

The checkered career of Ariel Sharon

With annotations from The Electronic Intifada in gray boxes

Ariel Sharon was born in Kfar Malal in 1928. He joined the Haganah at the age of 14. During the 1948 War of Independence, he commanded an infantry company in the Alexandroni Brigade. In 1953, he founded and led the "101" special commando unit which carried out retaliatory operations.

The Electronic Intifada notes: As commander of the notorious Unit 101, Sharon led attacks on Palestinian villages in which women and children were killed.

The massacre in the West Bank village of Qibya, on 14 October, 1953, was perhaps the most notorious. His troops blew up 45 houses and 69 Palestinian civilians – about half of them women and children – were killed.

The US Department of State issued a statement on 18 October 1953, expressing its "deepest sympathy for the families of those who lost their lives" in the Qibya attack as well as the conviction that those responsible "should be brought to account and that effective measures should be taken to prevent such incidents in the future." (Department of State Bulletin, Oct. 26, 1953, p. 552).

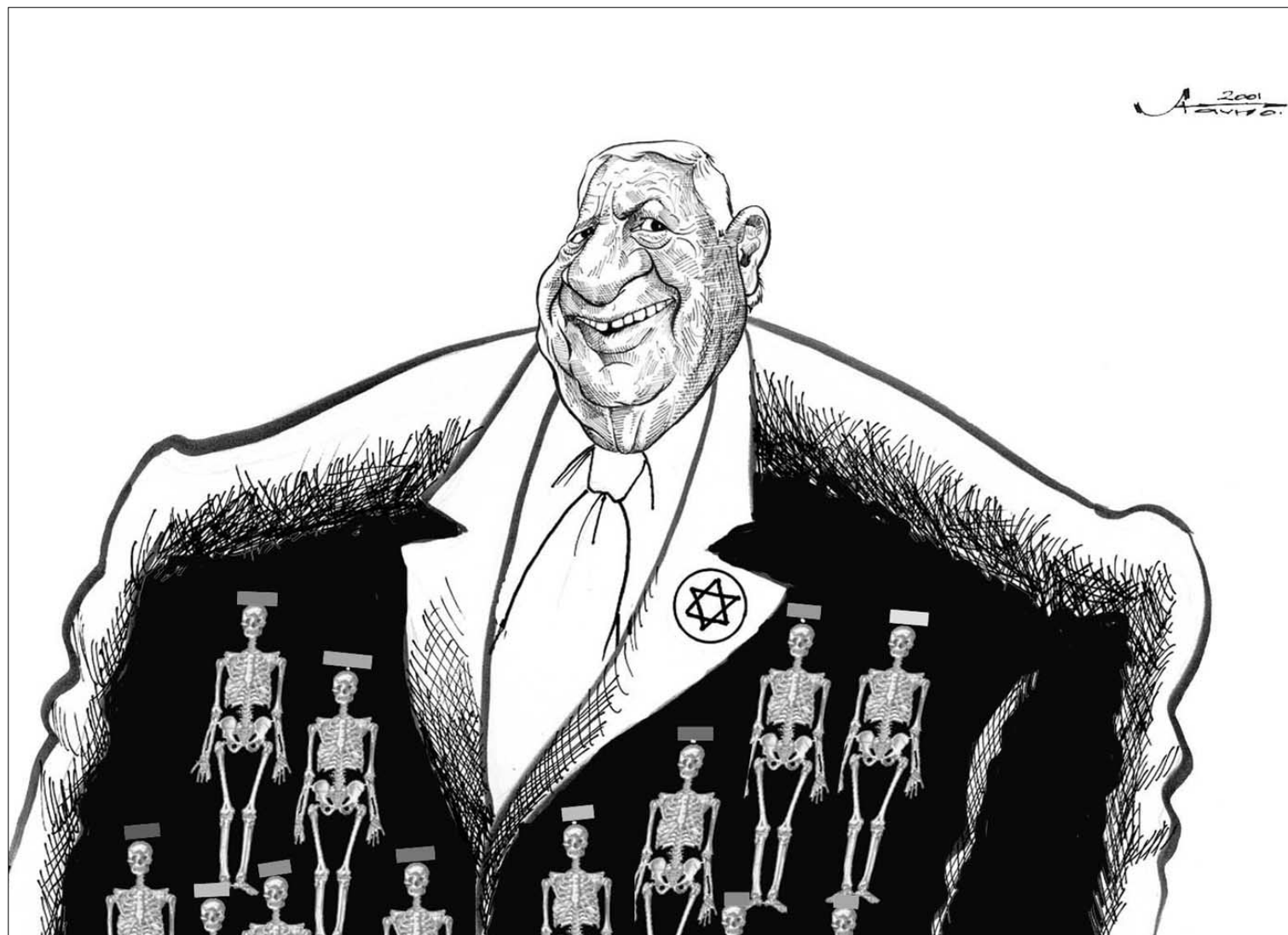
Sharon was appointed commander of a paratroop brigade in 1956 and fought in the Sinai Campaign.

