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Snatch-and-Grab Israeli Style: Disappearing into the Gulag



The arrest of Rasha Kareem.

Rasha Kareem wasn't hiding from the police. She didn't think she'd done anything wrong.

And she hadn't done anything wrong. Not by any reasonable standard.

Rasha was simply going about her day. She owned a beauty salon in Majd Al-Krum, a town in the Galilee. She was running routine errands when Israeli police pulled her over.

Rasha is tall and elegant. She has the face of a model and long, shimmering black hair. She was wearing a sleek black dress. She tried to maintain her composure as Israeli police swarmed around her. There is a look of confusion and then a flash of fear on her face as she is told she's being arrested.

Her hands are tightly cuffed in zip ties. Then Rasha begins to weep, as the police ominously strap a blindfold over her eyes. You can see the long fingers on her restrained hands tremble as she tries to wipe the tears from her face. Imagine what was going through her mind at that moment. Why the blindfold? Where are they taking me? What have I done to deserve it? This decorous and dignified woman, who had offered not the slightest resistance, was being treated as a terrorist.

What *had* Rasha done? Not much. Not anything, really. She was a Palestinian woman living in Israel who had written pro-Palestinian comments on Social Media. She expressed her sorrow and anger at the mounting deaths in Gaza. Like many, even a growing number of Israeli Jews, she wrote of her hopes that the killing would stop and the war would end.

But such openly expressed sentiments are considered a crime now in Israel and it seems someone had ratted out Rasha Kareem to the offices of Itamar Ben-Gvir, the fanatical Minister of Security in the Netanyahu government.

“A report was received of a few posts made by the suspect against the IDF’s soldiers and the Israeli government that could disrupt public order,” the Israeli police said in a statement.

Ben-Gvir and his minions wanted Rasha charged with incitement to terrorism. The histrionic minister of security, who controls Israel’s police wanted to make an example of her. An example of what, though? His ability to crush any form of dissent, however innocuous, from whatever harmless quarter, even a beauty parlor.

The Israeli police had a problem, though. Ben-Gvir didn’t trust the State Attorney General’s office to issue a warrant against Rasha Kareem. The Security Minister’s attacks on the Attorney General, Gali Baharav-Miara, have become more and more bombastic. Baharav-Miara, Israel’s first female attorney general, was appointed to her post by Naftali Bennett, during his brief tenure as PM, in 2022. There’s no question Baharav-Miara is a hardliner. But not hard enough for Ben-Gvir, who has accused her of leading “the moral and professional degradation” of the attorney general’s office and “acting in an unprecedented manner against the state.” The state being Ben-Gvir’s brutish ministry, one assumes.

So instead of serving Rasha Kareem with a warrant, Ben-Gvir's police targeted her on their own using the novel theory that her social media posts posed a threat to public order. On this thin pretext, Rasha was detained, cuffed, blindfolded and whisked away to some Israeli black site where she was subjected to interrogation.

But soon a startling video of her arrest leaked. Apparently, the video was shot by one of the Israeli cops involved in the arrest, so it's not out of the realm of reason to assume it was leaked by Ben-Gvir's goons with the intention to humiliate Rasha and intimidate anyone else from expressing empathy for Palestinians in Gaza.

If so, the malicious intent seems to have backfired. The video of Rasha's arrest elicited more sympathy and outrage, than fear or panic. Rasha's lawyer protested her arrest and detention to the office of the State Attorney, who swiftly found that Ben-Gvir's police had not received the necessary permission to investigate her and that "the police's decision to cuff the suspect with zip ties and blindfold her is unclear."

Kareem was released from custody and ordered to house arrest for five days. Ben-Gvir condemned her release and accused the State Attorney's office of "rushing to intervene in support of the terror backer Rasha Kareem."

The arbitrary arrest, detention and interrogation of Rasha Kareem is nothing new. During the First Intifada, more than 100,000 Palestinians were arrested, many of them without warrants or trials, under an administrative detention policy that was a relic of the British Occupation of Palestine. At least 85,000 were subjected to torturous interrogations.

Now this oppressive scheme is being revived. Since October Israel has arrested more than 9,000 Palestinians, including 300 women and 635 minors, from the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, alone. There's no accurate count of the number of Palestinians Israel has detained from Gaza but it's certainly more than the 9000 arrested in the West Bank.



Leaked photo of Palestinian detainees at Israeli's Sde Teiman torture center in the Negev desert.

Many of the male Gaza detainees, young and old, have been interned at Sde Teiman military-run torture camp near the city of Be'er Al Sabe, where they are kept blindfolded, stripped of most of their clothes and shackled for weeks at a time. Most of the Palestine women and young girls detained in Gaza have been sent to the Anatot military torture camp outside Jerusalem.

Unlike Rasha Kareem, who was snatched in daylight on the street, most of the arrests of Palestinians took place late at night with doors being blown open while the targets and their families were asleep. Israeli soldiers and security police often barge in with attack dogs, hurl threats and insults at family members, vandalize property inside the dwelling and humiliate and abuse the detainees in front of their families.

A typical case is that of Bilal Dawood, who was arrested late on the night of October 16, 2023, less than 10 days after the Hamas attacks. Israeli security forces blew the door off Dawood's house at the Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem. The explosion shattered the windows of the building. When the Israeli forces entered the house, they immediately began trashing the place, smashing the TV, and destroying furniture, lamps and dishes. As his mother looked on in horror, an Israeli soldier hit Bilal in the face with the butt of his assault rifle. As Bilal lay on the floor, he was repeatedly kicked, and then dragged across the room, leaving a trail of blood. When his mother screamed in protest, she too was hit in the face, dislodging her dentures. Then the Israeli forces taped her mouth shut.

