



August 10, 2014

Reports from foreign correspondents in the Gaza Strip vis-à-vis the limitations Hamas placed on media coverage of the military aspects of the fighting



A correspondent from the Finnish TV channel HS-TV reports on rocket fire from close proximity to the Al-Shifa'a Hospital
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nu-e5qWXx-k>)

Overview

1. Hamas' media policy forged during Operation Protective Edge restricts local and foreign correspondents covering the fighting in their reports on military-combat activity or military-related information (especially regarding rocket fire and the use of civilians as human shields). During the operation **foreign and local correspondents** followed Hamas' policy guidelines, for the most part, and mainly reported on the suffering of the local population and other civilian aspects of the fighting.
2. However there were occasional instances of foreign correspondents who did not follow Hamas guidelines, especially towards the end of July when media personnel began leaving the Gaza Strip. During the last two weeks reports have crept into the media about rockets fired into Israeli territory from populated areas, particularly from around sensitive institutions (the Al-Shifa'a Hospital, a hotel where many of the foreign correspondents stayed, a UN facility, a church).

Hamas' Media Policy

3. During the first days of Operation Protective Edge Hamas forged a policy for media reports to be implemented by local and foreign correspondents covering the fighting. Its objectives were to prevent reports that would prove Israel's claims of Hamas use of Gazan civilians as human shields, and to reinforce the propaganda theme that Israel deliberately attacked civilians and committed "war crimes." As a result, during the first days of the fighting the information bureau of the Hamas-controlled ministry of the interior in Gaza issued instructions under the heading "Be aware of the following." The instructions dealt with how the social networks in the Gaza Strip were to relate to Israeli activity (YouTube, July 10, 2014).

4. Instruction number five read, "**Do not publicize [information about] and do not share pictures or video clips showing rocket launching sites or the movement of resistance [operatives] in Gaza.**" Those responsible for news pages on Facebook were told "**don't use close-ups of heavily armed masked operatives, otherwise your Facebook page will be closed for incitement to violence.**" Hamas issued similar instructions to correspondents in other ways. For example, the Palestinian Journalist Bloc, a media group in the Gaza Strip affiliated with Hamas, instructed the media and correspondents in the Gaza Strip **not to photograph or publicize information about rockets fired by military-terrorist operatives belonging to the various organizations so as not to play into the hands of Israeli public diplomacy** (Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV, July 8, 2014).



Instruction number five from the Hamas-controlled ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip, "**Do not publicize [information about] and do not share pictures or video clips showing rocket launching sites of the movement of resistance [operatives] in Gaza"**

How Hamas Policy Is Implemented

5. During Operation Protective Edge local journalists were careful to follow Hamas' policy guidelines, among other reasons out of the concern for their own safety.¹ That was made evident by the great emphasis reports and news stories placed on the suffering of the local population, which used Hamas propaganda without criticism. Conspicuous by their absence were reports of the fighting in which terrorist operatives participated, their losses and the use they made of civilians as human shields.

6. **In retrospect it can be said that the local and foreign media reports generally followed Hamas policy.** They emphasized civilian suffering, the many civilian casualties and the increasing humanitarian distress, while severely criticizing Israel's conduct. On the other hand, **reports of the military aspects of the fighting and the sensitive issue of the use of the civilian population as human shields received relatively scant coverage.**

7. **In ITIC assessment, there are several reasons for the bias in the foreign media reports from the Gaza Strip during the fighting:** pressures Hamas exerts on correspondents; Hamas terrorist operatives strictly avoid exposing themselves to the media, for both security reasons and Hamas' media policy; the danger to the lives of correspondents who report from combat zones, and the personal tendency of many of them to report the human interest angle, which emphasizes the suffering of the population. Examples can be found in conversations between Israeli journalists and foreign correspondents who covered the fighting in the Gaza Strip.²

8. Regardless of the journalists' reasons, **Hamas' media policy was clearly successful**, as far as Hamas is concerned. A foreign correspondent, who preferred to remain anonymous, told Yedioth Aharonoth's Daniel Batini (August 7, 2014) that "First, Hamas said its spokesmen could only be interviewed in the courtyard of the Al-Shifa'a Hospital in Gaza City. That meant there were long lines of correspondents waiting for interviews, and as a result they watched the bleeding wounded arriving at the hospital

