

Peddling Propaganda About al-Shifa

Gareth Porter begins his dissection of a U.S. journalist's unequivocal backing of Israel's justification for closing down Gaza's largest hospital with a simple test: Who is the source?

By [Gareth Porter](#)

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The argument over the Israeli accusation that Hamas used Gaza's al-Shifa Hospital as a shield for its military effort against the Israel Defense Forces has continued, even as the headlines have shifted to the Israel-Hamas prisoner swap.

On Nov. 23, well-known author and online journalist Fred Kaplan weighed in forcefully in favor of the Israeli charge.

In a post on "X," Kaplan, who writes a weekly column on defense and foreign affairs for *Slatemagazine*, posted a comment supporting the conclusion of an [article in the Israeli daily Haaretz](#) unequivocally supporting the IDF's position.

Kaplan's post declared, "Clear evidence in *Ha'aretz* (which is often critical of Israel govt), that Hamas used tunnels under Al-Shifa hospital as a command center."

Clear evidence, in *Ha'aretz* (which is often critical of Israel govt), that Hamas used tunnels under Al-Shifa hospital as a command center.
<https://t.co/TYneI0JLXy>

— Fred Kaplan (@fmkaplan) [November 24, 2023](#)

With that, Kaplan defended the IDF's justification for closing down Gaza's largest hospital while carrying out a war designed to destroy vast areas of the world's most densely populated urban enclave. That hard-line view does not stand up to closer scrutiny.

The *Haaretz* article in question fails to provide a convincing case for the Israeli government's claim that Hamas was using the tunnel under al-Shifa Hospital as command center, and therefore that the hospital was being used as a 'human shield.' Instead it merely shows that the article's author, Janiv Kubovich, military correspondent for *Haaretz*, reflects the IDF view of the conflict on the *Haaretz* staff.

Kubovich does not cite a single piece of evidence for Hamas' culpability in using the hospital for military purposes that did not come directly from the military spokesman.

The reporter recommended by Kaplan with such high confidence relied completely on the most self-interested sources imaginable on the issue — the IDF's leading propagandist. It is a source lacking in any independent judgment.

The IDF's position on Gaza's hospitals, as articulated by its chief spokesperson, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, has been extremely rigid and unyielding, in line with the Israeli policy aim of imposing maximum human costs not only on Hamas but on the entire civilian population of Gaza.

That policy requires that all the hospitals must be shut down, and the society be systematically deprived of food and fuel and put under military pressure.

First Rantisi Hospital, Then al-Shifa

When hospitals are used for military purposes, they can lose their [protected status](#) under international laws of war.

A common denominator in IDF operations regarding hospitals in Gaza is to repeatedly release videos showing weapons either inside or next to a medical facility to justify shutting it down.

Before the IDF spokesman and his staff had even moved to al-Shifa, the IDF ordered Rantisi Hospital for Children closed after [Hagari showed footage of an alleged Hamas weapons cache in the basement](#).

After Rantisi Hospital it was al-Shifa's turn. On Nov. 11, the IDF began a drumbeat of propaganda ahead of its takeover, calling al-Shifa "the main hub of Hamas activity."

The Pentagon, which has extremely close ties to the IDF, gave its wholehearted support to the accusation.

To its credit, *Haaretz* [picked up an AP report](#) saying that Israel, "without providing evidence, has accused Hamas of concealing a command post inside and under the compound, allegations denied by Hamas and hospital staff."

We now know, however, that this well-organized propaganda campaign against al-Shifa could not have been based on actual intelligence on what lay in the tunnel under the hospital. No outsider could have possibly been inside the tunnel to report on what was to be found there, because the entrance to the tunnel had been sealed for an unknown period of time.

Also, the IDF was recently found exaggerating evidence of a Hamas command center under

the hospital. As **Consortium News** [reported last week](#), the IDF on Oct. 27 provided a visual depiction of a vast Hamas presence in no fewer than five buildings of al-Shifa's enormous campus, as well as what it called a "Hamas underground complex" below the main building. Spokesman Hagari also claimed that there was an entrance to that underground floor from within the hospital building, further incriminating the management of al-Shifa.

