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Hamas terrorist group. Yet all around him clamor critics and enemies of the Jewish state who demand an immediate ceasefire. With the war's every passing day, many of these detractors feign hysteria, lamenting the spectre of skyrocketing death tolls.

But are these death tolls—supplied by the Hamas “Health Authority,” for real? What do they tell us, or not tell us? Indeed, the closer we look, the more it seems that agitation over Gaza death tolls reflects a political agenda rather than actual concern for loss of life.

The fact is, counting the dead in a war—especially war in a bombed-out urban environment—is a long, tedious and usually imprecise exercise, even for objective observers, which Hamas is not. No wonder then, that on October 25th, President Biden said he had “no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people [were] killed” in the war. The real wonder is why the media daily parrot Hamas death tolls with virtually *no* disclaimers.

Moreover, media and others who obsessively cite death tolls are missing the larger point. What really matters is not the body count, but how Israel and Hamas respectively conduct themselves relative to innocent civilians. Indeed, Israel does its utmost to minimize civilian casualties, while Hamas does the opposite.

Those who lobby for a ceasefire want Hamas to remain intact so it can rise again. Enemies of Israel use “rising death tolls” exclusively to support their argument for an immediate ceasefire. Yet, Hamas will use any ceasefire to regroup and rebuild its terrorist infrastructure, as it has done during every ceasefire in previous conflicts with Israel.

Thus, Iran and Qatar, who bankroll Hamas, want a ceasefire, as do rabidly anti-Israel politicians like Rashida Tlaib. Mobs of pro-Hamas demonstrators also want a ceasefire—alternating their demand for “ceasefire now” with genocidal chants of “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free.”

Unfortunately, notwithstanding Hamas's claims, we have no idea what the true death tolls in this war are—let alone what they actually mean in assessing responsibility or “blame.”

Death tolls reported during a war are notoriously unreliable.

According to Taylor Seybolt, associate professor at the University of Pittsburgh, who coedited the book “Counting Civilian Casualties,” estimating civilian casualties can take years. In fact, in some cases, detailed verification of civilian deaths never

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happens.

During the Kosovo War in 1998-99, media reports claimed that 10,000 Kosovars were massacred by Serbian troops. Years later, however, at Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic's war crimes trial, the International Criminal Tribunal concluded there were just 2,788 bodies accounted for in mass graves. Truth is, death tolls for wars historically are estimates at best, notoriously inaccurate, and often vary by hundreds of thousands.

Hamas-sponsored Gaza death tolls also conveniently leave out the number of armed terrorists. Even if one assumes the unverified Gaza death tolls are accurate—also granting Israel's early December estimate of killing 6,000 fighters—the *civilian* death toll is significantly less than “official” numbers: 10,000 instead of the 16,000 reported by Gaza's Health Ministry. That means the combatant-to-non-combatant ratio as of December was 2.66 to 1. In contrast, the United Nations put combatant-to-noncombatant deaths caused by US and British forces in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2015 *much higher*: Between 3.1-4.1 to 1.

Gaza's death toll also does not indicate who bears responsibility for victims' deaths. The Hamas Health Ministry simply describes all fatalities as victims of “Israeli aggression,” including their own misfires.

For example, Hamas instantly blamed Israel for an air strike at Al-Ahli hospital that killed 500. Days later, however, Israel produced hard evidence that it was rather a failed terrorist rocket launch that caused the blast, killing perhaps 50. Thus, the blood of anyone killed in the blast is on the terrorists' hands, not Israel's.

In general, death tolls tell us very little about any given war.

What constitutes too many deaths in a war? What are too many *civilian* deaths? In truth, the number and categories of people killed in a war will depend on many variables.

Conventional warfare on open plains will produce more military casualties, whereas fighting in a dense urban environment will kill more civilians. For example, the U.S. assault on ISIS fighters embedded in Iraq's Mosul produced an estimated 40,000 purely civilian deaths. Estimated death counts following the Allies' World War II bombing of Dresden go as high as 250,000. No anti-war or pro-ceasefire demonstrations protested either action.

More important than death tolls are the methods the sides use to prosecute the war. In this war, Hamas uses tactics that ensure maximum casualties to its own civilians, whereas Israel's military uses tactics that exclusively target enemy fighters and strive to

avoid civilian casualties.

Extensive documentation proves Hamas uses civilians as human shields by placing themselves and their terrorist infrastructure in the vicinity of civilian structures. In fact, just last week, the IDF uncovered one of the largest caches of weapons in Gaza near a school and hospital. Using human shields is a war crime, as is using civilian structures like Gaza's Al-Shifa hospital as military bases.

In contrast, Israel takes care to ensure Gazan civilians are not harmed. The IDF routinely issues warnings to civilians to evacuate combat zones—by text, telephone, and leaflets. When the IDF does target a civilian structure, it does so only if the military advantage of targeting it is proportionate to potential civilian casualties, per international law.

In short, Hamas's military choices cause many more civilians to be killed than using other tactics. Likewise, Israel's choices reduce the number of civilian deaths, given the circumstances.

Please make the point when speaking with family, friends, colleagues—or in letters to the editor—that death tolls are not the important factor in a war. More important is that Hamas conducts itself without regard for civilian life, believing that Gazan civilians who die are simply martyrs for their cause. Israel conducts itself in a fashion that minimizes civilian deaths. No wonder the IDF is often called the most moral army in the world.

Best regards,

James Sinkinson, President

Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)

P.S. The events of October 7 have changed our world forever—and especially the world for Israel and the Jewish people. Likewise, the words “Never Again” will never be the same for us. October 7 has shown us that despite all promises of equity and commitments against hate on campus and on our streets, we can never depend on it. We will likely never be free of the scourge of antisemitism, fueled by the most outrageous slanders. I hope you'll agree that we opponents of Hamas and its savage massacre—and of all who support Hamas, against all humanitarian values—need to speak out. FLAME's new *hasbarah*—explanatory message—“**Enemies of Israel Tell Five Big Lies**”—

refutes today's most vicious lies against Israel and the Jewish people. I hope you'll review this convincing, fact-based editorial, which FLAME intends to publish in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *New York Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Star Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*. This piece will also be sent to all members of Congress, Vice President Harris and President Biden. If you agree that this kind of public relations effort on Israel's behalf is critical, I urge you to **support us** with a donation.

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