¹ A correspondent for the Palestinian magazine **Al-Sabah**, published in the Gaza Strip, reported that Hamas harassed any correspondent who dared to publicly criticize it. According to its sources, operatives from Hamas' security forces broke the arms and legs of a journalist and threw him into the street (Al-Sabah, August 4, 2014). A French-Palestinian journalist named **Raja Abu Daqa**, whose reporting went beyond the limitations of the Hamas guidelines, said that he was summoned by Hamas' security forces to the Al-Shifa'a Hospital. There he was interrogated, and then told that "for his own good" he should leave the Gaza Strip (Libération, July 23, 2014).

² Daniel Batini, Yedioth Aharonoth, August 7, 2014; and Anshel Feffer, Haaretz, August 8, 2014; Hebrew.

for treatment. That [system] created exactly the impression Hamas wanted, of an immediate emergency situation and a human and humanitarian catastrophe. **Second, Hamas never allowed foreign correspondents access to military sites attacked by Israel, whether they were bases, rocket launching sites or other targets. The organization's dead and wounded operatives were not photographed and therefore, from a media point of view, they do not exist.** All that serves **Hamas' objective of representing all the casualties as civilians.** Third, it was obvious that Hamas was firing rockets from civilian areas, but **Hamas operatives forbid camera teams from filming them,** because they did not want to reveal the tactic or the locations of the launch sites" (ITIC translation from Hebrew and emphasis throughout).

Examples of Reports from Foreign Correspondents about Rockets Fired in Close Proximity to Civilian Institutions and the Use of Civilians as Human Shields

Overview

9. Despite the biased reports in the foreign media, occasionally there were correspondents who did not follow the Hamas policy guidelines. Such reports became more frequent at the end of July-beginning of August as a ceasefire approached and some of the foreign media teams began leaving the Gaza Strip. However, there were only a handful of reports, out of several hundred that had been written.³ Examples follow:

Reports on Rockets Fired in Proximity to a Foreign Correspondents' Hotel⁴

10. Towards the end of the fighting (end of July-beginning of August) **several foreign correspondents reported on rockets fired from close to their hotel** (ITIC emphasis throughout):

- 1) **Nick Schifrin, foreign correspondent for Al-Jazeera in English**
 - a. In a story aired on July 31, 2014, he reported rocket fire close to the hotel many foreign correspondents stayed at. He said the rocket-launching site was attacked by the IDF after he finished reporting. He said it showed

³ More than 700 foreign correspondents came to Israel to report on the fighting, entering the Gaza Strip through the Erez crossing.

⁴ Apparently the hotel in question is the Al-Deira, a hotel in the western part of Gaza City, near the sea. According to an article in the London-based Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (August 2, 2014), the hotel is attractive for foreign and Arab correspondents who arrive in the Gaza Strip during emergencies. According to the article, at the beginning of August 30 foreign and eight Arab correspondents were staying at the hotel.

how close the rocket launchers were to residential buildings. He tweeted the following on July 31: "Definitely no cease fire yet. Field next to our hotel hit again at 3:25 am. **Earlier this week we saw rockets launched from there.**"

b. Following the report, which was incompatible with Hamas policy, Palpress.ps reported on August 4, 2014, that social network activists called for Nick Schiffrin to be expelled from the Gaza Strip. They claimed that his coverage was "unprofessional" and had given information about the Palestinian "resistance's" (i.e., the terrorist organizations) rocket launching sites. The PalPress website, which reported the affair, noted that the Palestinian organizations were keeping everything about the rocket launching sites a secret and **demanding that foreign correspondents in the Gaza Strip be careful**, and to take into consideration the special situation in the Gaza Strip.



The story by Nick Schiffrin about rockets launched near his hotel. Right: The launching site attacked by the IDF (Al-Jazeera.com).

