**Gazans Speak Out: Hamas War Crimes**

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Gatestone Institute http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4706/gazan-hamas-war-crimes

While the world's media has been blaming Israel for the death of Gazan civilians during Operation Protective Edge, this correspondent decided to speak with Gazans themselves to hear what they had to say.

They spoke of Hamas atrocities and [war crimes](http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4628/hamas-war-crimes-and-crimes-against-islam) implicating Hamas in the civilian deaths of its own people.

Although Gazans, fearful of Hamas's revenge against them, were afraid to speak to the media, friends in the West Bank offered introductions to relatives in Gaza. One, a renowned Gazan academic, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that as soon as someone talked to a Western journalist, he was immediately questioned by Hamas and accused of "communicating with the Mossad". "Hamas makes sure that the average Gazan will not talk to Western journalists -- or actually any journalists at all," he said, continuing:

"Hamas does not want the truth about Gaza to come out. Hamas terrorizes and kills us just like Daesh [ISIS] terrorizes kills Iraqis. Hamas is a dictatorship that kills us. The Gazans you see praising Hamas on TV are either Hamas members or too afraid to speak against Hamas. Few foreign [Western] journalists were probably able to report what Gazans think of Hamas."

When asked what Gazans did think of Hamas, he said:

"The same as Iraqis thought of Saddam before he was toppled. He still won by 90-something percent in the presidential elections. If Hamas falls today in Gaza, people here will do what Iraqis did to Saddam's statue after he fell. But even though Western journalists may not have been able to speak freely with Gazans, they still need a story to send to their editor by the end of the day. So it is just easier and safer for them to stick to the official line."

"What was that," I asked: "'Blame Israel'?"

"I don't know about that," he said. "More like, 'Never blame Hamas!'. Hamas was making a 'statement': Opposing Hamas Means Death*.* Hamas is a dictatorship that kills us."

M., a journalist, confirmed his view. "I do not believe any of the people Hamas killed in the last weeks were Israeli spies," he said. "Hamas has killed many people for criticizing it, and claimed they were traitors working for Israel during the war."

That conversation took place four weeks before [Hamas killed 21 alleged "Israeli Mossad agents](http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4646/hamas-war-crimes)."

D, a store owner, said:

"There were two major protests against Hamas during the third week of the war. When Hamas fighters opened fire at the protesters in the Bait Hanoun area and the Shijaiya, five were killed instantly. I saw that with my own eyes. Many were injured. A doctor at Shifa hospital told me that 35 were killed at both protests. He went and saw their bodies at the morgue."

To verify those reports, I spoke to a second Gazan academic, who holds a PhD. from a Western university, who stated:

"Hamas did kill protesters, no doubt about that. But we could not confirm how many were actually killed. If I have to guess, the number was more than reported. I am confident that not all of the 21 men Hamas killed on August 22 were collaborating with Israel. Hamas killed those men because it was weakened by Israel's attacks and felt endangered. So it went on a 'Salem Witch-Hunt.' They arrested everyone who opposed them and had to make a few examples to scare people from standing against Hamas. Hamas's tactic worked. Now Gazans are afraid to talk against Hamas even in front of their own family members. Gazans are probably afraid to criticize Hamas even in their sleep!"

As already reported by the award-winning journalist, Khaled Abu Toameh, [Hamas killed one of its leaders](http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4588/ayman-taha), Ayman Taha, and blamed Israel for it.

Asked about Abu Toameh's report, S., a Gazan political activist said:

"Taha was already in Hamas's jail before Israeli operations started. Hamas imprisoned him and tortured him because he was critical of its radical policies. He had warned Hamas not to cooperate with Qatar and Iran. Eye-witnesses said they saw Hamas militants bring him alive into the yard of Shifa hospital in Gaza and shoot him dead. They kept mutilating his body in front of viewers and little children and left it on the hospital's yard for a few hours before allowing the staff to take it to the morgue."

