



Academic Paper

Examining Israeli Allegations of Atrocities by Resistance Forces in Operation al-Aqsa Flood on October 7th, 2023



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Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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Table of Contents

Table of Content.....1

Introduction.....2

First: The Killing of Civilians and Hannibal Protocol.....3

Second: Claim of Killing Children..... 6

Third: Claim of Killing Pregnant Women and Fetuses.....8

Fourth: Claims of Rape Crimes.....9

Hamas’s Narrative.....13

Conclusion.....13

Endnotes.....15



Examining Israeli Allegations of Atrocities by Resistance Forces in Operation al-Aqsa Flood on October 7th, 2023

Fatima Hassan 'Itani¹

Introduction

Israel has been engaged in a campaign of genocide in the Gaza Strip (GS) since 7/10/2023, striving to destroy everything that could sustain human life in the region. This includes targeting Palestinian lives and destroying homes, healthcare facilities, infrastructure, schools, universities, mosques, churches, bakeries, shops and refugee camps...



The genocide perpetrated by Israel necessitates justifications to the international community, achieved through the dehumanization and demonization of victims via false testimonies and allegations against Palestinians. These narratives are extensively propagated in the Western world, persisting without retractions or apologies despite their debunking.

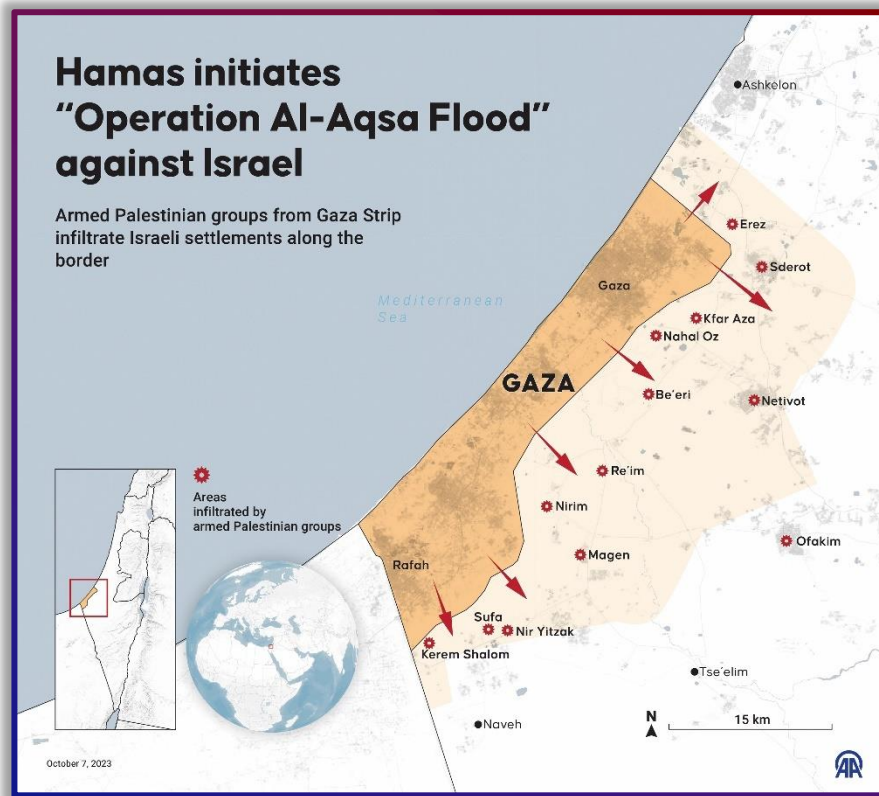
Israel's objective extends beyond seeking justice, as it claims, rather, it aims to solidify its aggressive settler colonialism in Palestine, prioritizing the Judaization of the land and its inhabitants over the plight of Palestinians.

Israeli allegations against Palestinian resistance forces and GS residents involved in Operation al-Aqsa Flood on 7/10/2023, were diverse. These claims, orchestrated by organized entities within Israel's government, aimed to justify its assault on GS and globally vilify Palestinian resistance, despite lacking validity.

Despite most of the claims against Palestinians being refuted, Israel launched an international campaign in mid-November 2023 to compile files against Palestinians involved in the events of 7/10/2023, in anticipation of criminal prosecution. Israel



disseminated false and fabricated information through sympathetic journalists, accounts and websites to garner global public opinion support for its GS war. This article will address some of these allegations and present evidence to debunk them.



