather than West Bank, or simply Occupied Territories.

Figure 1: Summary distribution of HRW document types regarding Israel, 2004



25 of the 33 had titles that were critical of Israeli policy. For example:

- "Tell CAT to Stop Aiding Illegal Home Demolitions in Gaza"
- "Israel: Budget Discriminates Against Arab Citizens"
- "Israel: Revoke Discriminatory Law"
- "Israel: End Unlawful Use of Force Against Civilians in Gaza"
- "Israel: West Bank Barrier Violates Human Rights"

Total relevance for Israel documents: 145 points

Palestinian Authority: In 2004, HRW produced 5 documents relating to the Palestinian Territories (<http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=isrlpa>):

2004 Classification: 2 Special Focuses, 2 Press Releases, 1 Multi Country Report

2 out of the 5 had titles that were critical of Palestinian policy. For example:

- **Critical:** "Occupied Territories: Stop Use of Children in Suicide Bombings"
- **Not critical:** "Israel/Occupied Territories - *Briefing to the 60th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights*"

Total relevance for Palestinian Authority documents: 37 points

Egypt: In 2004, HRW produced 19 documents in 2004 relating to Egypt (<http://hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=egypt>):

2004 Classification: 11 Press Releases, 3 Reports, 1 Special Focus, 1 Background Briefing, 1 Video, 1 Testimony, 1 Letter

12 of the 19 had titles that were critical of Egyptian policy.

- **Critical:** "Egypt's Torture Epidemic"
- **Not critical:** "Egypt: Emergency Court Acquits Political Dissident"

Total relevance for Egypt documents: 91 points

Iran: HRW produced 11 documents in 2004 regarding Iran
(<http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=iran>):

2004 Classification: 9 Press Releases, 1 Report, 1 Special Focus

7 of the 11 had titles that were critical of Iranian policy.

Total relevance for Iran documents: 44 points

Saudi Arabia: HRW produced 11 documents in 2004 regarding Saudi Arabia
(<http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=saudia>):

2004 Classification: 4 Press Releases, 2 Letters, 1 Background Briefing, 1 Commentary, 1 Oral Statement, 1 Report, 1 Testimony

7 of the 12 had titles that were critical of Saudi policy.

Total relevance for Saudi Arabia documents: 42 points

Syria: HRW produced only four documents in 2004 relating to Syria
(<http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=syria>):

2004 Classification: 1 Special Focus, 1 Report, 1 Press Release, 1 Letter

2 of the 4 had titles that were critical of Syrian policy.

Total relevance for Syria documents: 23 points

Libya: HRW produced only four in all of 2004 relating to Libya
(<http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=libya>):

2004 Classification: 2 Letters, 1 Background Briefing, 1 Press Release

3 out of the 4 had titles that were critical of Libyan policy.

Total relevance for Libya documents: 13 points

Iraq: One would expect much to be published regarding Iraq in the last two years, and sure enough, HRW produced 67 documents in 2004 relating to Iraq
(<http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=iraq>).

2004 Classification: 29 Press Releases, 11 Letters, 10 Commentaries, 9 Special Focuses, 3 Background Briefings, 3 Reports, 2 Graphics