A., a Fatah member in Gaza, spoke over Skype -- fearful that Hamas was intercepting phone lines:

"Even before the Israeli operation began, Hamas rounded up 400 of our members and other political-opposition figures. I would not be surprised if Hamas kills them all and then claims they were killed in an Israeli bombing. Hamas already beheaded a man known for opposing its views on the 22nd day of the war, then reported on its Facebook page that he was caught sending intelligence information to Israel. If Hamas does not like you for any reason, all they have to do now is claim you are a Mossad agent and kill you."

S. a medical worker, said:

"The Israeli army sends warnings to people [Gazans] to evacuate buildings before an attack. The Israelis either call or send a text message. Sometimes they call several times to make sure everyone has been evacuated. Hamas's strict policy, though, was not to allow us to evacuate. Many people got killed, locked inside their homes by Hamas militants. Hamas's official Al-Quds TV regularly issued warnings to Gazans not to evacuate their homes. Hamas militants would block the exits to the places residents were asked to evacuate. In the Shijaiya area, people received warnings from the Israelis and tried to evacuate the area, but Hamas militants blocked the exits and ordered people to return to their homes. Some of the people had no choice but to run towards the Israelis and ask for protection for their families. Hamas shot some of those people as they were running; the rest were forced to return to their homes and get bombed. This is how the Shijaiya massacre happened. More than 100 people were killed."

Another Gazan journalist, D., said:

"Hamas fired rockets from next to homes. Hamas was running from one home to another. Hamas lied when it claimed it was shooting from non-populated areas. To make things even worse for us, Hamas would fire from the balconies of homes and try to drag the Israelis into door-to-door battles and street-to-street fights -- a death sentence for all the civilians here. They would fire rockets and then run away quickly, leaving us to face Israeli bombs for what they did. They are cowards. If Hamas militants are not afraid of dying, why do they run after they fire rockets from our homes? Why don't they stay and die with us? Are they afraid to die and go to heaven? Isn't that what they claim they wish?"

K, another graduate student at an Egyptian university who had gone to Gaza to see his family but was unable to leave after the war started, said on July 22:

"When people stopped listening to Hamas orders not to evacuate and began leaving their homes anyway, Hamas imposed a curfew: anyone walking out in the street was shot without being asked any questions. That way Hamas made sure people *had* to stay in their homes even if they were about to get bombed. God will ask Hamas on judgment day for those killers' blood."

I asked him if Hamas used people as "human shields." He said: "Hamas held the entire Gazan population as a human shield. My answer to you is yes."

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas [told](http://www.egynews.net/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D9%84%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D8%A5%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A5%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D9%82%D8%A8/) the press on September 6 that Hamas had killed 120 Fatah members who broke the curfew.

T., a former Hamas Ministry officer, said: "Hamas fires from civilian areas for a good reason: The Israelis call the civilians and give them ten minutes to evacuate. This gives Hamas time to fire another rocket and run away."

Why, I asked, did Hamas *not* allow people to evacuate?

"Some people say Hamas wants civilians killed in order to gain global sympathy, but I believe this is not the main reason. I think the reason is that if all the people were allowed to evacuate their homes, they all would have ended up in a certain area in Gaza. If that happened, it would have made the rest of Gaza empty of civilians, and the Israelis would have been able to hit Hamas without worrying about civilians in all those empty areas. Hamas wanted civilians all over the place to confuse the Israelis and make their operations more difficult."

S., a Gazan businessman, said:

"The cease-fire Hamas agreed to carried the same conditions the Egyptians and the Israelis offered during the second week of the war -- after only 160 Gazans had been killed. Why did Hamas have to wait until 2,200 were killed, and then accept the very same offer? Hamas has blackmailed the world with the killed Gazan civilians to make itself look like a freedom fighter against an evil Israel. Hamas showed Gazans that it could not care less for their blood and their children. And why should Hamas care? Its leaders are either in mansions in Qatar or villas in Jordan. Mashaal [Khaled Mashaal, the head of Hamas] is in Qatar, Mohammad Nazzal is in Jordan and Abu Marzouk is in Cairo: why should they want a ceasefire? Everyone here in Gaza is wondering why Hamas rejected so many ceasefires. Hamas knows it will not defeat Israel's army, so why did it continue fighting? The answer is simple: Hamas wanted us butchered so it could win the media war against Israel by showing our dead children on TV and then get money from Qatar."

