

A

CLOSERLOOK

BY Y O S S I K R A U S Z

NATIONAL & WORLD NEWS

UNDERSTANDING THE DEATH
OF AID WORKERS IN GAZA



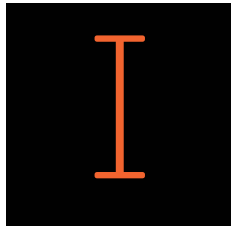
A DRONE STRIKE HITS ISRAEL DIPLOMATICALLY

“Unfortunately, in the past day there was a tragic event in which our forces unintentionally harmed non-combatants in the Gaza Strip. This happens in war. We are conducting a thorough inquiry and are in contact with the governments. We will do everything to prevent a recurrence.”

—Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, after a drone strike killed seven aid workers.

“The United States has repeatedly urged Israel to deconflict their military operations against Hamas with humanitarian operations, in order to avoid civilian casualties.”

—US President Joe Biden, who said that he was “outraged and heartbroken” about the killing of the aid workers and also said that this was “not a stand-alone incident.”



Israel has slowly been losing support from its allies as the war against Hamas has been going on. But a set of drone strikes in Gaza that killed seven foreign aid workers has created a sudden crisis, with multiple countries saying that they plan to restrict weapons exports to Israel, and even relatively friendly American politicians threatening to put such a policy in place in the US.

Part of the frustration around this strike on the workers with World Central Kitchen is that the group had been working in Gaza at the behest of the Israeli government and was also an organization that had worked in Israel, feeding Israelis displaced from the regions near the border with Gaza and Lebanon. Their presence in Gaza was seen as a way of rehabilitating Israel’s image in regard to whether it was allowing enough humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Instead, the deaths of the seven workers instantly turned world opinion against Israel, including from allies—with practical consequences. The Spanish celebrity chef who founded World Central Kitchen, José Andrés, used his position to lob heavier and heavier criticisms of Israel, first saying that it wasn’t living up to its own ideals and then saying that Israel seemed to be waging “a war against humanity itself.”

All of this has clearly put Israel on the defensive in the PR and political senses.

What happened during the strike

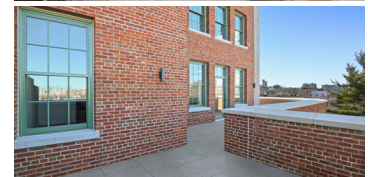
The basics of the drone strike were that three separate missiles were fired by drones last Monday against a convoy of aid workers, killing seven of them. But Israel quickly conducted an investigation and found several problems that they said had led to the drone strikes.

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At 10 p.m., a convoy of trucks left the WCK pier with 300 tons of supplies for Gaza. Three other trucks joined them, and by 10:28, the IDF says, at least one gunman had boarded one of the trucks. IDF protocols prohibit firing anywhere near aid vehicles.

The convoy left the coast and headed for a hangar to offload some supplies, which it did at 10:46. Then the convoy split up, with one truck heading northward and the rest of the convoy heading back to the coast. At this point, the two drone operators believed that they had seen the end of the humanitarian convoy and were now seeing Hamas-controlled trucks.

The one truck, which was now being monitored by one drone operator, did appear to have armed men in it, who could be seen getting out of it at a second hangar.

At 11:09, the drone operator who was following the rest of the convoy was given orders to shoot at the truck they believed to be carrying an armed man. They fired on one, and then when people from that truck got out and went into another, they fired at that one. When people from that truck got into the third, they fired at that one as well.

COGAT, the Israeli administration that oversees Gaza, says that they had tried to call a WCK staff member in the convoy. They also say that they called a WCK security member in New York, who said that the convoy was not responding to their calls.

The Israeli investigation found three problems with what happened that night. One was that the exact details of the convoy were not conveyed to the drone operators, leading them to believe that they were firing on Hamas vehicles.

The second was that the drone opera-

tor had believed that one of the men in the three-truck convoy was armed. He later said that the person was probably just carrying a bag.

The third was that the drone operator fired three times. After the first shot, they were supposed to reconfirm that there were appropriate targets in the next vehicles rather than simply taking more shots because some of the people had moved from the first vehicle into the second and then from the second into the third.