2) A story by Harry Fear, a freelance correspondent reporting from the Gaza Strip for the Russian TV channel RT (formerly Russia Today)

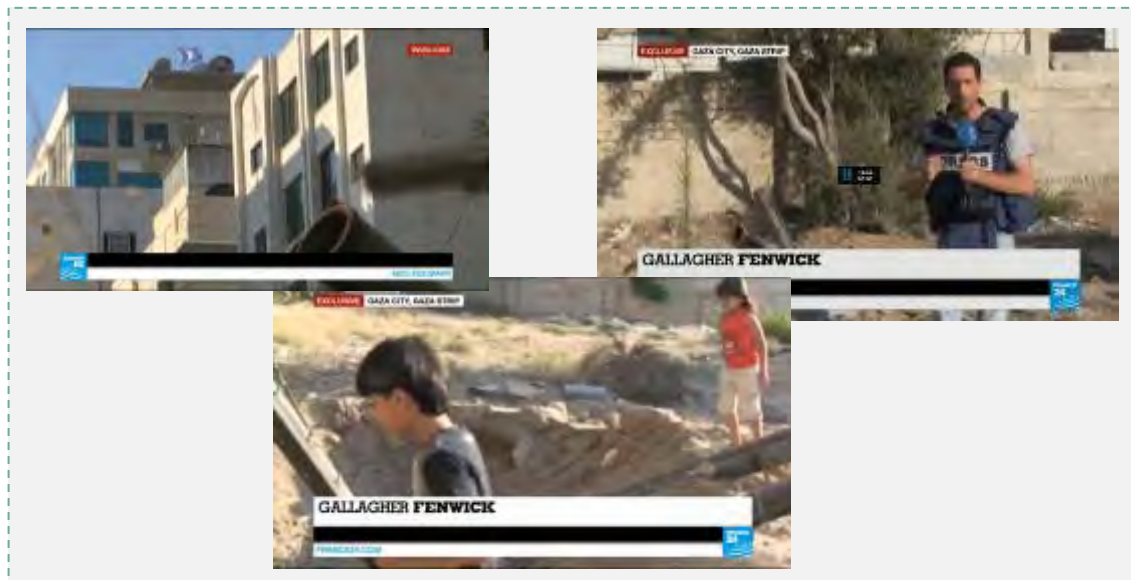
a. **Harry Fear** told the CPJ⁵ website that on July 29, 2014, Hamas security officers told him he had 24 hours to leave the Gaza Strip. It happened after he tweeted about a rocket launched close to the hotel he was staying at. On July 16, 2014, he tweeted the following: "Early morning Gaza rockets were fired into Israel. **A well-known site in W. Gaza City, near my hotel,**

⁵ The Committee to Protect Journalists, is a New York-based "independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide."

was among the origins, locals confirm." The CPJ website added that several correspondents, among them Harry Fear, had been severely criticized for tweeting information about Hamas' military-terrorist activities (CPJ.org, July 29, 2014).

b. After being criticized for his report, he tweeted a number of times claiming that it was not new information. He also gave examples of other tweets from media personnel, among them the Washington Post's William Booth, about rocket launches from populated areas in the Gaza Strip.⁶ **In any event, Harry Fear left the Gaza Strip at the end of July, possibly because of Hamas' demand.**

3) On August 5, 2014, **Gallagher Fenwick, a correspondent for France24 TV** reported on rocket fire. He said rockets had been fired at a distance of only **50 meters from the hotel where he and most of the other foreign correspondents were staying, and only 100 meters from a UN building**, which was flying the UN flag (See picture). He said that locating rocket launchers in densely-populated civilian areas made it difficult for the IDF to attack them. He also said that a rocket had been fired from the same location the previous week (France24, August 5, 2014). After he left the Gaza Strip he reported that rockets had been fired from the heart of a densely-populated area, and that Israel had told the truth, Hamas had turned all Gaza into human shields (Yedioth Aharonoth, August 7, 2014).⁷



Left: The UN flag on a building close to the rocket launching site. Right: Gallagher Fenwick at the site of the rocket launch. Below: Children play near the rocket launcher. Click <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMiG9JD2OxM> for the video.

⁶ On July 14, 2014, **William Booth** tweeted "Rockets from Gaza just now passed (way) over seaside **Al-Deira hotel** where hacks gathered. That's the vapor trail."