I asked S. if other Gazans shared his view. He said,

"Gazans are not stupid. We are now telling Hamas: Either you bring victory and liberate Palestine as you claim, or simply leave Gaza and maybe give it back to the Palestinian Authority or even Israel -- or even Egypt! We have had enough of Hamas's hallucinations and promises that never come true."

O., a researcher who lives in Gaza Strip's second largest city, Khan Younis, said:

"Most of us see Hamas as too radical and too stubborn, especially the way it was refusing ceasefires offered from Israel. They even refused a 24-hour ceasefire during the third week of the war. They denied us even 24 hours of quiet to bury the dead. Even some Hamas loyalists here are asking why Hamas refused several ceasefires and made us suffer. Hamas did this on purpose because Hamas is a slave to Qatar. Qatar wants the war to go on because it is a terrorist Islamist country, and Hamas wants more of us dead to appease its masters in Qatar. Let's be realistic, Hamas is in a bad shape now. Israel destroyed most tunnels; that is why Hamas had to join the ceasefire talks in Cairo. Were the Israelis' hits to Hamas not so painful, Hamas would not be negotiating in the first place. At the same time, Hamas is asking Israel for the impossible, like an open seaport and an airport. Israel would never allow that, and Hamas knows this, but Hamas might just be buying time by throwing out these demands. You have to keep in mind that Hamas is not concerned with our conditions as Gazans. After all it is our children who are dying, not the children of Hamas's leaders. Hamas is weak now, and I believe it lost most of its tunnels. Israel's Iron Dome destroyed so many of their rockets before they landed in Israel; that is why Hamas is being ruthless with Gazans. When Hamas locks people inside homes about to be bombed, when it kills people protesting against it and when it executes alleged traitors without even a trail, these are war crimes."

A [report by the Washington Institute](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/gaza-public-rejects-hamas-wants-ceasefire), released in July, also reports that most Gazans are not happy with Hamas's governance.

"It is true," said A., a teacher. "I do not know a single Gazan who is pro-Hamas at the moment, except for those on its payroll. Hamas maintains its control here through a military dictatorship, just like North Korea. People will be killed if they protest. Even Gazans living abroad fear to criticize Hamas because Hamas will take revenge on their relatives who are here."

M., a Gazan television producer, stated:

"Of course I am against Israel and I want it out of Gaza and out of the West Bank, but I still believe Hamas is more of a threat to the Palestinian people. Hamas took over Gaza by killing us [Palestinians] and throwing our young men from high buildings. That is what Hamas is about: murder and power. Hamas is also delusional. Its leaders refused the Egyptian cease-fire proposal, they got hit hard by the Israelis, and then when the war stopped, they declared victory. Even the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, admitted it when he lost Ohoud war [A war in which pagan Arabs defeated Muhammad's army and in which Muhammad was almost killed]. Hamas lives in its own fantasy world. Hamas wanted the dead bodies to make Israel look ugly. The media has exerted a huge pressure on Israel for every dead Gazan. In that sense, Hamas's tactic has worked, and we have seen more Western tolerance of Hamas, especially in Europe. Of course Hamas doesn't care if we all die so long as it achieves its goals. We are not going to accept living under Hamas any longer. Even if there is calm, and the firing stops, we are going to still be under Hamas's mercy, where all basic living standards are considered luxuries. Hamas is just buying time by going to the ceasefire talks. Hamas does not want a ceasefire."

When asked why that was, he said, "Ask Qatar's Sheikh, not me. He is Hamas's god who gives them billions and tells them what to do. May God curse Qatar!"

A first-aid volunteer, E., said that Hamas militants had confiscated 150 truckloads of humanitarian supplies the day before. He said the supplies were donated by charities in the West Bank and that their delivery was facilitated by the IDF. He commented: "This theft angers all of us [Gazans]. The Israeli army allows supplies to come in, and Hamas steals them. It seems even the Israelis care for us more than Hamas."

