

Libyan Deaths, Media Silence

Were Dozens Killed in Major NATO Airstrikes?

By [FAIR](#)

Global Research, August 18, 2011

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR)

18 August 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

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Allegations of Libyan civilian deaths as a result of NATO bombing have often been covered in the corporate media as an opportunity to scoff at the Gadhafi regime's unconvincing propaganda (**FAIR Blog**, [6/9/11](#)).

But dramatic new allegations that dozens of civilians were killed in Major after NATO airstrikes on August 8 have been met with near-total media silence.

According to Libyan officials, 85 civilians were killed in Major- a town south of Zliten, a site of frequent clashes and NATO airstrikes. There is no reason journalists should take this claim at face value. But reports from the scene suggest that something significant happened. According to **Agence France Presse** ([8/9/11](#)), "Reporters attended the funerals of victims and saw 28 bodies buried at the local cemetery.... In the hospital morgue, 30 bodies — including two children and one woman — were shown along with other bodies which had been torn apart."

The **AFP** report included NATO denials, with a spokesman claiming that the target "was a military facility clearly."

A **Reuters** correspondent ([8/9/11](#)) "counted 20 body bags in one room, some of them stacked one on top of the other.... In total, reporters saw about 30 bodies at the Zlitan hospital." The **New York Times** (8/10/11) ran a 170-word version of a **Reuters** dispatch which noted: "There was no evidence of weapons at the farmhouses, but there were no bodies there, either. Nor was there blood."

Amnesty International has called for an investigation, which led to this mention from **CNN** anchor John King (8/11/11):

Amnesty International is demanding that NATO investigate whether a Monday strike on Moammar Gadhafi's forces killed 85 Libyan civilians including 33 children. NATO says it has no evidence of civilian casualties at this point.

A Nexis database search yields very little coverage in U.S. outlets. But that is not because no reporters were present. **CNN** correspondent Ivan Watson covered a mass funeral after the strikes. But his report aired only on **CNN International** (8/10/11). Watson reported a visit to "three or four houses that had been demolished by some kind of missiles from the sky."

He added:

We were also shown a morgue where there were the bodies of at least 25 people. Many of them appeared to be men. There were some women and children included among those corpses.

Watson noted that it was “impossible for us, from this perspective, to confirm whether or not 85 people were in fact killed, but it does appear that at least some women and were among those hurt in this deadly strike.” (You can watch Watson’s report [here](#)).

Watson’s **CNN.com** report ([8/10/11](#)) included an interview with a Libyan who claimed that nine members of his family were killed in the attack, including his two-year old daughter. Watson also interviewed a man who was burying his daughter.

It is curious that Watson’s reporting was shared with **CNN**’s international audience, but not broadcast to its domestic audience.

But Watson did appear on **CNN** a few days earlier from the scene of another NATO strike in Zliten. The point of that report (8/5/11) was to suggest that official claims of civilian deaths were suspicious. In that segment, Watson noted that on a visit to a law school that had been attacked by NATO forces, he found what “appear to be uniforms over here, these olive green pants. And then we have got boxes here that look an awful lot like they could have been holding ammunition.”

Reporting that undermines Libyan claims of civilian casualties has been a staple of the war so far- as evidenced by headlines like “Libya Government Fails to Prove Claims of NATO Casualties” (**Washington Post**, 6/6/11) and “Libya Stokes Its Machine Generating Propaganda” (**New York Times**, 6/7/11).

Is Majer being ignored by the media because it is just more clumsy Libyan propaganda? Or is it because the story might conflict with the media’s overriding message that Libyan civilians aren’t dying in NATO’s airstrikes? In any event, corporate media outlets that have so diligently sought to debunk Libyan claims of civilian deaths should investigate what happened in Majer. On the **BBC** website, reporter Matthew Price published one such effort ([8/11/11](#)), headlined “What really happened in Libya’s Zlitan?” There should be more like it.

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