First: The Killing of Civilians and Hannibal Protocol

It has been over three months since Operation al-Aqsa Flood led by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) on 7/10/2023, in which approximately 1,139 people were killed² according to the latest and non-final Israeli official statistics. This number has been repeatedly and gradually adjusted by Israel, initially reported as 1,405 killed, then reduced to 1,200, claiming that the difference is due to bodies later identified as belonging to Hamas due to charring.³ This suggests that Israel initially included around 200 Palestinian fatalities among its killed civilians, leveraging them in its international media campaign to gain sympathy and justify its actions against GS. This is also evidence of the Israeli forces' use of brutal methods in killing people at the time, to the extent that they did not distinguish between



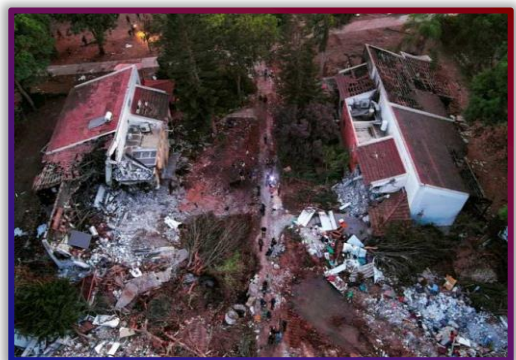
Jewish and Palestinian casualties in their tallies due to body charring. This proves that Israeli airstrikes and artillery shelling killed “civilian” Israelis, as the Qassam Brigades do not possess weapons capable of killing and burning such numbers.

As it seems, the majority of civilians killed on that day can be attributed to the implementation of the Israeli military leadership’s Hannibal Directive. This directive operates on the principle of “a dead soldier is better than a kidnapped one,” believing that the abduction of soldiers imposes an exceedingly high cost on Israel, which it must pay to secure their release. The directive allows for indiscriminate fire if a soldier is captured, with the intention of killing both the captors and the captive, as precisely done by the Israeli forces on 7/10/2023. They launched rockets at populated areas to repel the attackers, resulting in the killing and burning of numerous Israeli and Palestinian civilians, as reported by international and Israeli media outlets.

An investigative report published on Ynet website, on 12/1/2024 revealed that the Israeli military high command ordered all units on 7/10/2023 to prevent the abduction of Israeli citizens “at all costs,” “even if this means risking or harming the lives of civilians in the area, including the abductees themselves.” The report disclosed that about 70 vehicles driven by Palestinians returning to GS “were shot by a combat helicopter, an anti-tank missile or a tank,” many of which contained Israeli captives.⁴



The *New York Times* newspaper extensively detailed, in an investigative report, the deaths of 12 Israeli settlers, when Brig. Gen. Barak Hiram, overseeing the Israeli operations aimed at reclaiming the Be’eri settlement and its vicinity, instructed the tank commander, “Break in, even if it means civilian casualties,” thus urging Israeli forces to overpower the Palestinian militants who held 14 captives in one of the houses.⁵ Israeli Channel 12 broadcasted footage captured by a military helicopter showing an Israeli tank firing at a civilian house in the Be’eri settlement.⁶ Furthermore, at the site of one of the clashes on October 7 at Kibbutz Kfar Aza, Col. Golan Vach, the commander of an Israeli search and rescue team, told the press that in one destroyed house, they discovered 15 people dead, including 8 infants, but also admitted, “The destruction is a result of the attack by our tanks. Since these houses were seized by Hamas, we had to reclaim the entire



settlement. It wouldn't have been possible without tanks.”⁷ Additionally, during a Channel 12 interview on 24/11/2023, young, inexperienced female tank operators, aged around 20 years old, who were directed to enter the Holit settlement, confessed that they were instructed to fire regardless of the circumstances.⁸



Multiple survivors have provided accounts confirming the sighting of Israeli helicopters and tanks firing at the settlements. These include the testimony of Erez Tidhar, a military veteran who was on October 7 as a rescue and evacuation volunteer for the Eitam unit,⁹ as well as the statement of a former Israeli captive Doron Katz-Asher, released during an exchange operation. Katz-Asher recounted the Israeli army's firing at the tractor transporting her to GS, killing her mother and leaving her and her daughter wounded.¹⁰

