



JQF as a Dangerous Weapon

Little did we know how dangerous the *Jerusalem Quarterly File* had become. On a wintry 16 December, a shipment of the latest issue of *JQF* was sent to subscribers in the Jerusalem area from the journal's Ramallah depot. The car carrying the magazine, an Aramex commercial courier, was stopped at Qalandia checkpoint (one of several army posts which now separate Ramallah from Jerusalem) by an Israeli army or IDF soldier, and after a cursory search of the car his eyes were drawn to an article in issue No. 16 on the "Ghettoization of Jerusalem." After briefly leafing through the article he became agitated and declared that the publication contained "anti-Israel material." On the spot he impounded the whole shipment, about 120 issues of the journal, and took the driver/courier for a makeshift interrogation on the side. The driver was released one hour later but not the journal. The officer had it expropriated in the name of the security of the state of Israel.

Later that evening the same driver, coming back through the Beitunia crossing to Ramallah, saw the same issue of the journal

thrown into the muddy entrance of the Ofer camp - a military outpost and detention center for the Israeli army located next to Betunia village. A few workers, detained for being caught by the army outside Ramallah without a permit, were burning copies of JQF to warm themselves from the cold evening air. They had placed the issues in a barrel and were adding firewood to them. At least we had some solace in this new capacity of JQF to serve a warming function to the wretched detainees.

We immediately reported this event to the local press, and to *Yediot Ahranot* and *Ha'aretz*. The latter's correspondent in the occupied territory, Amira Hass, called the IDF spokesperson and tried to get a reaction from them. Fully two weeks passed before the army came back to her. The soldier at the Qalandia checkpoint was acting individually. It is not the policy of the IDF to have soldiers manning the 'Mahsoom' (checkpoint) to sensor publications, she was told. In the bureaucratic language of the army this was the response to correspondent Hass:

"The confiscation of inciting material is to be done solely with the permission of the checkpoint officer. In the event of soldiers discovering material that is suspected of being inciting, a professional officer of the liaison office [ie. the DCO or Civil Administration - Ed.] comes to the checkpoint and undertakes a preliminary examination of the suspected material. If needed, the material is taken for a more in depth examination or it is returned to its owners. This case has been investigated but details are not known."

We were also reminded that "next time" (obviously this is a saga with a sequel), we

should get the name of the responsible officer, time of the incident and its location, etc.

This all sounds very neat. Those of you who have ever crossed the Qalandia crossing must wonder how you can approach a soldier, after he has taken away the journal, with a detailed questionnaire about his personal particulars, and what he intends to do with the material. When we contacted the driver of the car involved, he said he was put in a corner, with gun pointed at him, lest he make the wrong move.

The paradox of this entire story is that the journal is published in Jerusalem under license, and with a Jerusalem address. If the soldier was really interested in details he would have discovered that JQF was originally imported to Ramallah from Jerusalem and not visa versa. But who cares about these details.

What we did find later was that our case was one of routine confiscation of publications at checkpoints throughout the West Bank. We talked to the director of Aramex in Ramallah and he said that over the last few weeks their deliveries from the Ramallah office had been stopped and publications confiscated by soldiers. In all cases, there was no recourse to retrieve the publications or find out the reasons for their confiscation.

The most recent case involved the wholesale confiscation of publications by the Center for Democracy and Workers Rights at Qalandia checkpoint. In this case the courier was told that the material was inflammatory and would be sent to Beit El. When contacted at Beit El a few days later, the IDF was still checking the status of the printed material. In most cases however the confiscation was done by "lone soldiers" not accountable to a higher authority. Well, when you put these lone

soldiers together, they become an army, and when you add the sum total of their acts it becomes a pattern. And when you have the top brass leaving them to behave unhindered, with their guns strapped at their side, the whole process becomes an instrument of state repression.

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