



# Selections from the Press

16 FEBRUARY–15 MAY 2016

This section includes articles and news items that are not readily available in the mainstream U.S. media and provide insightful or illuminating perspectives on events, developments, or trends in Israel and the occupied territories. They have not been edited to conform with *JPS* style.

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## MUNIR NUSEIBAH, “ISRAEL’S DANGEROUS NEW TRANSFER TACTIC IN JERUSALEM,” AL-SHABAKA

12 APRIL 2016

Israel is adept at creating new Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons, taking advantage of every opportunity to do so and exploiting temporary crises to promote permanent measures. Today, it is using the recent violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) to introduce a dangerous new twist to its long-standing residency revocation policy to force Palestinians out of East Jerusalem.

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This new concept—”breach of allegiance” to the state of Israel—is now being used to revoke the residency of Palestinian Jerusalemites, in addition to possible demolition of their family homes. The Israeli government is describing these actions as regular law enforcement measures, but analysis shows that they are part of its ongoing policies of forced displacement, with the aim of making long-term demographic changes and maintaining an overwhelming Jewish majority in Jerusalem.

The Israeli legal system and the military establishment have, since 1948, used several methods to minimize the number of Palestinians in the areas that fall under Israeli control, as I have described in an earlier Al-Shabaka policy brief [Decades of Displacing Palestinians: How Israel Does It](#). These measures have included armed force, restrictions on the civil status of Palestinians, restrictions on building, and dispossession of property (especially real estate), among others forcing the majority of the Palestinian population into becoming refugees or internally displaced.

The latest Israeli shift marks a turning point that is likely to produce thousands of new population transfer victims. It is the third such regulatory turning point in Israel’s efforts to “thin out” Jerusalem’s Palestinian population, as will be discussed below. Forced displacement of Palestinians is part of Israel’s legal system: this needs to be understood and more forcefully countered by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the international community as it is being done by human rights organizations in a new campaign.

#### TURNING POINTS 1 AND 2: “CENTER OF LIFE”

Israel’s ongoing policy of residency revocation is grounded in the increasingly explicit position that the Palestinians in Jerusalem are no more than foreign immigrants who can be easily transferred outside what Israel considers its sovereign territory. After Israel occupied and illegally annexed East Jerusalem in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, it considered Palestinian Jerusalemites “residents” in Israel, without the right to vote in the Israeli Parliament, so as to avoid adding large numbers of non-Jews to its citizen body. As time passed, the Ministry of Interior, with the consent of the Israeli Supreme Court, developed creative ways to revoke this tenuous status. As a result, since 1967 more than [14,000 Jerusalem residencies](#) have been revoked, most of them after the so-called peace process started in the early 1990s.

Successive Israeli governments have cleverly chosen the timing of new regulatory turning points to broaden the scope of residency revocations, manipulating temporary crises to do so. Two high-profile cases helped shape the pillars of the present residency revocation regime. The first was the case of the peace activist [Mubarak Awad](#), who moved to the United States in 1970, where he married an American citizen. Awad was active in promoting nonviolent resistance before and during the First Intifada, the popular Palestinian uprising between 1987 and 1991. In 1987, he applied to the Ministry of Interior to renew his Jerusalem ID card only to learn that his Israeli residency had been revoked as a result of his stay in the U.S. and the fact that he had received American citizenship. In hindsight, this is especially ironic now that some 15% of the settlers displacing Palestinians in the OPT are Israeli American Jews.

Awad subsequently [filed a petition](#) in the Israeli Supreme Court where he explained that his right to live in his hometown should not be compromised as a result of his stay abroad. He argued that Palestinian Jerusalemites should have an irrevocable residency status since they could not be

considered mere immigrants to Israel. The Supreme Court rejected his argument and approved the revocation of his residency. In a statement that defies belief, the Court noted that his political views were a consideration that the Ministry of Interior took into account when it decided to revoke his residency.

To support this argument, the ministry had attached the opinion of an Israeli Security Agency (Shabak) official, who went by the alias “Yossi,” to the effect that Awad advocated a one-state solution and called for civil disobedience. While the Court did not explicitly ground its decision on this opinion, it frequently referred to it in its verdict. Creating a new precedent, the Court determined that residency status could be denied when a resident’s “center of life” was no longer in Israel. Beyond Awad’s personal tragedy, what is particularly important is that this legal precedent was subsequently used to deny the residency status of thousands of Jerusalemites.

In 1995, the Supreme Court issued another pivotal verdict against [Fathiyya Shiqaqi](#), the wife of Fathi Shiqaqi, founder of the Islamic Jihad Movement. A Jerusalem resident, Shiqaqi was forced to move with her deported husband to Syria in 1988. Six years later she returned to Jerusalem and sought to renew her ID card and register her three children. The Ministry of Interior rejected her request and ordered her to leave the country. Up to this date, Israel had revoked residencies subject to a [written ordinance](#) by the ministry if the resident was absent for seven straight years or received a foreign permanent residency or citizenship. Although Shiqaqi’s case did not meet these stipulations, the Supreme Court still approved the revocation of her residency, given that Shiqaqi lived abroad with her husband and her “center of life” was no longer in Israel.

After this second turning point thousands of Palestinian residents who lived outside Jerusalem’s municipal borders in the West Bank, Gaza or abroad began losing their residency status. This large number of victims of forced displacement were not necessarily involved in any political activity. The revocation of their residency depended solely on the “center of life” criterion.

These two important cases seem to have been carefully chosen. In Jewish Israeli society, very few would empathize with the plight of an academic calling for civil disobedience or the wife of an Islamic jihadist. However, once these precedents were in place, the entire Palestinian population of Jerusalem came under threat.

### TURNING POINT 3: “BREACH OF ALLEGIANCE”

The latest turning point in Israel’s revocation policy has its roots in the revocation by the Israeli Ministry of Interior of three elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) as well as the Palestinian Minister of Jerusalem Affairs, in 2006. The ministry claimed that they had violated their “minimal obligation of loyalty to the State of Israel” by their election to the PLC and their affiliation with Hamas. Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations were outraged by the introduction of “allegiance” as a new legal civil status criterion, and the case has been pending at the Israeli Supreme Court since 2006. Should the Supreme Court approve this measure, Israeli authorities will be equipped with a new pretext for forced displacement, as Hassan Jabareen, director of the Haifa-based human rights organization Adalah, has stated.

However, the recent outbreak of violence in the OPT provided Israel an opportunity to act without having to wait for the Supreme Court’s verdict. As early as October 14th, 2015, the Israeli

“Security Cabinet” issued a decision to the effect that “the permanent residency rights of terrorists will be revoked,” without defining who was a terrorist. One week later, the Ministry of Interior notified four Palestinians, suspected of committing violent acts against Israeli citizens (three of them were accused of throwing stones), that the minister was considering using his discretionary power to revoke their residencies because the criminal acts they were accused of showed a “clear breach of allegiance” to the state of Israel. In January 2016, the ministry issued official residency revocation decisions against the four Jerusalemites.

Thus, it is no longer enough for a Palestinian Jerusalemite to be actually living in Jerusalem and to maintain his/her center of life in the city. Palestinian Jerusalemites are now expected to commit to the new undefined criterion of “allegiance.” The Israeli human rights organization HaMoked, which is based in Jerusalem, has challenged this new policy in the Israeli Supreme Court. However, the Court has not yet decided the case. Similarly, the case of the four Palestinian political leaders whose residency was revoked in 2006 is still pending.

No one knows yet how many residencies have been revoked according to the relatively new criterion of “allegiance,” but at least a few more cases are pending in the Supreme Court. HaMoked has made an application based on the freedom of information act to force the Ministry of Interior [to] reveal this information.

It is worth noting that international humanitarian law forbids the expectation of allegiance from a population under occupation. Thus, justifying a residency revocation due to a “breach of allegiance” is counter to international law. Furthermore, there is no justification to revoke the residency of anyone suspected of an act of violence because the Israeli criminal court system already punishes any violent—as well as many non-violent—acts committed by Palestinians.

From a broader legal and historical perspective, Israel should remember that forced displacement is a war crime when implemented in an occupied territory and a crime against humanity if it is widespread or systematic. The Israeli government’s latest measures combined with its existing ones would meet the criterion of systematic displacement tantamount to a crime against humanity.

## RESISTING THE POLICY OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT

The struggle against residency revocations in Jerusalem has mostly taken place in Israeli courtrooms and has, in general, so far been lost. The attempts by several Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations to argue at the Israeli Supreme Court that Jerusalemites are not immigrants but natives who have an unconditional right to live in their own city have failed. The Israeli Supreme Court has maintained that a Palestinian Jerusalemite’s right to live in East Jerusalem should continue to be at the discretionary power of the Minister of Interior. The current right wing government of Israel is using this discretion to fast-track the removal of as many Palestinians from Jerusalem as possible.

