

Activities

Activity 1

Balancing Self-Defense and Humanitarian Values

Preparation:

Estimated Time: 1.5 class periods • **Materials:** Each of the following dilemmas should be distributed to the class.

Background: Since its inception, Israel has had to balance its self-defense needs with its humanitarian values. The pre-Israel defense organization, the Haganah, had a strict policy of protecting the lives of innocent Arab civilians, which they called “the purity of arms” (tohar ha-neshek). The policy of protecting innocent civilian life continues to be a guiding principle of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The following activity focuses on the dilemmas that face Israeli policy makers, officers and combat soldiers while implementing this policy.

Activity:

- Have students skim the information on pages 32-35 (i.e., students should read the titles and subtitles, look at the pictures and skim the text).
- The teacher or a student volunteer should read aloud the text on page 32 regarding Israel’s challenge of balancing its self-defense needs and its humanitarian values. After reading “The Guiding Principles of Israel’s Policies,” ask students to comment. Do they agree with these principles?
- Turn to page 34. Tell the students you are going to read quotes of real people, including a Jihad terrorist. Discuss these quotes. How far is the Israeli army willing to go, in combat situations, to protect innocent Palestinians from being harmed?
- Introduce the topic of “precision attacks.” What do they know about this term? How did they learn about it (the media, computer games, Hollywood action movies, etc.)? Have students read aloud the first three columns on page 34, which represent the main methods Israel uses for precision attacks. These methods demonstrate that Israel places a great deal of value on sparing innocent lives, even at the price of taking a chance at being harmed and sustaining casualties on the Israeli side.
- Divide the students into groups of 4-8 students. Explain that they will face dilemmas based on real-life cases. They should discuss and make their decisions regarding each dilemma; they should spend about 10-15 minutes for each dilemma. After they have completed the activity, they should discuss their decisions and considerations with the entire class.

Dilemma 1: You and your colleagues are members of the Israeli cabinet. You have received reliable intelligence that a highly wanted terrorist, responsible for six terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, has just left his underground bunker. He is presently in his living room with his wife and two young children. Based on prior experience, you are certain that he will soon go back into hiding, where he will be unreachable. Furthermore, it is assumed that he will continue to plan terrorist attacks from his hideout via the members of his terrorist ring.

Should his house be attacked by an air strike? If not, what should be done? This strike would kill the terrorist, but also his wife and two children. These are the questions you need to consider. You will have to make a decision quickly.

Should nothing be done so the terrorist's wife and children will be spared?

If so, the terrorist will have the freedom to continue planning terrorist acts. Should an Israeli special operations land-based raid be carried out? A trained group of 4-5 Israeli soldiers could be called in to carry out an attack at the terrorist's home. While this option has a greater chance of sparing the terrorist's wife and children, the lives of the Israeli soldiers will be in danger. The house is surrounded by members of the terrorist's gang, who will certainly put up resistance if the house is attacked. In addition, the pathway to the house could be booby-trapped, which could harm and possibly kill Israeli soldiers. Another consideration: by the time this elite group arrives, the terrorist may have left and it may be too late to reach him.

What should be done? You have 15 minutes to decide.

Dilemma 2: Israel carefully targets only those people who pose a serious threat to Israeli civilians. But, to prevent future attacks and protect civilian lives, whom should you target?

- The person carrying a bomb?
- The person who drives the bomber to his destination?
- The engineer who builds the bomb?
- The mastermind of the operations?
- The person who provides money for the bomber or the explosives?
- The Muslim cleric who calls on his followers to kill Jews?
- The person who watches the preacher on TV?
- How do you decide?

Wrap-Up: In wars and conflict, innocent civilians are often hurt or killed. When engaged in the West Bank and Gaza, the Israeli army has a strict policy of doing its best to spare the lives of innocent Palestinians. The terrorists are aware of this policy and ethical standard. As a result, they often try to take advantage of this policy by using "human shields" during combat so they won't be attacked. Students should be aware of the ethical dilemmas Israel faces in combat situations.

