

Israeli Soldiers Ordered to Kill Civilians in Gaza, Says “Breaking the Silence”

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Thousands of buildings were destroyed by Israel in Gaza last summer. ([Ashraf Amra](#) / [APA images](#))

Israeli soldiers were under orders to shoot civilians dead while attacking Gaza last summer, according to [testimonies](#) published today by the group *Breaking the Silence*.

The testimonies, which include several interviews with mid-ranking Israeli military figures, highlight the extreme cruelty demonstrated during the 51-day offensive.

Some testimonies claim that Israeli soldiers were told that everything in Gaza was a “threat” and that they may use as much ammunition as they wished.

More than 2,200 Palestinians – mostly civilians – were killed in the offensive, [according](#) to the United Nations monitoring group [OCHA](#).

While Israeli leaders regularly claim that the military takes precautions against striking civilians, the *Breaking the Silence* testimonies suggest otherwise.

“Sterilized”

“Anything inside [Gaza] is a threat,” one sergeant, who served in the central Gaza area of Deir al-Balah, told *Breaking the Silence*. “The area has to be ‘sterilized,’ empty of people – and if we don’t see someone waving a white flag, screaming: ‘I give up’ or something – then he’s a threat and there’s authorization to open fire.”

“The saying was: ‘There’s no such thing there as a person who is uninvolved,’” the sergeant added. “In that situation, anyone there is involved.”

[Deir al-Balah](#) was one of several areas that sustained heavy casualties during Israel’s attack on Gaza. On 24 July, several Palestinians [were injured when Israeli forces shelled a United Nations school](#) serving as a refuge for Palestinians displaced by the fighting.

As [reported](#) by The Electronic Intifada, Amal Abu Jayab, a disabled Palestinian teen, was hit by an Israeli drone strike in Deir al-Balah on 13 July. She died four days later.

Another sergeant recalled instructions delivered to soldiers by a commander during training ahead of the ground invasion of Gaza, which began on 17 July. “We don’t take risks. We do not spare ammo. We unload, we use as much as possible,” he remembered his commander saying.

“Writhing in pain”

One staff sergeant stationed in northern Gaza during the war said soldiers were told to “shoot right away.”

“The instructions are to shoot right away,” [he told](#) Breaking the Silence, an organization formed by Israeli soldiers opposed to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. “Whoever you spot – be they armed or unarmed, no matter what. The instructions are very clear. Any person you run into, that you see with your eyes – shoot to kill. It’s an explicit instruction.”

Another staff sergeant, who was in an infantry unit in northern Gaza, [recalled watching a civilian](#) while he was “writhing in pain.”

“So this old man came over, and the guy manning the post — I don’t know what was going through his head — he saw this civilian, and he fired at him, and he didn’t get a good hit,” the staff sergeant remarked. “The civilian was laying there, writhing in pain.”

He said: “It was clear to everyone that one of two things was going to happen: Either we let him die slowly, or we put him out of his misery. Eventually, we put him out of his misery and a D9 [armored bulldozer] came over and dropped a mound of rubble on him and that was the end of it.”

That same sergeant told Breaking the Silence that when they informed the battalion’s commander, he was uninterested.

Looting

The soldiers also spoke openly about looting, [intentional destruction](#) and taking over Palestinian homes in Gaza during the offensive.

One staff sergeant from the Israeli armored corps [remembered tank operators running over cars](#) several times. Tank operators “had this sort of crazy urge to run over a car,” he said.

“And there was one time that my [tank’s] driver, a slightly hyperactive guy, managed to convince the tank’s officer to run over a car, and it was really not that exciting,” he said. Aside from a “scolding,” he said the tank operator was not punished.

Another sergeant who was stationed in northern Gaza reflected on the destruction his army had inflicted on the northern part of the Strip. “The houses were already in ruins by the time we got there,” he noted, explaining that armored bulldozers proceeded to roll through chicken coops.

Commenting on the extent of the destruction, he added: “I never saw anything like it, not even in Lebanon. There was destruction there, too – but never in my life did I see anything like this.”

“Reduced to a pile of sand”

Yet another infantry staff sergeant told Breaking the Silence [that soldiers threw grenades](#) into the homes before entering them. He remembered how an orchard was intentionally destroyed by tanks and armored bulldozers.

“It was one of the most beautiful orchards I’d ever seen ... and within a few hours it was totally erased – reduced to piles of powdered sand,” he said.

Razing the orchard was by no means an isolated incident. [Several testimonies](#) describe in detail how soldiers were ordered to destroy Palestinian homes and raze other infrastructure.

Homes were often targeted with entire families still inside them, according to other organizations. Earlier this year, [a report published](#) by the Israeli human rights group [B’Tselem](#) found that Israel’s “open-fire policy” during the Gaza attack resulted in “dozens of instances in which residential buildings were attacked from the air or ground, causing them to collapse on entire families.”

Explaining that the policy of bombing homes was implemented throughout Gaza, the B’Tselem report noted: “These attacks were not carried out on the whim of individual soldiers, pilots or commanders in the field. They are the result of a policy formulated by government officials and the senior military command.”

Impunity

Despite calls for investigations into Israeli war crimes in Gaza, no Israeli soldiers or commanders have faced any meaningful consequences.

Speaking to [The Guardian](#), the [Israeli military claimed](#) to “investigate all credible claims” of war crimes and misconduct.

Yet, both during the attack and in its wake, Israel repeatedly denied independent human rights investigators access to Gaza. Among those prevented from entering the strip were [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#), as well as UN investigators.

To make matters worse, much of Gaza remains in ruins some nine months after the attack concluded. As of late February, [only five percent](#) of the international aid promised by donor countries in order to rebuild Gaza had been delivered.

Though limited housing repairs have been made, none of the more than 12,000 Palestinian homes destroyed by Israel have been rebuilt, [according](#) to the Association of International Development Agencies.

With the perpetrators of massacres enjoying impunity and international donors failing to make good on its promises, Palestinians in Gaza are unlikely to expect justice in the near future.

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