

Israel's arrogance becoming evidence in case against it



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OPINION

On May 20, Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir posted a video showing Israeli security officers abusing Sumud flotilla activists who were attempting to break Israel's siege of Gaza. In the footage, Ben-Gvir is heard taunting activists, who are forced to kneel with their foreheads to the floor and their hands tied behind their backs. At one point, a female activist who tried to speak up was grabbed by the back of the neck and forced violently to the ground. Disturbing as it is, the video will not surprise anyone who has followed Israel's treatment of either Palestinian detainees or foreign activists and aid workers.

The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem published, in August 2024, "Welcome to Hell," a comprehensive report on the abuse of Palestinian detainees "as a matter of [state] policy". According to B'Tselem, Palestinians held without charge are routinely subjected to sexual abuse, beatings, attack dogs, sleep deprivation and humiliation. Earlier this month, veteran New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof published a detailed account of Israeli abuses, including allegations that dogs are used to sexually abuse Palestinian detainees.

These reports follow an August 2024 video leak showing Israeli officers gang-raping a Palestinian prisoner at the Sde Teiman detention facility, as well as a 2024 United Nations Special Commission report, which found that sexual abuse had become part of Israel's "standard operating procedures". Israeli soldiers and officers have also targeted foreign nationals. Activists, journalists, aid workers, medics and humanitarian personnel have routinely been killed, attacked or abused without consequence.

In 2003, 23-year-old American activist Rachel Corrie was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza as she tried to prevent the



Israel's Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir (3rd-L, standing) taunts the activists of the Global Sumud Flotilla, who set out to deliver aid to Gaza and break the blockade and were later illegally arrested and held face down in a squatting position with their hands tied, in the Ashdod Port on May 20, 2026.

demolition of a Palestinian home. In May 2010, Israeli commandos intercepted a Gaza-bound flotilla in international waters and killed nine activists on board the Mavi Marmara. Autopsies found that the victims had been shot at close range.

In May 2022, Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who worked for Al Jazeera, was shot in the head and killed by an Israeli sniper in the occupied West Bank. An investigation by the research agency Forensic Architecture and the Palestinian rights group Al-Haq, drawing on visual, audio and spatial analysis, found "clear intentionality" and "intent to kill".

In April 2024, Israeli drones struck three vehicles belonging to World Central Kitchen in Gaza, killing seven aid workers from several countries. The vehicles were clearly marked, and the convoy had coordinated its movements with the Israeli military while travelling in a deconflicted zone. After one vehicle

was struck, passengers fled to a second, which was also hit; a third was struck separately. An investigation suggested all three attacks were intentional.

Ben-Gvir's video, then, does not represent a departure from the general behaviour of Israeli forces. It reflects a broader pattern of abuse, humiliation and dehumanisation. Tellingly, there has been no meaningful accountability for any of these incidents: No Israeli official or soldier has faced criminal prosecution in connection with any of them.

What is perhaps most striking about the Ben-Gvir video is that he posted it himself — suggesting not only pride in his behaviour, but confidence that neither he nor his officers would face punishment.

That self-assurance reflects a wider pattern among Israeli political, security and media figures, who have grown accustomed to being celebrated rather than punished for abusive behaviour.

More broadly, soldiers and settlers have become openly boastful about apparent crimes, often posting the evidence themselves. During the height of the Gaza genocide, Israeli soldiers posted sniper videos of themselves shooting at unarmed civilians, alongside footage of

themselves detonating Palestinian homes, looting shops, trying on Palestinian women's lingerie and playing with the toys of children whose homes had just been destroyed. A 2024 Le Monde report documenting many of these videos suggested that a "sense of impunity" may have motivated soldiers to post them.

Israeli political, military and media figures have also felt comfortable making genocidal statements openly. In a televised address on October 8, 2023, Netanyahu promised to "turn Gaza into an island of ruins". Later that month, he repeatedly invoked the biblical injunction against the "Amalekites," a group the Israelites were commanded to destroy completely, including "women, children and infants" — a reference South Africa would later cite at the International Court of Justice.

In October 2023, former National Security Council head Giora Eiland argued that creating a "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza would help Israel win the war; he later set out what became known as the Generals' Plan, a proposal for the forced starvation of Palestinians in northern Gaza. Genocidal rhetoric has proliferated in Israeli media. On Israel's Channel 14, a host asked a guest whether it was acceptable for Is-

rael to "shoot civilians" in Gaza; the guest, a political analyst and lawyer, replied, "Of course! Of course!" According to Le Monde, three Israeli NGOs documented several hundred similar statements on the channel.

Ben-Gvir himself has a long history of supporting extremist violence and making genocidal statements about Palestinians. Both he and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich have encouraged violent settler attacks in the occupied West Bank, advocated illegal settlement expansion, promoted the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza and called on the military to block humanitarian aid from reaching starving Palestinians.

The Israeli scholar Menachem Klein has argued that Israel is a "genocidal society," a conclusion hard to dismiss given how Israeli policy, military conduct, media rhetoric and public discourse have converged to normalise systemic violence with near-total impunity.

The abuse of the flotilla activists is therefore not an aberration. It is the predictable behaviour of a system that has learned it can kill, humiliate and starve people without consequence.

But evidence suggests Israel's arrogance may be catching up to it. Within hours of the video's



Ben-Gvir's video of abused flotilla activists reveals a state so accustomed to impunity that it documents its own cruelty, even against Westerners. 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 evidentiary record comes directly from Israeli officials, soldiers and journalists — through their own videos, speeches, interviews and social media posts.



Traces of injuries inflicted by Israeli soldiers are visible on the body of one of the male members of the Global Sumud Flotilla upon their arrival at Istanbul International Airport, Turkey, on May 21, 2026. AFP confirmed on site.

● ABDELRAHMAN ALKAHLOUT/IMAGO



An activist from the Global Sumud Flotilla is carried on a wheel stretcher due to the injuries inflicted by Israeli soldiers, upon their arrival at Istanbul Airport, Turkey, on May 21, 2026.

● EMRAH GUREL/AP