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Opinion | When the Israeli Army Decides to Give a Detailed Answer

Tuesday 16 January 2024, by [HASS Amira](#) (Date first published: 16 January 2024).

In the routine occurrence during war, of bombing homes with their occupants inside, the IDF prefers to maintain ambiguity to conceal the magnitude of the 'collateral damage'

The response of the Israel Defense Forces Spokesperson's Unit this time was uncharacteristically detailed: It referred to the killing last Sunday, January 7, of two journalists, Hamza Dahdouh and Mustafa Thuraya.

Al Jazeera's bureau chief in Gaza, Wael Al-Dahdouh hugs his daughter during the funeral of his son Hamza Wael Dahdouh, a journalist with the Al Jazeera television network, who was killed in a reported Israeli air strike in Rafah in the Gaza Strip on January 7, 2024. Credit: AFP

Their names appeared on lists of members of the militant organizations Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, respectively, that Israeli troops found in the Gaza Strip, the IDF spokesperson claimed, and attached a scan of [a document supposedly containing Dahdouh's name. No such document was attached for Thuraya.](#)

This response, for which I waited about two and a half days after sending my questions, was published concurrently with a similar general announcement by the IDF spokesperson, which Israeli media outlets quoted. Other queries I have sent to the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, [concerning the mass killing of Palestinians in this war](#), received general and evasive answers. It is therefore appropriate to ask why we "merited" a detailed answer in the first case.

People check the car in which two journalists, AFP news' Mustafa Thuria, and Al Jazeera television network's Hamza Wael Dahdouh were killed in a reported Israeli strike in Rafah in the Gaza Strip on January 7, 2024. Credit: AFP

In the early hours of Sunday, January 7, a building in the village of Nasr, north of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, was bombed. Displaced persons from several areas in the Strip, all members of the Abu al-Naja family, had been staying in the building. The building is termed a "chalet," despite being made of concrete.

This is the name given to hundreds of similar small buildings that have sprung up in recent years in less crowded areas of the Strip. They were used by families that wanted to get away from the congestion of the city and the refugee camps, to relax for a few hours 20 kilometers (12 miles) from home, closer to the sea or to farming areas in the southeast of the sealed enclave. [Today, thousands of displaced people live in them.](#)

By the way, the old-timers still call the area of Nasr "Moraj," the local pronunciation of Morag, an Israeli settlement that was evacuated in 2005. On the Abu al-Naja family's Facebook page, a death

notice for 15 martyrs was posted – Hajj Saleh Abu al-Naja, his wife, seven of their children and a few grandchildren – and information about the wake house opened in the diwan, or family’s meeting place, of the extended family in the Al Jundi neighborhood in Zarqa, a city in Jordan.

When photographers and reporters came before noon, the last of the bodies were still being recovered. Neighbors carried them in blankets to the ambulance. Thuraya sent up a camera drone. At around 11 A.M., an attack drone fired a missile at the group of journalists. It exploded near them, and “only” injured two of them. The journalists assumed it was a warning missile (as in Israel’s “knock on the roof” tactic), telling them to move away.

One of them told Britain’s Channel 4 that the drone did not manage to film more than four minutes. The wounded were put into the ambulance, along with the bodies. It speeded to Rafah. A black Skoda with three journalists and a driver followed it. Suddenly, on Omar Ibn al-Khattab Street in Rafah, a second drone missile was fired, hitting the car. The driver, Qusai Salem, was killed, as were Thuraya and Dahdouh. The third journalist in the car was seriously injured.

Wael Al-Dahdouh, the Al Jazeera bureau chief in Gaza. Credit: Mahmud Hams/AFP

The Channel 4 report showed the IDF statement, in English, from January 7, saying that a terrorist operating a drone, who posed a threat to soldiers, was targeted. I found no such post in the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit Hebrew-language war log. Nor did I find a statement referring to the bombing of the Abu al-Naja family’s home and the justification for it.

This time, the killing of the two journalists broke even the ceiling of Israeli indifference: Dahdouh was the eldest son of Wael Dahdouh, the veteran Al Jazeera reporter. In October, an Israeli bomb killed Wael’s wife, daughter, son and grandson. Last week, Palestinian, Arab and international media outlets reported on his personal tragedy and the fact that he returned to broadcasting immediately after the funerals. That is why I also asked the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit to comment on the conclusion drawn by many journalists that the IDF is taking revenge on Wael Dahdouh by killing his family.

An IDF Spokesperson’s Unit statement Wednesday said that before they were hit, Dahdouh and Thuraya had operated drones that endangered our forces. To me personally, the spokesperson responded that the claims that the IDF attacked a target as an act of revenge are completely baseless.

I also asked about the bombing of the Abu al-Naja family’s home. The IDF spokesperson gave the answer given on previous occasions when I asked about [the killing of several family members inside their home](#): “We are not aware of an attack on a home in the Nasr neighborhood as described in the query. As additional details are received, the events will be examined.”

I assume that the announcement on the killing of the two journalists and the disclosure of the alleged reasons for their killing is so detailed because of the commotion that it stirred in the media. But there is another reason: The so-called collateral damage in this incident was minor: “only” the driver. In the routine occurrence of this war – the bombing of houses with all their occupants inside – the IDF prefers to maintain ambiguity that will hide the magnitude of the “collateral damage” its jurists permit it, and conceal the identity of the target.

The Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate cast doubt on the veracity of the Israeli claims that Dahdouh and Thuraya were members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, respectively. But in casting this doubt, there is an acceptance of the Israeli argument, according to which it is justified to kill any Palestinian who is unarmed and not involved in killing but is connected to Palestinian militant

organizations. By this illogic, a day will come when Palestinians will justify, in some international court, the killing of IDF field observers and soldiers who work at the IDF Spokesperson's Unit or at Army Radio.

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P.S.

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