Rafah Massacre 2014: “Black Friday” and the Hannibal Directive

On the morning of Friday, 1 August 2014, minutes after a humanitarian ceasefire took effect, the people of eastern Rafah returned to their homes, only to be met by bombs and shells from aircraft and tanks. On that day alone the occupation army fired more than two thousand bombs, missiles and shells at Rafah, a thousand of them in the first three hours, killing more than 140 Palestinians on the first day, wounding hundreds, and striking the hospital and ambulances. [1] [2]

The people of Rafah called that day “Black Friday.” Amnesty International concluded there was “strong evidence” that occupation forces committed war crimes in Rafah, which may amount to crimes against humanity. [3]

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The Rafah “Black Friday” massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Friday, 1 August 2014, with the assault continuing until 4 August [1] [2]
Place	The city of Rafah, especially its eastern area, southern Gaza Strip [1]
Context	Minutes after a 72-hour humanitarian ceasefire took effect at 8 a.m., during the 2014 war on Gaza [1] [2]
Pretext	The capture of Lieutenant Hadar Goldin by the resistance, and the application of the “Hannibal Directive” [1]
Munitions	More than 2,000 bombs, missiles and shells on 1 August, 1,000 of them in the first three hours [1]
Killed	More than 140 on the first day; 255, including 85 children, over four days according to Adalah and Al Mezan [2] [4]
Finding	“Strong evidence” of war crimes that may amount to crimes against humanity, according to Amnesty [3]

A ceasefire that did not last minutes

In the fourth week of the war on Gaza, a 72-hour humanitarian ceasefire was announced, to take effect at 8 a.m. on Friday, 1 August 2014. [1] The people of eastern Rafah returned to the homes they had fled after the occupation forces’ incursion, but within minutes the ceasefire turned into “a fierce war.” [2]

After a firefight in Rafah, the Palestinian resistance captured Israeli Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, and the occupation army responded by applying the “Hannibal Directive.” [1]

The Hannibal Directive: scorched earth

The Hannibal Directive, as Amnesty International describes it, is a controversial military command for dealing with the capture of soldiers by “unleashing massive firepower.” [1] In Rafah it involved F-16 jets, drones, helicopters and artillery,

turning the city into “an inferno of fire”; two one-ton bombs were dropped on a single-storey building in al-Tannur, with scores of civilians nearby. [3]

According to an Israeli military inquiry cited by Amnesty, more than two thousand bombs, missiles and shells were fired at Rafah on 1 August alone, a thousand of them in the three hours after the capture. [1] Survivors said jets fired more than a hundred missiles at Rafah’s crowded neighborhoods within a few hours. [5] Most of the city’s eastern area was destroyed, in what the circulated account calls a “scorched earth” policy.

Hospitals and ambulances targeted

Medical crews were not spared. On 1 August one of three ambulances carrying the wounded near a mosque was destroyed by apparently drone-fired missiles, killing three medics and the wounded with them, and another ambulance was hit by a similar strike. [1] [3] Ambulance driver Ismail al-Saafine said: “Our mission was so difficult as dozens of people were killed and remained in the streets.” [5]

Satellite imagery showed craters near Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital, which was damaged inside and out and closed at about 7 p.m. [1] People fleeing the bombardment had taken refuge there, [2] and the circulated account says the occupation claimed the captured soldier was inside as a pretext for continuing to strike it. The wounded were brought to the hospital on animal-drawn carts because ambulances were scarce. [5]

The circulated account says the morgues overflowed with bodies, so some were kept in food refrigerators, victims were buried unidentified because their bodies had been torn apart, and more than one victim was buried in a single grave.

The toll: what do the sources say?

Source	Period	Killed
Al Jazeera Net	1 August (hours)	More than 140 [2]

Source	Period	Killed
Amnesty International	1–4 August	At least 135 civilians, including 75 children [3]
Adalah and Al Mezan	1–4 August	255, including 85 children [4]

Amnesty says estimates of civilians killed range from at least 135 to over 200. [1] The war on Gaza, which began on 7 July 2014 and lasted 51 days, killed at least 2,251 Palestinians, most of them civilians, and wounded more than six thousand. [5]

Survivors' testimonies

Saleh Abu Mohsen fled his home in eastern Rafah with his family to Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital, where he realized his daughter Aseel had been left behind; he tried to return with an ambulance, but the shelling stopped him, and he found her body only four days later. [2] Mohammed al-Jazzar (52) lost his wife and four of his children: "I lost my family and 20 of my relatives without committing any sin." Mohammed al-Hashash lost eight family members and called it "a mass killing against the civilians," describing the day as "doomsday." [5]

Impunity

Amnesty International called for urgent, independent investigations, [3] and Adalah and Al Mezan demanded an independent and credible investigation into the "Black Friday" events in line with international standards. But three years later, the occupation authorities had closed files from those days without a criminal investigation, and none of those responsible had been brought to trial. [4]

Read about the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

On "Black Friday," a humanitarian ceasefire turned into one of the most violent massacres of the 2014 war: more than two thousand bombs and shells in a single

day, hundreds killed and wounded, a hospital closed under bombardment, and ambulances destroyed with those inside. The Rafah massacre remains a testament to the application of the “Hannibal Directive” to a city crowded with civilians, and to an international silence and impunity that continue to this day.

Frequently asked questions about the Rafah “Black Friday” massacre

When did the Rafah “Black Friday” massacre take place?

It took place on Friday, 1 August 2014, with the assault on Rafah continuing until 4 August, during the Israeli war on Gaza.

How many people were killed in the 2014 Rafah massacre?

More than 140 on the first day according to Al Jazeera, and 255, including 85 children, over four days according to Adalah and Al Mezan.

What is the Hannibal Directive?

An Israeli military command to respond to the capture of soldiers by unleashing massive firepower; it was applied in Rafah after the capture of Lieutenant Hadar Goldin.

How many shells were fired at Rafah on Black Friday?

More than two thousand bombs, missiles and shells on 1 August alone, a thousand of them in the first three hours, according to Amnesty International.

Was the Rafah massacre considered a war crime?

Yes; Amnesty International found “strong evidence” of war crimes that may amount to crimes against humanity, and no one has been held accountable.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “‘Black Friday’: Carnage in Rafah during 2014 Israel/Gaza Conflict,” Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture, 2015.
2. “‘Black Friday’: A Documentary Recalls the Rafah Massacre,” Al Jazeera Net, 16 June 2015.
3. “Gaza: Strong Evidence of Israeli War Crimes in Rafah,” Amnesty International, 29 May 2015.
4. “Justice Denied: Three Years after Israel’s Deadly ‘Hannibal Directive’ in Gaza Strip,” Adalah and Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 1 August 2017.
5. “Gaza Survivors Remember Israel’s Black Friday Massacre,” The New Arab.