

The Qana Massacre And The Risks Of Relying On Israeli Propaganda

by Minerva's Owl *Tuesday, Aug 1 2006, 11:50pm*

international / imperialism / commentary

Relying on Israeli propaganda can often lead to embarrassment, as CNN's Paula Zahn recently discovered. Read on to find out how she was used by the Israeli Defense Force.

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On July 30, the Israeli Defense Force ("IDF") released infrared aerial footage purporting to show a Hezbollah Katyusha battery situated in a residential area of Qana, firing rockets at Israel. The IDF claimed that Hezbollah hid the trucks, which are used as launch platforms for the Katyushas, in and around residential neighborhoods in Qana, in support of its claim that Hezbollah is using civilians as human shields. (The Wikipedia article on the Qana bombing provides a link to the IDF video.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Qana_airstrike)

And, although the IDF and the Olmert regime have expressed regret over the killing of dozens of innocent Lebanese civilians in Qana, when the Israeli Air Force ("IAF") bombed a three-story apartment building on July 30, they take no responsibility. Instead, they lay the blame at Hezbollah's feet, arguing that if it did not fire rockets from civilian population centers, the IAF would not target these sites for destruction. This is a convenient dodge that Israel has used on countless occasions to justify its wanton and seemingly senseless targeting of civilian populations.

The IAF used the same justification for the bombing of the Qana apartment building on July 30, only this time, realizing that the Western mainstream media - particularly in the United States - was paying a lot of attention to this latest atrocity, it released for propaganda use an infra-red aerial video taken by a surveillance aircraft purporting to show a Katyusha battery firing missiles that day from a residential location in Qana, presumably near the apartment building that was bombed.

Like true lap dogs, the Western mainstream media snatched up this "evidence" and used it to drive home Israel's propaganda point that Hezbollah not it was responsible for the deaths of the Lebanese civilians in that building, most of whom were children. In other words, Israel was saying, "Hezbollah made us do it. Now watch the video and you'll see that we were not responsible."

CNN is one of Israel's major propaganda outlets, and it dutifully aired the IAF surveillance video on Paula Zahn's program on July 31. What follows is an excerpt from the July 31 transcript of Zahn's program that sets up the airing of the video.

"ZAHN: Nic Robertson, appreciate the update. Thanks so much.

Now, tonight, the Arab world is outraged over the Israeli bombing that killed at least 54 Lebanese civilians in Qana. Israel says it targeted Qana because Hezbollah was firing rockets from there. Residents deny that, and many are calling it a massacre.

The anger spilled over in Beirut streets, as protesters broke into U.N. headquarters there, injuring three U.N. workers. Qana survivors have fled, looking for shelter elsewhere. And, today, the town is deserted, buildings now just rubble. Israel calls this a tragic mistake.

Joining me now, Lebanon's consul general here in the United States, Mohamad El-Harake.

Thank you so much for joining us.

The Israelis have expressed their sorrow for the loss of innocent loss in Qana. Do you really think the Israelis targeted those civilians?

MOHAMAD EL-HARAKE, CONSUL GENERAL OF LEBANON: I know that the Israelis are very proud of their military powers. And they are good in targeting Palestinian activists, so they can hit a car among the 20 cars, and save the other cars. So...

ZAHN: So, you are saying there's no doubt in your mind the Israelis are so good at this that they would have intentionally targeted civilians?

EL-HARAKE: Here, we're talking about smart bombs, about military expertise, very advanced, and we're talking also about, let us say, well-mapped area. They know everything. And, supposedly, there was Hezbollah fighters near this building, as they are claiming. Why...

ZAHN: Let's show some pictures, before you go any further... EL-HARAKE: Yes, sure.

ZAHN: ... because the Israelis have provided us video from the IDF of an aerial view of the area.

Let's look at this closely together. It shows the proximity of the missile launching sites very clearly here to the civilian population in Qana.

Do you deny that they put their rocket launchers close to civilians to use them as shields?

EL-HARAKE: Yes, at first, we should verify this video by expert to see if exactly it reflects the same building that was targeted."

<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0607/31/pzn.01.html>

It is interesting to note that Mohamad El-Harake, Counsel General of Lebanon challenges the authenticity of the IAF video, knowing full well that besides the awesome array of United States-supplied weapons at its disposal, Israel's arsenal also includes a very efficient propaganda apparatus. But, one would expect that most of Zahn's viewers probably discounted El-Harake's objection as so much Hezbollah/Lebanese counter propaganda. After all, these discerning folks would probably argue, the IAF video is solid proof that Hezbollah uses Lebanese civilians as human shields.

"As it turns out, however, the IdF made a full about face two days later, and stated in a press release that it had no proof that Hezbollah had fired any rockets from Qana on July 30, as reflected in this excerpt from a Ha'aretz news item on August 1. (Ha'aretz is one of Israel's largest newspapers known for its "liberal" slant, although it never challenges any pronouncements issuing from the IDF High Command.)

As the Israel Air Force continues to investigate the air strike, questions have been raised over military accounts of the incident.

It now appears that the military had no information on rockets launched from the site of the

building, or the presence of Hezbollah men at the time.

The Israel Defense Forces had said after the deadly air-strike that many rockets had been launched from Qana. However, it changed its version on Monday.

The site was included in an IAF plan to strike at several buildings in proximity to a previous launching site. Similar strikes were carried out in the past. However, there were no rocket launches from Qana on the day of the strike."

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/745185.html>

Two points are immediately quite obvious. 1) Unless Zahn's viewers read the Israeli press, they will probably never learn of this IDF "correction." Nor is it likely that CNN/Zahn will provide their viewers with a clarification. 2) Either someone at IDF headquarters was asleep at the switch and released the video by "mistake." Or, the video was deliberately released in an attempt to cover up another Israeli war crime and favorably influence public opinion via the Western mainstream media.

Another point to note is that Israel's past aggressions were carried out before the advent of the Internet. With the willing collusion of the Western mainstream media, its propaganda apparatus had a free hand in controlling the flow of information. However, it is not so easy to control public opinion today, since one no longer has to rely exclusively on the mainstream media for information. The Internet is chock full of alternate information, views and opinions over which Israel has no control. And, although Israel may be flexing its muscles in Lebanon - killing civilians and destroying infrastructure - and seemingly slowly gaining the "upper hand" over Hezbollah, it has already lost the PR war.

Finally, in closing, it should also be pointed out that Israel's self-proclaimed defensive invasion of Lebanon is now seen for what it truly is - another act of aggression by a state with imperial pretensions in the Middle East. Under the pretext of wanting a return of its two captured soldiers, the disarming of Hezbollah and the creation of a "security buffer zone" in southern Lebanon, Israel is once again waging an aggressive war against one of its neighbors, this time in order to wrest control of the Litani river from the Lebanese and annex southern Lebanon as part of the "Greater Israel" that was originally envisioned by its Zionist founding fathers a century ago.

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August 2006

Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-272.html>