**Palestinian prisoner issue plagued by selective reporting**

March 6, 2013

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<http://www.aijac.org.au/news/article/palestinian-prisoner-issue-plagued-by-selective->

Who are Samer Issawi and Ayman Sharawneh, the hunger-striking Palestinian prisoners that have become the latest "cause célèbre" for pro-Palestinian activists?

(See our [update](http://www.aijac.org.au/news/article/west-bank-unrest) on how the prisoner issue appears to be a deliberate pretext for creating unrest in an effort to push the Palestinian agenda prior to US President Barack Obama's visit to the region later this month).

Unfortunately, many recent news reports on the pair have neglected to report on the background of terror activity of these and other Palestinian prisoners. In doing so, the media has omitted crucial information to give perspective and balance to their coverage on a very contentious issue.

A typical example could be found buried in [an AFP report](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_world/view/1255007/1/.html) on Palestinian unrest related to the prisoner issue, dated February 19:

Issawi, 33, and Sharawna, 36, were long-term security prisoners who were initially released by Israel under a prisoner swap deal in October 2011

What their original crimes were left to the reader's imagination, however a number of media watchdog NGOs, including CAMERA, CiF Watch and BBC Watch have followed up on these lapses in reporting with blogs that have given a clearer picture of just who Issawi and Sharawneh are, and some perspective into the security risk these prisoners may pose.

In a response to a query by CAMERA an IDF Spokesman [said the following](http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=2&x_article=2401) about Samer Issawi:

[Issawi] was convicted of severe crimes, which including five attempts of intentional death. This included four shootings, between July 2001 and February 2002, in which Issawi and his partners fired on police cars and buses traveling between Ma'ale Adumim and Jerusalem. In one attack, a policeman was injured and required surgery.

On October 30, 2001, Issawi, together with an accomplice, fired at two students walking from the Hebrew University campus to their car in a nearby parking lot. In another case, Issawi provided guns and explosive devices to a squad, who fired on a bus. Finally, in December 2001, Issawi ordered an attack on security personnel at Hebrew University, providing a squad with a pistol and a pipebomb. Two of the squad members tracked security personnel but opted not to execute the attack.

In addition, CAMERA revealed a discrepancy regarding the reporting over the severity of Issawi's fast. Both an Israeli prison spokeswoman and the Palestinian Minister of Prisoner Affairs were quoted as saying that al-Issawi had eaten intermittently over the past 200 days - as further reported by the Associated Press, which [termed it](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gNUIeQNDIECgS_U9wkvto28gSOjg?docId=3a4f3dd810fa4791b64aa2e33ecc68d3) an "on-again, off-again" hunger strike.

Meanwhile many news organisations, including Ha'aretz and the Guardian, had continued to report that Issawi's fast had been strict and all-encompassing.

On Sunday, Issawi was given a forum to slam Israel in an op-ed on the Guardian's "Comment is Free" section on their website.  
  
[This op-ed](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/mar/03/hunger-strikers-fighting-for-palestinians-israel) was published online in tandem with [a news article](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/03/palestinian-hunger-striker-uk-israel-sanctions) by Phoebe Greenwood titled "Palestinian hunger striker demands UK impose sanctions on Israel".

It should be acknowledged that, in contrast to other reporters, Greenwood did reference Issawi's crimes in her story.

Issawi, who was affiliated with the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, was arrested in April 2002 and sentenced to 26 years in prison for membership of an illegal organisation, attempted murder and possession of explosives. During the second intifada he manufactured and distributed pipe bombs and in several incidents opened fire indiscriminately on Israeli civilian vehicles.

She also cited Palestinian Authority's Minister for Prisons Issa Qaraqe, who noted that Issawi and Sharawneh had turned down an offer to be released on condition that they be "deported", but failed to mention to the readers that the offer was actually to release the prisoners to the Palestinian-ruled Gaza Strip.

Issawi's op-ed was subsequently featured in the Guardian's print edition the day after it was published online.

Not surprisingly, his self-aggrandising essay absolved all Palestinian prisoners from responsibility for any wrongdoing whatsoever, Issawi borrowing from a narrative used last year by former Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath ahead of the UN vote upgrading the status of the Palestinian delegation to that of a non-member state.

Issawi, [like Shaath](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/palestinianauthority/9645925/Britain-must-atone-for-its-sins-in-Palestine.html) said that the UK must take the lead in sanctioning Israel since Britain "has a historic responsibility for the tragedy of my people" - an allusion to the Balfour Declaration.

Ayman Sharawneh's crimes were also a mystery if you read the reporting by most news organisations. A good example of this can be observed in a recent Associated Press story about on the hunger striker, [which was particularly vague](http://www.timesofisrael.com/supreme-court-rejects-hunger-strikers-release-appeal/).

