

Why Are Journalists Surprised that Israel Kills Children?

By [Amena Saleem](#)

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Relatives mourn after Israel killed four children playing football last summer. Ali JadallahAPA images

There was nothing surprising about [Israel finding itself not culpable](#) for the killing of [four boys on a Gaza beach](#) in July last year, as it did in a military judgment released a few days ago.

Israel's investigations into its own crimes aren't known for delivering guilty verdicts.

What was interesting, however, was the reaction of some mainstream journalists — journalists who felt they had a vested interest in this case because they had witnessed the strikes which killed the four boys from the Baker family as they played football one afternoon during Israel's 51-day assault on Gaza.

Articles by Peter Beaumont in [The Guardian](#) and Robert Tait in [The Daily Telegraph](#) give off a sense of disbelief and indignation that the investigation by the Israeli army into the attack cleared all personnel involved and declared the incident "a tragic accident."

Both these journalists, and Paul Mason in his [blog](#) for Channel 4 News, describe how their own observations, both during and after the attack, refute Israel's allegations that it was targeting Palestinian fighters.

But the sense that there has been a miscarriage of justice by a reputable organization, rather than an outright cover-up by a rogue army, remains.

Struck in error?

This journalistic respect for Israel's army is highlighted in Tait's article, as he writes that the slaughter of the boys was "surely an indication that something had gone badly wrong in Israel's military procedures for such a deadly strike to have been aimed at what were clearly children."

By which he indicates his belief, shared by many mainstream journalists, that, unlike the killing of the Baker boys, the rest of Israel's military procedures in Gaza last summer were not acts of indiscriminate slaughter.

Bombardments which leveled homes, mosques and entire neighborhoods, massacring whoever was in the vicinity, babies and children included, weren't, according to Tait's reasoning, deliberate acts of terror, but acceptable military activity.

The BBC, true to form, goes one step further in the esteem in which it holds the Israeli army. Its [online article into Thursday's findings](#) does nothing but quote chunks from the Israeli army report and is headlined "Gaza beach attack: Israel 'struck boys in error'."

There is no attempt to critically analyze the report's conclusions, as Tait, Beaumont and Mason all did for their respective news organizations, and no Palestinian comment.

Instead, the BBC simply provides a platform for Israel's self-exonerating report to be aired, free from the inconvenience of journalistic scrutiny.

And it ends, of course, in typical BBC fashion, by giving Israel's excuse for attacking Gaza last July and August — "to put an end to rocket-fire and remove the threat of attacks by militants tunneling under the border" — with no mention of the Palestinian reality of occupation, siege and resistance.

Damage limitation

It is this high regard in which many mainstream journalists hold the Israeli army which explains, perhaps, their shock that its soldiers could deliberately target children and then their disbelief that its commanders could dub that deliberate targeting an accident.

The question then is, why are mainstream journalists so easily taken in by Israeli propaganda, appearing to believe Israel's refrain that it has "the most moral army in the world"?

The truth they ignore, and consequently fail to convey to their audiences, is that Israel kills Palestinians at will and [with impunity](#).

Its army only announces investigations into a killing or killings on the rare occasion that Western journalists or politicians become agitated about Palestinian life being taken — usually because the [killing has been caught on camera](#) and can't be hidden.

Those same journalists seem unaware of the reality that an Israeli announcement of an "independent investigation" is nothing more than a damage limitation exercise, an exercise in "public relations" to quieten the critics, and that the word "independent" is meaningless in these cases.

It is meaningless because the outcome of an Israeli investigation into Israeli crimes will almost exclusively be a finding of Israeli innocence. There is nothing independent about the process, and it shouldn't be reported as such.

Wake up to reality

The military's absolution of blame for the slaughter of the Baker boys wasn't a one-off, as the resultant mainstream reporting seemed to suggest. It was part of a pattern which will be repeated over and over until the occupation ends.

Israel is a colonial power. It will kill whoever it has to (Palestinians, [US activists](#), [British media workers](#), [Turkish humanitarians](#), [UN staff](#)) to make its [colonial goals](#) a reality. And it will lie, cover up and propagandize in exactly the same way that all colonial powers did in centuries past to get away with its crimes.

Mainstream media journalists need to wake up to these facts. They need to be sharper, more intelligent and more astute in the way they cover Israel and the occupation. They need to read and understand history, especially European colonial history, and they need to embrace, rather than dismiss, context in their reporting.

Israel didn't just kill those four young boys last summer. Its warplanes, warships and tanks wiped out [89 entire Palestinian families](#), wiped out [504 Palestinian children](#) at an average rate of 10 a day, wiped out a total of more than 2,200 Palestinians.

Its politicians and military should be tried for all these crimes. And they should be tried in a properly independent manner — or as independently as the world allows — at the [International Criminal Court](#). This is what the mainstream media should be clamoring for. Not expressing polite surprise that an “independent” Israeli inquiry acquitted Israel of deliberately slaying four little Palestinian boys who dared to play football in Gaza.

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Articles by: [Amena Saleem](#)

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