

TESTIMONIES

As a soldier in Unit 8200, I collected information on people accused of either attacking Israelis, trying to attack Israelis, desiring to harm Israelis, and considering attacking Israelis. I also collected information on people who were completely innocent, and whose only crime was that they interested the Israeli security system for various reasons. For reasons they had absolutely no way of knowing. All Palestinians are exposed to non-stop monitoring without any legal protection. Junior soldiers can decide when someone is a target for the collection of information. There is no procedure in place to determine whether the violation of the individual's rights is necessarily justifiable. The notion of rights for Palestinians does not exist at all. Not even as an idea to be disregarded. Any Palestinian may be targeted and may suffer from sanctions such as the denial of permits, harassment, extortion, or even direct physical injury. Such instances might occur if the individual is of any interest to the system for any reason. Be it indirect relations with hostile individuals, physical proximity to intelligence targets, or connections to topics that interest 8200 as a technological unit. Any information that might enable extortion of an individual is considered relevant information. Whether said individual is of a certain sexual orientation, cheating on his wife, or in need of treatment in Israel or the West Bank - he is a target for blackmail. Throughout the duration of my service no one in my unit ever asked, at least not out loud, if there is anything wrong with this well-oiled system - whether the transformation of any individual into a target is a legitimate act.

When I joined Unit 8200 I was highly motivated. I passed a course and became an Arabic translator. There were things that I felt uncomfortable with in the work framework, though the importance of my role and our missions within the unit in which I served overshadowed these feelings.

One of those moments in which things began to change occurred during the first war in Gaza, "Operation Cast Lead". I was then at the peak of my service, as an experienced translator in a base which was responsible for the Palestinian arena .

Upon the start of the operation something seemed wrong to me. Instead of attacking rocket and weapons caches in the Gaza Strip, as a preparatory defense measure for the campaign against Hamas, the Israeli Air Force attacked a parade of police officers. The assault killed 89 policemen. I was a simple soldier, but I wanted to pass my opinion up the chain of command that this action was morally unsound and problematic. Not only as regards the attack on the police officers. Those were precious hours in which we should have been doing our jobs preventing the launching of rockets against Israeli civilians, and this did not serve that purpose. The home front was exposed to volleys of rockets without taking care of them in advance, as should have been done, and as we were told that should happen. The officer in charge agreed to pass on my remarks, but I never received an answer.

Throughout the operation I accompanied different teams engaged in collecting and translating intelligence on targets in the Gaza Strip - on both weapons and humans. I remember the overwhelming silence in the rooms from which we worked, seconds after the Air Force bombed those targets. A tense silence, hopeful of causing harm. When an attack was identified or executed, cheering and applause filled the room. X's were marked on headsets. X's were marked on the facial composite sketches that adorned the walls of the rooms. No one asked about "collateral damage." I felt bad - it was very difficult to realize that no one was interested in who else had been hit. Throughout the campaign, hundreds of civilians were killed - men, women, and children. collateral damage . No one stopped to ask whether the targets we collect for the Air Force justify the destruction of the lives of about one and a half million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip.

On January 1, the Air Force attacked the home of Nizar Rayan, a Hamas leader in Gaza. Eighteen civilians were killed in the assault on his home, most of whom were members of his family. The following day senior leaders of

Hamas' military wing were targeted. When the Air Force reported the people harmed, tension filled the room in anticipation of finding out whether the people injured were the targeted objectives of the attack. When it became clear that they were other unrelated persons, cries of disappointment were heard. Not because people had been killed arbitrarily, but because they weren't the people we were looking for. It's hard for me to imagine what my base would have looked like during the recent Operation Protective Edge. Probably just as it had in the past, only much more pronounced.

