

“LIQUIDATION SALE” ISRAELI MEDIA COVERAGE OF EVENTS IN WHICH PALESTINIANS WERE KILLED BY ISRAELI SECURITY FORCES

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1) Introduction

The violent reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exacts a very heavy blood toll from both sides. Since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000, more than 3,300 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces. In the same period more than 1,000 Israelis have been killed by Palestinians.¹

The way the killings are covered affects media consumers' ability to understand the complexity of the conflict, to interpret its varied contexts and to weigh the factors that contribute to its escalation. The conflict and the current circle of violence cannot be understood without knowing basic facts about reality on both sides. Israeli citizens are exposed to broad and intensive coverage of events in which Israelis are killed by Palestinians. One of the main questions that we seek to investigate here is whether Israeli media consumers receive basic information on killings of Palestinians by Israeli security forces.

The research presented in this report investigates media coverage of such events in December 2005, during which time, according to the major media outlets in Israel, 22 Palestinians were killed. In the framework of this study, we examined the daily editions of the three major newspapers, *Ha'aretz*, *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv*, and the evening television newscasts on Channels 1, 2 and 10. Within these editions and broadcasts, we studied all items concerning events in which Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces as well as items that dealt with the subject more generally (for example, items that discussed the "liquidations" policy or dealt with the responses of both sides to these events). A total of 135 items were examined.

1. The figures are from the web site of the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, the IDF Spokesperson and B'tselem - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories:
http://www.intelligence.org.il/sp/heb_n/con_5y.htm;
<http://www1.idf.il/dover/site/mainpage.asp?sl=HE&id=22&docid=37572.HE>; <http://www.btselem.org/Hebrew/Statistics/Casualties.asp>
In the period between the end of the implementation of the disengagement from Gaza (August 24, 2005) until the beginning of this report's period of investigation, December 1, 2005, 60 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces. During this period, *Ma'ariv* did not report 22 of the incidents, *Yedioth Ahronoth* did not report 14 of the incidents and *Ha'aretz* reported all of the incidents except for two.

2) What is a "Liquidation"?

In this report, we define a report of a "liquidation" as one that describes a situation where a premeditated killing has taken place. This definition is based on a widespread understanding of the term. This meaning is also hinted at in the alternative formulation coined by the IDF to describe such events: "targeted prevention". In other words, according to security forces, an act of "liquidation" is meant to thwart a combat action; meaning, it is an intentional act that is planned in advance.

A document submitted to the High Court of Justice in February 2003 by Shai Nitzan, deputy state prosecutor, clarifies that "liquidations" are intentional and pre-planned: "International law on the rules of warfare distinguishes between two categories of people: combatants and civilians. While combatants are legitimate targets for attack, **intentional** attacks on civilians are completely forbidden" (our emphasis).²

In an article entitled TRAGIC DILEMMA, published in *Ha'aretz* on February 29, 2004, Asa Kasher, one of the authors of the IDF code of ethics, makes clear that the term "liquidations" refers to preventative actions that target "a person engaged in practical preparations for carrying out an attack in Israel,"— thus, not during combat. Another article by Kasher, written jointly with Gen. Amos Yadlin (currently head of military intelligence and at the time of the article's publication commander of IDF colleges) underscores the basic meaning of an act of "liquidation": "A person is defined as a ticking bomb not only when an explosives belt is strapped onto him and he makes his way to an Israeli site. But rather, also at earlier stages of the actual process — when the person provides his comrades with the means for carrying out the attack, when he arranges the means of equipment and transportation, when he plans the attack, and so on".³

The definition of the term "liquidation" that was put forward at the beginning of this section is based on both military and legal sources. In fact, with few exceptions,⁴ this definition is consistent with the way that the term is used in media coverage, which reinforces its validity.

"Liquidations" can thus be understood to be events that occur under a clear set of circumstances — attacks on Palestinian activists that are preparing or carrying out hostile acts against Israel. By contrast, when a Palestinian is killed under different circumstances by Israeli security forces the situation is more ambiguous and complex. For the sake of convenience, we shall call instances of such deaths "non-liquidation" events. This report examines patterns of Israeli media coverage of all events in which Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces during the period of investigation. The report also inquires whether "liquidation" events were covered differently from "non-liquidation" events. It asks: What was the scope of the coverage? Were the circumstances that led to the killing of Palestinians investigated? What questions were asked and who provided the responses? The following pages seek to provide answers to these questions.

2. http://www.bambili.com/bambili_news/katava?main.asp?news_id=3139&sivug_id=1

3. National Security (a publication of the National Security College), September 2003.

4. Our research found that all of the media outlets, on occasion, used the term "liquidation" in reporting on a military action that resulted in the death of a Palestinian — without premeditation. On another occasion, one media outlet refrained from using the term "liquidation" or a similar formulation, even though the facts reported indicated that the military action in which the Palestinians were killed was intended to cause their deaths. During the investigated period, there were three events where such incongruence appeared in at least one media outlet. In two of the events incongruence appeared in only one media outlet.

3) Who Matters More? The "Liquidated" or Palestinians Killed under Other Circumstances?

One of the central questions posed in this study is whether the way that events were classified influenced the scope and salience of their coverage in the media. The findings show that "liquidation" events were reported in 80 percent of the television newscasts and newspaper editions that were examined, as opposed to other killings, which were reported in only 46 percent of cases.⁵ Thus, killings that were not defined as "liquidations" were reported just a little more than half as often as "liquidation" events.

For example, in a report in *Yedioth Ahronoth* on December 14 about an IDF action in Nablus, the article headline, on page 3 read: COMBAT SOLDIERS SET OUT FOR ACTIVITY IN NABLUS, SETTLERS PUNCTURE JEEP TIRES. Coverage of this event in other media outlets reveals that this operation to carry out arrests caused disturbances in the city, in which a Palestinian was killed by IDF fire and many others were injured. In *Ha'aretz*, on December 14, inside an article on page 6, it was written: "In another incident in the city of Nablus, Husam Saker, 22, was killed during severe clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and an IDF force that entered the city yesterday morning to carry out arrests". In an item broadcast in the eighth minute of the Channel 2 news on December 13, Nir Dvori reported: "[...] according to the Palestinians he was unarmed. Ambulances evacuated more than 20 injured Palestinians." *Yedioth Ahronoth* chose to omit this fact from its reporting and Channel 10 and *Ma'ariv* did not report on the operation at all.

