

GNITN Special Edition

Israel At War Day 560

Skewed Figures

Playing With Numbers

I usually joke that I don't like doing math in public, but when it comes to Hamas, they really should think before they post figures as we learn in a [report](#) from the *New York Post*:

According to the independent analysis group Honest Reporting, the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry recently updated its casualty list, quietly removing thousands of names without explanation. Notably, the revised list also dropped over a thousand children listed, sharply altering the previously reported demographic ratios that had been quickly seized upon by critics of Israeli military operations.

If you don't recall hearing about this until now, you're not alone:

This stark revision — largely overlooked by major media outlets — exemplifies a broader problem: the uncritical acceptance and use of questionable statistics to judge the legality and morality of military operations, most notably in Gaza.

I know I tell people all the time to not believe the numbers Hamas puts out, but a lot of people still use them as if they were facts even when faced with evidence to the contrary:

Despite the clear political control and questionable methodology behind Hamas casualty figures, political leaders and most international media outlets have cited Gaza Health Ministry (GHM) statistics without question or caveat.

We always need to consider the source and then the methodologies used to give the figures:

In the ongoing discourse surrounding the war in Gaza, casualty reporting has become a centerpiece of legal and moral debate. Much of the focus has centered on figures released by the GHM, which operates under Hamas — a US- and EU-designated terrorist organization. Yet far too little scrutiny is applied to how these statistics are collected, verified, and disseminated. As I've discussed in my work on urban warfare and casualty ratios, accounting for the dead and wounded during active combat, especially in dense urban areas, is inherently difficult, often imprecise, and prone to error or manipulation.

One source says that Hamas numbers are arrived at by less than reliable methods:

A recent investigative report by the Henry Jackson Society titled "Questionable Counting" documents serious flaws in GHM's casualty data. The ministry reportedly compiles numbers using a disjointed network of hospital records, unverified clinic reports, family input, and a Google Share Drive — rarely validated across sources.

But not only are their figures unreliable, they are also prone to manipulation for political reasons:

In the chaos of ongoing war, such methods are not just unreliable — they're ripe for political exploitation. These concerns were also echoed in an earlier investigation by the Associated Press, which reported how GHM's figures were frequently changed and riddled with inconsistencies such as duplicate names, gender mismatches, and age discrepancies.

There's A Bigger Problem

Not only are the terrorists numbers inaccurate, but they are taken as facts by almost everyone: *This practice reveals a broader, troubling trend: the world has come to accept casualty figures from Hamas-controlled institutions as near-instant truth. But it is neither reasonable nor practical to believe that any organization — let alone one operating under the duress and agenda of a terrorist group — can produce accurate, disaggregated casualty data within minutes or hours of an incident. The expectation itself ignores the inherent fog of war.*

This has happened before:

For context, consider other modern urban battles. In the 2016–2017 Battle of Mosul — one of the most studied urban operations of recent times — it took months, and in many cases years, to reach consensus estimates of civilian and combatant deaths. Even with international access and post-conflict investigations, the messy reality of urban warfare made real-time casualty accounting all but impossible.

Some sources in and out of the US government agree that GHM's data is skewed:

Credible media reports and US government officials, including the National Security Council, have acknowledged that the GHM's numbers frequently conflate combatants and civilians and lack crucial context about how, where, and under what circumstances individuals died. This lack of transparency contrasts sharply with the moral and legal weight often assigned to such statistics by international organizations and advocacy groups.

The author of the report, John Spencer, who is the chair of urban warfare studies at the Modern War Institute and co director of MWI's Urban Warfare Project knows that the accuracy under the current circumstances in Gaza lends itself to inaccuracy and propaganda:

In my research on the conduct of war in urban settings, I've emphasized how difficult it is to calculate accurate casualty ratios during or immediately after combat operations. In cities, civilians, fighters, and infrastructure exist in close proximity. Combatants use civilian structures and populations as cover.

The tactical reality of these environments complicates targeting, amplifies risk, and obscures accountability.

And the war in Gaza is all about urban areas and Hamas takes full advantage of those tight quarters as they use schools, hospitals, mosques and even baby nurseries in homes to hide their weapons and even launch their attacks. In short, Hamas promotes numbers that make Israel look bad and paints themselves as victims. It's not hard to see that if we're being objective.

Wars Aren't Easy To Judge

When it comes to military actions, assessing an attack isn't based on numbers of how many casualties there were, but the risk of them happening beforehand:

Critically, the laws of war do not require militaries to report casualty counts to prove compliance with the law. The proportionality principle within the laws of armed conflict requires commanders to assess the expected military advantage of a strike against the anticipated risk to civilians before executing an operation.

And you can't assign legality or morality based on these skewed numbers:

It does not judge legality based on post-event casualty numbers — particularly when such figures are produced by non-transparent, politically motivated actors.

Warfare Doesn't Work That Way

When we look at this war in Israel, we shouldn't fall prey to how Hamas wants it viewed:

The growing practice of using unverifiable or distorted casualty statistics to make moral or legal declarations about military conduct misrepresents how the laws of war are intended to function. Casualty numbers, especially when supplied by entities like Hamas, should not be the foundation of international judgment. Warfare is not a numbers game.

Israel shouldn't be judged by mere casualties and even then, such numbers need to come from impartial sources:

Legal compliance in war must be judged based on the intent of the action, the precautions taken, the proportionality analysis conducted in planning, and the efforts made to mitigate civilian harm — not on manipulated or incomplete casualty spreadsheets.

Only until the figures are determined by objective procedures can we assign views:

Until casualty figures are verified through independent, transparent processes, they should not be used to draw definitive conclusions about the legality or morality of military actions.

The international community must not use Hamas figures and they should insist on using higher standards for the data period:

The world must move away from using raw numbers — especially those produced by biased or non-transparent sources — as shortcuts to legal and moral judgment.

That is not how the laws of war work, nor is it how war itself operates. Analysts, journalists, policymakers, and the public must demand a higher standard of rigor and context before allowing questionable data to shape international perceptions and policy.

Hamas has an agenda and we need to acknowledge that before the media or even individuals give credence to their numbers:

The recent revelation by Honest Reporting, combined with findings from other investigations, confirms what many have long suspected: the casualty figures most often cited to condemn Israeli actions in Gaza are not just flawed — they are fundamentally unreliable and politically manipulated.

I've addressed this before about a year ago in a [video](#) citing the math on the numbers and this article only strengthens my assessment back then. Citing terrorist information only makes bad people look better and good people look bad. It needs to stop sooner than later.