The Electronic Intifada notes: On 16 August, 1995, Ohad Gozani in Tel Aviv, writing for The Daily Telegraph, in an article entitled, "Israelis Admit Massacre," reported:

"Reports of how Israeli paratroopers killed about 270 Egyptian prisoners of war 40 years ago are straining relations between the two countries. Egypt has demanded an investigation into the alleged atrocities, which date back to Israel's involvement in the 1956 Anglo-French campaign to take the Suez Canal.

The killings were revealed in a paper on the Sinai campaign commissioned by the army's military history division. They were described in graphic detail in newspaper and television interviews. In all, 273 Egyptians, some of them Sudanese civilian road workers, were killed in three separate incidents, according to the accounts.

Arye Biro, a retired army general, admitted shooting the Sudanese at a quarry two days into the campaign at the strategic Mitla Pass in central Sinai. Mr. Biro, then a company leader in the 890 Paratroop Battalion, said the 49 terrified prisoners were taken into a quarry and shot dead. He said: "We couldn't take care of anything else before we got done with them. One escaped with bullets in the chest and in the leg, but came back on all fours because he was thirsty. He soon joined his (dead) comrades."



Mr. Biro said he and his troops later killed 56 Egyptian soldiers and irregulars as they were advancing in a truck to the oil port of Ras-al-Sudr on the Gulf of Suez.

"Six survived the initial bursts of gunfire," he said. "They later went to sleep with the rest. Blood was coming out of every hole in the flatbed truck and in huge quantities."

A witness told the newspaper: "When the rear flap was lowered, all the bodies poured out in one mass. I couldn't bear the thought that we shot people without a fight." Another 168 Egyptian soldiers were cut down as the paratroopers headed South.

Mr. Biro's commanding officers were Ariel Sharon and Rafael Eytan.

In 1957 he attended the Camberley Staff College in Great Britain.

During 1958-62, Sharon served as an infantry brigade commander and then as Infantry School Commander.

He was appointed Head of the IDF Northern Command in 1964 and Head of the Army Training Department in 1966.

He participated in the 1967 Six Day War as commander of an armored division.

In 1969 he was appointed Head of the IDF Southern Command.

The Electronic Intifada notes: On 21 January 2001, Phil Reeves writing for The Independent, in an article entitled, "Sharon's return puts Wreckage Street in fear," reported:

"In August 1971 alone, troops under Mr. Sharon's command de-

stroyed some 2,000 homes in the Gaza Strip, uprooting 12,000 people (Palestinian refugees) for the second time in their lives. Hundreds of young Palestinian men were arrested and deported to Jordan and Lebanon. Six hundred relatives of suspected guerrillas were exiled to Sinai. In the second half of 1971, 104 guerrillas were assassinated."

Sharon resigned from the army in June 1972, but was recalled to active military service in the 1973 Yom Kippur War to command an armored division and lead the crossing of the Suez Canal.

