

# The Message of Israel's Torture Chambers Is Directed at All of Us, Not Just Palestinians

'Black sites' are about reminding those who have been colonised and enslaved of a simple lesson: resistance is futile

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*On a misty November morning 21 years ago, I was desperately trying to remain camouflaged. Concealed in the foliage of an orange grove in [Israel's](#) rural Galilee, I hurriedly took photos of a drab concrete building not marked on any map.*

Even the original road sign identifying the site as Facility 1391 had been removed after a local Haaretz newspaper investigation revealed it [housed a secret prison](#).

I was the first foreign journalist to track down Facility 1391, most of it hidden within a heavily fortified complex built in the 1930s to suppress resistance to [British](#) rule in [Palestine](#).

For decades, **Israel had [secretly held](#) mostly Arab foreign nationals captive at the site, unknown to the Israeli courts, the Red Cross and human rights groups.** Many were [Lebanese](#) citizens kidnapped during Israel's 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon. But there were also [Jordanians](#), [Syrians](#), [Egyptians](#) and [Iranians](#).



This site would soon be known as a "black site", a term popularised by Washington's

invasion of [Iraq](#) that year. Drawing on techniques refined by Israel at Facility 1391, the US would, in the coming months and years, torture Iraqis and others at Abu Ghraib and Camp X-Ray in [Guantanamo](#).

No one knew how many captives were held in Israel's Facility 1391, how long they had been there or if there were more such prisons.

However, the first testimonies from inmates revealed horrifying conditions. For most of the time, they were kept in a state of sensory deprivation, made to wear blacked-out goggles, except for when being tortured. In one case that [later came to court](#), a Lebanese captive had been sodomised with a baton by "Major George", the facility's torturer-in-chief.

Major George would go on to become [head of Israeli police](#) relations with the Palestinian population of Jerusalem.

## **Another Secret Prison**

It was difficult not to recall Facility 1391 this month, as CNN published an investigation into a new Israeli secret prison, Sde Teiman.

This prison was set up months ago to process not foreign nationals but thousands of Palestinian men and boys, victims of Israel's [occupation](#), seized from the streets of [Gaza](#) and the West Bank since Hamas carried out a one-day attack on 7 October. Some 1,150 Israelis were killed and 250 were dragged back into Gaza as hostages.

As with Facility 1391, revelations of the horrors taking place at Israel's new black site have garnered barely any attention from the western media establishment.

CNN, known for [excising Israeli atrocities](#) from its coverage on the orders of executives, should be applauded for finally doing what western media often falsely claims is its role: holding power to account.

Headlined "Strapped down, blindfolded, held in diapers", the [lengthy article](#) details the degrading, brutal conditions Palestinians kidnapped from Gaza and the West Bank are being subjected to.

The number of Palestinians passing through the secretive detention camp, located in the Negev desert, is unknown. But satellite photos show the site is rapidly expanding, presumably to accommodate ever more "prisoners".

Some Palestinians who have emerged, utterly broken from this incarceration system – where the world saw men and boys [being paraded](#) zip-tied, near-naked and blindfolded in Gaza's streets and stadiums back in November and December – began [telling of their experiences](#) months ago.

Predictably, the western media largely ignored the testimonies.

Even when staff from Sde Teiman started coming forward weeks ago to [divulge horror stories](#), western outlets collectively yawned – apart from CNN.

## Pattern of Media Failure

This pattern of failure has been noted in the pages of Middle East Eye for months.

Image [source](#)



For example, the western media establishment has studiously averted their gaze from Israeli reports that a proportion of those killed on 7 October were not victims of Hamas but of the Israeli army's notorious "[Hannibal procedure](#)", a protocol to kill fellow Israelis rather than let them be taken captive.

Western journalists still mostly avoid highlighting the fact that Israel is actively starving the entire population of Gaza of food and water, an unquestionable crime against humanity. Instead, journalists echo [their own governments](#) by labelling this Israeli-induced famine a "[humanitarian crisis](#)", as if it were an unfortunate natural disaster.