In addition, there are no clear counter measures on the diplomatic and international levels against Israel’s punitive acts. The PLO has secured the recognition of the State of Palestine by the UN General Assembly, and then joined a number of important human rights and international humanitarian law conventions including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

(ICC). However, it is not yet clear what use the State of Palestine is planning to make of this status and these conventions to resist residency revocations in Jerusalem.

Most of the advocacy after Palestine joined the ICC has been focused on crimes that took place during the war on Gaza, which is obviously important. However, I would argue that the issue of forced displacement is no less important. In Jerusalem and in other parts of the West Bank, forced displacement is part of Israel's legal regime. It is given expression through Israeli laws, administrative orders and court decisions. In the specific case of Jerusalem, Israeli administrative and legal institutions do not even consider international law arguments because Israel considers Jerusalem to be Israeli and not occupied territory.

Israel needs to get a strong message from international legal institutions and diplomatic circles that, regardless of the Israeli definition, the international community considers Jerusalem occupied and the transfer of its civilians as a criminal offense.

Against this background, several Palestinian human rights organizations in East Jerusalem and elsewhere across the West Bank (Al-Quds University's Community Action Center, St. Yves, Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center [JLAC], the Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem, Badil, Al-Haq and Al-Quds Human Rights Clinic) have recently launched a campaign to resist Israel's new transfer policies against Jerusalemites. The campaign began by [taking this issue to the UN Human Rights Council to raise it before international diplomats and human rights practitioners](#).

The campaign has decided to focus on ending punitive residency revocations because this has not yet been approved by the Israeli Supreme Court, making it easier to challenge. If, however, the Court decides that this policy is legitimate, it will be enshrined in the Israeli legal system and will most likely displace many additional Palestinians from Jerusalem.

Palestinian official institutions as well as civil society organizations should work hard against systematic Israeli policies of forced displacement. While Palestinians in general feel that international law has not served the Palestinian cause well, this should not be used as an excuse to give up on the legal struggle. This struggle should not only be aimed at Israel's legal institutions and their discriminatory policies, but it should also be taken to the international level. The Israeli Supreme Court itself might reconsider its endorsement of discriminatory policies if it feels it is under scrutiny.

Whether the pressure of the local Palestinian campaign will reverse the policy of punitive residency revocations remains to be seen. What is certain, however, is that the rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem need much more attention and the issue of residency revocation in Jerusalem needs to be on the agenda. Palestinian lawyers, human rights organizations and officials should take advantage of the momentum offered by Palestine's accession to a number of human rights treaties to increase their pressure on the international community. It is past time for the international community to meet its obligation to take all measures available to end the crime of forced transfer, hold accountable those responsible for such policies and reverse their effects by providing reparations to the victims, including their right to return to their homes. Focused campaigns on single-issue rights may be more effective from an advocacy point of view than general campaigns that aim to raise awareness about multiple injustices.

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## JOHN WASHINGTON, “THE U.S. WANTS TO DEPORT THIS PALESTINIAN—BUT FIRST IT’D HAVE TO RECOGNIZE PALESTINE,” *THE NATION* (EXCERPTS)

28 MARCH 2016

Beginning in besieged Gaza, through Turkey, Greece, Venezuela, Central America, and Mexico, Hisham Shaban Ghalia traveled 10,000 miles—flying, riding buses, walking, and even swimming—to get to the United States. But despite coming to this country to seek asylum from violence and hardship in the Gaza Strip, Shaban has been languishing for the past 16 months in an immigration detention center in Florence, Arizona. According to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Shaban can’t stay in the country. But because of the peculiar legal and diplomatic tangle that Shaban finds himself in, he can’t be sent back home, either. That’s because, according to U.S. law, Shaban has no home to be deported to.

Shaban’s asylum claim was denied last August, but ICE has neither deported him nor released him from custody. Shaban’s lawyer, Liban Yousuf, of the nonprofit Council on American-Islamic Relations, who began representing him pro bono only this January, filed a habeas corpus petition on February 20 (over six months after his asylum claim was denied) asking for Shaban to be granted supervised release, which, though it would provide no legal status, could allow him to work. While the petition is still being reviewed, ICE issued a “Decision to Continue Detention” on February 25, explaining that “ICE is currently working with the Government of Palestine” in order to remove him from U.S. custody. But the fact that the United States does not recognize Palestine as a state has rendered this process difficult. In his case file, ICE documents refer to his home country only within parentheses, his citizenship listed as: “Stateless (Palestine).” Shaban told me, “I have a serious fear that I’ll spend my life here [in detention].” As of publication, he has spent 499 days behind bars.

### BEYOND CITIZENSHIP

“Everyone,” according to Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “has the right to a nationality.” Palestine, in the early decades of the last century, was seen as a home for stateless Jews. Now, it is the Palestinians who are rendered stateless, who are searching for a recognition of their nationality, their home. Neve Gordon, author of *Israel’s Occupation*, explained the peculiar predicament of statelessness: “When a person is stripped of any connection to a state and all that remains is his or her being a human being, that is the moment when they need the most human rights, and they have no rights.”

Worldwide, there are an estimated 15 million stateless persons—what Vincent Chetail, professor of international law at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, called “a growing problem.” The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) however, not counting Palestinians in the figure, puts the worldwide number of stateless at 10 million. Chetail explained that due to “very restrictive legislation” for Palestinians requesting Refugee Status, “there are no other possibilities than to leave their country and enter into another one in an illegal manner.” (Asking for asylum, as Shaban did at the U.S. border, however, is not illegal, according to both U.S. and international law).

According to Article 31 of the UN 1951 Refugee Convention, relating to the Status of Refugees, no signatory country shall “impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees” who come from a territory where their life or freedom was directly threatened. Despite the provision, locking up asylum seekers, against Geneva Conventions, is standard practice in the United States, and elsewhere. “The problem,” Chetail explained, “is that under international law, detention should be a last resort, but in practice, they are using detention as a deterrent measure.”

There are no clear estimates as to how many stateless persons are in the United States. Between 2005 and 2010, according to statistics from the Executive Office of Immigration Review gathered in the UNHCR “Citizens of Nowhere” report, there were 1,087 asylum requests in the U.S. from people listed as Stateless or “No Nationality.” And yet, “because of their vulnerability and lack of access to rights and privileges in the United States, it is believed that many stateless individuals in the country remain under-ground and hidden.” An ICE official told me, via e-mail, that “as of March 14, 2016, ICE does not have any individuals classified as stateless.” Shaban, however, listed by ICE as “stateless,” was in detention on March 14, and he still is.

#### SEEKING ASYLUM

Though Shaban cites economic hardship, high levels of unemployment, pollution, consistent blackouts, and hunger—a reality lived by nearly 2 million Palestinians in the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip—as reasons for fleeing his home, he has also suffered through extreme violence at the hands of both Hamas and Israel.

Shaban’s house was damaged by an Israeli rocket in 2008 during the Israeli military’s Operation Cast Lead. When I spoke with Jawad Chalan, a close family friend of Shaban’s who had fled Gaza with him, he told me that local Hamas officials acted like a mafia in their home town of Jabaliya, and that if Shaban returned, “He would get hurt. He would get killed.” Because of the presence of retired senior Hamas leaders, Jabaliya has been repeatedly shelled by Israel, whose forces have used “weapons inappropriate for urban areas.” In July 2014, during the U.S.-backed Israeli siege, the same month that Israeli bombs killed 21 people in a Jabaliya elementary school, Shaban’s 4-year-old cousin, Yasmin Mohammed Mutawwaq, was killed by an Israeli bomb. [. . .]

Shaban fled Gaza in 2010 for Turkey, in search of asylum. From Turkey he was sent to the Kofinou Refugee Camp on the Greek side of Cyprus, where he first met a fellow Gazan, Mounis Hammouda. Opportunities in the Refugee Camp were almost as bleak as in Gaza. Shaban and Hammouda only ate twice a day. Hammouda told me there was no chance for employment: “No job, no school, no family.” They decided to leave Cyprus “to look for life.”

The men told me they were able to obtain visas to travel to Venezuela, where they remained for one week. From there they flew to Nicaragua, briefly found work, and met with a UN official who helped them obtain temporary visas. Despite the visas, they were detained and spent two nights in detention. In a hotel where they were living they met a Cuban woman, who they referred to simply as “Cuba,” and with her help (she spoke some English) they hired a human smuggler, who they paid \$1,000. Along with “Cuba,” they were passed off to a series of smugglers through Honduras, travelling by bus and foot—climbing through mountainous coffee plantations and swimming across rivers—through Guatemala, and to the border with Mexico. On an evening in

early October of 2014, they swam across the Suchiate River in the pouring rain, entered Mexico, and boarded a bus headed north. That same night they were detained at a checkpoint.

