



## [The Targeting of Healthcare Workers and Facilities](#)

By Brenna Haggerty

An air strike hit the Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza on the evening of October 17<sup>th</sup>. Gaza's health ministry reported that at least 500 had been killed in the initial blast. Most victims were women and children, as has been the case since the onset of the war. Gazan officials accuse the Israeli Defense Forces of orchestrating the attack, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claims that militant group Islamic Jihad was responsible. Regardless of where the blame may rest, persistent attacks on numerous hospitals have caused considerable numbers of dead and wounded among the civilian residents of Gaza. Doctors are exhausted with little resources and patients outnumber available beds. These factors contribute to the seemingly never-ending nightmare medical staff are experiencing - they cannot return home once their workday is over because their homes have been destroyed.

In its attempt to validate claims that militants caused the catastrophe, the IDF released what it claims was an intercepted call between two Islamic Jihad members discussing the "failed" rocket that crashed into the hospital in Gaza. Upon arrival in Israel, President Biden told Netanyahu during a press conference that the horrific act was committed by "the other team." In a bold display of support, the President of the United States claimed that he has personally seen data that clears Israel of accountability for the incident. However, neither the Americans nor the Israelis have presented any evidence to the public; and all indications are that the Israelis are responsible. In fact, two separate investigations by the Qatari AlJazeera and British Channel 4 media channels disproved the allegations while numerous military and ballistics experts have debunked the veracity of the claim. An Israeli official even stated on social media that the IDF was responsible for the attack in a now-deleted tweet. The Israeli's have a history of committing war crimes such as at the attack on Al Ahili Arab Hospital yet deflecting blame knowing the likelihood of an investigation is nonexistent.

Videos posted on social media immediately preceding and during the attack provide insight into how the attack unfolded. People present at the blast are heard saying "they" have struck Gaza, typically a reference to Israeli attacks. Based on an analysis of the video from military analysts, some speculate that the blast was not an airstrike; the fire looks more like that from a propellant fire than the result of a strike. Many analysts have made sure to add that it is very difficult to come to a concrete conclusion based on video evidence alone. The day following the blast, a spokesperson from the Israeli military claimed that there was no damage to the surrounding buildings of the hospital as would typically occur following an airstrike. He also questioned how quickly Gaza was able to report an accurate approximation of casualties; however, Palestinians retort that it was a hospital with the numbers present known and quickly counted.

It is unlikely that the Israelis will ever change their stance regarding who is responsible for the attack. Regardless, this would not be the first time the nation targeted healthcare facilities and workers since the onset of the war roughly two weeks ago. Since hostilities were reignited over a dozen ambulances and health institutions have been

hit. Targeting protected places, such as schools and hospitals, is considered a war crime under international humanitarian law. Even before the strike that killed upwards of 500 civilians, Doctors Without Borders/Medicins sans Frontieres released a statement regarding illegal bombings. As a result of targeted attacks, they had counted 18 ambulances destroyed and eight medical facilities partially damaged or completely obliterated. Sixteen medical workers were killed in these strikes. MSF reported these figures on October 12, days before the strike that killed 500 citizens.

In addition to the direct attacks, emergency service vehicles and workers face tremendous difficulties reaching victims. Israeli forces block entrances and exits to various cities, prohibiting the transfer of casualties and the injured. When Palestinian emergency responders are given the go-ahead by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to enter blocked-off areas, they are still attacked by the IDF.

Israel often claims that Palestinians receive warnings before a strike to evacuate the area. Palestinians, both civilians and correspondents, on the ground, dispute these claims. Waleed Siam, the Palestinian ambassador to Japan, announced that the Israeli military gave the Al Ahli Arab Hospital a warning on an hour's notice to evacuate. This statement contradicts the Israeli government narrative regarding their military procedures involving air strikes. Even when warnings are given, they are incredibly short notice, sometimes giving targeted facilities only three-minute warnings. The orders to evacuate hospitals and other healthcare facilities make it impossible for adequate care to be given and to safely remove patients who are in critical condition.

The repeated attacks on these crucial facilities and individuals are plunging Gaza even further into a humanitarian crisis. Civilians are using hospitals as shelters because these locations are supposed to be protected - or at the very least, not attacked - in accordance with international humanitarian law. Hospitals have had fewer resources to begin with because of Israel's restrictions on basic needs for Palestinians; but the war has exacerbated the needs of those in Gaza. Workers report that children are coming in with traumatic injuries looking for help, but the hospital is too overwhelmed. There is no capacity to help all of those who are suffering. This reality impacts not only those injured by the strikes but also existing patients in these facilities. It also forces doctors to make the impossible decisions of who they should save, who requires more care, and who is unfortunately beyond saving.

In addition, Gazans are living with minimal fuel or electricity since the Israelis cut off all access and threatened to bomb humanitarian convoys from Egypt. Israeli's oppressive measures have incapacitated hospitals and other necessary services from assisting the civilian population. In a social media post from Middle East Eye, a doctor solemnly recounts how his hospital relies on a fuel-based generator. He says once this fuel runs out, "disaster will happen in the hospital." He also notes that some areas of the hospital are now without water. Without proper access to electricity or clean water, life-saving procedures and medicine will be inaccessible to thousands. MSF reports that they have already used roughly half of their emergency provisions. All these factors will only cause the number of casualties and injuries in Gaza to grow.

President Biden just recently announced that he is sending \$100 million in aid to Gaza and the West Bank; but conditioning the assistance on having systems in place to ensure the money goes towards civilians and is not administered by Hamas officials. The question remains, how catastrophic a humanitarian disaster will be by the time the aid finds its way to those who need it.