
Myth, Fact, and the al-Dura Affair

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THIS PAST June, Wafa Samir al-Bis, an aspiring twenty-one-year-old *shabida*, or “martyr,” was apprehended by Israeli guards at the Erez checkpoint in Gaza and found to be carrying 20 pounds of explosives in her underwear. The young woman intended to make a last trip to the Soroka Medical Center in Be’er Sheva, where she had been receiving medical treatment for severe burns incurred in a domestic accident. Her goal this time was to blow herself up and kill as many young people as possible. Asked why she was aiming specifically at children, she replied that she wanted to retaliate for the death of Muhammad al-Dura.

Wafa Samir al-Bis is but one in a long line of *shabids* and would-be *shabids* inspired by the image of a twelve-year-old Palestinian boy whose death scene was broadcast worldwide at the very onset of the so-called al-Aqsa *intifada* that broke out in September 2000. Televised images of the boy, reportedly killed by Israeli soldiers, instantly ignited anti-Israel and anti-Jewish passions all over the world, provoking a wave of violence from the lynching of two Israeli reservists in Ramallah to synagogue burnings in France. In the ensuing years, the story of Muhammad al-Dura has attained near-mythic stature in the Arab and Mus-

lim world. In the West, though its essence is largely forgotten, it has fired the political imagination of many who accept it as emblematic proof of Israeli culpability for the outbreak of the armed conflict and even for Palestinian “martyrdom operations” against Israel’s civilian population.

The killing of Muhammad al-Dura is not the only long-lived accusation against Israel in the last five years. Another tale of atrocity, perhaps even better known, is the Jenin “massacre.” In the spring of 2002, the Israeli army moved into that West Bank city to wipe out a nest of terrorists responsible for a particularly intense sequence of murder and mayhem. Immediately, Palestinian sources claimed a figure of 5,000 dead (later reduced to a more modest 500) and an entire “refugee camp” bulldozed to rubble. By the time the truth emerged—Palestinians themselves finally confirmed a total of 56 dead, most of them in armed combat, and aerial views demonstrated the pinpoint nature of the Israeli operation—the damage had been done. Still today the Jenin “massacre” endures, out of reach of rational refutation.

But at least there is reliable information on what really happened in Jenin. That is not the case with the death scene of Muhammad al-Dura.

The background can be quickly summarized. In the summer of 2000, even before Yasir Arafat brought down the final curtain on the Oslo “peace process” by rejecting an American-brokered deal at Camp David, reports were circulating of a

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Palestinian military buildup. The first act of war was the murder of an Israeli soldier by his Palestinian partner on a joint patrol. But this was dismissed as a mere fluke. Instead, the spark that ignited the *intifada* was alleged to be Ariel Sharon's September 28 visit to the Temple Mount, Judaism's most sacred site and also the home of a number of Muslim shrines, including the al-Aqsa mosque.

The next day, September 29, the eve of Rosh Hashanah, riots broke out as Palestinians exiting from Friday prayers in the mosque overran a police post and hurled paving stones, conveniently stockpiled nearby, onto the heads of Jewish worshippers at the Western Wall below. On September 30, Marwan Barghouti, the West Bank leader of Arafat's Fatah organization, asserted that he could not and would not restrain further expressions of Palestinian protest.

It was later on that same day that a cameraman for France-2, a channel of the state-owned French television network, captured the death of a twelve-year-old Palestinian boy, allegedly shot in front of his helpless father by Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip. A news report, dramatically narrated by France-2's Jerusalem correspondent, was instantly aired and was offered free of charge to the world's media.

The effect was immediate, electrifying, and global. Overnight, Muhammad al-Dura became the poster child of the incipient Palestinian "struggle" against Israeli "occupation" and a potent symbol of the genocidal intentions of Israel's government. A doctored photomontage was soon produced for Arab-Muslim viewers, featuring an imported image of an Israeli soldier apparently shooting the boy at close range.

