

How the New York Times Twists Gaza

By [Peter Hart](#)

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Though it has faded somewhat from the headlines, Israel's war on Gaza is still going on, with a round of airstrikes that killed dozens this week. And how was this reported in the New York Times? As Hamas breaking a cease-fire agreement.

Jodi Rudoren's dispatch ([8/21/14](#)) begins with a rather astonishing lead:

"Hamas is the party that keeps extending this summer's bloody battle in the Gaza Strip, repeatedly breaking temporary truces and vowing to endlessly fire rockets into Israel until its demands are met."

The idea that it has been Hamas that has "repeatedly" broken cease-fire agreements is deeply misleading. An August 1 agreement, for instance, broke down under disputed circumstances (FAIR Blog, [8/6/14](#)), with Hamas claiming that its attack on Israeli soldiers inside Gaza came before the cease-fire was to start. The Israeli reaction was a massive attack on Rafah that killed dozens.

But declaring Hamas to be the party that rejects good faith efforts to stop the fighting is common (Electronic Intifada, [7/15/14](#)), while little attention is paid to Hamas offers of a cease-fire or truce, one of which came very early in the war (Mondoweiss, [7/16/14](#)). And when there is evidence that Israel has violated a new cease-fire agreement—as was the case on August 4—media reports do their best to obscure this fact (FAIR Blog, [8/6/14](#)).

On a more fundamental level, Israel's insistence on maintaining a blockade on Gaza is itself an act of war—meaning that most discussions about "ending" the conflict are really about how to extend a state of war against Gaza.

As is often the case, what caused this week's breakdown is in dispute. As theGuardian reported ([8/19/14](#)):

Israel accused Hamas of violating the latest of a series of temporary ceasefires after rockets were launched from Gaza, triggering a swift military and political response. More than 25 airstrikes hit Gaza in response to rocket fire, killing a woman and a two-year-old girl, and wounding at least 15 others in Gaza City.

The paper added: "The Hamas spokesman in Gaza, Sami Abu Zuhri, denied knowledge of the rocket fire which Israel said had breached the truce."

Whatever the immediate cause, the effect has been another round of devastating attacks.

But in the Times, not only was Hamas to blame, but they also wanted readers to know that this round of attacks was especially careful:

In contrast to the earlier phase of the war, Israel this week deployed its extensive intelligence capabilities and overwhelming firepower in targeted bombings with limited civilian casualties less likely to raise the world's ire.



Jodi Rudoren

Now, it's theoretically possible to make the argument that when compared to a month of attacks that killed 2,000 people, the [majority of them civilians](#), this latest round of attacks is less deadly. But the piece itself presents plenty of evidence that civilians are still being killed. In describing an attack on the home of Hamas military leader Mohammed Deif, the Times reports:

Mr. Deif's fate remained unknown Thursday, though the body of his 3-year-old daughter, Sara, was recovered from the rubble of the Gaza City home where five one-ton bombs also killed Mr. Deif's wife, baby son and at least three others.

This was not the only such incident. As Rudoren reported:

Several of Thursday's attacks targeted men on motorcycles or in cars who Israel said were militants, though Palestinian witnesses also reported that five people, three of them children, were killed while watering a Gaza City garden, and five others while digging a grave in the Sheikh Radwan cemetery.

Instead of dwelling on this, the paper felt the need to reiterate that this was "a limited air campaign" that was avoiding "the large-scale collateral damage that has provoked international outrage." That assessment, in the reporter's own voice, stands in contrast to this: "The Gaza Health Ministry said Israeli airstrikes had killed at least 60 people since the collapse on Tuesday of cease-fire negotiations in Cairo."

One could just as easily write a piece about how a terrified and suffering civilian population has found itself facing another round of attacks, with dozens of new deaths in a matter of a couple of days. But that's not the story the Times wanted to tell. It wanted to let readers know that the new attacks are all Hamas' fault-but that Israel is being especially precise this time around.

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