

Ariel Sharon, Another War Crime Surfaces: Expulsion and Massacre of the Bedouins

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Forty-two years late, another Israeli war crime emerges from the shadows. In this case, dozens, and more probably hundreds, of Israeli soldiers kept a decades-long vow of secrecy. One of them is Shlomo Gazit, today a respected (in Israel, at least) academic at Tel Aviv University.

In January 1972, Ariel Sharon decided that 3,000 Bedouin were in the way of a massive military exercise he wanted to conduct in the southern Negev and northern Sinai. So he summarily expelled two tribes in the el-Arish area of the Sinai from their homes, during a deep winter spell. At least 40 people died, mostly babies, children and the elderly.

A young army researcher, Clinton Bailey, heard from other Bedouin of the expulsion and went to meet the families. He photographed 28 small graves at their new makeshift location.

He then brought the expulsion to the attention of the head of the army, David Elazar. Although Elazar ordered the tribes to be returned to their land, it was too late for the dozens who had died. No action was taken against Sharon or anyone else. In fact, Sharon's military and later political career prospered on such "exploits".

Bailey and everyone else covered up the crime for four decades, fearful of the damage it would do to Israel's reputation. The silence has been broken now because Bailey divulged the incident to journalist David Landau, who was preparing a new biography of Ariel Sharon.

Haaretz coyly admits that its military correspondent of the time knew of the war crime too but kept quiet. The paper has published the story now, but one cannot but ponder its motives. This revelation should help book sales, and Landau is a former senior editor at the paper.

No one is denying that these events took place. The Israeli army even comments that the "case is known", though it wishes to say nothing more. Gazit has no recollection of being told about it at the time.

What other such crimes do we still not know about because Israelis consider their loyalty to their state more important than their responsibility as human beings to the truth and justice?

And although Haaretz, and most of those involved in the cover-up, treat this as some footnote in the historical record, or another aberration to lay at the feet of Sharon, the reality is that Israel is still driving Arabs - Palestinians - off their land. The people of the

Jordan Valley, Sussiya and East Jerusalem know this only too well.

www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.573778

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