

Israeli Soldiers Tell Story of Savage Cruelty in Gaza - One Given Blessing by the West

Women and children are being targeted intentionally, say Israeli whistleblowers. From ground troops to commanders, the rules of war have been shredded

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Global Research, July 21, 2024

[Middle East Eye](#) 19 July 2024

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#),
[USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#),
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They just keep coming. On the weekend, [Israel](#) launched another devastating [air strike](#) on Gaza, killing at least 90 [Palestinians](#) and wounding hundreds more, including women, children and rescue workers.

Once again, Israel targeted refugees displaced by its earlier bombs, turning an area it had formally declared a “safe zone” into a killing field.

And once more, western powers shrugged their shoulders. They were too busy accusing [Russia](#) of [war crimes](#) to have time to worry about the far worse war crimes being inflicted [on Gaza](#) by their Israeli ally - with weapons they supplied.

The atrocity committed at al-Mawasi camp, packed with [80,000 civilians](#), had the usual Israeli cover story - one rolled out to reassure western publics that their leaders are not the utter hypocrites they appear to be for supporting what the World Court has described as a “plausible genocide”.

Israel said it was trying to hit two Hamas leaders - one of them Mohammed Deif, head of the group’s military wing - although Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [seemed uncertain](#) as to whether the strike was successful.

No one in the western media appeared to wonder why the pair preferred to make themselves a target in an overcrowded, makeshift refugee camp, where they were at huge risk of being betrayed by an Israeli informant, rather than sheltering in Hamas’s extensive tunnel network.

Or why Israel deemed it necessary to fire a multitude of massive bombs and missiles to take out two individuals. Is that Israel’s new, expansive [redefinition](#) of a “targeted assassination”?

Or why its pilots and drone operators continued the [strikes](#) to hit emergency rescue crews dealing with the initial destruction. Was there intelligence that Deif was not just hiding in the camp, but had hung around to dig out survivors, too?

Or how killing and maiming hundreds of civilians in an attempt to hit two Hamas fighters could ever possibly satisfy the most basic principles of international law. “Proportion” and “distinction” require armies to weigh the military advantage of an attack against the expected toll on civilian life.

Biblical Vengeance

But Israel has torn up the rulebook on war. According to sources within the Israeli military, it now considers it acceptable to kill more than 100 Palestinian civilians [in the pursuit](#) of a single Hamas commander – a commander, let us note, who will simply be replaced the moment he is dead.

Even if the two Hamas leaders were assassinated, Israel could not have been in any doubt that it was perpetrating a war crime. But it has learned that, the more routine its war crimes become, the less coverage they receive – and the less outrage they provoke.

In recent days, Israel has struck several United Nations schools serving as shelters, killing dozens more Palestinians. On Tuesday, [another strike](#) in the “safe zone” of al-Mawasi killed 17.

According to the UN refugee agency, UNRWA, more than 70 percent of its schools – almost all of them serving as refugee shelters – [have been bombed](#).

Last week, western doctors who had volunteered in Gaza said Israel was packing its weapons with shrapnel to maximise injuries to those caught in the blast radius. Children, because of their smaller bodies, were being left with much more [severe wounds](#).

Aid agencies cannot properly treat the wounded, because Israel has been blocking the entry of [medical supplies](#) into Gaza. Committing war crimes, if western publics have not worked it out by now, is the very point of the “military operation” Israel launched in Gaza in the wake of Hamas’s one-day attack on 7 October.



A Red Crescent worker carries a child to the hospital after a bombing in Deir al-Balah, December. Credit: Palestine Red Crescent Society

That is why there are more than 38,800 known deaths from Israel's 10-month assault – and likely at least four times that number unrecorded, [according](#) to leading researchers writing in the Lancet medical journal this month.

That is why it will take at least [15 years](#) to clear the rubble strewn across Gaza by Israeli bombs, according to the UN, and as much as [80 years](#) – and \$50bn – to rebuild homes for the remnants of the enclave's 2.3 million people still alive at the end.

Israel's twin goals have been biblical vengeance and the elimination of Gaza – a [genocidal rampage](#) to drive the terrified population out, ideally into neighbouring [Egypt](#).

Shoot-everyone Policy

If that was not clear enough already, six Israeli soldiers recently stepped forward to speak out about what they had witnessed while serving in Gaza – a story the western media has entirely failed to report.