In four reports on events that were not defined as "liquidations", the fact that Palestinians were killed was mentioned in an offhand manner. In these cases only the most meticulous media consumers could realize the fact that a Palestinian person was killed. Thus, for example, a headline at the beginning of the Channel 10 newscast on December 3 was MARITIME SKIRMISH IN GAZA STRIP. IDF CONCERNED ABOUT EXPLOSIVE-LADEN BOATS. The fact that a Palestinian was killed in this maritime skirmish was mentioned deep in the item by a Palestinian eyewitness who said, in Arabic, that "the sea is closed as far as we're concerned. The 'Dabur' boats always chase us and shoot at us. The 'Dabur' chased after him and killed him at sea". The fact that a death occurred was indicated by only one word in the translation subtitles that appeared in the item. Similarly, in the Channel 10 newscast on December 22, military affairs correspondent Alon Ben-David reported in incidental fashion on the death of a Palestinian, following an item that dealt with the fortification of IDF bases to protect them from Qassam fire:

In the entire area where the Elei Sinai and Dugit settlements once were, the entire area from which Palestinians are firing towards Ashkelon, the IDF has already informed the Palestinians that anyone who enters this area – will be shot. The IDF fires on that area all the time. A Palestinian was also killed there today.

Channel 1 reported the death of the Palestinian that day at the end of an item, in the following way:

This is already the IDF's reponse [to the Qassams]. Soldiers in the artillery battery fired dozens of shells during the day at spaces from which Qassam rockets were launched. The Palestinians reported one person killed, but residents of Ashkelon and the area are not impressed by this firing, which they claim is directed at open spaces.

In cases where the media informed the public about the fact that a Palestinian was killed, no significant difference was found between the prominence given to "liquidation" events and other killings, most of which appeared in headlines.⁶ The scope of media coverage of "liquidations", however, was found to be significantly greater than the scope of coverage of other killings.

5. This figure refers to actual reports on events out of all the reports possible. The reporting percentage would have been 100 percent only if all of the media outlets reported on all of the killings following every event.

6. Out of the media reports on "liquidation" events, 75 percent appeared in headlines and 25 percent appeared only in the body of the news items. Out of the reports on events that were not defined as "liquidations", 71 percent appeared in headlines and 29 percent appeared only in the body of the items.

In order to obtain a complete picture of the coverage, its content needs to be examined as well – how are different fatality events reported? What questions do the media ask? How do the circumstances affect coverage?



On December 14, 2005, Ha'aretz published an article on page 6 that reported on IDF activity in Nablus

Deep in the text it was reported:

In another incident in the city of Nablus, Husam Saker, 22, was killed during severe clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and an IDF force that entered the city yesterday morning to carry out arrests.

Yedioth Ahronoth also reported on this activity on the same day, on page 3. Its report completely eliminated the fact of Husam Saker's killing.

COMBAT SOLDIERS SET OUT FOR ACTIVITY IN NABLUS, SETTLERS PUNCTURE JEEP TIRES



4) Who Is Telling the Truth? A Senior Naval Officer or a Palestinian Fisherman?

In covering events, it is customary for journalists to ask five basic questions: What happened? When did it happen? Who was involved? Where did it happen? And why did it happen? Our research shows that with regards to events in which Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces, media outlets tended to convey only the security forces' official version of events. In 75 percent of media reports on events in which Palestinians were killed (35 out of 48) the only sources that provided information from the field were military or security sources. In these cases the media outlets accepted the IDF version of events unequivocally and presented it without qualification. They did not confront these versions of events with information from Palestinian or other Israeli sources, nor did they present independent investigations to check their veracity.

An illustrative case concerns coverage of the "liquidation" of two Palestinians on December 31. Three out of the four media outlets that mentioned the event described it in a similar way: On January 1, an article headline on page 4 of *Yedioth Ahronoth* asserted QASSAM CELL LIQUIDATED IN GAZA. On the same day in *Ma'ariv*, under the headline: CONCERN: HAMAS PLANNING TERROR ATTACK AND QASSAMS, on page 5 was written:

Yesterday, for the first time since the start of Operation Blue Skies in the security zone in the northern Gaza Strip, the Air Force intercepted a terrorist cell that attempted to launch Qassam rockets into territory of the State of Israel. Members of the cell tried to position themselves south of the rubble of the settlement of Elei Sinai, which was evacuated in the disengagement. But before they managed to launch the rocket a missile was fired and hit them.

It appears that in these reports the media outlets accepted without reservation the statement of the IDF spokesperson, which said: "In the framework of IDF activity in Operation 'Blue Skies' to eradicate high-trajectory fire toward territory of the State of Israel, IDF forces identified a terrorist cell preparing to launch high-trajectory fire".⁷ Only in *Ha'aretz*, in an article published two days after the event, on January 2, 2006, did another version appear concerning the identity of those killed: "Palestinian sources said that the two men killed were civilians – brothers Hamza and Mu'ataz Hamduna, age 22 and 26. They claim that the family's fields are located adjacent to the site where the missile was launched". This claim appeared alongside the IDF spokesperson's claim which referred to terrorists.

3 out of the 4 media outlets that reported on the "liquidation" of Hamza and Mu'ataz Hamduna accepted the IDF spokesperson's version of events without qualification:

Yedioth Ahronoth, January 1, 2006, page 4 headline:
AND IN GAZA: QASSAM CELL LIQUIDATED



Ma'ariv, January 1, 2006, page 5,
article headline and text:

CONCERN: HAMAS PLANNING
TERROR ATTACK AND QASSAMS



Yesterday, for the first time since the start of Operation Blue Skies in the security zone in the northern Gaza Strip, the Air Force intercepted a terrorist cell that attempted to launch Qassam rockets into territory of the State of Israel. Members of the cell tried to position themselves south of the rubble of the settlement of Elei Sinai, which was evacuated in the disengagement. But before they managed to launch the rocket a missile was fired and hit them.

