

Statistics, Lies and War Reporting

By Eric Rozenman

Israel's existential struggle against Iran's "ring of fire"— Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Hezbollah in Lebanon, militia in Syria and Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen and Tehran itself—includes a psychological warfare showdown between Josef Goebbels and Thomas Jefferson.



Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, famously asserted that "a lie repeated once remains a lie.

But a lie repeated a thousand times becomes the truth." Jefferson, on the other hand, observed that "the basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right ..."

This brings us to the failure of many U.S. news outlets "to keep right" a basic statistic of the war in Gaza, the number of Palestinian Arabs killed and their identities.

In "Israel rescues four hostages in bloody raid," (June 9,

front page), *The Washington Post* stated that “in nine months of war, [more than 36,600](#) [changed to 36,800 a day later] people have been killed in Gaza, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants but says the majority of those killed are women and children.”

Four days earlier, *The Wall Street Journal* carried a feature headlined “A Family of Democrats Splinters Over Biden; U.S. Backing of Israel in war, humanitarian crisis in Gaza weigh heavily in election,” (June 5). It reported that Israel’s battle against Hamas after the latter’s October 7 slaughter of 1,200 people and capture of 240 more [“has killed more than 36,000 Palestinians](#), according to Palestinian authorities.”

This sort of language became press boilerplate early in the war. But “Palestinian authorities” are the Hamas-controlled Health Ministry. When uncritically reported, Hamas’ “human shields/martyrs strategy”—itself an ongoing war crime—advances the terrorists’ psych-war goal of delegitimizing Israel and its supporters.

As early as November 30, the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs compared the health ministry’s casualty figures that alleged 67 percent of the claimed 15,000 fatalities were women and children, with Hamas’ own much lower, specifically categorized 2014 war percentages. Its conclusion? Today’s Palestinian numbers [“are a scam”](#) significantly suppressing the number of male combatant deaths.

Scam or [“completely unverifiable,”](#) as a March 26 analysis by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy put it. In April, Gaza officials themselves admitted their records for more than 10,000 of the posted fatalities rested on “incomplete data.”

On May 13, *USA Today* reported that the United Nations—long an enabler of Palestinian rejectionism and terrorism through its

U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)—[reduced by nearly half](#) its estimate of women and children killed. While still relying on Hamas' Gaza Health Ministry, the U.N. noted many of its figures were "unsubstantiated."

In June came a stake through the heart of Hamas' vampire-like recurring women and children statistics (which omit those hit by the roughly 20 percent of rockets aimed at Israel that fall short or those killed by terrorists when trying to escape combat zones). "The Gaza Health Ministry Flimflam" in the June issue of *Commentary* magazine, dissected the methodology underlying the numbers. Researchers from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies found that "signs of [major defects in the casualty data](#) have been visible since December."

Yet media outlets still parrot the likely inflated total numbers and "women and children" category. The distorted numbers echo in President Biden's May 31 assertion that in Gaza "[too many innocent people](#) have been killed, including thousands of children."

Spurious figures help support spurious allegations of Israeli "genocide." Hence, the day after Israel's military rescued four citizens from Gaza, several thousand leftists, Muslim and other demonstrators [ringed the White House protesting](#) "Genocide Joe's" continued military backing of the Jewish state.

Even if Hamas' claimed 36,000 Gazan fatalities were accurate, and likewise Israel's estimate that it has killed [approximately 14,000 terrorists](#) so far, that would be a combatant-to-noncombatant ratio of 1:1.6. This indicates not genocide but restraint.

John Spencer, chair of urban warfare studies at West Point, is a former U.S. infantry officer with two tours in Iraq. He describes Israeli tactics as keeping non-combatant

casualties [“abnormally low.”](#) In 2015, the United Nations put noncombatant-to-combatant deaths caused by U.S. and British forces in Afghanistan and Iraq at [between 3:1 and 4:1](#).

Regardless, as British novelist Howard Jacobson observed, what better way to invert reality than to smear Israel with the great [crime committed against the Jewish people](#) within the memory of some still living?

News media refusal to “keep right” coverage of Israel helps enable genocidal anti-Zionist antisemitism and clouds U.S. foreign policy. Right now, Goebbels is beating Jefferson.

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