

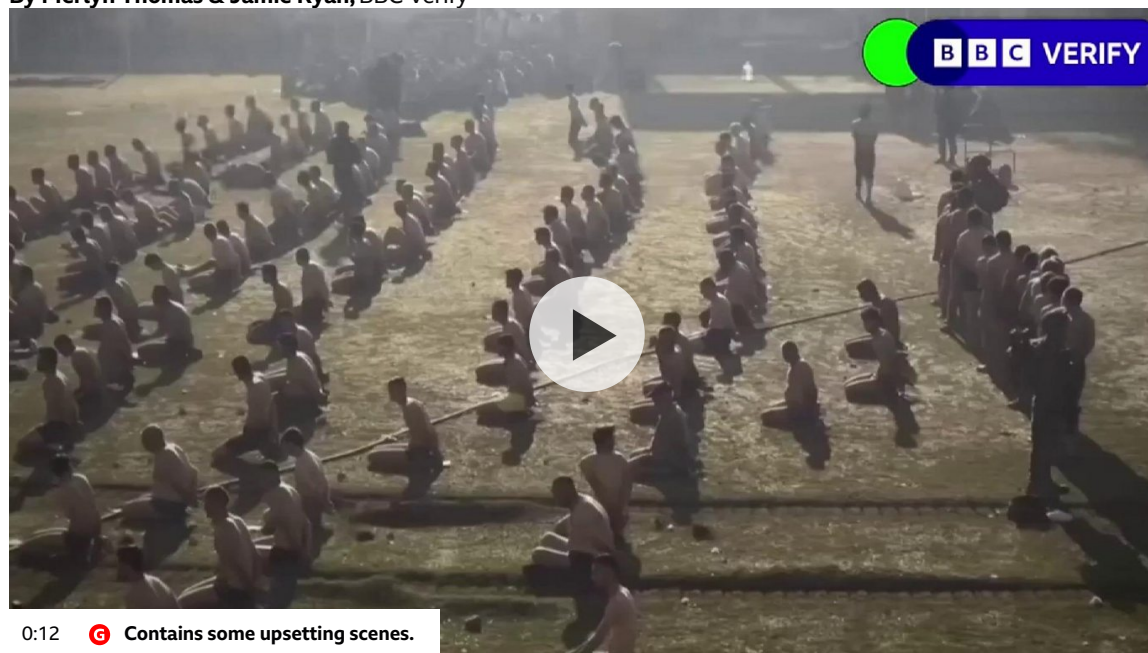
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Israeli soldier videos from Gaza could breach international law, experts say

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By Merlyn Thomas & Jamie Ryan, BBC Verify



0:12 Contains some upsetting scenes.

BBC Verify found videos posted online showing Gaza detainees bound and blindfolded - this video was posted on 24 December 2023

Videos of Gazan detainees stripped, bound and blindfolded that were filmed and uploaded online by Israeli soldiers could breach international law, legal experts say.

International law says detainees must not be exposed to unnecessary humiliation or public curiosity.

BBC Verify looked at hundreds of videos openly shared by Israeli soldiers in Gaza since November 2023. We verified eight showing detainees.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) says it has terminated the service of one of the reservists we identified, and videos like these do not represent its values. It did not respond to any further request for comment.

Dr Mark Ellis, a leading expert and chair of a UN-created advisory panel on international criminal tribunals, said the footage we showed him from Israeli soldiers might violate the recognised rules for treating prisoners of war.

Serving soldiers

Most of the videos we analysed show scenes of fighting and soldiers looking through homes abandoned by residents.

One video shows soldiers launching weapons dressed up as dinosaurs, and others show them setting up a pizza restaurant in an empty Palestinian home.

But we found eight, filmed and shared publicly, which legal experts say show the ill-treatment of Palestinian detainees.

They were all posted by men who are or were serving soldiers, who did not hide their identity.

We uncovered one account by analysing an image of a Palestinian detainee which was widely shared online earlier this week. Reverse image search tools show it came from the YouTube account of Israeli soldier Yossi Gamzoo.