That was the peak of my service within the Israeli army. The period during which I collected information on people who were accused of attacking Israelis, trying to attack Israelis, the desire to harm Israelis, thinking of attacking Israelis, in addition to collecting information on completely innocent people, whose only crime was that they interested the Israeli defense establishment for various reasons. Reasons they have no way of knowing. If you're homosexual and know someone who knows a wanted person - and we need to know about it - Israel will make your life miserable. If you need emergency medical treatment in Israel, the West Bank or abroad - we searched for you. The state of Israel will allow you to die before we let you leave for treatment without giving information on your wanted cousin. If you interest unit 8200 as a technological unit, and don't have anything to do with any hostile activity, you're an objective.

Any such case, in which you "fish out" an innocent person from whom information might be squeezed, or who could be recruited as a collaborator, was like striking gold for us and for Israel's entire intelligence community. As such, Palestinians who are not related to or involved in fighting Israel are objectives. Thus, in terms of intelligence (aside from the physical blockade of the Gaza Strip), Gazan citizens are no different from their brethren in the West Bank - despite the "disengagement", so to speak. During my training course in preparation for my service in this assigned role, we actually learned to memorize and filter different words for "gay", in Arabic.

Any Palestinian is exposed to non-stop monitoring by the Israeli Big Brother, without legal protection, and with no

way of knowing when they too would become an objective - targeted for harassment, extortion, or physical injury. Junior soldiers can decide anyone is a target for the collection of information. There is no procedure in place to determine whether the violation of the individual's rights is necessarily justifiable. The notion of rights for Palestinians does not exist at all. Throughout the duration of my service no one in my unit ever asked, at least not out loud, if there is anything wrong with this well-oiled system - whether the transformation of any individual into a target is a legitimate act.

At the conclusion of my service in the army I was a commander and instructor for several months, teaching youth who had graduated from High School and were being prepared to serve as translators for the Intelligence Corps. I repeatedly tried to raise these questions with them: is it legitimate to deem as a target any person who interests the Israeli security system, for whatever reason? The answer I received, time and again, was yes. Today I believe the answer is no.

When I enlisted into the Intelligence unit, I thought I would deal with prevention of terrorism, and do whatever was necessary to protect national security. Throughout my service, I discovered that many Israeli initiatives within the Palestinian arena are directed at things that are not related to intelligence. I worked a lot on gathering information on political issues. Some could be seen as related to objectives that serve security needs, such as the suppression of Hamas institutions, while others could not. Some were political objectives that did not even fall within the Israeli consensus, such as strengthening Israel's stance at the expense of the Palestinian position. Such objectives do not serve the security system but rather agendas of certain politicians.

I had a really hard time with some of the things we did, as did the people who were with me in my section. Regarding one project in particular, many of us were shocked as we were exposed to it. Clearly it was not something we as soldiers were supposed to do. The information was almost directly transferred to political players and not to other sections of the security system. This made it clear to me that we were dealing with information that was hardly connected to security needs.

We knew the detailed medical conditions of some of our targets, and our goals developed around them. I'm not sure what was done with this information. I felt bad knowing each of their precise problems, and that we would talk and laugh about this information freely. Or, for instance, that we knew exactly who was cheating on their wife, with whom, and how often.

I knew people in the unit and I heard good things about it, but I didn't do anything special to enlist into this particular unit. I knew it was a good job with high-quality people, bearing a lot of responsibility, and it sounded good. From the first day of the course one is made to feel really important, and that you're going to be exposed to interesting classified things, and to have a lot of responsibility.

I assumed a role in which people are called "targets", and those people who really interest us are in no sense terrorists, but rather generally normative people - who interest us because of their roles, so that we can obtain more intelligence and achieve greater access. We take advantage of the capabilities that we have over these people in order to put ourselves at ease. We take

advantage of the impact that we have on their lives. Sometimes it involves truly harming a person's life, or their soul. I mean extortion whereby they must hide things from people around them. It can really screw up their lives. It made me feel omnipotent.

When I began this job I was surprised by the extent of my responsibility. I felt I had a say about important things. I could initiate things that would impact the lives of Palestinians - I could urge my unit to take all kinds of measures. The attitude was "Why not?" "We can, so let's do it." I thought that what I was able to do was crazy. We were the bosses.

