

Israel Is Caught Lying Time and Again. And Yet We Never Learn

Disinformation over the blast at Gaza's al-Ahli hospital worked as planned, taking the focus off the victims and lifting pressure on Israel to stop its rampage

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Western politicians and media act as if they are caught in a permanent spell, sympathetically indulging even the most wildly improbable denials from Israel that it has committed war crimes.

As Lenin famously observed: "A lie told often enough becomes the truth".

We can go further. It never matters how often Israel is caught out in a lie, because its next lie will be given the benefit of the doubt. Western media refuse to [learn from the past](#).

The Israeli military has a long track record of compulsively concocting face-saving falsehoods – disinformation that vilifies the very Palestinian people it has oppressed for decades.

The latest example came a few days ago.

Israel vigorously kicked up dust to obscure its responsibility for hitting the al-Ahli Baptist hospital in Gaza City last Tuesday, killing many hundreds of Palestinians sheltering in its grounds. Faced with Israel's [relentless campaign of bombing](#), families had assumed they would be safest close to a Christian institution.

Drawing on previous experience, Israel rightly assumes that by the time the dust settles – and the truth emerges – the world will have moved on. The lie will stand.

Context Stripped Out

Israel's job is made considerably easier by the media, whose coverage of Israeli atrocities can invariably be depended on to strip out relevant context.

As Israel began pummelling Gaza more than two weeks ago with thousands of high-explosive bombs, its leaders clarified exactly what their intent was.

Referring to the people of Gaza as "human animals", Defence Minister Yoav Gallant vowed to "eliminate everything". An Israeli [military official explained](#) that the "emphasis is on damage, not accuracy". Another said Gaza [would be reduced](#) to "a city of tents... There will be no buildings."

Meanwhile, President Isaac Herzog accused the entire people of Gaza of being responsible [for the Hamas attack](#), effectively denying every man, woman and child their civilian status and designating them all terrorists. He added: "We will break their backbone."

President Isaac Herzog is considered one of the more 'leftwing' political figures in Israel. Here he is rewriting international law by engaging in openly genocidal rhetoric against the Palestinians in Gaza:

'It's an entire nation out there that is responsible. It's not true...
pic.twitter.com/LHqNBkHgJy

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [October 15, 2023](#)

Israel has demanded that Palestinians leave the northern half of the tiny Gaza Strip, requiring them to ethnically cleanse themselves. It has indicated that the vacated area will be treated as a free-fire zone.

According to the United Nations, in less than two weeks, a quarter of Gaza's homes have been [turned to rubble](#), and 600,000 Palestinians [left homeless](#).

- 25% of homes in [#Gaza](#) reported damaged or destroyed
- 59 attacks on healthcare (including Al Ahli Hospital)
- 170 education facilities hit
- Water and sanitation facilities severely damaged

Latest update: <https://t.co/VzBVfYg51v#NotATarget>
pic.twitter.com/GLesZHj9T5

— UN Humanitarian (@UNOCHA) [October 19, 2023](#)

To ensure Palestinians do as they are told, Israel has targeted the support structures and major institutions in northern Gaza that ordinary people depend on. Mosques, schools, United Nations compounds and hospitals have been hit.

In the days leading up to the attack on al-Ahli hospital, [23 other medical centres](#) in northern Gaza received warnings to evacuate immediately. Dozens have been hit, according to the [World Health Organisation](#).

Those threats were ignored because the hospitals are already overflowing with patients too injured from Israel's bombardments to be moved, and because there are no facilities to treat them elsewhere.

Apparently angered by this defiance, Israel hit al-Ahli hospital with two shells [three days before](#) the larger strike. This is known by the Israeli military as its "[knock on the roof](#)" procedure: firing a small weapon at a building as advance warning to evacuate before a much bigger strike.

Gaslighting Operation

Israel had told us precisely what it was going to do. But when it then did it, Israel began its now familiar gaslighting operation. It denied it was the guilty party, accusing a Palestinian militant group, Islamic Jihad, of the war crime instead.

