

Israel Murders IDF Soldier to Prevent His Capture

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[Sgt. Guy Levy](#) of the armored corps, killed July 26, 2014 by the IDF to prevent his capture

I've devoted a good deal of my life to Israel. I've studied, read, visited, lived, breathed it. Not in the way diehard pro-Israel fanatics do. But in a different way that matched my own intellectual and political proclivities. It's a subject that is rich, varied, troubling, bedeviling, and exhilarating. But every once in a while I learn something I never thought possible; and I don't mean this in a good way.

Tonight, my Israeli source informed me that **Sgt. Guy Levy**, serving in the armored corps, was captured by Hamas fighters. He had been part of a joint engineering-armored-combat unit searching for tunnels. Troops entered a structure and discovered a tunnel. Suddenly, out of the shaft sprang two militants who dragged one of the soldiers into it. By return fire, one of the Palestinians was killed, while the other fled, presumably with the soldier.

[This Israeli report](#), which was censored by the IDF, says only that the attempt to capture the soldier failed. It says nothing about his fate. The expectation of anyone reading it would be that the soldier was freed. But he was not. **In order to prevent the success of the operation, the IDF killed him.** Nana reports that the IDF fired a tank shell into the building, which is the same way another captured soldier was killed by the IDF during Cast Lead.

I would presume that once the militant fled into the tunnel with his prisoner that the IDF destroyed the tunnel and entombed those within it, including the soldier. I would also presume that the IDF knows he is dead because they retrieved his body.

To the uninitiated this will seem a terribly strange, uncivilized, even immoral act. But that's where I learned something I'd never known before about the IDF. There is an unwritten secret regulation written by the IDF High Command, but nowhere codified in writing. Its existence is protected by military censorship. Journalists have rarely written about it. When they have it's usually been in code or by inference.

It's called the [Hannibal Directive](#). Though the Wikipedia article doesn't explain the reference to Hannibal, I assume it relates to the death of the great Carthaginian general, who took poison rather than allow himself to be captured by his mortal enemy, the Romans. Though Sara Leibovich-Dar [wrote in 2003](#) that the name came from a military computer!

In my long history of dedication to this subject, I've rarely seen anything that has disturbed me as much. The Hannibal Directive is:

...A secret directive of the [Israel Defense Forces](#) with the purpose of preventing Israeli soldiers being captured by enemy forces in the course of combat.

...The order, drawn up in 1986 by a group of top Israeli officers, states that at the time of a kidnapping the main mission becomes forcing the release of the abducted soldiers from their kidnappers, even if that means injury to Israeli soldiers.

The order allows commanders to take whatever action is necessary, including endangering the life of an abducted soldier, to foil the abduction...

As happens so often in these cases, an IDF commander instrumental in drafting the order denied the horrific logic of the directive and then offered an example of how he would proceed which only confirmed it:

In a rare interview by one of the authors of the directive, Yossi Peled...denied that it implied a blanket order to kill Israeli soldiers rather than let them be captured by enemy forces. The order only allowed the army to risk the life of a captured soldier, not to take it. "I wouldn't drop a one-ton bomb on the vehicle, but I would hit it with a tank shell", Peled was quoted saying. He added that he personally "would rather be shot than fall into Hizbullah captivity."

In other words, the IDF will do almost everything in its power to prevent capture of its soldiers including killing him. It might not put a bullet directly in his brain, but it would certainly shell a home or vehicle in which he was situated.

Perhaps there's a lingering bit of the liberal Zionist I once was here, but I'd always heard that Israel never leaves a soldier behind. It does everything possible to bring all its troops home, and once captured does everything possible to retrieve or free them.

All this time I was sorely mistaken. When all hope is lost of liberating the soldier from captivity, he dies. What's equally disturbing is that the existence of the directive is an open secret. Commanders warn their soldiers that no one may be captured and that if you are you must commit suicide. If you can't do that, then they will do their best to kill you. Perhaps they don't articulate it precisely in those words, but that's the clear intent.

Lest you think Hannibal is a theoretical regulation, it has been implemented before and captured soldiers have been killed by the IDF. Most recently it [happened during Operation Cast Lead](#):

During the war there was a case where the Hannibal directive was invoked. An Israeli soldier was shot and injured by a Hamas fighter during a search of a house in one of the neighborhoods of Gaza. The wounded soldiers' comrades evacuated the house due to fears that it was booby-trapped. According to testimony by soldiers who took part in the incident the house was then shelled to prevent the wounded soldier from being captured by Hamas.

