

Who Was Responsible for The 2014 Destruction of Gaza?

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After 50 days of Israeli attacks on a basically defenseless civilian population in Israeli-occupied Gaza, the media is claiming that Hamas was responsible for Gaza's utter devastation. According to such media accounts, Hamas was not only responsible for the kidnapping and murder of the three settler students on June 12th — they also initiated the attacks on Israel, forcing Israel to “defend itself” by obliterating Gaza's infrastructure and devastating their population. Hamas, according to such accounts, refused legitimate ceasefire deals by insisting that the 8-year siege be lifted, broke the temporary ceasefires, and refused to disarm, thus bringing the disaster on themselves. Israel's supporters now run ads that compare the democratically-elected resistance government to ISIS. What are the facts behind those accusations against Gaza's government? Why was Gaza attacked?

Gaza, under continuous Israeli military occupation since 1967, has also been under an Israeli blockade since Sept. 2006; experts compare the largely censored siege to the notorious Warsaw Ghetto of 1940-1942. Gazans, like the Jews of the Ghetto, used tunnels to survive; they became desperate when the new Egyptian government closed the tunnels. Hamas, which had won the 2006 election held in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, was then forced to join the Fatah party in a new, US- recognized “unity government” that was sworn in on June 2, 2014 — days before three settler students were kidnapped.

Three settler students leaving Hebron were kidnapped and killed the night of June 12th. One student called the emergency police hotline to report that he was being kidnapped; the message was followed by shots, groans and almost two minutes of silence. Despite an exchange of 54 early-morning phone calls from a parent, a “search” was not started until the next day. Media was then informed that the students had been killed, but the government put a gag order on the story that lasted until the bodies were found on June 30th. [*Tarachansky*]

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Hamas of the crime — producing no hard evidence (*Tarachansky*) — and tried to pressure Mahmoud Abbas into ending the “unity government”. Despite Hamas' denials, “retaliatory” air strikes on Gaza started on June 14th*, along with a “search” that started what would be a two-month rampage of arrests, beatings, killing and destruction throughout the West Bank — and a propaganda campaign that whipped Jewish Israelis into a genocidal frenzy of anti-Arab hatred.

The police emergency hotline response to the dramatic phone call for help was suspiciously apathetic, as was the 8-9 hour delay before starting a search (Harel), which allowed perpetrators ample time to cover their tracks. On July 4th, Israeli journalist Avi Issacharoff pointed out the complexity of the operation and, implicitly, the likelihood of some Shin Bet

involvement:

[The accused] did not act alone. They clearly had people to help them in preparing a hiding place, buying food, obtaining a car, and arranging transport from one place to another during the operation. They also apparently had someone to maintain communications with the people who funded the attack. Someone also helped them transfer the bodies to the Khirbat Arnab ruins area, and perhaps even helped to hide them.

In short, there were between five and 10 people, if not more (not including the outer circle of car thieves and weapons dealers), who aided them directly in carrying out the attack. And they all managed to evade the Shin Bet. ...

In order to reach the Khirbat Arnab ruins, one must leave Halhul heading west, toward Kfar Nuba. Next to a house there, which is undergoing construction, runs a paved road that turns into dirt after a kilometer. After a few more minutes, you turn left on a dirt road that a regular car would have difficulty navigating, go up a hill, and from there only 4x4 vehicles can continue.... if the vehicle in which the teens were kidnapped was the Hyundai 35 found burnt out near Dura in southwest Hebron, then it stands to reason that a different vehicle took the terrorists and their three victims to the Arnab ruins. ...