It said a Palestinian rocket had misfired and [fallen onto the hospital](#).

Israel's claim was ridiculous. On a video of the actual strike, you can hear the loud whistling sound of an incoming, high-velocity missile or shell moments before it explodes. Palestinian groups in Gaza have only primitive rockets that lumber through the sky. If one fails, it tumbles at free-fall speed, not at near-supersonic velocity.

The casualty rate alone proved it had to be an Israeli missile. No Palestinian rocket has ever killed more than a handful of people, not hundreds as this one did.

But Israel was ready with a campaign of lies and disinformation.

Embarrassingly, an adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had issued a social media post celebrating Israel hitting a supposed ["terrorist base" in the hospital](#). The post was hurriedly deleted.



Hananya Naftali ✓

@HananyaNaftali

BREAKING: Israeli Air Force struck a Hamas terrorist base inside a hospital in Gaza.

A multiple number of terrorists are dead.

It's heartbreaking that Hamas is launching rockets from hospitals, Mosques, schools, and using civilians as human shields.

[#Hamas_Is_ISIS](#)



Instead, Israel issued footage of a Palestinian rocket falling nearby. However, Israel had to pull the video, too, when journalists noticed the time stamp [was 40 minutes after](#) the explosion at Al-Ahli.

Next, Israel produced a [laughably inept audio](#) recording supposedly of two Hamas fighters chatting – in the wrong dialect – about whether they or their rivals in Islamic Jihad had fired the stray rocket.

Israel runs a “[mistaravim](#)” unit of Israelis who disguise themselves as Palestinians to operate undercover in Palestinian communities. It also famously operates networks of Palestinian collaborators whom it threatens or bribes. Faking an audio would be child’s play for Israel.

In any case, [in the recording](#) the pair cited a cemetery close to the hospital as the site of their supposed failed rocket launch. But that [contradicted](#) other Israeli military claims that

the rocket had been fired from an entirely different location.

At the weekend, Forensic Architecture, a research team based at the University of London, [issued](#) their preliminary findings.

Preliminary analysis by FA, [@alhaq_org](#) & [@earshot_ngo](#) into the [#AlAhli](#) hospital blast in Gaza casts significant doubt on IOF claims that the source of the deadly explosion was a Palestinian-fired rocket travelling west to east. [pic.twitter.com/PtYtP9l81j](#)

— Forensic Architecture (@ForensicArchi) [October 20, 2023](#)

Analysis of the site showed, both from the pattern of damage caused by the strike and changes in the sound signature of the projectile as it moved through the air, that its trajectory was from Israel *into* Gaza, not out of Gaza. Other analysis [indicated](#) that the audio file of the two Hamas operatives talking had been manipulated.

Israel's disinformation skills looked almost as amateur as its much-vaunted intelligence operations, which failed to spot months of planning by Hamas for its breakout on 7 October.

Seed of Doubt

The goal here, as ever, was not to produce evidence but to win the propaganda battle through misdirection, planting [a seed of doubt](#) that western politicians and media could then exploit to cloud the issue for their publics.

Instead of giving the victims proper attention, instead of finally galvanising anger over Israel's wanton killing of thousands of Palestinian civilians in two weeks, the media's reporting reverted to a predictable formula. It weighed claim and counter-claim over the hospital strike, it carried profiles about Islamic Jihad, and – most importantly for Israel – it adopted a wait-and-see, [don't-rush-to-judgment](#) approach.

A moment that might have led to concerted diplomatic pressure on Israel to stop its rampage and negotiate a ceasefire dissolved into a round of bickering in which the hospital victims entirely disappeared from view.

By the time outside observers get into Gaza and carry out forensic tests, assuming they can, the story will be cold. No one will care, and Israel will not be held to account – morally, diplomatically or legally.