That the death of Muhammad al-Dura was the real emotional pretext for the ensuing avalanche of Palestinian violence—and a far more potent trigger than Sharon's "provocative" visit to the Temple Mount—is attested by the immediate and widespread dissemination of his story and of the *pietà*-like image of his body lying at his father's feet. Streets, squares, and schools have since been named for the young Islamic *shahid*. His death scene has been replicated on murals, posters, and postage stamps, even making an iconic appearance in the video of Daniel Pearl's beheading. His story, perhaps the single most powerful force behind the Palestinian cult of child sacrifice over the last years, has been dramatized in spots on Palestinian television urging others to follow in his path, retold in a recruitment video for al Qaeda, and im-

mortalized in epic verse by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish.

But is it true? Although serious doubts were immediately raised about the veracity of the France-2 news report, they were swept aside by the emotions it provoked and by the flare of violence in the last months of 2000. France-2 indignantly turned down all requests to investigate or even to help others investigate by releasing outtakes. To this day, many people believe that even to raise a doubt about the authenticity of the report is tantamount to denying the reality of the 9/11 attacks on New York City.

But let us begin at the beginning, with France-2's prize-winning scoop, aired just hours after the incident.

HERE IS what viewers saw and heard: a few seconds of rioting somewhere on the West Bank, followed by a vague scene of armed men at Netzarim junction, a crossroads in the Gaza Strip. A jeep comes down the road. A single shot rings out, and a man in uniform at the open door of the jeep falls or jumps to the ground, clutching his right leg. An ambulance pulls up, stops on the far side of the road. The man is dragged across the ground, placed on a stretcher with his weight resting on his wounded right leg, and loaded into the ambulance. Charles Enderlin, France-2's correspondent, announces in an eyewitness-style voiceover:

Three PM at Netzarim junction in the Gaza Strip. A dramatic turn of events. The Palestinians shot live ammunition, the Israelis replied. Ambulance drivers, bystanders, journalists are caught in the crossfire.

Now the camera focuses on a man and a boy crouched behind a concrete barrel or culvert, their faces contorted in fear. Enderlin: "Here Jamal al-Dura and his son are targets of gunfire from Israeli positions." The camera pans to a nearby Israeli outpost. The father waves with his right hand in the direction of the Israeli position. The father is hunched behind the barrel, the boy nestled against his back. Enderlin:

Muhammad is twelve years old. His father tries to protect him. He waves. But another round of fire bursts out. Muhammad is dead, and his father grievously wounded.

During the 55-second sequence, two shots have hit a concrete-block wall that stands like a backdrop for the scene, landing far afield of the father

and son. Other bullet holes, similarly off-target, can be seen in the wall as well. The father shields the boy; the father's arm is clearly visible, perpendicular to the ground. Guttural cries are heard, adding to the feeling of panic. The last round of gunfire kicks up a cloud of dust, obscuring the man and boy. When the dust clears, the boy is stretched out at his father's feet; the father bobs his head as if groggy.

And that was it. As Enderlin would later explain, the reason France-2's scoop was offered free to the world was that the producers did not want to earn a profit from so tragic an incident. Only the terrible moments of the child's death throes, he added, had been edited out, being "too unbearable." The film sequence itself, attributed at first to a "France-2 cameraman," was subsequently identified as the work of the station's Palestinian stringer, Talal Abu Rahmeh. By then, the full authority and reputation of France-2 itself had been indelibly stamped on the footage.

Within days, an elaborate narrative was being disseminated to flesh out the elusive details of the 55-second video. On October 3, 2000, testifying under oath before the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, the cameraman Talal Abu Rahmeh alleged that Israeli soldiers had intentionally, in cold blood, murdered the boy and wounded the father. Abu Rahmeh's testimony was precise and vivid. There had been, he said, a five-minute exchange of fire between Palestinian policemen and Israeli soldiers. This was followed by fully 45 minutes of gunfire coming exclusively from the Israeli position and aimed directly at the man and the boy crouching desperately behind a concrete barrel. According to the cameraman, he had captured on film a total of 27 minutes of this fusillade, risking his own life in the process. As an experienced war photographer, he could attest without hesitation that the Israeli outpost was the only position from which the boy and the man could be hit.

