

Every Place in Gaza, Including Schools, Is a Target

By [Prof. Vijay Prashad](#)

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It is almost as if the Israeli army is trying to gather as many Palestinians as possible in one place and then kill them all. Ahmed Abed and his family fled the Dalal al-Maghribi school in early August after an Israeli airstrike displaced them. That airstrike killed 15 Palestinians, who had taken refuge there after Israel had bombed their homes in the Shujaiyah neighbourhood of Gaza City. The family arrived in the al-Taba'een school, a private school with an attached mosque, that sheltered 2,500 people. Since the Israelis began their most recent bombardment of Gaza in October 2023, Palestinians have taken refuge in private schools and in schools run by the United Nations (UN). The UN reports that in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli attacks have damaged 190 of their facilities, most of them schools. There are few sanctuaries left in Gaza. These schools - whether private or UN - are the only places that were seen as relatively safe.

At 4.30am on August 10, Israeli jet fighters flew over Gaza City and dropped US-made GBU-39 250-pound bombs on the al-Taba'een school and mosque. During that time, many of the inhabitants had lined up at the mosque to go for the *Fajr* or dawn prayer. The bombs hit the people near the mosque, killing at least 100 Palestinians. It is a grotesque massacre that took place just when the United States decided to rearm Israel with these kinds of weapons. Sarah Leah Whitson, former Middle East director for Human Rights Watch, wrote that the arms sales to Israel by the US on the day of this bombardment demonstrated a 'Pavlovian conditioning for a feral army'.

The United States, despite occasional statements about withholding weapons, has consistently armed Israel during this genocidal war. Since 1948, the United States has provided 130 billion dollars worth of weapons to Israel. Between 2018 and 2022, 79 per cent of all weapons sold to Israel came from the United States (the next was Germany, which supplied 20 per cent of Israel's arms imports). These arms sales have come in deliberately small bunches of under 25 million dollars per sale so that they do not require the scrutiny of the US Congress, and therefore public debate. Till March, the US approved a hundred of these small sales since October 2023, which amount to over 1 billion dollars in weapons sales, including the GBU-39. It is important to know that the bomb, created in the United States, was likely loaded onto an Israeli fighter jet by a US technician seconded to the Israeli bases.

A Pattern of Targeting Schools

Mahmoud Basal, the spokesperson for Gaza's civil defence unit, said that the medics who got to the scene at al-Taba'een school, many of them already veterans of this kind of violence, were confounded by what they found. 'The school area is strewn with dead bodies and body parts', he said. 'It is very difficult for paramedics to identify a whole dead body. There's an arm here, a leg there. Bodies are ripped to pieces. Medical teams stand helpless

before this horrific scene'. At least 40,000 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli bombings since last October, and two million Palestinians have been displaced from their homes.

In the lead-up to the attack on al-Taba'een school, the Israeli forces have been escalating their bombings of schools in Gaza that serve as shelters. In July, the Israeli military struck seventeen schools in Gaza, killing at least 163 Palestinians. In the week before August 10, Israel hit the Khadija and Ahmad al-Kurd schools in Deir al-Balah killing 30 Palestinians (July 27), the Dalal Moghrabi school in Shujaiyah killing 15 Palestinians (August 1), the Hamama and Huda schools in Sheikh Radwan killing 16 Palestinians (August 3), the Hassan Salame and Nasser schools in an-Nassr killing 25 Palestinians (August 4), and the al-Zahraa and Abdul Fattah Hamouda schools killing 17 Palestinians (August 8).

This sequence of attacks on schools came before the August 10 bombing, which shows that there is a pattern of targeting civilians who are seeking shelter in schools. The massacre at al-Taba'een is the 21st attack by Israel against a school that is serving as a shelter since July 4. Ahmed Abed lost his brother-in-law Abdullah al-Arair in the massacre at al-Taba'een. 'There is nowhere else to go', he said. 'Every place in Gaza is a target'.

Israeli Denials

Israel accepted that it has bombed these schools but denies that it killed civilians. In fact, Israel no longer names these places such as al-Taba'een and Dalal Moghrabi as schools; it calls them 'military facilities'. The Israeli military said that it had killed at least 20 'terror operatives' since it claims to have hit an 'active Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad command room embedded within a mosque'. The Israeli authorities released names of at least 19 people who they claimed were senior operatives of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, an independent organisation based in Switzerland, studied the claims made by Israel's military and found them to be factually wanting. The Monitor's staff went to the school, did a survey of the survivors, and reviewed the Israeli-controlled civil registry for the names. The team's 'preliminary investigation found that the Israeli army used names of Palestinians killed in Israeli raid - some of whom were killed in earlier raids - in its list'. The three people killed earlier, but whose names appeared in the Israeli lists, include Ahmed Ihab al-Jaabari (killed on December 5, 2023), Youssef al-Wadiyya (killed on August 8, 2024), and Montaser Daher (killed on August 9, 2024). The Israeli list also had three elderly civilians who have no connection to any militant group, including Abdul Aziz Misbah al-Kafarna (a school principal) and Yousef Kahlout (an Arabic language teacher and deputy mayor of Beit Hanoun). The list also includes six civilians, 'some of whom were even Hamas opponents'.

It is remarkable that even in their own statements the Israeli officials seem unsure about their own claims. Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari of the Israeli military said that 'various intelligence indications' show that there was a 'high probability' that Ashraf Juda, a commander of the Islamic Jihad's Central Camps Brigade, was in al-Taba'een school. But the Israelis could not confirm it. So, the Israelis killed a hundred civilians even though they were not certain if their target was in the facility at that time.

The Israeli army has set up a pattern for its genocidal campaign. It first bombs civilian neighbourhoods, sending terrified people into shelters such as schools and hospitals. Then,

it announces blanket evacuation orders from an entire area, forcing people in these shelters to live in fear since many of them do not have the wherewithal to leave them for other places (indeed, 'there is nowhere else to go', said Ahmed Abed). Having made these evacuation orders, Israel then bombs the protected shelters, including hospitals and schools, with the argument that these are military targets. This formula was enacted in Gaza City, and in other parts of Gaza.

Now, Israel has announced forced evacuation orders for people in Khan Younis, the city in central Gaza. Alongside these orders, Israeli forces have begun aerial and artillery attacks at the eastern edge of Khan Younis. We will now see these kinds of attacks on schools and hospitals that are shelters for desperate people in the centre of Gaza, every building seen by the Israelis as a legitimate target.

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