The media also obscures the fact that western powers, especially the [US](#) and UK, are directly assisting Israel in its mass starvation of Gaza's population – both by denying funding to the UN's main relief agency, Unrwa, and by refusing to put any significant [pressure on Israel](#) to allow in aid.

Echoing the Biden administration, the media still hesitates to call Israel's actions in Gaza what they are, preferring an occasional mealy-mouthed assessment that Israel "[may be at risk](#)" of committing war crimes. None point to the bigger picture that all of these individual "possible" war crimes indisputably amount to genocide.

That obfuscation has become even harder to maintain with the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) applying this week for arrest warrants for suspected war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, along with three Hamas leaders.

Nonetheless, the media have stressed Israel's and the Biden administration's indignation at the court rather than the substance of its charges, including the allegation that Israel is exterminating Palestinians in Gaza through planned starvation.

The media avoids clarity on these topics because clarity would be inconvenient. Why? Because, as we shall see, the western media's purpose is to create a narrative that serves western governments in pursuing their overarching foreign policy goals in the oil-rich Middle East, not ending the boundless suffering in Gaza or holding Israel to account for its crimes.

## Used as Lab Rats

As a handful of whistleblowers revealed to CNN, **Palestinians are incarcerated for weeks on end in Sde Teiman as they are tortured - both through formal interrogations and through the conditions they are held in.**

They are forced to sit blindfolded outdoors on a thin mattress through the desert heat of the day and sleep in the cold of the desert night. Continuously cuffed, they are forced to remain motionless and silent. At night, dogs are set on them. Anyone who speaks or moves risks being savagely beaten till bones are broken.



Palestinian men were rounded up and stripped by Israeli forces in Gaza before being taken to an undisclosed location (Screengrab/X)

People's hands and legs are tightly zip-tied for so long that, according to the report, some have needed limbs amputated.

As one Israeli whistleblower recounted to CNN, none of these abuses are about intelligence gathering. "They were done out of revenge," he admitted. The inmates are punching bags for the Israeli soldiers and guards.

But this is about more than simple vengeance. Understanding what is happening at Sde Teiman provides a clearer picture of what is happening on a far bigger, even more industrial scale in Gaza.

Especially revealing are the conditions in a field hospital at the detention camp, housing Palestinians either maimed in Israel's savage destruction of Gaza or injured by beatings from Israeli soldiers.

They are handcuffed to gurneys in row after row, blindfolded and naked apart from an adult nappy. They are not allowed to speak.

There they lie day after day, night after night, in a state of utter sensory deprivation, with nothing to distract from their wounds and pain. In the midst of this, Israeli medical interns can use their exposed, vulnerable flesh as a canvas for experimentation.

According to one whistleblower, the detention centre has quickly gained a reputation for being “a paradise for interns”.

There, they are allowed to use Palestinians as little more than lab rats and encouraged to carry out medical procedures they are not qualified to perform.

A whistleblower told CNN: “I was asked to learn how to do things on the patients, performing minor medical procedures that are totally outside my expertise.”

Such procedures were frequently done without anaesthesia. Unlike doctors in Gaza, Israeli doctors have ready access to painkillers. It is a choice not to use them.

## **Medical Staff Missing**

With western media so readily colluding in the dehumanisation of Palestinians, it is important to remember who these “prisoners” are.

Israel wishes us to believe it is targeting Hamas and those it “arrests” – the widely accepted euphemism, used by CNN in this article, for those Israel takes hostage – are Palestinians suspected of ties to the militant group.

However, one of the most significant testimonies of abuse from Sde Teiman reported by CNN comes from **Dr Mohammed al-Ran, the grey-haired head of surgery at Gaza’s [now-destroyed Indonesian hospital](#)**.

He was “arrested” – kidnapped – by Israel in December and taken to Sde Teiman. There is no suggestion al-Ran was engaged in armed combat against invading Israeli troops or was associated with Hamas in any other way. He was seized, along with other medical staff, while working a three-day shift at another medical centre, the al-Ahli al-Arabi Baptist Hospital.

