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EVERYTHING BUT THE TRUTH

ROCKETS RAIN DOWN ON ISRAEL'S CITIES.
TERRORISTS ATTEMPT TO INFILTRATE ISRAELI VILLAGES.
HAMAS VOWS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JEWISH STATE.

FOR THE MEDIA, THESE FACTS SHOULD POINT TO ISRAEL'S UNCOMPROMISED RIGHT TO DEFEND ITSELF AGAINST THE HAMAS AGGRESSORS. BUT THE REPORTERS AND EDITORS WHO PRODUCE THE NEWS HAVE OTHER IDEAS

BY Machla Abramovitz
PHOTOS AFP ImageBank, Flash 90

On July 13, five days after Israel had launched Operation Protective Edge

to shield its citizens from hundreds of missile strikes launched from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, Jodi Rudoren of the *New York Times* wrote the following lead summing up the war to that point:

JERUSALEM — So much here seems so broken right now: the peace process, the moral compass.

The Palestinian reconciliation pact is in tatters. The Israeli police force is having a crisis of public confidence. Houses of suspected Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip have been pulverized into piles of debris by Israeli airstrikes. Red alerts signaling long-range rockets from Gaza have canceled cultural events in Jerusalem and disrupted a wedding in a Tel Aviv suburb.

After hundreds of missile strikes on Israel's cities, volleys that have made bomb shelters the temporary living quarters for thousands of residents in Israel's south, and panicked adults and children alike from Ashdod to Haifa, Rudoren summarizes the entire Hamas terror campaign by reducing the missiles and their code red alerts to inconveniences that postpone cultural events and disrupt weddings. In Rudoren's view, it seems, the indiscriminate launching of missiles against a civilian population is the equivalent of a heavy snowstorm that forces the delay of a museum outing and spoils a bride's big day.



Media Bias at Work

The facts can be elusive, we are often told. They are even more elusive when you're not looking for them, or ignoring them, as is often the case when it comes to reporting on Operation Protective Edge — Israel's newest battle against Hamas in Gaza.



News Coverage: Holly Williams of *CBS This Morning* reports from Gaza that Hamas appeared to reject an Egyptian-proposed ceasefire because it did not include the removal of Israel's security-based naval blockade imposed on Gaza since 2007, which she described as having "deprived Palestinians of necessities like fuel and medical supplies."



Analysis: As CAMERA pointed out, it is Williams's assertion that is deprived of accuracy.



Real Story: What CBS failed to report, or perhaps didn't even know, was that according to COGAT, the Israeli authority responsible for the coordination of humanitarian affairs with Gaza, in the first several days of Operation Protective Edge, "some 200 truckloads of food and essential supplies were delivered into the Gaza Strip," including 187,000 liters of gasoline and 12 medical equipment trucks. Israel's supposed naval blockade — itself a blatant exaggeration of Israeli Navy security patrols in the Mediterranean — has had no impact on the 21,704 trucks carrying 536,481 tons of goods into Gaza from Israel since the start of 2014.

Israel supporters near and far are used to this kind of media bias — especially from the *New York Times* — but the problem only seems to be getting worse. And with the onset of Operation Protective Edge, readers worldwide were faced once again with the persistent media bias that turns Israelis into the unquestioned aggressors and Palestinians into the hapless victims.

But the truth is far more complex, and a number of pro-Israel media watchdog organizations have emerged to actively take on reportorial bias and force media organizations to account. These organizations have certainly made progress, in many cases forcing editors to revise stories and media organizations to conduct internal investigations, but the so-called "narrative" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still decidedly in Israel's disfavor.

Parachute Journalism There are many reasons for reportorial bias, but a major contributing factor is an ideological conflict with the policies of the State of Israel. Journalists are famously more liberal than conservative, and those that enter the profession often hold left-of-center liberal views. Top newspapers like the *New York Times* recruit their reporters from the finest universities, institutions where the State of Israel is treated as a pariah and its supporters vilified. This learned bias can't help but seep into the news coverage.