This amplified version of the incident, with slight but significant variations and a wealth of human-interest details, then took on a life of its own, being repeated and embellished in numerous background stories, special reports, and interviews about the tragic fate of the "simple boy from Gaza, who loved birds." In one of these narratives, Jamal and Muhammad were said to have left the El Bureij refugee camp early on the morning of September 30 to visit a used-car market. Finding the market closed, they headed home in a communal taxi, arriving at Netzarim junction shortly before midday. The taxi was blocked by a raging gun bat-

tle, so Jamal decided to go the rest of the way on foot. In an interview on Israeli television, Jamal said that upon entering the crossing he found the firing so heavy that he took refuge behind an up-ended concrete culvert, where he and his son were pinned down for the 45 minutes of relentless gunfire aimed deliberately at them from the Israeli position. He waved to the soldiers, who could see he was an innocent civilian trapped there with a boy; they shot him in the hand. He tried to protect his son with his arm, but they shot him in the arm and shoulder. He tried to protect him with his leg, but they shot him in the leg, smashing his pelvis. The tragic outcome was described for a BBC documentary by Talal Abu Rahmeh: Jamal tried to call for help on his cellphone, asking someone to get the soldiers to stop shooting, or to send an ambulance. The ambulance driver was shot dead. The soldiers kept on shooting until they killed Muhammad, who died either instantly from a fatal wound to the stomach or, in another version, bled to death for 15 to 20 minutes because no ambulance could get through to evacuate him.

In the following weeks, journalists like Suzanne Goldenberg in the (London) *Guardian*, Gilles Paris in *Le Monde*, and dozens of others would write about this incident as if they themselves had been at Netzarim junction on the fatal day.

THE AL-DURA story was so immediately and so deeply harmful to Israel that no matter what government officials might say or do, they only seemed to make matters worse. Enderlin has stated that, before airing the report, he called the IDF spokesman to inform him of the breaking news and to caution him against shirking Israeli responsibility. The soldiers in the fort, however, had reported nothing remotely resembling what Enderlin described, for the simple reason that they had seen nothing. And yet, the first official Israeli statement on the incident included an apology for the death of the boy and a promise to investigate. It took a few days before the IDF concluded that, given the shooting angle from the Israeli position, the man and boy could not have been hit by IDF gunfire. This was treated as adding insult to injury.

Other objections were dismissed with similar contempt. Early on, for example, it was pointed out that the 55-second video did not show any of the normal signs consistent with wounds from high-power bullets. There was no blood on the victims' clothes, on the wall, or on the ground. Their postures appeared wholly voluntary, with no

sign of shock or trauma. As for Abu Rahmeh's claim of a 45-minute free-for-all, experts in ballistics concurred that automatic rifles fired uninterrupted for that length of time would reduce their victims to shreds, and the concrete block wall behind them to rubble. Nor did such behavior accord with what one knew about the ethics, discipline, and skill of IDF soldiers.

Early doubters of the received version included the French documentary filmmaker Pierre Rehov, who sued France-2 for spreading false information; the case was thrown out of French court. Nahum Shahaf, an Israeli physicist who led the first official IDF investigation, has been studying the incident ever since, accumulating one of the most exhaustive film libraries on the subject. Metula News Agency (MENA), an Israel-based, French-language service, likewise undertook a lengthy and still ongoing investigation. Esther Schapira, a German television producer who went to Israel convinced of IDF guilt, came away with a film exposing the contradictions and discrepancies of the France-2 news report; she was convinced that the boy had been killed by Palestinians. In a June 2003 article in the *Atlantic*, the American journalist James Fallows concluded that Muhammad al-Dura "was not shot by the Israeli soldiers who were known to be involved in the day's fighting," but also that we would never know who killed him.

Was Muhammad al-Dura shot by Israelis? By Palestinians? Perhaps not shot at all? Most attempts to develop a cogent counter-scenario have fallen victim to the tangle of conflicting details and the sheer accumulation of minutiae. Though it is almost impossible to say anything meaningful about the 55-second filmed news report to someone who knows little or nothing about the elaborate surrounding narrative, it is extremely difficult to get beyond the emotions elicited by the visual image to a critical examination of that narrative. Even "corrective" articles regularly commit factual errors about everything from the chronology of the *intifada* to the layout of Netzarim junction, ignore anomalies in the eyewitness accounts, or are oblivious to the absence of corroborating evidence. Finally, and fundamentally, every effort to reproduce the event dispassionately butts up against quite understandable resistance from those who cling to the packaged version.