He had been forced to flee the Indonesian hospital after it was bombed by Israel and staff there were severely beaten.

**Untold numbers of medical personnel have been [murdered or disappeared](#) by Israel during its systematic attacks on Gaza’s hospitals. The [destruction of the enclave’s health sector](#) is another glaring crime against humanity the western media has carefully avoided identifying.**

The contrast with the media’s unrelenting certainty about Russia’s war crimes in Ukraine a short time ago is stark indeed.

Human rights groups are desperately trying to track down these Palestinian hostages with habeas corpus writs, just as they earlier tried to find the foreign nationals held captive in Facility 1391. The Israeli courts have been wilfully obstructive.

In one test case, the Israeli human rights group HaMoked, which was central to identifying Facility 1391, [has been petitioning](#) Israel’s supreme court – whose judges include some living in illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank – to find a Palestinian X-ray technician missing since February.

He was seized by Israeli troops at Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza. The suspicion is that he

is being held in Sde Teiman.

According to HaMoked, more than 1,300 Palestinians from Gaza are missing, presumed to be in Israeli detention, including 29 women.

Another surgeon, Dr Adnan al-Bursh, is known to be among more than two dozen Palestinians [who have died](#) in mysterious circumstances in Israeli captivity. He was most likely tortured to death or possibly killed in a failed medical procedure.

## **‘Unprecedented’ Abuses**

In further proof that this wave of violence against prisoners is entirely unrelated to suspicions that they belong to Hamas or participated in the 7 October attack, details emerged over the weekend of relentless and savage abuses of the most prominent Palestinian prisoner held by Israel.



**[Marwan Barghouti](#), from the Palestinian National Liberation Movement led by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas - Hamas’s arch-opponents - has been locked up for the past 22 years.** Sometimes referred to as the “Palestinian Mandela”, Barghouti is considered a potential future leader of the Palestinian people.

According to fellow inmates and human rights groups, Barghouti is [barely recognisable](#) after a series of beatings, one of which has left him struggling to see out of his right eye.

He is reported to be in constant pain from a suspected dislocated shoulder resulting from one assault, an injury that has not been treated.

According to his Israeli lawyer, he has been dragged across the floor handcuffed and naked in front of other inmates at Ayalon Prison.

Barghouti has lost significant weight due to the severe food restrictions imposed on all Palestinian prisoners since October and has been denied access to books, newspapers and television.

Tal Steiner of the Israeli human rights group the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel told the Guardian that Barghouti was being subjected to “unprecedented” abuses and that such torture had become “standard” for the 8,750 Palestinians known to have been jailed since October.

The government minister overseeing Israel’s prison service, [Itamar Ben Gvir](#), belongs to the avowedly fascist party Jewish Power, whose ideological roots in Kahanism explicitly

regard Palestinians as little more than vermin.

## **Bargaining Chips**

The western media have focused endlessly on the suffering of the 100 or more Israeli hostages still held in Gaza, though it remains unmentioned that much of that suffering derives from Israel's actions.

The hostages, like the Palestinians of Gaza, are under Israel's rain of bombs. And like Palestinians, they face sustained food shortages caused by Israel's aid blockade. The indiscriminate violence against Gaza affects both hostages and Palestinians alike.

But based on reports by CNN and Israeli media, it seems likely that many of the thousands of Palestinians kidnapped by Israel since October are facing a far crueller fate than the Israeli hostages in Gaza.

Hamas is invested in keeping the Israeli hostages as safe as possible because they are valuable bargaining chips for getting the Israeli army out of Gaza and freeing Palestinians from torture sites like Sde Teiman.

Israel faces no such pressures. As the occupying power and Washington's favourite client state, it can inflict any punishment it chooses on Palestinians with little repercussion.

That is another facet of the past seven months that the media refuse to acknowledge.

## **Destroying Aid**

Meanwhile, **western publics are smeared if they try to name Israel's crimes as genocide or articulate how the genocide is unfolding.** This echoes the suspicions of an overwhelming majority of judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) back in January and is implied by the ICC chief prosecutor's application for arrest warrants this week.

