**Hamas Uses Hospitals and Ambulances for Military Purposes**

IDF Blog

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[https://web.archive.org/web/20140806022351/http://www.idfblog.com/blog/2014/07/28/hamas-uses-hospitals-ambulances-military-purposes/](https://web.archive.org/web/20140806022351/http%3A//www.idfblog.com/blog/2014/07/28/hamas-uses-hospitals-ambulances-military-purposes/)

**One of the fundamental aims of the laws of armed conflict is the protection of hospitals, ambulances, and medics from attack. International law grants this group special protection from attack during active conflict.**

Hamas chooses to use these protected areas for military purposes in order to shield itself from IDF strikes – and to draw international condemnation of Israel if the IDF is forced to respond.

In Hamas’ world, hospitals are command centers, ambulances are transport vehicles, and medics are human shields. Hamas’ actions in this regard are flagrant violations of international law. Hamas undermines the essential protections that enable the provision of medical services to those in need during wartime, and threatens the security of all who are carrying out legitimate medical services in dangerous conditions.

Wafa Hospital: A Hamas Command Center and Rocket-Launching Site

Hamas transformed Wafa Hospital, a civilian building in the Shuja’iya neighborhood of Gaza City, into a command center, rocket-launching site, observation point, sniper’s post, weapons storage facility, cover for tunnel infrastructure, and a general base for attacks against Israel and IDF forces. Hamas repeatedly opened fire from hospital windows and used anti-tank missiles from the premises. Hamas deliberately and cynically turned the hospital into a legitimate military target.

In response to threat that this posed to IDF forces, the IDF repeatedly conveyed warnings to the hospital staff, Palestinian officials, and international aid organizations, including the World Health Organization, requesting that they act in order to stop the hospital from being used for military purposes, and warning that the IDF will be forced to act if these activities continue. When Hamas’ activities did not cease, already in the first week of the operation, the IDF repeatedly spoke with all of the relevant parties and warned all civilians to leave.

On July 23, Hamas had continued firing from the hospital. The IDF made an additional warning call on that day; audio from the call confirms that the hospital was closed and that no medical staff or patients were in the building.

After confirming that no civilians were present, the IDF attacked the compound and the terrorists within the hospital grounds, in order to remove the threat posed to IDF forces. Secondary explosions can be seen, confirming IDF intelligence about the site.

Watch this video showing gunfire from the hospital, the warning calls, the IDF airstrike, and the secondary explosions:

[EMBEDDED VIDEO: <http://humanrightsvoices.org/site/documents/?d=21918>]

The IDF’s actions in this case went beyond its obligations under international law.

In addition to turning hospitals into fortresses, Hamas also uses ambulances to transport its fighters. When ambulances are exploited for military purposes, they may lose their protection from attack and be targeted subject to the requirements of international law.

On the morning of July 22, IDF forces engaged terrorists in the Gaza Strip, killing ten of them. Other terrorists used an ambulance in order to escape the firefight. In order to avoid the possibility of civilian casualties, the IDF did not target the ambulance.  Watch:

[EMBEDDED VIDEO: <http://humanrightsvoices.org/site/documents/?d=21839>]

Minimizing Harm to Civilians

The IDF goes to [great efforts](http://humanrightsvoices.org/site/documents/?d=22033) to [minimize harm to the civilian population](http://humanrightsvoices.org/site/documents/?d=21983&id=25267) in the Gaza Strip. This includes facilitating the provision of medical services through the Civil Liaison Administration, which coordinates such activity with international organizations operating in the Gaza Strip. The IDF also facilitates the transfer of medical supplies in the Gaza Strip through the land crossings and in some cases, permits persons with medical emergencies to enter Israel in order to receive care. The IDF has also set up a [field hospital at the Erez border crossing](http://humanrightsvoices.org/site/documents/?d=21910&id=25194), to facilitate care for wounded civilians from the Gaza Strip.

The IDF will continue in its efforts to minimize harm to the civilian population, and to ensure that only military objectives are attacked in accordance with international law. The IDF warns that where medical facilities and vehicles are used for military purposes, they are liable to lose their protection from attack and may be targeted in accordance with the requirements of international law.