They really relied on our judgment calls. I had access to many systems and capabilities, and I felt it was too much. No boundaries were set for us, for both passive activities such as gathering intelligence, and for active initiatives that had an impact on people's lives.

If there anyone interests us, we'd collect information on his or her economic situation and mental state. Then we would plan how we can perform an operation around this individual, in order to turn them into a collaborator or something of the sort.

But I was uncomfortable with this, so I chose to disconnect from it. - To clock in my hours, and check out.

There are always two unit representatives in the field, one at the West Bank division HQ and one in Gaza. We would take turns, and what I recall most about this are the assassination missions. We would collect intelligence for the operation, incriminate the person, and pass on the information to the Israel Air Force.

Once when I was the unit representative, there was someone suspicious next to a weapons warehouse in Gaza and we thought he was our target. It had taken us a long time to find him. Judging by his location, the time and similar data, we concluded it was him. After we assassinated him it turned out that he was a kid. My job there was supposedly technical. The atmosphere was that

of an office job. In real time you can see maps and images from the helicopter, but you're sitting in an office so it's very easy to feel detached and distance yourself. Nor was it my job to ask questions. I was told what was needed and that's what I did. I remember an image on the screen of him in an orchard, and the explosion on the screen, the smoke clearing and his mother running to him, at which point we could see he was a child. The body was small. We realized we had screwed up. It got quiet and uncomfortable. Then we needed to carry on as there were other things to do, though the mood was grim. I don't know of any investigation of what had happened, or if it was reviewed at a later date.

I

I enlisted into the Intelligence Corps with a clear understanding that regarding anything that involves the Palestinian arena, I will engage in self-defense. Throughout my service in my unit I did and encountered things that seemed irrelevant from a security standpoint, and I did not have a clear conscience participating in such activities. Contrary to my expectations, our database included not only security-related intelligence but also personal and political information. That is to say, on a personal level, there is no respect for Palestinian privacy.

From a political standpoint, information is collected that can serve to manipulate Israeli, Palestinian, and international politics.

Although ours is not actual field-work, it has serious impact on the lives of many people, and this is something that I think soldiers in the unit forget when everyone just does their part. Since we're so focused on not missing any important developments, we always prefer to assume the worst. For example, if anyone is suspected, even very faintly, it is possible that the stain will never fade, and that person will suffer sanctions as a result.

Our daily service dulls everyone's sensitivity and this is reflected, for example, in running jokes about very personal things that come up in our intelligence material. Or, for instance, in the expression "blood on the headset", or X's marked on our headsets after assassinations.

II

After my discharge from the Intelligence Corps, I had a moment of shock while watching the film "The Lives of Others", about the secret police in East Germany.

On the one hand, I felt solidarity with the victims, with the oppressed people who were denied such basic rights as I take for granted to be mine. On the other hand, I realized that the job I had done during my military service was that of the oppressor.

My first reaction as a discharged soldier was that we do the same things, only much more efficiently.

I was a course instructor for soldiers assigned to the Palestinian arena. As the course was being organized we would go to some storeroom full of "booty" and receive uniforms, weapon parts, exploded grenades, flags of Palestine, Fatah and Hamas. Personal family items like photos of children, watches, family photos, medals, football trophies, books, Qurans, jewelry - Palestinian "memorabilia." I don't know for sure, but I realized that all these things came from arrest missions, either from peoples' homes or from people who were killed. It is all just piled up. We were taken to this storeroom and told to take whatever we pleased, signing the

stuff out afterwards. I took some flags and uniforms. At the end of the course we didn't even return them. I still have them signed out. We took all the stuff to the classrooms and hung it up on the walls for display. The idea was to "poison" the students. At the beginning of the course they have no idea to which arena they'll be assigned. So on the morning when they receive their assignments they enter the class and we motivate them with the items hanging on the walls, among other things. We didn't exactly explain what they were; we just said "booty." There is not much talk about it. It arouses their curiosity and amuses them.

