

The Claim that Hamas' Military Center is Under Gaza's Biggest Hospital

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Dar Al Shifa Hospital - CC BY-SA 4.0,
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On October 19, Ehud Barak, former Israeli Prime Minister, gave an interview to the BBC on its "Newsnight" program in which he said that it was well known that Hamas has its "central command post" under Al Shifa hospital in Gaza and implied Israel would attack it after seeing that all the patients were evacuated to another facility. There's a recording of the interview at the site Archive.org. You can see it by clicking [here](#) and scrolling right until you see Barak's picture. A transcript of that section of Barak's remarks is below.

Barak said, "Every reporter that lives in Gaza or in Israel knows" about the location of this command center. His claim is preposterous and a cover for a likely upcoming large-scale war crime. This illegal alleged act to locate a "command post" underneath Al Shifa hospital has never been reported. If it had been known, it would certainly have led to big exposes in many newspapers and on TV. Hamas is ruling the Gaza Strip and surely has a web of tunnels all over that area, but it's hard to imagine the doctors and officials of the hospital would allow a command post to be built under the hospital or if they had been threatened to keep silent the facts still would have been leaked out. Barak says that Hamas is cynically using "patients" to protect this command center. As Eli Valley reminds us in a [brilliant cartoon](#), this "human shields" argument has been an Israeli government propaganda trope for many years.

If in fact the Israeli military believed Hamas had its command center under the hospital, it already would have been attacked many times. The idea that the IDF would wait and then, as Barak says,

take out patients, “passing them to another installation,” is a sick joke. Even if the IDF could develop a humanitarian sense, there is no other “installation” to move patients to from Gaza’s biggest hospital. The [World Health Organization](#) has said that 12 of Gaza’s 35 hospitals have *closed* this month. Israel, which routinely bars Gaza Palestinians from Jerusalem in “peacetime,” certainly is not going to allow thousands of injured “children of darkness” as [Netanyahu](#) calls them into Israeli hospitals.

The whole thing should bring to mind what happened in Iraq in 1991 when the United States bombed the [Amiriya shelter](#). The U.S. military claimed it was a “command and control center,” but in fact it was a well-known civilian shelter. Hundreds were gruesomely killed. An attack on Gaza’s biggest hospital to destroy a supposed underground shelter would take bombs of huge power and likely kill multiples of those killed in that Baghdad shelter. On [Democracy Now!](#) on October 24, Sherif Kouddous said the Al Shifa hospital is designed for 700 people, but was treating 5,000 with many on the grounds outside hoping proximity to the hospital would bring them safety.

On October 28, the Israeli military command openly made the charge at a press conference. According to the *New York Times*, “It said that Al Shifa conceals underground command centers for Hamas.” The *Times* reported that Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief spokesperson for the Israeli military, claimed that Hamas “does its command and control in different departments of the hospital.” The only “proof” offered were photos from the air of Al Shifa with drawings made by the IDF superimposed. The *Times* article also estimated that 60,000 Palestinians were sheltering around Shifa hospital.

On October 30, Dr. [Mads Gilbert](#), a Norwegian doctor who worked in Gaza hospitals in many of the recent wars, was asked about the charge on *Democracy Now!* He said:

I will ask President Netanyahu to put on the table the proofs and the evidence that there is a control and command center for the Palestinian resistance in Shifa Hospital. We have heard these claims since 2009. We have twice been threatened to leave Shifa Hospital, in 2009 and 2014, because the Israelis were going to bomb it because it was a command center. Now, I have been working in Shifa for ... 16 years on and off, in very hectic periods.... I’ve been able to walk freely around. I take lots of pictures. I video, film. I’ve been sleeping in the hospital during bombardment. I’ve been all over. I’ve never been restricted, controlled. Nobody has ever controlled my picture and documentation material. So, ..., if there is a command center, show us. You have pictures and X-ray films of all Gaza, all the tunnels, everything. So, why is it that these 16 years of threats that Shifa is a command center has not been given any evidence at all that it *de facto* is? Now, if it was a military command center, I would not work there, because I obey to the Geneva Convention, number one.

One also wonders why the IDF, if it really believed that Hamas had its center under the hospital, would be openly proclaiming this top bit of “intelligence” and giving Hamas commanders an opportunity to slip away.

Relevant portion of *BBC* transcript:

Barak: I know that no Israeli general would give an order to attack a hospital and no pilot will launch a weapon into a place he knows is a hospital.

Interviewer Emir Nader: They may well be right. You may well be right, but the reason

why so many people find it credible that they can believe this is because schools have been hit. Numerous hospitals have been told by the Israeli army to be evacuated ahead of a strike because it is a potential target.

Barak: I don't know to what extent the viewers of the BBC know that the central command post of the Hamas in Gaza Strip is where it is you believe. It's in a bunker underneath the Shifa Hospital. The biggest hospital in the Gaza Strip is the place under which they buried their command post in order to be protected by those patients.

Emir Nader: That's a very strong claim and we have to take your word for it, the Israeli army's word for it, because you're the only people saying that, and it could be used to justify a very, very devastating attack on one of the most important places, humanitarian places within Gaza.

Barak: So first of all, it's a matter of facts. It's known to everyone who knows the Middle East. Every reporter that lives in Gaza or in Israel knows that the command post of the Hamas in the Gaza Strip is underneath.

Emir Nader: We have not heard that, we've not heard that. No one outside of the Israeli army is saying that.

Barak: I am happy to be the first to tell you, but it's deliberate. It's a system that doesn't care about their own citizens, So we are facing a tough and shrewd rival, but we are determined to destroy it, and we will do and it will take.

Emir Nader: So you think you're going to attack the Shifa Hospital? Do you think that's what's next? Because this language is extremely...It's laying the ground for any humanitarian position in the Gaza Strip to be leveled. ...nowhere's safe.

Barak: Believe me it's more complicated. So I can promise you that we will never attack the hospital as it's full with patients who are there, in spite of knowing that it's deliberately underneath the hospital, but I cannot promise you for sure that at a certain point we won't impose a kind of taking the patients out and passing them to another installation where they can be treated safely and then they destroy the command post of Hamas.