Ariel Sharon was elected to the Knesset in December 1973, but resigned a year later, serving as security adviser to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (1975).

He was again elected to the Knesset in 1977 on the Shlomzion ticket.

Appointed Minister of Agriculture in the first government created by Menachem Begin, he pursued agricultural cooperation with Egypt.

In 1981, Sharon was appointed Defense Minister, serving in this post during the Lebanon War, which brought about the destruction of the PLO terrorist infrastructure in Lebanon.

The Electronic Intifada notes: As minister of defense in 1982, Sharon orchestrated Israel's invasion of Lebanon, a military operation that killed tens of thousands of civilians as Israeli forces sought to destroy the Palestine Liberation Organization's infrastructure in the region.

According to the statistics published in the Third World Quarterly (Volume 6, Issue 4, October 1984, pp. 934-949), over 29,500 Palestinians and Lebanese were either killed or wounded from 4 July 1982 through to 15 August 1982, 40 percent were children. Israel's stated

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motive for its "Operation Peace for Galilee" invasion of Lebanon was to bring peace to frontline Israeli communities in Northern Galilee. In fact, the disastrous events of 1982-85 were the very catalysts of the Hizbullah Shi'a resistance movement in South Lebanon. Previous to Israel's military intervention in the early 1980s, the Shi'a of South Lebanon had not professed any aggression or hostility towards the Israelis.

Ariel Sharon is responsible for the massacre of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, on the southern outskirts of Beirut. The slaughter in the two contiguous camps at Sabra and Shatila took place from the evening of September 16, 1982 until the morning of September 18, 1982, in an area under the control of the Israeli armed forces. The perpetrators were members of the Phalange (Kata'eb, in Arabic) militia, the Lebanese force that was armed by and closely allied with Israel since the onset of Lebanon's civil war in 1975.

The precise number of victims of the massacre may never be exactly determined. The International Committee of the Red Cross counted 1,500 at the time of the massacre but by September 22 this count had risen to 2,400. On the following day 350 bodies were uncovered so that the total then ascertained had reached 2,750. Israeli military intelligence estimated that 700 to 800 were killed.

UN Resolution UNSC 521 (1982) of 19 September 1982 offered unequivocal condemnation of the Sabra and Shatila Massacre, although it avoided naming any perpetrators at this early stage.

The question of direct Israeli involvement in the massacre is one that has never been fully resolved. However – despite denials – there is little doubt that Israeli troops surrounding the two camps were aware of what was going on inside.

In the realm of international relations, he was instrumental in renewing diplomatic relations with the African nations which had broken off ties with Israel during the Yom Kippur War. In November 1981, he brought about the first strategic cooperation agreement with the US and widened defense ties between Israel and many nations. He also helped bring thousands of Jews from Ethiopia through Sudan.

Between 1984 and 1990 Sharon served as Minister of Trade and Industry. In this capacity, he concluded the Free Trade Agreement with the US in 1985.

In 1990-1992, he served as Minister of Construction and Housing. Following the fall of the Soviet Union and the waves of immigration from Russia, he initiated and carried out a program to absorb the immigrants throughout the country, including the construction of 144,000 apartments.

The Electronic Intifada notes: Sharon was a key player in the settlement explosion throughout the

1977-1992 Likud-era of Israeli government. This period was characterized by more land confiscation and more settlement activity than had ever been seen before in Israeli history. The number of settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories increased by over two thousand percent during this period, to approximately 110,000 people.

From 1992 to 1996, he served as a member of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

In 1996, Ariel Sharon was appointed Minister of National Infrastructure and was involved in fostering joint ventures with Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinians.

The Electronic Intifada notes: Yet again, Sharon was in charge of settlement construction. In the post-Oslo period, Israel established 30 new settlements and thus nearly doubled the settler population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from 109,000 in 1993 to nearly 200,000 in 1999 (figures exclude new settlements in the greater Jerusalem metropolitan area). Source: Foundation for Middle East Peace.

He also served as Chairman of the Ministerial Committee for Bedouin advancement.