This is all too familiar to anyone who has followed decades of the media's endlessly forgiving coverage, when it matters, of Israel's occupation and illegal colonisation of the Palestinians' historic homeland.

The fog that instantly enveloped the al-Ahli hospital story was a repeat – if on a far bigger scale – of what happened last summer when five Palestinian teenagers were killed in an air strike on Gaza's Jabaliya refugee camp.

As with the hospital massacre, Israel immediately denied it was responsible, saying it had not carried out air strikes on Jabaliya at the time. It blamed Islamic Jihad for a rocket misfire.

“We have videos that prove beyond doubt that this is not an Israeli attack,” an Israeli official [confidently asserted](#). Oded Bassuk, head of the army’s operations directorate, called the children’s deaths “a self-inflicted injury. We could see the rocket hit a Palestinian home.”

As with the hospital story, the military released video footage purporting to show the misfired rocket.

But it was all deceit. Later, when the story had moved on, the [Israeli army quietly admitted](#) that it was responsible for killing the children.

Boys on the Beach

The murder of children by Israel is not an unusual occurrence. But it is also when Israel can be expected to concoct its biggest falsehoods – for the obvious reason that the killing of children is when the world briefly wakes up to Palestinian suffering before turning off again.

As with the hospital strike, a potentially pivotal moment arrived in 2014 during another of Israel’s repeated rampages in Gaza. A series of Israeli strikes [killed four young boys](#) from the Bakr family who were playing football on a beach.

At the time, [Israel claimed](#) that the children had been killed accidentally, because they strayed into a seafront “compound belonging to Hamas’s Naval Police and Naval Force (including naval commandos), and which was utilised exclusively by militants”.

Israel’s claim, which gained amplification in the media, was that the boys were collateral damage in a drone strike on Palestinian militants.

Unfortunately for Israel, this was easily disproved. Several western journalists, who in those days dared to venture into Gaza, witnessed the strike because the beach was next to their hotel. The idea that Hamas militants would locate themselves on a beach next to a hotel known for hosting western journalists was patently absurd from the off.

Those [journalists confirmed](#) that there were no militants in the area at the time, and that the boys should have been visible as children to the drone operators.

Reporters noted that the beach was regularly used by fishermen and families for bathing. An [investigation](#) of a small shipping container, which had been destroyed by an Israeli missile the day before, also failed to support Israel’s claim that military equipment was stored there.

A later investigation found that the drone operators had fired [without taking care](#) to distinguish between the children and militants.

None of that mattered. Israel’s massacre of the children was forgotten. With no pressure on it, Israel’s reliably supine supreme court ruled last year that no [further investigation was necessary](#). Case closed.

Executed by Sniper



Perhaps the best-known recent disinformation campaign by Israel occurred 18 months ago, [over the killing](#) of Al Jazeera journalist [Shireen Abu Akleh](#).

Her murder, while wearing a flak jacket emblazoned with “Press” during an Israeli invasion of the West Bank city of Jenin, caused a wave of international indignation.

It was a particularly high-stakes moment for Israel. The media took an unusual degree of interest because Abu Akleh was a prominent journalist who had worked with many of those reporting on her killing. She also held American citizenship.

Again, Israel blamed Palestinians for the death of one of their own. They produced a video that purported to show an exchange of fire with Palestinian gunmen close to where Abu Akleh was standing when she was shot in the head.

But [an investigation](#) by Israel’s B’Tselem human rights group proved the video was taken in an entirely [different area of Jenin](#).

Major [US media](#) carried out their [own investigations](#) showing [Israel had lied](#). There was no gunfight near Abu Akleh’s location. The most likely explanation was that an Israeli sniper decided to execute her, aiming for the narrow area of exposed flesh between her helmet and flak jacket collar.

Belatedly, with the story refusing to go away, Israel admitted one of its soldiers was [most likely responsible](#) for her killing.