The leadership of WCK has rejected Israel's investigation as inadequate and has called for an independent investigation.

Israel's response

The IDF issued direct apologies to José Andrés and to WCK, as did Prime Minister Netanyahu.

The IDF also quickly took disciplinary action, removing chief of staff of the Nachal Infantry Brigade Col. (res.) Nochi Mendel and the brigade's firepower coordination officer, a major. It also censured the commander of the Southern Command, Maj. Gen. Yaron Finkelman; the commander of the 162nd Division, Brig. Gen. Itzik Cohen; and the commander of the Nachal Brigade, Col. Yair Zukerman.

Israel also immediately made some concessions in regard to providing aid to Gaza, allowing the Port of Ashdod to be used to bring in aid and opening another crossing from Israel into Gaza for trucks. It seemed clear that the Israeli government felt pressure after the killing of the aid workers in a way that it hadn't before.

The response from other countries

That pressure was, indeed, intense. The aid workers who died were a US-Canadian, an Australian, a Pole, three Britons and a Palestinian. The countries whose citizens were killed were most scathing about the drone strike on the WCK workers, but an outcry went out around the world as well.

Poland has summoned the Israeli ambassador. Australia's prime minister has called Israel's explanation of the drone strike inadequate. And a debate in the UK has begun over withholding arms from Israel.

The worst blows, however, are coming from Israel's closest ally, the US, where the response to the drone strikes has made the most serious dent in Democratic support for Israel yet.

The Biden administration expressed horror at the deaths, and Joe Biden threatened to condition aid to Israel on its treatment of civilians and aid workers. (After Israel announced more routes for humanitarian aid into Gaza, Biden said, "I asked them to do what they're doing.")

One of the most high-profile Democrats joined a call for Biden to halt weapons transfers to Israel. Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California, the former speaker of the House, signed a letter to that effect with more than 30 other House Democrats, most of whom are on the more left-leaning side of the party. (The letter also called for the US to carry out its own investigation of the drone strikes.)

Pelosi's inclusion is a sign that Israel is in real trouble in regard to support in the US.

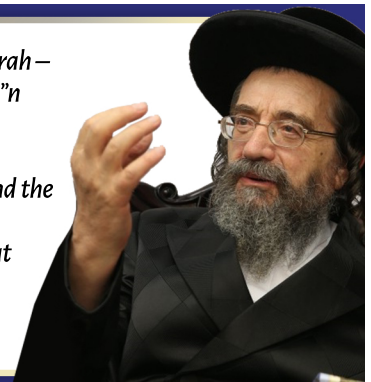


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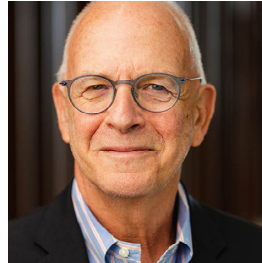
Fortunate are those who have a portion in such dissemination of Torah and the increase of such talmidei chachomim, where such study of the holy Torah, literally, maintains this world; sweetens the midas hadin; and brings great salvation to the Jewish people in difficult times such as these.

Maran Hagaon Hamekubal, Harav Yaakov Meir Shechter, shlit"á



We spoke with an expert in drone warfare to understand more about this and other stakes of its nature

PROF. AMOS GUIORA IS A FORMER OFFICER IN THE IDF'S JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL CORP



Let's just get your qualifications in regard to drone warfare.

I served for 20 years in the IDF Judge Advocate General Corps, including three years as the adviser to the Gaza Strip. I've been there and have written about it.

And you had working knowledge of the procedures involved in drone warfare.

Yes, though we call it targeted killing, not drone warfare.

Do you feel that there is a clear picture of what happened during the attack on the WCK workers?

Clear is a complicated word. Do I understand what I think are the basics? They identified a target, and those in the trigger-pulling chain of command thought this was the target. It obviously wasn't the target.

This will sound trite, but I don't mean to be. Mistakes happen. The Israeli military is not the first to make mistakes, and it will not be the last military to make mistakes.

The questions always are, when you lock in on what you believe to be a legitimate target, what internal checks do you have when you're in the "go" moment?

