

Slapping an Israeli Soldier More Newsworthy than Shooting a Palestinian Child in the Face

Coverage of Ahed Tamimi obscures Israeli violence and occupation

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*Israeli soldiers [shot](#) 14-year-old Palestinian **Mohammad Tamimi** point-blank in the face with a rubber-jacketed bullet on December 14, 2017, in Nabi Saleh, a small village in the occupied West Bank. The boy had to undergo [six hours of surgery](#) and was placed in a medically induced coma.*

An hour later, Mohammad's cousin, **Ahed Tamimi**, slapped and kicked at an armed Israeli soldier. Early the next week, after [video](#) of Ahed's actions went viral, Israeli soldiers [raided](#) the Tamimi home at 3 a.m., arresting Ahed and confiscating the family's phones, computers and laptops.

Ahed has been denied bail and could face years in prison. (**Nour Tamimi**, a 16-year-old cousin of Ahed's who is also in the video, was also arrested and has been released on bail. Ahed's mother Nariman was arrested later that day when she inquired about her daughter, and she remains in custody.)

Erasing the shooting

A January 1 [Newsweek article](#) described the incident as Ahed "assaulting Israeli soldiers," "threatening two Israeli soldiers and then hitting them in the face," "pushing the soldiers as well as kicking them, hitting them in the face and throwing stones at them." The piece referred to Ahed's actions as "assaults" and an "attack." It failed to report that Israeli soldiers had just shot and severely injured her 14-year-old cousin.



Ahed Tamimi is accused of attacking soldiers.

Newsweek's depiction ([1/1/18](#)) of Palestinian prisoner Ahed Tamimi (left), "16-year-old who attacked Israeli soldiers."

CNN ([1/8/18](#)) also ran a piece that left out the most serious act of violence that day, as did **Reuters** ([12/28/17](#), [1/1/18](#)). An **Associated Press** report ([12/28/17](#)) had the same deficiency, leaving the false impression that the soldier was attacked without provocation.

The **Newsweek** piece also failed to note that the Israeli soldiers are members of a military force that has been occupying the West Bank for 50 years. Nor does **CBS's** December 21 [account](#) mention the occupation, which structures every interaction between Palestinians and Israelis. (The fact that occupied people have a [legal right to resist occupation](#) is left out of all of the articles discussed in this piece.)

A report in the **New York Times** ([12/22/17](#)) does not mention that Mohammad Tamimi was shot in the face with a rubber bullet until the 13th paragraph, as though this fact is of minimal importance. The **Times** describes Nabi Saleh as having "long-running disputes with a nearby Israeli settlement, Halamish, that Nabi Saleh residents say has stolen their land and water." The **Times** does not note that, as a colony on occupied territory, Halamish is [illegal under international law](#).

Normalizing military tribunals

The **Newsweek** piece says Tamimi "has now been indicted on five counts of assaulting security forces," and that she is "charged with interfering with the soldiers' duties by preventing them from returning to their post." It notes that "in May, she was charged with interfering with soldiers who were trying to arrest a protester throwing stones," and refers to her indictment two other times, including in the headline. At no point does the article mention that the proceedings are taking place in a military court. Similarly, an **Associated Press** ([1/9/18](#)) report refers to "Israel's hard-charging prosecution" and "the charges" against Tamimi, without mentioning that she is being tried by the same occupying military that shot her cousin.

Omitting that information makes it sound like Tamimi will receive a fair legal process, but the evidence suggests the opposite. [According to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel](#), Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are subjected to a military court system that “does not grant the right to due process and the rights derived from it,” whereas Israelis illegally colonizing the Occupied Territories have the rights and privileges of a civilian legal system.

In the military courts, [the age of majority is 16](#), which means that Palestinian teenagers can be tried as adults, while 18 is the age of majority for Israelis. Defence for Children International Palestine (DCIP), a group that has consultative status with the UN, [reports](#) that Israeli military court judges, who are either active duty or reserve officers in the Israeli military, “rarely exclude evidence obtained by coercion or torture, including confessions drafted in Hebrew, a language most Palestinian children do not understand.” The Israeli military courts’ conviction rate of greater than 99 percent underscores how stacked they are against Palestinians.

Framing Resistance as PR Stunts

The **New York Times**’ framing of Tamimi’s story suggests that the case’s central issue is whether Palestinians or Israelis would have been better off if the soldier had reacted more violently to being slapped. The **Times**’ David Halbfinger says

that Israelis could not decide whether the soldiers were virtuous pillars of forbearance and strength . . . or an embarrassing advertisement of national paralysis and vulnerability.

Palestinians, meanwhile,

debated whether the video might have damaged their cause, by showing their oppressors behaving gently, or helped it, by showing that resistance can be effective even when one is unarmed.

The paper even implied that Palestinians may be happy that Tamimi was arrested, writing that “the scene of the young woman being hauled away may have given Palestinians the clear-cut propaganda coup they had been denied by the original confrontation.”

Acts of Resistance and Restraint Defy Easy Definition in the West Bank

By DAVID M. HALBFINGER DEC. 22, 2017



The New York Times ([12/22/17](#)) placed the same emphasis on life-threatening violence and social media tactics: “The latest incident, filmed in the family’s backyard, occurred within hours after a cousin of Ms. Tamimi’s was [shot in the face with a rubber bullet](#), and it was streamed live on Facebook on December 15.”

CNN similarly trivialized Tamimi’s arrest, noting that Israelis call her “Shirley Temper” because of “her long ginger curls” and because they accuse her of “starring in carefully choreographed ‘Pallywood’ videos, a dismissive characterization of protests considered staged for the camera.”

While the **Times** and **CNN** provide a forum for speculation about whether Palestinians want their own children to suffer because it makes for good public relations, there is much this framing overlooks. For example, none of the above-mentioned articles mention the risk of Tamimi being seriously harmed in Israeli jails. Yet UNICEF [charges](#) Israel with subjecting Palestinian youth to “practices that amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention against Torture.” These include children “being aggressively awakened in the middle of the night by many armed soldiers and being forcibly brought to an interrogation center tied and blindfolded, sleep-deprived,” and “threatened with death, physical violence, solitary confinement and sexual assault, against themselves or a family member.”

Israel’s well-documented mistreatment of Palestinian youth is ignored in these reports, which suggests it is not Palestinian parents but Western reporters who are interested in crafting a public relations spectacle.

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