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A Tale of Two Atrocities: Douma and Gaza



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The mainstream media once again have enthusiastically endorsed Donald Trump's latest strike on Syria, pulled off without Congressional approval and in blatant violation of US and international law. Reporting in breathless detail the weapons used and the sites bombed, the mainstream media seem to agree with President Trump that Syrian President Bashar Assad is a "Gas Killing Animal" responsible for the ghastly deaths of Syrian innocents in a chemical attack, one which demands swift, forceful retaliation. This rush to

judgment comes even as international organizations have yet to conduct any formal investigations into the evidence of what, if anything, happened in Douma and who is responsible.

Now compare this intense media coverage of the alleged Syrian chemical attacks to the near silence accorded the horrific civilian massacre perpetrated by Israeli soldiers in Gaza, at the very same time. The Gazan health ministry reports that at least 34 unarmed Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces over the past weeks, with hundreds more injured during six weeks of planned demonstrations titled the “Great March of Return.” which largely consisted of tire-burning and prayer. Human Rights Watch [denounced](#) the killings as “calculated” and “unlawful.” A video of an Israeli sniper shooting an unarmed Palestinian man is but one example of the substantial available evidence of this deliberate killing of innocent civilians. After the sniper shoots the man, one of the soldiers yells “yes!” and “son of a bitch!” in celebration as a crowd rushes toward the body. Israel’s defense minister Avigdor Lieberman rejected calls for an inquiry into these Israeli killings of Palestinians, saying soldiers along the Gaza frontier “deserve a medal” for what they did. The United States, rather than labeling Lieberman a “killing animal,” instead blocked a Kuwait-drafted U.N. Security Council statement that would have called for an independent investigation. And the mainstream media says next to nothing.

Three differences in the reportage here are readily apparent: First, the evidence: In contrast to still unverified reports of who’s responsible for the alleged Syrian attacks, there is overwhelming first-hand video evidence of the flagrant massacre of unarmed Palestinian civilians in Gaza by Israeli soldiers. Second, the manner of killing. The alleged murder of civilians using chemical weapons apparently calls for worldwide moral indignation and humanitarian retaliation, whereas indiscriminate murder by sniper rifles, as done by Israel in Gaza, causes no such concern. Third, the victims: the US media’s almost total neglect of the brutal murders of innocent Palestinian men, women and children leads to the inescapable conclusion that, in contrast to Syrian victims, Palestinian victims don’t matter. How do we account for this discrepancy? Thirty years ago Noam Chomsky and Ed Herman explained it incisively in their book on US mass media called *Manufacturing Consent*. Their seminal insight was the distinction between *worthy* and *unworthy* victims. They showed through copious research that the US media consistently portray people abused or murdered by enemy states, such as Syria, as *worthy* victims, whereas those

treated with equal or even greater severity by US client states, such as Israel, are ignored as *unworthy* victims.

They also showed that as long as the major media outlets endorse official US consensus – say, that Assad is a “Gas Killing Animal” – they are not required to produce credible evidence, construct serious arguments, or present extensive documentation. Meanwhile, the public generally does not even notice the chilling silence accorded to *unworthy* victims of client states like Israel, whose suffering is drowned out by the disingenuous humanitarian outcry for the suffering of *worthy* victims of enemy states like Syria.

Of course what determines whether victims are worthy or unworthy has nothing to do with their actual suffering, or the ghastliness of their deaths, but rather with whether the state perpetrating the suffering is friend or foe. Conclusive demonstration of this is that Assad’s alleged Syrian victims are deemed worthy and must be avenged, whereas the Syrian victims of US airstrikes and drones are almost invisible, as unworthy as their suffering Palestinian counterparts. Such is the monstrous calculus of the criminal US regime and its criminally complicit media.