Their testimonies, [published](#) by the Israel-based publication 972 last week, confirm what Palestinians have been saying for months.

Commanders have authorised them to open fire on Palestinians at will. Anyone entering an

area the Israeli military is treating as a “no-go zone” is shot on sight, whether man, woman or child.

Back in March, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz warned that the Israeli military had created just such [“kill zones”](#), where anyone entering was executed without warning.

After months of an Israeli aid blockade that has created a man-made famine, Israel’s military has turned the people of Gaza’s ever-more frantic search for food into a game of Russian roulette.

This perhaps explains, in part, why so many Palestinians are unaccounted for – Save the Children [estimates](#) some 21,000 children are missing. The soldiers quoted in 972 say the victims of their shoot-everyone policy are bulldozed out of view along routes where international aid convoys pass.

A reserve soldier, identified only as S, said a Caterpillar bulldozer “clears the area of corpses, buries them under the rubble, and flips [them] aside so that the convoys don’t see it – [so that] images of people in advanced stages of decay don’t come out”. The soldier also noted:

“The whole area [of Gaza where the army operates] was full of bodies... There is a horrific smell of death.”

Several of the soldiers reported that stray cats and dogs, denied food and water for months just like Gaza’s population, feed on the dead bodies.

The Israeli military has repeatedly refused to publish its open-fire regulations since it was first challenged to do so in the Israeli courts in the 1980s.

A soldier named B told 972 that the Israeli army enjoyed “total freedom of action”, with soldiers expected to shoot directly at any Palestinian approaching their positions, rather than a warning shot in the air: “It’s permissible to shoot everyone, a young girl, an old woman.”

When civilians were ordered to evacuate from a school serving as a shelter in Gaza City, B added, some mistakenly exited right towards the soldiers, rather than to the left. That included children.

“Everyone who went to the right was killed – 15 to 20 people. There was a pile of bodies.”

According to B, any Palestinian in Gaza can inadvertently find themselves a target:

“It is forbidden to walk around, and everyone who is outside is suspicious. If we see someone in a window looking at us, he is a suspect. You shoot.”

‘Like a Computer Game’

Drawing on military practices familiar in the [occupied](#) West Bank too, the Israeli army encourages its soldiers to shoot even when no one is engaging them. These random, indiscriminate eruptions of fire are known as “demonstrating presence” – or more

accurately, terrorising and endangering the civilian population.



In other instances, soldiers open fire just to let off steam, have fun, or, as one soldier put it, “experience the event” of being in Gaza.

Yuval Green, a 26-year-old reservist from Jerusalem, the only soldier prepared to be named, observed:

“People were shooting just to relieve the boredom.”

Another soldier, M, similarly noted that “the shooting is very unrestricted, like crazy” – and not just from small arms. Troops use machine guns, tanks and mortar rounds in a similar, unwarranted frenzy.

A, an officer in the army’s operations directorate, pointed out that this mood of utter recklessness extended all the way up the chain of command.

Although the destruction of hospitals, schools, mosques, churches and international aid organisations requires authorisation from a senior officer, in practice, such operations are almost always approved, A said:

“I can count on one hand the cases where we were told not to shoot. Even with sensitive things like schools, [approval] feels like only a formality ... No one will shed a tear if we flatten a house when there was no need, or if we shoot someone who we didn’t have to.”

Commenting on the mood in the operations room, A said destroying buildings often “felt like a computer game”. In addition, A cast doubt on Israel’s claim that Hamas fighters comprised a high proportion of Gaza’s death toll. Anyone caught in Israel’s “kill zones” or targeted by a bored soldier was counted as a “terrorist”.

Burning Homes

The soldiers also reported that their commanders destroyed homes not because they were suspected of serving as bases for Hamas fighters, but purely out of an urge for revenge against the entire population.

Their testimonies confirm an earlier Haaretz [report](#) that the army was implementing a policy of torching Palestinian homes after they served their purpose as temporary locations for soldiers. Green said the principle was:

“If you move [on], you have to burn down the house.” According to B, his company “burned hundreds of houses”.

A policy of wanton, vengeful destruction is similarly implemented – on a far larger scale – by Israel’s fighter pilots and drone operators, explaining why at least two-thirds of Gaza’s housing stock has been left in ruins.

