

UN: Palestinian Rocket Likely Killed BBC Reporter's Child

An errant Palestinian rocket, not an Israeli air strike, likely killed the baby of a BBC reporter during fighting in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip last November, a U.N. report has indicated, challenging the widely believed story behind an image that became a symbol of what Palestinians said was Israeli aggression.

Omar al-Masharawi, 11 months, was killed on Nov. 14, the first day of Israel's Operation Pillar of Defense. An Associated Press photograph showed his anguished father, Jihad Masharawi, clutching his slain child, who was wrapped in a shroud. Palestinians blamed Israel, and the image was broadcast around the world and widely shared on social media.

Now a report from the U.N. office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights says the baby was "killed by what appeared to be a Palestinian rocket that fell short of Israel."

Hamas, whose fighters fired most of the rockets into Israel during the conflict, had no response Monday.

According to the BBC, Masharawi dismissed the findings as "rubbish" and said no U.N. official had contacted him over the findings. He also claimed that the responsible Palestinian group would have apologized to the family in such an event, the BBC reported.

An Israel Defense Forces spokesman said the Israeli military could not confirm or deny whether the Israelis had hit the Masharawi house.

Matthias Behnke, head of the OHCHR office for the Palestinian territories, cautioned he could not "unequivocally conclude" that the death was caused by an errantly fired Palestinian

rocket. He said information gathered from eyewitnesses led them to report that "it appeared to be attributable to a Palestinian rocket."

He said Palestinian terrorists were firing rockets at Israel not far from the Masharawi home. Behnke said the area was targeted by Israeli air strikes, but the salvo that hit the Masharawi home was "markedly different."

He said there was no significant damage to the house, unusual for an Israeli strike. He said witnesses reported that a fireball struck the roof of the house, suggesting it was a part of a homemade rocket. Behnke said the type of injuries sustained by Masharawi family members were consistent with rocket shrapnel.

The Gaza-based Palestinian Center for Human Rights said it still held Israel responsible for Omar's death. The PCHR has condemned Hamas fighters and other terrorists in the past for errantly fired rockets that have killed Palestinians, including during the November clash.

A researcher said the group interviewed family members, neighbors and security officials before concluding that an Israeli strike killed the baby.

The baby was killed hours after fighting erupted following Israel's killing of a top Hamas leader in an air strike, in response to incessant rocket fire from Gaza.

Israel carried out hundreds of air strikes against terrorist centers in Gaza. Palestinian terrorists indiscriminately fired hundreds of rockets and mortar shells toward Israel.

During the eight-day conflict, about 160 Palestinians and six Israelis were killed.

The U.N. report did not name the Masharawi family in its one-sentence statement about the incident. Behnke, the U.N.

official, said the report referred to the incident.

The report discussed the incident in the context of Palestinian terrorists disregarding civilians, both by firing rockets from crowded Palestinian areas and by aiming them indiscriminately into Israel.

In the same report, the authors also criticized Israel for appearing to disregard civilians while pursuing terrorists and military targets, and for targeting civilian sites, like hospitals, bridges and media offices.

Among many cases, they noted that an 84-year-old man and his 14-year-old granddaughter had been killed by an Israeli military strike on Nov. 21 while they were in their olive orchard on Gaza's eastern border. They also cited an Israeli air strike on a crowded Gaza City neighborhood that killed 12 people, including five children and four women.

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