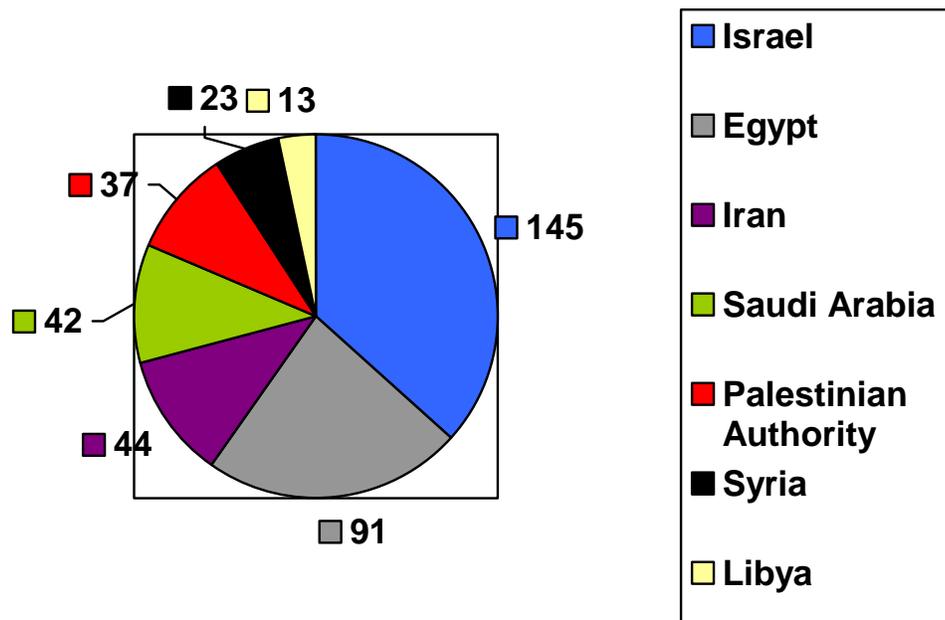
12 out of the 67 had titles that were critical of Iraqi policy.

Total relevance for Iraq documents: 318 points

However, this number is deceptive. It is noteworthy that only 12 of the titles are clearly anti-Iraq. In fact, **only 27 out of the 67 documents from 2004 even pertain directly to Iraq** (again, less than the 33 documents that directed against Israel in 2004). Instead, the vast majority of HRW's Iraq-related documents from 2004 focus on criticism of American and coalition policy, including the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal, torture techniques, cluster bombs, house demolitions, rights of detainees held by the U.S., and failure to secure key evidence for trials.

43 of HRW's Iraq-related documents from 2004 pertain directly to American and coalition action before, during, and after the war. (The reason for the overlap is because some documents, such as those regarding the Iraqi Special Tribunal for Crimes Against Humanity, pertain to both the coalition as well as to Iraq).

Figure 2: Comparison of Relevance of HRW's 2004 Documents (Total Points)



Conclusion: HRW clearly focused on Israel not only in the quantity of documents produced in 2004, but also in the relative weight of those documents, compared to other countries in the Middle East. The only exception is the Iraq-related documents, of which most actually pertained to US policy.

PART 2) THE USE OF LANGUAGE -- 2004

In this following section, we have examined the terminology used in HRW's various activities for each country, focusing on common key phrases. This analysis shows the high frequency with which terms such as "violations of international law" are used with respect to Israel (180 in this period) in comparison to the Palestinians (30 citations), and Egypt (43 citations).

Israel-related documents, January-December 2004

(<http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=isrlpa>), including the annual "Human Rights Overview Report on Israel / Occupied Palestinian Territories"

(<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/13/isrlpa9806.htm>):

"violation of international humanitarian law": 49 citations
"illegal home demolitions/unlawful destruction": 41 citations
"violation of international law": 26 citations
"violation of international human rights/human rights law": 21 citations
"illegal settlements": 17 citations
"human rights abuses/violations": 10 citations
"coercing civilians to serve as human shields": 4 citations
"violation of the laws of war": 3 citations
"unlawful killing of civilians": 3 citations
"illegal separation barrier": 3 citations
"war crimes": 2 citations
"widespread torture": 1 citation

Total in this category: 180 citations

Palestinian-related documents, January-December 2004

(<http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=isrlpa>):

"Palestinian suicide bombing": 11 citations
"violate international humanitarian law": 6 citations
"crimes against humanity": 4 citations
"human rights abuses/violations": 3 citations
"using civilians as human shields": 2 citations
"war crimes": 2 citations
"violation of international law": 1 citation
"violation of the laws of war": 1 citation

Total in this category: 30 citations

Note: The term "terrorist/terrorism" was used 25 times in publications related to "Israel / Occupied Palestinian Territories", but in every case (with a single exception), these are only in quotes from Israeli officials. (Terrorism is generally defined as the deliberate use of violence against civilians to obtain political objectives.) HRW eschews "Palestinian terrorism", instead referring to euphemisms such as "armed groups," "militants," "fighters," "gunmen," "armed activists," and "combatants." For instance, the 2005 Overview Report refers to "Palestinian **armed groups** fired rockets from areas of the Gaza Strip at Israeli civilian settlements and populated areas in Israel close to the border, and carried out seven suicide bombings inside Israel."

