

Operation Protective Edge: One Year After Israel's Gaza Strip Assault — No Accountability

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Global Research, July 14, 2015

[Mondoweiss](#)

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

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

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Image: Funeral of eight members of the Abu Jarad family in Beit Hanoun, July 19, 2014

One year has passed since Israel began its devastating assault on the occupied and besieged Palestinian Gaza Strip. The 50-day attack, which killed more than 2,200 Palestinians—more than two-thirds of whom were civilians—including more than 550 children, made last year the deadliest Palestinians have experienced since Israel occupied the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in 1967, according to the United Nations ([PDF](#)).

Israel also damaged or destroyed more than 150,000 Palestinian homes in this assault, codenamed “Operation Protective Edge”. Due to the ongoing joint Israeli and Egyptian blockade of the Gaza Strip, not a [single home](#) has been rebuilt, as more than 100,000 Palestinians remain internally displaced in temporary shelters, in schools, or in others’ homes. The UN has noted that “the extent of the devastation and human suffering in Gaza was unprecedented and will impact generations to come”.

Recent reports by [Defense for Children International Palestine](#) (DCIP) and Breaking the Silence ([PDF](#)) document extremely disturbing cases in which Israel used US weapons—including F-16 fighter jets, Apache helicopter gunships, Hellfire missiles and Caterpillar D-9 bulldozers—supplied at taxpayer expense, to kill Palestinian children in deliberate, indiscriminate, or disproportional attacks and to wantonly destroy Palestinian homes and other civilian infrastructure for no military purpose whatsoever.

In one incident, an Apache helicopter-fired missile hit a residential building in Beit Hanoun on July 18, 2014 killing five children. Older brother Ahmad Abu Jarad told DCIP:

“We found my sister Samar crushed with blood coming out of her nose, ears and head, and her neck was smashed. My other sister, Ahlam, was also dead. She was all charred, only part of her hair was not burned. The scene was excruciatingly painful. We recovered my brother Naim, who was still breathing at the time. His right leg was cut off, his private parts were cut off, too, and his entire body was smashed. He died before we could put him inside the ambulance.”

A first sergeant in an armored corps unit testified to Breaking the Silence that “there’s nothing at all left of Juhar al-Dik,” a village near Gaza City. When asked what caused the destruction, he replied:

“Most of it was D9s (armored bulldozers). They just took down all the orchards. Not a single tree left. They worked on it for three weeks. When they didn’t have a specific job like leading our way or opening up a specific route for us or some other mission, they just went and flattened things. I don’t know what their specific order was, but they were on a deliberate mission to leave the area razed, flattened.”

To date, Israel has predictably failed to hold itself accountable for these atrocities through domestic judicial proceedings. The lack of seriousness of Israeli investigations into “Operation Protective Edge” was displayed most egregiously when the military exonerated itself in the killing of the four [Bakr cousins](#)—Ahed and Ismail, aged 9, Zakaria, aged 10, and Mohammad, aged 11—as they played soccer on the Gaza City beach.

Assuming that Israel will hold itself accountable is like appointing the arsonist to investigate the fire he started. Israel can and must be accountable for its actions by outside actors, including Congress and the Obama administration. US laws are designed to prevent foreign countries from using US weapons to commit human rights abuses. The Arms Export Control Act limits US weapons to “internal security” and “legitimate self-defense” and the “Leahy Law” sanctions units of militaries that commit grave human rights abuses and prevents individuals associated with these crimes from receiving US visas.

No country should be placed above the law, especially one which is considered an ally of the United States and receives more US military aid ([PDF](#)) than all other countries combined. Members of Congress have the opportunity to remedy the impunity that Israel unfairly enjoys by sending this letter ([PDF](#)) to Secretary of State John Kerry, urging him to investigate the findings from these human rights reports and hold Israel accountable, as mandated by US law, for any violations that occurred.

Members of Congress and their staff are also invited to attend a [Capitol Hill briefing](#) on Wednesday, July 29 at noon in 121 Cannon, featuring eyewitness accounts of the impact of Israel’s attack from a Gaza-based photojournalist, along with testimony from legal advocates on Israel’s failure to hold itself accountable, and the options and need for the United States and the international community to do so.

Encourage your Member of Congress to support this letter and attend this briefing by [taking action](#).

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