

Imperialist powers silent as Israeli ministers, politicians normalise torture, abuse and rape of Palestinian prisoners

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Ministers and legislators from parties in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's fascistic coalition government have leapt to the defence of soldiers who anally raped a Palestinian at the Sde Teiman detention centre in the Negev. Video of the attack surfaced last week.

They supported a furious, far-right mob that came to the detention centre to confront the army and prevent the arrest of the accused soldiers. The police stood by, arresting no one, as the mob broke into Sde Teiman, and later into Beit Lid. This prompted Defence Minister Yoav Gallant to call for an investigation into whether National Security Minister and leader of the Jewish Power Party Itamar Ben-Gvir had ordered the police stand-down.

The video, verified by the British *Daily Telegraph*, shows a Palestinian prisoner being taken to a wall before he is gang raped by reservist soldiers shielding their faces. The prisoner had been raped so violently that he had to be transferred to a hospital in Beersheba for treatment for severe injury to his anus, a ruptured bowel, lung damage, and broken ribs that left him unable to walk.

The video is part of the mounting evidence of sexual abuse and torture of Palestinian prisoners. *"Welcome to Hell": The Israeli Prison System as a Network of Torture Camps*, published by B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, cited the shocking testimonies of 55 Palestinians released from Israeli prisons and detention centres that indicated a systemic policy of abusing and torturing thousands of Palestinian detainees under the direction of the fascist Ben-Gvir.

Moreover, some of the at least 60 deaths of Palestinian prisoners were the result of the mistreatment, abuse and withholding of medical attention by their Israeli jailers, crimes under international humanitarian law.

B'Tselem's report was backed up by a separate survey carried out by *The Guardian* and a 23-page report in July by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) noting the "escalating use of torture" by Israel against Palestinian prisoners since October 7. The Israeli military have denied International Committee of the Red Cross and other organisations access to the Sde Teiman detention

camp.

The abuse is so horrific that in June Israel's high court called on officials to close Sde Teiman detention camp and transfer Palestinian prisoners to other facilities. Around 9,623 are being held at without rights and typically without charge in Israel's military facilities and prisons.

Within Israel, Finance Minister and leader of the Religious Zionist Party, Bezalel Smotrich, condemned the people responsible for releasing the video! In a tweet on X, he called for an "immediate criminal investigation to locate the leakers of the trending video that was intended to harm the reservists and that caused tremendous damage to Israel."

After soldiers were arrested on July 29, Ben-Gvir told Israeli media that it was "shameful" for Israel to arrest "our best heroes." He added, "I recommend that the defence minister, the [Israel Defense Forces-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." He later published a video message stating, "IDF soldiers deserve respect" and should not be treated like criminals.

Ben-Gvir, who presides over the police and prison service, has insisted that any crime is permissible if it is for the security of the state. In June, he released a video demanding, "Prisoners should be shot in the head instead of being given more food." He stated, "It is unfortunate that I have had to deal in recent days with whether Palestinian prisoners should receive fruit baskets," and stressed his support for a bill proposed by his Jewish Power Party, which calls for executing Palestinian prisoners. He said, "Until then, we will give them minimal food to survive. I do not care about this."

Energy Minister and Likud Party member Eli Cohen supported the "reservists who do holy work and guard the despicable Hamas terrorists," adding "We should all embrace them and salute them, certainly not interrogate them and humiliate them."

Hanoch Milwidsky, of Netanyahu's Likud party, said, "If he is a Nukhba [Hamas member], everything is legitimate to do. Everything!" Tally Gotliv of Likud told far-right rioters

protesting against the soldiers' arrests that Israeli troops deserved total immunity, regardless of their actions.

The right-wing TV *Channel 14* published a medical opinion by Professor Alon Pikarsky alleging in a closed hearing at the Beit Lid military court that the Palestinian prisoner had raped himself.

This follows years in which far right leaders lost no opportunity to call for "population transfer," aka ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population, and to incite public violence against the Palestinians. By January, the number of statements and documents of Israeli leaders, war cabinet ministers, senior army officers and public figures setting out the state's intention to commit genocide and destroy Gaza, collated in a database by Law for Palestine, had reached more than 500.

Ben-Gvir and Smotrich have vociferously opposed any ceasefire deal with Hamas to release the hostages, most of whom are now feared dead, saying it would be tantamount to Israel surrendering, and threatening to quit Netanyahu's coalition if he agreed a deal.

The fascistic nature of the Israeli government flows inexorably from the racialist and xenophobic-nationalist character of the Zionist project, particularly after the 1967 war that confirmed the Israeli state as an expansionist entity intent on transforming the Palestinians into permanent refugees. Within weeks of the war, the Labour-led national unity government established settlements in the newly conquered territories in defiance of international law, shaping Israel's political, ideological and social physiognomy for decades to come. It attracted a new wave of immigrants who settled in the Occupied Territories.

These settlements became a pole of attraction for religious right-wing fundamentalists who founded the settler movement and espoused vigilante tactics to intimidate the Palestinians and drive them off their land. These forces played an important role in shifting Israeli politics to the right and providing a political base not only for the struggle against the Palestinians, but also against liberal-minded secular Jews.

This right-wing lurch is not unique to Israel. Indeed, there has been little reporting of what has now become routine practice—the torture and abuse of Palestinians in detention in Israel—in the US and international media, much less any comment. That is because it parallels the shift to the right both in the domestic and foreign policy of bourgeois regimes the world over that is rooted in the breakdown of the world imperialist system and the nation-state system.

The US and its European allies who never miss an opportunity to condemn the crimes, real or imagined, committed by their enemies—Iran, Russia and China—have been virtually silent about the fascistic comments of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich. Like Israel's ministers, politicians and media, they support such criminality when it is in their predatory interests. Indeed, US practice, under Republican and Democratic administrations, in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and Abu Ghraib

prison in Iraq provided the template for its attack dog in the Middle East to follow.

The US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 demonstrated a new era of militarism, colonial adventures and oppression abroad, and a savage assault on the democratic rights of the working class at home, had begun.

When presented with the evidence of prisoner abuse and torture at Sde Teiman, US officials simply called on the Israeli military to investigate, ignoring the fact that soldiers in Gaza are looting, vandalising, shooting and killing with impunity. US President Joe Biden and his vice president and now Democratic Party presidential candidate, Kamala Harris, British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz have kept their mouths shut.

Instead, governments internationally are seeking to delegitimise opposition to the Zionist state's war crimes that they are helping to perpetrate in Gaza with slanderous assertions of antisemitism.

The Biden administration and its European allies who are funding and overseeing the genocide in Gaza view the solution to the "Palestinian problem," through murder, starvation, displacement and torture, as the preliminary to a wider war against Lebanon, Syria and, above all, Iran. Such a region-wide conflagration is developing with the provocative assassinations of Palestinian leader Ismail Haniyeh and Hezbollah leader Fuad Shukur in Israeli strikes in Lebanon and Tehran and the dispatch of additional US warships to the region.

This is a component of Washington's global strategy that centres on a confrontation with Russia and China, aimed at reversing America's declining economic position. The US proxy war with Russia in Ukraine is the largest war on the European landmass since the end of World War II and has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and risks a nuclear holocaust, even as Washington transforms the Indo-Pacific into a potential battlefield with China.

Such wars will be fought without heed to the international laws—the 1949 Geneva Conventions—adopted after the horrors of World War II aimed at minimizing human suffering and protecting civilians as well as prisoners of war.

It shows that the fight against the Gaza genocide can only go forward as part of a fight against imperialist war worldwide. That means not appeals to governments, but a political struggle against them. And it raises the need for a socialist perspective directed against the capitalist system whose inherent drive for resources, markets and profits is the root cause of war.



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