



Life Matters Journal

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

As we are now well into 2023 and three years out from the start of pandemic lockdowns, it's important that we reflect on the tumultuous times we've experienced in recent years. The world has seen an alarming rise in political polarization, social unrest, and violence. Amidst all this chaos, it's essential that we remember what truly matters: our shared humanity.



When we see news of atrocities happening across the globe, instead of feeling compassion, it is easy to grow accustomed to apathy. In just this issue of *Life Matters Journal*, we discuss the war between Ukraine and Russia, the civil war in Ethiopia, and the effects of pro-life laws on miscarriage management. These are undoubtedly heavy topics, but our writers, as always, dig to the root of these issues to focus on the human beings affected by it all. This rehumanization is more critical than ever.

Also in this issue is a tribute to Judy Heumann, a force for change in the fight for disability rights, written by Sophie Trist, one of our staff writers who also lives with disabilities. Heumann's work to rehumanize her fellow Americans with disabilities led to incredible strides toward justice. Her story serves as a powerful testament to the efficacy of nonviolent activism, and it renews my hope that even just a few passionate, persistent activists can make a real difference.

So let us recommit ourselves to the principles of rehumanization in 2023. Let us strive to build bridges, rather than walls. Thank you for your continued support of *Life Matters Journal*; I look forward to the work we can accomplish together.

For peace and life,

Maria Oswalt

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether that violence is legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are *Life Matters Journal*, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer

The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the Consistent Life Ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

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Predicably Tragic, Tragically Predictable: The Needless War on Ukraine Drags into Its Second Year

By Samuel B. Parker

“A word of command has made these silent figures our enemies; a word of command might transform them into our friends. At some table a document is signed by some persons whom none of us knows, and then for years together that very crime, on which formerly the world’s condemnation and severest penalty fall, becomes our highest aim.”

—Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

It has been a year since Russian forces crossed the border into Ukraine and initiated an offensive that became the latest and most significant development in a long-running Russo-Ukrainian conflict, which continues to define much of Eastern European politics. That single year has borne witness to immense tragedy and horrific suffering.

A fluid situation on the ground, the limited availability of reliable figures, and relentless propagandizing from both Russian and Ukrainian officials make it difficult to calculate exactly how many casualties have been inflicted since Russia launched its invasion last February. In late autumn, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley estimated that over 200,000 Russian and Ukrainian soldiers had been killed or wounded in the fighting.¹ And while the United Nations places the civilian death toll at around 7,000, General Milley suggested that as many as a staggering 40,000 civilians are dead as a direct result of

Chilling accounts of war crimes have also emerged, from the front lines and from population centers alike.

the war and its consequences, which include lack of access to food, water, and basic infrastructure.²

Chilling accounts of war crimes have also emerged, from the front lines and from population centers alike. In the first month of the hostilities, the Russian Air Force conducted an airstrike against a pediatric hospital in Mariupol; not long after, video and eyewitness evidence surfaced of Russian troops in Bucha lining up and shooting Ukrainian captives.³ These atrocities would establish a precedent and develop into a pattern of behavior: reports that the Russian military deliberately targets densely populated areas and summarily executes civilians have persisted, often with corroboration. Germany’s prosecutor general claims that the pieces of evidence of Russian war crimes in Ukraine have reached triple digits; mass killings and attacks on civilian infrastructure have been a particular focus of German investigations.⁴ Meanwhile, video surfaced

that seemed to show Ukrainian soldiers gunning down Russian soldiers who had surrendered and were lying prone on the ground. The United Nations has also determined that Ukrainian forces, much like their Russian counterparts, have brutally tortured prisoners.⁵

Behind the appalling violence of the war, various subtler human rights violations have occurred. The Russian government has turned to a collection of conscripts and convicts to wage its war: deploying servicemen who did not volunteer or consent to fight for destructive imperialist aggression, and prisoners who were

only freed under the condition that they be willing to die for deluded Russian irredentism.⁶ In Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has used the cover of defensive war and alleged ties to Russia in order to outlaw some political parties and ban entire religious organizations.⁷ While some might argue that such infringements upon fundamental human rights are justified by the harsh realities inherent in a bloody struggle for survival, it is in fact during war that the observation of human rights becomes more vital than ever before.

More than eight million refugees have fled their homes in Ukraine, seeking safety throughout Europe and the United States.⁸ While these men, women, and children have escaped the bloodshed, they are still its victims. Their lives never can and never will be the same.