They spent 24 days in a detention center in the state of Chiapas, where they were separated from “Cuba”; they never saw her again. Finally, they were granted a 20-day visa to travel through Mexico on their way to the United States. On November 14, 2014, when they saw the U.S.-Mexico border wall for the first time, they told me, they saw it as a sign of hope. Hammouda said that the United States has always been for him “a place of justice, freedom, mercy.” When they presented themselves to Customs and Border Protection officials, identified themselves as Palestinians and asked for asylum, they were shackled and taken into detention. The trip so far had cost them more than \$20,000, they estimated, which they had borrowed from friends and friends of friends.

They spent one night in a holding cell in Nogales, and were then transferred to Florence, Arizona, where they were detained in the ICE Florence Service Process Center. Initially, both men passed their credible-fear interviews, the first step in the asylum process. Neither of them, however, had, or could afford, legal representation. Months began to tick by. [. . .]

Though Shaban was “medically cleared for custody” on November 25, 2014, only two months later he was also diagnosed with adjustment disorder and mixed anxiety. According to a medical report dating January 26, 2015, he claimed he was feeling “depressed because of his situation,” as well as feeling “worthless” and “having suicidal thoughts.” Seventy-five days into his detention he told medical staff that he felt “he has wasted his life.” Psychological studies have shown that asylum seekers detained for periods longer than six months show greater levels of “PTSD, depression and moderate to severe mental health–related disability.” When I talked to him in early March, he told me, “I am feeling more and more pessimistic.”

According to ICE, they have in the past deported Palestinians by working through the governments of Israel, Jordan, or Egypt, “with careful coordination” and the “utilization of [ICE’s] attaché network.” In the summer of 2015, Shaban and Hammouda’s deportation officer offered to send them to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Malaysia, or Iraq—countries where neither of them have ever been. The men took it as a threat, but they stressed to me that they would go anywhere, as long as they were no longer in detention. Shaban said, “I only care about being free.” The same deportation officer later told them that they might spend the rest of their lives behind bars.

Nearly a year after their initial detention, on August 20, 2015, still without legal representation, Shaban was denied asylum before a judge in Florence, Arizona, for failing “to meet his evidentiary burden”—not producing documents to support his asylum claim. According to a comprehensive study in the *Stanford Law Review*, “whether an asylum seeker is represented in court is the single most important factor affecting the outcome of her case.” Without any help or guidance, barely understanding the proceedings, Shaban represented himself *pro se*. The judge ordered him removed from the United States to Saudi Arabia, or as an alternative, to Israel, a country Shaban has never been to.

The same day he was denied asylum, he signed a waiver giving up his right to appeal the case. He told me that he didn’t understand what he was signing. In the habeas corpus petition Shaban’s lawyer alleges that his “continued detention is unconstitutional” because it “violates his right to substantive



due process,” and deprives him of his freedom. Currently, he awaits a ruling from ICE on the habeas petition. “They can send me to the moon,” Shaban told his friend Jawad Chalan. “I don’t care where they send me. I don’t want to stay in prison.” [ . . . ]

Detention wasn’t easy for either man, though they at least had each other for moral support. Hammouda was released on a \$9,000 bond on March 9 to await his asylum hearing, and now Shaban is almost completely isolated in the detention center. He has trouble contacting his family because of the nine-hour time difference, the exorbitant rates for calls (\$1.25 per minute), and the frequent power outages in Gaza.

Statelessness is not a crime; in fact, it is a status that renders persons especially vulnerable to crime, as well as subject to arbitrary, lengthy, or indefinite detention. According to ICE, Shaban and Hammouda were “transferred to ICE custody pending a review of their cases by the immigration courts.” The review, in Shaban’s case, is over. He was denied asylum, and yet he remains in detention.

#### CONTINUED DETENTION

In the 2001 Supreme Court case *Zadvydas v. Davis*, concerning Kestutis Zadvydas (born in Germany to Lithuanian parents, with neither country granting him citizenship) who was ordered deported in 1994, but would not be accepted by either country, Justice Stephen Breyer, writing for the majority opinion, claimed, “a statute permitting indefinite detention would raise serious constitutional questions. Freedom from imprisonment lies at the heart of the liberty protected by the Due Process Clause.” [ . . . ]

In oral arguments during the *Zadvydas v. Davis* case, the late Justice Antonin Scalia commented, “It is up to you to find a country to get sent back to. The burden is not on us.” An essential aspect of basic human rights—like that of having a state—however, is that they should not need to be invoked, or pleaded and argued for for years in court, for them to be granted. The burden should be on the powers that remove those basic rights—like the right of freedom—to prove why they must be removed.

Shaban, who has been ordered deported, has already met Scalia’s ultimatum, he’s already found a country—the country that he calls home, but was forced to flee from: Palestine. The burden is on the U.S. government to recognize it, or recognize his fear and grant him asylum. At this point, all Shaban wants is to be free.

\* \* \*

**UPDATE—Tuesday, Jun. 7:00 A.M.:** *On May 26, after 559 days in detention, Hisham Shaban was released. His lawyers, confounded by ICE’s unexpected move, suspect that public pressure and their own insistence on continuing to fight for their client gave the government few options. “They couldn’t articulate a reason to keep him [detained],” Liban Yousuf, one of his attorneys, said. Shaban has not been granted legal status, is still in Removal Proceedings, and is still officially “stateless.” He was set free under Supervised Release, which means that ICE is officially still trying to remove him, and that he is left in a sort of indefinite legal limbo. Conditions for Supervised Release include having to check in periodically with ICE officials, having to notify them by letter whenever he leaves the state, and not being able to travel outside the country.*

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## JONATHAN COOK, "ISRAELI TEXTBOOK 'BAD FOR ARABS, BAD FOR JEWS,'" AL JAZEERA

10 MARCH 2016

Leaders of Israel's large Palestinian minority have begun creating an alternative syllabus for Arab schools, in what they are terming "a revolutionary" step towards educational autonomy. It will be the first time in Israel's history that the Palestinian minority has tried to wrest control of the curriculum taught in Arab schools from the Israeli Education Ministry. The move follows the Israeli Education Ministry's decision to revise the civics textbook, a central part of Israel's matriculation exam.

Traditionally, civics has been the only subject that uses the same textbook in both Jewish and Arab schools. The changes have triggered a wave of protest from Israeli civic teachers' associations. They have urged members to boycott the new textbook, due to be published in the next few weeks. The move is likely to face stiff resistance from Israeli officials. Successive governments have refused to countenance educational autonomy for Israel's Palestinian citizens. Israel's 1.6 million Palestinian citizens are a fifth of the population.

Education officials have been [accused](#) of downgrading democratic values to place a much greater emphasis on Israel's Jewish character. Mohammed Barakeh, head of the High[er] Follow-Up Committee [for Arab Citizens of Israel], a coalition of the main Palestinian political factions in Israel, told Al Jazeera that he had approved the decision to issue Arab schools teachers with an alternative civics course.

He said the ministry's new textbook had pushed the Arab education system to "crisis point." "Our teachers are now being required to present us as immigrants in our own country. And our students are being taught that the Jewish identity of the state is far more important than its democratic identity," he said. "It is time for us to take the initiative and teach our children the true meaning of democratic values."

Although Palestinian and Jewish students are segregated in Israel, the curriculum in Arab schools has always been strictly controlled by Jewish officials, Asad Ghanem, a politics professor at Haifa University, told Al Jazeera. The Follow-Up Committee has given Ghanem responsibility for overseeing the development of an alternative civics curriculum in time for the next academic year, in September.

The Palestinian leadership in Israel has grown increasingly concerned about the direction taken by the education system since Naftali Bennett, leader of the far-right settler party Jewish Home, took over the Education Ministry last spring.

Dirasat, a legal and social policy think-tank based in Nazareth, will take charge of writing the new curriculum sent to Arab schools. Dalia Halabi, its director, said a survey of the existing curriculum by Dirasat and ACRI, an Israeli civil rights group, found that it had become increasingly right-wing and nationalist.

"It does not encourage critical thinking or questioning from students," she told Al Jazeera. "It aims at indoctrination." Ghanem said control over civics was vitally important because it determined the values of the next generation. "Since [Benjamin] Netanyahu came to power in 2009, efforts have intensified to delegitimise the Palestinian minority's standing in every field—politics, education and culture," he said.

The textbook produced by the Follow-Up Committee would present the Palestinian minority's perspectives on major historical and political issues that had always been excluded from the Israeli curriculum, Ghanem added.