In 1998 Ariel Sharon was appointed Foreign Minister and charged with conducting negotiations towards a final agreement with the Palestinian Authority. He accompanied Prime Minister Netanyahu to the Wye River Plantation as chief negotiator. While serving as Foreign Minister, Sharon met with US, European, Palestinian and Arab leaders to advance the peace process.

The Electronic Intifada notes: Sharon's concept of "advancing the peace process" remained somewhat flawed during this period.

According to an Agence France Presse report of 15 November 1998, while addressing a meeting of militants from the extreme right-wing Tsomet Party, Foreign Minister Sharon stated:

"Everybody has to move, run and grab as many hilltops as they can to enlarge the settlements because everything we take now will stay ours ... Everything we don't grab will go to them."

The Electronic Intifada notes: Only four months before his election, the ever-confrontational Sharon visited Al-Haram ash-Sharif on 28 September 2000 and sparked off the Second Palestinian Intifada that has so far seen 393 Palestinians killed up to 8 March, according to the Palestine Red Crescent Society.

On 19 October 2000, the United Nations Human Rights Commission, meeting in an emergency session, adopted a resolution titled, "Grave and massive violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people by Israel," which condemned: "the provocative visit to Al-Haram al-Sharif on 28 September 2000 by Ariel Sharon, the Likud party leader, which triggered the tragic events that fol-

lowed in occupied East Jerusalem and the other Occupied Palestinian Territories, resulting in a high number of deaths and injuries among Palestinian civilians."

Sharon's visit to the third holiest site in Islam, guarded by – according to the most conservative reports – 1,000 armed Israeli soldiers, was overtly designed to demonstrate Israel's "sovereignty" over Jerusalem, especially over the Al-Haram Ash-Sharif (which most Israelis call "the Temple Mount") and provoke an angry response. It was also intended to impress the right wing of the Israeli public, who later castigated Labor Prime Minister Barak for his "restraint" in the face of the Palestinian uprising by electing Sharon, who sparked it off.

Sharon holds a degree in Law and Middle Eastern Studies from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1962). He has published a book and numerous articles in local and foreign newspapers.

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He worked mostly to create and advance projects such as the Flagship Water Project funded by the international community to find a long-term solution to the region's water crisis and a basis to peaceful relations between Israel, Jordan, the Palestinians and other Middle Eastern countries.

Following the election of Ehud Barak as Prime Minister in May 1999, Ariel Sharon was called upon to become interim Likud party leader, and in September 1999 was elected Chairman of the Likud.

On February 6, 2001, Ariel Sharon was elected Prime Minister. He presented his government to the Knesset on March 7, 2001, retaining also the Immigrant Absorption portfolio.

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His record and international law

War crimes and crimes against humanity are particularly heinous crimes. Responding to the atrocities committed in the course of the Second World War, the international community set itself an objective to combat such crimes.

This ambition has found expression in a number of international treaties, notably under the aegis of the United Nations.

The 1998 request for the extradition of Augusto Pinochet and the legal battles that ensued demonstrated a heightened interest in bringing persons involved in grave crimes to justice.

The Pinochet case reaffirmed the principle that human rights atrocities are subject to "universal jurisdiction" and can be prosecuted anywhere in the world.

Two rulings by the House of Lords found that Pinochet was not immune from prosecution even though he was head of state at the time the crimes were committed.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's personal history is intertwined with war crimes and crimes against humanity. Cases such as those of Yugoslavian former President Slobodan Milosevic, the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide, and others, provide compelling precedents for ending the impunity that Ariel Sharon has thus far enjoyed.

Sharon should be indicted for the crimes in which he bears responsibility as the first step in a process of accountability that will bring justice to his victims and their families.

Judicial authorities in Israel have never shouldered their legal responsibilities and thoroughly investigated and prosecuted Ariel Sharon for the massacres and other

crimes he committed. The failure of the Israeli legal system to act obligates the international community – in particular the European Union since all its member states are High Contracting Parties of the Geneva Conventions – to hold Ariel Sharon accountable, regardless of whether he is a private citizen of Israel, a Cabinet minister, or the head of a government.