"The worst reporting comes from a particular liberal/left-wing bias inherent in many media organizations that tend to hire their reporters and staff from a particularly narrow background," says Simon Plosker, managing editor of Honest Reporting, an

Israeli-based media watchdog. "This is particularly the case in the BBC, which falsely claims to seek 'balance,' while the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* make no bones about their political and editorial slants."

Boston-based CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting) recently conducted a six-month study of *New York Times* coverage in which it found that the newspaper consistently downplayed Israeli views and amplified, or even promoted, Palestinian perspectives. "Month after month, the newspaper obscured Palestinian attacks and Israeli deaths, diverting readers' attention instead to Palestinian casualties and acts of nonlethal vandalism by Israelis."

A further source of bias stems from a lack of education about the complex beat of the Middle East. Many of the reporters assigned to cover the Israel-Palestine conflict are



Media Bias at Work



News Coverage:

CAMERA singled out the *New York Times* for what it called false claims

stating that Prime Minister Netanyahu had not responded immediately to the killing of a Palestinian teenager, Mohammed Abu Khdeir. It also said that the *Times*'s interpretation of a poem by Chaim Nachman Bialik, cited by Israel's prime minister, supposedly encouraged prejudice among Israelis, when in fact the poem is widely understood as a call for heavenly justice and a rejection of human vengeance.



Analysis:

Gilead Ini of CAMERA says the narrative that emerged following the murder of Khdeir, an Arab boy who was killed by Israeli extremists, was particularly vile.

"After years of ignoring or dismissing anti-Jewish incitement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, many reporters and commentators seized on only one horrible incident of Jewish terrorism to make the story into one of supposed Israeli incitement and racism," he says.



The Real Story:

There are racists in the margins of every society. But the consensus from Israel was that

the murder of the Arab boy was despicable and that the killers deserve the full weight of justice. On the other hand, Ini says, Hamas political leaders, and even family members of the Palestinians who murdered the three Jewish boys, expressed support or even pride for that act.

Ini claims that journalists are uncomfortable with the idea of judging Palestinians and a bit too comfortable judging Israelis. "It is a distorted picture, and a disservice to news consumers who hope to understand the conflict as it is."

against Israel during Operation Protective Edge than in previous operations, such as 2012's Cast Lead or 2008's Pillar of Defense.

The reasons vary. For one, compared to the chaos and violence occurring elsewhere in the Middle East, what is happening in Gaza has lost some of its impact. There is also a much more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of how Hamas operates and the extent to which it is willing to go to secure its objectives. As well, the fact that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu accepted an Egyptian ceasefire proposal during the second week of the conflict — while Hamas didn't — clarified for most objective observers that Israel isn't the party escalating the war.

Further, Plosker credits this decrease in hostility to a fundamental change in the way Israel handles the media. During its 2012 Operation Cast Lead, for security reasons Israel did not allow journalists into Gaza. Today, they are allowed access and are witnessing firsthand what is happening there, rather than relying on footage from Al Jazeera and Hamas. Subsequently, there have been much fewer instances of staging of events by Palestinians than in the past.

Toward a better understanding of media bias, *Mishpacha* has categorized a number of media outlets into three categories: the good, the bad, and the ugly. As we'll see, some media outlets are reporting in a fair manner on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while others are simply beyond the pale.



THE GOOD

THERE ARE HUGE DIFFERENCES IN OUTLOOK among media outlets in different countries, Plosker says. In general, articles appearing in European publications are much more antagonistic toward Israel than those that appear in the United States. That's why it's surprising that in England, where the BBC plays such a large role, there are in fact three daily newspapers that generally report on Israel fairly.

Jonathan Arkush, vice president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, cites a *Times of London* piece from July 14, headlined "The Wail of a Siren and 15 Seconds to Find Cover in Israel" as a good example. The story takes a decidedly sympathetic view toward Israeli suffering during the Hamas bombardment, noting the terror of dealing with indiscriminate rocket fire and painting

a human picture of Israeli citizens. The article describes the aftermath of a code red siren when, the *Times* writes, "people phone each other, telling friends and family they are okay, and trying to work out where the rocket could have landed."