Only in *Ha'aretz*, on January 2, 2006, in an article on page 5, did another version appear besides the IDF version concerning the identity of those killed:

Palestinian sources said that the two men killed were civilians – brothers Hamza and Mu'ataz Hamduna, age 22 and 26. They claim that the family's fields are located adjacent to the site where the missile was launched.

7. <http://www1.idf.il/DOVER/site/mainpage.asp?clr=1&sl=HE&id=7&docid=48827>

The same trend is evident when journalists are supposed to investigate the sequence of events that led to a killing. In an item broadcast on Channel 1 on December 10, for example, Colonel R., commander of the naval base in Ashdod, described an incident in which a Palestinian was killed by IDF soldiers' fire:

The swimmers carried behind them materiel, combat materiel. The force entered in order to arrest the swimmers. During the process of arrest the swimmers refused to stop and tried to get away, while at this stage fire was directed at our forces from the beach. Our forces shot the swimmers in order to prevent the smuggling.

Three out of the four media outlets that covered the event presented a similar version regarding the shooting by Palestinians that led to the firing by the Navy ship, but Channel 2 brought a slightly different story,⁸ in the words of anchor Danny Kushmaro:

Two Palestinians were killed today across from the beaches of Gaza by Navy fire, suspected of trying to smuggle combat materiel from Egypt. The two swam from the Egyptian side while towing an unidentified object into Palestinian territory. They did not respond to the Navy's calls to halt. **After the soldiers fired, fire was returned at them from the Palestinian coast** (our emphasis).

These examples and others that appeared during the month of our investigation indicate that reality is not always simple and unequivocal. But the media tends to tell us simple stories: Four media outlets did not present an independent investigation or look into questions that arose from the reports: What were the swimmers carrying? Who were they? Who opened fire? And they might even have asked what the reason was for the discrepancy between versions of events.

An item on Channel 10, on December 13, shows that media outlets actually can investigate the details of security events, on all sides, especially when the events endanger Israeli lives. Throughout the item, whose headline at the beginning of the newscast was FIRST REPORT: AIR FORCE HELICOPTER ATTACKED ISRAELI FISHERMEN ON THE COAST, reporter Shai Hazkani compared the situation being described to a "liquidation": "This event looks as though it were lifted from an action film or at least from a liquidation operation in Gaza [...] but we're not talking about Gaza, but rather a coastal strip between Palmachim and Ashdod and two Israeli fishermen that came to fish". Later in the item Hazkani asks the attacked fishermen: "How does it feel? Did you truly fear that you're a moving target [...]?" One of them replied: "First of all, fear, humiliation. What am I – an Arab in Gaza?! What is this, I'm here beside my home, two meters from my home, and a helicopter comes down on me like that?! Who is this pilot? [Who is] this insolent person who would do such a thing?! I don't understand!"

In contrast to the pattern usually found in the media, in this case Hazkani asked the questions that needed to be asked:

We are in what the IDF apparently calls a firing range, but as you see, it wasn't hard to get here. There are no fences and hardly any signs. Anyone can get here accidentally and find themselves under an attack like this one. Sources in the Air Force say this is a known firing range, even though it is not fenced.

Hazkani also sought answers from Lieutenant Colonel N., who responded to his questions:

We stopped not far from them while flashing the searchlight and indicating to them to move away. As a result of this, it took them a little while until they understood and until they prepared to leave and moved away. Only after we confirmed that the vehicle had left the firing range, at that point we gave firing approval and the training began.

Hazkani concluded the item while a profoundly troubling issue still reverberating in the background: "The pilots admit that they sought to evict the fishermen from the territory as quickly as possible. They called for a patrol car to be sent to remove them, but at a certain point, when the vehicle didn't arrive they just got tired of waiting".

8. The difference we emphasize concerns the circumstances of the event itself (who opened fire) and not the number of people killed. All of the other media outlets that reported the event, as well as other sources (including the IDF spokesperson and Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations) reported one person killed in this event.

The comparison that the reporter himself made between this event and a "liquidation" operation shows that it is possible to cover events differently. Here, ample space was devoted to describing the concerns and feelings of civilians that came under attack, questions were raised about the circumstances that led to the shooting, and serious investigative reporting took place. By contrast, when it is a matter of Palestinian lives, the media do not see fit to invest even minimal effort in pursuing similar questions.

In 48 reports on Palestinians killed as a result of shootings by Israeli security forces, alternatives to the IDF's version of events appeared only eight times. Out of these, seven referred to events that were not "liquidations". During the entire period of investigation **only one** non-IDF version of events appeared that referred to a "liquidation" event.⁹

Eighty percent of the unequivocal reports on "liquidations" appeared in headlines. By contrast, in coverage of events where Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces under different circumstances, in most cases the IDF version of events appeared only within the body of the news items. These findings reinforce the supposition stated at the beginning of this report, that the media is more apt to frame "liquidations" than "non-liquidation" incidents as simple unambiguous events.

As stated above, alternatives to the IDF version of events were presented in only a few cases. Moreover, in almost all these cases (6 out of 8), the alternative version was marginalized compared to the coverage given to the IDF's version of events.

For example, the headline of an article on page 8 of *Ma'ariv* on December 4 was: NAVY SINKS PALESTINIAN BOAT. The sub-headline presented the IDF version of the event: ONE OF THE PALESTINIANS ONBOARD THE BOAT WAS KILLED; IDF SOURCES CLAIM IT WAS AN ATTEMPT TO SMUGGLE COMBAT MATERIEL FROM EGYPT TO GAZA. Only within the text of the article could an alternative account be found of the identity of the killed man and the circumstances of the event: "IDF sources claim that the Palestinians tried to smuggle combat materiel from Egypt to the [Gaza] Strip and opened fire at the soldiers. But according to Palestinian sources, these were three fishermen that accidentally crossed the border into Egypt."

Ma'ariv, December 4, 2005, article headline on page 8:
NAVY SINKS PALESTINIAN BOAT.