Among them would be discussions of the Nakba, the mass dispossession of the Palestinians during the 1948 war that created Israel, and a critical analysis of Israel's definition as a Jewish state. "At the moment the curriculum relates to us in terms of our sectarian identities—as Muslims, Christians, Druze—rather than recognising our Palestinian identity," he said. "That has to change." He said he hoped other parts of the ministry's curriculum, especially history and religious studies, would also be rewritten in the future. The Follow-Up Committee also intends to make the new civics material available online for parents.

Halabi said some teachers were "very afraid" of retaliation by the Education Ministry if they adopted the alternative curriculum. "We can't put them in the front line alone," she said. "We have to support them."

Ghanem said the break with the official curriculum became inevitable after work by the Education Ministry on the new civics textbook—which has not been updated since 2000—accelerated rapidly under Bennett.

Israeli education officials have [conceded](#) that no member of the Palestinian minority was involved in drafting the text. Ghanem said he had been contacted for his comments on an early draft two years ago, before Bennett's tenure, and had sharply criticised it. He never heard back from the ministry. "It is simply anti-democratic not to have a single Arab representative involved in writing a book dealing with such sensitive topics," he said. He added: "The book isn't just bad for Arab students, it is imparting values that are bad for the Jewish pupils too."

"It teaches them only the formal aspects of democracy—elections, majority rule, separation of powers—while denying its substantive meaning: Equality before the law and minority rights."

Amru Aghbaria, the only Palestinian on the ministry's professional committee advising on the civics curriculum, [resigned](#) last December. In his resignation letter, he [said](#) he was being used as a "fig leaf for an improper process." He also noted that the most recent government figures, for 2014, showed half of Palestinian students failed the civics matriculation exam, up from 37 percent two years earlier. The [failure](#) for Jewish pupils was just 21 percent. Ghanem said the high numbers of students failing the exam reflected the difficulties for Palestinian students of relating to the existing curriculum. "Sadly, that won't end just because we produce an alternative textbook. We can teach students democratic values but they still have to try to pass an exam set according to the Education Ministry's agenda."

Palestinian leaders in Israel have long [complained](#) about massively discriminatory budgets favouring Jewish schools, and a [shortage](#) of thousands of classrooms and teachers in Arab schools. As a result, Palestinian students in Israel have on average [much lower scores](#) in exams than their Jewish peers, with the gap growing in recent years.

Fears that the situation will deteriorate further with the introduction of the ministry's new civics course were heightened in January when Bennett defended the changes. "Are we ashamed of the fact that the state of Israel is a Jewish state?" he [said](#) on Army Radio.

Last month he was also [reported](#) to have ousted the ministry's chief scientist, Ami Volansky, over his efforts to tackle racism in Israeli schools towards ethnic minorities. The index was

intended as a response to the murder of the Palestinian teenager Mohammed Abu Khdeir by Israeli youths in July 2014.

Although the ministry produced the new civics textbook amid great secrecy, leading Jewish educators who have seen the final text to complain that it is riddled with factual inaccuracies, maligns the Palestinian minority, and discounts democratic values.

Revital Amiram, who recently demanded that her name be removed from the final textbook, told Al Jazeera that she was “deeply unhappy” about the revisions made to her chapters. They included a “highly misleading” quote from a Palestinian member of the Israeli parliament in 1949, praising Israeli democracy. She noted that the Palestinian minority was living under military rule at the time and such quotes did not reflect wider opinion. She said: “We are being denied the right to see the completed textbook. If it was balanced and fair, then why all this secrecy?” The Education Ministry was unavailable for comment.

Controversies have beset the Education Ministry since Bennett took over. A novel about a romance between a Jew and Palestinian was [banned](#) from schools because it encouraged intermarriage. Funds on “pluralism” education have been frozen, and left-wing groups like Breaking the Silence barred from entering schools. Last month six members of the Council for Higher Education [resigned](#), accusing Bennett of abusing his powers over appointments. Some 1,500 academics have [expressed](#) no confidence in Bennett.

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## GEOFFREY ARONSON, “ISRAEL, GOLAN HEIGHTS AND THE SYRIAN ENDGAME,” AL JAZEERA

24 APRIL 2016

As the beginning of the endgame on Syria commences, Israel is signaling its intention to join in the feasting on Syria’s decaying sovereignty—demanding international recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights captured from Syria in the June 1967 war.

The occasion for this demand was an extraordinary cabinet session on the Golan plateau—the first ever—where, according to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s reckoning, 50,000 Israeli settlers reside. “I chose to hold this festive cabinet meeting on the Golan Heights in order to deliver a clear message,” [Netanyahu declared at the outset of the meeting](#). “The Golan Heights will forever remain in Israel’s hands. Israel will never come down from the Golan Heights.”

This Israeli message bears repeating, particularly now when the parties to the war in Syria are jockeying for advantage in the first stages of the diplomatic battle to end the war and to design Syria’s future. Netanyahu, no less than the multitude of players circling around the decimated Syrian state, is determined to place its maximal demands on the diplomatic agenda now being fashioned in Washington and Moscow.

### THE GOLAN HEIGHTS’ ANNEXATION

It is significant that Netanyahu set out this demand for international recognition of the Golan Heights’ annexation without addressing the larger question of a peace treaty with

Damascus, which has always been part of the broader diplomatic context in which negotiations over the Golan Heights have been held.

Syria, of course, is hardly able to consider engaging in negotiations over the Golan Heights' future. Nor is there much evidence that any Syrian party to the war is prepared to recognise Israeli sovereignty. Both opposition leader Riad Hijab and Syria's [permanent representative to the UN] Bashar al-Jaafari found themselves in unusual [agreement on their adamant rejection of Netanyahu's provocative declaration](#).

In any case, Netanyahu is hardly concerned about Syria's views on the matter. He is aiming at [a] different—and in his view, more decisive—audience altogether. Not Syrian or even Arab, but American and especially Russian.

On the day before the cabinet meeting on the Golan Heights, Netanyahu put forward the broad menu of Israel's demands on Syria in a [conversation with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry](#). "I told the Secretary of State that we will not oppose a diplomatic settlement in Syria on condition that it not come at the expense of the security of the State of Israel; i.e., that at the end of the day, the forces of Iran, Hezbollah and [ISIL] will be removed from Syrian soil."

"The time has come," he continued, "for the international community to recognise reality, especially two basic facts. One, whatever is beyond the border, the boundary itself will not change. Two, after 50 years, the time has come for the international community to finally recognise that the Golan Heights will remain under Israel's sovereignty permanently."

#### WIDE RANGE OF DEMANDS

Washington, at least publicly, did not address the wide range of demands Netanyahu outlined, preferring to reiterate Washington's long-standing view that the Golan Heights is "not part of Israel."

The cold shoulder presented by Washington could not have surprised Netanyahu, where frustration with the Israeli leader runs deep. Indeed, it is Moscow, where Netanyahu went on April 21, rather than Washington, that looms largest in the Israeli premier's considerations about protecting and advancing Israel's interests in Syria.

This has most notably been the case since the decisive Russian intervention on behalf of the Assad regime last year, and it will feature prominently in Netanyahu's current round of discussions with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The [critical nature of the Israel-Russian entente on Syria](#) was addressed by the Minister of Transportation Yisrael Katz who explained that: "Coordination of steps between us and Russia allows Israel to defend these interests without fear of Russian intervention, and it is extremely important not only in near, but in the long run. . . . We need to remember that we have interests relating to the Golan Heights, and it is good that, in the case of a settlement in Syria, we have the ability to effectively communicate with Russia."

In contrast to this delicate and effective dialogue, relations with Washington remain hostage to the clash resulting from Washington's acknowledged failure to do anything in the last eight years to slow the advance of Israel's settlement and occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Today, Washington contents itself with heartfelt lamentations, most recently articulated by Vice President Joe Biden, about the course Israel has chosen and a policy agenda that focuses on the slim reed of what used to be called "economic peace."

Kerry recently explained this policy: “. . . I do think it is possible to get something started, get something moving in which you could lay out a vision for where you’re going and perhaps get the parties together and have some understanding, some confidence-building measures. You could have some efforts, for instance, in the West Bank on Area C, which is the area controlled by Israel in its entirety—and begin to build up Palestinian capacity.

“I think you could do more on security . . . more on economic development. You could build a horizon where there are some expectations for what has to be achieved that begin to quiet things down and give people some confidence or hope that there is, within that framework, the kernels of possible negotiations. I don’t think you can just plunk down and start to negotiate tomorrow, but I do think there are definitive steps that could be taken. And we have—what?—nine, 10 more months, and I think President Obama will always welcome something that’s real.”

This shortcoming is all the greater because of the spectacular failure of the Obama administration’s initial demand for a complete settlement freeze. The patent first established during the Obama administration’s diplomatic offensive on Palestine—grandiose American statements lacking any real strategic sense or commitment to their implementation—is now playing out in Syria, as well.

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## **NOUR SAMAHA, “HEZBOLLAH’S DEATH VALLEY,” *FOREIGN POLICY* (EXCERPTS)**

3 MARCH 2016

SHEBAA, Lebanon—This small Lebanese town straddles a steep valley, with Syria on one side and Israel on the other. It sits under the watchful eye of an Israeli military base perched on the top of a nearby mountain, while an observation post manned by U.N. peacekeepers watches from another. The Lebanese army holds an assortment of positions within the town and its outskirts, and the snow-capped mountaintops of the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights can be seen clearly from the town center.

This is where the region’s many conflicts intersect. It is also where they most amplify one another. A few miles to the east, on the Syrian side of the border, an array of opposition forces—including the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front, groups within the Free Syrian Army, and militias aligned with the Islamic State—hold ground. Within the valley, Israel and Hezbollah eye each other warily.

Hezbollah is counting on this becoming a flashpoint for any future conflict with Israel. In fighting alongside the Syrian government, Hezbollah has not only lost the lives of more than 1,000 of its fighters, but it has also gained a level of tactical experience and weaponry that has made it a far more threatening force for its enemies elsewhere in the region. Those close to the group say that for the first time Hezbollah has the ability to bring a war with Israel into Israeli territory.

“In the next war, Hezbollah won’t stay on the borders, and the Israeli settlements in the north will not be protected from this,” said a source close to the movement based in south Lebanon. “Hezbollah will bring the war to them, and Israel’s biggest concern is over Hezbollah’s experience in Syria, as it now has the experience to be offensive rather than just defensive.”

## BETWEEN GUIDED MISSILES AND THE ISLAMIC STATE

Hezbollah's recent retaliations against Israel have occurred near Shebaa, highlighting this area as the soft underbelly of Israel's security.

Last month, amid thick fog, several Hezbollah fighters crossed the fence at the foot of the town dividing it from the Israeli-occupied Shebaa Farms. Slipping past several Israeli radars and military positions, they planted an improvised explosive device just a few feet away from the large Israeli military base in the area. Two days later, the IED was detonated, damaging an armored D9 bulldozer and military Humvee as an Israeli army convoy passed by.

While the incident passed without earning much attention—there were no fatalities—it highlighted the Lebanese armed group's ability to penetrate into Israeli-occupied territory.

Other Hezbollah attacks in the area have been deadlier. Following an Israeli strike on several key Hezbollah members in Syria's Quneitra province in January 2015, Hezbollah retaliated by firing several missiles at an Israeli patrol in occupied Shebaa, killing two soldiers.

On the Israeli side, top officials have confirmed that Hezbollah continues to be one of the country's top security threats and raised the possibility of a large-scale offensive against the group. "Iran is waging a war against Israel via proxies like Hezbollah in Lebanon, who today poses the most serious threat to Israel," said Israeli army chief Gadi Eizenkot, architect of the "Dahiya doctrine," named after a southern suburb of Beirut, which calls for a disproportionate use of force to achieve military objectives.

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon went even further. "In Syria, if the choice is between Iran and the Islamic State, I choose the Islamic State," he said during a conference at the Institute for National Security Studies last month. "Iran determines the future of Syria, and if it leads to perpetuation, Iranian hegemony in Syria will be a huge challenge for Israel."

While Hezbollah largely fired unguided rockets into Israel during the 2006 war, its weapons capabilities have allegedly received a major upgrade. According to analysts and sources close to the party, the group is in possession of tactical ballistic missiles, Scud missiles, Fateh-110 Iranian missiles, and M-600 missiles, a Syrian modified version of the Fateh-110.

"Now Hezbollah has the ability to strike guided munitions across Israel; they can hit targets inside Israel—including central and southern areas—with increased accuracy, including command posts, airfields, and major economic targets," said Jeffrey White, a defense analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

White said that Hezbollah also seems to have acquired advanced air-defense systems and Yakhont naval cruise missiles, which could also potentially threaten Israel's air force and target the country's oil platforms in the Mediterranean Sea. "This is new," he said. "Ninety-five percent of the naval activity in 2006 was from the Israeli side, so in the next war the naval operations could look quite different."

The numerous strikes carried out by the Israeli Air Force in Syria since 2013, allegedly targeting weapons caches belonging to Hezbollah, testify to the depth of the country's fears about the group's acquisition of advanced weapons. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly warned that the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah is a "red line." "If anybody wants to use Syrian territory to transfer nuclear weapons to Hezbollah, we'll take action," he said during an interview with CNN last year. "And we continue to do that."

Last month, Israel's Northern Command—including its naval units and air forces—carried out a massive two-week training exercise in preparation for the possibility of war on multiple fronts on its northern border. And earlier this month, the Israeli Air Force carried out mock raids over Hezbollah military positions and training camps in the eastern Lebanese town of Baalbek, which sources affiliated to the party speculate were done to test Hezbollah's response level. "The Israelis want to see what sort of air-defense systems Hezbollah may be in possession of," said one source.

The Israel Defense Forces has also [changed](#) its operational assessment to reflect the likelihood that Hezbollah was in possession of advanced surface-to-air missile systems and had the ability to target Israeli fighter jets. But sources within the movement were coy when asked what new weapons Hezbollah might use in a future war. "Each war there are new surprises in terms of weapons, and we never reveal what we have until the time is ready," another source added with a smile.

#### HOW SYRIA HAS CHANGED HEZBOLLAH

Some analysts speculate that the Syrian war has bogged down Hezbollah, preventing it from preparing for a future conflict with Israel. Those close to the party, however, argue that precisely the opposite has happened—that fighting in support of the Syrian armed forces has provided Hezbollah with a well-armed, battle-hardened cadre of fighters. "Our fighters are getting training and experience through the work they are doing in Syria, and this is a great concern for the Israelis," said the source within the party. "And our work there won't distract us from the southern front against Israel."

In a Feb. 17 [speech](#), Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah focused largely on Israel, warning it of the dire consequences if Israel plans on launching a war against the movement. Alluding to the party's capabilities, he cited the chemical plant in the northern city of Haifa as an example of a possible target. Citing an unnamed Israeli expert, he said that a rocket targeting the ammonia tanks, which contain more than 15,000 tons of gas, would leave tens of thousands dead and 800,000 people affected.

"This would be exactly as a nuclear bomb, and we can say that Lebanon today has a nuclear bomb, seeing as any rocket that might hit these tanks is capable of creating a nuclear bomb effect," he warned.

But Hezbollah's changes in the past decade go beyond its more advanced weaponry. Prior to its involvement in the Syrian war, its main battlefield experience in recent years involved sending small teams, comprising between five and 15 fighters, to infiltrate Israeli-held territory. These operations would require a limited number of trained fighters and could be completed—from leaving the base to returning—within a few hours. In Syria, by contrast, Hezbollah's commanders found themselves responsible for commanding hundreds of fighters in a single battle.

This required Hezbollah's leaders to develop a sophisticated command-and-control structure, including advanced telecommunications networks, the use of drones for reconnaissance, and the ability to maintain long supply lines—all tactics that its members think could play a central role in the next war with Israel.

"[The Israelis] think we have the ability to not just invade villages in their north, but also stay and control the areas," said the same source within Hezbollah who spoke about the experience the group gained in Syria.



## TO FIGHT OR NOT TO FIGHT?

Yet according to both analysts and those within Hezbollah's circles, the party is not looking for a war with Israel in the near future. This is not only because of its involvement in Syria, but also because the political climate in Lebanon is not as conducive as it was in 2006.

Overall, Lebanon has become more politically polarized, which has also put Hezbollah on the defensive. Many Lebanese are opposed to the party's agenda—both in Syria and in Lebanon—and can no longer be counted on to welcome those fleeing southern Lebanon in the event of war instigated by Hezbollah. Furthermore, Syria is no longer available as an option for displaced Lebanese, as it had been in 2006. If another war was to break out with Israel, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese could be left stranded under a shower of missiles and fighter jets.

Yet despite such deterrents to war, Shebaa still feels precarious. The tensions within Shebaa itself are a microcosm of those in towns across southern Lebanon: The town is home to a Sunni majority but is surrounded by Druze towns and villages and has a small church that caters to its tiny Christian population. Politically, the strongest force in the town is the Islamist movement al-Jamaa al-Islamiya, which shot to prominence during the Syrian crisis due to the influx of money and donations from the Gulf in order to serve the Syrian refugee population. The parliamentarian for the province is a Baath party member, who has retained his seat for the past 15 years. Furthermore, there remains a strong presence of Resistance Brigade members, the non-Shiite affiliate of Hezbollah in Lebanon, in the town.

