

**BREAKING
THE SILENCE**

Military Rule

Testimonies of soldiers from the Civil
Administration, Gaza DCL and COGAT

2011-2021



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Introduction	6
Organizational Structure	8
Map: The Civil Administration — Regional Districts	11
Glossary	12
Translators' Note	18

Part 1 — Population	19
[1] "No, You Can't Have Your Most Basic Needs Met"	27
[2] Bureaucratic Violence	27
[3] Delete, Delete, Delete	28
[4] We'll Hurt the Whole Family	29
[5] She Had to Go Back to Gaza	30
[6] "Hello, This is Nijam, I Want to Enter My House"	32
[7] Palestinians are Constantly Subject to Psychological Abuse	33
[8] Cognitive Dissonance	34
[9] We're Not Welfare NCOs, We're Not Caring for Them	35
[10] You Have Absolute Power	38
[11] I Felt I Couldn't See the Person Behind It	38
[12] Our Level of Arabic is Basically Zero	41
[13] For Me the Palestinians Were a Burden	41
[14] "Ruh, Ruh, Bara, Bara"	43
[15] He Made a Mistake	46
[16] Hang Up on Them	46
[17] We Don't Want Them to Enter	47
[18] Just for the Laughs	49
[19] "Come Back Tomorrow, Eight Thirty"	52
[20] It's Another Tool That Helps Control the Population	52
[21] They Scan the Face	53
[22] Information on Palestinian Residents	54
[23] It is Necessarily a Violent Act	55
[24] So Many Banned People, it's Surreal	56
[25] "You're Banned by the Police"	58
[26] Just a Way to Put Pressure on the Person	59
[27] Deny this Person Entry	60
[28] A System of Interests	64

[29] They Give Us Information	65
[30] Compradors are Like Collaborators	67
[31] There are Some Who Call Them Bantustans	68
[32] How Much Bulgur Goes Into the Gaza Strip	70
[33] The Shin Bet’s Position is to Say No	71
[34] Waiting for Shin Bet Approval	72
[35] It’s Bureaucracy	73
[36] The Entire Gazan Sewage System Will Collapse	74
[37] That’s Just How it Is	75
[38] The Shin Bet Controls Everything that Happens There	77
[39] Bureaucratic Oppression	78
[40] At-Risk Permit	79
[41] To Govern	81

Part 2 — Land 84

Map: The West Bank — Areas A, B and C 89

[42] It’s Not a Battle if You Know in Advance Who’s Going to Win	90
[43] The Settlers Come to the Meetings	91
[44] No Village Gets Water from Mekorot	96
[45] Regular Meetings With the Heads of Jewish Settlements	97
[46] A Bypass Road	100
[47] Settlers Can Call in and Report	100
[48] I’ve Confiscated Loads and Loads of Things	101
[49] There’s No Such Thing as “An Illegal Outpost”	102
[50] The Secretary General Would Meet with the Head of the Civil Administration	103
[51] So The Land Stays as Clear as Possible of Palestinians	104
[52] A Different Law for Different People	105
[53] Illegal Palestinian Construction in Area C is Much More Severe from the Administration’s Point of View than Illegal Jewish Construction . . .	106
[54] The Area C Operations Room	110
[55] I Don’t Want You Bringing this Thing Through Here	110
[56] One of the Unit’s Missions is to Normalize the Occupation	112
[57] Strips of Control	113
[58] We’re the Commanders of the Palestinian Police	114
[59] We’re the Masters	115

Introduction

The Civil Administration is a military body tasked with managing the civilian aspects of ruling the occupied West Bank. Together with the Gaza District Coordination and Liaison office (DCL), it is subordinate to the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT). These governing bodies are responsible, among other things, for granting or denying permits to Palestinians to enter Israel for work, medical care or travel abroad; controlling the import and export of goods, including food; allocating natural resources and planning and building civilian infrastructure. In other words, COGAT, the Civil Administration and the Gaza DCL shape and impact countless aspects of Palestinians' daily lives. It is impossible to understand the Israeli occupation without putting these units under the spotlight, and yet, they receive very little public attention both within and outside of Israel, and their work has rarely been the subject of in-depth research and investigation.

At first glance, these units appear to serve a mainly bureaucratic function and, as such, lack direct involvement in the routine violence exercised to maintain Israeli control over the occupied territories. The reality, however, is entirely different. Soldiers' testimonies included in this booklet provide a glimpse into a system of bureaucratic control and management that plays a key role in the complex, intricate system that is the Israeli occupation.

As demonstrated in the testimonies given by soldiers and officers who served in COGAT, the Gaza DCL, and particularly the Civil Administration, the unit's work operates on two axes that exemplify Israeli occupation policies as a whole: preserving and perfecting control and monitoring of the Palestinian people, on the one hand, and entrenching and expanding Israel's hold on Palestinian territory, on the other. This booklet is divided along these axes and takes a closer look at each one.