Ever invested in undermining Russian interests and, doubtless, genuinely eager to protect the national sovereignty of its allies, the U.S. government spent \$113 billion in 2022 on the defense of Ukraine: almost \$10 billion a month.⁹ In spite of notorious and systemic corruption that has long plagued the Ukrainian government, the United States has continued to divert vast quantities of taxpayer dollars to the cause, even as Americans cry out for debt relief, aid for underfunded schools and social programs, and healthcare reforms: financing war, as ever, at the expense of peace.¹⁰

And so the second year of this war begins, with no end in sight. It is a war that has been predictably tragic; it is also a war that has been tragically predictable. As is invariably the case in all wars, human lives have been lost or upended, civil liberties have been eroded, and massive sums have been exhausted.

For what?

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Remembering Judy Heumann: Humanizing People with Disabilities and Telling Our Stories

By Sophie Trist

For most of human history, people with physical and mental disabilities have been killed, institutionalized, stigmatized, incarcerated, and otherwise dehumanized. While there is still much work to do to achieve equal rights and human dignity for people with disabilities, we have made great strides over the past five decades. A primary driver for this change was teacher, writer, diplomat, and disability justice activist Judith "Judy" Heumann. Judy passed away on March 4, 2023, so now is the time to reflect on her legacy and the work that still remains.¹

Dehumanization was part of Judy's story even before she was born. Her parents were both Holocaust survivors who escaped Nazi Germany as teenagers and ended up in New York City. After a bout of polio left Judy with quadriplegia, her parents ignored medical advice to institutionalize and abandon their disabled daughter. In the 1950s, no laws existed guaranteeing students with disabilities the right to a free public education, so Judy was nine years old before her mother managed to get her into a segregated program.²

As a teen, Judy spent summers at Camp Jened, a groundbreaking camp where kids with disabilities formed friendships, played, and learned from disabled role models. In her memoir *Being Heumann*, Judy wrote, "At camp, we tasted freedom for the first time in our

lives."³ The disability culture formed at Camp Jened, and the activism it inspired, is the subject of the award-winning Netflix documentary *Crip Camp*.⁴

Judy was initially denied a teaching license solely because of her disability. The ACLU refused to take up her case, but Judy successfully sued the New York City Board of Education.

In the 1970s, Judy moved to the University of California Berkeley and joined the Independent Living Movement, which called for integrating disabled people into their communities and promoting

their autonomy.⁵ In 1973, Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act, the first federal civil rights protection for people with disabilities. Section 504 of that law read, "No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States shall solely on the basis of his handicap be excluded from participation, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."⁶

But four years after the law was signed, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare had yet to release enforcement regulations. By April 5, 1977, fed-up activists nonviolently occupied the HEW building in San Francisco. The sit-in, of which Judy was a prominent organizer, lasted twenty-six days, making it one of the longest nonviolent protests in American history.

After a bout of polio left Judy with quadriplegia, her parents ignored medical advice to institutionalize and abandon their disabled daughter.

The disabled activists received support from politicians, churches, labor unions, racial justice activists, and gay rights groups.⁷ Judy writes in her memoir, "When I look back now, I see that one of the greatest aspects of the 504 sit-in was the way it united us. We weren't focused on how we were different — we were focused on our common goal, our collective purpose. We looked beyond how we each spoke and moved, how we thought and how we looked. We respected the humanity in each other. We stood for inclusiveness and community, for our love of equity and justice — and we won."⁸

Judy's commitment to rehumanizing people with disabilities persisted through a long and storied career. She co-founded the World Institute on Disability, served as an advisor on disability affairs at the World Bank, and worked in the Clinton and Obama administrations, first leading the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, then for the State Department, putting disability rights on the global agenda. She worked with politicians and other disabled activists to get the Americans with Disabilities Act passed in 1990. She participated in the iconic Capitol Crawl on March 12 of that year. During this unforgettable protest, people with disabilities, including a nine-year-old girl, abandoned their mobility aids and crawled up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to demonstrate the dehumanization and violence inherent in inaccessible spaces.⁹

As I write this, increasing acceptance of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia systematically devalues disabled lives.¹⁰ Eugenic abortion practices and the prospect of editing disability out of the gene pool threaten to erase us. Americans with disabilities still can't marry without risking their benefits, and discrimination in education, housing, and employment remains endemic.¹¹ Disabled people and our allies fighting these and myriad other injustices owe much to Judy Heumann and leaders like her who refused to accept that our bodies and minds are the problem. They gave us concepts like the social model of disability, allowing us to reclaim our narratives and unapologetically assert our full and equal humanity. As whole-life activists, we constantly push back against exclusionary definitions of humanity and work toward human rights for every single human being, born and unborn. This work requires the resourcefulness, interdependence, coalition-building, and leadership disabled people have demonstrated throughout our decades-long fight for civil rights.