But we do have extensive evidence of what was occurring at Netzarim junction on September 30, 2000. More than a dozen cameramen were at the junction filming the action that day. They were all

Palestinian, but they were working for Reuters, AP, NHK, France-2, and other prestigious networks. Aside from Abu Rahmeh's footage, brief excerpts from what they shot have appeared in news broadcasts. But hours of outtakes also exist, and their eloquence is astounding. I cannot claim they show everything that happened, but enough raw footage exists to substantiate what follows.

NETZARIM JUNCTION is a simple intersection where one road leads (or, following Israel's disengagement, will have led) to the Jewish settlement of Netzarim and another to the Palestinian village of El Bureij. A rudimentary Israeli outpost stands on the road to the settlement—a small fortress of blind slabs with a few tiny gunslits surmounted by a fragile lookout cage. Otherwise, Palestinian police and civilians circulated freely throughout the area on the day in question. They occupied a pair of three-story apartment buildings, known as "The Twins," that overlooked the outpost and that housed the families of Palestinian policemen assigned to joint patrols under the Oslo agreement. Palestinians also held another building, an abandoned factory, that towered over the Israeli position. In addition, they operated from a mound of sandy earth directly facing the al-Duras and known because of its shape as "the pita," and down the road a bit toward El Bureij, from a cluster of what look like concrete bunkers.

On all the outtakes I saw, only one exchange of gunfire takes place: a brief outburst from the bunkers and a responding series of shots, ostensibly from the Israeli position. As for the death scene, it was filmed in front of a concrete-block wall abutting a makeshift building, opposite the pita but situated at an angle that made the al-Duras' barrel inaccessible to gunfire from the Israeli outpost.

In one version of his story, Talal Abu Rahmeh went to Netzarim junction at seven in the morning on a hunch that the children would be out demonstrating "because it was a school day," and he knew they demonstrated on school days. In another version, he ran over to the junction at 3 PM, after someone called his office to inform him that there were fierce battles going on. The outtakes show he was there from early morning. Apparently, a dozen of his colleagues had the same intuition; they too can be seen in the raw footage.

The Reuters, AP, and France-2 outtakes that I viewed show two totally different and easily identifiable types of activity at Netzarim junction: real, *intifada*-style attacks, and crudely falsified battle

scenes. Both the real and the fake scenes are played out against a background of normal civilian activity at a busy crossroads. In the “reality” zone, excited children and angry young men hurl rocks and Molotov cocktails at the Israeli outpost while *shababs* (“youths”) standing on the roof of the Twins throw burning tires down onto the caged lookout; this goes on seemingly for hours, without provoking the slightest military reaction from Israeli soldiers.

At the same time, in the “theatrical” zone, Palestinian stringers sporting prestigious logos on their vests and cameras are seen filming battle scenes staged behind the abandoned factory, well out of range of Israeli gunfire. The “wounded” sail through the air like modern dancers and then suddenly collapse. Cameramen jockey with hysterical youths who pounce on the “casualties,” pushing and shoving, howling *Allahu akhbar!*, clumsily grabbing the “injured,” pushing away the rare ambulance attendant in a pale green polyester jacket in order to shove, twist, haul, and dump the “victims” into UN and Red Crescent ambulances that pull up on a second’s notice and career back down the road again, sirens screaming. In one shot we recognize Talal Abu Rahmeh in his France-2 vest, filming a staged casualty scene.*

Split seconds of these ludicrous vignettes would later appear in newscasts and special reports; the husk, the raw footage that would reveal the fakery, had been removed, leaving the kernel rich in anti-Israel nutrients. Such staged scenes showed up, for example, in a dramatic CBS *60 Minutes* special report on Netzarim crossing—a place “now known,” intoned Bob Simon, echoing Palestinian sources, “as Martyr’s Junction.”