The sub-headline presented the IDF version alone:
ONE OF THE PALESTINIANS ONBOARD THE BOAT
WAS KILLED; IDF SOURCES CLAIM IT WAS AN
ATTEMPT TO SMUGGLE COMBAT MATERIEL FROM
EGYPT TO GAZA.

Only within the text of the article could an alternative
account be found of the identity of the killed man and the
circumstances of the event.



"IDF sources claim that the Palestinians tried to smuggle combat materiel from Egypt to the [Gaza] Strip and opened fire at the soldiers. But according to Palestinian sources, these were three fishermen that accidentally crossed the border into Egypt."

Another example appeared on December 10 in a report by Shai Hazkani in the Channel 10 newscast:

IDF sources say they successfully thwarted an attempt to smuggle combat materiel by sea. A Navy 'Shaldag' ship fired this morning at two Palestinians that swam in an area where swimming is forbidden near the maritime border with Egypt. One of the swimmers was killed and the other is missing. IDF sources say that the two towed a large suspicious package behind them.

9. It should be noted that one report was based entirely on Palestinian sources: *Ha'aretz*, December 12, 2005, p. 5.

Immediately afterwards, Colonel Yoram Lax, Navy commander for the Ashdod region, appeared and expressed himself clearly and authoritatively: "The swimmers carried after them combat materiel, the swimmers refused to stop and tried to evade capture while at this stage our forces began being shot at from the coast". Opposite this senior officer, an unnamed and very agitated Palestinian fisherman appeared, but was not asked to address—nor could he address—the details of the event itself: "The situation is absolutely terrible. They shoot at people, they approach fishermen and tell them to get out of their boats and into the water; they put us in the water and shoot at our boats and at the harbor". The authoritative Israeli officer left little chance for the agitated Palestinian fisherman in the contest for public opinion.¹⁰ Thus we find that even when the media deem it proper to confront the IDF version of events with other versions, the two sides are not given equal exposure.

Only twice during the entire period of investigation did an alternative version receive significant exposure. On December 22, an article was published in *Ha'aretz* that received a small referral on the front page: ARRESTED IN THE MORNING BY THE BORDER POLICE, DIES IN THE EVENING AFTER BEING DRAGGED BY A DONKEY. The headline of the article, which appeared on page 16 of the edition stated: TESTIMONY: BORDER POLICEMEN TIED A PALESTINIAN TO A DONKEY AND TRIED TO MAKE IT GALLOP. The IDF's response to the claims appeared within the article. The *Ha'aretz* weekend supplement, published on the same day, devoted an extensive article to the subject, by Gideon Levy, which examined the event in detail. The rest of the media outlets did not report the event.

On December 4, an article was published on page 11 of *Yedioth Ahronoth* which dealt with two events in which Palestinians were killed by IDF fire. The banner headline of the article was: TENSE WEEKEND IN GAZA: TWO PALESTINIANS KILLED, QASSAMS FIRED ON THE SOUTH. The main headline was IDF KILLS PALESTINIAN FISHERMAN. The sub-headline stated NAVY SHIP OPENED FIRE ON FISHING BOAT THAT DID NOT HEED CALL TO HALT * PALESTINIANS: THE FISHERMEN DID NOT DO ANYTHING FORBIDDEN * IDF: THAT'S NOT HOW FISHERMEN BEHAVE * YOUTH KILLED NEAR PERIMETER FENCE TRYING TO CROSS INTO ISRAEL. In exceptional fashion, these headlines present different versions, equally, concerning the circumstances that led to the killing of the Palestinian on the fishing boat.¹¹ But this is, as stated, an exception.

The lack of willingness in the media to confront the IDF's version of events with alternative versions and to carry out in-depth investigations about the circumstances that led to the deaths of Palestinians can be seen not only in coverage of "liquidations", but in coverage of other killing events as well. Our findings show that with respect to "liquidations" this tendency is even more pronounced. When the relatively extensive scope of coverage that is given to "liquidations" is taken into account the picture becomes clear: "Liquidations" receive the lion's share of attention. They are depicted as straightforward and simple events in which the IDF neutralizes definite threats to the security of Israel and its residents. Coverage that is entirely based on versions provided by the security establishment—which decides on "liquidations" and carries them out—cannot help but bestow complete legitimacy on "liquidations". Even in the few cases where different versions of events are compared, usually surrounding "non-liquidation" events, the editing process suppresses or plays down the complexity of these situations by reducing the scope of the reporting, by shunting the item to a marginal position, or by favoring the security establishment's official version of events. In light of the above, we can better understand why media coverage lacks virtually any discussion of the "liquidations" policy, its effectiveness, its morality, its legality or its effect on events transpiring in the region. The next chapter of this report deals with these issues.

10. It should be noted that in another incident in which a Palestinian was killed in an altercation with a Navy force, Channel 10 provided a response from an official Palestinian source. The source did not refer to the details of the case itself but rather criticized the conduct of the IDF in general.

11. Nonetheless, in coverage of the killing by the perimeter fence a familiar pattern can be seen: The headline determines that the youth that was killed was trying to infiltrate into Israel while in the last paragraph of the article it is written: "The Palestinians claim that the killed person was shot while he was next to his house and that he did not try to cross the fence".

5) “You Can’t Speak of ‘Targeted Prevention’ When in Fact Innocent Children Are Killed”

a. Lack of critical discussion of the “liquidations” policy

Since the beginning of the first Intifada, Israeli security forces have carried out “liquidation” operations against Palestinians that they have defined as wanted. These operations have become more technologically advanced and since the “liquidation” of Hussein Abayat in November 2000 they have become part of the stated policy of the Government of Israel.¹² During the month of the investigation, 10 Palestinians were killed by “liquidations”. Despite the use of this means, during the entire period investigated the media did not disclose to its consumers the controversy surrounding the “liquidations” policy.