Article 146 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War states that each High Contracting Party – "shall be under the obligation to search for persons alleged to have committed, or to have ordered to be committed, grave breaches of the Convention, and shall bring such persons, regardless of their nationality, before its own courts. It may also, if it prefers, and in accordance with the provisions of its own legislation, hand such persons over for trial to another High Contracting Party concerned, provided such High Contracting Party has made out a prima facie case."

Article 147 of the Convention states that the grave breaches noted in Article 146 include willful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments, willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement of a protected person, compelling a protected person to serve in the forces of a hostile power, or willfully depriving a protected person of the rights of fair and regular trial prescribed in the present Convention, taking of hostages and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly.

In sum, this was probably the most craven example of "journalism" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict I have seen in a long time. You and Ms. Weymouth have failed your readers by occluding realities, spinning facts, and playing with loaded words, which can be, in the long run, just as dangerous as playing with loaded guns. The last time Sharon dined on and on about terrorism was in the lead-up to Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon. In the Middle East, there is certainly blood on everyone's hands, and Ariel Sharon probably has more blood on his hands than any of the players now on the political scene. His key role in the disastrous and bloody 1982 invasion of Lebanon – which many top Israeli military officials felt Sharon undertook without fully informing then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin of its ulti-

mate goals and probable costs – eventually led to Sharon's censure, by an official Israeli commission of inquiry, for indirect responsibility and egregious dereliction of duty in the massacre of up to 2,000 unarmed Palestinian refugees and Lebanese citizens in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in the southern suburbs of Beirut in September 1982. Ms. Weymouth's obsequious, kid-glove treatment of Sharon has effectively whitewashed Sharon's blood-soaked history. One would hope that a paper of the Washington Post's stature would be responsibly committed to policing the past, not cravenly culpable in rewriting it.

Sincerely,

Laurie King-Irani

ELECTRONIC INTIFADA: THE REVOLUTION WILL BE WEB-BASED

The Electronic Intifada project is a focused network of pro-Palestinian activists with a history of internet and media activism. The project aims to focus on just one aspect of the struggle, the war in the media for a representation of the Palestinian point of view.

Electronic Intifada Home Page: www.electronicintifada.net/new.html

Articles about Electronic Intifada: "The Electronic Intifada," by Pascale Ghazaleh, Al-Ahram Weekly, Oct. 26 – Nov. 1, 2000 – Pascale was the first journalist to adopt the phrase, "Electronic Intifada," that we coined in 1999 while working on a variety of internet campaigns. <http://electronicintifada.net/about/about-ahram.html>

"Intifada Against Bias," by Rachida Azough, De Volkskrant, Feb. 23, 2001 – One of several articles in the Dutch press about the launch of The Electronic Intifada project.

<http://electronicintifada.net/about/about-volkskrant.html>

"The Electronic Intifada: the revolution will be web-based," by Laurie King-Irani, March 2001 – this article was published in As-Safir (Beirut), Daily Star (Beirut), Al-Hayat (London), and on the Common Dreams web-site. <http://electronicintifada.net/about/about-ei.html>

"Exposing Myths," by Carolien Roelants, NRC Handelsblad (the Netherlands), March 13, 2001 – an e-interview with one of the project's founders, Arjan El Fassed. <http://electronicintifada.net/about/about-handelsblad.html>

The story of a subversive site maintains the communications confrontation line in the information age. (Arabic) by Laurie King-Irani, March 2001 – this article, an Arabic version of "The Electronic Intifada: the revo-

lution will be web-based," was published in Al-Hayat (London) on March 26, 2001 (PDF format). <http://electronicintifada.net/about/20010326al-hayat.pdf>

The Electronic Intifada on KPFF Pacific's "Middle East In Focus" programme. The transcript of a May 2, 2001 interview with two of The Electronic Intifada's founders, Nigel Parry and Laurie King-Irani, on Don Bustany's "Middle East In Focus" programme. <http://electronicintifada.net/about/about-kpff.html>

For information about supporting The Electronic Intifada, please see: <http://electronicintifada.net/supporttheproject.html>

The Electronic Intifada team: Ali Abunimah, Arjan El Fassed, Laurie King-Irani, Nigel Parry

The term 'terrorism': The journalistic equivalent to carrying a loaded gun?

