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Belated Reporting on Oct 7 Helps Justify Genocide

Mick Hall analyzes an Australian Broadcasting Corporation's story — 11 months into a genocide — on the Israeli military's use of the Hannibal Directive to kill its own citizens.



Not Another Bomb: Solidarity Action with Gaza at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. (Diane Krauthamer, Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

At the weekend Australia's national broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), featured a story reporting the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) had indeed carried out the Hannibal Directive, killing untold numbers of Israeli civilians on Oct. 7.

It regurgitated several reports in Israeli media dating back as far as January, which revealed the use of the doctrine, interpreted as a license to kill Israeli soldiers being taken hostage by the enemy.

In this case the directive was used after Israelis, mostly civilians, were taken prisoner by the Al-Qassam Brigades, either as they were being transported to Gaza or held captive in their homes at kibbutzim in southern Israel.

The latest of those reports, by Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* in July, revealed IDF commanders had ordered captured soldiers to fire at three separate locations, explicitly referencing the Hannibal Directive.

The ABC story should not be seen as a sign of legacy media finally coming round to reporting on Gaza truthfully.

Instead, the story should be viewed as an example of establishment media's propensity for begrudgingly giving a nod to demonstrable facts only when needed.

In fact, the belated reporting of Israel's use of the Hannibal Directive 11 months into a genocide reveals a qualitative difference between a passive and subservient mainstream media and an active and vital independent journalism earnestly working in the public interest and in accord with the Genocide Convention, a U.N. legal instrument that demands states take steps to stop genocide from occurring.

[See: *What We're Not Hearing About Oct 7*]

It is telling that the only original element in the ABC story were comments the broadcaster sought from "Israeli philosopher" Asa Kasher, author of the IDF's code of ethics, who said use of the directive had been "legally wrong and morally wrong."

The directive had supposedly been revoked in 2016 after Israel's attorney-general said killing a hostage was prohibited.

The ABC's use of Kasher as a salient voice is typical of the manner in which the way a story is framed serves to obscure the nature of Israel's colonial domination and the illegality of its occupation.

It also gives a type of balance to the story that keeps the broadcaster safe from the worst excesses of Zionist lobbying, while setting the narrow parameters of acceptable criticism of Israel.

Although Israel is responsible for deliberately killing possibly hundreds of its own citizens during its response to Oct. 7, this was presented by Kasher as an aberration, a scandalous lack of professional standards of an army bound by an ethical code within a democratic state.

Key Act of Avoidance



Kasher in 2017. (Ilan Kostica, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Hence, what the ABC story avoided doing was pointing out that Israel falsely blamed Hamas for killing 1,400 civilians, the original inflated figure it used before it was revised down to under 1,200, as part of a disinformation campaign to demonise the resistance group and dehumanise Gazans in general in the wake of Operation Al Aqsa Flood.

That figure of 1,200 killed solely by Hamas is still routinely reported by corporate media. [Kamala Harris in her debate with Donald Trump Tuesday night repeated the disinformation, saying Hamas had killed all 1,200 Israelis.]

Other elements of this propaganda included false accounts of dozens of babies beheaded, others ripped from the womb or cooked alive in ovens, as well as systemic rape and horrific disfigurement of women by resistance fighters.

These stories, devised by Israeli military and political figures and laundered by mainstream media, helped whip up an orgy of hate and revenge and frenzied support within Israeli society for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's biblical injunction to commit genocide against an occupied population under siege.

The propaganda, crudely calibrated to appeal to a deep-seated Orientalism within the West, including a fear of barbarous, irrational Muslims murdering Europeans in the most savage fashion, sought to condition the public to accept Israel's erroneous right to defend itself in whatever way it saw fit.

Led by the United States, Western governments spoke with one voice after Oct. 7, giving diplomatic cover to atrocities that may yet result in some leaders facing charges at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

This was the framing by independent journalists at outlets like *Electronic Intifada*, *The Grayzone* and *Consortium News* and their reports were written at the time when challenging the dominant narrative was critical.

[See: *PATRICK LAWRENCE: Decency Becomes Indecent*]

The ABC report said some testimonies from Israeli civilians and military personnel said that Israeli forces responding to the Hamas attack had killed Israelis, but that those making such statements were condemned. However, it added, there followed more testimonies and Israeli media reports confirming it was true.

That paragraph, with its reference to the “condemnations” of the testimonies, was the nearest the ABC journalist came to explaining why their outlet had not reported the Hannibal Directive’s use before now — external pressure.

