

How to Criticize the Israeli Government

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[War Is A Crime](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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The other day I tweeted [an article](#) that reported on a rather horrible story. It seems that the Israeli government gives African women drugs that keep them from reproducing.

I think if this story had been about Canada, Korea, France, or Brazil people would have read it. The conversation would not have immediately shifted to my alleged hatred of all Canadians.

Since it was about Israel, some people chose to announce that I hated Jews. Such a response is not only baseless and nonsensical, but it shifts attention to me and away from the story, which in the end isn't seen.

Now, I don't know any more about that story than what I've read at that website (the website of a Jewish organization, as it happens). The report may be accurate or not. Israeli [newspapers](#) seem to report it as fully established, neither doubted nor challenged. The story at least seems to merit investigation. The point is that nobody told me it was inaccurate (news that would have delighted me). Instead, they told me that I was anti-Semitic.

This happens with the United States too, of course. If I criticize the U.S. government a few thousand times, and if the president is a Republican, I'll hear from some disturbed individual who wants to recommend that I leave the country since I hate it so much. Why one would try so hard to reform the government of a country he hated is never really explained.

With Israel, such nonsense is triggered much more swiftly. I haven't made a career of trying to reform Israel's government. All I had to do was tweet a link to an article. Those who have gone to greater lengths to criticize the crimes of the government of Israel have, in some cases, seen themselves censored, vilified, and their careers derailed. Many [persevere](#) despite this climate.

There is, however, a way to speak openly and honestly about Israel. Not everyone can do it. The trick is to be a veteran of the Israeli military. This approach helps [people](#) whose "service" was years ago. And it helps those whose memories of what they did "for their country" are very fresh. Not only does such status shield one from a great deal of criticism, but it provides a substantive advantage in being able to report first-hand on what the Israeli military has been doing. Just as [Veterans For Peace](#) are able to speak with some legitimate authority in the United States against the use of war (see [Winter Soldier](#) now if you haven't), members of the Israeli military, and those who recently were Israeli soldiers, command attention.

A new book called "[Our Harsh Logic: Israeli Soldiers' Testimonies from the Occupied](#)

[Territories 2000-2010,"](#) collects the accounts of numerous Israeli soldiers, although withholding their names. Videos of some of the soldiers telling their stories can be seen [online](#). The online database sorts the stories into categories: > [Abuse](#)> [Assassinations](#)>[Bribery](#)> [Checkpoints](#)> [Confirmation of killing](#)> [Curfews/closures](#)> [Deaths](#)> [Destruction of property](#)> [Human shields](#)>[Humiliation](#)> [Looting](#)> [Loss of livelihood](#)> [Routine](#)> [Rules of engagement](#)> [Settlements](#)> [Settler violence](#).

"Supporting the troops" is usually understood to exclude listening to the troops. But these troops should be listened to. Their experiences are very similar to those of the U.S. and coalition troops in Iraq. But their war has lasted much, much longer, and with no end in sight. Their testimonies make clear that their tactics do not serve the supposed purpose of reducing violence, and are in fact not intended to do any such thing. The bizarre ordeals imposed on the soldiers outdo Kafka and pale in comparison to the nightmares imposed on Palestinians. The driving forces are quite clearly racism, sadism, imperialism, and excessive obedience.

A very few of the many samples I was tempted to provide:

"They called us to some location, they found [rockets] in the minaret of a mosque. What do you do? You look for someone to go up to the mosque and take down the [rockets] because it's dangerous for us. So they knocked on doors in the area. There's always someone with us who speaks Arabic. . . . So they knocked on the doors and found someone. He was retarded. They said, 'Go up to the mosque. There are pipes in the minaret. Bring them down.' They didn't even tell him it was explosives."

"There was an operation in the company next to mine where they told me that a woman was blown up by [an explosive used to break through doors], her limbs were smeared on the wall, but it wasn't on purpose. They knocked and knocked on the door and there was no answer, so they decided to open it [with live ammunition] . . . and just at that moment the woman decided to open the door. And then her kids came over and saw her. . . . someone said it was funny, and everyone cracked up, that the kids saw their mother smeared on the wall."

"[T]he brigade commander . . . briefs us, 'Any kid you see with a stone, you can shoot at him.' Like, shoot to kill. A stone!"

"[I]t's unbelievable how in the end the report on the radio was, 'In an operation in Tul Karem the IDF captured,' like, you know, 'twenty suspects, ten weapons, and fertilizer suspected for use in manufacturing [explosives], a ton and a half of fertilizer.' So it's a success, because you hear it on the radio, and you say, 'Hey, look, like we went there, this is what we got, we did what we were supposed to do.' And what we did was just the opposite. Because what did we do? We committed crimes. We destroyed homes. No house that we went into was the same when we left."

"There was this house we captured in Hebron . . . we took this house. You know the procedure: the family moves down a floor. Now, what did we do? We were . . . on the third floor, the guys set up a pipe, a pipe to pee, so they could pee outside. They put the pipe, we put the pipe exactly so that all the piss would flow into the courtyard of the house below us. There were a few chicken coops just there, it all poured out there. That was the joke every day, waiting for the father or one of the kids to go to the coop, and then everyone

stands and pisses.”

“Apparently, that captain had gone to Takua, which is a pretty hostile village — they were throwing stones at the jeep. So, he just stopped a Palestinian guy who was passing, forty-something years old, and tied him to the hood of the jeep, a guy just lying on the hood, and they drove into the village.”

“The Palestinians didn’t know there were soldiers behind them, and the soldiers would just spray their legs. . . . His one goal was to lure Palestinian children, just to cut off their legs.”

“We had a commander in the unit who would just say in these words, . . . ‘I want bodies. That’s what I want.’”

“You’re not ranked by arrests — you’re ranked by the number of people you kill.”

“[The company commander] taught us about rubber bullets, and they showed us how it comes in what’s called a ‘tampon,’ which is a kind of plastic bag that contains the bullets. So they said, ‘You need to separate them, meaning you tear open the package and put them in one by one so you cause damage.’ And they actually explained it to us, in this really pornographic way, ‘Aim for the eyes so you take out an eye, or at the stomach so it goes into the stomach.’”

“Try to imagine it: I see my officers with their backs to me, laughing, falling about, and below I see the Border Police beating people up, guys being choked, one guy bleeding. And I think, ‘This is just like the books I read.’ . . . Whenever people get shot, I have this image in my head, I must’ve seen it in a movie, of Nazis shooting Jews in pits, and officers standing at the side, laughing.”

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