The West's recent, perverse and self-serving redefinition of antisemitism – a victory for pro-Israel lobby groups – equates Jew hatred with [criticism of Israel](#) more so than actually hating Jews.

Under the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's new definition, it is antisemitic to draw a parallel between Israel's actions and the genocide with which westerners are most familiar: the Holocaust.

Conveniently for Israel, western establishments can now disavow an all-too-obvious lesson of history and human psychology: the victims of abuse are quite capable of committing such abuses themselves.

CNN's reconstruction of the field hospital at Sde Teiman shows dehumanised Palestinians – bound, blindfolded and naked – in rows of gurneys ready to be experimented on. Why would that not evoke, for western audiences, memories of Josef Mengele, the notorious Nazi doctor who viewed concentration camp inmates as less than human, mere fodder for his experiments?

What echoes should westerners feel watching Jewish extremists from Israel's illegal

settlements [ambush aid trucks](#) heading to Gaza, smash up the supplies desperately needed by a starving population, burn the trucks and beat the drivers – all while Israeli soldiers and police stand by, allowing the destruction to take place?

How might it be wrong – antisemitic, no less – to ponder whether a similar brutal, genocidal racism drove extremists in Germany in 1938 when they rampaged against Jews on Kristallnacht?

And what about those who have compared tiny Gaza to a concentration camp during Israel's 17-year siege by land, air and water, with encaged Palestinians deprived of basic freedoms and the essentials of life? Or those who now call Gaza a death camp as Israel starves the population?

Are such assessments really evidence of Jew hatred? Or are they proof that these observers have understood well the lessons of history and the Holocaust? The systematic degrading and abuse of a people should always be viewed as a crime against our shared humanity.

The moral duty facing us all is to stop such atrocities, not to withhold judgement and mutely watch them play out to their logical conclusion.

## **Torture Chambers**

**The current horrors Israel is inflicting on the inmates of Sde Teiman and, on an even bigger scale, on the Palestinians in the Gaza death camp, are about much more than simple vengeance for 7 October.**

Sde Teiman is the small torture chamber, mirroring the much bigger torture chamber of Gaza itself, where bombs and starvation are achieving precisely the same ends.

Until seven months ago, Israel's goal was to keep the Palestinians a subjugated, enslaved, hopeless people, confined to a series of concentration camps in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They were expected to remain mute in their suffering and invisible to the outside world.

Over the long term, it was assumed that Palestinians would prefer to flee their immiseration in these permanently occupied, colonised lands.

The slave revolt of 7 October – brutal and ugly as such revolts have been throughout history – was a devastating shock. Not just to an Israel wedded to its racist, hands-on colonial project of subjugating the Palestinian people. It was also a shock to the West's wider colonial project, into which Israel is so tightly integrated.

In Washington's "rules-based order", the only meaningful rule is that what Washington and its clients want, they get. The planet, its resources and peoples are viewed as little more than playthings by the world's superpower-in-chief.

Revolts to this order – whether advanced by Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran – cannot be allowed to become a model. The "rules-based order" must be restored with a savagery necessary to teach the the colonised and enslaved their place.

That was the message of Washington's own black sites needed in its futile "war on terror"



from Abu Ghraib to Guantanamo - sites that drew on Israel's experiences of "breaking" inmates at Facility 1391.

The complicity of western establishments in Israel's current genocide is not an anomaly. It does not derive from a misunderstanding or confusion. The western political and media class see the genocide in Gaza as clearly as the rest of us. But for them, it is justified, required even. The colonised and oppressed must be taught that resistance is futile.

Sde Teiman, like the Gaza death camp, is serving its purpose. It is there to break the human spirit. It is there to turn the Palestinians into willing collaborators in their own destruction as a people, in their own ethnic cleansing.

And a subliminal message is being directed at the western public at the same time: this could also be your fate if you do not join in cheerleading Israel's atrocities in Gaza.

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