Towards the end of the course one of the participants dressed as a Hamas fighter, in uniform, to entertain everyone. There is also something called a "demonstration." Everyone puts on those uniforms and headbands, takes up the flags and stages a demonstration. It's done in the auditorium for the all the other course participants. It's *the* entertainment event of the entire course. Everyone is seated and the class gets on stage and begins to shout all sorts of stuff. The highlight of the Palestinian-arena track was to put on a demonstration. When I was a course participant we yelled, "Enough with Palestine, we want to relocate to Australia!" When I was an instructor a talk show was staged, with characters, I don't recall exactly.

Along with the weekly quiz there is something called "bonus" - all sorts of funny stuff. Sometimes funny conversations are played that we heard by mistake and kept. These are unimportant things, useless intelligence-wise, but they are kept because they are funny, and held onto for years. For example "women talk." These are womens' conversations, 99% private nonsense. Or all sorts of conversations about very private matters, including yelling, crying, fighting and cursing.

As an instructor I gave a class called "Morality and Intelligence", which I had also participated in as a student. The Lieutenant A. Affair was a major part of this class. As an instructor I had access to the army's inquiry into this affair. In hindsight I discovered that it had been a fake inquiry. The report said the objective of that operation was to demolish a building empty of people, and that Lieutenant A.'s job was to make sure the building was indeed empty - when in fact the contrary was true. The objective was to bomb a building containing innocent people, and the Lieutenant was supposed to inform the unit when they were inside. We discussed this affair in class. Everyone said what they would have done in A.'s stead. The conclusion was that he meant well but did not do the right thing. He should have clearly stated his fears. Now I know what really went on, and that in hindsight this whole discussion was ridiculous. Anyway, the only conclusion reached was that in this unit there is no such thing as an illegal order. It is not we who decide what is moral and what isn't. Nowadays I realize that this is what the bombing pilot says too: "It's not for me to say what is moral and what isn't." Everyone passes the responsibility onto others. After

deliberating a bit, as that was the method of the class, the final message was: "Do what you're told." We also talked about what is done with information on a target's sexual preferences. Here, too, there was some would-be deliberation, but the message was that there is no problem with this issue. As an instructor I said that one should apply one's own judgment and not always pass on such information. I did not feel I could express a stronger message. Anyway, class consensus was that this did not pose a problem. I was once made to listen to a talk that an Israeli security officer had with a Palestinian who he tried to recruit. It's an excellent talk for instruction and learning. It was used by the unit for some years. There's a point where he says, "Your wife's brother has cancer." The Palestinian answers, "So?" And he says, "Well, you know..." and they go on to speak about something else, and the Israeli keeps going back to the cancer issue. He said something like "Our hospitals are good" and he was clearly offering something to the Palestinian, or threatening him.

Palestinians' sex talks were always a hot item to pass on from one person in the unit to the other, for a good laugh. One person would call over another to come listen. Or some other entertaining talks. For example, "funny" medical conditions like hemorrhoids. It's part of the unit's morale. You also pass on photos for laughs that belong to targets, or just to Palestinians. Just photos, family photos, and the guys have a laugh when the children are ugly. There are also private photos, for example, that couples' took for one another. At some point I distanced myself from this stuff. I told my friends this was wrong, but they all said it wouldn't hurt anyone. Our superiors knew about it, no question about that. I would not even say they looked away, because it was obvious that it was okay and that there was no problem. If there was a problem it would only be for wasting work time, focusing on nonsense.

The Israeli public thinks that intelligence work is only against terrorism, but a significant part of our objectives are innocent people, not at all connected to any military activity. They interest the unit for other reasons, usually without having the slightest idea that they're intelligence targets. They cannot begin to guess for what reasons they interest the unit. We did not treat those targets any differently than we did terrorists. The fact that they were innocent was not at all relevant as far as we were concerned, with regard to how we treated them.

Something I had a really hard time with was that all kinds of personal data was stored in the unit, such that could be used to extort/blackmail the person and turn them into a collaborator. At the base we were told that if we find out some "juicy" detail about them, that it's important to document it. Examples of this were a difficult financial situation, sexual preferences, a person's chronic illness or that of a relative, and necessary medical treatment.