Yasmin Porat, one of only two survivors of the Israeli attack on a house in the Be'eri settlement testified to Israeli State Radio Kan that Palestinian resistance members treated them “very humanely.” However, the Israeli army, ordered by Barak Hiram, ended the confrontation by deliberately shelling the entire house, despite the captives still being inside. Porat reported that among the casualties was 12-year-old Liel Hatsroni, whose image Israeli officials later used in propaganda, falsely claiming that she was burned alive by Hamas.¹¹ Former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett also alleged that “She was murdered just because she's Jewish.”¹²

Family members of Israelis killed by Israeli tank fire demanded in a letter to the Israeli army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi to conduct a “comprehensive and transparent probe into the decisions and actions that led to this tragic outcome.”¹³

Reports by The Electronic Intifada website confirm that a significant number of Israeli civilians killed on 7/10/2023 were victims of Israeli attacks rather than Palestinian actions. By the end of that day, Israeli drone squadron 161 alone “performed no fewer than 110 attacks on some 1,000 targets, most of which were inside Israel,” following an initial assault, in the first four hours, in which “helicopters and fighter craft attacked about 300 targets, most in Israeli territory.”¹⁴

On 15/10/2023, Ynet reported that “28 combat helicopters fired over the course of a day,” with Apache pilots skipping “all the restrictions.” “A large part of the fire direction and receiving the targets from the forces fighting in the field reached the pilots through phone calls or sending pictures on WhatsApp,” leading to the launch of hundreds of 30mm cannon shells as well as Hellfire missiles.¹⁵



In an article published by *Haaretz* newspaper on 18/11/2023, and according to Israeli police, 364 people were killed at the Nova festival out of 4,400 were present at the event. The investigation revealed that an Israeli combat helicopter arrived at the scene and fired at resistance forces, also hitting some of the revelers who were there. The Israeli security establishment assessed that Palestinian resistance forces did not know in advance about the festival.¹⁶



Second: Claim of Killing Children

Although the falsehood of a claim has been proven, it sparked widespread outrage upon its publication, with the Israeli side exploiting it to manipulate inaccurate stances. On 10/10/2023, Nicole Zedeck, a correspondent for i24News, alleged that the Palestinian resistance had decapitated babies and that “About 40 babies were taken out on gurneys” in the Kfar Aza settlement.¹⁷ Soon after that, prominent international media outlets, such as sites of FOX News¹⁸ and NBC Montana;¹⁹ the *New York Post*²⁰ and *The Times*²¹ newspapers; and site of Mailonline;²² in addition to CNN news channel, and the *Daily Express*, *The Independent*, *Metro* and *The Daily Telegraph* newspapers,²³ all echoed this misleading assertion despite the lack of any official Israeli confirmation. Consequently, it created a widespread belief in the Western world that Hamas had perpetrated significant atrocities, influencing political decisions and public sentiment in these countries. This was not only unjust to Palestinian resistance but also harmed the Palestinian people, who endured atrocious attacks based on these inaccurate reports.



It also sparked significant global concern, especially after President Joe Biden asserted that he had seen “confirmed pictures of terrorists beheading children.” However, the White House spokesperson later refuted Biden’s personal viewing of the pictures, clarifying that “The president based his comments about the alleged atrocities on the claims from Netanyahu’s spokesman and media reports from Israel.”²⁴The investigative news site The Grayzone reported on 11/10/2023 that it has identified a key source of that claim, “He is David Ben Zion, a Deputy Commander of Unit 71 of the Israeli army who also happens to be an extremist settler leader who incited violent riots against Palestinians,” and demanded a Palestinian town be “wiped out.”²⁵ Despite some media outlets retracting the story, the majority of its negative impact had already taken hold. Removing it from the minds of many who had been exposed to it, even from those newspapers and sources that later denied its accuracy, became challenging.

Colonel Golan Vach, a commander of the IDF National Rescue Unit, stated on 17/10/2023 that “he had carried the bodies of decapitated babies” in Kfar Aza settlement.²⁶Also, Retired Lt. Col. Yaron Buskila, a member of the Israel Defense and Security Forum (IDSF), an organization founded by retired army generals that advocates (particularly on the international level) for the idea that peace in Israel can only be achieved through force, stated to The Epoch Times, an extreme right-wing international newspaper, that he spoke to a rabbi who reportedly visited the Kfar Aza settlement and told him that he saw decapitated children.²⁷

These allegations have been repeated by well-known Israeli organizations and institutions known for their lack of accuracy and credibility, such as the ZAKA organization and United Hatzalah.