While Israel started “retaliatory” air strikes on Gaza on June 14th, it was only after Israel killed a senior Hamas official on June 30, that Hamas responded with its first rockets since 2012. (Tarachansky) Former UN Special Rapporteur Richard Falk claimed that “there’s no legal, political or moral argument that would uphold the claim that Israel is acting in legitimate self-defense.” (Klipperstein)

Israel not only targeted Gaza civilians (Washington Blog) (almost 2200 were murdered, with 11,000 injured) but also targeted the civilian infrastructure such as UN facilities, schools, hospitals, clinics, ambulances and medics, virtually every mosque, and the only power plant, which provided potable water. Over 400,000 were left homeless; entire families were wiped out; entire neighborhoods were razed to the ground. Despite the carnage, Hamas refused to agree to laying down arms until Israel lifted the siege. Gazans agreed to choose death over a continuation of the siege. (Sourani)

Gaza has been left with little food, no potable water, a lack of critical medical supplies, no electricity, or even material to rebuild with. Israel’s genocidal attack on Gaza illustrated its use of the Dagan Plan, using Israeli civilian deaths as an excuse to cause massive Palestinian casualties and its Dahiya Doctrine, causing such extensive destruction that it would take decades to recover, thus weakening the government. Despite the ceasefire agreement, Israel has refused to honor its pledge to lift the siege and it has continued to attack Palestinians and grab land.

Responsibility for the kidnappings and murders

The Hamas leadership had nothing to gain and everything to lose from kidnapping Israeli students and they issued an official denial the day after Netanyahu’s accusation. There were two subsequent Hamas- related admissions of guilt: one from exiled Hamas leader Salah al-Arouri that al-Qassam Brigades was responsible for the abductions, and on August 5th, an admission of Hussam Kawasme, a member of Hamas from Hebron, who also implicated other family members and acquaintances. The Kawasme admissions were treated with some scepticism in initial Israeli articles [Issacharoff, Aug 10], presumably

because they could have been the result of torture. In Israeli media, Hamas political chief Khaled Mashaal appeared to acknowledge the results of the Israeli investigations implicating local Hebron members but implied that the students were legitimate targets. [Isakoff] Despite the admissions, the Hamas leadership was not believed to have been responsible for the kidnappings and deaths. (Cameron, Crowcroft, Ginsburg) The Israeli September 23rd killing of the two accused men from Hebron precluded their presentation of further evidence.

Israel had motives for these attacks. Netanyahu used the kidnappings to wreck havoc on Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank — and claim over a thousand more acres of land near Bethlehem. The new US- backed unity government ended Israel's excuse to stall peace negotiations. Mideast experts such as Noam Chomsky, Henry Siegman and Michel Chossudovsky have noted other motives: an Israeli annexation of Gaza and Israel's ultimate control of Gaza's offshore gas (*which Israel is meanwhile benefiting from*). Norman Finkelstein noted that Israel's demand that Gaza be disarmed is tantamount to demanding that Gaza agree to Israeli annexation. Israel is not legally permitted to annex Gaza and the demand denies the Palestinian right to self-determination and an ending of the occupation.

A week before the kidnappings, Mossad Chief Tamir Pardo publicly wondered at the reaction if three students disappeared (**Chossudovsky**); the chief of Shin Bet had been seen in the Hebron area the week before the abductions. (Issacharoff) An extremist Salafi organization known as Dawlat al-Islam linked to ISIS claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of the three Israelis on August 13th; such a link could connect the act with the Israeli military, which has known links to ISIS. (Chossudovsky)

Conclusion and *urgent* call to action:

There is an urgent need to confront the media before the new blame- the- victim accounts are entrenched in the public understanding. Media accounts must hold Israel fully accountable for the devastation of Gaza and for the lethal, ongoing siege.

The media should acknowledge that Palestinians have the right to self-determination. Hamas should be recognized as the democratically- elected party of all Palestinians living under occupation; legislators and members must not be treated as "terrorists" by virtue of that membership.

Those who care about the situation facing Palestinians must take it upon themselves to challenge media accounts that blame the victims; Israeli impunity threatens the international humanitarian laws that defend everyone in the world community. The only hope for a just peace depends on people speaking up.

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