

es to the Palestinian territories to end the Israeli occupation  Egyptian delegation endeavour to dismantle the Palestinian crisis  Han

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Questionnaire

What should Palestinians fear most?

- Israeli occupation
- Security chaos
- Inter-Palestinian fighting
- Interference by other global parties

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Main News

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Exit Denied: An Escalation in the Campaign of Ethnic Cleansing - By Noura Khouri

Date: 26 / 01 / 2007 Time: 19:00

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BETHLEHEM - At around 12:30 am last night I was heading back to Bethlehem, by myself, from Ramallah as to avoid the early morning delay at the dreaded Qalandia terminal. At night there are very few cars , so I thought I'd take advantage and avoid the waiting and anxiousness to cross such a barrier causes. On some level, everyone must confront the mental and emotional anguish brought on by such confrontations.



Crossing Qalandia on foot (MaanImages Archive)

This time, however, I was driving confidently towards my destination, armed with my newly issued visa in hand. I was prepared for the journey.

Or so I thought.

I pulled up to the first gate, where they rarely check ID's since this is the first passage, the further scrutinizing is normally done at the following point.

Regardless, I held up my passport, as I always do to show the soldier my precious piece of blue laminated cardboard and paper. Then, instead of the regular nod of the head and lifting of the gate, came the sanctimonious voices from above, in Hebrew, from the loud speakers. I looked more closely to see what was going on, but through the bullet-proof windows, gates and darkness of the night, all I could see were the heels of shoes kicked up, and the burning butt of a cigarette being smugly smoked.

I asked the soldier what was going on, and what the problem was. He replied in his perfect British accent, "Just because you wave around your American passport, you think you can get through here?!"

Yes, of course I do. That is how it is supposed to work!



After about a five minute standoff an exercise in patience and breathing techniques, I asked in the calmest voice I could, what his name was. He told me, "Daniel". I asked Daniel if I had done something wrong. He repeated the bit about waving around my American passport.

My responses clearly did not satisfy him, and I am not sure anything I said would have. So I began on - about occupation, and collective punishment. As the queue was growing quite long behind me at this point,I asked if he was holding us here for security. Then his African counterpart chimed in. She said, "yes, they are all terrorists!" in the only English words I heard her utter. Then I asked them if they had ever heard of international law. Daniel asserted, "Here, this is my law".

Then he spoke into his walkie-talkie, and let me though.

Immediately as I pulled forward, there were three soldiers lined up in a military formation. When I pulled up in front of them, the female soldier, who later told me her name was "Suzanne", yelled at me in Hebrew to reverse, and go back. After doing so, she went on to attempt to intimidate me with her mean looking snarls, and loud voice. When she asked, I showed her inside my trunk, to prove that I do not have a bomb. It was then that she told me to empty the contents onto the ground...that is when I told

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her that I would not empty the books that I had in there, and she got really angry. So I told her if she wanted my books on the ground, she would have to put them there, as I would absolutely not.

This did not satisfy her insatiable appetite for meanness and oppression, so then she began mocking me, making fun of my name and told me that I was not allowed to pass through the checkpoint, and I must return to Ramallah -- as she threw my passport at me.

If one feels the slightest bit of indignation and sense of injustice by stories of such ongoing and clear ABUSES OF POWER, and the suffering that is caused by the checkpoints, it is not even possible to begin to imagine the feelings of rage, degradation and trauma one is left with after such first hand experiences. And the treatment I received was just the tip of the iceberg.

It is not even certain that these were soldiers. OCHA recently announced that "Private Security Companies (SC)" had taken over the manning of this checkpoint – and that others are to follow. These private contractors are illegal according to international law, because they are accountable to none!

While these armed thugs are behaving this way with me, with complete immunity, I am afraid to see how they treat the more vulnerable among us. These soldiers, or whoever they are, are now making up their own laws and rules. They no longer even have to uphold a pretense of a chain of command, army rules to follow, or respect for international law.

And yet, this is just the beginning of the IDF's attack on travel and freedom of movement in the West Bank. The IDF has recently announced that the permit system which makes it impossible to travel to Gaza, which gives Israel 'carte blanche' to impose its deadly policies, will become the norm in the West Bank. Thus, it is clear that Israel is stepping up its planned campaign to create Qalandia as this international border of entry into the Palestinian islands of prisons. Accountable to no standards of law itself, the IDF unabashedly admitted that the 44 roadblocks they supposedly 'eased restrictions' of, never even existed!

Simultaneously they are working 24-hours a day, 365 days a year, to expand the existing settlements for the likes of immigrants such as Suzanne and Daniel who are taking their cues from the Israeli government, who, in turn, are in the process of completing 24 tunnels for Palestinians to drive underground in - which will connect this prison of Palestinian islands - and cement the 56 settler-only roads above ground, for Jews only to travel on!

While Palestinians hope for a political solution to ease the sheer insanity that Israel has imposed on them, creating every possible misery in their lives; it is the Israeli government's hope and future vision to bring Gaza to the West Bank. We can not possibly begin to imagine what this will mean on every insidious level.

The map is drawn. The underground tunnels for the Palestinians are being dug. The settler-only roads are already in place. All they need to do now is connect the dots - that will be our dear Palestine. It is just a matter of time.

Noura Khouri is a Palestinian-American currently based in Bethlehem, West Bank

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