On the other hand, official Israeli institutions have proven these allegations to be false. The National Insurance Institute of Israel (NII) published on its website on 9/11/2023 a list of 695 Israeli civilians who were killed on 7/10/2023 (and in the days that followed), along with their IDs and the circumstances of their deaths. Among them were 36 minors, 20 of whom were under the age of 15, including seven children under the age of ten. Ten were killed as a result of rocket attacks. According to NII, 46 civilians were killed in Kfar Aza, the youngest of whom was 14 years old. Only one infant girl, Mila Cohen (ten months old), along with her father and grandmother, was killed in Be’er Sheva. Her mother survived,²⁸ and the perpetrator of her murder has not been identified.



The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* denied, in a report, the allegations of beheaded babies and burnt babies on 7/10/2023, affirming that such a narrative is untrue and lacks evidence. It mentioned that “Most of the other children who were murdered were killed in or near their homes, usually with other family members,” and confirmed that there is



no evidence that children from several families were murdered together, rendering inaccurate Netanyahu's remark to President Biden that Hamas forces "took dozens of children, tied them up, burned them and executed them."²⁹ *Haaretz* stated, after examining each victim's name individually, that the total number of casualties is 1,219, including 1,105 killed on 7/10/2023; 851 civilians (including 32 children aged between 4-17 years and a 10-month-old infant), and 368 Israeli soldiers.³⁰

Therefore, these Israeli claims are false and inaccurate, and several media outlets and journalists have retracted reports they published regarding the allegation of beheaded babies. Among them is CNN channel, whose correspondent Sara Sidner apologized for reporting the news. The White House also retracted the statement made by Biden, and the Israeli army spokesperson to Anadolu Agency stated that the army does "not have any details or confirmation about that."³¹ Israeli journalist Yishai Cohen also deleted an interview he had posted on the X platform, which included claims that dead "Babies and children were hung on a cloth line in a row," during the attack launched by Palestinian resistance on Israeli settlements in the Gaza envelope on 7/10/2023. Cohen clarified, in tweets he posted on 29/11/2023 on the social media site X, that "The interview was offered to me by the IDF spokesperson. I did not know the interviewee [Yaron Buskila] before. A representative of DoC was present in all the filming and approved the broadcast."³²

Furthermore, Chaim Otmazgin, head of Zaka's "special forces," in a statement to Agence France-Presse (AFP), admitted that the organization's volunteers "sometimes misinterpreted what they saw." Whereas *Haaretz* published a report exposing Zaka's "cases of negligence, misinformation and a fundraising campaign that used the dead as props," and that Zaka "was entangled in debts of millions of shekels," while noting that since October 7, "says a source at Zaka, they have raised over 50 million shekels (\$13.7 million)." Additionally, Otmazgin, who "serves in the Home Front Command's rescue unit" was highlighted for having "played a central role in the association between the organization and the IDF."³³

Third: Claim of Killing Pregnant Women and Fetuses

On 24/10/2023, Yossi Landau, head of the Zaka organization in southern Israel, made false claims to various international media outlets, including the German daily newspaper *Bild* asserting that he found the body of a pregnant woman with a gunshot wound to her head and her abdomen cut open to remove the fetus. Landau specified to *Haaretz* the location where he purportedly witnessed this incident. However, survivors interviewed by the Israeli newspaper from the same building contradicted Landau's account, stating that there was no pregnant woman. Despite attempts by CheckNews, a fact-checking website launched by the French newspaper *Libération*, to contact Landau, no response was received. Nevertheless, Israeli authorities emphasized Landau's



testimony, and the Israeli embassy in the United States shared it on X/Twitter and Instagram on 27/10/2023.³⁴

In her article published on 22/11/2023, in *Newsweek* magazine, Michal Herzog, the wife of Israeli President Isaac Herzog, referred to this testimony and falsely claimed that there is a video showing Palestinians in one of the settlements “torturing a pregnant woman and removing her fetus.” However, it later became apparent that “the images are in reality taken from a video shared in 2018, which allegedly shows the abuse committed by a Mexican cartel.” Asked by CheckNews, the Israeli presidency implicitly acknowledged its mistake and attempted to evade by defending the Zaka organization claiming that its witness “was not able to answer us due to the traumas experienced”!! But according to a source within the forensic services involved in the identification of the October 7 casualties, no one corresponding to this description would have been taken care of,³⁵ and this decisively proves the falsehood of the Israeli claim.