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Overlooked Conflicts: The Grisly Toll of Ethiopia's Civil War

By John Whitehead

Although the war between Ukraine and Russia has dominated the news, other countries have been suffering through their own violent conflicts in recent years. In this and future pieces, I will highlight contemporary wars and other conflicts that are too often overlooked.

Note: This piece discusses sexual violence and other human rights violations.

Ethiopia has been devastated by civil war since late 2020. Over roughly two years, this conflict in the second-most-populous country in Africa is estimated to have killed hundreds of thousands of people and left millions dependent on humanitarian aid.¹ A cease-fire agreement in late 2022 offers some hope but time alone will tell if genuine peace comes to Ethiopia.²

The war has pitted Ethiopia's federal government, led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, against anti-government forces based in the northern region of Tigray. Other parties involved in the conflict are the neighboring country of Eritrea and various Ethiopian militias. The war involves regional and ethnic divisions within the country.³

A Divided Country

The only African nation never to have been colonized, Ethiopia is home to 110 million people belonging to over 40 distinct ethnic groups.⁴ Tigrayans, who speak Tigrinya rather than Ethiopia's majority language of Amharic, are one of the smaller ethnic groups, accounting for just 5 percent of the population. Despite their minority status, however, the Tigrayans dominated Ethiopian politics for almost 30 years. The 2018 rise to power of Abiy, who is from Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the Oromos, represented a threat to Tigrayan dominance. By 2019, the Tigrayan political party the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) found itself outside the government for the first time in decades.⁵

Political tensions became open conflict in 2020, when Abiy postponed planned national elections, supposedly because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The TPLF protested this decision, and Tigray held its own elections. Abiy denounced the elections as illegal and cut off federal funding to Tigray. When armed Tigrayan forces attacked a federal military base in November 2020, Abiy declared that "the last red line has been crossed" and launched a military intervention in Tigray.⁶

Abiy's stated goal for the military action was to arrest a "criminal clique" of TPLF leaders. In his campaign, he has had an ally in neighboring Eritrea. Meanwhile, the TPLF launched missile strikes against Eritrea.⁷

The War's Toll

The subsequent two-year war was marked by a military back-and-forth between the two sides: in 2021, the TPLF came close to toppling Abiy's regime before being forced back by the government. The war was also marked by atrocities committed by both sides.⁸

During the war, the federal government attempted to isolate the Tigray region by cutting off electricity, water, telecommunications, and other services. This isolation policy hampered humanitarian aid from reaching the region. Limited access to aid was an especially dire problem as millions of people in Tigray came to require food assistance.⁹

The absence of internet or phone service in Tigray, combined with government intimidation of journalists, has made the war's effects difficult to document.¹⁰ However, available information suggests the human toll of the conflict is high.

The UN World Food Programme estimated in mid-2022 that almost half of Tigray's population was in "severe" need of food and that malnutrition rates had "skyrocketed." Half of pregnant or lactating women and one-third of children under five in Tigray were malnourished.¹¹

The Tigrayan doctor Abenezer Etsedingl has said that the war made coordinating emergency medical services among hospitals very difficult. Further, the war effectively rendered Tigray without any ambulances, so patients sometimes had to travel to the hospital by horse-drawn wagon. Medicine was also often lacking: the World Health Organization reported in late 2022 that Tigray had run out of vaccines, antibiotics, and other medicines. Maternal mortality increased 800% in Tigray during the war, according to Etsedingl.¹²

Beyond depriving Tigray of necessities, pro-government forces have also reportedly inflicted suffering more directly. Government troops have allegedly used sexual violence against women and

sometimes men in Tigray; hundreds of such incidents have been reported and many more may have gone unreported. Such violence has notably been accompanied by increased demand for abortions in Tigray.¹³

Outside Tigray, the federal government imprisoned thousands of ethnic Tigrayan military personnel elsewhere in Ethiopia, presumably fearing these personnel would be disloyal. A *Washington Post* investigation based on interviews of prisoners and others indicates that in late 2021 Ethiopian government forces carried out mass killings of these detained Tigrayans.¹⁴

