

Israel Intentionally Killed Civilians After Soldier's Capture in Gaza — Amnesty

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A man injured by Israel's bombs is taken to al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah, a city in southern Gaza, at the beginning of August last year. (Eyad Al Baba/APA images)

A joint [investigation](#) by Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture found "strong evidence" that the Israeli army carried out war crimes in an attempt to kill an Israeli soldier captured in Gaza last summer and as revenge for his capture.

On 1 August 2014 — a day Palestinians have come to know as Black Friday — the Israeli army initiated its deadliest act of butchery during its 51-day war on Gaza, bombing men, women and children in an effort to kill one of its own soldiers in [Rafah](#), Gaza's southernmost city.

When the dust settled, anywhere between 135 to more than 200 Palestinian civilians were dead, including 75 children. With the morgues full to capacity, medical workers were forced to store the corpses of small children in [vegetable refrigerators](#) and [ice cream coolers](#) to accommodate the high volume of dead bodies, producing some of the most haunting images produced by the 51-day offensive.

Using eyewitness testimony, satellite images and multimedia documentation of the carnage, researchers at Forensic Architecture, based in Goldsmiths, University of London, reconstructed the Black Friday attacks. This allowed them to determine that the Israeli attacks were aimed at locations believed to be harboring the soldier Hadar Goldin, leading Amnesty to conclude that the Israelis were trying to kill Goldin with no regard for the harm inflicted on civilians.

"The ferocity of the attack on Rafah shows the extreme measures Israeli forces were prepared to take to prevent the capture alive of one soldier — scores of Palestinian civilian lives were sacrificed for this single aim," said Philip Luther, director of Amnesty's Middle East and North Africa program.

Based on statements made by Israeli officials and soldiers, Amnesty also concluded that the attacks were partly motivated by vengeance for the capture.

Hannibal

Just before a temporary three-day humanitarian ceasefire negotiated by Egypt and the United States went into effect on the morning of 1 August, a unit of soldiers from the Israeli army's [Givati Brigade](#) conducted a tunnel incursion southeast of Rafah on the order of its

commander [Ofer Winter](#), an ultranationalist religious Zionist who [exhorted his troops to holy war](#) in Gaza.

It was there that they encountered a team of Palestinian resistance fighters and exchanged gunfire. Two Israeli soldiers and one Palestinian were killed in the ensuing firefight, while another, Goldin, went missing. It was later determined that Goldin died in the gunfight, but in the immediate aftermath the Israeli army operated under the assumption that he had been captured alive, putting into motion a bloodbath of epic proportions.

Goldin's alleged capture led to the implementation of the [Hannibal Directive](#), a classified Israeli military protocol authorizing firepower to prevent a captured Israeli soldier from being taken alive, even if it means killing the soldier and hundreds of civilians in the process.

Hannibal was crafted in the 1980s to deny Palestinian or other Arab resistance groups a bargaining chip down the line while relieving Israeli leaders of the political fallout from having to make concessions — such as prisoner swaps — to secure a captive's release.

On Ofer Winter's command, Israel unleashed a torrential downpour of at least 2,000 bombs, missiles and shells on 1 August alone. Half of the explosives were fired within the initial three hours of the operation on an area bustling with civilians who had just returned home for what they believed was a ceasefire.

No escape

"I would not be exaggerating if I told you that around 50 to 60 shells were falling every minute," Rafah resident Saleh Abu Mohsen told Amnesty.

"People were running away from their homes in terror. It was a scene reminiscent of 1948 [the 1948 ethnic cleansing of more than 750,000 Palestinians, known as the Nakba], which we had only seen on TV," he said, adding, "People were barefoot, women were running with their heads uncovered, it was a very difficult scene."

The carpet-bombing began just before 10am, sending Palestinians bolting for safety in all directions, but to no avail. Israeli missiles decapitated fleeing civilians as they ran in the streets and shredded vehicles attempting to evacuate the wounded to Rafah's al-Najjar Hospital.

The most lethal Black Friday attack occurred in Rafah's eastern al-Tannur neighborhood, where the Israeli army dropped two one-ton MK-84/GBU-31 bunker buster bombs designed to penetrate underground command centers onto a single-story building, leaving a massive crater and a wide radius of destruction.

Though the building was empty, at least 18 people were killed in the streets as they dodged an assortment of artillery, helicopter and drone fire hunting them. It was the single deadliest attack on Black Friday.

Among those killed in the maelstrom was Mohammed Anas Mohammed Arafat, just 55-days-old. The infant was impaled while in his mother's arms as she fled their home with her four children.

"He died in my hands... My son got hit in the head and was injured in the face and his face split open," Shirin Jamal Arafat told Amnesty.

The attack appeared to be aimed at a tunnel shaft inside the building, where the Israeli army believed Goldin was possibly being held.

Killing the wounded

In the earliest hours of the attack, “the Israeli army appeared to fire at moving vehicles without distinction,” particularly ambulances moving toward al-Najjar Hospital. The Israeli attacks on ambulances were likely an attempt to prevent Goldin’s captors from getting him medical treatment.