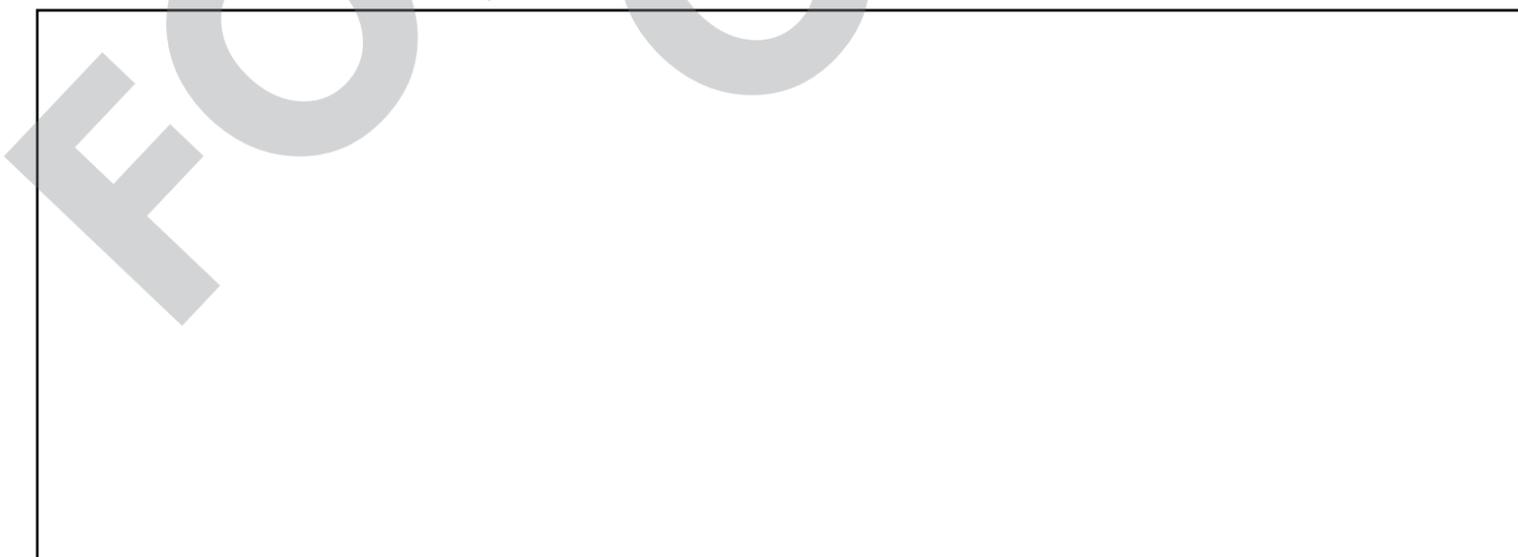
Arkush feels that the majority of Britain's printed media — the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Daily Mail* — is strongly pro-Israel. Still, the British Jewish community is constantly monitoring the media, especially what is happening at the BBC, with its decided anti-Israel slant. "We have rapid response groups who maintain a close watch on what the media says and will respond to things that are a departure from proper journalistic standards."

Arkush attributes much of England's

positive perception of Israel to the IDF's extremely successful social media presence. "You see it on [the IDF's] Twitter feed, and there's no doubt it's effective, because I see that what is being written there is being reflected in the British media. Journalists like quick, easy information, and the IDF is really doing a very good job."

Arkush adds that Israel is inching closer to getting some of the media to side with the Jewish state. "It's a big thing to say that in England, with our media. People understand that Israel didn't want this conflict, didn't start this conflict, and could not be expected to tolerate living under barrages of rockets."

After years of claims of bad *hasbarah* programming, Israel, it appears, may have finally turned a corner.





THE UGLY

THE BAD

THEN, THERE ARE THOSE MEDIA SOURCES that adhere to the tried and true strategy that the best defense is a good offense.