Ayman Sharawneh was originally sentenced for 38 years for militant activity but was released in 2011 exchange for a captive soldier.

However, the fact-checking website CiF Watch [reminded readers](http://cifwatch.com/tag/ayman-ismail-al-sharawna/) on February 11 of the severity of Sharawneh's charges:

Al-Sharawna was jailed in Israel because of his involvement in a terrorist attack [on May 11, 2002], in which two Palestinians placed an explosive device near a group of civilians in Beersheba and fled the scene. Eighteen Israelis were injured in the attack. (A technical fault prevented the bomb from exploding fully.)

He was sentenced to 38 years in prison, but released on October 18, 2011 as part of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal.

On January 31, 2012, the IDF re-arrested Al-Sharawna, resident of a Palestinian town near Hebron, on suspicion of having returned to terror planning with a Hamas cell in the West Bank.

On Monday, BBC Watch [dissected a BBC report](http://bbcwatch.org/2013/03/04/bbc-continues-to-conceal-terror-connections-of-palestinian-hunger-strikers/) from February 28 on two other Palestinian prisoners, Tariq Qaadan and Jafar Ezzedine, who had recently ended their hunger strike after receiving concessions from Israeli authorities.   
  
This report also failed to give details of the prisoners' background in terror activity, and why that might have factored into their detention, As BBC Watch reported:

Tariq Qaadan and Jafar Ezzedine are both from Arabe near Jenin and both are senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives.  
Qaadan has been arrested several times in the past, including in 2002 and 2004. In March 2011 Qaadan was arrested by the Palestinian Authority in connection with investigations into the terror attack in Jerusalem in which British national Mary Jean Gardner was killed and over 50 people injured.  
Jafar Ezzedine has also been arrested in the past and took part in a previous hunger strike organized by Palestinian prisoners in May 2012.

Furthermore, the BBC had ignored the fact that the Israeli Supreme Court had reviewed Ezzedine's case, BBC Watch continued.

[In February], Ezzedine took his case to the High Court of Justice, which rejected his appeal, clarifying that a hunger strike cannot be considered a factor in decisions relating to the length of administrative detention.

Finally, there is the issue of the Palestinian prisoner Arafat Jaradat, who died in Israeli custody last month. Again, selective reporting by much of the media omitted crucial pieces of the story, which may have misled readers that Jaradat's arrest was itself unwarranted or his detention excessive; as well as the circumstances of his death in custody.

(In spite of Palestinian claims to the contrary, the autopsy yielded [no evidence of torture or physical abuse](http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=304907).)

On February 24, the New York Times' bureau chief Jodi Rudoren [reported](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/25/world/middleeast/palestinians-demand-inquiry-into-detainees-death-in-israel.html?_r=0):

After weeks of intensifying protests in solidarity with the hunger strikers, attention turned Sunday to Mr. Jaradat, who relatives said worked at a gas station, was the father of a 4-year-old girl and a 2-year-old boy, and came from a family in which all the men had spent time in Israeli jails. He was arrested last Monday over throwing stones at Israeli cars near a West Bank settlement during November's conflict between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

The Guardian's Phoebe Greenwood gave a similar account to Rudoren's, but included a significant additional piece of information - that a person was injured in the rock-throwing attack.

The 30-year-old, a petrol station worker and father of two, was arrested on 18 February in relation to a stone-throwing incident in November during which an Israeli was slightly injured.

Haaretz, however, reported that Jaradat has been suspected not only of stoning cars, [but also throwing Molotov cocktails](http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/what-killed-arafat-jaradat.premium-1.506629) - firebombs - a much more serious offense.

The Jerusalem Post's report [went even further](http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=304267).

Security forces had detained Arafat Shalish Shahin Jaradat, 30, last Monday for allegedly throwing stones and a Molotov cocktail at soldiers, his attorney, Kamia Sabbagh, said.  
Palestinian sources said that Jaradat belonged to Fatah's armed-wing, the Aksa Martyrs Brigades.  
...  
According to sources within the Shin Bet (Israel Security Service), Jaradat was arrested on Monday, after residents from his village of Sa'ir outside Hebron said that he took part in a rock-throwing attack in November that wounded an Israeli.  
Jaradat confessed to the attack during questioning.

Meanwhile, CiF Watch confirmed the Jerusalem Post's account, [citing reports](http://cifwatch.com/2013/02/25/the-guardians-phoebe-greenwood-ignores-arafat-jaradats-terror-affiliation/) in Arab news sites such as Ahram online, Al Jazeera and Al Arabia that Jaradat was a member of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades terror group - this being confirmed by statements by the group itself, and by a PA official. This likely further explains Jaradat's extended detention.