Many times these midnight raids turn lethal. On the night of December 5, 2023, the Mansara family was awakened by voices outside their house in the Qalandia Refugee Camp near Jerusalem. The young Mohammad Mansara approached the door to see what the commotion was about, not knowing the sounds were coming from Israeli forces preparing to break into the house to arrest his brother Abdullah.

As Mohammad moved to open the door from the inside, the Israelis detonated a bomb on the outside. The explosion killed the young man and seriously injured his mother, who was standing nearby. The Israelis stepped over Mohammad's eviscerated body, restrained his family members from helping him or his mother, grabbed his brother Abdullah and hauled him away into the night. No ambulance was called to treat the wounded.

A couple of days after the October 7 attacks, Israeli forces broke into a house occupied by two Palestinian women and a two-week-old baby, also female. Again the home invasion took place late at night, when all the occupants were asleep. The door of the house was knocked

down and the Israeli forces, all of them male, entered the house and surrounded the bed of a Palestinian woman called “H.H.” The woman pleaded with the soldiers to be allowed to cover herself and her hair in a hijab and abaya. They refused. The soldiers then entered the room of H.H.’s daughter and her two-week-old child. Saying they were searching for a cell phone, they ordered the daughter to strip naked for a cavity search. When she refused, they threatened her with a taser. When H.H. attempted to intervene, a soldier spat in her face, covering her glasses with a foul-smelling glob of saliva. Then the soldiers demanded that H.H.’s daughter strip her baby. Meanwhile, the soldiers rummaged through the house, ripping pages out of the family’s Koran and parading around with the women’s underwear, while HH and her daughter sat on the floor with both their hands and feet bound. Later they were taken to an interrogation facility, where one of the interrogators whispered in HH’s ear his intent to rape her from “the front and the back.”

The targets of these raids have included Palestinian students, teachers, engineers, lawyers, doctors, and even Palestinian members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, at least 18 of whom have been arrested and detained without warrants. Often the victims have done little more than, like Rasha Kareem, make a pro-Palestinian or anti-war post on Social Media or tweet a verse from the Koran.

Most of these Palestinians are being held under Israel’s shadowy administrative detention policy, which allows the state to arrest, detain and torture Palestinians without presenting charges or indictments. Instead, Israeli state security is allowed to justify the arrest by citing so-called “Secret Files,” which, like Kafka’s Josef K, the accused is never allowed to see or dispute.

In addition to administrative detention, Israel also enacted “emergency measures” on October 26 to deal with “unlawful combatants” that gave the Israeli army the authority to arrest Palestinians on secret evidence and detain them without charges for up to 75 days before a judge can rule whether the arrest was lawful. The “emergency measures” allow the Israelis to prevent detainees from having access to a lawyer for up to 210 days.

Most of the “enemy combatants” are held at the Yemen Field military camp, under conditions of extreme severity. None of the detainees at Yemen Field are allowed visits from the International Red Cross or their lawyers. Thus, not only is there no way to challenge these arrests, but there’s also no avenue to protest the abusive conditions or torturous treatment in prisons.

The conditions at Yemen Field and the other camps were harsh to begin with, but after October 7 Bin-Gvir was allowed latitude to make them even more austere. Food rations were

cut from three meals a day to two. A typical breakfast consists of a small cup of yogurt, a piece of bread, and a tomato. The second meal consisted of a small serving of rice along with a sausage, all often undercooked. Windows were knocked out to make the cells freezing in the winter months. The blankets in the cells were threadbare. Many prisoners were made to wear the same clothes for more than 50 consecutive days. Rooms were searched almost daily, often by guards wielding metal rods and holding attack dogs. Garbage was routinely burned inside the prison compound flooding the cells with toxic smoke.

Dozens of Palestinians, snatched by Israeli security forces, have died in Israeli custody since October 7. And at least two were beaten to death, like Freddie Gray in Baltimore, by Israeli forces while being transported to one of the torture camps.

Abed El Rahman Mar'ii was beaten to death in Megiddo Prison on November 13, 2023. The official autopsy report showed that “bruises were seen over the left chest, with broken ribs and chest bone underneath. External bruises were also seen on the back, buttocks, left arm and thigh, and right side of the head and neck...As no signs of background disease were found, and based on his history as a healthy young person, one may assume that the violence that he suffered, manifested by the multiple bruises and multiple severe rib fractures, contributed to his death. A cardiac arrhythmia (irregular pulse) or even a fresh myocardial infarction (a heart attack) can result from such injuries without leaving any physical evidence.”

A leaked report from UNRWA describes the death of a detainee after his interrogators put an “electric stick” up his anus. Ibrahim Shaheen, a 38-year-old truck driver was arrested in December and held for nearly three months. He was repeatedly interrogated about the location of dead Israeli hostages. Shaheen said he was tied to a chair and shocked nearly a half dozen times. A detainee named al-Hamlawi described being restrained in a chair wired with electricity and shocked so frequently that he began to urinate uncontrollably. Another detainee said his interrogators “made me sit on something like a hot metal stick and it felt like fire.”

Even juvenile detainees are not immune from abuse. Consider the case of JK, an 18-year-old Palestinian boy confined to Niqab Prison, who recalls being seized by Israeli prison guards wielding metal batons who forced him to strip naked and then began taking photos of him. When JK tried to shield his genitals, the guards kicked him repeatedly and clubbed him with their batons. Then they forcibly pried his legs open to photograph his genitals and anus as they taunted him.

Few of these cases of murder and abuse inside Israeli prison camps are ever investigated and, historically, 99 out of 100 cases that are investigated are closed without any charges being filed.

So, I guess we can say Rasha Kareem was lucky. Luckier than many Palestinians anyway. Some go into the darkness of the Israeli gulags and never return. The others never return the same.

For more information on the treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prison camps see [Addameer: Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association](#).

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