Several other dubious or disproven stories have as their source another non-governmental organization, United Hatzalah, whose manager Eli Beer recounted to the Republican Jewish Coalition in Las Vegas, USA, on 28/10/2023, stories that were later proven to be false.³⁶ On 15/11/2023, Sara Netanyahu, the wife of the Israeli Prime Minister, wrote to several “first ladies”, including the wife of the President of the United States, Jill Biden, a message containing false and inflammatory content, alleging that “One of the kidnapped women was pregnant. She gave birth to her baby while a Hamas prisoner.” This letter was widely relayed by numerous Israeli and western media. On 18/11/2023, three days later, the British tabloid Daily Mail published an article claiming that a Thai woman, hostage of Hamas, had given birth in captivity. Information denied in the following days by the family of the hostage in question. None of the women released were pregnant or had just given birth.³⁷

Channel 13 journalist Raviv Drucker refuted many Israeli claims on 25/1/2024, and asked journalist Micky Rosenthal, who was with him on the program, about the reason behind using these false statements. Rosenthal replied, “to increase the magnitude of hatred for Hamas.” As Rosenthal put it, “The war is not only military, not only political, it’s mainly media.”³⁸



Fourth: Claims of Rape Crimes

On 18/11/2023, CNN aired a report by journalist Jake Tapper. The report claims to provide testimonies on “rape crimes” against Israeli women that allegedly took place on 7/10/2023. The CNN report begins with an interview with Cochav Elkayam-Levy. She



is identified as an “expert in human rights law who organized a civil committee to document evidence.” The speaker is indeed an expert, but not of human rights law, according to a report on Mondoweiss website, on 1/12/2023, she had a post for the Israeli government’s Attorney General’s Office in the International Law Department. She has tight connections with the National Security Council for the Israeli Prime Minister. Elkayam-Levy is also the founder and director of the “Dvora Institute,” which works as a close advisory body to the Israeli prime minister’s “National Security Council.” However, in her interview, which opens the CNN report, Elkayam-Levy presents nothing but justifications for the absence of evidence and facts.³⁹

A CNN report presented a video of an Israeli soldier, showing his back only, identified by the letter “G,” claiming to be a paramedic of unit “669” – the Israeli Air Force Special Tactics rescue unit. In his testimony, which was later proven false, the soldier says that during a search in the houses of Kibbutz Be’eri, during combat, he opened a door of a bedroom to find the bodies of two girls aged between 13 and 15, both killed, one of them naked with semen remains on her lower back. But according to a report on Mondoweiss website, upon examining the names of all the girls killed in Kibbutz Be’eri on 7/10/2023, to match the facts, no pair of Israeli teenagers meeting that description were found dead together. Furthermore, according to an interview with Channel 13, the leader of the Kibbutz Be’eri battle, Brigadier General Barak Hiram, counted 13 different military units that formed the combat force that were there – Unit 669 was not among them.⁴⁰

The CNN report then brings two witnesses to talk about the conditions of the dead bodies they have seen. The first appears under a pseudonym for an unknown reason, despite showing her face and wearing civilian clothes. The report identified her as a “volunteer” at the morgue of the Shura military base. The witness previously appeared in a written report by Ynet, published on 31/10/2023, that included a photo of her in military uniform, where she was identified as a reservist corporal in the Israeli army, and in which she did not mention any claims of sexual violence. The second witness is Rami Shmuel, identified by the report as one of the organizers of the “Nova” festival. In fact, he is an organizer of the “UNITY” festival – another electronic music festival, held the day before the “Nova” in the same location. CNN fails to mention the fact that Rami Shmuel was not present at the festival location during the attack. According to Shmuel’s Facebook post, published on the afternoon of 7/10/2023, he was “safe” in a villa in Netivot settlement.⁴¹