Shebaa has also been greatly affected by the influx of Syrians fleeing the war—roughly 4,000 of its 7,000 residents are refugees, largely coming from Beit Jinn, a Syrian town located just over the mountain from Shebaa. While there is little tension between the local population and the refugees at the moment, the longer the war next door drags on, the less stable the relationship could become.

“The Syrians are much cheaper labor than the Lebanese, so this will soon become an issue,” one resident said. “And then what will happen?”

## A CROWDED BATTLEFIELD

What will happen, however, is getting more difficult to predict by the day. The conflict across the border in Syria is becoming increasingly complicated, as armed groups like al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State do battle with the Syrian army and Hezbollah, which are backed by Iran and Russia. Another war between Israel and Hezbollah, some fear, could lead to a conflagration that consumes the entire region. [. . .]

Yet others see the presence of state actors, such as the Russians and the Iranians, as a deterrent to a war on the Golan front. “The fact there are so many players in the mix creates more of a deterrent factor than a catalyst,” said Randa Slim, an expert at the Middle East Institute. “Neither Russia nor Iran wants a war in the south with Israel right now.” [. . .]

Officials and members of Hezbollah have made it clear they would prefer the borders to stay calm, but if Israel pushes the group into a confrontation, “the resistance won't stay in Lebanon; it will reach the Galilee,” said one of the sources. “It will not look like the 2006 war at all.”

## EMILY MULDER, "ISRAEL'S PRIVATISATION OF A 'SHOOT-TO-KILL POLICY' AGAINST PALESTINIANS," MIDDLE EAST EYE

11 MAY 2016

Palestinian taxi driver Mustafa Abu Ramouz had seen Palestinians killed by Israeli forces at Qalandiya checkpoint, before two Palestinian siblings were shot dead there last month. Pregnant 24-year-old Maram Salih Abu Ismail was killed alongside her 16-year-old brother Ibrahim Taha by private guards at the checkpoint on 27 April after Maram allegedly threw a knife at a police officer. The siblings were travelling to Jerusalem when police said they refused demands to return to the pedestrian walkway after they had entered a vehicle access area with the intention to carry out a "terrorist attack."

However, witnesses said Maram did not have a knife, and that the two did not understand the Hebrew demands to turn around after they entered the wrong areas, something Abu Ramouz told Middle East Eye he saw take place regularly due to unclear signage. "It's happened several times in front of me, when people entered the wrong area and were asked to go back by the army," Abu Ramouz said. "All of the time people go back. But this time they [Maram and Ibrahim] were killed, they were not given the chance."

Despite a ruling by a Jerusalem court last week that an investigation be launched into the shootings, analysts told MEE the private contractors responsible were unlikely to be held accountable. Bureaucratic backlog at the crossing—like others Israel has privatised—would most likely make identifying those responsible impossible, they added.

Israel's Justice Ministry told MEE that a preliminary investigation revealed no police misconduct, and that its police investigations department was "not authorised to handle the matter" as a consequence. It directed all questions regarding the case to police, who the ministry said would "carry out any further procedures or investigations."

While the Qalandiya crossing falls under police control, Israeli police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said he was "unaware" of who had jurisdiction over the security contractors that killed Abu Ismail and Taha.

Abu Ramouz has driven taxis for 20 years. Born in Jerusalem, the 40-year-old Palestinian holds a Jerusalem residency card and has lived in Qalandiya refugee camp—northwest of and now cut off from Jerusalem by Israel's separation wall—since he was four. He has travelled through the Qalandiya checkpoint on a near-daily basis since its creation during the Second Intifada. "It began in 2000, and then developed slowly. They started putting up watchtowers, cement blocks, and eventually they made it from a checkpoint into a border crossing," he said.

Qalandiya was one of 34 checkpoints, several of which lie deep in the West Bank, which were turned into "border crossings" and privatised or part-privatised towards the end of the uprising in 2005, according to a report by research group Who Profits. Due to Qalandiya's proximity to Jerusalem, it was among 19 of the 34 to be placed under police control, and as of January was in a state of "partial privatisation."

Modiin Ezrachi, an Israeli company, is paid by Israel to provide contractors at Qalandiya and at the majority of other partially or fully privatised crossings. No one from the company was available

to comment on its role. As a result at Qalandiya, as Abu Ramouz points out, military police check IDs and conduct security checks, police and border police officers operate the checkpoint, and private guards are stationed—generally behind concrete blocks—as force protection.

Rosenfeld, the police spokesman, told MEE that police at Qalandiya work in coordination with private security contractors, who are given the same powers as police. “If there’s an incident at a checkpoint, the security guards can make an arrest; they have the same authorisation to do that,” he said. “If they have no choice, and they have to open warning fire, they can do that. If they have no choice, and they have to shoot a terrorist who is carrying out an attack, they can do that as well.”

While Rosenfeld said activity of guards and police at the checkpoint was well-coordinated, consecutive State Comptroller reports have [criticised](#) cooperation as inadequate. Critics meanwhile point to the complex web of coordination as an intentionally ambiguous structure developed to abdicate responsibility for rights violations.

## GREY LEGAL AREAS

For University of Amsterdam academic Lior Vollinz, who researches security contractors around Jerusalem, the layered operation of agencies that accompanied checkpoints privatisation intentionally created a legal grey area. His comments have been echoed by several other academics.

In a [2010 report](#), Israeli legal scholar Yael Ronen said: “It is argued that such violations are less visible when carried out by private security persons because [they] are not bound by the same transparency standards as the state.” Following Israel’s move towards privatisation, Israeli scholar Neve Gordon [said](#): “From a political perspective, outsourcing is beneficial because even if the abuses are exposed, they are frequently presented to the public as having been perpetrated by someone else.”

Israel’s Association for Civil Rights meanwhile has [filed](#) numerous appeals against the use of private security in occupied East Jerusalem. The association says the contractors carry out discriminatory practices against Palestinians without any legal system in place to hold them accountable.

## PRIVATISING “SHOOT-TO-KILL”

Discussing the deaths of Abu Ismail and Taha, Abu Ramouz stressed that the decision by the private contractors to kill the siblings did not take place in a void. Citing the at least 10 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in the Qalandiya area since unrest sparked in October, Abu Ramouz pointed to Israel’s use of what the [UN](#) and [international rights groups](#) have termed a “shoot-to-kill” policy against Palestinians that resulted in “extrajudicial executions.”

Israeli rights group B’Tselem has [slammed](#) Israel’s state-sanctioned use of excessive violence against Palestinians, which has long granted immunity to Israeli forces who carry out transgressions against Palestinians.

Abu Ramouz says that for many Palestinians, security contractors are another extension of the Israeli occupation. “Most people don’t see a big difference between them. . . . I mean this is the Israeli army, this is the Israeli police, this is a private Israeli security guard. But in the end you [a Palestinian] are an enemy to all of them, and they all treat you badly.”

“He’s just there for the security of the soldier. They have no laws for these guards in Israel, and they’re allowed to do anything,” Abu Ramouz said.

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## ISRA SALEH EL-NAMEY, “WATER POLLUTION REACHES CATASTROPHIC LEVELS IN GAZA,” THE ELECTRONIC INTIFADA

10 MAY 2016

The 34-year-old had started to do the laundry but the supply of water at her home ran out. And though he had spent a long day at school, her son Ahmad, 11, went back and forth nearly half a kilometer a dozen times to fetch buckets of water from a truck near the municipality building in Khan Younis, where the family lives. The laundry had to be done.

Mother and child have gotten used to this routine. “The norm is not to have water during the day,” Abeer told the Electronic Intifada. “It is very tiring for my child to fill a bucket and carry it at least 400 meters like this.”

Frequent power cuts in Gaza have made it impossible to provide homes with running water all day. With summer approaching, moreover, Gaza is threatened with a water scarcity crisis that has been compounded by successive Israeli military assaults and a nearly 10-year-old blockade.

Muhammad Abu Shamala, an official at the Khan Younis water plant, describes the situation as “catastrophic.” “Pollution of our water resources has reached alarming proportions and the salinity of the underground aquifer continues to increase,” Abu Shamala said.

The United Nations [stated](#) that Palestinians in Gaza use on average less than half of the minimum 100 liters of water per person per day recommended by the World Health Organization. By way of contrast, Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank [use](#) 369 liters per person per day.

### CRISIS MEASURES

The Khan Younis municipality has no capacity to address mounting concerns: there is a lack of functioning infrastructure and no ability to undertake repairs. The necessary building materials are either difficult or impossible to import because of the Israeli-imposed siege. “The situation gets even worse in the summers,” said Abeer Abu Nimer. “This is why we have to be even more careful when we use water.”