There are other deceptions too. One of the stated reasons for Israel being in Gaza is to “bring back the hostages” – many dozens of Israelis who were dragged into Gaza on 7 October. That message, however, has apparently not reached the Israeli military.

Green noted that, despite a blunderbuss operation last month that killed more than 270 Palestinians to rescue four Israeli hostages, the army is actually deeply indifferent [to their fate](#).

He said he heard other soldiers stating:

“The hostages are dead, they don’t stand a chance, they have to be abandoned.”

Back in December, Israeli troops [shot dead](#) three hostages waving white flags. Reckless shooting into buildings poses the same threat to the lives of hostages as it does to Palestinian fighters and civilians.

Such indifference might also explain why the Israeli political and military leadership has been willing to conduct such a comprehensive bombing of buildings and tunnels in Gaza, risking the lives of the hostages as much as Palestinian civilians.

Culture of Violence

The story told by these soldiers in 972 should not surprise anyone – apart from those still desperately clinging to fairytales about Israel’s “most moral army in the world”.

In fact, an [investigation](#) by CNN on the weekend found that Israeli commanders identified by [US](#) officials as committing particularly heinous war crimes in the occupied West Bank over the past decade have been promoted to senior positions in the Israeli military. Their job includes training ground troops in Gaza and overseeing operations there.

A whistleblower from the Netzah Yehuda battalion who spoke to CNN said the commanders, drawn from Israel’s religious extremist ultra-Orthodox sector, stoked a culture of violence towards Palestinians, including vigilante-style attacks.

As the CNN investigation indicates, the wanton death and destruction in Gaza is very much a feature, not a bug.

For decades, the Israeli military has been implementing its inhumane policies towards Palestinians not just in the tiny enclave, but across the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem too.

Israel has been suffocating Gaza with a siege for 17 years. And since 1967, it has been suffocating the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem with illegal settlements – many of them home to violent Jewish militias – to drive out the Palestinian population.

What is new is the intensity and scale of the death and destruction Israel has been allowed to inflict since 7 October. The gloves have come off, with the West's approval.

Israel's agenda - of leaving historic Palestine empty of Palestinians - has been advanced from an ultimate, distant goal to an urgent, immediate one.

Snake-like Politicians

Nonetheless, Israel's much longer history of violence and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians is about to come sharply into focus, despite the best efforts of Israel to keep our attention fixed on a Hamas "terrorism" threat.

The [International Court of Justice](#) in the Hague, often referred to as the World Court, is considering two cases against Israel. Best known is the one launched in January, putting Israel on trial for genocide.

But on Friday, the World Court is due to issue a ruling on an older case - one that predates 7 October. It will pronounce on whether Israel has broken [international law](#) by making the occupation of Palestine permanent.

While stopping the genocide in Gaza is more pressing, a ruling from the court recognising the illegal nature of Israel's rule over Palestinians is equally important. It would give legal backing to what should be obvious: that a supposedly temporary military occupation long ago mutated into a permanent process of violent ethnic cleansing.

Such a ruling would provide the context for understanding what Palestinians have been truly up against, while western capitals and western media have gaslit their publics year after year, decade after decade.

This week, Oxfam [accused](#) the new [British](#) government under Keir Starmer of "aiding and abetting" Israel's war crimes by calling for a ceasefire from one side of its mouth while actively supplying Israel with weapons to continue the slaughter. The Labour government is also dragging its feet on restoring funding to UNRWA, best placed to address the famine in Gaza.

Labour 'must stop aiding Israel's law breaking' in Gaza, says Oxfam

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At Washington's behest, Labour is seeking to block efforts by the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor to issue [arrest warrants](#) against Netanyahu and his defence minister, Yoav Gallant, for war crimes. And there are still no signs that Starmer has any plans to recognise Palestine as a state, thus putting a UK marker down against Israel's ethnic cleansing programme.

Sadly, Starmer is typical of the West's snake-like politicians: flaunting [his outrage](#) at Russia's "depraved" attacks on children in Ukraine, while keeping silent on the even more depraved bombing and starvation of Gaza's children.

He vows that his support for Ukrainians "won't falter". But his support for Palestinians in Gaza facing a genocide never even started.

The Palestinians of Gaza - and the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem - are not just up against a law-breaking, savage Israeli military. They are being betrayed each day afresh by a West that gives such barbarity its blessing.

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