

release, condemnations poured in — Canada, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands all summoned Israel's ambassadors — including from allies who appear increasingly embarrassed by Israeli actions. Since the last months of 2023,

global public opinion has shifted dramatically against Israel, with Netanyahu recently admitting that Israel is losing the global public relations battle. This matters: In democratic societies, it is difficult to sustain foreign policies the public views as morally

indefensible, and unconditional support for Israel is becoming a political liability in US elections. Some within Israel's establishment recognise the danger. Condemnations of Ben-Gvir came not only from abroad but from figures such as Benny Gantz and

Gideon Saar, who accused him of harming the nation. Even Netanyahu, a close ally, rebuked him. It is likely only a matter of time before the arrogance catches up. South Africa's genocide case against Israel is ongoing at The Hague, and much of its eviden-

tiary record comes directly from Israeli officials, soldiers and journalists — through their own videos, speeches, interviews and social media posts. The problem for Israel is that a system predicated on impunity eventually stops concealing it-

self. Once abuse becomes normal enough to be filmed, posted and celebrated, it becomes far harder for the rest of the world to look away.

*The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.*

## Itamar Ben-Gvir suddenly villain of Israeli politics for one reason

# He revealed Israel's true face to world



• YENI ŞAFAK



By Jonathan Ofir  
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### OPINION

This week, Israel's Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir became an unlikely target of derision across the Israeli political spectrum, including the right-wing. His offense? Revealing the true face of Israel to the world.

The story begins with the latest Gaza freedom flotilla, which again was sending boats and activists to try to break Israel's illegal and inhumane siege on Gaza. Similar to past flotillas, Israel hijacked the boats at sea, and detained the activists. 430 activists were kidnapped in Israel's recent act of piracy, coming from over 40 countries.

This time, all of the activists were to be taken to Israel. Ben-Gvir was waiting for them and

made a video mocking the activists for social media. "This is how we welcome the terror supporters," he wrote in Hebrew, where his English title was "Welcome to Israel".

At the beginning of the video, an activist who is standing up, chanting "free free Palestine" is seen being pushed violently to the floor by security who shout "quiet, quiet," Ben-Gvir continues to march in, waving an Israeli flag, and a mass of kidnapped activists is seen being forced into stress positions with their heads down to the floor. "Good work," Ben-Gvir says to the guards, and shouts to everyone: "Welcome to Israel! We are the masters of the house!"

It is important to note that this is a common scenario in these arrests, and there is nothing really new about it. It is a light variation of what is being done to Palestinians every day, and various snuff videos showing

such systemic torture have been aired on mainstream Israeli television channels. These videos have also commonly included Ben-Gvir's mantra "We are the masters of the house," which was his election slogan.

The Israeli Prison Service even went as far as issuing a statement to Ha'aretz, saying that the detention was "carried out in accordance with procedure and professional considerations". Times of Israel notes that this was done "as media outlets suggested the prison officials present in the clip were acting against political and military policies". These are, in fact, their procedures, these are their policies.

Yet, despite this, and perhaps in a sign of how Israel's international standing has fallen, Ben-Gvir's video set off an international firestorm, and has become a PR problem of its own. Both Poland and France have issued entry bans against

Ben-Gvir with French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Noël Barrot saying, "We cannot tolerate French nationals being threatened, intimidated, or brutalized in this way, especially by a public official" and calling for other EU countries to issue sanctions against him. Italy's Giorgia Meloni said it was "unacceptable" that "these demonstrators, including many Italian citizens, are subject to this treatment." British Foreign Minister Yvette Cooper was "truly appalled" by the video, which "violates the most basic standards of respect and dignity in the way people should be treated".

Of course, no such outrage is to be found when it's Palestinians, but that's always another story. Now, it's a problem that internationals, including Europeans, are being jeered at by Ben-Gvir as they were paraded through detention like animals. Given the response, Israel's has-



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bara central turned to damage control mode, and Ben-Gvir was thrown under the bus as a bad apple.

Prime Minister Netanyahu claimed that Ben-Gvir's video was "not in line with Israel's values". It wasn't the what, it was the how: "Israel has every right to prevent provocative flotillas of Hamas terrorist supporters from entering our territorial waters and reaching Gaza. However, the way that Minister Ben-Gvir dealt with the flotilla activists is not in line with Israel's values and norms," he added.

Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar, who thus heads the hasbara office, shared Netanyahu's message, but had a message of his own, even more condemnatory of Ben-Gvir, claiming Ben-Gvir wasn't the face of Israel: "You knowingly caused harm to our State in this disgraceful display — and not for the first time. You have undone tremendous, professional, and successful efforts made by so many people — from IDF soldiers to Foreign Ministry staff and many others. No, you are not the face of Israel," he wrote in his sharing of Ben-Gvir's tweet. And then the Foreign Ministry posted a tweet with one video and three photos:

A video of a guard giving water to a hostage; A photo of another offering water to a hostage; a hostage being questioned at a table; a woman smiling (presumably a hostage).

"These are our values," says the caption.

All we're missing is candy being handed around, and maybe a choral performance to top it off. The reality of the situation was that the activists had been held in these stress positions for many hours, and the human rights organization Adalah reported that activists were sent to the hospital, suspected of having broken ribs due to breathing difficulty, having been subject to electric shock, and shot with rubber bullets. Activists also reported sexual assault. On one particular Israeli ship, at least 12 sexual assaults were documented. This is, of course, standard procedure when it comes to Palestinians.

So, this moral panic over Ben-Gvir's crude behavior is really an attempt to draw attention away from this abuse, and it appears to be working. He is being made out to be an obnoxious fascist outlier, when, in fact, Ben-Gvir represents the true face of Israel.

This is all about Israel, as a whole. It's Israel's siege, it's Israel's genocide, and the world needs to awaken to this understanding. It's not just about a few rotten apples, a particularly vile minister, or a few bad cops.

*The article first appeared on Mondoweiss.*



Right-wing protesters applaud the suspects of the abuse of a Palestinian detainee outside the Sde Teiman detention facility near Beersheba, occupied Palestine.  
• JILL GRALOW/REUTERS