

Learn details of the Gaza story that don't make the U.S. or Western news agencies from F.A.I.R. (Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting) and their weekly Radio program called Counterspin.

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FAIR Counterspin January 9, 2009 (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting: FAIR.Org)

700 Gazans dead, many of them civilians

UN Sources: More than 40 killed by Israeli Tank fire at a UN School

The Red Cross is reporting that Israel is forbidding medical aid to reach bombing sites including one where the organization said they found emaciated children

Such stories have prompted outrage among international journalists but have received a more sanguine response from U.S. Journalists who largely frame Israeli actions as defensive and necessary and righteous.

Joining us now is Ali Abunimah cofounder of <http://electronicintifada.net/> and author of **One Country: A bold proposal to end the Israeli Palestinian conflict.**

Ali Abunimah: What's happening in Gaza unfortunately fits in with decades of Israeli policy of speaking with Palestinians primarily with bombs.

In Gaza before any of this started, just the first half of 2008 more than 600 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza. It barely made the news. Now we're seeing that many or more killed in the space of a few days so Israel is escalating its violence. At the same time on the other side, Yes, Israeli's have suffered, but few Israeli's have died in this course of this violence in Gaza from rockets than road accidents just to put things in perspective.

HOST: One key point in U.S. reporting is 'what caused the current attack. As USA Today reported on January 5th, "In November, the truce prayed as Hamas rockets continued to land in Israel". That USA Today quote is typical of the US media narrative that Israel is defending itself and if it wasn't for Hamas breaking what was the successful cease-fire, none of this bloodshed would be necessary. How do you respond to that theme?

Ali Abunimah: Well with two points, but let me preface it by saying that when you look at the official Israeli talking points, the ones they actually send out to journalists, and the majority of the coverage in the United States, you find that they're almost identical. There's absolutely no scrutiny of claims going on which is particularly shocking when you consider that Israel has barred international journalists from entering the Gaza strip. There are journalists there, but not Western ones. Aljazeera is there. But there are two claims that Israel has made that have been parroted. One is that Israel has been constantly under missile fire for years and years and years and is just defending itself and the other is that Hamas broke the cease-fire and both of them are really not the truth. The reality about the cease fire is that it held from June 19th when it was agreed until November 4th when Israeli forces entered the Gaza strip and killed 6 Palestinians and it was only after that that Hamas retaliated with a number of rockets. During the period of the truce, according to the Israeli government itself, there were only 26 rockets fired from the Gaza strip. None of them attributed to Hamas, none of them causing any damage or injury. So it was after Israel attacked Gaza on November 4th that Hamas started retaliating not just to that attack, but subsequent attacks and dozens of Palestinians were killed in the month of November, they just ignored that. The other element is the claim is that thousands and thousands of rockets have been falling on Israel. If you do the math, just take at face value the Israeli claim that 6,300 rockets have been fired from Gaza since 2005. Well, those rockets according to media reports, carry an explosive charge (a usually a fertilizer explosive) of about two pounds. So if you do the math, what you come up is that over a period of

years, Palestinians have launched perhaps 12 tons of explosives at Israel. Sounds like a lot, right? But on the first day, just December 27th, Israel said it dropped 100 tons of bombs on the Gaza strip and we've had 11 days and human rights watch points out that in the period from September 2005 through May 2007, the Israeli Army fired 14,617 105mm heavy artillery shells into Gaza, and the Israelis aren't using fertilizer explosives. They're using military grade high explosives, but for some reason, we never hear any of that.

HOST: Well, It's by now a traditional theme in U.S. reporting on Israel and Palestine that Palestinians are forever initiating hostilities while Israel is simply responding to the hostilities. That's playing out in this case too, isn't it?

Ali Abunimah: Absolutely, and the other part of it is the disproportionate coverage that is given to Israelis. I think many media organizations are so afraid of being criticized that they're anti-Israeli, that they play the story as if there is balance, as if Israelis and Palestinians are experiencing this equally. I mean in Gaza, you have a real humanitarian catastrophe. Families leaving their homes with nowhere to go. Schools being shelled. Hospitals with piles of bodies in them. Everywhere in the Gaza strip, injured people not even going to the hospitals because they know they cannot get treatment. People without food. The Red Cross talking about major breeches of international humanitarian law. In Israel, 3 civilians have been killed. I feel very sorry for them. But again, to put that in perspective, statistics say more civilians have died from road accidents than from this conflict since December 27th, and in Israel, football matches are going on, an election campaign is going on, you know all the TV reality shows are going on as if it were a million miles away from the Hell that Israel has created in Gaza. There is no proportion to this story, and in one of the stories that just absolutely astounded me, was in an Israeli newspaper, that the Israeli government has agreed to pay for the cost of treating Israeli pets hurt by Palestinian rockets. This is just astounding.

HOST: By contrast to U.S. reporting, the reporting in Arab countries, as is perhaps to be expected has been quite different. On January 8 the day we're recording this interview, the Los Angeles Times ran a story about the Arab media and how it portrays Gazans as heroes and victims. What can you tell us about Arab Language reporting?

Ali Abunimah: It's really been excellent, and I mean what they play on there is kind of the racist notion that Arab journalists couldn't possibly be objective or they couldn't give you the facts and that's what I think lies behind that kind of snide remarks from the LA Times. The reality is that we're getting live coverage on Aljazeera. Incidentally anybody can get Aljazeera in English on the Internet. They have an English channel now and it's free on the internet, and it is worth watching to see what you are missing from the mainstream media, but the reason Aljazeera has live coverage is because they take the story seriously, they take the lives of Palestinians seriously and so they have bureaus permanently stationed there, whereas Western and particularly American Networks, all of their reporters are up in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem living a very nice life and they trot down to Gaza once in a while for a day trip or to do a story if ever, and so it was very easy for Israel to just close the border and all those journalists are stuck in Tel Aviv, while they couldn't do that to Aljazeera because they were already there.

HOST: Are there any other English language Arab media that you would recommend?

Ali Abunimah: Well I think Aljazeera is the best that I would recommend, but there's other English language media. The Guardian has been good although they don't have a reporter in the Gaza strip. I'll plug my own organization Electronic Intifada dot net (<http://electronicintifada.net/>) because we do have reporters in the Gaza strip and we are reporting live from Gaza, real testimonies in the words, the voices of the people in Gaza as well as the kind of analysis and opinion that you will not read on the Op-Ed pages of the Washington Post or the NY Times.

HOST: We've been speaking with Ali Abunimah, the author of One Country: a bold proposal to end the Israeli Palestinian conflict, and the cofounder of <http://electronicintifada.net/> (<http://electronicintifada.net/>). Ali Abunimah, thanks for joining us today on Counterspin.

Ali Abunimah: Thank you