A legitimate target generally means that this is a person who poses an immi-

nent danger, and we could have a long discussion about what imminence means. But in the current conflict, my take on imminence is that there is a pretty broad articulation on the definition of a legitimate target.

But it's not just enough to say that so-and-so is a legitimate target. You have to have that moment when he is a legitimate target, that is, when he's made himself "available" as a target.

But here is the complicated part. Let's say so-and-so is a bad guy and everyone has signed off on the hit, and let's say he's going to be driving a white car. It's not enough to see so-and-so and to see a white car. Are you sure that so-and-so is in the white car, and are you sure that it's this white car and not that white car?

The question will always be to what degree you have checks and controls to make sure that indeed this is the guy and this is



the white car that the intelligence community has said that he is driving. There has to be enough corroborated intelligence. The question will always be whether you're working based on intelligence corroborated in the moment.

You also have to dissociate yourself from it. These people from Hamas are bad people, but you have to dissociate yourself from that emotionally and make sure that you've corroborated the intelligence information. If you're not convinced, you can't pull the trigger.

And especially here, which is as urban as urban warfare can be, and in Gaza, which is about the size of my living room. You have to be able to make sure that the intelligence is accurate and also timely.

What I think has caused all of the geopolitical attention is that these were foreign aid workers. That has brought the international community, including the president of the United States, down on Netanyahu in a way that—this will sound offensive—if this had been a targeted killing and they had not been foreign aid workers, I don't think this would have caused the same response.

In regard to Netanyahu's response, I think I understood what he was trying to say when he said that bad things happen, but you can't say, "Bad things happen" when the people killed are these people.

People have been fired over this. Do you think that IDF operating procedures were followed here?

I don't know what these firings are about. Were they the trigger pullers?

The IDF has gone back and forth on the subject of court martials for combat decisions, for operational misconduct, or whether they should just be disciplinary hearings. I haven't read the full report that led to the firing, so I don't understand why the chief of staff fired them. It struck me as a response to public pressure—and that's public pressure from outside Israel more

"I don't understand why the chief of staff fired them. It struck me as a response to public pressure—and that's public pressure from outside Israel more than inside Israel."

than inside.

You believe that Israelis feel differently?

As someone who reads the Israeli press probably 20 hours a day, I'm not sure that the Israeli public fully understands the extent to which this event has caused very severe damage. The president of the United States is genuinely angry about this, and I'm not sure that the Israeli public fully appreciates that.

These weren't just foreign aid workers who were working in Israel. They were foreign aid workers who had been invited in and were coordinating with Israel.

There are different levels of coordination. I think that there is concern as to which level the government is generally interested in coordination.

I have no doubt that the IDF, the boots on the ground, want coordination. I don't think that the guys on the ground want anything but coordination, because they're dealing in this war zone that is just the size of my living room. Is it always 100 percent possible? No, it's not. And that's honestly what happened here.

I would like to think that the IDF drowns out the double message—or quadruple message—from the government about co-

ordination.

Do you believe that there have been operational problems in this war? Do you see this as part of a larger problem in the IDF's actions?

Do I think that there are tactical or strategic mistakes that have been made? Well, of course there were strategic mistakes made. October 7 couldn't happen without strategic mistakes being made. The killing of the three Israeli hostages: What's that? The killing by the Israeli one-star general of Israelis who were hiding in Kibbutz Be'eri: What's that?

But I don't think that those are deliberate strategic mistakes. They were tactical mistakes that were made. Should they have happened? Of course not. Is this reflective of some broader, strategic idea? No.

That doesn't excuse them in any way. That doesn't excuse the fact that October 7 happened. But that's a different discussion.

Is there something that you would recommend as far as reviewing the policy of these targeted killings?

No. I think that the policy is the policy. The way you, so to speak, earn your living in these things is the implementation of the operational decision-making, and there is incredible pressure here.

That doesn't justify it or excuse mistakes. Obviously, when this terrible war is over, there will be lots of things that need to be reviewed.

This is a very damaging incident for Israel, but you don't see it as part of a general trend.

No. And if I were king for a day—which is a job I wouldn't wish on anyone—I would say, Team, you messed up here, full stop. We will figure out our systems better and implement changes. Is this a reason to stop targeted killings or drones? No. ●