

'Breaking the Silence' and Gaza

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Rockets being shot from Gaza into Israel during the latest conflict. Image via Reuters

The shooting war in Gaza was again accompanied by a massive political and media attack against Israel, with accusations of “war crimes” and “human rights violations” in parallel to the barrages of rockets and missiles.

The weapons and soldiers in the political war are led by the Palestinian and Arab propaganda machine and reinforced by their sympathizers in the media.

In addition, a small but visible number of disgruntled Israelis, with access to a great deal of money, provide an important fig-leaf of legitimacy. Under the guise of human rights groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), they use the façade of moral principles to promote a highly immoral and blatantly anti-Israel agenda, based on double standards and lies.

Among the most active is an NGO calling itself “Breaking the Silence” – supposedly highlighting “the silence” of ordinary Israelis regarding the many “crimes” of the government and army.

As IDF soldiers in Gaza were defending Israel, Breaking the Silence mounted its own blitz. The group’s leaders published no less than 10 attacks on the IDF in leading newspapers in Europe and elsewhere around the world, accusing the IDF of “collective punishment,” causing “unreasonable harm to Gazan civilians,” and “functioning as executioners who have lost respect for human life.”

For example, Idan Barir published an article in *The Telegraph*, “[Israel’s shelling of Gaza is a vast game of Russian roulette](#).” He blamed Israel for seeking to “frighten and disorient the civilian population” while alleging, in direct opposition to the evidence, that the attacks in Gaza “were not motivated by any specific intelligence information.” Instead, the war in Gaza was designed to punish innocent Palestinians.

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Another official, Yuli Novak, published four articles on a similar theme - in *Le Monde*, *The Guardian*,; *De Morgen*(Belgium), and Norway’s *Aftenposten*. Novak apparently did not care that she directly contradicted herself. For British readers, she wrote “[When I served, the Israeli military was the most moral in the world. No more](#),” but her *Le Monde* piece was headlined, “[A former Israeli soldier: Our goal was to spread fear](#).”

These political attacks, like so many of the distortions served up by fringe NGOs and eagerly devoured by the consumers of anti-Israel hate, give short shrift to Hamas and terrorism. Readers can conveniently push aside uncomfortable facts, such as the 4,560 rockets and missiles launched at Israeli civilians from Gaza’s mosques, schools, hospitals and homes. Each is a double war crime, for locating lethal weapons among civilians – known as human shielding – and for intentionally targeting civilians.

Instead, the reality of violence and hate that Israelis face every day is blurred into the background, while unfounded allegations of “immorality” are given the spotlight.

For predisposed Israel-haters and promoters of BDS campaigns (boycotts, divestment, and sanctions),

publications by members of Breaking the Silence are important ammunition. If Israelis agree that their country is immoral and acts in deliberate, systematic violation of international law, then this must be so.

Of course, the vast majority of Israelis, including on the political left, who have served in the IDF, know that these allegations are absurd and part of a radical and anti-democratic political agenda. Breaking the Silence claims that its activities are focused on exposing “the Israeli public to the reality of everyday life in the Occupied Territories... and to stimulate public debate.” But if these were the actual goals, international advocacy would not be a central component of its activities.

Further removed from the proclaimed objectives, this group also [distributed to members of the international media](#) “testimonies” from previous rounds of violence in Gaza. Foreigners who are unfamiliar with the facts on the ground, and often predisposed to embracing Palestinian victimization, readily accept these “testimonies.” But when examined by Israelis, they were shown to be a mix hearsay and innuendo, with no evidence for war crimes allegations.

Indeed, much of Judge Richard Goldstone’s discredited report on the 2009 Gaza conflict was based on the allegations of “Breaking the Silence,” supposedly from soldiers who participated in the fighting. But to his embarrassment, Goldstone later realized that these claims were not supported by evidence, like the rest of his 500 page indictment of Israel.

Money plays a major role in this political war. Breaking the Silence has an annual budget of over \$1 million (3.7 million shekel in 2012, the last available comprehensive data). Direct and indirect support comes from the governments of Spain, Denmark, the European Union, the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Germany, and Norway, as well as the New Israel Fund (NIF).

As the allegations against Israel increase, so does the budget. In early August, Breaking the Silence received emergency funds from a framework called the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Secretariat –the money comes from Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark.

The express purpose of this funding is for “documentation of human rights and international humanitarian law violations during the course of Israel’s ongoing military offensive on the Gaza Strip.” This new evidence will be central in the forthcoming UN kangaroo court (“Goldstone 2”), to be led by William Schabas.

With the help of its European benefactors, Breaking the Silence will still be fighting the political war against Israel long after the military attacks have ended.

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