

The New York Times and the Gaza crisis: Israeli war propaganda in the guise of news

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The *New York Times* is the leading media organ of US liberalism and is closely aligned to the Democratic Party. In recent days it has planted a series of propaganda pieces disguised as news articles, which aim to justify Israel's war crimes in Gaza.

These articles appear in the context of worldwide revulsion at the criminal methods Israel is using in the densely populated Gaza strip, home to 1.4 million people. So far, more than 900 Palestinians have been killed, about half of them civilians, and thousands more have been wounded in an Israeli air, sea and ground assault that is utilizing advanced weapons supplied by the United States against a virtually defenseless population.

On January 9, the *New York Times* published a brief article on its front page, "Fighter Sees His Paradise in Gaza's Pain," written by Taghreed El-Khodary, reporting from Gaza. The article describes a horrific scene of suffering and death in the Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. But it focuses on a wounded fighter for Islamic Jihad, who is depicted as welcoming the killing of Palestinian civilians as a form of martyrdom and a boon to his organization's aims. According to El-Khodary, this shows "the way ordinary people are squeezed between suicidal fighters and a military behemoth."

What cynicism! The article feigns sympathy for the Palestinian victims of Israeli mass murder in order to suggest that any resistance to the perpetrators is illegitimate.

The population of Gaza is not being "squeezed" between Israel and those who are fighting its onslaught. As more and more evidence makes clear, the Palestinians are the *target*—not the "collateral damage"—of a campaign of bloodletting and collective punishment designed to terrorize the population.

In a January 11 article by Steven Erlanger entitled "A Gaza War Full of Traps and Trickery," the *Times* offers a

more elaborate defense of the war crimes Israel has already perpetrated—and others that will follow.

The article's first full paragraph lays out the argument: " Hamas, with training from Iran and Hezbollah, has used the last two years to turn Gaza into a deadly maze of tunnels, booby traps and sophisticated roadside bombs. *Weapons are hidden in mosques, schoolyards and civilian houses, and the leadership's war room is a bunker beneath Gaza's largest hospital*, Israeli intelligence officials say." (Emphasis added.)

The *Times* serves up, as if it were uncontested fact, Israel's unsubstantiated claims that the "mosques, schoolyards, and civilian houses" which it continues to destroy—killing hundreds of civilians in the process—double as weapons stores, and therefore deserve to be destroyed, civilian casualties notwithstanding.

Even were Israel's assertions of weapons stores true, from the standpoint of international law, not to mention an elementary respect for human life, this would not justify the deliberate bombing of civilian targets. Where, in any case, are the Palestinians supposed to place their weapons? Perhaps Erlanger thinks they should be stored in a clearly labeled warehouse. Or, more to the point, that the Palestinians should be totally and permanently disarmed.

Erlanger's claim that the Gaza leadership is hiding in a "bunker beneath Gaza's largest hospital" is especially chilling. He is all but justifying, a priori, the bombing of the hospital, where the maimed and dying are receiving desperately inadequate care due to Israel's blockade and its targeting of ambulances, medical supplies and personnel. Do Erlanger's unnamed sources in "Israeli intelligence" already have plans to destroy the hospital?

The article similarly presents as fact Israeli claims that Hamas has "training from Iran and Hezbollah." The newspaper chooses not to point out that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) possess some of the most deadly

military hardware in the world, courtesy of \$3 billion in annual funding from Washington.

Erlanger then notes that Hamas militants are “unwilling to ... come into the open” and are “fighting in civilian clothes; even the police have been ordered to take off their uniforms.”

Here the implicit argument is that the IDF’s killing of civilians, as well as its mass arrest of the male portion of the Palestinian population, to which Erlanger refers in passing, is justified because Palestinian fighters do not don uniforms and present themselves to the Israelis to be executed. Once again, the author fails to note that in the first hours of the Israeli attack, all Gazans wearing the uniforms of police or security personnel were targeted by missiles and bombs.

To bolster the Israeli lie that Hamas is responsible for the mounting toll of death and destruction in Gaza because it uses civilians as “human shields,” Erlanger cites “an Israeli journalist embedded with Israeli troops” to claim that “in one apartment building in Zeitoun, in northern Gaza, Hamas set an inventive, deadly trap,” placing “a mannequin in the hallway off the building’s main entrance.” He continues: “They hoped to draw fire from Israeli soldiers who might, through the blur of night vision goggles and split-second decisions, mistake the figure for a fighter. The mannequin was rigged to explode and bring down the building.”

Leaving aside the credibility of Erlanger’s source, what is the implication of this tale? Clearly, that Hamas is deliberately luring Israeli soldiers into blowing up apartment buildings and unwittingly causing civilian casualties.

The author then identifies the Israeli journalist as Ron Ben-Yishai, “a senior military correspondent for the newspaper *Yediot Aharonot*.” Erlanger does not let on that Ron Ben-Yishai is a right-wing journalist with longstanding ties to the IDF and the Likud Party.

The author’s choice of Zeitoun is no accident. In the neighborhood south of Gaza City, the IDF rounded up an extended family, forced it into a building at gun point and fired missiles on the building, killing at least 70 people—all civilians, mostly women and children. Then, for four days, the Israelis refused to allow the International Red Cross access to the neighborhood and stood by, offering no assistance to the dying. As aid workers finally made their way to the neighborhood during Israel’s three-hour pause in bombardment, they found unspeakable scenes of human suffering, including four young children, half-dead, clinging to the corpses of

their mothers (see: Gaza: The massacre in Zeitoun)

Erlanger continues: “Israeli officials say that they are obeying the rules of war and trying hard not to hurt noncombatants but that Hamas is using civilians as human shields in the expectation that Israel will try to avoid killing them.

“Israeli press officers call the tactics of Hamas cynical, illegal and inhumane; even Israel’s critics agree that Hamas’s regular use of rockets to fire at civilians in Israel, and its use of civilians as shields in Gaza, are also violations of the rules of war.”

In reference to the now infamous IDF bombing of a schoolhouse and UN refuge in Jabalya, which killed more than 40 people, Erlanger writes: “The Israelis said they returned fire in response to mortar shells fired at Israeli troops [claims that have been rejected outright by the UN and other observers]. Such an action is legal...”

He goes on to hedge somewhat his legal brief for this particular war crime, adding that “there are questions about whether the force used was proportional under the laws of war, given the danger to noncombatants.” In fact, under international law, what the IDF did would be a crime even if its story about mortar shells were true, because such a grossly disproportionate response is illegal.

On the same day as Erlanger’s article, the *Times*’ public editor, Clark Hoyt, wrote a column citing complaints of biased reporting from both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian readers. Noting in passing, without comment or criticism, Israeli censorship of the war, including a total ban on reporters entering Gaza, he concluded with a complacent and self-satisfied: “The *Times* ... has tried its best to do a fair, balanced and complete job—and has largely succeeded.”

The *New York Times*’ dishonest and cynical defense of Israel’s slaughter in Gaza is a measure of its own moral and political degeneration and that of US liberalism as a whole. It underscores the complicity of the entire American media, liberal and conservative, in war crimes.



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