



EU Foreign Policy Chief Defames Israel With Baseless Claims

Jacob Olidort
Director of Research

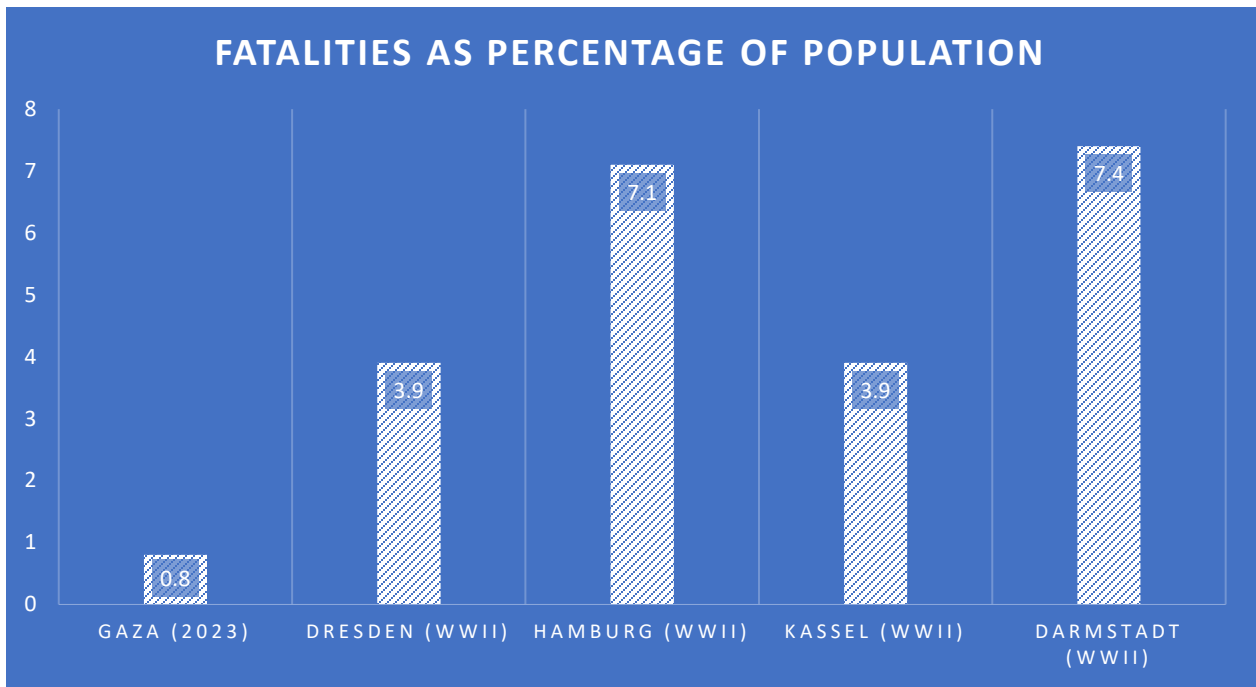
Yoni Tobin
Policy Analyst

On December 11, 2023, European Union (EU) High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell [said](#) that “if you compare what happened in the German cities bombed during the Second World War, there are reports that have been published in this regard that indicate that the level of destruction in Gaza is higher.” Borrell’s statement reveals the ahistorical and non-factual basis of criticisms of Israel.

Allied bombing of German cities, such as Hamburg and Dresden, during World War II resulted in much greater, and faster, death and destruction than Israel’s careful and precise operations in Gaza. In just two days in February 1945, for example, allied bombers dropped almost 4,000 bombs on Dresden, killing some 35,000 people, or almost 4 percent of the population. Even stranger, Borrell seems to ignore Ukraine—an ongoing war much closer to his jurisdiction that has resulted in much greater destruction than the one in Gaza.

What Happened?

- On December 11, 2023, European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell [said](#) that “if you compare what happened in the German cities bombed during the Second World War, there are reports that have been published in this regard that indicate that the level of destruction in Gaza is higher than that suffered by Dresden or that suffered by Cologne, and similar to that which Hamburg suffered.”
 - » He also [said](#) that “[t]he human suffering constitutes an unprecedented challenge” and that since “Israel acknowledges that it has eliminated 5,000 Hamas fighters, when we are talking about 20,000 civilian casualties, half of them children, the ratio between the objective of defending itself and the civilian casualties that are caused produces concern, at a minimum.”



