

Media Coverup of Israeli Crimes against Humanity in Gaza: An Urgent Call to Confront the Mainstream Media

By [Karin Brothers](#)

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After 50 days of Israeli attacks on a basically defenseless civilian population in Gaza, the pro-Israeli media is now trying to blame the victims for the devastation. Worse, Israel's supporters are running scurrilous ads that malign Hamas, even comparing it to ISIS. The editors and publishers of such media must urgently be confronted with demands that their outlets reflect the facts rather than the attacks on Palestinian resistance and the pro-Israeli re-writing of history.

Israel's genocidal attack on Gaza illustrated Israel's use of its Dagan Plan, using Israeli civilian deaths as an excuse to cause massive Palestinian casualties and its Dahiya Doctrine, causing such extensive destruction that it would take decades to recover, thus weakening the government. Israel not only targeted civilians (Washington Blog) (almost 2200 were murdered, with 11,000 injured) but also targeted the civilian infrastructure such as UN facilities, schools, hospitals, clinics, ambulances and medics, virtually every mosque, and the only power plant, which provided potable water. Hundreds of thousands were left homeless; entire families were wiped out; entire neighborhoods were razed to the ground. Gaza has been left with little food, no potable water, a lack of critical medical supplies, electricity, or even material to rebuild with.

According to recent media accounts, Hamas was responsible for the devastation of Gaza: Hamas not only supposedly kidnapped and murdered the three settler students on June 12th, they also initiated the attacks on Israel, forcing Israel to "defend itself" by obliterating Gaza's infrastructure and devastating their population. Hamas, according to such accounts, refused legitimate ceasefire deals and even broke the temporary ceasefires. Israel appears to be the victim of fiendishly clever Hamas which forced Israel to commit genocide (Cohn) — causing it very bad press — all for no good reason.

Most media coverage omits the important background to the situation in Gaza:

- Hamas won the 2006 election held throughout the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip because of its reputation for integrity, its concern for social welfare, and its insistence that Israel acknowledge Palestinian rights under international law;
- Gaza is under Israeli military occupation: Israel's total control of Gaza's land, sea and air access has turned it into the world's largest open-air prison. Since those under occupation are legally allowed to fight for their freedom, *Palestinians have the legal right to bear arms*;
- Instead of acknowledging any Palestinian rights, Israel called Hamas "terrorist" and

has arrested both legislators and members *by virtue of their membership*; Israel even stole Hamas tax moneys;

□ Israel imposed an illegal humanitarian siege on Gaza in 2006, tightening it in September 2007 to the extent that food, medical supplies, building supplies, school supplies, even soap and detergent have been banned; the restrictions, which cause permanent stunting of children and poor health throughout Gaza (Gilbert), have been compared to the notorious Warsaw Ghetto. *This siege has been censored or minimized in our media. Gazans supported the Hamas attempt to force Israel to lift this siege, claiming that they would rather die than return to those conditions (Sourani)*

□ On June 2, the “unity government” of Fatah and Hamas was sworn in, and much to Israel’s chagrin, with official American support; Israel no longer had an excuse to refuse negotiations.

Israel responded to alleged Hamas actions by attacking Gaza

Three settler students leaving Hebron were kidnapped and killed the night of June 12th. One student called the emergency police hotline to report that he was being kidnapped; the message was followed by shots, groans and almost two minutes of silence. Despite an exchange of 54 early-morning phone calls from a parent, a “search” was not started until the next day. Media was then informed that the students had been killed, but the government put a gag order on the story that lasted until the bodies were found on June 30th. [Tarachansky] Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Hamas of the crime; local Hamas members were named as suspects. Despite Hamas’ denials, “retaliatory” air strikes on Gaza started on June 14^{th*}, along with a “search” that started what would be a two-month rampage of arrests, beatings, killing and destruction throughout the West Bank, whipping up a frenzy of anti-Arab hatred. The Israeli government produced no hard evidence for its accusations.

It was only after Israel killed a senior Hamas official on June 30, that Hamas responded with its first rockets since 2012. (Tarachansky) Former UN Special Rapporteur Richard Falk claims that “there’s no legal, political or moral argument that would uphold the claim that Israel is acting in legitimate self-defense.” (Klipperstein)

While Israel had no legal right to attack Gaza, the responsibility for the deaths of the students is murkier.

The Hamas leadership had nothing to gain and everything to lose from kidnapping Israeli students and they issued an official denial the day after Netanyahu’s accusation. Despite the admission of exiled Hamas leader Salah al-Arouri that al-Qassam Brigades was responsible for the abductions, the general consensus is that the Hamas leadership was unaware of it and not responsible for it. (Cameron, Crowcroft, Ginsburg)

On August 5th Hussam Kawasme, a member of Hamas from Hebron, admitted his responsibility and implicated other family members and acquaintances. The Hamas political chief Khaled Mashaal appeared to acknowledge the results of the Israeli investigations but implied that the students were legitimate targets because they were aggressors, living illegally on stolen Palestinian land. [Isakoff] The Kawasme admissions were treated with some skepticism in initial Israeli articles, presumably because they could have been the

result of torture.

Circumstantial evidence points to Israel

The Israeli motive for an event that would destroy the new “unity” government was evident, particularly because of its American support. Mideast experts such as Noam Chomsky, Henry Siegman and Michel Chossudovsky have also noted other motives: the annexation of Gaza and the ultimate control of Gaza’s offshore gas (*which Israel is meanwhile benefiting from*).

The police emergency hotline response to the dramatic phone call for help was extraordinarily apathetic, as was the 8-9 hour delay before starting a search (Harel), which allowed the culprits generous time to cover their tracks. Israeli articles noted that Netanyahu offered no evidence whatsoever when he accused Hamas of the abduction (*Tarachansky*), and there seemed to be little interest in forensic investigation. Those who found the bodies in the remote hills were unidentified. Netanyahu’s use of this event to wreck havoc on both Gaza and the West Bank (*and claim one thousand acres of land near Bethlehem*) arouses suspicions of Israeli involvement.

An important article by Avi Issacharoff points out the complexity of the operation and, implicitly, the likelihood that it could have been at least monitored by Shin Bet; the chief of Shin Bet had been seen in the Hebron area the week before the abductions. (Issacharoff) A week before the students’ abduction, Chief of the Mossad Tamir Pardo had wondered at the reaction if three students disappeared. (Chossudovsky) An extremist Salafi organization known as Dawlat al-Islam linked to ISIS claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of the three Israelis on August 13th; such a link could connect the act with the Israeli military, which has known links to ISIS. (Chossudovsky)

Conclusion and *urgent* call to action:

There is an urgent need to confront the media before the new blame the victim accounts and the maligning of Hamas and the legitimacy of Palestinian resistance are entrenched in the public understanding.

Media accounts must hold Israel fully accountable for the devastation of Gaza and for the lethal, ongoing siege. Those who care about the situation facing Palestinians must take it upon themselves to challenge those responsible for the media accounts that blame the victims. Our own futures depend on it.

** (Israel had been attacking Gaza with ongoing air strikes using other rationales. Gaza militias sometimes fired homemade rockets to protest their incarceration and the siege, which Israel would use as a rationale to mount ongoing air strikes on Gaza. Hamas does not control everything in Gaza.)*

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