



Educator's Guide

Israel's First Special Ops Unit

This video deals with a tense topic, fraught with controversy and passionate perspectives: how should governments respond to terrorism? Israelis have been fighting terrorism since well before the establishment of the State and certainly before Israel's sweeping victory in 1967. In 1953, just five years into statehood, Israel needed to respond to terrorist attacks from outside its borders, and Israel formed Unit 101, its first special operations team, yet it disbanded quickly after it began its operations. Using this video and educator guide, students will learn why the unit was formed, why it disbanded only months after its creation, and impact it left on the nascent state. How can a country like Israel balance its obligations to protect her citizens and also engage in warfare with the moral and ethical high ground intact? Can both be accomplished?

Link to Video: <https://unpacked.education/video/israels-first-special-ops-unit/>

Further Reading

1. Shalim, Avi. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, chapters 1-3
2. Benny Morris, "The Israeli Press and the Qibya Operation, 1953." *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Jstor article)
3. Jewish Telegraphic Agency archive, 1953
<https://www.jta.org/1953/10/21/archive/ben-gurion-blames-qibya-provocation-on-arab-states-war-policy>
4. Yishayahu Leibowitz, *After Kibiyeh*, <http://www.leibowitz.co.il/leibarticles.asp?id=85>

Review – Did the students understand the material?

1. Who was Ariel Sharon and what was his role in this story?



2. What event took place in Israel that sparked 101 Unit to respond with the Qibya incident?
3. What does the word “Fedayeen” mean?
 - a. Terrorist
 - b. Devotee
 - c. Pilgrim
 - d. Self-sacrificer (correct answer)
4. For how long was Unit 101 operational?
 - a. 3 months
 - b. 5 months (correct answer)
 - c. 9 months
 - d. 1 year
5. Who said “we can exact a high price for our blood, one that Arab regimes will not consider worth paying”?
 - a. Ariel Sharon
 - b. David Ben-Gurion
 - c. Abba Eban
 - d. Moshe Dayan (correct answer)

Discussion Questions

1. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, controversial Jewish philosopher and one of the most iconic Israeli public intellectuals wrote:
"Only the decision of one who is capable of acting and on whom rests the responsibility for acting or refraining from action can pass the genuine test of morality. We, the bearers of a morality which abominates the spilling of innocent blood, face our acid test only now that we have become capable of defending ourselves and responsible for our own security. Defense and security often appear to require the spilling of innocent blood."
After viewing this episode, do you think Israel passed the “Acid test” in this situation? Why or why not?



- 2.** Yeshayahu Leibowitz also writes that we can of course compare and contrast Israeli behavior to other sovereign countries who do much worse:

"We can, indeed, justify the action of Kibiyeh before "the world"...We could argue that we have not behaved differently than did the Americans, with the tacit agreement of the British, in deploying the atomic bomb: America saw herself in the fourth year of a war she had not initiated, and after the loss of a quarter of a million of her sons, facing the prospect of continued war in the style of Iwo Jima and Okinawa for an unforeseeable period of time. This fear led to the atrocity of Hiroshima, where 100,000 civilians, mostly women and children, were killed in one day to bring about the quick termination of this nightmare. We, too, are now in the sixth year of a war that was forced upon us and continues to inspire constant fear of plunder and murder. No wonder that border settlers and those responsible for their life and security overreacted and reciprocated with cruel slaughter and destruction. It is therefore possible to justify this action, but let us not try to do so. Let us rather recognize its distressing nature."

Do you agree with Leibowitz's assertion that we should not justify this action?

- 3.** Most Diaspora Jews do not serve in the military, but the vast majority of Israeli Jews serve in the Israeli army. Is one's perspective on war and terror different when one experiences it first-hand? Is one perspective more "legitimate" than the other?

Reflection Questions

- 1.** If you were a young person living in Israel at this time and infiltrations were happening frequently and borders were permeable, how do you think you would have reacted to the incident at Kibiyeh - with happiness or sadness, fear or security, a sense of moral uprightness or ethical ambiguity?
- 2.** Yeshaya Leibowitz (quoted in the further reading section) states that there may well be actions that are vindicated and justified, but they remain accursed. What do you think he means by that and how can you think within your own life of when this may and may not be true?
- 3.** The Israeli military warns civilians to remove themselves from harm's way before asking action. This has happened frequently in the West Bank and most recently,



in Gaza. Why do you think Israel chooses to do this and do you think Israel should bear responsibility for the loss of civilian life if someone is killed after having sent warnings?