The al-Dura death scene was filmed right in the middle of these falsified incidents. It can be localized and situated. In one section of Reuters footage we see the man and the boy crouched behind the upended culvert as a jeep drives slowly up the road, stops in firing range of the Israeli position that is clearly visible in the near distance, makes a U-turn, drives in the opposite direction, stops short of the barrel/culvert, and helps perform the clearly faked evacuation of a man wounded in the right leg, as also shown in the France-2 news report. In fact, two ambulances stand for a long moment no more than fifteen feet from the al-Duras. There is no evidence of armed combat in their vicinity. No sound of gunfire. Men run down the road, passing in front of the al-Duras. No one is hit.

Nobody who was present at the junction that day

has ever corroborated Abu Rahmeh’s testimony, though he claims that several children huddled around him for protection as he filmed, and voices—of grown men—were recorded by the microphone attached to his camera. None of the other cameramen working at the junction that day filmed the al-Duras during their alleged ordeal under Israeli fire (though the pair can be discerned on one occasion, inadvertently captured in the background in an uneventful stretch of Reuters outtakes).

I also viewed a copy of the satellite feed transmitted by Abu Rahmeh late in the afternoon of September 30. In addition to the 55 seconds aired that evening, it includes a final image of the boy who would be described afterward as “killed instantly by a shot to the stomach”: in it he is seen shifting position, propping himself up on his elbow, shading his eyes with his hand, rolling over on his stomach, covering his eyes.

In addition, I saw outtakes from an interview in which Abu Rahmeh tells how he discovered the boy’s identity. Leaving the junction at around 4:30 PM, he bumped into a colleague and showed him the images he had just filmed. The other journalist, by chance a relative of Jamal al-Dura, supplied the names of the victims. Mourners in the massive funeral procession, allegedly held before sundown that very day, carried Muhammad al-Dura posters. Where and when were they printed?

IT IS no easy task to challenge the integrity of a powerful broadcaster in France, where the state-owned media operate with limited independence and no real competition. Charles Enderlin’s prestige and the dominant position of *France Télévisions* were enough to discredit the most diligent early analysts. To this day, Enderlin (a French Jew who became an Israeli citizen some 20 years ago and has served in the Israeli army) refuses to reply to questions about the accuracy of the news report and its enveloping narrative; responding with ad-hominem counterattacks, he threatens to sue his detractors for libel.

More than normal journalistic pride may be involved here. Enderlin’s news report was consistent with his stated overall view of the Middle East conflict. In his 2003 book, *Shattered Dreams*, he places the blame for Oslo’s failure squarely on Is-

* Students in a special course at the Israeli Military Academy, who had access to this raw footage, tagged and tracked the amateur actors as they went through their day, playing multiple roles. The injured and dead jump up, dust themselves off, play at offensive combat; casualties evacuated by ambulance are later seen loading a fellow actor into an ambulance or smiling with satisfaction as the ambulance door slams shut.

raeli prime minister Ehud Barak and U.S. President Bill Clinton, effectively absolving the Palestinians of responsibility. The same interpretation is, of course, shared by virtually the entire French intellectual and political elite, and endorsed by influential print media like *Le Monde*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, and *Télérama*.

Still, in 2004, as the *intifada* slowed and its mythology faded, the al-Dura story, too, began to break down. Charles Enderlin and the French media gradually backed away from their initial assertion as to the origin of the fatal bullets, leaving the incident in a limbo where the Palestinians could continue to accuse Israel of murdering the boy in cold blood while the French let it be understood that he was killed in a crossfire. Then, at the end of October 2004, something happened that would have broken the logjam if the French media were truly free, which they are not.

Luc Rosenzweig, a retired *Le Monde* journalist who had doubted the veracity of the al-Dura news report from the first, completed an investigative article in which he formally accused France-2 of an “almost perfect media crime.” His essay was scheduled to appear in the mainstream newsweekly *l'Express* on the fourth anniversary of the *intifada*. But the magazine’s editorial director, Denis Jeambar, decided to delay publication in order to double-check Rosenzweig’s facts.