Historical Background

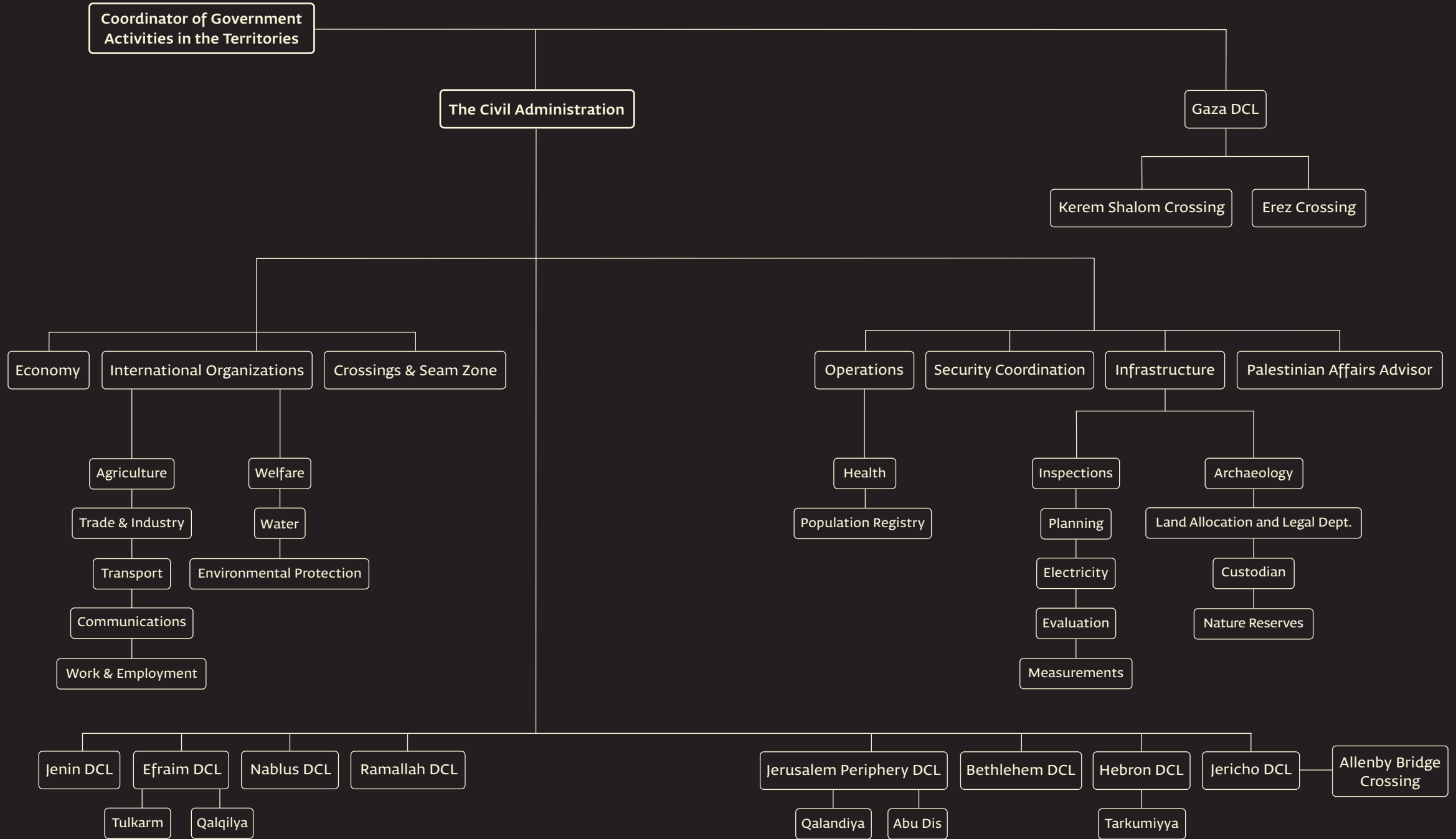
When Israel first occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip in June of 1967, its military became the de facto sovereign in these territories and installed a military government to run them. The military commanders – the Head of the Central Command in the West Bank and the Head of the Southern Command in Gaza, both of whom hold the military rank of General – were vested with all governance, legislative, administrative and appointment powers in the respective territories and over their residents. According to the Shaham Plan, conceived by Military Advocate General Meir Shamgar in 1963, the West Bank was split into eight

districts, and military governors were appointed for each and given power over all military and civilian affairs in their particular districts. This division exists, but for minor adjustments, to this day (see map on page 11).

In 1981, after the peace treaty with Egypt was signed, the Government of Israel created the Civil Administration. Still a military unit, it was meant to separate Israel's security-related activities in the occupied territories from civilian ones and assume responsibility for Palestinians' civilian affairs from the military government. Along with soldiers and commanding officers, this military unit also has IDF-payrolled civilians known as "staff officers," who serve as representatives of Israeli government ministries in the occupied territories. While organizationally, the Civil Administration is subordinate to COGAT, it originally received permission and powers to act vis-à-vis the Palestinian population from the Head of the Central Command and continues to answer directly to him as the de facto sovereign in the occupied territories. Up until the execution of the Gaza Disengagement Plan in 2005 and the removal of Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip, an identical system operated there under the Head of the Southern Command. After disengagement, the Gaza Civil Administration was dismantled, and the Gaza DCL assumed responsibility for executing COGAT policies in the area, now remotely.

