

Israeli far-right activists and government officials storm military sites after soldiers arrested for assaulting Palestinian prisoner

Jean Shaoul
30 July 2024

Settlers, far-right activists, and legislators broke into the notorious Sde Teiman detention centre in Israel's Negev desert on Monday to oppose the arrest and detention of soldiers accused of sexually assaulting a Palestinian prisoner.

An even larger mob rioted outside Beit Lid base, headquarters of Israel's military courts and military police, before breaking in and attempting to stop the legal investigation of the nine soldiers. Rioters attacked the media.

The riots have caused a political storm, highlighting the fascists' rejection of even token restrictions on Israel's criminality against the Palestinians.

The prisoner had been raped so violently by the reservist soldiers that he had to be transferred to a hospital in Beersheba for treatment. According to the news outlet *Arab48*, he is unable to walk after suffering from "a serious wound in his rectum area".

Sde Teiman was established by the Knesset as a prison for "unlawful combatants" immediately after the outbreak of the Gaza war to hold Hamas members, including those who took part in the October 7 attack. It has become known as Israel's Guantanamo due to its brutal treatment of hundreds of Palestinians, with a report by the UN Relief and Works Agency published last March in *The New York Times* citing testimonies from detainees saying they were beaten, robbed, stripped, sexually assaulted and prevented access to doctors and lawyers.

According to *Haaretz*, around 30 Palestinians have died at Sde Teiman. Last month, Israel's Attorney-General Gali Baharav-Miara ordered the closure of Sde Teiman, following a petition by Israeli human rights organizations to the Supreme Court and international reports of widespread abuses against detainees. The Supreme Court has since accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of obstructing the closure.

The arrest of the nine soldiers for sexual assault came after the British *Daily Telegraph* reported that Hamas had warned

Israel's National Security Minister and Jewish Power leader Itamar Ben-Gvir that the Israeli hostages held in Gaza would be harmed if the abuse of Palestinian prisoners did not stop and provided a video showing them being abused. It indicates the degree to which the justice and military authorities feared that such an exposure would further compromise the imperialist powers' support for Israel's genocidal war against the Palestinians.

The soldiers reportedly resisted their arrests, posting videos on social media. They barricaded themselves into the facility and used pepper spray before eventually being taken into custody. Other soldiers in their unit reportedly handed in their weapons and refused to continue their service.

Far-right Israelis, outraged by the arrests, called for protests across Israel in support of the soldiers. Dozens of people, including members of the Knesset and Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu, gathered outside Sde Teiman, breached the gates and stormed the detention centre, attempting to prevent the soldiers' detention. They only left when they realized that the soldiers had already been transferred to Beit Lid.

A soldier at the military base said, "A police force was present near the military base, but it did not enter the base to help repel the demonstrators until about an hour after they stormed it, and after the protesters had left it. There was no guard force to confront them and no officer was present to lead the event."

When it became known that the soldiers had been transferred to Beit Lid base for questioning, 1,200 rioters gathered outside the base, accusing soldiers serving there of being "traitors." Among the demonstrators were armed and masked soldiers, some wearing the Force 100 logo of the unit re-established at the start of the war and tasked with guarding Gazan detainees at Sde Teiman. Dozens broke into the base before being dispersed by police, who made no arrests.

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) chief of staff Herzl Halevy

condemned the break-ins, saying that what had happened “bordered on anarchy” and harmed the army, Israel’s security and the war effort. Three battalions due to be sent to Gaza had reportedly been placed on high alert to reinforce the Beit Lid base, should disturbances continue, with a military court hearing set for Tuesday. When Halevy arrived at Beit Lid, he was met with chants of “Resign!”

On Tuesday, senior Israeli officers criticized the police’s performance during the storming of the military bases in Sde Teiman and Beit Lid, pointing out that the acting police inspector general, Avshalom Peled, did not come to the Beit Lid base or send border guards. A senior police officer said, “The police leadership and the brigade turned a blind eye to the events in Beit Lid. There was no shortage of forces, but rather a shortage of clear instructions and orders.”

Another officer said that although some of the far-right elements who stormed Sde Teiman were identified during the raid and were known to the police from previous demonstrations, the police do not intend to arrest any of them.

Fascistic members of Netanyahu’s coalition government took an active part in fomenting the riots, with some taking part in the break ins. Ben-Gvir, whose ministry controls the Israel Police and Israel Prison Service, said, “The spectacle of military police officers coming to arrest our best heroes at Sde Teiman is nothing less than shameful.” He added, “I recommend that the defense minister, the [IDF] chief of staff and the army authorities back the fighters and learn from the prison service. The summer camps and patience for the terrorists are over. Fighters should get full backing.”

Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich demanded that the military advocate general “take her hands off the reservists.”

Justice Minister Yariv Levin from Netanyahu’s Likud Party said that he was “shocked to see harsh pictures of soldiers being arrested,” and that it was “impossible to accept this.” He blamed the High Court of Justice, which had called for the detention centre’s closure, for the arrests of the soldiers, claiming that the move vindicated reviving efforts to overhaul the judiciary.

Far-right parties Jewish Power and Religious Zionism mobilised their supporters, calling for a rally at Sde Teiman, with Jewish Power Heritage Minister Amichay Eliyahu, Religious Zionism legislator Zvi Succot and Likud legislator Nissim Vaturi seen breaking into the detention centre facility amid the riot. Other legislators seen at Sde Teiman or Beit Lid included Tally Gotliv, Zvi Succot, and Limor Son Har-Melech, who declared the military advocate-general “is a criminal. The people of Israel will fight against enemies from outside and enemies from within.”

Netanyahu’s son Yair wrote on X following the arrest of

the soldiers that the state prosecution is “criminal and anti-Zionist.”

Channel 14 reported on Monday that the soldiers’ arrest warrants had been canceled and that military police were limiting themselves to an interrogation.

Netanyahu appealed for calm at Sde Teiman, saying that he “strongly condemns the break-in,” while Defense Minister Yoav Gallant gave his backing to the IDF and military police, saying “civilians storming an IDF base is a serious incident, which gravely harms Israeli democracy and plays into the hands of our enemy during war.”

President Isaac Herzog echoed those calls, adding, “Let’s strengthen the IDF and its commanders and condemn any chants that only make our enemies happy.”

The Israeli human right group Public Committee Against Torture said in a statement that soldiers at the base “were acting outside any law—first in their treatment of detainees, and now toward military law enforcement agents,” adding that far-right leaders’ support for the reservists is “emblematic of the root causes that enable such abuse to happen in the first place.”

These events have highlighted the rise of the far-right and its gangs of fascistic supporters and the deep divisions in Israeli society that had already become apparent during Netanyahu’s judicial overhaul last year. A commentator in the right-wing *Jerusalem Post* drew an analogy with the January 6 attack on Capitol Hill by supporters of Donald Trump.

Yair Lapid, leader of opposition party Yesh Atid, said, “This is not a riot; this is an attempted coup by an armed militia against a weak prime minister who is unable to take control of his government.” He added that lawmakers who stormed IDF bases are sending the message that “they are done with democracy, they are done with the rule of law. A dangerous fascist group threatens the existence of the State of Israel.”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact