

## **“Death to the IDF”: A Call for Dismantlement and Accountability for Crimes in Gaza**

On Saturday, June 28, 2025, the punk duo Bob Vylan led chants of “Death to the IDF” during their performance at Glastonbury Festival. The chant drew widespread condemnation from pro-Israel politicians and lobbying groups, who framed it as incitement to violence. However, this interpretation misrepresents the chant’s intent. This essay argues that the chant should be understood as a legitimate and morally urgent demand to dismantle the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) as an institution and to hold accountable individuals responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts that may amount to genocide, in accordance with international law.

### **The Scale and Nature of the Atrocities**

The scale of destruction and loss of life in Gaza since October 7, 2023, is immense. The Gaza Ministry of Health reports over 62,000 confirmed direct deaths, while broader estimates project a total toll nearing 500,000 when accounting for indirect deaths from famine, healthcare collapse, and unaccounted individuals potentially buried under rubble. A 2024 *Lancet* study projected up to 186,000 indirect deaths, and Harvard research highlighted 377,000 missing persons. Israeli policy statements referencing plans to relocate 1.8 million of Gaza’s pre-war 2.3 million residents imply a drastic population reduction. Satellite data (Statista, June 2025) shows that 70% of buildings are damaged or destroyed, with 75% uninhabitable and half reduced to rubble. The destruction of infrastructure—including hospitals, water facilities, and sanitation systems—coupled with the maiming of 25,000 individuals, many of them children, fulfills multiple criteria under the Genocide Convention: mass killings, infliction of serious harm, destruction of essential living conditions, prevention of births through environmental and medical collapse, and forced displacement.

These outcomes result from deliberate policies by the Israeli government. Prime Minister Netanyahu has overseen military operations; Finance Minister Smotrich has obstructed humanitarian aid; Defense Minister Gallant initiated the “human animals” siege; and Foreign Minister Katz has supported devastating measures. The IDF has not merely executed orders but celebrated its actions. Investigations by *Haaretz* and *Fathom* reveal IDF psychological operations units disseminating graphic content of Palestinian casualties with dehumanizing captions via unofficial channels. These actions reflect not isolated misconduct but a systemic culture of impunity and violence.

### **Interpreting the Chant: A Political and Legal Demand**

The chant “Death to the IDF,” echoed by a large crowd at Glastonbury, is not a literal call for violence against individual soldiers. Rather, it expresses a demand for the dissolution of an institution that has systematically engaged in conduct violating international humani-

tarian law. This interpretation aligns with historical precedents, such as the Allied decision to dismantle the Nazi Wehrmacht after World War II.

Calls to dismantle militaries implicated in mass atrocities are not new. This chant symbolizes the moral and legal necessity of ending the operational capacity of the IDF and holding accountable those who bear individual responsibility for violations—including military commanders, political leaders, and soldiers who participated in or enabled unlawful acts. It reflects a symbolic and political rejection of a military force that, as currently constituted, operates outside the bounds of legality and humanity.

### **Legal Context: Occupation, Not War**

Article 51 of the UN Charter permits self-defense in response to armed attacks by states, a provision not applicable here. Gaza is not recognized by Israel or most of the international community as a sovereign state, and Hamas is considered a non-state actor. Under international law, Israel remains the occupying power in Gaza, bound by the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), which restricts the use of military force against the occupied population.

Military actions such as sieges, bombings, and the targeting of civilian infrastructure fall outside the scope of legitimate policing under Article 27 of the Convention. The scale of response—500,000 estimated deaths in Gaza versus 1,200 Israeli casualties on October 7, 2023—demonstrates a grossly disproportionate and unlawful use of force. This context reinforces the claim that Israel's conduct does not meet the legal threshold for self-defense, but rather constitutes an illegal occupation and potential acts of genocide.

### **Historical Precedent: Nuremberg and Individual Responsibility**

The Nuremberg Trials established that obeying orders does not absolve individuals from responsibility for war crimes or genocide. The London Charter and Nuremberg Principle IV affirm the obligation to disobey illegal commands. These principles underpin military codes globally, including the IDF's own ethical framework, which requires soldiers to refuse unlawful orders.

Documents circulated by international lawyer Itay Epshtain show Israeli lawmakers ordering destruction of civilian infrastructure and denial of essentials, directives that are plainly illegal. The IDF's execution of such policies—coupled with boasting and celebratory rhetoric on social media—demonstrates willing and knowing participation. These actions mirror the kinds of offenses prosecuted after World War II and underscore the necessity of individual accountability.

### **The Moral Imperative for Dismantlement**

Despite provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice in January 2024 and the ongoing investigation by the International Criminal Court, international mechanisms have so far failed to prevent mass suffering. The estimated death toll and destruction in Gaza demand decisive action: dismantling the IDF as it currently exists and prosecuting individuals at all levels who have committed or enabled crimes.

This is not a call for vengeance but for justice. Dismantling an institution that facilitates war crimes would uphold the international legal order and deter future atrocities. The IDF's internal culture—as evidenced by public celebrations of destruction—underscores the urgency of institutional disbandment and reconstitution under lawful and ethical norms.

### **Addressing Hypocrisy in Rhetorical Standards**

Framing the Glastonbury chant as incitement, while tolerating far more explicit hate speech by Israeli officials and citizens, exposes a double standard. Since at least 2021, during Jerusalem Day marches, crowds including government figures such as Itamar Ben Gvir have chanted “Death to Arabs,” a slogan accompanied by physical assaults on Palestinians. These expressions of ethnic hatred are largely normalized in Israeli public discourse.

In contrast, the Glastonbury chant targets a military institution, not an ethnic or religious group, and calls for its dismantlement due to its involvement in mass atrocities. To conflate this with incitement to violence is to misrepresent its content and intent while ignoring more overt and dangerous rhetoric tolerated elsewhere.

### **Anticipating Counterarguments**

Some may argue that Israel's actions are defensive responses to Hamas attacks. However, under international law, occupying powers are not entitled to invoke self-defense in the same way sovereign states are. The disproportionate impact, targeting of civilians, and documented celebration of violence invalidate claims of legitimate defense.

Others may warn of political instability resulting from dismantling the IDF. Yet history shows that tolerating impunity leads to deeper instability and further atrocities. As with the delayed Allied response to the Holocaust, inaction in the face of genocide becomes a moral and historical failure.

### **Conclusion**

The events in Gaza represent one of the gravest humanitarian and legal crises of the 21st century. With an estimated 500,000 deaths, the IDF's operations—authorized by leaders like Netanyahu, Smotrich, Gallant, and Katz—have crossed into the territory of systematic atrocities. The chant “Death to the IDF” must be understood not as a call for violence, but as a political and legal demand for dismantling a military institution implicated in crimes against humanity and genocide.

The international community must act decisively: dismantle the IDF in its current form and hold accountable all individuals, from commanders to political leaders, with demonstrable responsibility for these crimes. Doing so will reaffirm the principle that no military force can act with impunity and will uphold the legacy of Nuremberg, where justice prevailed not through silence, but through accountability.