**I Don’t Trust the AP’s Report on Civilian Deaths in Gaza and Neither Should You**

February 14, 2015

By Algemeiner Staff

Algemeiner http://www.algemeiner.com/2015/02/14/analysis-i-dont-trust-the-aps-report-on-civilian-deaths-in-gaza-and-neither-should-you/

The Israel-hostile Associated Press is at it again. [Note this article from Friday alleging that IDF air strikes on Gazan houses killed mostly civilians during last summer’s war against Hamas.](http://news.yahoo.com/ap-exclusive-israeli-house-strikes-killed-mostly-civilians-170243561.html) The article—entitled “AP Exclusive: Israeli house strikes killed mostly civilians”—was penned by Karin Laub, Fares Akram and Mohammed Daraghmeh.

Have a read, and then consider this:

1. First, given what I revealed about AP’s civilian casualty reporting DURING the war—in my “Media Intifada exposé at [Forbes.com](http://forbes.com/)—I simply have no faith in their examination now of these 247 airstrikes. I simply don’t trust them, and nor should you. They violated their responsibilities to readers during the war, and have never come forward to acknowledge that their prior journalism was sloppy and improper (or worse). In that prior reporting, AP and other major media outlets (including the New York Times and Reuters) simply parroted the Hamas claim that most of the war dead were civilians. Sometimes they attributed it to the UN, which received its figures from Hamas. Why did this matter? Because every time a major media outlet reported that “a majority” or “a vast majority” or the “overwhelming number” of casualties were civilians, it reverberated around the globe like a missile—fueling anti-Israel and general anti-Semitic sentiment (and violence against Jews in Europe and elsewhere).

So what was AP’s methodology for its current “examination” of the 247 airstrikes on houses? We’ll never know, because the wire service doesn’t tell us. What specific problems did they encounter that might have skewed or affected their research? We’ll never know, because AP doesn’t tell us those anecdotes.

2. Last month, the highly-regarded Meir Amit Intelligence and Information Center released its latest report on the subject of civilian casualties. Their experts are taking the time to go through the deaths, one by one, and their final tally won’t be available for months—if not years. Indeed, after Operation Cast Lead [2008-9], as I’d reported, “nearly two years passed before a Palestinian minister inadvertently let slip that the IDF figures then were correct,” according to Eado Hecht, an independent defense analyst who has taught military theory and history at the IDF Command and General Staff College. (Hecht currently works with the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, one of Israel’s leading think tanks.)

However, in the Meir Amit center’s January report, they announced that 1,600 of the 2,140 Gazans who were killed have been identified as such: 55% are combatants, and 45% non-combatants. For the other 540 people, they do not yet know which category to put them in. The center also says that Hamas is obfuscating the actual lists and affiliations, partly because of objective technical difficulties (poor paperwork and a lack of access to some of the bodies), and partly deliberately as part of its propaganda campaign against Israel.

The article in AP is focused on “a particular subset of the fatalities—those killed while inside houses ostensibly targeted by the Israelis,” defense analyst Hecht told me on Friday. “I write ‘ostensibly’ targeted by Israelis because something in the order of 2,600(+) Palestinian rockets and mortar bombs were fired deliberately (most of them) or by mistake into Palestinian residential areas. The deliberate fire being against Israeli soldiers in that area—but without warning local civilians to move out. So of the 247 houses struck, how many were clearly struck by Israel and how many by Palestinian fire.”

3. You won’t read what I have in my Point #2 in the AP story. Perhaps their reporters and editors felt it would take away some of the thunder from their angle? They DO cite Meir Amit this time around—but only on the center’s confirmation that they have no evidence of female fighters, as well as the center’s questioning of the reliability of Gaza witnesses (a few words only). AP then credits “preliminary” UN figures that at least 66% of the total dead were civilians. Really? And where did the UN get that number? We know the answer. And why didn’t AP do their readers a service by at least including the 45% figure from the Meir Amit center that contradicts the UN/Hamas?

There are some journalists in my business who don’t think it’s a good idea for reporters like me to expose our own. It’s the “Glass Houses” fear, and it’s certainly not a career-booster. But I would remind them of the code of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, which states: “Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers AND EACH OTHER [emphasis added by me].” The code also says that journalists should “expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.” Furthermore, journalists should… “Test the accuracy of information from all sources.”