There was little critical discussion of the “liquidations” policy. During the month of our investigation 33 items were published that contained any critique of the efficiency, morality, legality or effects of the “liquidations” policy. When such critiques were presented, in most cases they were indirect or implied. They could be found at the margins of articles, in commentary columns, or in supplements. These meager discussions contrast—as we shall see—with major headlines that proclaimed “liquidations” or with Israeli declarations calling for an increase in “liquidations”. From this pattern it can be inferred that the media, in effect, express agreement with the policy and with its official presentation, or at least, that they have relinquished their critical journalistic function in this context.

Here are two examples of implied criticism: Deep in an article that was published on page 2 of *Yedioth Ahronoth* on December 6, was written:

In the past two months Islamic Jihad in northern Samaria has lost more than 110 people: ten were killed, 28 injured and others are in interrogation rooms. The organization also lost two of its senior commanders: Louie Sa’adi, who was killed, and Iyad Abu-Rub, who was arrested. Attackers, collaborators, treasurers and couriers have been arrested, but the fountain of fuel that motivates and nourishes this organization still has not been stopped. Hundreds of thousands of dollars reach the territory each month from Damascus. The organization has shrunk, but the commanders that have fallen from its ranks have been replaced by others and the fighting continues [...]

The same essence arises from a report by Shai Hazkani, in an item on the Channel 10 newscast on December 8: “But meanwhile, the bombardments and the liquidations have not changed the results, the Qassams keep falling”. These statements and others may hint that the “liquidations” are not achieving their intended objectives, but the criticism is only implied. There is no real discussion here.

In addition, 26 of these 33 items appeared in less central (and less read and less influential) positions: In marginal places in the articles, in weekend supplements or in commentary columns. By contrast, the headlines the reported on “liquidations” or on calls by senior Israeli officials to increase them did not offer any hint of criticism. For example:

SENIOR TERROR ACTIVIST LIQUIDATED IN RAFAH (*Ha’aretz*, August 8, page 5, the event is also mentioned on the front page).

TARGETED PREVENTION IN GAZA, FOUR POPULAR RESISTANCE COMMITTEE ACTIVISTS KILLED BY ISRAELI MISSILE (From Channel 1 newscast headlines, August 14).

LIQUIDATION OF FOUR PALESTINIANS IN GAZA ON THEIR WAY TO AN ATTACK AND AN EXPLOSIVES LAB EXPLODES IN NABLUS (Main headline, Channel 10 newscast, August 14).

MINISTER OF DEFENSE TO IDF: RENEW THE TARGETED PREVENTIONS (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, December 5, page 9)

12. See: “Are All Actions Acceptable in the Face of Terror? On Israel’s Policy of Preventative (Targeted) Killing in Judea, Samaria and Gaza”, Mordechai Kremnitzer, Position Paper 60, Israel Democracy Institute, 2005 (Hebrew).

SHARON INSTRUCTED: NEED TO RESPOND TO THE ATTACK WITH A HEAVY HAND – CLOSURE AND LIQUIDATIONS (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, December 5, page 6).

UNDER PRESSURE FROM PARENTS, FORTIFICATION OF BOOT CAMP IN ZIKIM BEGINS; SHARON APPROVES SECURITY ZONE IN GAZA AND CONTINUATION OF LIQUIDATIONS (Main headline, Channel 1 newscast, December 25).

SHARON APPROVES EXPANSION OF LIQUIDATION LIST (*Ma'ariv*, December 26, page 10)

In the items that appeared under the aforementioned headlines, no alternative positions on the "liquidations" policy appeared and there was no discussion of their necessity. Any in-depth critique of the policy, as stated above, was rare. A rare critique, by Yigal Sarna, appeared in an op-ed column titled LETTER TO THE GSS DIRECTOR that was published on page 5 of the "24 Hours" supplement of *Yedioth Ahronoth* on December 14:

"Do you know how many times we celebrated the killing of the last terrorist?" asked me a senior former GSS (General Security Service) official, Nahman Tal. He's a man from your organization, Yuval Diskin, a true veteran who has seen everything and heard everything [...] He's been through all the ranks and all the wars and seen everything from the vantage point of the sewers in Beirut and Balata. "You will never subdue a society that is revolting on nationalist grounds", he told me. [...] These are sentences that should be engraved in the wall of the office where in a few days you will celebrate the next successful liquidation. [...] Each liquidation brings four new heads in its place. Please, stop this march of blood and stupidity now - because there is no one there above you.

On December 28, Channel 10 dealt with Avi Dichter, the former GSS director, joining the Kadima Party. After an item dealing with the political implications of the move, a profile of the man was broadcast in the twentieth minute of the newscast. In the item, commentator Raviv Drucker, said the following:

Under Dichter's leadership, the GSS became a prevention organization, providing training to organizations all over the world. Some of the liquidations that the GSS carried out under Dichter were of the type that once used to garner victory albums. [...] Dichter saw his role as a terrorist liquidator - nothing less, but also nothing more. From his perspective, questions about the timing of a liquidation or its effect on Palestinian public opinion didn't really matter. More than a few people, also within the GSS, saw Dichter as responsible for eliminating the Palestinian's Authority's ability to act against Hamas. [...] After one of the liquidations three former GSS directors even invited themselves over for a cozy conversation that was not at all routine: What was that good for? You got rid of a villain, but a restrained villain, the former GSS heads told Dichter. The ceasefire ended following the liquidation, but Dichter was not convinced.

This example and others shown below demonstrate that the debate over the "liquidations" policy takes place within the heart of the security establishment and it is not only limited to "extreme leftist" circles. Still, Israeli media outlets hardly reflected this fact.

Only a few times did criticism of the "liquidations" policy appear in headlines. Four instances were devoted to the words of Motti Moral, Amir Peretz's advisor, concerning Ariel Sharon's determined effort to divert the public agenda from social affairs to security. While Moral's critique did receive exposure in the main headlines, most of those stories focused on the political and party implications of his statement. The attention given to the essence of his argument was marginalized. Thus, for example, anchor Yonit Levy, in turning to an item on the subject on the Channel 2 newscast on December 15, said: "**The political battle whose turn has come** today is a battle between advisors. It started when Amir Peretz's strategic advisor blamed the Prime Minister for carrying out targeted preventions in order to shift the agenda to security" (our emphasis). Similarly, the headlines of the Channel 1 newscast on December 28 reported: SENIOR OFFICIALS IN THE LABOR PARTY BLAME SHARON FOR PURPOSELY EXAGGERATING THE SECURITY SITUATION, though against this spoken backdrop Amir Peretz was heard saying: "I have a hard time believing that the Government of Israel would utilize the IDF out of political considerations".

