

UK covers up Gaza spy footage from day of aid worker massacre

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A World Central Kitchen vehicle hit by an Israeli drone in Gaza. April 1, 2024 (Photo: Omar Ashtawy via Alamy)

London, August 29 (RHC)-- According to reports from London, the Royal Air Force has surveillance tape of Gaza from the day Israel killed British aid workers – but refuses to publish it. The London-based media outlet "Declassified UK," in an article written by John McEvoy, says that UN experts warn the British military that they may have to hand tape to International Criminal Court.

Britain's Ministry of Defense holds video surveillance footage of Gaza from the day that Israel killed seven international aid workers but is refusing to publish the tape.

Among those killed in the World Central Kitchen convoy on 1 April were three British military veterans: John Chapman, James Kirby and James 'Jim' Henderson.

The footage was taken by a Royal Air Force (RAF) surveillance plane which spent approximately five hours above Gaza that day. It seemingly returned to base in Cyprus minutes before the airstrikes were launched.

The RAF may therefore have collected footage of events leading up to the tragedy, which could provide clarity over Israeli claims that " Hamas gunmen" were seen near the convoy.

World Central Kitchen founder Jose Andres criticised Israel's investigation into the incident, in which two senior officers were fired over what was deemed a "grave mistake." Andres told ABC: "The investigation should be much more deeper...we need more information. We need to see better quality videos."

Britain has now emerged as an unlikely source of such footage, having sent more than 200 spy flights over Gaza supposedly to help Israel locate hostages held by Hamas.

The UK military confirmed in a Freedom of Information (FOI) response to Declassified that "video footage of Gaza from the Shadow R1 [surveillance] flight on 1 April is held." However, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) claims the tape is exempt from disclosure on security grounds and hinted that its contents may relate to UK special forces or MI6.

Declassified UK intends to appeal the FOI decision, which it shared with some relatives of the deceased aid workers. Jim Henderson's father Neil told Declassified UK: "This footage should not be kept hidden from our family." He said in a written statement that "the UK government must urgently disclose any evidence it holds" which might "shed light on why James was wrongly targeted by Israel."

He added: "Jim was an honest, caring, loyal and hard working young man who served his country and was passionate in helping others without concern for his own safety and welfare."

Forz Khan, the Henderson family's lawyer, said he is "writing to the new Labour government to demand answers on whether UK military and intelligence assistance to Israel has been used in attacks on British citizens in Gaza".

The MoD press office did not answer Declassified's questions about whether it would show the footage to bereaved families, or if it was potentially relevant for investigations into their deaths. It also ignored a request to clarify precisely which areas of Gaza and at what times the footage was recorded.

A MoD spokesperson only said: "While the Prime Minister has continued to call for an immediate ceasefire, we have been clear that the Royal Air Force has been operating unarmed surveillance flights over Gaza solely for the purpose of helping to locate hostages.

"In line with our international obligations, we would consider any formal request from the International Criminal Court to provide information relating to investigations into war crimes."

This statement signifies a slight shift in UK government policy since Labour's Keir Starmer became prime minister. Conservative defense secretary Grant Shapps was asked five times in the last parliament

whether the UK government would give the ICC any spy flight footage that showed Israel committing war crimes.

Shapps, who lost his seat in July's election, refused to directly answer the questions, claiming "the number one concern" was "to find and locate British hostages, and that's where that surveillance work will focus".

Declassified asked the ICC prosecutor's office whether it would formally request access to Britain's surveillance footage of Gaza, as part of its probe into potential war crimes by Israel and Hamas.

A spokesperson said it "is working with all relevant actors including national authorities, to collect information relevant to this investigation" but is "unable to provide further information with respect to details of its investigative activities in response to your request at this stage".

As signatories to the Rome Statute, the Genocide Convention and the Convention on Torture, the UK has a responsibility to investigate and prosecute those who have committed core international crimes.

Professor Ben Saul, a United Nations special rapporteur, told Declassified: "If a country possesses possible evidence of a war crime, it has a duty to investigate with a view to either prosecuting any suspects or sharing the evidence with other countries interested to genuinely prosecute, or with the International Criminal Court given its active investigation in Israel/Palestine."

Saul, who is a UN expert on countering terrorism while respecting human rights, added: "Another method of seeking to ensure respect for humanitarian law could be to publicly disclose the evidence so as to expose the conduct and deter further violations."

Eye in the Sky

The spy flight took off from RAF Akrotiri, Britain's air base on Cyprus, at 5pm local time on 1 April and landed at 10:49pm, flight tracking data shows. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) claimed the aid worker convoy departed from a humanitarian pier in Gaza at 10pm, with "armed suspects" allegedly boarding the vehicles at 10:28 pm. Three drone strikes were launched four minutes apart, at 11:09 pm, 11:11 pm, and 11:13 pm.

News of the airstrikes on the aid workers began to surface on Palestinian social media channels slightly earlier, at around 10:30 pm, according to the New York Times.

The flight time between Akrotiri and Gaza is around 30 minutes, suggesting the British surveillance plane was heading back to base over the eastern Mediterranean when the attack occurred, or had just landed.

It may have recorded footage of the aid convoy's movements along Gaza's coastline shortly before the vehicles were systematically targeted by Israeli drones. This footage could be used to cross-reference the IDF's official investigation, and paint a more precise picture of what actually happened.

Israel's investigation was conducted by Yoav Har-Even, the former head of Israeli state-owned weapons firm Rafael who once led the IDF's Operations Directorate.

Jim Henderson's father Neil said Israel's internal probe "by its very nature will not be independent" and said it would be "totally unacceptable" for UK authorities to trust that process and "an abdication of the responsibility that the British government has towards its citizens."



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