From Option to Imperative



Memorial for individuals killed at the Nova Music Festival on Oct. 7, 2023. (Relspas, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0)

The doctrine, written in 1986 in response to the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers in Lebanon, gave the IDF an option of taking a risk of killing soldiers when attacking their hostage-takers. Over time it evolved into a strategic imperative of killing their own as a better option than having them taken prisoner.

It was clear why Hamas took 251 hostages back to Gaza on Oct. 7, according to Israel. In 2011, Hamas swapped one Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, for more than 1,000 prisoners. No doubt the Hamas leadership wanted to use them to bargain over the thousands of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli dungeons, some 9,940 as of June, according to human rights organisations.

The ABC news piece acknowledged the veracity of Israeli media reports that the IDF dispatched attack drones, fired hellfire rockets and 30mm cannons from dozens of helicopters at vehicles that were driving away from the Nova Music Festival and that tanks fired into houses at Kibbutzim as resistance fighters gathered up hostages.

It quoted former Air Force Colonel Nof Erez, who had told a *Haaretz* podcast:

“This was a mass Hannibal. It was tons and tons of openings in the fence, and thousands of people in every type of vehicle, some with hostages and some without.”

His comments followed early reports in January in the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronot*, which said IDF pilots attacked vehicles returning to Gaza despite a fear they might contain hostages.

Reporter Yoav Zeitoun stated:

“Twenty-eight fighter helicopters shot over the course of the day all of the ammunition in their bellies, in renewed runs to rearm. We are talking about hundreds of 30-millimetre cannon mortars and Hellfire missiles.

The frequency of fire at the thousands of terrorists was enormous at the start, and?only at a certain point?did the pilots begin to slow their attacks and carefully choose the targets.”

He said tank officers also confirmed they applied their own interpretation of the directive when firing on vehicles returning to Gaza.

Another journalist, Ronen Bergman, writing for the same newspaper in January, said 70 vehicles were destroyed by Israeli tanks and firing from aircraft killing everyone inside.

He said the IDF

“instructed all its fighting units... to stop ‘at all costs’ any attempt by Hamas terrorists to return to Gaza, using language very similar to the original ‘Hannibal Directive,’ despite repeated assurances by the security establishment that the procedure has been cancelled.”

The ABC pointed out that Israeli civilians survived Israeli forces firing on them and killing other hostages during at least two incidents, repeating testimonies of Kibbutz survivors who said they had been fired on by the IDF, from a helicopter at Nir Oz and from tank shelling at Be’eri.

Timing & Complicity

The BBC, CNN and other Western media institutions have yet to follow the ABC in acknowledging the Hannibal Directive was used on Oct. 7. Given the reliability of eyewitness accounts and statements of military officials featured in Israeli media and disseminated by Western independent journalists, those stories are inevitable but remain a matter of timing.

Acknowledging that Israel knew its own forces had slaughtered its own citizens — just as it is doing by killing Israeli hostages amid its indiscriminate bombing of Gaza — risks removing a key building block of Israel’s justification for annihilating the basic means of survival in Gaza in its “war against Hamas.”

As the IDF responded to the ABC’s request for a response to its story:

“The IDF is currently focused on eliminating the threat from the terrorist organisation Hamas. Questions of this kind will be looked into at a later stage.”

Media self-censorship is time-dependent, with omission and obfuscation useful and necessary for a particular period, according to the agenda it serves, in this case, an ethnic cleansing not yet fully complete.

Eventually news leaders, either to save credibility or remain relevant, allow journalists to report facts. And when that happens, foreign policy settings of Western governments typically dictate the depth and pace of disclosure.

The ABC story points to a cowardice among newsroom leaders, wary of a backlash from the Israeli lobby and flack from a sub-imperial Australian government zealously aligned with U.S. foreign policy if the dominant narrative isn’t adhered to.

Their approach contrasts sharply with the courage of independent journalists, subject to character assassinations and even arrest under anti-terror laws, as was the case with journalists Richard Medhurst and Sarah Wilkinson recently in the U.K. Their work remains contemporaneous instead of post facto, bringing information into the public domain so that the destruction of the Palestinian people can be halted while in motion, before fully enacted.

Mick Hall is an independent journalist based in New Zealand. He is a former digital journalist at Radio New Zealand (RNZ) and former Australian Associated Press (AAP) staffer, having also written investigative stories for various newspapers, including the *New Zealand Herald*.

By **Mick**

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