4. It’s worth noting that one of the AP bylines on today’s story belongs to Fares Akram. In my summer article, I exposed Akram—then the New York Times’ top Gaza-based reporter—for having used Yasser Arafat as his profile photo on Facebook at one point. I also noted that he had waxed poetically about Arafat in the context of “heights of great men” in the caption of a second photo there. In addition, in 2009, following an Israeli air strike that tragically killed his father and a cousin, Akram wrote that “I am finding it hard to distinguish between what the Israelis call terrorists and the Israeli pilots and tank crews who are invading Gaza.” Would that not raise questions about his ability to be impartial in his reporting on the subject? Should it not raise questions about whether he might be better suited to cover other conflicts instead? Given my own strong (open) views and investigative reporting about Israel, I could certainly never cover a war in Gaza for AP. Or could I—if Akram can?

Akram, a Palestinian resident of Gaza, had also published more than a dozen dispatches for Al Jazeera (owned by Hamas-funding Qatar)—parallel to his Times reporting—during last summer’s war. Akram left the Times in the autumn; AP scooped him right up.

5. One other thing I noted in my article last summer (which I’m delighted that more than 114,000 people felt worthy of viewing—thus supporting this kind of media criticism): A groundbreaking study ignored by my colleagues came out in June of 2014, a month before the Israel-Hamas war started. A prominent group of American public health experts found that civilian casualties constituted 85% to 90% of the 248 armed conflicts in the world since the end of World War II. While even one civilian casualty in Gaza is a tragedy, given the complexities and civilian-shielding in Gaza, what the IDF has accomplished there will be a model for future warfare. Might not AP consider such statistics when they write articles such as Friday’s? Given the rise in anti-Semitism around the world just since the summer’s war, such stats might give some historical context that might even lessen the Jew-hatred—or at least not expand it.

6. I’ll close with more from my communication today with defense expert Hecht. “UN figures are not really UN figures,” he says, which I also reported back in August. “They are Hamas-controlled figures passed on to the UN.

Furthermore, no one knows exactly how many houses were targeted by the Israelis, but UN studies (and this time they really are UN studies, using using satellite imagery) claim severe damage to thousands of buildings (one figure is 20,000 destroyed or severely damaged). The percentage of civilians killed in 247 houses alone is only indicative of someone choosing specific houses to count while ignoring other houses that did not suit the specific slant they were trying to give. Especially since the total count of children, women and elderly men given by the Palestinians themselves is a total of 943. In other words, in just over 1% of a total of some 20,000 buildings destroyed or severely damaged, were inflicted 508 of all the 943 (just under 54%) children, women and elderly men the Palestinians claim were killed.

“Even assuming that all the remaining 435 children, women and elderly men killed were each killed in a different house,” Hecht continues, “that means that at most 682 houses with children, women and elderly men in them were hit by the Israelis—about 3.5% of all the houses hit! Even taking the much lower number of houses destroyed given by other sources—approximately 10,000 buildings destroyed or severely damaged—that only raises the percentage of houses destroyed with civilians in them to about 7%. Of course, in fact the civilian casualties were not evenly spread one-per-house, so actually the percentages are much much lower. It seems to me that—even assuming, for the sake of argument, that all these figures are true and all the damage was caused by Israelis—then the Israelis were extremely circumspect in their strikes, and made a great effort to prevent civilian casualties.

“In short,” concludes Hecht, “people are figuring with the numbers to suit their fancy (political agendas).”

AP member outlets sometimes tweak the original AP headlines. In this case, several publications have done so—distorting the article itself and making Israel look even worse. Case in point: “Stars and Stripes,” which provides information and news to the U.S. military community. Their headline on the piece is “AP Review: Israeli airstrikes in Gaza killed mostly civilians.” Thus, a reader is quickly led to believe that the AP examination doesn’t pertain just to houses, but to all of Gaza. Similarly, the headline in the Idaho Statesman reads “Airstrikes in Gaza killed hundreds of civilians last summer.” (The website says the article was updated but, alas, not the headline.)

More examples, in case you’re not disgusted enough: The San Angelo Standard Times headline is “Civilians bore brunt of Israeli strikes.” The Independent (UK): “Mostly civilians killed in Gaza raids.”

Back to AP itself, I’m not asking the wire service to like Israel. (Articles by former AP correspondents such as Matti Friedman make it pretty clear that the wire service is biased against the country). I’m not asking that Fares Akram like or even respect Israel. I doubt that can ever happen. But what I am expecting—indeed what the hundreds of media outlets that own AP must expect—is fair reporting. That’s how I was raised as a journalism student, and as a practitioner of investigative reporting for three decades. It would have taken just a few sentences to be fair in this one article, but that didn’t come to pass.

In the old days, the Columbia Journalism Review might have taken notice. But I suspect they’ll pass on this.