Massacres reportedly took place in at least six locations in Ethiopia. At one location, two detainees witnessed six prisoners being killed and others being severely injured. “I have seen the bodies being dragged from their rooms,” a detainee reported. Prisoners who escaped their captors were not always better off. Witnesses described local residents around one prison camp attacking and killing escaped prisoners.¹⁵

The government’s Eritrean allies have also allegedly committed similar human rights violations. Amnesty International reported on Eritrean soldiers killing hundreds of Tigrayan civilians.¹⁶ A UN official also reported sexual violence by Eritrean forces.¹⁷

The Ethiopian government’s forces and its allies have not had a monopoly on atrocities in this war, however. Human rights groups have reported Tigrayan forces also massacring civilians and using sexual violence during the war.¹⁸

A research team at Ghent University in Belgium has tried to track the costs of Ethiopia’s civil war. Their most conservative estimates are that over 200,000 combatants and over 300,000 civilians died between November 2020 and August 2022 because of the war.¹⁹ The United Nations estimates that at least 2.4 million people have been forced from their homes.²⁰

An end to the civil war became a possibility last November when representatives of the federal government and the TPLF signed a cease-fire agreement. The agreement was brokered by the African Union and contains provisions for disarming troops, allowing both aid and government forces back into Tigray, and trying to reintegrate the northern region back into the country.²¹

This cease-fire, which seems close to an outright victory for Abiy’s government, may be the result of several factors. Recent military successes by government forces and their Eritrean allies, combined with the African Union’s diplomatic efforts, presumably played a role. Abiy may also have been influenced by pressure from the United States, which has supported Ethiopia’s government in the past and so had some leverage over the regime.²²

The cease-fire holds as of this writing, with Tigrayan forces recently handing weapons over to federal authorities. Electricity is returning to Tigray as well.²³ Whether something approaching peace will return to Ethiopia in the long term remains to be seen. Should fighting resume, the African Union, the United States, and other parties with influence should make a diplomatic effort to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

The United States and other nations able to do so, as well as international organizations, should invest funds in rebuilding Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia devastated by the conflict. Individuals wishing to give in support of Ethiopia may wish to donate to Catholic Relief Services or the Mennonite Central Committee.^{24, 25}

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I Had a D&C After a Missed Miscarriage. I'm Still Anti-Abortion.

By Lauren Pope

Like Jessa Duggar, I had a dilation and curettage (D&C) procedure performed after a missed miscarriage.¹ And — despite misleading headlines to the contrary — neither of us had an abortion.

Giving headline writers and journalists the benefit of the doubt, I will concede that the medical system labels miscarriages as “spontaneous abortions” in medical billing.² However, this formulation becomes stretched when your body fails to “spontaneously” expel your deceased child. In order to prevent infection, sometimes medical induction is necessary. This is why someone might plausibly say that a D&C in this situation is an “induced abortion”; it is, technically, the induced expulsion of the already-deceased child. Is that the same as having an elective D&C abortion, where the child’s life is intentionally ended?³ No, of course not.

Semantic games serve only to obscure the truth. There is no ethical concern with doing a D&C following fetal demise, because there is no life to save except the mother’s.⁴ The child, tragically, has already died. Removing their body — and the rest of the associated products of conception — from the womb is no more ethically fraught than having to remove uterine fibroids or a too-attached placenta following a delivery.

A D&C procedure, in and of itself, is morally neutral. It becomes problematic only when it is used as a tool of violent destruction. Elective abortion involves the intentional snuffing out of a unique human life.⁵ A D&C used to kill a preborn human is very different from a D&C used to remove an already dead body.

The online discourse surrounding Jessa Duggar’s miscarriage has become even more toxic by the insistence that having a D&C following fetal demise is somehow illegal. Let me be clear about this: such a procedure is legal in all 50 states, without exception.⁶ Lying to women that they may be unable to access proper miscarriage care is heinous. It could potentially cause a woman to neglect seeking medical care during a life-threatening emergency because she believes that doing so might be a criminal offense.

Conflating miscarriages and abortions also results in those

of us who’ve sadly experienced miscarriages having to return to that trauma and defend ourselves against false accusations of hypocrisy.⁷ It hurts.