Columnists like Roger Cohen are a case in point. In his *New York Times* column of July 15, "Israel's Bloody Status Quo," he claims that Sheldon Adelson, a Jewish philanthropist and owner of Israel's largest paper, *Israel Hayom*, said that Gaza should be "returned to the Stone Age." But that's not exactly what he said. Rather, Adelson recommended that Gaza be defanged of every "rocket, bomb, and gun" and returned to a time when all its citizens could do was throw stones.

The behemoth British broadcaster BBC is often in the sights of Israel defenders, as its news stories on Israel consistently contain an anti-Israel bias. So much so that pressure from pro-Israel groups forced the BBC to conduct an internal investigation into its Mideast coverage in 2004. The results were never released to the public.

Arkush says that some, though not all, reporting on the BBC is terribly slanted against Israel. For instance, BBC reporter Jeremy Bowen's coverage is consistently unsympathetic to the Jewish state. But there is also a lot of coverage that is not unsympathetic, but is simply fact. He believes the BBC's coverage of the current Gaza war has been fair. Arkush acknowledges that internal BBC reports confirmed inherent biases against Israel, but claims that some corrective measures were taken, although he doubts that Jeremy Bowen was much influenced by this.

Arkush agrees with Plosker that in Europe there is a pretty shocking journalistic attitude toward Israel. "Although there is less anti-Semitism in England, our media is worse. Our media is sensationalist. Media loves images of suffering. That's what sells. Thank G-d, we haven't got symmetry of casualties, otherwise we would have 200 dead people in Tel Aviv."



Media Bias at Work



News Coverage: An Israeli gag order stifled reportage that gunshots were heard on the emergency call made by one of the kidnapped boys, and this may have contributed to the murder of the East Jerusalem Arab teenager Muhammed Abu Khdeir, according to Robert Mackey, online columnist for the *New York Times*. Citing various journalists and online commentators, he suggests that this silence allowed the Israeli government to build up support for its military actions against Hamas and helped channel outrage against Palestinians, creating an atmosphere of blood lust and calls for violent revenge.



Analysis: This coverage is a prime example of what is called "stacking the decks," according to Ini. The pundits upon whom Mackey relies for their opinions are all well-known Israel bashers. Ali Abunimah, head of the Electronic Intifada, has accused the Palestinian Authority of collaborating with Israel. Noam Sheizaf, another pundit cited, writes on the far-left Israeli website +972. He and his fellow authors embrace a virulent anti-Israel ethos, as does Mackey's third pundit, Amira Hass, whom Ini calls "an Israeli radical who represents the self-loathing fringe of Israeli society."



The Real Story: As soon as the abduction of the three boys became known, the IDF flew into action in a race against time to try to determine who the kidnapers were and where the boys were being held. Despite the sound of gunshots, there was still hope the boys might be found alive.

IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET, online pundits who are not news professionals have become a trusted source for news consumers. And there is no shortage of online sites that proudly show off their anti-Israel credentials. Blogger Philip Weiss, who runs a site called Mondoweiss, frequently lambastes Israel and shapes the news narrative for his followers. In one recent example, he applauded NBC reporter Brian Williams for stating Palestinians were "trapped" in Gaza in a "lopsided" conflict, and don't have a warning or defense system like the one that the US helped "buy for the Israelis." (The question of why there are no bomb shelters in Gaza was never raised.) Mondoweiss — who belongs to a species of Israel commentators who claim they are pro-Israel even while mercilessly bashing the Jewish state — recently published an article by a contributor that blamed Jews, and not pro-Palestinian demonstrators, for a July 13 attack on three synagogues in Paris. Weiss is a sought-after speaker and political authority who was recently interviewed on NPR.

