Prize-winning film *NAZA* provokes a vitriolic response from Netanyahu and Israeli officials

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Israel's far-right government has responded ferociously to *NAZA*, a film that exposes some of the Zionist regime's crimes against the defenceless Palestinians in Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his ministers have responded by attacking the filmmakers, portraying the documentary as a treasonous attack on the state and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Citing *NAZA*, Netanyahu has pledged to bring in legislation allowing for the revoking of citizenship of those who "defame" soldiers or the state abroad, and a separate bill raising the damages for defaming the IDF to NIS 1 million, or US$329,000.

NAZA, an 80-minute documentary film by Israeli directors Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor, won the Special Jury Prize at this year's Venice Film Festival and received a record 25-minute standing ovation. Produced by the *Guardian*, the film builds on investigations Abraham had written for the online *+972 Magazine* and *Local Call* news site over the last three years. NAZA, "collateral damage", is an acronym the IDF uses for the civilian casualties it expects will result from its bombing and assassination terror.

The film features interviews with 24 former members of the Israeli military, including data analysts, drone operators, snipers, outlining the AI systems and protocols Israel uses to target and kill civilians in Gaza. One interviewee describes a 15-percent "permitted error" rate in the AI-assisted targeting system, though the implication is that an even higher rate is acceptable. Another describes a system ("Where's Daddy?") that strikes when a man returns home, killing his entire family and any neighbours or visitors. According to those interviewed, thresholds could differ depending on the target's importance; i.e., at times, up to 500 civilian deaths were accepted as a necessary cost for taking out a Hamas leader in a single strike.

As to the supposed defamation of the IDF, Israel's war has killed more than 73,000 Palestinians in Gaza, of whom around 56 percent are women, children and elderly men. But the remaining 44 percent, adult men, cannot simply be equated with combatants. A joint investigation by *The Guardian*, *+972 Magazine* and *Local Call* found that, as of May 2025, an Israeli military intelligence database contained 8,900 named Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad fighters classified as confirmed or probably dead, compared with approximately 53,000 Palestinian deaths recorded at the time. That would mean only 17 percent of the dead had been identified in the database as combatants. That it is Israeli military and intelligence personnel who have provided the film's testimony is especially politically damaging.

The film has no distributor in Israel. The *Guardian* reported Thursday that following NAZA's cinema release in other countries, it will be streamed for free in late November on the newspaper's website.

Netanyahu said of his two bills that those who "defame" the Israeli army "They have no place among us".

Prior to Netanyahu's announcement, "Culture" minister Miki Zohar called the film "despicable" and demanded the Israeli co-directors of *NAZA* be stripped of their citizenship on grounds of "treason against the state." He asked Shin Bet, the domestic spy agency, "to investigate how the materials were obtained, who is behind them, and whether in the process of obtaining or publishing them, actions were taken that amount to aiding the enemy during wartime."

Itamar Ben-Gvir, the far-right National Security Minister, wrote on X, of the filmmakers, "You are a disgrace and an embarrassment to the entire people of Israel. Go away! I am certain that your friends, that is to say our enemies Hamas in Gaza, will welcome you with open arms."

The official campaign was accompanied by threats from far-right groups, calling for violence against the directors

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and their families and the demolition of their homes, chanting “Death penalty for traitors.” A large mural showing Abraham and Szor’s faces emblazoned with the word “Traitors” and surrounded by crosshairs were posted online, attracting hundreds of vicious comments, including calls for their murder. On Wednesday, the journalist Haggai Matar, a director of *+972*, and Sicha Mekomit of *Local Call*, said their offices had been broken into by right-wing activists who had filmed the intrusion.

IDF chief of general staff Eyal Zamir claimed the film was “based on blood libels, deliberate distortions of reality and grave, false accusations against IDF soldiers and commanders.” The accusation of “blood libel”--the medieval antisemitic myth that Jews murder non-Jewish children for ritual purposes--is an attempt to transform the perpetrators of crimes into victims.

Opposition leaders were no less hostile. Former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett also called it a “horrific blood libel against our sons and daughters”, and former Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman described the directors as “haters of Israel”. Gadi Eisenkot, the former IDF chief of staff and leader of the opposition Yashar party currently leading in the polls, also condemned the film.

President Isaac Herzog, who in October 2023 rejected the distinction between Hamas and Gaza's civilian population, arguing they “could have risen up” against Hamas, also intervened to defend the IDF's legal oversight. He said he knew “with certainty” that there was close legal supervision of significant combat units. In fact, the legal framework Israel invokes—proportionality, military necessity, and internal targeting review—allows commanders to authorise operations with foreseeable mass civilian casualties, so long as their attack contributes to “the broader imperatives of winning the war”.

Yair Golan, leader of the Democrats, a fusion of the remnants of the Labour Party and the Peace Now movement, suggested that Netanyahu was using the *NAZA* controversy to distract from his own responsibility for the failures surrounding October 7. Netanyahu subsequently included Golan among the people he was targeting with his proposed legislation on defamation of IDF soldiers.

More than 1,500 members of the film industry signed a petition in support of the film’s directors, stating that they were being subjected to a “campaign of incitement and vilification” that came close to “effectively sanctioning violence”. Speaking to Israel's N12 channel, Israeli actor and screenwriter Shlomi Elkabetz said, “These are questions [raised in the film] that must be examined, not silenced”.

There is a long history of Israeli state intervention against films and screenings that challenge the official narrative of Palestinian history or Israeli military conduct. These have included attempts to ban or restrict *Jenin, Jenin* (2002); the cancellation of a screening of *Lyd* (2023); pressure over *1948: Remember, Remember Not* (2023); attempts to discourage screenings of *No Other Land* (2024); and police intervention over screenings of *From Ground Zero* (2024).

Netanyahu and his ministers are now attempting to turn criticism of the state's military conduct into a question of loyalty to the state itself. The proposed use of citizenship law against the filmmakers is particularly significant. Citizenship is ordinarily a legal status carrying rights; it is not a reward for political loyalty. To threaten to remove it from citizens because they have exposed alleged crimes by their own government is to assert that political membership is conditional upon loyalty to the state and its military.

The threat extends beyond Abraham and Szor. If exposing the conduct of the state's armed forces can be defined as treason, and if those who do so can be threatened with loss of citizenship, then the government is warning other citizens about the limits of permissible dissent.

The hysterical character of the government’s response is indicative of how it has been shaken by revelations from inside the military, attracting an international audience and receiving overwhelming acclaim. As Abraham and Szor stated in an *+972 Magazine*, “The soldiers’ testimonies also implicate a much larger system, for which the highest echelons of Israel’s political and military leadership bear ultimate responsibility. We hope the film can contribute toward accountability for Israel’s grave crimes and justice for their victims.”

NAZA will have its North American premiere at The New York Film Festival on September 26, ahead of a national cinema rollout in the US from October 9.

It will also be released in 55 other territories including the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, Hong Kong, Brazil, Turkey, Thailand, France, Spain, Germany, Turkey, Central America and the Middle East.

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