With their hands tied, authorities regularly launch public information campaigns to urge and help residents save water. “We try to raise awareness that these water resources have to be carefully used; otherwise the next generations are going to pay a high price,” Abu Shamala said.

Eitaf Harb is certain that the water in Gaza is unfit for human use. The 31-year-old moved to Khan Younis three years ago when she got married. Since then, she has started to suffer from skin irritation she thinks is caused by the water used to bathe.

### UNFIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

Harb was born in the Gulf and began to notice her skin reacting after just two months in Gaza. She showed the Electronic Intifada brown blotches on her arms and legs that she had never suffered from before. Her experience of life outside Gaza means she is more acutely aware of the quality of water here. “The water is salty and cannot be safely used for bathing or even washing the dishes,” she said.

Gaza's water is dangerously polluted, a situation that has only worsened with Israeli bombings. The water contains such high levels of chloride and nitrates that the United Nations estimates that 96 percent is unsafe for drinking. Water quality has also been adversely affected by the lack of proper sewage infrastructure. Sewage either flows straight into the sea just off the coast or into cesspits. In both cases, it then seeps into Gaza's only underwater aquifer. Gaza's authorities are unable to bring in the necessary materials to build a proper sewage network because of the Israeli blockade.

Yasser al-Shanti, the head of Gaza's water authority, blames Israel for the decreased quality of the drinking water in Gaza. Israeli shelling destroyed a number of desalination plants—both privately built or officially sanctioned—which were used to treat wastewater and provide clean drinking water. “We have more than a hundred desalination plants, but very few are fully operating due to the damage they sustained during the latest conflict in 2014,” al-Shanti told the Electronic Intifada.

The presence of privately built desalination plants is another headache for authorities who say they are not properly regulated and therefore potentially unsafe. Officials regularly warn Gazans against buying water from such plants.

#### TOTTERING INFRASTRUCTURE

Al-Shanti estimates that about 778 underground wells were damaged during the 2014 assault, of which only 162 have been fixed. The numbers are hard to verify since many wells are dug privately. Israel has denied entrance for the materials needed to do most of the urgent repairs.

The official said approximately 100 million cubic meters of water are lost annually because of poor infrastructure. Winter downpours could have replenished reservoirs had they been properly functioning but al-Shanti estimates that, instead, 60 percent of rainwater simply seeps into the sea.

Compounding the problem, a decrease in farmland and a growth in populated areas leaves the soil dry and unable to absorb rainwater. “When we continue to consume water from our reservoir, the water becomes more saline. It should be replenished, but unfortunately this is not how things go,” al-Shanti said.

To mitigate the crisis, Gaza's municipality now buys an extra 5 million cubic meters of water every year from Israel, doubling the previous amount. But the al-Muntar reservoir that had been built to receive extra water was destroyed by Israel in 2014 and, al-Shanti said, Gaza does not get to use the full amount of water. “Our facilities cannot save the whole amount of water we buy, at a high price,” he said. “That is because they have to be developed and extended to absorb the delivered quantities of water.”

### SHARIF NASHASHIBI, “THE PA IS NOT SERVING PALESTINE: IT SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO FAIL,” *THE NATIONAL*

9 APRIL 2016

Last week, Palestinian Authority (PA) president Mahmoud Abbas gave an interview to a local Israeli TV channel that cemented the widespread view among Palestinians, and those sympathetic to their cause, of his weakness against Israel. He insisted that he is not its “employee” or “agent,” but sounded exactly like one by saying: “Give me responsibility for the Palestinian territories, and test me. . . . If Israel has specific intelligence information, give it to me and I’ll handle it.

If I don't handle it, [Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu] can come and do it." In other words, Mr. Abbas answers not to the Palestinian people, but to Israel's prime minister.

Mr. Abbas warned that the PA is on "the brink of collapse," echoing warnings from Israeli officials in recent months. In the absence of fundamental reforms to the PA, or any elections for a presidency that Mr. Abbas has held on to despite his term ending seven years ago, perhaps it is best that the PA collapses. This is by no means a radical or fringe view.

According to a November poll by the Center for Opinion Polls and Survey Studies (COPSS) at An Najah National University, 46.9 percent of Palestinians support dissolving the PA, while 41.7 percent reject it. This follows a December 2014 poll in which 55 percent said it had become "a burden on the Palestinian people." These findings are striking given that the PA is the largest domestic employer.

Such public disillusionment is hardly surprising, however, because since its creation almost a quarter of a century ago, the PA has utterly failed to achieve its missions and fulfil its responsibilities towards its people. Of course Israel has worked tirelessly to subjugate the Palestinians, but the PA is also culpable. So too is Mr. Abbas, who has presided over the Authority for almost half of its existence.

Instead of working to end the longest military occupation in modern history, the PA is managing it for Israel via "security coordination." This involves clamping down on Palestinian resistance, armed and peaceful.

Last week, Mr. Abbas reiterated that "I want to cooperate with the Israelis." This despite opinion polls showing the vast majority of Palestinians opposed to this, despite Israeli forces and settlers killing hundreds of Palestinians in recent months, and despite the relentless colonisation of their land.

Security coordination has continued more than a year after the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) announced its suspension—a decision that should have been binding on the PA. Mr. Abbas and his foreign minister Riad Malki have even given grotesque assurances that there will be no uprising against Israel under the president's watch. So the PA, which is supposed to be part of a national liberation struggle, seems willing to put down an uprising by its own people against their subjugation on Israel's behalf.

Indeed, Mr. Abbas warned last week that "if we give up on security coordination there will be chaos here." His concern was not for his own people, but because "there will be rifles and explosions and armed militants popping up everywhere and rushing at Israel. Without coordination, a bloody intifada would break out." His warning of the PA's collapse is expressed in terms of its inability to protect Israel, not how it will affect Palestinians.

Furthermore, the Authority, which is meant to safeguard Palestinian rights, serially abuses them. For example, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has documented "police beatings and arbitrary arrests of demonstrators," "excessive force," "repressing critical news reporting and demonstrations," "suppressing dissenting views," and "serious rights abuses, including credible allegations of torture," for which "no security officials were convicted."

As such, the PA is not only failing to curb Israeli abuses, but is busy perpetrating its own, all under Mr. Abbas's watch. It is also seen as corrupt, a view held by 79 percent of Palestinians, according to a poll last month by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR).

Mr. Abbas has often expressed his opposition to armed resistance against Israel. However, he is an architect of a peace process that has only provided cover and time for Israel to entrench its occupation and colonisation of Palestine, to the extent that 61 percent of Palestinians believe a two-state solution is no longer practical due to settlement expansion, according to the same poll.

He is also against peaceful means of resistance, most strikingly a boycott of Israeli goods and services. This despite the PLO's binding decision last year "to boycott all Israeli products," despite a growing number of Israeli officials and their foreign allies acknowledging that the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement represents the biggest threat to Israel, and despite 84.2 percent of Palestinians supporting a boycott, according to the COPSS poll.

Given all this, it is no surprise that there is so much public dissatisfaction with Mr. Abbas. Two-thirds of Palestinians want him to resign, according to the PCPSR poll, and only 16 percent trust him, according to an August poll by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre.

Nonetheless, his position is relatively secure in the absence of presidential elections on the horizon, and his sidelining of critics and potential challengers (most recently former PLO secretary general Yasser Abed Rabbo and former PA prime minister Salam Fayyad last summer). This means he effectively embodies the Authority, making it a tool to maintain and further his political power rather than to emancipate the Palestinian people.

His warning of the PA's collapse, just months after rejecting similar Israeli warnings, may be designed to shore up his position by garnering support for the Authority, thereby enabling it to quell mass unrest that is likely to target the PA as well as Israel.

Last year, the PLO rightly said that "Israel, the occupying power in Palestine, must assume all its responsibilities in accordance with its obligations under international law." This can only be done with the dissolution of the PA, because its collusion with Israel allows the latter to shirk those responsibilities.

Little wonder, then, that Mr. Netanyahu said in January: "We must prevent the Palestinian Authority from collapsing if possible." What better reason for its dissolution than its backing by those responsible for the Palestinians' plight?

## KRISTIAN DAVIS BAILEY, "TRAVELING WHILE BLACK: I WAS RACIALLY PROFILED AND LOCKED UP IN ISRAEL," *COLORLINES* (EXCERPTS)

25 FEBRUARY 2016

For two months I have been silent about an unexpected and traumatic experience: my racial profiling, arrest and incarceration by the state of Israel in mid-December.

