The Murder of Six Journalists in Gaza and the Israeli Army's Repeated Targeting of Journalists

Earlier this week on Sunday, Israeli forces carried out the targeted assassination of six journalists in an attack on a media tent outside of the main gate of Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital, including prominent Al Jazeera correspondent Anas Al-Sharif and several of his colleagues. The murders have elicited global outrage, with press freedom organizations stating that they are appalled by Israel's repeated and longstanding pattern of brazenly targeting and killing journalists – with the Israeli army going so far as to even unashamedly take credit for this latest assassination in an official military statement. For impartial observers, it is undeniable that actions like these are part of a systematic effort to suppress and deter those documenting the truth of what is taking place on the ground in Gaza. During the course of the conflict, Israel has barred international media and news outlets from reporting in the enclave, and as a result, the world has relied on local Gaza-based Palestinian reporters for factual coverage – with these individuals valiantly risking their well-being and lives to do so. Thus, Israel's latest intentional murder of journalists is clearly aimed at silencing some of the last remaining voices inside Gaza who have shed light on the unimaginable scale of atrocities being committed there.

To many analysts, the timing of this is a calculated move as well, given Israel's plans to initiate a full-scale attack and military takeover of Gaza despite widespread denunciation. The assassination of Al-Sharif and his colleagues comes at a time when Israel is seeking to implement this universally condemned plan and has therefore been called out as a desperate attempt to prevent the exposure of further war crimes and human rights violations in Gaza. A host of entities have drawn attention to the obvious connection between the two, highlighting that it is no coincidence that the killing of the journalists coincides with the announcement of the Gaza takeover plan. Furthermore, Israel's shameful tactic of trying to smear journalists as being connected to militant groups without any credible evidence has also been heavily criticized. Al-Sharif had long been the subject of an Israeli smear campaign, to the point where he had feared the potential of being targeted and killed. This prompted him to appeal to human rights activists and global media outlets for the protection of journalists like himself in Gaza, particularly as public incitements from Israeli military officials became more frequent due to continued on-air coverage documenting their atrocities. Regrettably, these unfounded claims against Al-Sharif and others are part of a reprehensible long used Israeli practice of labeling journalists as militants in an effort to try and justify their targeting of them.

Even prior to this latest targeted assassination, press freedom advocates have documented how the Gaza War has been by far the single deadliest conflict for journalists. According to researchers, more journalists have been killed in Gaza since the conflict began than in the U.S. Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the wars in the former Yugoslavia, and the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan combined. In total, nearly 270 journalists have been killed by Israeli forces during the course of the less than two-year-long war. All of this demonstrates the blatant systematic targeting and killing of journalists – which Israel has gone as far as openly admitting with the murder of Al-Sharif and his colleagues. As defenders of press freedom and human rights have lamented and pointed out, the Israeli military feels that it can do this with impunity because none of its other unprecedented number of attacks on journalists have had any consequences to deter these repeated flagrant violations of international law and war crimes.

While there has been significant global outrage at this most recent Israeli killing of journalists, this must be combined with concrete punitive measures if this type of unlawful and immoral behavior is to be prevented from continuing to take place. The absence of this, especially considering the ever-growing criticism of Israel's actions in Gaza and the brazen nature of its array of violations, would be a shocking failure of the international community's duty to protect journalists and other civilians. Allowing this to go unpunished would be turning a blind eye to what many have outlined as being part of a deliberate strategy to cover up the truth, obstruct the documentation of war crimes, and hinder the possibility of future accountability.