

“We—Israeli soldiers—were put there to punish the Palestinians”

By [Global Research](#)

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Following are excerpts from an article that appeared in the Hebrew edition of the Israeli daily Haaretz (October 21, 2007) entitled “New Israeli study confirms our worst fears.” The title reflects a viewpoint often found in Haaretz, which believes that the Zionist state has lost its idealist impulse and can and should operate humanely toward the Palestinians. The opposition to that state’s countless and continuing atrocities can only be welcomed, but the “can” part of that idea goes not only against logic, since that state was built by the forcible exclusion of the Palestinians, but also the experience recounted by this and similar valuable exposures.

The article is about a research paper by psychologists Nofer Ishai-Karen and Joel Elitzur, based on Ishai-Karen’s interviews with soldiers in a platoon she had served with 20 years earlier. The soldiers described their experiences when they were sent to the Gaza town of Rafah to put down the Palestinian uprising of 1990. That first Intifada—the word means “the revolt of the stones”—was unarmed.

With one exception, these soldiers spoke anonymously. The Israeli army stopped Elitzer, Ishai-Karen’s professor, from conducting similar research.

Soldier “A” testimony: “We decided to turn an old shower in our base to a make-shift detention cell. A Palestinian was brought there, handcuffed and mouth-banded so he couldn’t talk, or move. We ‘forgot’ him there for three days.”

Soldier “B” testimony: “I was on my first patrol. Others simply shot like mad. I started to shoot as they did. (They set his weapon on full automatic.) I took my weapon and shot. Nobody was there to tell me otherwise.”

Psychologist Ishai-Karen was shocked to find that the soldiers enjoyed the “intoxication of power,” and had pleasure from using violence. She said, “Most of my interviewees enjoyed their own instigated violence during their occupation service.”

Soldier “C” testimony: “The truth is that I love this mess—I enjoy it. It is like being on drugs. If I didn’t enter Rafah to put down some rebellion at least once a week, I’d go berserk.”

Soldier “D” testimony: “What is great is that you don’t have to follow any law or rule. You feel that you are the law; you decide. Once you go into the Occupied Territories you are god.”

Soldier “E” testimony: “We drove an APC (armored personnel carrier) through Rafah. A man of 25 walked nearby. He didn’t hurl a stone at us or anything. Then without any reason ‘X’ shot him in the stomach. We left him lying on the sidewalk.” ...

Nofer Ishai-Karen: “Some NCOs (junior officers) encouraged the soldiers to behave brutally, and provided their own example.”

Soldier “H” testimony: “After two months in Rafah a new NCO commander arrived. The first patrol, which he commanded, was at 06 hours. Rafah was under curfew. Not a soul was on the street. Then he saw a young boy, of about four, playing in the sand in the courtyard of his home. The kid was building a castle in the sand. Suddenly the NCO, a guy from the Engineers Corps, ran to chase the kid. We followed. He captured the kid and broke his elbow. Broke the kid’s elbow! Damn me if I’m not telling the truth! Then the NCO treaded on the kid’s stomach three times, before he moved on. We couldn’t believe our eyes. But the next day we went on patrol with that guy and the soldiers started to imitate him.”

What happened then?

“Some guys couldn’t stomach it. The case of severe abuse of three young adolescents, who were bound hand and foot by a staff sergeant, got them to alert a senior officer. When the medic arrived the boys were bleeding all over, their clothes were soaked with blood, and they were shivering from fear. They were made to kneel like dogs and were afraid to move. The NCO was punished by three months detention. But the platoon commander backed the NCO and reprimanded the conscientious soldiers for ‘defaming the platoon.’” (The soldier who reported the incident ended up ostracized by the rest of the unit.)

Finally back to Ilan Vilenda, the only soldier who allowed Nofer to use his full name and even be photographed. Vilenda was a staff sergeant in charge of “operations”. (He was quoted in this article’s title.)

Who is responsible?

General Matan Vilna’i (now serving under Prime Minister Ehud Barak as Vice Minister of Defense) was at the time Chief of the IDF (Israeli Army) Southern Command. He often visited our platoon and discussed with soldiers, says Nofer.

General Matan Vilna’i must have known what happened. High-ranking officers who served in the Occupied West Bank had voiced similar warnings against Israeli Army behavior. “The orders left a wide gap, a margin...of an intentionally unspecified ‘grey zone’, which encouraged violent behavior of soldiers,” said Reserve Colonel Elisha Shapira, who served in the Nablus Area at the same time. Soldiers were told “don’t hit Palestinians—but bring them to interrogation ‘swell-headed’—blown-up.”

Translator’s notes

The events Nofer Ishai-Karen researched happened some 17 years ago. The situation has further deteriorated since that time. Now Israeli Army and Air Force generals openly take pride in acts of revenge against Palestinian civilians.

To my best knowledge, the Israeli Army hasn’t charged a single case of abuse or murder by soldiers of Palestinians in a proper court.

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