I was on my way to Birzeit University in the West Bank to speak about the Black Lives Matter movement and the connections Black youth and organizers [have made to the Palestinian struggle](#). I've recently contributed heavily to this work: I organized a [delegation of Palestinian students to Ferguson](#) in 2014, co-organized the [2015 Black Solidarity for Palestine statement](#) endorsed by 1,000 activists including Angela Davis and Talib Kweli, and co-wrote the 2015 Black-Palestinian solidarity video "[When I See Them, I See Us](#)" that featured Danny Glover and Ms. Lauryn Hill.

To get to Birzeit, I entered the West Bank from Jordan via the Allenby Bridge, which is actually a land crossing between a Jordanian and an Israeli-controlled terminal on Palestinian land.

The Israel Airports Authority officer in charge alleged that my clearly-labeled bottle of ibuprofen from CVS was actually Captagon, an illegal amphetamine that [Western news media](#) has recently labeled the drug of choice for Syrian and ISIS fighters.

The so-called evidence of my trafficking was a photo the chief pulled up on his phone. He claimed that what he identified as Captagon looked just like my pills. My tablets were small and red with “I-2” engraved on them. (I later learned that “I-2” stands for “ibuprofen, 200 milligrams.”) Most of the images of Captagon I’ve seen online show [pills that are yellowish-gray or beige](#).

After I argued with the five additional officers who had gathered to look at my ibuprofen, one of them told me that I was right, that I was carrying painkillers. She then told me to go sit down in the terminal waiting area.

But an hour later, border agents took me to a side room where a police officer told me that I was suspected of smuggling drugs into the country. I was subjected to a full strip search and placed under arrest. I entered Palestine in the backseat of a police van, handcuffed and shackled and flanked on either side by Israelis with [U.S.-made military-grade assault rifles](#).

The police drove me 30 minutes from the Jordanian-Palestinian border to a station in Ma’ale Adumim—an Israeli settlement in the West Bank that is [illegal under international law](#). Here, the police interrogated me before I could speak to the lawyer I had asked for, [in contravention of Israeli law](#). They told me to sign multiple forms that were printed only in Hebrew, a language I cannot read or understand. The police then confiscated all of my electronics—phone, computer, camera, voice recorder and hard drive.

After briefly consulting with a public attorney, police took me to the [Russian Compound](#) in Jerusalem. Despite repeated requests, I was not allowed to call my parents, the U.S. Embassy or any local contacts. Nobody knew where I was.

Just as I had been shocked that my interrogator in Ma’ale Adumim was Arab, I was surprised to see an Ethiopian man among the police officers at the Russian Compound jail. Besides these officers and a few Sudanese prisoners, these were the only non-White people I saw during my arrest. I shared a cell with three older Israeli men and spent most of the night in disbelief, hoping someone outside would figure out where I was. It was my first time in a jail.

At my court hearing the next morning the judge agreed to release me on a 6,000-shekel bail (\$1,500 USD) under the conditions that the police would keep my passport and that I could not leave the country for 10 days. The bail emptied my account, and the travel restriction kept me in the country three days longer than planned.

Police released me 27 hours after I first arrived on Palestinian soil. It was only at this moment that my family had any idea where I was. My parents said they had a feeling something was wrong after they hadn’t heard from me. They recommended contacting the U.S. Embassy and Representative Gregory Meeks (D-NY), the congressman for the district in Queens where I grew up and where my parents still work. I emailed both. One day later, I spoke with the head of American Citizen Services at the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv. He designated my case high-priority after hearing from Meeks.



I had missed my panel on international solidarity while I was imprisoned, but [Jamil Dakwar](#), a Palestinian human rights attorney who was attending the conference, volunteered to give me legal advice throughout the week and made sure I was as comfortable as possible. I stayed with friends in Tel Aviv and Haifa since I could not cross the checkpoint into the West Bank without a passport or proof-of-entry into the country.

Two days after my release, I was summoned to the Ma'ale Adumim police station for a second interrogation. During a two-hour period, the two police officers questioning me spent no more than 10 minutes asking about the Captagon I was allegedly smuggling. For the rest of the time they scrutinized photographs from my camera and phone. Based on these pictures they interrogated me about my prior travels in the region, the organizing I'd done in the U.S. and my attendance at a [political rally for Rasmea Odeh](#) headlined by Angela Davis.

The police attempted to create a narrative that I supported Al Qaeda and ISIS and they called me a liar when I stated, unequivocally, that I did not. Then they made anti-Muslim, anti-Palestinian and anti-Black statements, at one point comparing my alleged crime in Israel to them visiting New York City as tourists and going to Harlem to buy drugs.

But the police obviously did not believe their own claims, as they let me go after the interrogation. I then waited for the results of their lab test to confirm that I had indeed been carrying ibuprofen, a widely used over-the-counter pain reliever.

Four days later, the U.S. Embassy called to tell me that the police would return my passport the next day—eight days after I arrived and one after I had planned to leave. The police had closed my case on the basis of “no fault,” meaning that I did nothing wrong and no record of the charge would remain.

Since returning to the U.S. in January, I have not been able to find a picture online of Captagon that looks anything like the red pills in the image that the border chief used to justify my arrest. The officers who made this accusation either intentionally lied or irresponsibly operated on bad intelligence. Either way, I have no illusions about what occurred.

Israeli border agents racially profiled me long before accusing me of drug smuggling. Halfway through the bus ride between the Jordanian and Israeli terminals, an Israeli soldier ordered me and a Muslim man from the U.K. traveling with his wife and children off our bus the moment it entered Israel-controlled territory. We were the only two questioned out of 20 people. Ten minutes later, at the Israeli arrivals terminal, the first customs official that I spoke to had flagged me for additional questioning and called for her supervisor.

The racism of the border process at the Allenby Bridge was obvious. Most White and East Asian travelers made it through without delay. Almost all of the 20 people who were stopped when I was there were visibly Muslim, Arab or South Asian—some, in spite of being citizens of “safe” places like the U.S. and U.K. I did see a White woman questioned for her suspected involvement in Palestine solidarity work. [. . .]

Anti-Blackness also exists in Israel. Until a social worker exposed the practice, Ethiopian Jewish women immigrating to the country were given the contraceptive Depo-Provera [without their knowledge or consent](#). This resulted in a 20- to 50-percent decline in the birth rate of Ethiopian Israelis from about 2003 to 2013. Israel is home to an [open-air prison](#) for Eritrean and Sudanese

asylum-seekers, whom Prime Minister Netanyahu has called “infiltrators.” There have also been racist rallies against non-Jewish Africans supported by government officials.

I was targeted at the intersection of Israel’s Zionism and anti-Blackness. I was targeted at the intersection of the global War on Drugs and the War on Terror. I was targeted for being a young Black male. The international marker of “Blackness as criminal” superseded the global mobility of a U.S. passport. [ . . . ]

Whether intentionally or not, authorities stopped me from delivering messages about Black internationalism to the conference I was supposed to attend. Having confiscated my phone, computer and passport, police limited my ability to communicate, visit people and use my platform as a writer to amplify the stories of Palestinians facing immense repression.

I felt silenced from the moment I was arrested. I knew that because of my skin color, no amount of indignation or protest would free me and could actually make things worse. After my release, I was afraid to publicize my case because I thought it would interfere with my legal process and my exit from the country.

But while my arrest and interrogations were large on the scale of my personal experiences, they are insignificant compared to the suffering of Palestinians.

For all my mistreatment, I was released from jail at a time when, according to the Palestinian prisoners’ rights group Addameer, Israel is holding more than 600 Palestinians indefinitely under the policy of administrative detention without charge or trial. These “administrative detainees” were among the 6,800 Palestinian political prisoners being held in December 2015—including almost 500 children. [ . . . ]

I was also able to enter and travel freely across Israel and the West Bank. This same right is denied to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza and refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

According to the human rights organization Badil, 67 percent of the global Palestinian population is made up of refugees. Some are banned from all of Palestine. Some are internally displaced, living in the West Bank or Gaza but aren’t allowed to enter Jerusalem and what is currently called Israel. Most of these refugees or their ancestors fled or were expelled during Israel’s founding in 1948 or during the 1967 War.

To put this in perspective, a Palestinian friend I met while he was pursuing his master’s degree in St. Louis could travel 7,000 miles from the U.S. to Palestine, but he could not go 70 miles from his refugee camp near Bethlehem to visit me in Haifa. And in the two weeks I was in the area in December, Israel arbitrarily banned two Palestinian-American friends from entering the West Bank for 10 years by labeling them as “security threats.” One lived in the West Bank through high school and both are scholars.

The grave indignities of racism and colonialism are the reason I will keep fighting for Palestine and it is through the encouragement of Palestinian comrades that I begin to share this story now. [ . . . ]

As the “Assata Taught Me” hoodie I wore throughout my time in jail, court and police custody reminds me, “We have nothing to lose but our chains.”

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