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Child soldiers of Hamas not the sole victims of a conflict clouded by propaganda

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IN the long history of terrorism in the Middle East conflict, Palestinian children have tragically been exploited by groups such as Hamas for a wide range of attacks against Israeli civilians - including in suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks which have taken many innocent lives.

On March 11 this year, Khakim Awad and Amjad Awad murdered five members of the Fogel family, including three children. At least one killer was a minor. More frequently, Palestinian children often rain down heavy rocks on Israeli cars - often fatally.

Unfortunately, in the article headlined "Stone cold justice" (The Weekend Australian Magazine, November 26) on the efforts by the Israeli courts to deal with the very difficult problem posed by Palestinian "child terrorists", these basic facts are erased. Instead, it repeats the highly distorted image of Palestinians as victims and relies primarily on organisations and individuals who have invested heavily in promoting this political campaign. For example, officials from Defence for Children International - Palestine Section, a noble-sounding name that masks its real activities as a powerful propaganda organisation, provided many of the claims in the article. DCI-PS's agenda is primarily political, and its emphasis on children is a means towards this objective.

In many of their activities, the leaders of this organisation distort history beyond recognition, such as by erasing the history of Arab attacks. The 1948 war (known as the Nakba in Arabic), in which many Israeli children and others were killed, is twisted by DCI-PS to fulfil its political agenda. According to the organisation's version, Israel has "historical and legal responsibility for the Nakba" and its consequences, even though the war was initiated by the invasion of Israel by five of its neighbours.

In more recent examples, DCI-PS propagandists erase tens of thousands of rockets launched at Israeli towns such as Sderot (each such attack is a war crime), instead declaring that Israeli efforts to protect civilians from attack are "illegal acts of aggression". After the Gaza war in early 2009, DCI-PS published a list of innocent Palestinian children it claimed had been killed by Israel, and disregarded evidence showing that 17-year-olds Ibrahim Mostafa Fraih Sa'id and

Ibrahim Abed al-Rahim Rajab Suliman, among others, were clearly involved in the Hamas attacks.

The DCI-PS claims further misrepresent the situation by failing to address the gravity of these crimes. In September of this year, Asher and Yonatan Palmer were murdered in a terror attack near Hebron. Asher lost control of the car after a rock smashed the windshield, killing him and his one-year-old son.

Systematic reports from the Israel Defence Forces detail "160 severe cases implicating minors . . . stone and rock throwing as well as bomb throwing that have caused death" in recent years.

Court documents in 2008 reveal attacks on individuals such as Revital Ben Haim and Lipaz Rotter, who each sustained major injuries after their vehicles were struck by stones.

Israel's court system is sensitive to the age of these perpetrators. In both the cases mentioned above, judges issued reduced sentences to the minors involved in these attacks because of their age.

The tragedy of Palestinian children who are taken advantage of by groups such as Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine for attacks, their Israeli child victims, and the resulting moral dilemmas faced by Israeli courts are important topics for discussion. Any analysis should examine ways in which minors are used by militants and politicised NGOs such as DCI-PS as pawns.

Attempts to minimise or erase the severity of these crimes works against an enduring solution, and perpetuates the exploitation of Palestinian youth, as well as adding to the toll on Israeli children.

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