Given his position, Jeambar was able to arrange a meeting with France-2’s news director. He was accompanied there by Rosenzweig and Daniel Leconte, a prize-winning TV producer. Asking simple questions about Abu Rahmeh’s satellite feed, the trio got shocking answers. They requested the 27 minutes of raw footage showing the al-Duras pinned down by Israeli gunfire; they were shown a half-hour of fake battle scenes similar to those described above. They asked why there were no pictures of Israeli soldiers aiming at the al-Duras; they were told that on this point the cameraman had retracted his testimony, given “under pressure” to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights. They asked to speak to the cameraman, then said to be undergoing medical treatment in Paris; they were told he did not speak French and that his English was too rudimentary (patently untrue). They asked to see the scene of the child’s death throes, professedly edited out by Charles Enderlin because it was “too unbearable”; they were told that no such images existed. They in turn produced pictures of a dead child, identified as Muhammad al-Dura, who had been admitted to Gaza’s Schifa hospital at noon or 1 PM on Sep-

tember 30, several hours before the alleged incident occurred; his face did not match that of the boy in the shooting scene, his wounds did not match the eyewitness descriptions. They were told that the channel’s forensic specialists would look into the matter.

AT THIS point, Jeambar, perhaps thinking that the whole affair had become too hot to handle, reneged on his commitment to publish Rosenzweig’s exposé. Seizing the initiative, Metula News Agency immediately leaked a report of the meeting and, at a press conference in Paris, reiterated its case for the al-Dura death scene as an outright falsification. Thereupon France-2, threatening legal action against anyone daring to question the integrity of its journalists, launched a spin operation: it sent Abu Rahmeh to Gaza to film Jamal al-Dura’s scars and showed the resulting footage at a press conference from which all known skeptics were excluded. Articles appeared defending Charles Enderlin and denouncing Metula News Agency; most of them were incongruously illustrated with an image from the original news report clearly showing Jamal’s bare arm—perfectly intact—a few short seconds before the round of gunfire that ended the scene.

But the bubble of tolerance protecting the French media had begun to stretch and tear. Three months after their October 2004 meeting with France-2, Denis Jeambar and Daniel Leconte came forward with their side of the story. The gist of their essay, published in *Le Figaro* after being rejected by *Le Monde*, confirmed the MENA release while chastising both Rosenzweig and MENA for jumping to the unwarranted conclusion that the death scene had been staged. Jeambar and Leconte also enjoined France-2 to make a full disclosure, withdraw its unjustified accusations, and recognize the incalculably damaging effects of its report in inciting violence and blackening Israel’s name.

The very next day, Enderlin responded with an article in *Le Figaro* suggesting that his distinguished colleagues join him in a sort of gentleman’s agreement to lay the affair to rest. His broadcast may have been hasty, he wrote, but it was justified on the grounds that the public had to know the truth, because so many children were being killed. He should have said, “were going to be killed,” because Muhammad al-Dura, as his father proudly proclaimed, was the first *shahid*, and Enderlin’s broadcast itself was instrumental in much of what followed. But, more than four years later, Enderlin

was still trying to defend his report as an accurate reflection of the situation on the ground.

Whatever his intentions, the result for Enderlin was disappointing. Indignantly defending their integrity, Jeambar and Leconte took him to task for having compromised his own. As Jeambar stiffly noted, journalists are supposed to report on what happens, not on what might have happened. Or, one could add, might not have happened.

So, is there now general agreement on the truth about the al-Dura affair?

Interviewed on a French-Jewish radio station in the thick of the controversy, Jeambar and Leconte described their sense of astonishment upon discovering the staged battle scenes. And yet, by the end of the interview, they were assuring themselves and their audience that the death of Muhammad al-Dura was *not* staged, that the father's injuries were authentic, that the Metula News Agency had exaggerated, and that the poor child must have been killed in a crossfire.

This notion of a death by crossfire is the *deus ex machina* of the al-Dura controversy. I have heard it a hundred times, and once used it myself. It is invoked in order to save reasonable people from even contemplating the possibility of a fabrication. But it is a figment of the imagination. The sole eyewitnesses—the cameraman and the surviving victim, Jamal al-Dura—have described 45 minutes of uninterrupted shooting from one direction only.