Recognizing the humanity of an unborn child does not mean sacrificing the humanity of the person carrying her. We can recognize the tragic necessity of medically or surgically managing miscarriage without supporting abortion on demand. The conflation of the two is a deliberate political strategy to frighten women and pregnant people into supporting abortion, and it should be called out as such. Jessa Duggar didn’t have an abortion.⁸ She had a miscarriage. Shame on those who would try to make her feel worse because of her politics during such a trying time.

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Killing by AI: The Growing Threat of Automated Weaponry

By John Whitehead

The Ukraine-Russia war has highlighted a relatively subtle but deeply disturbing trend in warfare: a growing reliance on artificial intelligence in conducting military operations. In defending their country, Ukrainians have used drones that rely on a mixture of human and AI guidance to bomb their targets.¹ Such technology may mark another step toward a world in which fully autonomous drones are allowed to kill people without any human oversight.

The drones currently being used by Ukraine are the Polish-made Warmate and U.S.-made Switchblade 600. These drones are guided by a human operator, who selects a target for bombing. After target selection, the drones can be left hovering over the target for minutes. Once the drones' AI technology determines that they have a clear shot at the target, they attack without the operator having to make the final decision on whether to do so.²

Although not wholly independent of human control, the Warmate and Switchblade point toward future lethal technology that is untethered to direct human oversight. The Ukrainians are using another U.S.-made system that is not meant to kill people, but to knock out enemy drones. This anti-drone system is already fully autonomous. Meanwhile, Israel has a drone, designed to destroy radar installations, that can hover over its target for up to nine hours. One can easily imagine the same type of AI that is currently being used to automatically destroy drones or radar being used to destroy human beings in the same way.³

In fact, the CEO of AeroVironment, the manufacturer of the Switchblade 600, has said, “The technology to achieve a fully autonomous mission with Switchblade pretty much exists today.” He predicts such missions will be carried out in a few years.⁴

AI that can independently carry out lethal military missions has been a serious pursuit of military research for some time. Heidi Shyu, the US undersecretary of defense for research and engineering, has identified as a U.S. military goal the deployment of unmanned vehicles that can carry out missions — including attacks — with limited human guidance. “I believe that we need trusted AI and trusted autonomy to be able to operate without GPS,” Shyu has commented.⁵

AI might already have carried out lethal military missions. A United Nations investigation into Libya's civil war reported an episode in 2020 in which one faction used “lethal autonomous weapons systems... programmed to attack targets without requiring data connectivity between the operator and the munition.”⁶ The device used may have been the Turkish Kargu-2 drone, which can fire various types of ammunition and has some capacity for autonomy.⁷

Any new military technology poses the danger of initiating an arms race as various nations seek to acquire their own versions of the technology. The arms race leads to the technology becoming more common, cheaper to make or pirate, and more easily accessible to terrorists and criminals. These dangers apply to the development of drone weaponry as well.

Autonomous drone weaponry poses another, distinctive danger, however. If national militaries deploy drones or other technology programmed to seek out, identify, and kill people designated “enemies,” then life-or-death decisions will be dependent on the quirks of a computer program.⁸ Civilians or others who should not be targeted in military operations will almost certainly be killed by mistake.

Law professor Hitoshi Nasu has pointed out some of the problems presented by autonomous weapons. If the AI is programmed to target people with guns, will it kill farmers wielding rifles to protect their livestock? If the AI is programmed to target soldiers wearing uniforms, can it discern when a soldier is trying to surrender?⁹ Also, could the AI become confused about which uniforms are specifically military, and kill mail carriers or hospital orderlies instead?

Further, all these problems become even more worrisome if (as has been U.S. policy for over 20 years) drones continue to be used to target alleged terrorists, who presumably would wear civilian clothes and live in civilian settings.¹⁰ Even setting aside all the other legitimate objections to targeted killing, the question arises: how would an AI reliably discern who is the correct intended target?

Granted, having drones or other weapons operated by humans clearly has not guaranteed civilian safety. However, the presence of a human operator offers at least some oversight of operations, however minimal. A human being can reconsider in light of new information (or pangs of conscience) and stop a mission. Would AI do so?

Rather than continuing to develop autonomous weapons, nations should work together to limit the development and spread of these weapons through an international arms control agreement. People should not be exposed to the new danger of automatic killing machines.

