

## **Casualty Figures in the Hamas-Israel War**

The number of civilian casualties reported in the Hamas-Israel War has caused anguish around the world, prompting many demands for an immediate ceasefire. There have undoubtedly been many casualties among the people of the Gaza Strip – a source of deep regret for most people – yet as early as November 2023, the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs (JCPA) described the Gaza casualty figures as a scam.<sup>1</sup> They had reached 15,000, said to include 6,150 children (41%) and 4,000 women (26%). The JCPA highlighted that after similar Gaza battles in 2014, reported casualties included just 16% children and 15% women, indicating that in the current war Hamas are keeping male casualty figures low through unreported mass burials. The JCPA also noted that Dr Munir al-Borsh, Director General of the Palestinian Health Ministry which produces the casualty figures, is a member of the government in Gaza. Which means that a paid employee of Hamas was responsible for producing the casualty figures.

### **Systematically manipulated**

In January 2024, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy published research titled ‘How Hamas Manipulates Gaza Fatality Numbers’. Acknowledging that civilian harm is inevitable in urban battles where terrorist fighters hide among the population and refuse to surrender, it noted that Hamas-produced casualty figures were relied upon almost universally by international media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). But detailed analysis of the figures, accepting the difficulty of obtaining accurate ones in a war, led to the conclusion that ‘Hamas-produced statistics are inconsistent, imprecise, and appear to have been systematically manipulated to downplay the number of militants killed and to exaggerate the proportion of noncombatants confirmed as dead.’<sup>2</sup>

### **Evidence of fabrication**

Further to that analysis, in March 2024, Tablet magazine published an article by Abraham Wyner, Professor of Statistics and Data Science at the University of Pennsylvania. Examining casualty figures from a two-week period in October and November 2023, he observed that they rose in a regular, almost linear pattern, which suggests they were not real because there was none of the ‘natural variation’ that occurs in such situations.<sup>3</sup> Second, he noted that there was no significant correlation between the women casualties and the child casualties, which is most unusual as they would normally be together in homes or shelters. And third he calculated that there was no significant correlation between the number of men and the number of women casualties – something that should be expected in the ebb and flow of fighting. Thus, from a statistical perspective, there is significant evidence that those casualty figures had been fabricated.

The first concern raised by Professor Wyner is reflected in a brief review published by the Lancet in December 2023, in which the authors claimed there was no obvious inflation of the overall figures. Yet their chart of casualty figures between 7<sup>th</sup> October and 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023 showed the ‘almost linear’ pattern that Professor Wyner described as unnatural.<sup>4</sup>

### **Reliance on opinions**

The BBC is a major media organisation which regularly quotes the Hamas figures and, in defence of them, it published a ‘Verify’ article in December 2023. It starts with quotes from various officials such as the World Health Organisation’s Richard Brennan, who considered the Gaza casualty figures trustworthy. But rather than focusing on the casualty figures themselves, the BBC

added quotes from so-called ‘military experts’ about Israel’s use of very large bombs, many of which, they said, are ‘unguided’ and likely to cause more civilian casualties. They also used imprecise quotes expressing opinions from wartime casualty experts, like Prof Michael Spagat, who said he would “not be at all surprised” if around 80% of those killed were civilians.<sup>5</sup>

That BBC analysis was far less rigorous than the others quoted above, relying on quotes that favour accuracy of the Hamas numbers, and the BBC’s line of reporting, rather than probing the contradictions and inconsistencies in the casualty figures.

### **Obvious errors**

In contrast to that effort by the BBC, an article for the National Review by Danielle Pletska, Senior Fellow with the American Enterprise Institute, highlighted some of the obvious errors and contradictions in the Hamas figures. For example, on one day the sum of the women and the children casualties exceeded the total number reported. In another instance, there were no male casualties at all, just women and children – which is extremely unlikely. While acknowledging ‘the fog of war’, she summarised the situation by saying, ‘the cumulative problems of unreliable Hamas reporting, battlefield uncertainty, the media’s lack of information, and, additionally, media bias, suggest that the numbers of fatalities and casualties emanating from Gaza as “authoritative” have been increasingly untethered to reality.’<sup>6</sup>

In the light of all this, it should be a matter of great concern that major media outlets continue to quote the Hamas-produced figures, especially when some quote them as being purely civilian casualties and make no mention of Israeli estimates of the number of terrorists killed. However close to reality the overall casualty numbers might be, the evidence points to a major distortion of the number of men / terrorists who have died. That distortion has had a major impact upon international public perception of Israel’s conduct of this war against terrorists who are intent on its destruction.

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### **References**

<sup>1</sup> The Casualty Figures in Gaza Are a Scam

<https://jcpa.org/article/the-casualty-figures-in-gaza-are-a-scam/>

<sup>2</sup> How Hamas Manipulates Gaza Fatality Numbers’

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/how-hamas-manipulates-gaza-fatality-numbers-examining-male-undercount-and-other>

<sup>3</sup> How the Gaza Ministry of Health Fakes Casualty Numbers

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/how-gaza-health-ministry-fakes-casualty-numbers>

<sup>4</sup> No evidence of inflated mortality reporting from the Gaza Ministry of Health

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)02713-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)02713-7/fulltext)

<sup>5</sup> Israel Gaza: What Gaza's death toll says about the war

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67764664>

<sup>6</sup> Don’t Fall for Hamas’ Numbers Game

<https://www.aei.org/op-eds/dont-fall-for-hamass-numbers-game>