

Editorial (Israel) | On Insecurity Minister Ben-Gvir's Watch, Any Critic of Israel's Government Will Be 'Dealt With'

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People used to warn that if Israeli democracy continued to degenerate, life here would become "like in benighted regimes." There's no longer any reason to say "if" and "like." Israel has become a state in which it's dangerous to be a citizen who opposes the government. This is exactly what benighted regimes look like.

Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Israel Prison Service Chief Kobi Yaakobi, in December. Credit: Moti Milrod

In benighted regimes, the police become the regime's agent of repression, and anyone marked as a public critic of the government automatically becomes a regime opponent who must be "dealt with."

On Tuesday, we received an additional reminder of this. The Israel Police [detained for questioning two activists](#) who were involved in painting a stripe on a Jerusalem road in March 2023 to protest the government coup.

Why did the police suddenly remember to detain the activists, more than 18 months after the incident? Surely not because they were "suspected of defacing real estate," in the language of the police announcement of the arrest. They were detained again because the police are aware of "the spirit of the commander" regarding anti-government activists.

That "spirit" refers not to the official commander, Police Commissioner Danny Levy: He was appointed to faithfully serve his boss, National Insecurity Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. Because police officials are fully cognizant of this, they aim to please Ben-Gvir himself.

Just this week, [promotions](#) were approved for three officers who are close to Ben-Gvir. One is Commander Niso Guetta, who was filmed assaulting a photographer outside the prime minister's residence in Jerusalem in 2020. His promotion reflects the desired "spirit of the commander": Anyone who suppresses protest with an iron fist will be promoted; anyone displaying an understanding of principles, such as the rights of protest and of freedom of expression, will be driven from the force.

The activists' detention comes on top of a much more serious incident: the [show trial](#) planned for the four people charged with firing flares near Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's home in Caesarea. They've been held in custody for over a month, in conditions normally reserved for terrorists, because the prosecution decided to collaborate with the government's growing fascism and to claim they had terrorist motives.

While firing the flares was unwarranted and should be punished, the disproportionate way authorities have handled this case is meant to send a message: This will be done to anyone who dares to oppose the government, they will languish in the police's cellar lockup and then spend years in prison. That is also why, after MK Gilad Kariv (The Democrats party) visited the four this week, they were [subjected to a strip search](#).

The government is acting like an oppressive regime that rides roughshod over its citizens. The police are an instrument in its hands, and the prosecution collaborates. The opposition must wake up before it is silenced completely, and the public must go out and demonstrate against this illegitimate regime, before it's too late.

Haaretz Editorial

P.S.

- Haaretz. Dec 19, 2024:
<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/2024-12-19/ty-article-opinion/on-insecurity-minister-ben-gvirs-watch-any-critic-of-the-govt-will-be-dealt-with/00000193-e0ac-d93a-abd3-eaeceacb0000>
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