Notes

1. Frank Bajak and Hanna Arhirova, “Drone Advances in Ukraine Could Bring Dawn of Killer Robots,” Associated Press, January 3, 2023, <http://bit.ly/3YiGxN6>.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. Jason Sherman, “Russia-Ukraine Conflict Prompted U.S. to Develop Autonomous Drone Swarms, 1,000-Mile Cannon,” *Scientific American*, February 14, 2022, <http://bit.ly/3K1osyR>.

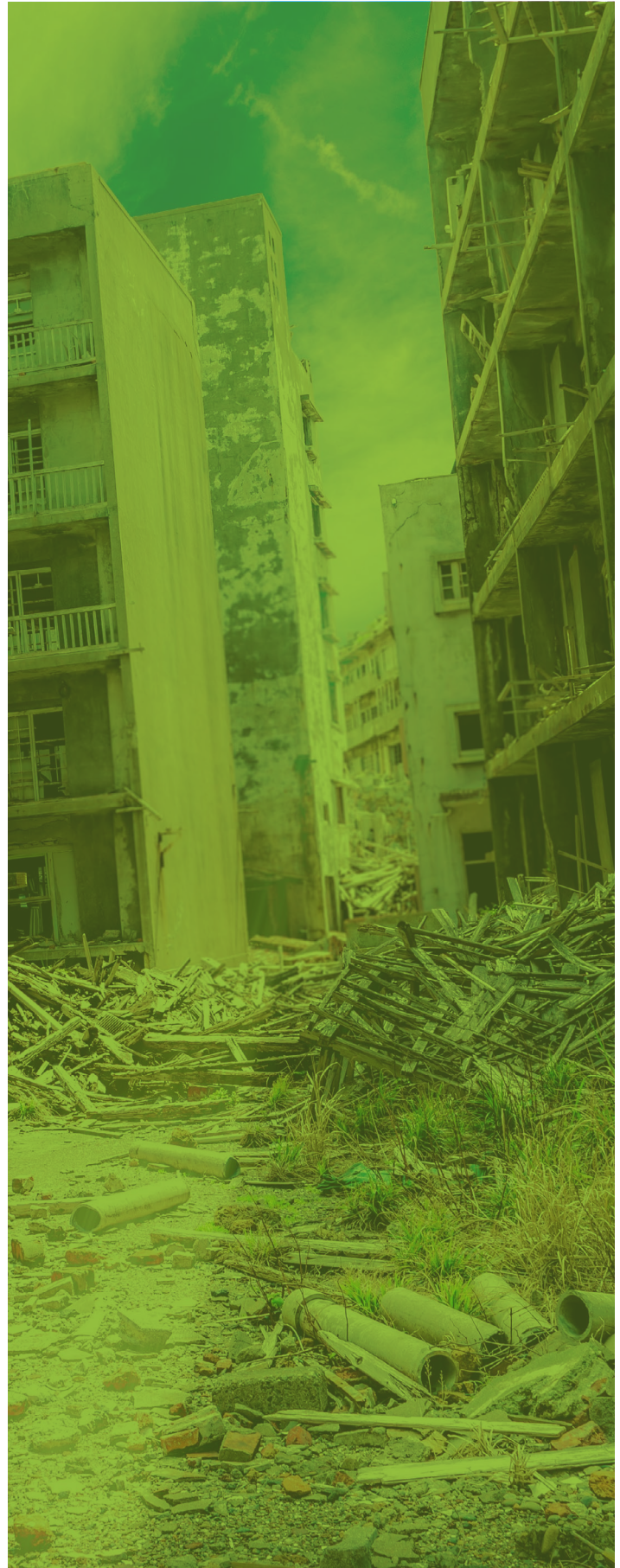
6. United Nations Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011)*, March 8, 2021, p. 17, available at <http://bit.ly/3JSC7rT>.

7. Airforce Technology, “Kargu Rotary-Wing Attack Drone,” June 4, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3HNw84Q>; Hitoshi Nasu, “The Kargu-2 Autonomous Attack Drone: Legal & Ethical Dimensions,” Lieber Institute at West Point, June 10, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3jHRXei>; United Nations Security Council, *Final Report*.

8. For a more detailed discussion of the implications of killing by AI, see Kelsey Atherton, “Loitering Munitions Preview the Autonomous Future of Warfare,” Brookings Institution, Tech Stream, August 4, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3JYz29Q>.

9. Nasu, “The Kargu-2 Autonomous Attack Drone.”

10. See John Whitehead, “A Global License to Kill: The History of US Targeted Killing,” Rehmanize International blog, September 10, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3P4OxM0>.





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