⁷ <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4556016,00.html>

- 4) **Srinivasan Jain**, a correspondent for the Indian New Delhi TV station (NDTV) reported the following:
- a. After he left the Gaza Strip, he released a video he had photographed from his hotel room on at 0630 hours on August 4, 2014. **The video shows a group of military operatives in an abandoned plot of land near the hotel. The operatives can be seen moving under a blue tent erected to hide their actions** [possibly because blue would be associated with the UN by anyone who saw it]. After positioning the rocket launcher under the sand, laying cables and preparing it for firing, they removed the tent, covered the location with branches, changed their clothing and left. The following day the correspondent documented rocket fire from the same location, and when he tried to reach the launching site he was asked not to approach.
 - b. NDTV issued the following response (NDTV.com): "This report is being aired on NDTV and published on ndtv.com after our team left the Gaza strip – Hamas has not taken very kindly to any reporting of its rockets being fired. But just as we reported the devastating consequences of Israel's offensive on Gaza's civilians, **it is equally important to report on how Hamas place those very civilians at risk by firing rockets deep from the heart of civilian zones**" (ITIC emphasis throughout).



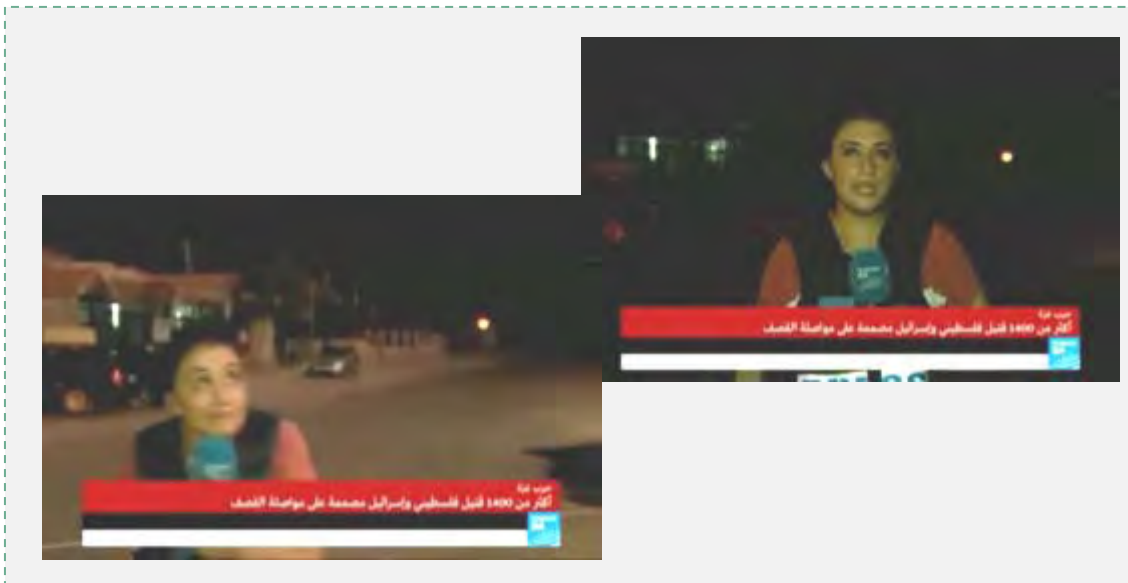
Left: The blue tent erected to hide the operatives. Right: The correspondent next to the window in his hotel room. Bottom: He tries to approach to launch site. Click https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_ihf2omMX4 for the video.

Foreign Correspondents Report Rockets Launched near Al-Shifa'a Hospital, now Hamas' Headquarters

11. A number of foreign correspondents **reported rockets fired in close proximity to Al-Shifa'a Hospital** and that it had been **turned into Hamas' headquarters**. The reports corroborate ITIC information about the various military-terrorist uses Hamas has made of the Al-Shifa'a Hospital, the largest hospital in the Gaza Strip, both during Operation Protective Edge and previously during Operation Cast Lead.⁸

12. For example:

- 1) On the night of July 31, 2014, **Ms. Maha Abu Al-Kas, a correspondent for France24**, reported from the Al-Shifa'a Hospital about the difficult conditions there. As she was reporting **a rocket was fired close to where she was standing**. The shriek of the rocket was clearly audible and the flash of its firing was visible (YouTube, August 3, 2014).



