

What Are They Watching?

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When it comes to Israel and its enemies, Human Rights Watch cooks the books about facts, cheats on interviews, and releases predetermined conclusions that are driven more by their ideology than by evidence. These are serious accusations, and they are demonstrably true. Consider the following highly publicized "conclusion" reached by Human Rights Watch about the recent war in Lebanon between Hezbollah and Israel: "Human Rights Watch found no cases in which Hezbollah deliberately used civilians as shields to protect them from retaliatory IDF attack." No cases! Anyone who watched even a smattering of TV during the war saw with their own eyes direct evidence of rockets being launched from civilian areas. But not Human Rights Watch. How could an organization, which claims to be objective, have been so demonstrably wrong about so central a point in so important a war? Could it have been an honest mistake? I don't think so. Human Rights Watch not only failed to interview witnesses who had contrary evidence, it ignored credible news sources, such as the New York Times and the New Yorker.

"Hezbollah came to Ain Ebel to shoot its rockets," said Fayad Hanna Amar, a young Christian man, referring to his village. "They are shooting from between our houses." Mr. Amar said Hezbollah fighters in groups of two and three had come into Ain Ebel, less than a mile from Bint Jbail, where most of the fighting has occurred. They were using it as a base to shoot rockets, he said, and the Israelis fired back.

– Sabrina Tavernise, "Christians Fleeing Lebanon Denounce Hezbollah," the New York Times, July 28, 2006

Near the hospital, a mosque lay in ruins ... A man approached and told me that he was a teacher at the Hariri school. I asked him why he thought the Israelis had hit a mosque, and he said, simply, "It was a Hezbollah mosque." ... A younger man came up to me and, when we were out of earshot of others, said that Hezbollah had kept bombs in the basement of the mosque, but that two days earlier a truck had taken the cache away.

– Jon Lee Anderson, "The Battle for Lebanon," the New Yorker, August 8, 2006

Even if the location of U.N. posts were known to Israeli commanders, that doesn't rule out the possibility that Hezbollah fighters used one as a shield from which to unleash fire. They've done so in the past, says retired Major General, Lewis MacKenzie, who witnessed the technique while on peacekeeping assignments in the area, "It's the same as if you set up your weapons systems beside a mosque or a church or a hospital."

– Carlie Gillis, "Diplomacy Under Fire," MacLean's, August 7, 2006

The surgeon led a group of journalists over what remained — mangled debris, shredded walls, and a roof punched through by an Israeli shell.

"Look what they did to this place," Dr. Fatah said, shaking his head. "Why in the world

would the Israelis target a hospital?"

The probable answer was found a few hours later in a field nearby. Hidden in the tall grass were the burned remnants of a rocket-launcher.

Confronted with the evidence, Dr. Fatah admitted his hospital could have been used as a site from which to fire rockets into Israel.

– Sonia Verma, "Hezbollah's Deadly Hold on Heartland", National Post, August 5, 2006

"[Samira] Abbas said she heard from relatives that her house in Bint Jbeil had been destroyed. She said Hezbollah fighters had gathered in citrus groves about 500 yards from her home."

– Mohamad Bazzi, "Mideast Crisis — Farewell to a Soldier; Reporting from Lebanon; Running Out of Places to Run," Newsday, July 28, 2006

"What that means is, in plain English, 'We've got Hezbollah fighters running around in our positions, taking our positions here and then using us for shields and then engaging the (Israeli Defence Forces),' said [Lewis] MacKenzie, who led Canadian peacekeepers in Bosnia.

– Steven Edwards, "UN contradicts itself over Israeli attack", CanWest News Service, July 27, 2006

It was also reported that Hezbollah fired from the vicinity of five U.N. positions at Alma Ash Shab, AtTiri, Bayt Yahoun, Brashit, and Tibnin.

– United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, Naqoura, July 28, 2006 (Press Release)

While these pictures have escaped the ravaged country, other images and footage taken by local newspaper and television teams are routinely seized by armed Hezbollah fighters at road blocks. In one image a group of fighters, including youths, are preparing to fire an anti-aircraft gun just meters from an apartment block with sheets drying on a balcony.

Others show a Hezbollah fighter armed with a nickel-plated AK47 rifle guarding no-go zones after Israeli blitzes.

Another depicts the remnants of a Hezbollah Katyusha rocket in the middle of a residential block, blown up in an Israeli air attack.

The Melbourne man who smuggled the shots out of Beirut told how he was less than 400 meters from the block when it was obliterated. "Hezbollah came in to launch their rockets, then within minutes the area was blasted by Israeli jets," he said. "Until the Hezbollah fighters arrived, it had not been touched by the Israelis. Then it was devastated. "After the attacks they didn't even allow the ambulances or the Lebanese Army to come in until they had cleaned the area, removing their rockets and hiding other evidence ..."

– Chris Tinkler, "Revealed: How Hezbollah puts the innocent at risk; They don't care,"

Sunday Mail (Australia). July 30, 2006

How could Human Rights Watch have suppressed this evidence from so many different sources? The only reasonable explanation is that they wanted there to be no evidence of Hezbollah's tactic of hiding behind civilians. So they cooked the books to make it come out that way. Even after the fighting ended and numerous reports of Hezbollah hiding among civilians were published, Kenneth Roth essentially repeated the demonstrably false conclusions that "in none of those cases was Hizbullah anywhere around at the time of the attack." So committed is Human Rights Watch to its pre-determined conclusions that it refused to let the facts, as reported by objective sources, get in its way. Many former supporters of Human Rights Watch have become alienated from the organization, because of, in the words of one early supporter, "their obsessive focus on Israel." Within the last month, virtually every component of the organized Jewish community, from secular to religious, liberal to conservative, has condemned Human Rights Watch for its bias. Roth and his organization's willful blindness when it comes to Israel and its enemies have completely undermined the credibility of a once important human rights organization. Human Rights Watch no longer deserves the support of real human rights advocates. Nor should its so-called reporting be credited by objective news organizations.

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