But that entire Israeli-U.S. propaganda line was discredited by the subsequent discovery by the IDF — never widely covered by the Western press — that a tunnel below the above-ground office of Hamas held what the IDF believed was the actual high command headquarters of Hamas, as [reported by The Jerusalem Post on Nov. 14](#).

IDF Knew Real Hamas HQ While Lying About al-Shifa <https://t.co/HP6mxRYFk7>

While telling the world that Hamas HQ was under al-Shifa Hospital, the IDF had already found the actual command center 8.5km away, reports Gareth Porter.

— Consortium News (@Consortiumnews) [November 23, 2023](#)

The IDF spokesman then explained that the map he had previously presented to the media was meant only to be "conceptual" and, according to a Nov. 23 AP report, [not to be taken literally.](#)"

Evacuation Strategy

By Nov. 12, the IDF strategy for emptying al-Shifa Hospital was already well underway. *Haaretz* reported on that date that the IDF had phoned the office of the hospital to demand it be completely evacuated.

□ Al Shifa Hospital.

Complete destruction in the vicinity of Al-Shifa Hospital, the occupation left behind during its siege and aggression to the hospital. pic.twitter.com/32GuenrzF2

— Palestine Now (@PalestineNW) [November 30, 2023](#)

That was well before the IDF spokesman arrived at al-Shifa with his staff early in the morning of Nov. 15 (a day after *The Jerusalem Post* report) to prepare a video displaying Hamas weapons, uniforms and a computer said to have been discovered in the hospital's MRI rooms just hours earlier that morning.

Haaretz's Kubovich declares firmly, "There is no way the hospital administrators didn't know what was happening." This assertion is based entirely on the fact that the tunnel had siphoned off electricity from the hospital's above-ground generator.

That certainty depends on the assumption that the hospital's management had evidence of an extraordinary addition to the normal load. And that would have depended on a relatively long-term use of the facility by Hamas before and during the war that began in May.

The IDF's Hagari clearly did not know how long Hamas had maintained a presence in the tunnel, which was devoid of any sign of recent use when Israeli forces opened it up.

In his own video [Hagari speculated](#) that Hamas had left the tunnel when it knew that the IDF was going to enter al-Shifa. However, Associated Press correspondent Josef Federman, who was also taken on a tour of the tunnel facility, [observed](#) that rooms were “bare, small and rusted,” suggesting a long period of disuse.

Which War Was It?

But despite Kubovich's flat statement that “there is no doubt they were used by Hamas company, brigade and battalion commanders,” it turns out that he was not at all sure the tunnel was used in the current war. Kubovich goes on to say that “fighting was directed from there in recent rounds, *if not in the current war* [emphasis added].”

In other words, the last time it had been used might have been the previous Israel-Hamas war in 2014. It cannot be taken for granted, therefore, that the al-Shifa Hospital management was aware of the Hamas use of the facility, as Kubovich had asserted.

BREAKING

Director of the Al-Shifa hospital Mohammed Abu Salmiya, along with a number of other doctors have been arrested by Israeli forces. pic.twitter.com/kiz4Xlgell

— Rami Jarrah (@Ramijarrah) [November 23, 2023](#)

The current director of the hospital, Mohammed Abu Salmiya, who was arrested this week for questioning about the alleged Hamas use of the hospital, only assumed his duties in 2019, and in all probability was unaware of any Hamas military use of a tunnel underneath the hospital.

But the IDF's concern is not with truth. Its concern is for the extreme right-wing Likud government's intention (based on [numerous statements](#) of genocidal intent) to not only destroy Hamas, but impose the greatest number of deaths on the Palestinian population. That required an elaborate effort to indict hospitals as active participants in the war on Hamas' behalf and dismantling all the hospitals in Gaza, and especially of al-Shifa.

The article touted by Kaplan offers no “clear evidence” of Hamas' use of al-Shifa Hospital as “command center” in the current war.

Kaplan's apparent belief that the IDF narrative about al-Shifa Hospital was somehow accurate or truthful fails to take seriously the powerful genocidal threat this extremist Israeli government poses.

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Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian writing on U.S.

national security policy. His latest book, [Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare](#), was published in February of 2014. Follow him on Twitter: [@GarethPorter](#).

Featured image: Major General Herzi Halevi, at left, with other members of the Israeli military at the Egypt-Israel border in June. (IDF Spokesperson's Unit, Wikimedia Commons, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#))

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