And what does the filmed news report show? The answer is staring us in the face, cinched by the collapse of France-2's four-year concealment of its lack of evidence. As even Charles Enderlin has tacitly admitted, the al-Dura report was not some brief excerpt from a longer stretch of filmed reality but a scene with no depth, no duration, no origin, and no continuation. The 45 minutes? Gone. Abu Rahmeh's 27 minutes? Gone, too. We are left with approximately a single minute of Jamal and Muhammad al-Dura filmed in continuous time.

In that minute, the two crouch behind an up-ended culvert and contort their faces in fear. Gut-tural screams are heard, but they do not come from the man or the boy; they come from men standing within range of the France-2 cameraman's microphone. Jamal bobs his head. Muhammad stretches out at his father's feet. Then, in the brief portion that was carefully edited out but that can be seen in the outtakes, the boy changes position several times, using voluntary muscles that only living people can activate.

During the 55-second sequence we see two bullets hitting the wall, which is already pockmarked with a number of other bullet holes nowhere near father and child. A cloud of dust obscures the last few frames. There is no sign or sound of a crossfire. There are no death throes.

The rest, as we say in French, is literature. There can be no further attempts to reconstruct the incident by adding to those 55 seconds since, as France-2 has now revealed, there *is* no additional footage.

But now look again at the Reuters outtakes. A jeep drives up a road, turns, goes down the other side, takes part in a battle scene. An ambulance pulls up, a "wounded" man is dragged across the road, placed on a stretcher, loaded into the ambulance, the ambulance drives away. Men run from position A to position B. Children toss Molotov cocktails at the IDF fortress. There is much laughter and cheering from the "audience," clusters of cheerful young men watching the show. All this time, traffic trundles through the intersection, schoolchildren go by with their bookbags, a fashionably dressed woman talks on her cellphone and chats and jokes with cameramen who stand nonchalantly with their backs to the Israeli position. Things are moving, the energy level is high, the *shababs* are fearless. Palestinian policemen mingle in the crowd, occasionally shoot a few rounds into the air, join in the battle scenes, get "wounded" and come back for more. Children set fire to tires; you can almost smell the rubber burning. The France-2 cameraman, Abu Rahmeh, is there, too, clearly visible, in the heat of the action, filming ambulance evacuations of fake casualties in large patches of real time. Familiar, retrievable, believable.

Where then did the story, the enveloping narrative, come from? Where did all those prestigious journalists get the background information they developed with such evident sincerity in their reports? There is only one source: Talal Abu Rahmeh. The story told by Jamal, bandaged in a hospital room, dovetailed with Abu Rahmeh's story. Enderlin religiously confirmed it. Everyone else repeats it.

Charles Enderlin constantly reaffirms his confidence in the professional competence and honesty of Abu Rahmeh—they have been working together for years—and systematically reiterates the dramatic facts of the al-Dura incident just as he heard them from his trusted cameraman. Where else could the story have come from? Though Enderlin narrated the incident as if he were on the spot, he has made no secret of the fact that he was in Ra-

mallah on September 30, covering Marwan Barghout's press conference. His account of the dramatic phone calls he received from Abu Rahmeh is part of the fleshed-out narrative. According to Enderlin, the cameraman phoned to say that he was caught in a shooting zone and that his life was in danger. He asked the France-2 correspondent to look after his family if the worst should befall him. The two men called each other several more times, the photographer describing the scene of the man and the boy trapped, the father repeatedly wounded, his hand, his shoulder, his elbow, his hip. The child's horrible death. Somewhere around 5:30 PM, the cameraman transmitted the satellite feed that would be edited into the famous news report narrated by Charles Enderlin.

How long did it take Enderlin, a seasoned journalist, to realize that his cameraman was lying, and that there were no additional images, no 45 minutes and no 27 minutes, to confirm the scene Abu Rahmeh said he had filmed? How long did it take France-2 officials to realize they had made a mistake in trusting the word of Enderlin? As long as the burden of proof rested on France-2's challengers, it was relatively easy to quibble over details. Now that the event has been reduced to its 55 inconclusive seconds, one must ask a different question. What was the role of the government-owned French television network, which is to say the French government itself, in devising, implementing, and spreading this atrocious calumny, whose repercussions are with us to this day?