

Yet Another Example of The Guardian's Viciously Biased and Inaccurate Reporting on Israel

by Hugh Fitzgerald



In its venomous coverage of Israel, the British newspaper *The Guardian* has for years been the print equivalent of Jeremy Corbyn. Recently Israel dismantled a group of seven Bedouin tents and eight animal pens on land the Bedouins did not own and that the IDF has used for live-fire practice since 1967 – that is, for more than half a century. **Israel's military liaison to the Palestinians said it had destroyed structures that had been erected illegally on an IDF live-fire zone:**

An enforcement activity was carried out by the Supervision Unit of the Civil Administration against 7 tents and 8 pens which were illegally constructed in a firing range located in the Jordan Valley," the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) said in a statement.

The Guardian's report of the dismantlement of the Bedouin encampment can be found here: "Israeli forces leave 41 children homeless after razing Palestinian village, UN says," by Oliver Holmes, [Guardian](#), November 5, 2020:

In the occupied West Bank Israelis have razed a Palestinian village, leaving 73 people – including 41 children – homeless, in the largest forced displacement incident for years, according to the United Nations.

At Khirbet Humsa, there was no “village” as the U.N., and *The Guardian*, want you to believe.

This was a Bedouin encampment, consisting of seven tents, and eight pens for livestock, which had been placed illegally on land the Bedouins did not own, and which, furthermore, was land located in one of the IDF’s live-fire zones. These Bedouins themselves, as sheep herders, naturally practiced transhumance, moving from place to place before coming to Khirbet Humsa, as their animals required new places for grazing. The Israelis did not “raze” anything – the tents were knocked down – and there was little destruction of their household belongings, including beds and bedding, as photographs online clearly show the contents of those tents to have remained intact. The *Guardian* fails to mention a key fact: the Bedouins of Khirbet Humsa had no legal title to the land they were on, nor did they have permits to put up their “illegal structures.” Surely this is something that readers need to know.

Nor does the *Guardian* mention that the Bedouins of Khirbet Humsa had availed themselves of every legal remedy up to, and including having their case brought to Israel’s High Court. For years they had been fighting in the Israeli courts (with far-left Israelis as their advocates), for the right to remain on land to which they had no legal claim, and on land that since 1967 has been used by the IDF as a live-fire zone. Finally, Israel’s High Court (famously solicitous of Palestinian rights) denied their last appeal this November. The inhabitants of Khirbet Humsa had thus had years of warning that they would likely have to move, but refused to do so, even though – and this, too, is not mentioned in the *Guardian*

story – the Israelis offered help in relocating them to a place outside the live-fire zone. None of this – that the Bedouins had no legal title to the land, that there was no “village,” but rather, seven tents and eight animal pens that were knocked down, that the contents of those tents were left intact, that the inhabitants had had years to make other arrangements, that the Israeli government had offered assistance in relocating them outside the live-fire range – appears in the tear-jerking story in the Guardian. If these Bedouin are now “homeless,” you can be sure it’s a most temporary condition, and one that the Israeli government will do its utmost to remedy.

The tent encampment of Khirbet Humsa is in the “West Bank” (a/k/a Judea and Samaria) is not “occupied” by Israel, despite that epithet being affixed by the ignorant and the venomous, as here by the Guardian. The “West Bank” is within the territory that was assigned by the Mandate for Palestine in 1922 to become the Jewish National Home. *The Guardian*, and the U.N., seem to think they can continue to ignore the Mandate for Palestine, its provisions, and the territory that was included in it. No, we beg to differ. The League of Nations provided several mandates for the Arabs and one – the Mandate for Palestine – for the Jewish people. (As it turned out, of course, the Arabs ended up with 22 states, far more than any other people in the world.) The territory to be included in the Palestine Mandate extended from the Golan Heights in the north to the Red Sea in the south, and from the Jordan River in the east to the Mediterranean in the west. Jordan was the “military occupier” of the West Bank from 1949 to 1967; its claim to sovereignty of the area was recognized by only two states, the U.K. and Pakistan. In 1967, Israel took possession of the West Bank, and was finally in a position to exercise its pre-existing legal claim to the Mandate.

