Al Jazeera’s Gaza bureau fired on after threats from Israeli government

David Brown
23 July 2014

Gunshots were fired into Al Jazeera's office in Gaza Tuesday, one day after Israel's foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, called for the network to be shut down.

Al Jazeera evacuated the building after two “very precise shots” hit its 11th floor offices. No one was killed in the incident, but according to Al Jazeera's press release, the gunshots panicked locals living in the building and led the Associated Press to vacate its offices in the same building.

On Monday, Lieberman had compared the network’s coverage of the Gaza war to Nazi propaganda and accused it of terrorism. “Just as Britain wouldn't allow [the Nazi publication] *Der Stürmer* [to work] from London,” he said, “or the US [allow] Al Qaeda TV from New York, we will work to ban Al Jazeera from Israel.”

According to Lieberman, Al Jazeera “has abandoned even the perception of being a reliable news organization and broadcasts from Gaza and to the world anti-Israel incitement, lies and encouragement to the terrorists.”

In response to the gunfire, Al Jazeera stated: “The foreign minister's comments were a direct threat against us and appear to have been taken as a green light for the targeting of our journalists in Gaza. We hold the Israeli authorities fully responsible. They have put lives of journalists in danger.”

In a separate statement, the news outlet called the incident a “dark sign for all journalists operating in the territory.”

Al Jazeera is the state-funded news agency of Qatar, which allows its reporting to occasionally cut across US foreign policy. Qatar has taken a more critical public stance in relation to the Israeli attack on Gaza than the other Arab bourgeois regimes.

Al Jazeera has frequently been the target of repression for its reporting. Three of its journalists are currently imprisoned by the Egyptian military junta on fabricated charges of conspiring with the Muslim Brotherhood. Its offices have previously been struck in war zones.

In 2001, Al Jazeera’s Kabul bureau was bombed by the US just before Northern Alliance troops took control of the city. Just a month before, then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell had asked the emir of Qatar to rein in Al Jazeera's editorial line.

In 2003, US forces fired a missile into the network’s Baghdad bureau, killing correspondent Tariq Ayoub. In both instances, in Kabul and Baghdad, Al Jazeera had communicated its location to the US military to avoid accidental fire.

In its coverage of both wars, Al Jazeera distinguished itself by publishing video and pictures depicting the brutality of the invasions. In the current Gaza invasion, it is once again presenting news considered politically damaging to the Israeli state and its backers in the US and Europe.

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