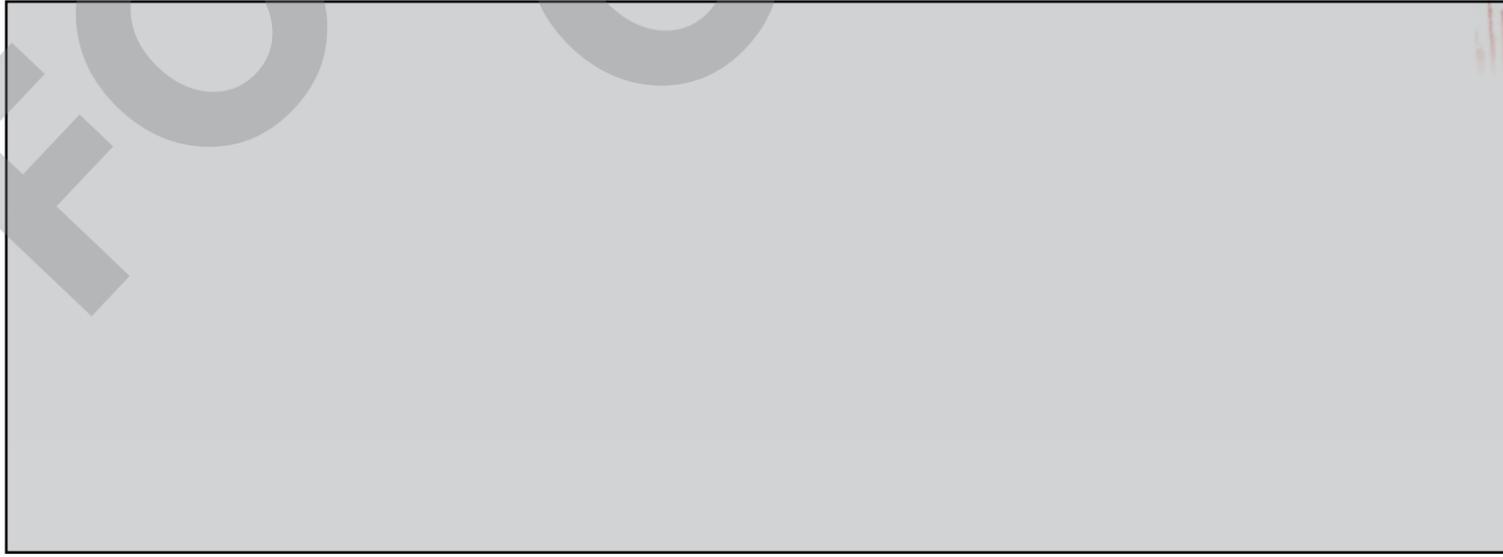
Like Weiss, Ali Abunimah is a notorious anti-Israel activist who runs a website called the Electronic Intifada. Abunimah goes to great lengths to tarnish Israel, stretching the truth beyond elasticity. In one recent example, he told the BBC that over the last six months "Israel killed five times as many