Excavators escorted by military vehicles were filmed approaching Khirbet Humsa and proceeding to flatten or smash

up tents, shacks, animal shelters, toilets and solar panels.

The Israelis did not “smash up” tents, but did knock them down – that is, “flattened” them. They were not torn to shreds and, from the photos, several look as though they can be reused. The Israelis deliberately minimized damage to the Bedouins’ belongings, which can be seen, largely intact, in photographs online. There were also a number of animal pens – not human dwellings – that were destroyed.

“These are some of the most vulnerable communities in the West Bank,” said Yvonne Helle, the UN humanitarian coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory.

Yvonne Helle appears not to understand that what she calls a “community” or a “village” is nothing of the sort, but a Bedouin encampment of just seven tents, and it is “vulnerable” because it is situated in a live-fire zone; it is the Israelis who have long been trying to persuade the Bedouins to move to a safer area. This case has gone on for years, as the Bedouins went through the courts to appeal the government’s decision to remove them, and finally, when the High Court, having carefully considered the matter and denied their appeal, only then did the IDF use force to uproot them, at the same time offering to help them move to another, safer location outside the live-fire zone. *The Guardian* makes no mention of the Bedouins’ access to the Israeli courts to challenge their removal. How many of their readers would assume that they had had no such recourse, that there had not been years of legal wrangling, and that Israeli soldiers had simply swooped in on the inoffensive and unsuspecting Bedouins without warning, wantonly demolishing an entire “village” on land that those Bedouins owned?

Let us look again at the Israeli statement about Khirbet Humsa:

An enforcement activity was carried out by the Supervision Unit of the Civil Administration against 7 tents and 8 pens which were illegally constructed in a firing range located in the Jordan Valley,” the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) said in a statement.

7 tents, 8 pens, “illegally constructed in a firing range.” That’s not a “village,” but a Bedouin encampment. Should the U.N.’s Yvonne Helle want those Bedouins to continue to live in an area of maximum danger – a firing range? Isn’t Israel right to remove these Bedouins from such obvious danger? Imagine the outcry if some of those Bedouins had been killed during a live-fire exercise by the IDF.

Three-quarters of the community lost their shelters during Tuesday’s operation, she said, making it the largest forced displacement incident in more than four years. However, by the number of destroyed structures, 76, the raid was the largest demolition in the past decade, she added.

By Yvonne Helle’s own testimony, Israel did not “destroy” a “village” if one-quarter of the “shelters” are still intact. She is counting every tent, every pen, every small shed, even every portable toilet to arrive at her grossly inflated figure of “76 structures” in order to claim that this is the “largest demolition” in the past decade.

On Wednesday, families from the village were seen rifling through their wrecked belongings in the wind, with some of the first rain of the year arriving the same day. The UN published a photo of a bed and a cot in the open desert.

The Bedouins’ belongings were not “wrecked” as the *Guardian* reports, as one can see online photos of their belongings – beds, bedding, a child’s crib, cushions, clothing, cooking utensils – largely intact.

The village is one of several Bedouin and sheepherding communities in the Jordan Valley area that is located within Israeli-declared army training “firing zones”, and despite being within the Palestinian Territories, people there often face demolitions for a building without Israeli permission.

The “village,” or more exactly, the tent encampment, consisting of seven tents for humans and five animal pens, is not “within the Palestinian territories.” It is in Area C, which remains completely under Israeli control. And it also needs to be repeated, that all of the “West Bank” – now divided among Areas A, B, and C, that differ in the degree of autonomy that the Palestinians in each of the three areas enjoy, is territory that, according to the Palestine Mandate, was part of what was to become the Jewish National Home, and then the State of Israel. *The Guardian* doesn’t care about history or international law; it keeps calling the “West Bank,” where the seven tents of Khirbet Humsa’s Bedouins were located, “Palestinian Territories.”

Israel’s Civil Administration issued a statement claiming that it carried out an operation against seven tents and eight pens which were illegally constructed. The U.N. says Israeli forces destroyed 18 tents and sheds housing 11 families, 29 tents and sheds used as livestock enclosures, three storage sheds, nine tents used as kitchens, 10 portable toilets, 10 livestock pens, 23 water containers, two solar panels, and feeding and watering troughs for livestock.

