**Top Investigative Reporters Assail Associated Press Story on Gaza Civilian Casualties**

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By Chris Coffey

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Two of America’s top investigative journalists, Richard Behar and Gary Weiss, have assailed a recent story by the *Associated Press* on Israel’s military action against Hamas in Gaza last summer.

Published in the [*The New York Observer*](http://observer.com/2015/03/how-the-ap-botched-its-investigation-of-civilian-deaths-in-the-israel-hamas-war/), the Behar-Weiss report on the *AP* reveals a pattern of one-sided reporting, staged photos, and poor research. It also uncovers a departure from established ethical journalism, and contends that the *AP* story “was set into motion by slanted, politically biased non-governmental organizations.”

On February 13, 2015, the [*AP* released its report](http://bigstory.ap.org/article/098f6f687f4e41a1a9b7387e515e6a66/ap-exclusive-high-civilian-death-toll-gaza-house-strikes) which focused on Israeli Air Force strikes on homes during the Gaza War and claimed that according to its findings “just over 60 percent – were children, women and older men, all presumed to be civilians.”’

Replete with [pictures](http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/02/13/ap-exclusive-israeli-strikes-on-homes-in-gaza-war-took-high-civilian-toll-ap/) of damaged Gaza buildings, one *AP* photo showed a young boy standing atop the rubble of his damaged home with a caption reading: “The attack killed his father, a Hamas policeman, his mother and two siblings.” A number of large news organizations ran the story, and carried the photos.

“When the *AP* article came out, its bias was evident,” Gary Weiss told *The Algemeiner*. So he and Richard Behar, the Contributing Editor, Investigations, for *Forbes* magazine, got to work reporting on the reporters.

Both Behar and Weiss had experience focusing on civilian casualties as part of their nonprofit investigative journalism venture, *The Mideast Reporter*. Behar had already penned a piece in *Forbes* about [“The Media Intifada,”](http://www.forbes.com/sites/richardbehar/2014/08/21/the-media-intifada-bad-math-ugly-truths-about-new-york-times-in-israel-hamas-war/) a term coined by Weiss to describe news outlets co-opted by the so-called “Hamas war machine.”

“Civilian casualties are a very important news story,” said Weiss. “The *AP* was right to delve into the subject.”

After talking to *AP* sources, in addition to non-*AP* sources, Behar and Weiss discovered serious problems with the Gaza story.

“The [*AP*] reporting was flawed. Questions were not asked. There were gaping holes in the article big enough to drive a tractor through them,” Weiss said.

For instance, Behar and Weiss reported that the *AP* neglected to tell its readers that the father of the young boy pictured in the story was a Hamas Commander, not a hapless civilian.

They also found that the *AP* story was influenced by organizations with a “political agenda hostile to Israeli policies…” In fact, the mission of one of these organizations, Al Mezan, “is to gather the raw materials needed to engage in what’s known as ‘lawfare’ with Israel, bringing Israelis and the state itself to trial for ‘war crimes’…”

More troubling was the revelation that the *AP* did not: “discuss, or even acknowledge, the issue of Hamas utilizing child soldiers… the possibility that some of the teenage casualties might have been combatants.”

So why did the *AP* file such a biased report on civilian casualties in Gaza?

The *AP* has not responded to Behar or Weiss about their article. Behar thinks that the *AP*’s reticence is sad because “when *AP* reporters contact people for stories they are writing they expect them to answer their questions. I guess what’s good for the goose ‘ain’t’ good for the gander.”

Behar and Weiss wrote in *The Observer* that the *AP* “disregarded its own standards too blatantly for it to be considered a fluke.” They added however that it would be an “overgeneralization to say that *AP*’s entire news report, or that its entire Middle Eastern coverage, is untrustworthy.”

In the end, Behar and Weiss did not set out to destroy the *AP*. Rather, Weiss thinks the goal was “to begin a frank discussion about the *AP*‘s coverage of the Middle East, and why its work was so bad. The media outlets that own *AP* and use its stories, sometimes unthinkingly, need to be aware of these issues.”