In her Newsweek article on 22/11/2023, Michal Herzog referred to a video showing Naama Levy, a soldier in the Israeli army and border patrol officer, being captured from the Nahal Oz military base, described as “in bloodied pants held captive at gunpoint.”⁴² However, there’s no evidence presented to support this accusation besides the blood, which isn’t enough to prove the claim of rape. It’s possible that the blood on Levy’s pants came from her wounded and tied hands behind her back, or from sitting on the



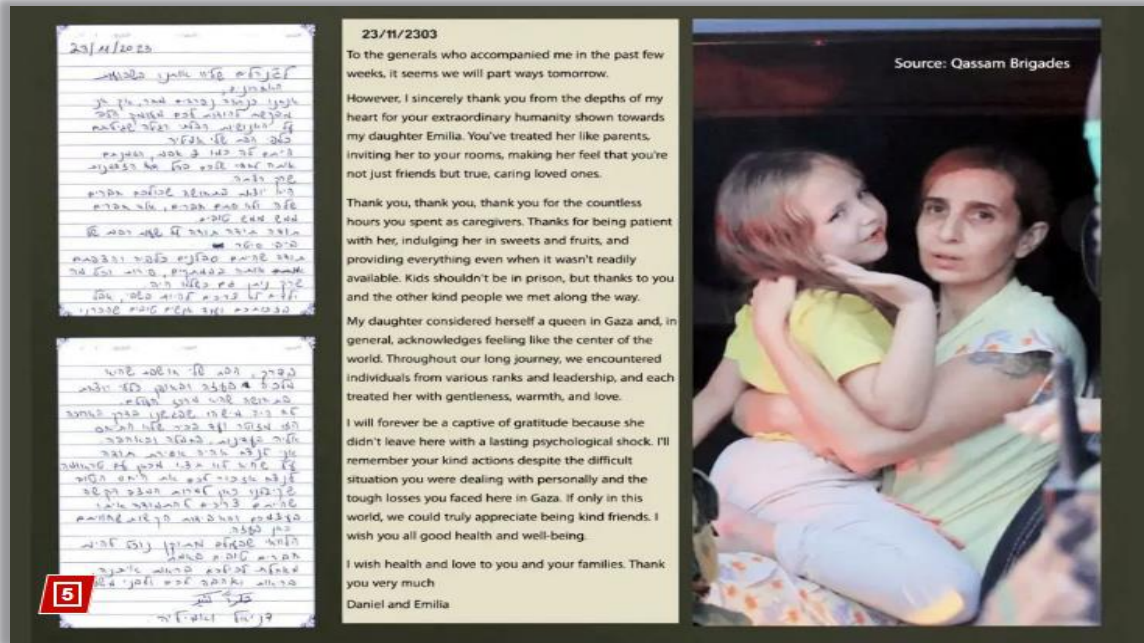
ground stained with someone else's blood. This is because the video showing Levy's arrest depicts her standing against a wall with female soldiers in the military barracks when she was captured. She had the blood stain on her pants at that time, and then she was taken away in a military jeep as shown in the video.

Israel has not provided any criminal evidence or testimonies from women it claims were raped. According to The Times of Israel, its investigation "found physical evidence of sexual assault was broadly not collected" from bodies, and the window for gathering conclusive evidence had passed because "rape kits, which have a 48-hour window to be collected after an assault, were not prioritized." Israeli police spokesperson Dean Elsdunne stated on 14/11/2023, that during the first 48 hours, the Gaza envelope area was still an "active combat zone." Elsdunne added that "many bodies arriving at Shura were in such bad condition that collecting physical evidence of sexual assault, such as semen or DNA samples, was not possible." Mirit Ben Mayor, who leads communications for the Israeli police, said much of the state's case will rest on "circumstantial evidence." In addition, Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai said, "Many of the victims who survived the massacres are not ready to speak." According to May Golan, Israel's Women's Empowerment Minister, "the very few 'victims' who survived are receiving psychiatric treatment and are therefore, conveniently, unable to talk."⁴³ How can Israel prove rape accusations without concrete evidence or testimony from the "victims" alleging sexual assault?

However, the world saw Israel's detainees from the Palestinian resistance in Gaza saying goodbye warmly to women and children in front of cameras. They exchanged handshakes, jokes and smiles, showing clear evidence of the resistance's treatment of women.