Left: The France 24 correspondent flinches away from the noise of the rocket launcher, and the flash can be seen. Right: The correspondent reporting from the Al-Shifa'a Hospital. Click <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuN6lzalalE> for the video.

- 2) On August 2, 2014, a Finnish correspondent told Finnish HS-TV **that rockets were being fired from the parking lot behind the Al-Shifa'a Hospital in Gaza City** (YouTube, August 2, 2014).

⁸ For further information see the July 23, 2014 bulletin "Hamas and the Other Terrorist Organizations in the Gaza Strip Use Medical Facilities and Ambulances for Military-Terrorist Purposes."



The Finnish correspondent reporting from Al-Shifa'a Hospital on rocket fire from the hospital's parking lot (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nu-e5qWXx-k>)

3) On July 15, 2014, **William Booth** wrote the following in the Washington Post: "At the Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, crowds gathered to throw shoes and eggs at the Palestinian Authority's health minister, who represents the crumbling 'unity government' in the West Bank city of Ramallah. The minister was turned away before he reached the hospital, **which has become a de facto headquarters for Hamas leaders, who can be seen in the hallways and offices**" (ITIC emphasis).

Rocket Fire from a Church Compound

13. On August 6, 2014, George Thomas of CBN interviewed the head of the Roman Orthodox Church in Gaza, Bishop Alexios. The Bishop showed Thomas **how Hamas exploited the church compound** [which includes an orphanage and a school] to fire rockets at Israel. He refused to provide more information because of security reasons (YouTube, August 6, 2014).



Bishop Alexios shows the CBN correspondent the church compound exploited by Hamas to fire rockets into Israel (YouTube, August 6, 2014)

Italian Correspondent Exposes Hamas Lies about a Failed Rocket Launch in the Shati Refugee Camp that Killed Ten People, Most of Them Children

14. Italian correspondent Gabriele Barbati, who represents the Radio Popolare Milano station in Jerusalem, tweeted the following immediately after he left the Gaza Strip:

"Out of Gaza far from Hamas retaliation: **misfired rocket killed children yday in Shati**. Witness: militants rushed and cleared debris. 10:46 a.m. Tue, Jul 29. IDF Spokesperson said truth in communique released yesterday about Shati camp massacre. **It was not Israel behind it**" (ITIC emphasis throughout).

15. The **affair again illustrates Hamas' use of false propaganda**:

1) **On July 28, 2014, the Palestinians claimed that the IDF attacked the Shati refugee camp and the Al-Shifa'a Hospital.** Palestinian reports from the Gaza Strip claimed that ten people, most of them children, had been killed in the Shati refugee camp, and that 40 people had been wounded. Palestinian "eye witnesses" claimed to a Lebanese TV station that Israeli aircraft had fired two missiles,

2) **Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri rushed to accuse Israel of "slaughtering children"** in the Shati refugee camp in Gaza City and called it "carnage" and "a war crime." **Iyad al-Bazam**, a spokesman for the Hamas-controlled ministry of the interior, accused Israel of attacking a kindergarten in

Shati and an outpatient clinic in the Al-Shifa'a Hospital (Maannews.net, July 28, 2014).

3) **The IDF Spokesman and Coordinator for Government Activities Yoav Mordechai categorically denied the accusations.** He said that the rockets had been fired from the Tel al-Hawa neighborhood in Gaza City (Israel's Reshet B radio, July 28, 2014). **The following day, July 29, 2014, the IDF Spokesman released aerial photographs proving that the rockets fired on July 28, 2014, from the Gaza Strip at Israel, hit the Shati refugee camp and the Al-Shifa'a Hospital. However, the report of the Italian correspondent corroborates the Israeli version.**



Aerial photos released by the IDF Spokesman on Twitter (July 28, 2014) prove the rockets that hit the Shati refugee camp and Al-Shifa'a Hospital were launched by terrorist operatives.