Residents of the Musabbeh neighborhood gathered at the nearby mosque in the afternoon, following Israeli orders to evacuate. An eyewitness told Amnesty that he watched from his rooftop as a drone missile struck Suleiman Muhawish al-Hashash and his daughter, who were passing by the mosque on foot looking for a ride to safety.

When people inside the mosque came out to help, a second missile attacked. “Then a third missile hit the door of the mosque, injuring Youssef Ahmed Sheikh al-Eid, Dua Sheikh al-Eid and her three children, all under four years of age,” the witness told Amnesty.

Three ambulances were dispatched to the scene. The first to arrive scooped up the wounded but was struck by a missile fired from a drone.

The missile caused an explosion that burned all eight people — including three medics, an elderly man, a woman and three children — before the ambulance could make it back to the hospital.

Jaber Darabih, a paramedic from the second ambulance to arrive, which was also attacked, later learned that his son, a volunteer medic named Youssef Darabih, was among the dead. Their bodies were so badly torched, they “had no parts — no legs, no hands ... So we took them out and put them inside plastic bags and brought them to the Abu Youssef al-Najjar Hospital and put them in the refrigerator,” Jaber told Amnesty.

Those who made it to the hospital alive on Black Friday poured into al-Najjar Hospital, the medical facility nearest to the site of Goldin’s capture.

The hospital was completely overwhelmed and unequipped to deal with the severity and volume of injuries. To make matters worse, the Israeli military repeatedly attacked in and around the hospital, blowing out windows, injuring medical staff and patients and ultimately forcing a frantic evacuation that sent patients fleeing with intravenous drips in hand.

Ashraf Hijazi, a doctor at the hospital, recalled to Amnesty that “some had plaster casts, with drips in their chests and stomachs. I saw a young boy in a plaster cast crawling trying to flee by dragging himself along.”

Amnesty concluded that the Israeli army was attacking the hospital just in case Goldin had been wounded and his captors were seeking medical help.

“Gloves off” policy

The Black Friday attacks, though lessening in ferocity, carried over into 2 August.

Rasha Abu Taha, who was pregnant during the attack, told Amnesty that on Black Friday

over 25 family members had gathered at her in-laws' house in the al-Shabora refugee camp. The following day, after an intense night of attacks, Abu Taha was preparing lunch as the children played and snapped photos when "suddenly the ceiling fell on us."

Abu Taha rushed to rescue all the children she could, including her daughter, nephew and two nieces. Her sons, 12-year-old Mohammed and 10-year-old Youssef, and her nephew, 8-month-old Rizq, were killed.

"They brought Youssef out on a blanket without a head nor arms, only the lower part of his body," Abu Taha told Amnesty.

While the Israeli army claims to have fired on "suspicious" persons and structures containing tunnel shafts that were possibly harboring Goldin, Amnesty concluded that in some cases, the motive was revenge ([revenge](#) as a motive was not uncommon last summer).

"Public statements by Israeli army commanders and soldiers after the conflict provide compelling reasons to conclude that some attacks that killed civilians and destroyed homes and property were intentionally carried out and motivated by a desire for revenge — to teach a lesson to, or punish, the population of Rafah for the capture of Lieutenant Goldin," Amnesty found.

Revenge appears to have motivated the ferocious destruction of the Tabet Zare neighborhood, where an Israeli ground operation plowed through buildings with D-9 bulldozers and sprayed homes with Israeli tank fire.

"The motto guiding lots of people was, 'let's show them'," an Israeli officer told Breaking the Silence, an organization of Israeli soldiers who have served in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Other soldiers declared to the media that their intention during the operation was "to settle accounts" or to "extract a price," according to Amnesty.

Givati Brigade commander Ofer Winter [bragged](#) to one of Israel's most widely circulated newspapers, "We shredded them," adding, "Anyone who abducts should know that he will pay a price."

"They simply messed with the wrong brigade," Winter declared. apparently with pride.

The fact that the implementation of the Hannibal Directive continued even after a death certificate was issued for Hadar Goldin on 2 August suggests revenge was indeed a guiding principle in Rafah.

"Under the veil of the Hannibal Directive, the Israeli army enacted a 'gloves off' policy," concluded Amnesty, "whereby it struck general targets from its 'target banks' — a continuously updated list of targets prepared by the military intelligence — that were not previously authorized because they were determined to involve too high levels of collateral damage."

Amnesty goes on to note that those responsible for these atrocities are unlikely to face repercussions for what amount to war crimes due to "the pervasive climate of impunity that has existed for decades" in regard to Israeli brutality.

Indeed, only three Israeli soldiers who participated in the 51-day slaughter have been indicted by Israeli military prosecutors for alleged looting during the ground invasion. Meanwhile, an Israeli military investigation ruled that the overwhelming firepower unleashed on Black Friday day was [proportionate](#).

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