One of them is lying. Either it is Israel’s Civil Administration, or it is the U.N., and the far-left Israeli “human-rights group” B’Tselem, which claim that there was much more extensive destruction than Israel has admitted.

Whom should we believe? Israel has a long record of telling the truth, while the U.N. -- when it comes to Israel – has a long history both of exaggerating Israel’s putative misdeeds

and of outright lying. The Guardian, of course, prints anything negative about Israel it can – stories about the nonexistent “Jenin massacre,” the “deliberate” killing by the IDF of Palestinian medical personnel rushing to help the wounded at Israel’s security fence, the supposed “execution” of already incapacitated Palestinians; Israel’s “murder” of the young Mohammed al-Durah (who turned out to have been killed by Palestinian fire) and so many other faked “atrocities” attributed to the Jewish state. Given its many decades of truth telling, Israel has earned the right to be believed when its version of what happened at Khirbet Humsa contradicts what the U.N. claims.

Israeli forces also destroyed more than 30 tonnes of food for livestock and confiscated a vehicle and two tractors belonging to three residents, the group added.

The Israelis make no mention of confiscating any vehicles at Khirbet Humsa. If they in fact did so – which I find implausible – they will undoubtedly return them to their Bedouin owners, once those owners have found a new place to live outside the live-fire zone.

“As part of its efforts to take over more and more Palestinian land, Israel routinely demolishes Palestinian homes and property,” said B’Tselem spokesperson Amit Gilutz.

Israel does not “routinely” demolish Palestinian homes and property. There are almost 20,000 of illegal Palestinian structures right now in Area C. It demolishes illegal structures erected without permits by both Jews and Palestinians, but only after long legal challenges by the affected parties have run their course, and the decision to demolish upheld by the courts, right up to the High Court. It is not an easy process. No one has denied Israel’s claim that the structures were illegal, on land the Bedouins did not own; instead, but the U.N. and the Guardian instead pass over such

essential information in silence.

“But the wiping off of a whole community at once is extremely rare, and it seems like Israel was making use of the fact that everyone’s attention is currently set elsewhere to move forward with this inhumane act,” he [Amit Gilutz] said in reference to the US election.

The “wiping off” of a “whole community”? That “community” has not been “wiped off” the map, its inhabitants scattered to the winds. Those 73 Bedouins remain intact as a group, and with Israel’s help – such an offer of help is never mentioned by the *Guardian* – will find another, safer place, outside of the free-fire zone, to pitch their tents.

In summary:

For years the Bedouins living at Khirbet Humsa in a handful of tents – seven by Israel’s count – refused the demand that they move because they had built illegal structures on land they did not own, land that, furthermore, was in an area that the IDF used for live-fire exercises. The Bedouins during that time appealed the removal order all the way to the High Court of Israel. It was the High Court that decided the Bedouins’ appeal was without merit. *The Guardian* fails to mention this lengthy legal process, wanting readers to believe that Israeli soldiers simply arrived one day out of the blue and proceeded, with their wonted cruelty, to smash to smithereens a “village” belonging to inoffensive Bedouins who had no idea why such violence was being visited upon them..

And then there is the venomous charge that Israel deliberately chose to take down the tents at Khirbet Humsa at a time when “everyone’s attention” was “set elsewhere” – an obvious allusion to the coronavirus pandemic. The only “timing” that was involved was that set by the High Court. As soon as it had made its final decision, upholding the government’s right to take down the tent encampment, the Israelis promptly did so.

That had nothing to do with some supposed attempt to sneak by the world's notice the removal of the encampment, a most implausible charge for, as everyone knows, the U.N. is focused laser-like on the slightest infraction by those ruthless Israelis.

When the former residents of Khirbet Humsa are resettled – not wandering “homeless” as the Guardian wants you to believe will be their wretched future – in a safe area, and with the help of the government of Israel, do you think that the *Guardian* will let its readers know of how things turned out for the Bedouins from Khirbet Humsa? No, I don't either.

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