He has uploaded multiple videos from Gaza since early December, including shots of his troop, which he identifies as the Granite Battalion 932, which is part of the IDF's Nahal Brigade.

In a video posted on 24 December 2023, the Palestinian detainee from the image is shown stripped and bleeding with his hands bound and sat on a chair while being interrogated.



An IDF soldier interrogates a detainee in Gaza

We identified the location as Gaza College, a school in the north of the strip, from the distinctive decor as well as the institution's logo which can be seen in the video and which we matched to its Facebook page.

Later in the same video, the detainee is seen being marched barefoot through the streets of Gaza.

In a statement, the IDF said: "The photo was taken during a field questioning. The suspect was not injured. A reservist photographed and published the picture contrary to IDF orders and values. It was recently decided to terminate his reserve service."

Videos removed

On the same day, Mr Gamzoo posted another YouTube video showing hundreds of Palestinian detainees gathered in a sports field, which we geolocated and verified as Gaza's Yarmouk stadium.

Most of those in the video have been stripped to their underwear. Some are blindfolded and kneeling on the ground in ordered rows, while Israeli soldiers watch on.

At one point, a group including three women detainees appear kneeling and blindfolded behind a football goal with an Israeli flag hung above it.



Detainees appear in a video posted online by an IDF soldier

An Israeli soldier appears in the video several times, and appears aware he is being filmed.

By comparing his uniform and insignia with other publicly available images of IDF uniform online, we identified him as lieutenant colonel, or battalion commander. Both videos were taken down from Mr Gamzoo's public YouTube page soon after the BBC contacted the IDF.

Code of ethics

Two videos uploaded to TikTok by another IDF soldier include pictures of blindfolded detainees, interspersed with images of soldiers posing with guns.

One posted on 14 December, set to an Israeli rap song, includes an image of blindfolded detainees packed into a pick-up truck with a soldier posing next to them with his thumbs up.

We identified the soldier from his other social media accounts as Ilya Blank.



An IDF soldier stands on a pickup truck with blindfolded detainees

He posted a second video that includes an image of a blindfolded man on the floor, surrounded by what appear to be three IDF soldiers.

We have located a number of the photos used in his videos to northern Gaza.

After we contacted the IDF and TikTok, the videos were taken down.

Article 13 of the Third Geneva Convention states prisoners of war must be protected at all times, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against "insults and public curiosity".

Dr Ellis, who is executive director of the International Bar Association, says the key is "not creating a public curiosity" for prisoners of war and not "degrading them or humiliating them".

He added: "The idea of walking people through in their underwear and filming that and sending it out certainly would violate that.

"The rules that are set down would not in any way allow this type of act."

Prof Asa Kasher, an Israeli academic who helped write the IDF's first code of conduct, said sharing the pictures of half-naked people was against the IDF's code of ethics.

He said there could be a military need to briefly strip a detainee in order to check if they were armed, but that he could not see a reason for "taking such a picture and sharing it with the public".

"The reason for holding them half-naked is to humiliate them," he said.

Human rights lawyer Michael Mansfield said the footage should be assessed by a UN court.

"There is a very severe restriction on how you deal with people who are detained who are prisoners of war in a time of war or conflict, which this plainly is, and that provision is really one in which you are intended to treat prisoners with respect," he said.

We sent six videos to TikTok, who confirmed that they were all in violation of their community guidelines. They said their guidelines were clear that content "that seeks to degrade victims of violent tragedies" was not tolerated. The videos have all since disappeared from the platform.

A spokesperson for YouTube said it had removed tens of thousands of harmful videos and terminated thousands of channels during the conflict between Israel and Gaza, and that it had teams working around the clock to monitor for harmful footage content.

Additional reporting by: Paul Brown, Alex Murray, Thomas Spencer, Paul Myers, Richard Irvine-Brown and Daniele Palumbo.

Correction 26 February: An earlier version of this article referred to a Yossi Gamzoo Letova (the name given on social media profiles). The Israeli embassy in London has subsequently clarified that the IDF said there was previously an IDF reservist named Yossi Gamzoo rather than Yossi Gamzoo Letova.

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