

Breaking what silence?

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In exploiting the allegations of human rights violations for political propaganda, groups such as BtS and their funders are not in any way contributing to the moral imperative of preventing such abuses.

Eleven years ago, in September 2001, the UN Human Rights Commission brought more than 5,000 officials from 1,500 organizations to Durban, South Africa for a conference that adopted a strategy of political war against the Jewish nation-state based on obscene falsehoods like “ethnic cleansing” and an “alien domination” of the “indigenous Palestinian population.” The program of action is promoted by a multi-million dollar industry led by dozens of NGOs that exploit the language of human rights as a weapon targeting Israel. Since Durban, the NGO-led activity has produced the Goldstone Report, with numerous false allegations of “war crimes” during the Gaza war, and numerous similar attacks. These fuel the campaigns of boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) seeking to isolate and demonize Israel.

In this political warfare, Israeli groups, largely funded from abroad, such as “Breaking the Silence” (BtS), play a central role. In late August, they issued a publication that appeared in newspapers across Australia and the UK, based largely on anonymous “testimonies,” which were then quoted without independent verification by foreign journalists. The report was filled with allegations of IDF misconduct and what the organization refers to as a “pattern of behavior” of soldier misconduct that it claims to have “uncovered” through its research.

The stated aim of BtS, whose campaigns are made possible by major support from European governments and the New Israel Fund, is to “expose the Israeli public to the reality of everyday life in the Occupied Territories.” However, in many of its activities, BtS courts the international media rather than presenting its allegations to the Israeli government or the IDF for investigation through due process of law. And in a country whose democratic debate features every possible dimension and point of view, and where there are more opinions than citizens, it is also unclear just what “silence” this organization is attempting to break.

In this process, BtS’s campaigns to discredit the IDF have turned the organization into an invaluable ally of those NGOs behind the “Durban Strategy” – with the explicit goal of “the complete international isolation” of Israel, using repeated accusations of “war crimes,” “genocide” and “apartheid.”

The August 2012 report was first published by an Australian journalist eager for a scoop. As a result, these claims are now receiving sensationalist headlines in Australia, generating the type of demonization of Israel that the Durban Strategy envisaged. Similar activities have taken place in Europe and North America, including on many university campuses, and are often accompanied by speaking tours.

To its credit, Australia’s Jewish community responded to the BtS road-show by highlighting its many failures. Danny Lamm, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, labeled their research and findings to be “anonymous... devoid of critical detail and untested by any kind of cross-questioning.”

In its latest report, BtS focuses on allegations regarding children, following a similar campaign by a highly politicized organization known as Defense for Children International-Palestine Section (DCI-PS).

BtS claims that its testimonies are from a “time perceived as calm and uneventful from a ‘security’ standpoint,” and that “the reality that emerges from the testimonies shows that harsh treatment of Palestinian children continues unabated, and despite the overall security situation.”

However, the report makes no mention of the central role that Palestinian children and minors play in the ongoing deadly attacks against Israeli citizens. According to the IDF, 2011 had the highest incidence of rock throwing since 2005 – almost always involving Palestinian children. Both DCIPS and BtS immorally portray this activity as benign, despite the many cases in which Israeli civilians have been wounded or killed.

For instance, in September 2011, Asher Palmer and his one-year-old son were murdered when Palestinian youths attacked their car by throwing rocks. But providing information on such attacks does not coincide with BtS’s political agenda.

At times, the group has gone further still, even suggesting that Israel is ultimately to blame for terror attacks against its civilians. In an exhibit at the Army Museum in Stockholm in March 2011, Itamar Shapira, a member of BtS, declared “we are the oppressors, we are the ones that are violating human rights on a daily basis. We are creating the terror against us, basically.” Shapira’s comments expose the humanitarian facade.

In exploiting the allegations of human rights violations for political propaganda, groups such as BtS and their funders are not in any way contributing to the moral imperative of preventing such abuses.

Rather, they themselves engage in conduct that is immoral and fail to fulfill the humanitarian mandate that they espouse.

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