A headline in *Ha'aretz* on December 30 also voiced implied criticism of the "liquidations" policy: DESPITE THE MANHUNT: THE JIHAD NETWORK IN THE WEST BANK KILLED 24 ISRAELIS THIS YEAR.

An article that appeared on page 2 of *Yedioth Ahronoth* on December 9 gave broad coverage to the claims of Palestinian plaintiffs against Avi Dichter for his role in the "liquidation" of Salah Shahade, in which 15 people were killed. But the quotation marks in the headline UNITED STATES: CLASS-ACTION LAWSUIT AGAINST DICHTER FOR "WAR CRIMES" made clear the editors' position regarding their claims.

During the entire period of investigation only one in-depth critical discussion of "liquidations" took place in a prominent place. It happened at the beginning of the Channel 1 newscast on December 7, following a report on the "liquidation" of Mahmoud Arkan:

Anchor Haim Yavin: "Oded, the man that was liquidated belongs, belonged, to the Resistance Committee, while the attack in Netanya was carried out by the Jihad. So where did all this get us?"

Arab Affairs Commentator Oded Granot: "Let's just say, for simple reasons, the man's luck took a turn for the worse. He was simply less careful than the others. We've reported that all the leaders, senior figures, in the Islamic Jihad went underground after the attack in Netanya. He apparently did not estimate that he was important enough to be counted among those that would be targeted by the IDF, and that's what happened. All in all, Haim, we have to understand that what happened today, this targeted prevention, does not provide an answer, it does not provide a real response to the Jihad's intent to continue carrying out attacks within the green line from the West Bank."

Yavin: "So now what? Should we expect a response now? Another attack in Israel?"

Granot: "Yes. I would say that, indeed, until the morning hours that will be the test period, if that is their intention. They haven't responded since the firing, the IDF artillery firing, following the attack on the Netanya Mall, they haven't responded. The question is if they will respond by firing Qassams, and by firing them en masse? This will indicate whether they want to escalate the situation or whether they will remain satisfied with this and absorb [the Israeli counterstrike]. The interesting point is that Abu Mazen is in the Gaza Strip and he is actually being pressured from all sides. He is approaching Israel via Condoleezza Rice and saying: stop the escalation of the situation, stop the targeted liquidations, it's not helping me".

b. Lack of critical discussion of the cause-and-effect relationship between “liquidations” and attacks

Out of 135 reports that were examined in this study, only 30 (about 20 percent) included any reference to the causal context surrounding the events (acts of violence between the two sides that are tied to, usually, or are explained, in terms of violent acts previously perpetrated by the other side).

Israelis and Palestinians are apt to interpret differently the cause-and-effect relationships that lead to the creation of the circle of violence. Our research shows that interpretations depicting Israel as responding to Palestinian aggression are brought forth in the media by both Israeli officials and senior Israeli commentators. By contrast, alternative interpretations are brought forth, in most cases, by Palestinians involved in acts of terror – which can undercut the legitimacy of these claims in the eyes of Israeli media consumers. This is done even though there are also Israeli sources that maintain the alternative position. For example, the main headline of an article on page 3 of *Yedioth Ahronoth* on December 6, stated: SUICIDE TERRORIST: I AVENGED THE LIQUIDATION OF JIHAD COMMANDERS. Beside the headline a picture appeared of the suicide terrorist armed with a gun. The headline of an article on page 7 of the December 15 edition asserted: THE JIHAD THREATENS: WE WILL AVENGE THE LIQUIDATION OF THE FOUR ACTIVISTS.



Yedioth Ahronoth, December 6, 2005, page 3: SUICIDE TERRORIST: I AVENGED THE LIQUIDATION OF JIHAD COMMANDERS

Yedioth Ahronoth, December 15, 2005, page 7: THE JIHAD THREATENS: WE WILL AVENGE THE LIQUIDATION OF THE FOUR ACTIVISTS



Commentaries by Israeli writers and commentators, which presented the Palestinians as responding to Israeli aggression as a matter of fact, without any connection to promises of revenge or threats by terrorist factions, appeared only five times during the period examined. For example, in the studio on the Channel 10 newscast on December 15, Alon Ben-David said:

It's not certain that we're headed for an escalation. In the meantime I would say that this does not deviate from the bounds of the Palestinians' regular response to a liquidation. The shooting is only sporadic – a total of 10 rockets were fired since yesterday, since the liquidation.

Similarly, here is what Haim Yavin said in transitioning to an item on the Channel 1 newscast on December 8: "And within 24 hours – another liquidation. This time in the northern Gaza Strip. A senior figure in the Tanzim, who was responsible for a series of attacks, was liquidated, and in the IDF preparations are already underway for a barrage of Qassams".

Only once during the entire period of investigation were similar claims presented by an official Palestinian source analyzing the cause-and-effect relationship from his own perspective in a matter-of-fact fashion. But the item in which this appeared was published on page 3 of the "24 Hours" supplement of *Yedioth Ahronoth* on December 6, next to an article on the Festigal (a children's music festival). In the article, under the headline "THE ATTACK IS A RESPONSE TO THE LIQUIDATIONS" Roni Shaked interviewed Ziad Abu-Ziad, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, who said the following:

I don't like to expect bad things, but in the recent period there have been liquidations, arrests, and military operations by the Israeli side that led to an escalation, and as a result it was possible to expect a counter response. Don't forget, during the past weeks a few leaders of the Islamic Jihad were liquidated. This was expected. We hoped there wouldn't be an attack, but to our chagrin, it happened.

The only time that claims from an official Palestinian spokesperson were presented was in a commentary column that was not published in the news section: *Yedioth Ahronoth*, December 6, 2005, page 3 of the supplement.

