

Libyan Deaths, Media Silence Were Dozens Killed in Major NATO Airstrikes?

Read the entire report at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=4379>
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Allegations of Libyan civilian deaths as a result of NATO bombing have often been covered in the corporate media as an opportunity to scoff at the Gadhafi regime's unconvincing propaganda (**FAIR Blog**, 6/9/11). But dramatic new allegations that dozens of civilians were killed in Majer after NATO airstrikes on August 8 have been met with near-total media silence.

According to Libyan officials, 85 civilians were killed in Majer-- a town south of Zliten, a site of frequent clashes and NATO airstrikes. There is no reason journalists should take this claim at face value. But reports from the scene suggest that something significant happened. According to **Agence France Presse** (8/9/11), "Reporters attended the funerals of victims and saw 28 bodies buried at the local cemetery.... In the hospital morgue, 30 bodies -- including two children and one woman -- were shown along with other bodies which had been torn apart."

... A **Reuters** correspondent (8/9/11) "counted 20 body bags in one room, some of them stacked one on top of the other.... In total, reporters saw about 30 bodies at the Zlitan hospital." The **New York Times** (8/10/11) ran a 170-word version of a **Reuters** dispatch which noted: "There was no evidence of weapons at the farmhouses, but there were no bodies there, either. Nor was there blood."

Amnesty International has called for an investigation, which led to this mention from **CNN** anchor John King (8/11/11): "Amnesty International is demanding that NATO investigate whether a Monday strike on Moammar Gadhafi's forces killed 85 Libyan civilians including 33

children. NATO says it has no evidence of civilian casualties at this point. "

A Nexis database search yields very little coverage in U.S. outlets. But that is not because no reporters were present. **CNN** correspondent Ivan Watson covered a mass funeral after the strikes. But his report aired only on **CNN International** (8/10/11). Watson reported a visit to "three or four houses that had been demolished by some kind of missiles from the sky." He added: "We were also shown a morgue where there were the bodies of at least 25 people. Many of them appeared to be men. There were some women and children included among those corpses."

... Watson's **CNN.com** report (8/10/11) included an interview with a Libyan who claimed that nine members of his family were killed in the attack, including his two-year old daughter. Watson also interviewed a man who was burying his daughter. It is curious that Watson's reporting was shared with **CNN's** international audience, but not broadcast to its domestic audience...

Reporting that undermines Libyan claims of civilian casualties has been a staple of the war so far-- as evidenced by headlines like "Libya Government Fails to Prove Claims of NATO Casualties" (**Washington Post**, 6/6/11) and "Libya Stokes Its Machine Generating Propaganda" (**New York Times**, 6/7/11).

Is Majer being ignored by the media because it is just more clumsy Libyan propaganda? Or is it because the story might conflict with the media's overriding message that Libyan civilians aren't dying in NATO's airstrikes? ...

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