Why Is It Important?

- Borrell's statement is meaningless. Saying that what is happening in Gaza is equivalent to what happened in Germany during WWII could mean anything at all.
 - » But if Borrell's intent was to suggest that the destruction in Gaza exceeds, or even is equivalent to, that visited upon German cities in WWII, then he is utterly wrong. Statements like his reveal how criticism of Israeli operations in Gaza lacks any grounding in fact, historical understanding of past conflicts, or knowledge of the laws of armed conflict.
- First, Borrell's figures about Gaza are inaccurate. Roughly 18,400 people in total have been [killed](#) in Gaza as of December 13—even if one accepts Hamas-supplied estimates—and approximately 7,000 of those [killed](#) have been terrorists, according to Israel. Thus, rather than the 20,000 civilians killed that Borrell claims, the figure—again taking the estimates of both sides at face value—is closer to 11,000.
 - » In other words, Borrell exaggerated the civilian death toll by almost 100 percent.
 - » Additionally, a minimum of 38 percent of those killed have been terrorist operatives, rather than 25 percent, as Borrell alleged.
- Further, contrary to Borrell's (seeming) assertion, the Allies likely inflicted far greater damage and casualties in their World War II bombing campaign over Germany. High-end, Hamas-sourced [estimates](#) of Gazan deaths in the war are around 18,400, constituting roughly 0.8 percent of Gaza's [population](#) of roughly 2.3 million. Allied bombing of German cities such as Hamburg and Dresden killed up to seven percent of those cities' populations.
 - » In the Allies' air raids on Hamburg, Germany, in July and August 1943, an [estimated](#) 45,000 people were killed, approximately seven percent of Hamburg's population of roughly 634,000 at the time and roughly nine times the proportion of the population that has been killed in Gaza.

- Additionally, the sheer destruction in Hamburg was both qualitatively and quantitatively enormous, with roughly 4,880 factories, over 210,000 homes, 12 bridges, and 180,000 tons of shipping [destroyed](#).
- » Two days of intense bombing of Dresden in February 1945 [resulted](#), according to estimates, in roughly 35,000 casualties. At the time, Dresden had a [population](#) of approximately 600,000, plus another estimated 300,000 refugees, meaning that around 3.9 percent of the 900,000 inhabitants of Dresden were killed in the Allied air raids.
 - Of those killed, an estimated 70 percent [suffocated](#) due to carbon monoxide discharged in the bombing, according to historians.
 - In one 14-hour period on February 13, some 3,000 tons of bombs were [dropped](#) on Dresden, [causing](#) the destruction of roughly 25,000 of the 28,000 houses in Dresden at the time, over 14,000 houses, 72 schools, 19 churches, and dozens of other buildings.
- » Other German cities also [suffered](#) extremely high casualty rates during the air raids, including the city of Darmstadt, which suffered a fatality rate of roughly 7.5 percent, and the city of Kassel, which incurred fatalities comprising around 4 percent of its total population.
- It is also unclear what conclusion should be drawn on the basis of damage to buildings in either World War II or in Gaza today about the merits of the allied effort or Israel's effort, respectively.
 - » The total amount of destruction, while tragic, is not a metric for judging compliance with the laws of armed conflict.
 - Determinations of war crimes and compliance with the law of armed conflict are made on the basis of intent of individual attack decisions, not outcomes of the total conflict, as JINSA Distinguished Fellow LTC Geoffrey Corn explains; "The instinct to rely on 'effects-based' condemnations...is legally invalid," he [writes](#).
 - » Nor is the comparison of losses on two sides of the conflict an indicator of morality. As Israeli Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer has [pointed out](#), 8 million Germans died in WWII versus 400,000 Americans, but that does not make the Nazi cause just.
- Even more puzzling than the inaccuracy of Borrell's statements is its myopia. There is an ongoing conflict that has generated much greater human suffering and is much closer to Borrell's jurisdiction than Israel's war against Hamas, namely Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That war has caused nearly half a million [casualties](#) on both sides, more than 20 times more than in Israel and Gaza, and over six million individuals have [displaced](#) from Ukraine and another nearly five million people have been displaced internally within Ukraine.