Despite the majority of detainees not giving public interviews, the media shared the experience of detainee Mia Limberg, who left captivity with her dog Bella. Also, there was a thank-you message from detainee Daniel Aloni to Hamas members for their treatment of her and her daughter Emilia. Additionally, a TV interview of a mother Chen Goldstein-Almog and her released daughter Agam Goldstein-Almog recounted how Hamas members treated them with respect, where one Hamas member, for example, used a towel during arm-wrestling to avoid physical contact. The daughter said, "For them, women are sacred. Women are like queens." Chen mentioned that "they gave her [daughter] a beautiful name there... Salsabeel, it means water and it is mentioned in the Quran."⁴⁴ Is this the same Palestinian resistance group that Israel alleges, using unfounded fabricated accounts, committed the rape crime on 7/10/2023, in an attempt to convince the world?





“I will forever be a captive of gratitude”... The Al-Qassam Brigades shared a photo of a message written by one of the detainees (Daniel Aloni) before her release in the exchange deal on 24/11/2023. In the message, she thanked the members and leaders of the Brigades for their support during her and her daughter's time in captivity.⁴⁵

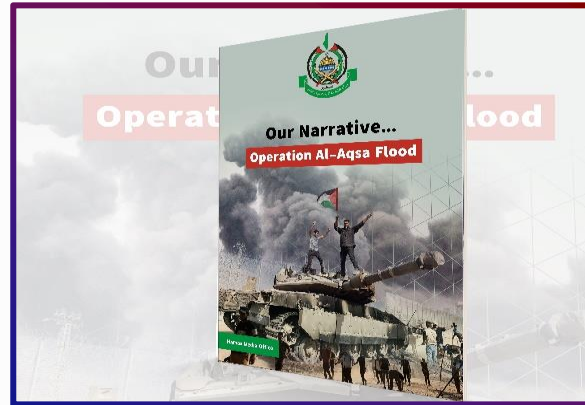


Mia Limberg at the moment of her release along with her dog on 28/11/2023.



Hamas’s Narrative⁴⁶

It’s important to note that the Hamas movement, amidst numerous false Israeli accusations after Operation al-Aqsa Flood on 7/10/2023, had its media office issue a document in January 2024 to clarify that their operation specifically “targeted the Israeli military sites, and sought to arrest the enemy’s soldiers to pressure on the Israeli authorities to release the thousands of Palestinians held in Israeli jails through a prisoners exchange deal. Therefore, the operation focused on destroying the Israeli army’s Gaza Division, the Israeli military sites stationed near the Israeli settlements around Gaza.” These locations were responsible for bombarding Gaza and its residents.



It also clarified that “Avoiding harm to civilians, especially children, women and elderly people is a religious and moral commitment by all the Al-Qassam Brigades’ fighters. We reiterate that the Palestinian resistance was fully disciplined and committed to the Islamic values during the operation and that the Palestinian fighters only targeted the occupation soldiers and those who carried weapons against our people,” adding, “if there was any case of targeting civilians; it happened accidentally.”

Conclusion

The Israeli accusations against the Palestinian resistance and GS residents of brutality and inhumanity in the attack on 7/10/2023 are an attempt to legitimize further Israeli crimes in GS. These accusations do not justify the retaliation against more than 2,325 massacres, the killing of more than 27,238, including more than 12,000 children, and more than 8,190 women, 122 journalists, 339 medical staff, and 46 civil defense members. Nor do they justify the loss of more than 7 thousand Palestinians under the rubble (70% of them are children and women), the injury of more than 66,452 Palestinians, the displacement of more than 2 million people in GS, and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of



residential units, mosques, churches, health centers and government buildings, all until 3/2/2024, the 120th day of the war.⁴⁷

Israeli crimes in GS are well-documented with audio and visual evidence, and even admitted by Israeli officials, despite their false denials. This is often encouraged by the extreme right-wing settlement movement, which, according to a *Haaretz* article by Uri Misgav, prohibits criticism of the government and Israel's "saintly soldiers." They believe that "it is forbidden to end the fighting; dead soldiers and hostages are a worthy, noble sacrifice on the way to redemption, the silver platter on which the State of Judea will arise. For this camp, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is the Messiah's donkey, a useful idiot. They keep warning him that the day he dares stop the fighting is the day that his government falls."⁴⁸



Endnotes

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