INTERVIEW WITH ZIAD ABU ZIAD, MEMBER OF THE PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL: "THE ATTACK IS A RESPONSE TO THE LIQUIDATIONS"



>>Ziad Abu Ziad, are we at the beginning of a new wave of attacks?

"I don't like to expect bad things, but in the recent period there have been liquidations, arrests, and military operations by the Israeli side that led to an escalation, and as a result it was possible to expect a counter response. Don't forget, during the past weeks a few leaders of the Islamic Jihad were liquidated. This was expected. We hoped there wouldn't be an attack, but to our chagrin, it happened."

The minuscule number of times that Israeli media consumers are exposed to an analysis of current events from the Palestinian perspective can lead to a situation whereby media consumers lack awareness of the complexity of the picture and its various interpretations. An exceptional report by Roni Daniel appeared on the Channel 2 newscast on December 8:

So there aren't any casualties – but there is a circle of activity that just keeps escalating: Qassam firing, preventions and blows to the heads of the organizations, then artillery fire – it all moves in a circle of action and response, with the trend, in light of the upcoming elections—here and there—toward escalation.

But, as stated above, a complex Israeli perspective such as this one is presented in the media only rarely.

c. Imprecise use of terms

The media's tendency to tell a simple story also finds expression in the terminology that media outlets choose to use to describe acts of "liquidation". During the month of our investigation, with few exceptions, journalists in the major media used three principal terms: "targeted prevention", "liquidation" and "assassination". The term "liquidation" was most popular while "assassination" was most rare. *Ha'aretz* consistently used the term "assassination" in its headlines and Channel 10 used the term "liquidation". The other media outlets alternated between use of the terms "liquidation" and "targeted prevention". Sometimes all three terms were used in a single item.

The expression "targeted prevention" has a positive connotation, presenting the act of "liquidation" as "surgical" – striking only its intended target. Its use bestows a degree of legitimacy to the act. The term substitutes for terms with negative connotations, such as "assassination" and "liquidation".

Ami Ayalon, the former GSS director, effectively criticized use of the term "targeted prevention" in particular and expressed the importance of terminological choice in general, in an interview that appeared in the *Yedioth Ahronoth* political supplement on December 9.¹³

The annihilation of entire neighborhoods is not a targeted war. Razing dozens of acres of groves is not a targeted war. Killing one terrorist along with half a neighborhood definitely isn't. [...] Words create behavior patterns and behavior patterns expand the hatred and nourish terrorism. One can't talk about a 'targeted prevention' when in fact innocent children are killed [...] When I speak of a targeted war, the emphasis is not on the moral issue, but rather on the operational aspect: the superfluous use of force recruits more people.

Reporter Avi First voiced a similar critique in an item on the petition by The Public Committee against Torture in Israel against the "liquidations" policy, which was broadcast on Channel 1 on December 11:

According to the petitioner, The Public Committee against Torture in Israel, the term "targeted prevention" is not really precise. In the past five years, though 284 targets - meaning terrorists - were successfully liquidated, together with them another 146 passersby were killed and more than 500 were wounded.

And here's what military affairs correspondent Alon Ben David said in the Channel 10 studio on December 14:

The reason why we are seeing this film today [a film documenting a "liquidation"], in a very uncommon way—because we don't usually get films from these activities—is because this action, in rare fashion, as I say, justifies the term targeted prevention.

And thus, between the lines, with no additional discussion or any questions from the news anchors, the senior correspondent on Channel 10 claimed that these acts of "prevention" are not targeted. These claims did not prevent media outlets from continuing to use the term without disruption. Many times media outlets chose to ignore any evidence that undermined the term and did not inform the public about casualties among passersby that resulted from the "liquidations". Ten out of 20 reports on "liquidation" events during the period examined did not include information on casualties among passersby and in nine other reports such information appeared only in marginal places in the items. Only once did such a report appear in a prominent place.

The problematic use of the term is brought into sharper focus in those reports where "targeted prevention" appears in the headlines but an in-depth inspection of the news item reveals that in the act itself innocent passersby were struck. Thus, for example, the main headline of the Channel 10 newscast on December 7 declared: TARGETED PREVENTIONS HAVE BEEN RESUMED. IN THE SOUTHERN GAZA STRIP, MAHMOUD ARKAN, AN ACTIVIST IN THE POPULAR RESISTANCE COMMITTEES, WAS LIQUIDATED. But in the item itself it was said: "The man was killed on the spot by missiles that were fired at his white Subaru. Another ten were wounded, some of them passersby".

13. The critiques of the term "targeted prevention" all appeared in relatively hidden places. These types of critiques are included in the quantitative figures that appear at the beginning of the chapter. The December 9 edition of *Yedioth Ahronoth* referred to the interview with Ami Ayalon on the front page, but the critique that is quoted only appeared within the interview itself.

6> Conclusion

In media coverage of events where Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces during December 2005 a number of editing patterns stand out:

- Events that were not defined as “liquidations” were reported just a little more than half as often as “liquidation” events.
- The vast majority of reports were based on the IDF version of events alone. The few cases in which an alternative to the IDF version was presented were events that were not defined as “liquidations”. The alternative versions were reported in relatively marginal places compared with the IDF version.
- A critical discussion of the “liquidations” policy was lacking in the media discourse. Where there was such discussion, it was in most cases merely implied or ambiguous and could be found only deep in news items, in commentaries or in supplements. Critiques of the effectiveness of the “liquidations” policy, or of its legality or morality, appeared in very few places. This, despite the fact that from the news reports it is evident that, even within the security establishment, this is a controversial policy.
- The reports lacked attention to the circumstances and wider context in which violent events occurred. In reports that did refer to the context, it was found that interpretations which presented Israel as responding to Palestinian aggression were put forth by official Israeli sources and by senior commentators. By contrast, alternative interpretations were presented, in most cases, by Palestinians involved in acts of terrorism – which served to undercut the legitimacy of those claims.
- The media discourse almost completely lacked any critical discussion of the term “targeted prevention”, which was adopted widely by four of the six media outlets that were examined. Reports of casualties among passersby during actions that were supposedly “targeted” mostly appeared in the margins of news items or did not appear at all.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that the Israeli media tends to assign minor importance to events in which Palestinians are killed by Israeli security forces. On many such events it does not report at all. When the media does report on these events, in the vast majority of cases its reporting is based on only one version of events—the official version of the security establishment—and significant investigations or alternative accounts are not presented.