You have every right to ask: what soldier in his right mind would follow such an order. There are thankfully examples of ones who refused. But there are a number who didn't including the tank commander who fired on his comrade in that home in Gaza, killing him.

You also have a right to ask how the IDF could approve such a regulation. The answer is it

didn't. It has never been vetted by military lawyers. If it had been, the High Command might've been told it was an illegal, immoral directive which had no standing. Then the IDF would have to implement an order its highest legal authorities had deemed treif. That would never do. So neither the generals, nor the Judge Advocate has ever delved into the matter. It is yet another example of the national security state refusing to examine the deepest, most troubling principles on which it is based.

Implementation of the Hannibal Directive comes on the heels of the freeing of Gilad Shalit after five years in captivity. The nation freed 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in order to release Shalit. Israeli hardliners screamed bloody murder about freeing murderers with blood on their hands. Some said it would have been better if Shalit had died rather than face this ignominy.

I believe that Benny Gantz and Bibi Netanyahu aren't prepared to go through such a trauma again. They believe their constituency would understand if they killed a soldier rather than lose him to capture. Let's make no mistake about this: it is a purely political calculation. A nakedly, cynical political calculation. It suggests that the interests of the nation trump the life of the individual. These are considerations of an authoritarian state and not a democratic one. A democracy values the individual. It recognizes that the nation cannot exist without the individual. Even that the nation should not exist unless it respects and values that individual.

The Hannibal Directive perverts such principles. It embraces a fascist perspective in which the individual is subsumed within the mass. He has no specific individual value unless he is serving the interest of the nation. And his interests may, when necessary be sacrificed to the greater good.

I thank Dvorit Shargel for raising an important, and thorny issue. She implored me to consider the trauma of Levy's family hearing their son was killed not by Palestinian fire, which would be painful enough, but by his own comrades.

It's very doubtful the IDF would tell the family the truth unless it had no other choice. So then the question is, should we allow the IDF to lie just to cover up the use of the Hannibal directive and allow the family to believe he was killed by the enemy instead of his own?

My answer to this reluctantly is No. The greatest good is served by transparency. By knowing the truth, telling the truth, forcing everyone involved to explain what they did and why. Secrecy and pandering helps no one, even the dead soldiers's family. I am sorry if this causes them added suffering. But blaming me is blaming the messenger not the real culprit.

Here is some of the discussion around the matter conducted by military ethicists (if there can be such a thing):

Dr. Avner Shiftan, an army physician with the rank of major, came across the Hannibal directive while on reserve duty in South Lebanon in 1999. In army briefings he "became aware of a procedure ordering soldiers to kill any IDF soldier if he should be taken captive by Hizbullah. This procedure struck me as being illegal and not consistent with the moral code of the IDF. I understood that it was not a local procedure but originated in the General Staff, and had the feeling that a direct approach to the army authorities would be of no avail, but would end in a cover-up." He contacted [Asa Kasher](#), the Israeli philosopher noted for his authorship of [Israel Defense Forces' Code of Conduct](#), who "found

it difficult to believe that such an order exists," since this "is wrong ethically, legally and morally". He doubted that "there is anyone in the army" believing that 'better a dead soldier than an abducted soldier'.

On this point however Asa Kasher was apparently wrong. In 1999 the [IDF Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz](#) said in an interview with Israeli daily [Yedioth Ahronoth](#): "In certain senses, with all the pain that saying this entails, an abducted soldier, in contrast to a soldier who has been killed, is a national problem." Asked whether he was referring to cases like [Ron Arad](#) (an Air Force navigator captured in 1986) and [Nachshon Wachsmann](#) (an abducted soldier killed in 1994 in a failed rescue attempt), he replied "definitely, and not only."

The legality of the order has never formally been examined by the IDF's legal department. According to Prof. [Emanuel Gross](#), from the Faculty of Law at the University of Haifa:..."Orders like that have to go through the filter of the Military Advocate General's Office, and if they were not involved that is very grave," he says. "The reason is that an order that knowingly permits the death of soldiers to be brought about, even if the intentions were different, carries a black flag and is a flagrantly illegal order that undermines the most central values of our social norms.

I hate to harp on this, but liberal Zionists enjoy claiming Israel is a nation of laws. That it upholds the rule of law. But this is clearly not the case. No democratic nation would permit such a directive after undergoing legal review. So the answer in Israel is simply to prevent it from undergoing any such review. It allows the flourishing of a secret code that governs critical aspects of the Israeli military.

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