Israel doesn’t just actively lie when its army murders. One of its most cynical deceptions arrived in 2021 when it designated six respected Palestinian human rights and welfare groups in the West Bank as “terrorist organisations”.

It demanded that the European Union immediately stop funding them. Their [offices were raided](#), with equipment confiscated and smashed, and their doors sealed. [Staff were arrested](#).

Israel’s [aim was obvious](#): to shut down organisations that provide support structures for ordinary Palestinians and advocate in international forums for the Palestinian cause by documenting Israeli crimes. That has been especially important when cash-strapped foreign

media have been shutting down their own bureaux in the region.

The lie was so outrageous that even some usually receptive media outlets had trouble swallowing it. Many months later, leaks of a [highly classified CIA report](#) revealed that the Israeli accusations were entirely without foundation.

Culture of Lying

The list of these deceptions and disinformation campaigns just goes on and on.

Look up the names Muhammad al-Durrah, Rachel Corrie, James Miller, Tom Hurndall, Iain Hook. Israel dissembled over all these high-profile murders carried out by its soldiers.

Even cursory research shows Israel lying about its [use of cluster munitions](#) in Lebanon in 2006, as well as its [mass killing of civilians](#) in the Lebanese village of Qana in the same war – exactly 20 years after it had earlier lied about its responsibility for killing [more than 100 civilians](#) in a United Nations compound in the same village.

Israel lied about its oversight of the mass killing of Palestinians in the [Sabra and Shatila refugee camp](#) in Lebanon in 1982 by its Christian Phalangist allies.

None of this should surprise. The culture of lying has prevailed since before Israel's creation in 1948. From its inception, the Zionist movement promoted the lie that Palestine [was an empty land](#).

To perpetuate this foundational myth, Israel lied about its wholesale ethnic cleansing operations in 1948 – one in the north was called [Operation Broom](#)– that forced out some 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and drove them into refugee camps. It [falsely claimed](#) they had been ordered to do so by neighbouring Arab states.

It hid archival evidence of massacres of Palestinian civilians carried out by its forces, such as at [Tantura](#) and [Dawayimah](#), and smeared anyone who tried to draw attention to them.

Equally, [it lied](#) that it offered the refugees a chance to return.

And it destroyed hundreds of Palestinian villages to stop the refugees from coming back to their homes – and then sought to conceal these crimes by [planting forests](#) in their place.

Edifice of Lies

Armies end up lying in times of war because inevitably they commit crimes they wish to conceal.

The difference with Israel is that its lies are integral to its decades-long existence as a state dispossessing and colonising another people's homeland. It must mask its system of apartheid and the crimes that inhere in such regimes of privilege and subjugation.

Israel is at permanent war with the Palestinians and the wider region, so it must lie compulsively and continuously. Each lie builds on the earlier ones. Should one fall, the whole edifice risks crumbling.

Which is what makes untangling those lies such a difficult and thankless task.

Having to engage in protracted forensic battles against Israel and its many apologists to expose every single lie draws attention away from Israel's even bigger deceptions. It obscures the context.

Fighting to hold Israel to account for killing hundreds at al-Ahli hospital comes at the price of shifting the focus away from the fact that Israel is actively carrying out an ethnic cleansing operation in Gaza and committing genocide against the Palestinian people there.

To struggle against one lie is to leave other lies – often lies of omission – free to worm their way into the public's consciousness.

These difficulties are compounded by the media's willingness to indulge and collude in Israel's disinformation – as it has been doing since the creation of a self-declared Jewish state – because Israel is such an important strategic asset. As a reliable ally, it was intended to project western power into the oil-rich Middle East.

Those who seek to bring light to a subject immersed in so much darkness find themselves smeared as antisemites – as though solidarity with Palestinian suffering could only ever be motivated by hatred of Jews.

Which is why Israel can live with the bickering over who hit the al-Ahli hospital. Because the storm will soon pass, and the Palestinian victims will still be dead.

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