

5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE HAMAS-RUN GAZA HEALTH MINISTRY

The Gaza Health Ministry – the Hamas-controlled Gaza branch of the Palestinian Ministry of Health – is the predominant source of information on casualties in Gaza. The *Washington Post* quoted a reporter [referring](#) to the ministry’s spokesperson as the “only game in town” for casualty figures for journalists. Some media outlets [identify](#) the ministry as a Hamas-controlled entity, while others [do not](#). Either way, the media continue to use the ministry’s data even after the exposure of its false claim that an Israel airstrike caused a [lethal blast](#) at al-Ahli hospital on October 17.

1. Hamas controls the Gaza Health Ministry

After Hamas seized the Gaza Strip from the Palestinian Authority in 2007, it began running a parallel government within the coastal enclave. One of the departments under Hamas’s purview is the [Gaza branch](#) of the Ministry of Health, with responsibility for disseminating data on Palestinian deaths in Gaza. The Gaza Health Ministry courted controversy in 2018 when it [reported](#) and subsequently retracted claims, reportedly made under Hamas [pressure](#), that Israeli tear gas killed a Palestinian child who suffered from a preexisting condition. It also [failed to report](#) injuries that Hamas-controlled security forces inflicted on anti-Hamas protesters in 2019.

2. The White House considers the ministry’s numbers unreliable

When asked about the number of Palestinian deaths reported by the Gaza Health Ministry, President Joe Biden [said](#), “I have no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people are killed.” National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby [said](#) the White House will not use “numbers put out by an organization that’s run by a terrorist organization.” “Hamas has a clear propaganda incentive to inflate civilian casualties as much as possible,” [warned](#) Luke Baker, a former Reuters Jerusalem bureau chief. He [added](#): “Any health official stepping out of line and not giving the death tolls that Hamas wants reported to journalists risks serious consequences.”

3. Hamas rules Gaza with an iron fist

Threats and intimidation prevent many Gazans from protesting Hamas’s corrupt and authoritarian rule. When Palestinians do take to the streets, Hamas [suppresses](#) them [violently](#). Hamas also has a history of torturing and [summarily executing](#) suspected collaborators and anyone who might [undermine](#) Hamas’s rule. There are numerous instances of Hamas terrorists intimidating journalists and their [local intermediaries](#) when their reports run counter to Hamas’s preferred narrative. In 2014, Palestinian journalist Radjaa Abou Dagga [wrote](#) about how Hamas uses Shifa Hospital for military purposes but then withdrew the article, fearing for his family. Hamas also [arrested](#) a Gaza journalist in 2016 for alleging corruption in the Health Ministry.

4. The recent Al-Ahli incident further undermines the ministry’s credibility

On October 14, 2023, media outlets around the world [reported](#) rapid [claims](#) made by the Gaza Health Ministry that Israeli missiles struck the al-Ahli hospital, killing around 500 Palestinians. The U.S. intelligence community assessed that a Palestinian rocket likely caused the damage and [estimated](#) that 100 to 300 people died at the hospital, while a European official put that figure at below 50. *The Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal*, among others, later revised their coverage and reported that evidence strongly favored a Palestinian rocket as the cause of the blast. Relatedly, the ministry’s data includes Palestinians killed by other Palestinians. In August 2022 clashes, for example, errant Palestinian rockets [caused](#) one-third of the reported Palestinian fatalities. The Israel Defense Forces [estimated](#) that nearly one-fifth of the Palestinian rockets fired at Israel during that conflict malfunctioned or otherwise fell short of their target.

5. The Gaza Health Ministry death tolls do not distinguish between civilians and combatants

The ministry does not [distinguish](#) between civilians and combatants in its count. Its casualty figures also do not identify the circumstances of death, making it impossible to identify terrorists who died in the initial assault on Israel or during the Israeli defensive operations that followed. Within days of the gruesome attacks of October 7, 2023, Israeli officials [reported](#) they recovered the bodies of 1,500 terrorists in Israel. The Health Ministry has not clarified whether or not these individuals are counted on its registry. Hamas’s casualty count might also include Palestinian minors and adults [aiding](#) Hamas fighters in an auxiliary capacity. Analysis from *The New York Times* during the 2014 Israel-Hamas war [found](#) that men ages 20 to 29 were the most overrepresented among the dead. Hamas also employs fighters above and [below](#) that range, but this is a strong indication that Israeli attacks targeted and succeeded in eliminating Hamas terrorists.