Further, the report refers to "**gunmen** apparently affiliated with the Hamas movement" (<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/13/isrlpa9806.htm>). And while HRW repeatedly notes that it has documented and condemned the practice by "Palestinian armed groups" of targeting civilians or carrying out indiscriminate attacks against them, the only such report was issued in October 2002 (<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/isrl-pa/>), nearly two and a half years ago.

Iraq-related documents, January-December 2004

(<http://hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=iraq>) -- These include documents that focused on Iraqi actions, not American or coalition actions in Iraq:

"forced expulsion/displacement of civilians": 43 citations

"genocide": 27 citations

"crimes against humanity": 18 citations

"atrocities": 17 citations

"war crimes": 15 citations

"forced population transfers": 7 citations

"ethnic cleansing": 7 citations

"violation of international law": 7 citations

"human rights abuses/violations": 6 citations

"violation of international humanitarian law": 4 citations

"mass executions": 3 citations

"violation of laws of war": 2 citations

"suicide bombing": 1 citation

"using civilians as human shields": 1 citation

Total in this category: 158 citations

Egypt-related documents, January-December 2004

(<http://hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=egypt>):

"widespread/systematic use/epidemic of torture": 25 citations

"violate international human rights/human rights law": 6 citations

"violation of international law": 5 citations

"human rights abuses/violations": 3 citations

"violation of international standards": 1 citation

"violating internationally protected equality provisions": 1 citation

"violating fundamental principles of confidentiality and safety": 1 citation

"legally enforced inequality": 1 citation

Total in this category: 43 citations

Libya-related documents, January-December 2004

(<http://hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=libya>):

"human rights abuses/violations": 1 citation

"torture is common": 1 citation

Total in this category: 2 citations

Saudi Arabia-related documents, January-December 2004
<http://hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=saudia>):

"human rights abuses/violations": 13 citations
 "forced labor": 8 citations
 "illegal practices": 5 citations
 "violation of international law": 2 citations
 "violation of the law": 1 citation
 "violate international human rights/human rights law": 1 citation
 "violating the right to autonomy and choice": 1 citation
 "violating the basic due process rights": 1 citation
 "breach of fundamental standards of humanity": 1 citation
 "atrocities": 1 citation

Total in this category: 34 citations

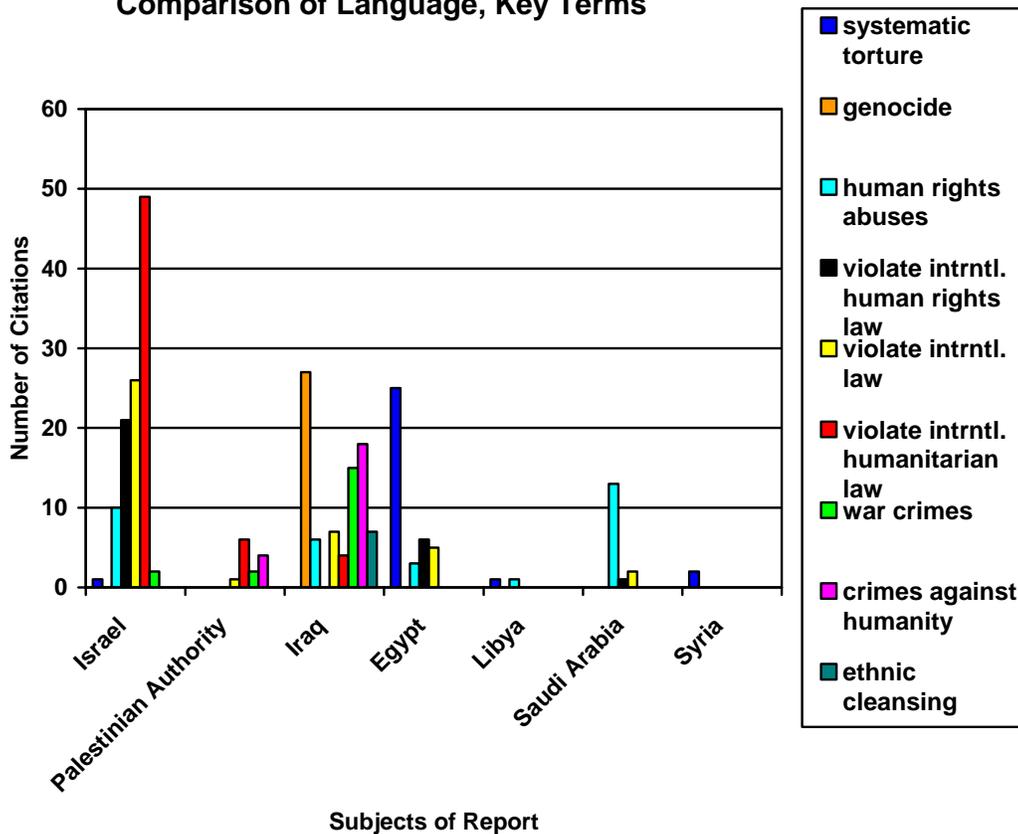
Syria-related documents, January-December 2004:

"systematic use/epidemic of torture": 2 citations
 "systematic discrimination": 1 citation

Total in this category: 3 citations

Figure 3:

Comparison of Language, Key Terms



3) Photo Exhibits

HRW makes extensive use of images in its activities and campaigns, including photo exhibits, which tend to emphasize Palestinian suffering. In contrast, none of HRW's photo exhibits from the region show the human suffering from the Israeli point of view. There are no photographs of Israeli civilian deaths or injuries, nor are there pictures of destruction to Israeli homes, schools, discotheques, busses, cafes, etc. Furthermore, HRW provides no pictures of Palestinian terrorists or examples of incitement to violence. And the only other use of images from the region pertains to Iraq.

Details of photo exhibits:

1) Patterns in the Rubble: Home Demolitions in Gaza, from 2004 (13-photograph slideshow)

(http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/gaza/photos/slideshow_as2/slideshow_as2.html).

Pictures depicting homeless Palestinians after the IDF destroyed their houses: 5

Pictures depicting house demolitions and areas razed by Israeli armored bulldozers: 4

Pictures depicting destruction of Palestinian agriculture and infrastructure due to IDF bulldozers: 2

Pictures depicting "Israeli vandalism" of Palestinian homes: 1

Pictures of innocent Palestinian victims killed by the IDF: 1

Note that there are no images of weapons smuggling tunnels across the narrow Philadelphi corridor between Egypt and Gaza, the use of houses to hide these tunnels, the buildings used for making and launching rockets, or the Israeli victims. This photo-essay tells only one side of the story, and does not even attempt to explain Israel's security requirements related to actions in Rafah.

2) The West Bank Separation Barrier: Photo Essay, from 2003

(<http://hrw.org/photos/2003/israel/>). This 10-photograph exhibition illustrates Israel's security barrier as choking Palestinian towns and livelihoods, and makes no mention of Israel's legitimate security requirements, or of the careful legal process in Israel accompanying the construction of this barrier. This photo essay is highly deceptive.

Pictures depicting innocent Palestinians cut off from their livelihood: 5

Pictures depicting the barrier encircling Palestinian towns: 3

Pictures depicting hardworking Palestinians waiting to cross at a gate: 1

Pictures explaining the "fence" element of the barrier: 1

Note: There are no images of the terrorism that has led to the construction of the barrier, of Palestinians illegally infiltrating into Israel, etc.

3) Photos from Jenin: IDF Military Operations, from 2002

(<http://www.hrw.org/photos/2002/jenin/pages/11.htm>). This 10-photograph display clearly portrays Israel as the aggressor, with no mention of terror bombings that preceded it, including the Park Hotel attack on Passover. The exhibition does not illustrate the extent of the weapons factories that were found in Jenin, or the alternatives that Israel could have employed, including aerial bombardment.

Pictures depicting innocent Palestinian casualties resulting from Israeli operations: 4
Pictures depicting house demolitions and areas razed by Israeli armored bulldozers: 4
Pictures suggesting that Palestinians may be accountable for some of the injuries: 1
Pictures of "martyrs": 1