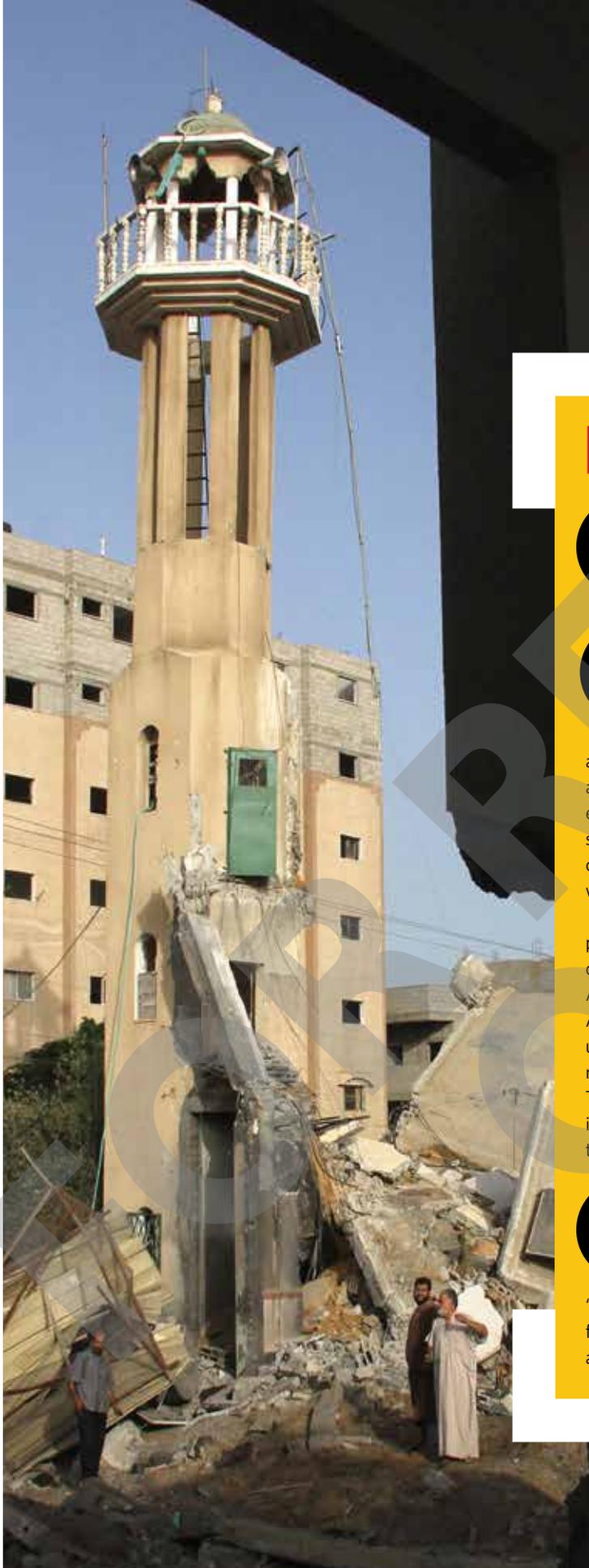
Palestinians in Gaza as it did in the first six months of 2013." He further maintained that it was Israel who violated the 2012 ceasefire agreement with Hamas. "The BBC and others only pay attention once the rockets are flying toward Israel," he told a BBC anchor.

This was a manipulation of facts. During the 2013 timeframe noted by Abunimah, the reports note zero civilian deaths by Israel in Gaza and six deaths during a similar six-month 2014 span. They also clearly state that Hamas rocket attacks against Israel preceded any Israeli response.

Hamas apologists are, therefore, bending over backward to explain away Hamas aggression. Many of them are funded by European Union money funneled to NGOs whose sole purpose is to propagate anti-Israel propaganda. Among them are those who are now claiming a distinction between Hamas's military and its political wing, claiming that the political wing associated with the Palestinian Authority has no control over its armed militias.

This spin has wiggled its way into the lexicon of the US State Department as well. On July 15, State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki referred to the alleged conflict between the "political" and "military" wings of Hamas. Psaki said hostilities might end "if the political wing of Hamas... can have influence over the military wing."





Media Bias at Work



News Coverage: Hamas batters Israeli cities with bombs, provoking air strikes by Israel in retaliation.



Analysis: Missile strikes on Israeli cities present a major problem for those pundits and reporters whose frame of reference only allows for Israeli culpability and Palestinian lack of agency, according to Ini. "The fact that Hamas is clearly an aggressor here means that more smoke and larger mirrors are necessary to convince the public otherwise," he said. "For example, Israel's warnings to Gaza civilians about upcoming strikes — warnings that are highly praised — are described as contentious or controversial, or even as a form of psychological warfare."

To illustrate the point, Ini points to criticism of the IDF's policy of "roof knocking," which entails dropping nonexplosive devices on a target prior to the real bombs falling. Philip Luther, Amnesty International's director of the Middle East and North Africa program, criticized the policy — which is rare, if not unprecedented, in modern warfare — claiming that it does not leave enough time between the warning and the strike. Therefore, he told the *International Business Times*, the policy is ineffectual. Ignored by Amnesty were Hamas's calls for Gazans to act as human shields.



The Real Story: A MEMRI (Middle East Media Research Institute) translation of a video showing Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhi publicly calling for civilians to protect their homes by confronting "Israeli warplanes with their bare chests" receives no attention from Amnesty. Luther is silent on the practice of using civilians as human shields, a clear violation of international law.