

A world without enforceable rules, the powerful do not become safer — they become lonelier, and eventually, more vulnerable. History does not reward empires that mistake impunity for strength, writes **Dr Allawi Sse-manda**

In 2019, as a doctoral student of International Relations, I read the United States of America (USA) media coverage of the 2003 Iraq invasion. I read all the USA major print media outlets' coverage of the war, starting from a month before the USA invaded Iraq until their withdrawal (February 20, 2003 to December 2011).

I was reading for my research, which focused on America's securitisation of foreign policy to legitimise Washington's extraordinary measures during the USA's illegal wars. From the said coverage, it was clear: Op-Eds and editorials in American media justified the USA's invasion of Iraq, framing it as "liberation" of the country.

Twenty-three years later, we are watching the news, especially on American television networks, where men and women in suits continue to tell us that the American-Israeli invasion of Iran is a liberation of the country. Never mind that this so-called liberation launched by President Donald Trump and his friend, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, claimed the lives of at least 168 innocent school children aged between 7 and 12 when the US bombed Shajareh Tayyebah Girls' School.

The unique part of this war is that it is not only illegal, but its elements of war crimes are publicly advertised on social media by the US president before and after committing them. For example, the US president has repeatedly boasted after US forces targeted civilian infrastructure such as bridges and energy, which experts assert is against international law. Indeed, more than 100 international law experts, including former government legal advisors and academics from institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Stanford, among others, have warned that the war violates the UN Charter and constitutes war crimes.

The United Nations Charter — a document the USA helped draft and solemnly ratified — prohibits, under Article 2(4), the use of force against the territorial integrity of any sovereign state. This Charter allows very limited exceptions for when a country would launch an invasion against the other. These exceptions are: where a country is exercising self-defence under Article 51, and this is triggered only by an actual armed attack, or explicit authorisation from the UN Security Council under Chapter VII. For this war, neither of these conditions exists. What exists instead is a manufactured urgency — intelligence assessments of intent, threat projections. Even the USA intelligence confirmed that Iran was not a threat to Washington. Just days after the USA and Israel launched their war against Iran.

Ms Tulsi Gabbard, the director of US National Intelligence, referring to the USA's June 2025 strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities, Gabbard told the Senate Intelligence Committee hearing that "as a result of Operation Midnight Hammer, Iran's nuclear enrichment programme was obliterated... There have been no ef-

USA-Israel war against Iran illegal, cementing precedent



forts since then to try to rebuild their enrichment capability." With this, one can confidently say Iran was not a threat to the USA, and hence, the claim that Washington and Tel Aviv attacked Iran as a pre-emptive option cannot stand.

Since February 28, we have watched with mounting horror the rhetoric from Washington regarding this war. From the President of the USA to his Secretary of War, Mr Pete Hegseth, explicitly floated the idea of targeting civilian infrastructure inside Iran. "Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!" Mr Trump posted on Truth Social, a microblogging social media platform. From an international law perspective, such threats are not a military strategy but a textbook definition of war crimes.

The USA, which has always presented itself as a guardian of international law, must understand that international humanitarian law, enshrined in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977, is not merely a suggestion but a binding law. The principle of distinction — one of the oldest and most fundamental rules of armed conflict — requires warring parties at all times to distinguish between combatants and civilians. They must distinguish between military objectives and civilian objects. These are not aspirations but legal obligations that carry individual criminal responsibility under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

In this war, we have already seen the USA and Israel bombing Iran's universities and hospitals. Personally, when I watch such news, I think of the students cramming for exams in libraries. When I read about bombing Iranian hospitals, what comes to mind are nurses, doctors, and the patients who cannot evacuate. When research hubs and scientific

People mourn during the funeral of victims following a reported strike by Israel and the United States on a school in Minab, Iran, on March 3. PHOTO/REUTERS



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institutions are designated as threats, I think of the scientists — the oncologists, the climate researchers, the engineers — who are civilians by every measure of international law. Targeting them is not collateral damage. It is a deliberate attack on protected persons and protected sites, which constitutes a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions.

Africa to pay for US-Israel's war

From history, we have seen that Africa often absorbs the shockwaves of conflicts it had no hand in starting.

Aware that Iran sits astride the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly 20 percent of the world's traded oil flows daily, any sustained military disruption to that passage guarantees disruption.

Countries like Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, Ethiopia, will suffer fuel price shocks that cascade through every other sector, namely: transport, agriculture, manufacturing, etc. Consequently, we will see inflation rising, which will add to the suffering of ordinary families, already stretched due to slow economic recovery thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic and Mr Trump's tariffs.

US-Israel war sets bad precedent

For smaller and middle-power nations, this war must be a wake-up call. Just months after threatening to take over Greenland, which shocked most

European powers, President Trump invaded Venezuela, a sovereign country, and abducted the president and his wife and took them to the US as he boasted how he would own and control Venezuela's oil! While several countries turned a blind eye to this issue, Mr Trump decided to invade Iran. Should the world normalise this law of the jungle?

For decades, Western countries demanded that smaller states respect the sovereignty of others, submit to international courts, and comply with UN resolutions. Sadly, when smaller or middle powers are attacked by Western powers in violation of the said rules, we see no opposition from European friends!

It is this double standard that erodes the confidence of the Global South in the rules-based global order. The West's response to Israel's war against Gaza and its response to the Russia-Ukraine crisis exposed the West greatly. If the West is not careful, America-Israel's war on Iran may complete this erosion. Does this matter? Yes. A world without enforceable rules, the powerful do not become safer — they become lonelier, and eventually, more vulnerable. History does not reward empires that mistake impunity for strength.

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1	UNHCR/ITB/2685	Supply, delivery, and installation of generators of various capacities across various refugee settlements in Uganda.	03 May 2026, by 17:00 Hrs EAT
2	UNHCR/RFP/2688	Design and Build: Supply, delivery, installation, civil works, and commissioning of eight (8) pressed-steel sectional reservoir tanks at Palabek, Palorinya, and Adjumani refugee settlements in Uganda.	10 May 2026, by 17:00 Hrs EAT
3	UNHCR/RFP/2726	Design and Build: Solarisation of Kitoro Borehole; pump upgrade of Kavule 2 Borehole; construction of transmission pipelines to Malembo and Kagoma Block 10 storage tanks; pipeline extension to the Bukinda New Arrivals area; and installation of ten tap stands in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Kikube District.	10 May 2026, by 17:00 Hrs EAT
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