

## Checkpoints in Palestine

As you drive into California from Oregon, you will be stopped at a border checkpoint. You will be asked whether you're bringing in fruits or vegetables which were purchased outside of California. If you answer "no," then you will be allowed to proceed. The impact this has on your life will be fairly inconsequential.

Now, imagine that you must pass through a checkpoint in order to leave Berkeley and travel to any other city, even Oakland. Imagine, furthermore, that hundreds of dirt and concrete obstacles block your access to roads in Berkeley. The impediments to your movement will now have a greater impact on your daily life.

Imagine, furthermore, that these checkpoints and roadblocks are placed there by the Oregon State Police, who can issue—by decree—any arbitrary regulations about who can pass at what times and under what conditions. There is no legal framework in which you are guaranteed access to medical care, to your workplace, to your school, or to the market. You are at the mercy of the police.

Finally, imagine that Oregon declares all unincorporated areas outside of Berkeley's city limits to be "Oregon State Lands." Only the Oregon State Police can grant permits to build on this land, and they have an unstated but very obvious policy of refusing such permits to any Berkeley resident.

You would inevitably conclude that the checkpoints are inhumane on the one hand, and primarily serve Oregon's desire to control land in California on the other hand.

For Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank, the checkpoints and other impediments to movement are simply a means for Israel to control all activity in the West Bank, particularly land-use policy. They also make it easy to collectively punish the entire Palestinian population on short notice.

It is important to understand the geographical distribution of these checkpoints and roadblocks. ***The vast majority are not on the Green Line, which is what most of the International Community considers the border between Israel and the West Bank.*** There are 26 checkpoints "between" the West Bank and Israel, many of which are not actually on the Green Line, but instead are gates in the Annexation Wall, which Israel illegally built inside the West Bank to incorporate private Palestinian land into Israel. Only those checkpoints which are actually on the Green Line might be considered analogous to the checkpoints along the Oregon-California border. The vast majority, however, are internal to the West Bank:

- 27 permanently staffed checkpoints which block movement between different Palestinian cities.
- 16 temporarily staffed checkpoints which are manned when the West Bank is put under closure.
- 12 checkpoints in Hebron.
- Hundreds of earth and concrete barriers blocking roads from village to village, from city to city, and sometimes completely preventing any movement outside of a city at all. At any time, there could be some armed soldiers present, effectively putting these on par with "real" checkpoints.

These impediments allow for the efficient imposition of curfews on the West Bank. During the Second Intifada (2000-2005), the Israeli military (IDF) would place whole villages under curfew if some of the residents were suspected of throwing stones at Israeli cars. Towns from which suicide bombers came were treated even more harshly, including cities like Nablus with over 100,000 people. Curfews, furthermore, were enforced with live fire, in accordance with revised IDF regulations designed to clamp down on any sort of Palestinian uprising—violent or otherwise—with an iron fist. (Source: B'tselem)

Abuse at these checkpoints is rampant and well-documented. It includes:

- Beatings
- Verbal abuse
- Confiscation of car keys for extended periods of time and the puncturing of tires
- Confiscation or desecration of identification documents
- The constant presence of guns as a means of intimidation.

These are apart from the structural abuses which are inherent to the checkpoint regime:

- ❖ The frequent inability for ambulances to pass through checkpoints, which has led to:
  - Deaths
  - Serious injuries
  - Women giving birth at checkpoints, resulting in death or injury to both the baby and the mother.
- ❖ Blocked access to food, water, and other necessary supplies, particularly when villages or cities are placed under curfew. The result, predictably, has been malnutrition.
- ❖ Denial of access to schools /universities, greatly impeding Palestinian youth from leading normal lives.
- ❖ Separation of families who often have relatives throughout the West Bank.
- ❖ Denial of access to work, greatly exasperating unemployment in the West Bank.
- ❖ An insistence on coordination with the Israeli Civil Administration –i.e. the bureaucratic wing of the military government—for any sort of humanitarian exception to these draconian measures. This is a humiliating demand that Palestinians accept the legitimacy of the foreign military which rules them.
- ❖ A near inability for Palestinians to resist –physically, but non-violently, through building and agriculture—Israel’s self-serving and illegal land-use policies in the West Bank.

To understand these policies, and how the checkpoint regime serves them, it is necessary to understand the political geography of the West Bank since the Oslo accords of 1993-1995.

- ✓ Area A is under the complete control of the Palestinian authority, although since 2000, Israel has frequently re-invaded area A and occupied parts of it for extended periods of time. **Area A is only 18% of the West Bank.**
- ✓ Area B is under Palestinian administrative control but Israeli security control. This accounts for many small villages throughout the West Bank which, in effect, are ruled in all regards by the IDF. Area B is about 24% of the West Bank.
- ✓ **Nearly 60% of the West Bank is Area C, over which Israel claims complete administrative and military sovereignty, and which Israel considers “Israel State Lands.”** Much of this land was expropriated from Palestinian owners, and the rest was claimed through the selective use of old Ottoman land laws. Building and habitation by Jewish Israeli settlers is highly encouraged and easily approved by the Civil Administration, while building and –in effect—residence by Palestinians is almost entirely prohibited.
- ✓ The result is that Palestinians have almost no control over their own lives, anywhere in the West Bank. The regions in which they have some degree of autonomy are simply hundreds of islands surrounded by the IDF-controlled sea known as “Area C.” The Government of Israel formally claims the Occupation of the West Bank ended in 1995. This is a lie.

Israeli civilians have been attacked by Palestinians from the West Bank, but only the checkpoints along the Green Line actually serve to prevent those attacks. Even those are not so effective: “leading officials in Israel’s security establishment have admitted that, absent a physical border between the West Bank and Israel, comprehensive closure contributes very little to preventing perpetrators of attacks from infiltrating into Israel.” (Source: B’Tselem). Only a political agreement which most Palestinians find acceptable –which must respect their human, political, national, and property rights—will guarantee safety for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank serve to deny Palestinians access to their own land which is constantly being expropriated and exploited from underneath them for the sole benefit of Israelis. The checkpoint regime is not a security measure: it is an apartheid regime.

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