The following letter by Laurie King-Irani, a former editor of the Middle East Report Magazine published by Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) and a co-founder of Electronic Intifada, was published in the Washington Post in mid-March.

Dear Editor,

I read the Sunday Outlook section's interview with newly-elected Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon yesterday with astonishment, shock, and ultimately outrage. This was not a work of responsible journalism, but a public relations coup for the Israeli Government presented in the pages of your esteemed newspaper. The entire interview, conducted by Ms. Lally Weymouth, uncritically adopted the

discourse, perspectives, and interests of the most hard-line factions on Israel's fractious political scene.

A quick word count analysis suggests that the most commonly used word or phrase – voiced not only by Sharon but by the interviewer – was "terror," "terrorism," and "radical Islamic terror." Such words and phrases bring much heat, but little if any light, to considerations on current tragic events in the Middle East. "Terrorism" is a loaded word possessing more emotional connotations than factual denotations. The British foreign correspondent Robert Fisk, who has covered events in the Middle East from 1978 up until the present, incurring the ire of all parties with his unwavering commitment to reporting the story no matter where the chips may fall, unequivocally states in his

book, "Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon" (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991) that no serious journalist should ever use this term when discussing political and military events in the Middle East: "terrorism" no longer means terrorism. It is not a definition: it is a political contrivance. "Terrorists" are those who used violence against the side that is using the word. ... To adopt the word means we have taken a side in the Middle East, not between right and wrong, good and evil ... but with one set of combatants against another. For journalists in the Middle East, the use of the word 'terrorism' is akin to carrying a gun. Unless the word is used about all acts of terrorism – which it is not – then its employment turns the reporter into a participant in the war. He becomes a belligerent." pp 40-41.

Ms. Weymouth's uncritical use of the term "Palestinian terror" in yesterday's interview, no less than the lack of any critical questioning on her behalf of Sharon's use of that term, indicates that she has announced that she, and by extension, your newspaper, are "carrying a gun" in your reporting of the tragic events that have unfolded over the last five months in Israel/Palestine, in which the vast majority of the dead, injured, and now the besieged have been Palestinians, not Israelis, as an uninformed reader of yesterday's interview could have easily assumed.

Having lived and worked in both Israel and Lebanon for six years (1991-1997) as a researcher, journalist and editor, I must concur with Mr. Fisk's caveat about the journalistic use of the word "terrorism." Seldom if

ever mentioned in the US press is the fact that attacks on military personnel and installations are not classified, under international law, as "terrorism" but as guerrilla actions of resistance. Rarely, if ever, mentioned in the US press is the fact that international law recognizes the right of occupied and oppressed groups to resist and oppose occupation. Nowhere in your interview does Ms. Weymouth use the word "occupation." This is unfortunate for your readers, as any understanding of Palestinian violence (which I myself oppose, as I oppose Israel's massive and brutal violence against Palestinian and Lebanese civilians over the last 52 years), must begin with the undeniable historical, military, political, and economic context of Israel's 33-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

In sum, this was probably the most craven example of "journalism" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict I have seen in a long time. You and Ms. Weymouth have failed your readers by occluding realities, spinning facts, and playing with loaded words, which can be, in the long run, just as dangerous as playing with loaded guns. The last time Sharon dined on and on about terrorism was in the lead-up to Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon. In the Middle East, there is certainly blood on everyone's hands, and Ariel Sharon probably has more blood on his hands than any of the players now on the political scene. His key role in the disastrous and bloody 1982 invasion of Lebanon – which many top Israeli military officials felt Sharon undertook without fully informing then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin of its ulti-

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