Coverage of “liquidation” events is even more problematic. In coverage of these incidents the IDF version of events appears in headlines without qualification. The terminology that is used to describe “liquidation” events is consistent with the viewpoint of the security establishment. There is no critical discussion of the “liquidations” policy itself and its many ramifications. As mentioned above, “liquidation” events are covered at twice the rate as other killing events.

These editing patterns suggest that in its coverage of killings of Palestinians by Israeli security forces, and especially in its coverage of premeditated killings, the media fails to fulfill its main role in a democratic society – to report and critique and to provide the public with a full picture, as much as possible, of the main news events that transpire.

"Liquidation Race"

Three days in February – 11 killed. Did the escalation affect media coverage?

On February 4, 2006, a Qassam rocket was fired at Kibbutz Carmia, wounding an infant. Following the incident, the head of the Southern Command, Yoav Galant, said "As a general rule, I can say that if it is not quiet on the Israeli side, it will be louder sevenfold on the Palestinian side and whoever deals in terrorism, fires at Israel, tries to carry out attacks or plans them—will not be spared".¹⁴ In the three days between February 5-7, 2006, 11 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces' fire – half the number of those killed in all of December. This figure indicates an escalation in aggressive action by the Israeli security apparatus against Palestinians. But did this escalation influence media coverage as compared with the editing patterns that were found in December?¹⁵

All of the media outlets that were examined recognized the fact that military action had been stepped up and they covered the events prominently. For example, a headline at the beginning of the Channel 1 newscast on February 6 declared: ESCALATION IN GAZA – IN 24 HOURS 5 TERRORISTS LIQUIDATED. ISLAMIC JIHAD PROMISES REVENGE. On the same day a headline in *Yedioth Ahronoth* read 5 LIQUIDATIONS IN 24 HOURS. The next day, on February 7, a headline at the beginning of the Channel 2 newscast announced: IDF ON A LIQUIDATIONS OFFENSIVE: THREE PALESTINIANS KILLED IN GAZA AND ONE IN NABLUS. The same trend was also apparent in the correspondents' reports. Thus, for example, in an item on Channel 1 on February 7, Ohad Hamu said: "Israel's actions in Gaza look like a steady chain of targeted liquidations, unlike any other in the past". Alon Ben-David said similar things in an item broadcast the same day on Channel 10: "In Gaza they haven't absorbed a blitz like this one in a long time. One liquidation after another..."

But did media recognition of a "liquidations offensive" lead to a critical discussion of the subject?

In four media outlets¹⁶ some of the reports contained only implied critiques, which mostly appeared on the margins of news items – similar to the pattern found in this study during December 2005.

For example, in an article published in *Ha'aretz* on February 8, under the headline NINTH ASSASSINATION SINCE SATURDAY NIGHT: TWO FATAH ACTIVISTS KILLED IN GAZA STRIP, it was written:

However, until now there is considerable doubt as to whether Israel's heavier hand has brought real results. Yesterday four rockets were fired from the Strip and similar figures were recorded in previous days as well. Military sources say that the intent is to deter terrorist organizations, but they don't delude themselves that these actions will put a complete stop to the firing.

A similar critique was voiced by Alon Ben-David in the Channel 10 newscast:

But these liquidations do not stop the drizzle of Qassams in the south. In the IDF it's known that there is no solution to the Qassam, but they've decided: if Sderot feels pain, the pain will be sevenfold in Gaza. And in Gaza it indeed looks painful. Israel intends to continue these liquidations and in Gaza it doesn't look like they intend to stop firing Qassams, and so the Strip, as it appears tonight, is headed for an escalation.

These significant critiques referred only to the claim that this policy is not achieving its intended goal. During the very same days, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, severely criticized the "liquidations" policy in moral and legal terms, but this critique was not reported at all in *Ha'aretz*, Channel 1, Channel 2 or Channel 10. Only two of the media outlets, *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv*, reported it, and they even gave prominence to this criticism of the "liquidations" policy in headlines on their front pages, in contrast to the editing pattern that was found during December.

14. This was said on the Channel 1 newscast on February 5, 2006.

15. We compared media coverage during December 2005 with media coverage on February 5-8, 2006.

16. *Ha'aretz*, Channel 1, Channel 2 and Channel 10.

For example, a referral on the front page of *Yedioth Ahronoth* on February 8, stated: LIQUIDATIONS RACE – IDF FORCES KILLED 10 WANTED MEN IN THE TERRITORIES IN FOUR DAYS * U.N. SECRETARY GENERAL KOFI ANNAN ATTACKS SHARPLY: THESE ARE EXECUTIONS WITHOUT TRIAL *. The sub-headline of an article on page three of the edition stated: AND DESPITE EVERYTHING: A HOUSE IN SDEROT TOOK A DIRECT HIT YESTERDAY * U.N. SECRETARY GENERAL ATTACKS ISRAEL: "THIS IS EXECUTION WITHOUT TRIAL".

On the same day a sub-headline on the front page of *Ma'ariv* stated: U.N. SECRETARY GENERAL CONDEMNS LIQUIDATION POLICY. The banner headline on page eight read: WAVE OF LIQUIDATIONS CONTINUES * YESTERDAY IDF ASSASSINATED 3 MORE PALESTINIANS. The main headline continued: ANNAN AGAINST LIQUIDATIONS and in the sub-headline was written: SINCE SUNDAY ISRAEL HAS LIQUIDATED 11 TERRORISTS * U.N. SECRETARY GENERAL ATTACKS: "THESE ARE EXECUTIONS WITHOUT TRIAL" * DESPITE AIR FORCE ACTIVITY, TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS CONTINUE LAUNCHING QASSAM ROCKETS.

It seems that an extraordinary number of killings and international criticism may spur critical discussion. Nonetheless, even in the extreme situation described, most of the media outlets ignored opportunities for criticism.