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***Israel Says Its Account of Rescue Workers Killed in Gaza Was Partly ‘Mistaken’***

The Israeli military had previously asserted that the workers had been “advancing suspiciously” toward its troops. A video obtained by The New York Times on Friday appeared to contradict that account.



A screenshot from a video captured the moment Israeli troops opened fire on a group of medics in Gaza, in late March.



By [Isabel Kershner](#)

Reporting from Jerusalem

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The Israeli military on Saturday acknowledged that the initial accounts from troops involved in the killing last month of 15 people in southern Gaza — who the United Nations said were paramedics and rescue workers — had been partially “mistaken.”

The assessment, which was shared in a briefing with reporters by an Israeli military official, came the day after [a video](#) obtained by The New York Times appeared to contradict the military’s earlier version of events. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity under army rules.

The Israeli military official said the internal investigation of the attack, which has drawn international scrutiny and condemnation, is ongoing.

Briefing reporters on Saturday night on the military’s initial findings, the official said forces from a reserve infantry brigade had been lying in ambush along a road to the north of the Gazan city of Rafah in the pre-dawn hours of March 23 and, at 4 a.m., had killed what he described as two Hamas security personnel and detained a third one.

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Two hours later, as dawn was breaking, a convoy of ambulances and a fire truck approached the same spot. The Israeli forces were still on the ground and received a report from a surveillance aircraft that the convoy was moving toward them, the official said. When the rescue workers arrived and left their vehicles, he said, the forces believed that more Hamas operatives had arrived and opened fire on the occupants of the vehicles from afar.

The Israeli military had previously asserted, repeatedly and erroneously, that the vehicles were “advancing suspiciously” toward the troops “without headlights or emergency signals.”

The video obtained by The Times shows that the approaching ambulances and fire truck were clearly marked and had their emergency signal lights on when Israeli troops hit them with a barrage of gunfire.

The military official briefing reporters on Saturday did not offer an explanation for the contradiction, other than to say that the initial account from forces on the ground had been “mistaken.”

The military official said that Israel believes at least six of the 15 were Hamas operatives, but did not immediately provide any evidence, citing the classified nature of the intelligence work involved in the identification process. In recent days, the military had repeatedly asserted that nine of those killed had been militants belonging to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The Red Crescent, the International Committee of the [Red Cross](#) and the United Nations have previously said all of those killed were humanitarian workers who should never have come under attack.

[On March 30, rescue teams found 15 bodies, most in a shallow mass grave along with their crushed ambulances](#) and a vehicle marked with the U.N. logo. The video obtained by the Times was discovered on the cellphone of a paramedic who was found in that mass grave.

The Israeli official declined to comment on whether any of those killed had been armed. He said Hamas operatives in Gaza often did not wear military uniforms and that Israel had seen them posing as civilians, hiding in hospitals and school buildings.

The [killings](#) have drawn international scrutiny since the 15 people first went missing. The United Nations and the Palestine Red Crescent Society said the aid workers had not been carrying weapons and posed no threat. The president of the Palestine Red Crescent Society, Dr. Younis Al-Khatib, said that the bodies had been “targeted from a very close range.”

Image



Members of the Palestine Red Crescent and other emergency services carrying the bodies of fellow rescuers killed a week earlier by Israeli forces, during a funeral procession on March 31. Credit...Eyad Baba/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Palestine Red Crescent Society officials said last week that ambulances had set out around 3:30 a.m. on March 23 to evacuate Palestinian civilians wounded by Israeli shelling but that an ambulance and its crew had been hit on the way.

Several more ambulances and a fire truck headed to the scene over the next few hours to rescue them, according to the society, as did a U.N. vehicle, the United Nations said. Seventeen people were dispatched in total, of whom 10 were Red Crescent workers, six were emergency responders from Gaza's civil defense and one was a U.N. worker.

The Red Crescent said one medic was still missing and that one had been detained by Israeli forces and then later released.

[Isabel Kershner](#), a Times correspondent in Jerusalem, has been reporting on Israeli and Palestinian affairs since 1990. [More about Isabel Kershner](#)

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