

Israel's Large-Scale Killing of Palestinians Passes Unreported

Their suffering is not newsworthy:

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At least 19 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli military on Friday November 3, 2006, including two women, and other civilians. No Israelis were killed. Though photos of Friday's Israeli attack on Palestinian women have been widely disseminated, the bigger story is still not being told. These killings are part of a new, longer-term pattern – a dramatic rise in the number of Palestinians killed by the Israeli military since the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority took office seven months ago, despite a continued low number of Israelis killed by Palestinians. Palestinians, already subjected to Israeli military occupation and overwhelming violence, have been killed at a rate of 26 Palestinians for every Israeli killed since Hamas took power on March 29, 2006, and 76 Palestinians per Israeli since July 1. Though the mainstream media still reports on a “conflict” between “two sides”, over the last seven months it has simply been a slaughter.

According to casualty figures from the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem,[1] the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA),[2] and press reports for November 1-3,[3] in the period since the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority took office on March 29, 2006 through November 3, 2006, 491 Palestinians were killed by Israelis while 19 Israelis killed by Palestinians, 25.8 Palestinians killed for every Israeli. Since July 1 that ratio has increased to 76.2 Palestinians killed per Israeli, with 381 Palestinians killed versus just five Israelis.

Ratio of Palestinians Killed to Israelis Killed During Current Palestinian Uprising (September 29, 2000 – November 3, 2006) Sources: B'Tselem, UN OCHA, and media reports. B'Tselem's and OCHA's descriptions of the circumstances surrounding these deaths show that approximately half the Palestinians killed during this period were clearly civilians.

The year 2006 has seen by far the most skewed ratio of Palestinians to Israelis killed. While no deaths should be accepted, the figures show that the Israeli war machine has shifted into an unprecedented frenzy. Through the entire second Palestinian intifada or uprising which began September 29, 2000, approximately 3.9 Palestinians have been killed for every Israeli killed.[4] The highest previous multi-month ratio of Palestinians to Israelis killed during this intifada occurred from March to December 2004 when around 9.5 Palestinians were killed for every Israeli. In the first Palestinian intifada from 1987-92, 5.2 Palestinians were killed for every Israeli.

The increase in Palestinians killed in 2006 reversed the downward trend from 2005, the year with the lowest number of both Palestinian deaths (197), and Israeli deaths (50) during this

uprising. In April 2006, with Hamas taking power, Palestinian deaths climbed back to 2004 levels. From July 1 – November 3, 2006, Israel has killed an average of 93 Palestinians per month, the highest monthly average since Israel's reinvasion of the West Bank in March/April, 2002.

In 2006, unable to support the usual claim that it is responding defensively to the killing of Israelis, the Israeli government has offered various unconvincing explanations for the large numbers of Palestinians it is killing. But Israel's intensified violence seems intended to punish Palestinians for voting Hamas to office in democratic elections, and to restore Israeli self-esteem that was damaged by the failure of the war with Lebanon.

Israel's shifting justifications are repeated with little skepticism by the mainstream media. First Israel said it was acting to stop Palestinians from firing homemade Qassam rockets into Israel, rockets that have killed just eight people within Israel over five years. Then Israel said it was responding to Palestinians' capture on June 25, 2006 of a single Israeli soldier, though Israel holds 10,000 Palestinians captive. News reports currently suggest that the ongoing Israeli attacks may jeopardize the soldier's safe return. Now the Israeli government is again playing up Qassam rockets, and arms smuggling into Gaza as justifications.

Israeli reporter Amira Hass put Gaza arms smuggling in perspective, writing in the Israeli Ha'aretz on October 18 that "what exists in Israelis' consciousness is not the millions of cluster bombs ... or the tens of millions of bombs and shells and lethal bullets stored in our arms warehouses and our gun barrels and the bellies of our helicopters and planes. Although the amount of such explosives is measured in the millions of tons, it is the 20 tons of explosives and the few thousand rifles that permeate the Israeli consciousness." Ironically, under the much vilified Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, Palestinians have killed by far the fewest Israelis in any period during this six-year intifada

Despite the fact that they have vastly inferior weapons, are killed in much greater numbers than Israelis, live under Israeli occupation and are having their land taken from them by Israelis, Palestinians are generally portrayed in the US as the aggressor. Ironically, under the much vilified Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, Palestinians have killed by far the fewest Israelis in any period during this six-year intifada — nineteen Israelis over seven months.

Hamas has largely maintained a ceasefire since early 2005, even as Israel and western governments demand that Hamas renounce violence and recognize Israel, and the western media simplistically repeats that Hamas is "committed to the destruction of Israel." In the meantime, Israel is actually destroying the Palestinian people and any hopes for a Palestinian state through heightened violence and land seizure. But the world has been silent about Israeli actions.

The dominance of the Israeli narrative and of Israeli voices in the US media is one factor that allows Americans to maintain this hypocrisy. Rather than providing comparable information about both sides, Palestinian attacks and weaponry are over-emphasized, and the Israeli government line repeated. Comparative figures and analysis of the overwhelming numbers of Israeli missiles and bombs fired at Gaza and Lebanon,[6] of Israel's vast weaponry, and of the numbers of Palestinians killed, are typically harder to find.

For example, the New York Times, Los Angeles Times and Washington Post, three of the largest and most respected US newspapers, all describe the current crisis as beginning with

the capture of an Israeli soldier, erasing history prior to June 25, 2006. Israel's heightened assault on Gaza began with heavy shelling in late March, resulting in the killing of large numbers of Palestinians in Gaza before June 25, including gruesome attacks like the June 9 shelling of a Gaza beach which killed seven members of the family of 12 year-old Huda Al Ghalia.[7]

Over the last three months, those same three newspapers have failed to comment on the recent dramatic disparity between Palestinian and Israeli deaths. During that period, The New York Times is the only one of those three papers to have provided figures comparing the numbers of Palestinians and Israelis killed. The Times did so three times over three months, in just 1-2 sentences each time, with no accompanying analysis of trends.[8] Over the last three months, the Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post reported only the figures for Palestinian deaths, six times[9] and two times[10] respectively, again with no analysis. All three papers begin their death counts from June 25, 2006.

It is difficult to imagine that a similarly dramatic increase in the ratio of Israeli to Palestinian deaths could occur without major discussion by the media and the world, or that such lopsided deaths in another conflict would pass without comment. Despite a Hamas ceasefire, and publicly available data showing that Israel is now carrying out a one-sided assault, Hamas violence remains the focus. Propaganda continues to trump reality, with the active collaboration of the US media. Palestinians are portrayed as terrorists, and Israelis as victims of Palestinian terrorism. There is scarcely a mention international law, or Palestinians' status as a people living under 39 years of Israeli military occupation and subjugation.

Palestinians, however, realize that they are being slaughtered despite the fact that they are not killing Israelis, just as they know that they were encouraged to hold democratic elections and then punished for doing so. Frustrated by the world's hypocrisy and lack of support, and subject to daily Israeli assaults, it is not likely that Palestinians will maintain their unilateral ceasefire forever. Yet if Palestinians do eventually strike back, it's not clear that the world will even register what they are responding to.

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