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## Restoring Fear – Why Israeli Soldiers Rape



Image by Alex Shuper.

On October 25, Israeli politician Moshe Feiglin [told](#) Arutz Sheva-Israel National News that “Muslims are not afraid of us anymore.”

It might sound odd that Feiglin saw the element of fear as critical to Israel’s well-being if not its very survival.

In actuality, the fear element is directly linked to Israel’s behavior and fundamental to its political discourse.

Historically, Israel has carried out massacres with a specific political strategy in mind: to instill the desired fear to drive Palestinians off their land. Deir Yassin, Tantara and the over 70 documented [massacres](#) during the Palestinian Nakba, or Catastrophe, are cases in point.

Israel has also utilized torture, rape and other forms of sexual assault to achieve similar ends in the past, to exact information or to break down the will of prisoners.

UN-affiliated experts [said](#) in a report published on August 5 that “these practices are intended to punish Palestinians for resisting occupation and seek to destroy them individually and collectively.”

Israel’s ongoing war in Gaza has manifested all these horrific strategies in ways unprecedented in the past, both in terms of widespread application and frequency.

In a [report](#) entitled ‘Welcome to Hell’, published on August 5, the Israeli rights group, B’tselem, said that Israel’s detention “facilities, in which every inmate is deliberately subjected to harsh, relentless pain and suffering operate as de-facto torture camps”.

A few days later, the Palestinian rights group, Addameer, published its own [report](#), “documented cases of torture, sexual violence, and degrading treatment”, along with the “systematic abuses and human rights violations committed against detainees from Gaza.”

If incidents of rape, sexual assaults and other forms of torture are marked on a map, they would cover a large geographical area, in Gaza, in the West Bank, and Israel itself – mostly notably in the notorious [Sde Teiman Camp](#).

Considering the size and locations of the Israeli army, well-documented evidence of rape and torture demonstrates that such tactics are not linked to a specific branch of the military. This means that the Israeli army uses torture as a centralized strategy.

Such a strategy has been associated with the likes of Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel’s national security minister. His aggressive [statements](#), for example, that Palestinian prisoners should be “shot in the head instead of being given more food”, are perfectly aligned with his equally violent actions: the starvation policy of prisoners, the normalization of torture and the defense of rape.

But Ben-Gvir did not institute these tortuous policies. They have predated him by decades and were used against generations of Palestinian prisoners, who are granted few rights compared to those enshrined by international law, particularly the [Fourth Geneva Convention](#).

But why does Israel torture Palestinians on such a large scale?

Israeli wars against Palestinians are predicated on two elements: a material and a psychological one. The former has manifested itself in the ongoing genocide, the killing and wounding of tens of thousands and the near destruction of Gaza.

The psychological factor, however, is intended to break the will of the Palestinian people. Law for Palestine, a legal advocacy group [published](#) a database of over 500 instances of Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, inciting genocide in Gaza.

Most of these references seem to be centered on dehumanizing the Palestinians. For example, the October 11 [statement](#) by Israeli President Yitzhak Herzog, that “there are no innocent civilians in Gaza”, was part of the collective death sentence that made the extermination of Palestinians morally justifiable in the eyes of Israelis.

Netanyahu’s own ominous biblical reference, where he called on Israeli soldiers to seek revenge from Palestinians, [stating](#) “Remember what Amalek has done to you”, was also a blank check for mass murder.

While choosing not to see Palestinians as humans, as innocent, as worthy of life and security, Israel has granted its army carte blanche to do as it saw fit to those, in the [words](#) of Israeli Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant, “human animals”.

The mass killing, starvation and widespread rape and torture of Palestinians are a natural outcome of these shocking dialectics. But the overall purpose of Israel is not simply to exact revenge, though the latter has been quite important to Israel’s desire for national recovery.

By trying to break the will of the Palestinians through torture, humiliation and rape, Israel wants to restore a different kind of deterrence, which it lost on October 7.

[Failing](#) to restore military or strategic deterrence, Tel Aviv is invested in psychological deterrence, as in restoring the element of fear that was breached on October 7.

Raping prisoners, leaking videos of the gruesome acts, and carrying out the same horrific deed, again and again, are all part of the Israeli strategy – that of restoring fear.

But Israel will fail, simply because Palestinians have already succeeded in demolishing Israel’s 76-year matrix of physical domination and mental torture.

The Israeli war on Gaza has proven to be the most destructive and bloody of all Israeli wars. Yet, Palestinian resilience continues to grow stronger, because Palestinians are not passive, but active participants in the shaping of their own future.

If popular resistance is indeed the process of the [restoration](#) of the self, Palestinians in Gaza are proving that, despite their unspeakable pain and agony, they are emerging as a whole, ready to clinch their freedom, no matter the cost.

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