Another aid worker, A., confirmed that Hamas steals the humanitarian supplies given to Gaza. "They [Hamas] take most of it, sell it to us, and just give us the stuff they do not want."

A Gazan mosque's imam said that the most precious aid item Hamas stole was water. "Gazans are thirsty and Hamas is stealing the water bottles provided to us for free and selling them at 20 Israeli shekels [approximately $5] for the big bottle and 10 Israeli shekels for the small one."

H., who did not want his profession to be mentioned, lost one of his legs in an Israeli raid. I asked him who he thought was responsible for his injury. He stated:

"Hamas was. My father received a text-message from the Israeli army warning him that our area was going to be bombed, and Hamas prevented us from leaving. They said there was a curfew. A curfew, can you believe that? I swear to God, we will take revenge on Hamas. I swear to God I will stand on my other foot and fight against Hamas. Even if Israel leaves them alone, we will not. What had my two-year-old nephew done to be killed under the rubble of our home so Khaled Mashaal [Hamas leader based in Qatar] could be happy? We want change at any cost. I am not claiming the Israelis are innocent, but I know Hamas has fired rockets from every residential spot in Gaza. If that was not hiding behind civilians, then it was stupidity and recklessness. Nobody who is normal, in his right mind, in Gaza supports Hamas. People have lost parents, children and friends, and have nothing more to lose. I believe if given the chance and the weapons, they will stand against Hamas."

K., a Gazan school teacher agreed:

"When Hamas starts caring for our children we will start caring for Hamas. Hamas has one policy, to attack Israel; so Israel attacks back, and gets us killed and Hamas then gets more money from Arabs and Erdogan [Turkey's president]. My son has autism; he cannot handle the sounds of rockets and bombs landing. Why would I support Hamas, which causes this suffering to him? Gazans have had enough of Hamas, any claims that we love Hamas is just propaganda. A [recent poll](http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/489) indicates that most of us support Hamas; this is not true, except maybe in the West Bank where they have not yet lived under Hamas rule. I cannot accuse the polling center of fabricating the poll, but my safest explanation for the result is that Gazans polled are too afraid to give their true opinions of Hamas. Hamas watches everything here. Most Gazans now have to deal with the aftermath of the war. Almost 300,000 Gazans are now homeless and Hamas is not providing them with anything. So why would they or their extended families have any love for Hamas? Would there be any common sense to that? Most Gazans are angry at Hamas, and most of us would love to see them replaced by any other force."

Despite all Hamas has done to Gazans, they do not seem to hold much love -- or less hatred -- for Israel.

S., a graduate of an American university and a former Hamas sympathizer, warned:

"Don't get fooled. Gazans are not in love with Israel yet, but they do not want to fight Israel anymore. We do not want to embrace Israel; we just want to live normally without wars. We want to live and work in Israel like we used to. We are under Hamas occupation, and if you ask most of us, we would rather be under Israeli occupation, instead. I would welcome Netanyahu to rule Gaza so long as Hamas leaves, and I think most Gazans feel the same way. We miss the days when we were able to work inside Israel and make good money, we miss the security and calm Israel provided when it was here, but politically speaking, we just think of it as the better of two evils: Israel and Hamas."

M., who lost his 11 year old daughter in an Israeli bombing said: "I will not forgive either Hamas or Israel for losing my daughter. If you ask me if I hate Israelis, my answer would be no, but do I love them? Of course not. There is too much blood between us, but I can only hope someday we both will move on and heal our wounds."

When asked what he would do if he were in Israel's place, being attacked non-stop by Hamas, he responded: "I do not care if both Israel and Gaza burn in hell."

F., a Gazan physician, said:

"I wish Israel never existed, but as it does not seem to be going away, I would rather be working in Israel like I used to before the first Intifada, not fighting it. Hamas sympathizers, apologists and appeasers should be ashamed of themselves for supporting a terrorist organization that has butchered civilians, Israeli and Palestinian. Apparently a group of Israelis is working on bringing Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal to trial in the International Criminal Court. But perhaps the world should consider putting all the Hamas leaders on trial for crimes against the Gazan people."