The signing of the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, which were meant to be temporary, interim agreements, largely shaped the roles and responsibilities of the Civil Administration today. The establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the withdrawal of IDF forces from major Palestinian cities and the division of the West Bank into Areas A, B and C have reshaped the functions fulfilled by the Civil Administration: some of its powers were handed over to the Palestinian Authority, and it took on the added role of coordinating activities with Palestinian government and security bodies. At the same time, the transition from direct management of civilian affairs, to administration of day-to-day life through a security-tinted lens by the military regime has also bolstered the power of the Shin Bet, which has become, in effect, the highest ruling body in the occupied territories. As demonstrated by several of the testimonies included in this booklet, the Shin Bet holds the power to determine the security classification of every Palestinian civilian in the occupied territories, thus giving them the final say in the treatment they will receive from the Civil Administration or Gaza DCL. This gives the Shin Bet critical influence over Israeli policy and decision making vis-à-vis the Palestinian population.

Organizational Structure



The West Bank



The Civil Administration - Regional Districts

Glossary (In alphabetical order, apart from the first three key terms)

COGAT Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories. The military unit responsible for implementation of Israel's policy vis-à-vis the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and which coordinates Israel's relations with the Palestinian Authority (PA). The unit also holds responsibility for security coordination between Israeli and PA security and law enforcement bodies, as well as coordination with and oversight of international organizations working in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Civil Administration A sub-unit of COGAT, responsible for the civilian aspects of the IDF's military regime in the West Bank. The unit derives its authority from the Head of the Central Command – the general who holds sovereignty over the West Bank – and its authority is binding on both the Palestinian and Jewish populations living in the West Bank.

DCL District Coordination and Liaison office. Regional offices of the Civil Administration, spread throughout the West Bank. The DCL's responsibilities include coordination and liaison with the Palestinian Authority, issuing permits for the Palestinian population and operating the law enforcement and oversight of construction and infrastructure (water, electricity, roads etc.) in their region. In most cases, the reception window (*see below*) is situated in the DCL.

Allenby Bridge Crossing The only border crossing between the West Bank and Jordan, located close to the city of Jericho. As a rule, Palestinians are not permitted to travel abroad via Israel's airports (apart from in highly exceptional circumstances), and thus the Allenby Bridge Crossing serves as the Palestinian population's main border crossing for international travel – for both West Bank and Gaza residents. The crossing is operated by COGAT and the Israel Airports Authority, who also control who can cross through it.

Areas A, B and C In line with the Oslo Accords signed in the 1990s, the West Bank was divided into three parts (*see map on page 89*): In Area A, which includes the large Palestinian cities and towns, the Palestinian Authority has responsibility over civilian and policing matters. In Area B, the Palestinian Authority has responsibility over civilian matters while the IDF is responsible for security. And in Area C, the IDF is responsible both for civilian and security matters. Area C was meant to be transferred in a gradual process to the Palestinian Authority apart from specific areas whose status was to be decided in final status agreements. It makes up 60% of the West Bank and is where almost all of the Israeli settlements and outposts are located, as well as numerous Palestinian villages.. Contrary to the agreements signed by both parties during the Oslo Accords, the IDF operates regularly in all areas of the West Bank.

Ban Restriction of access of a Palestinian resident of the occupied territories to a certain permit (in most cases this applies to permits for entering Israel). There are several types of bans (*see below*), and various reasons can be cited for banning someone. Despite the many restrictions that come with receiving a ban, Palestinians who are banned are not informed of this, and their ability to appeal the ban, or to find out what the ban was given for, is extremely limited.

– **Operations Branch Ban** A ban given by officers within the Civil Administration. The reasons for giving such a ban range from the Palestinian in question owing money to the Israeli authorities (an unpaid fine) to behavior deemed inappropriate according to the officers who operate the DCL's reception window.

– **Police Ban** A ban placed by the Israeli Police force on a Palestinian who is suspected of involvement in, or having committed, a criminal offense.

– **Shin Bet Ban/Security Ban** A ban placed by the Shin Bet (*see below*) on a Palestinian suspected of involvement in terrorist activity, or a member of that person's family. This is the most common type of ban, and according to various estimates, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are currently banned by the Shin Bet.

'The Battle for Area C' The name given to the Israeli authorities' efforts to monitor and restrict Palestinian presence in Area C of the West Bank. These efforts involve increased monitoring and aggressive enforcement against Palestinian construction and agricultural cultivation in these areas. As part of this 'Battle,' the Civil Administration operates a telephone hotline known as 'Operations Room C' (*see below*).

'Blue Wolf' / 'White Wolf' Biometric databases used by the IDF and Civilian Security Coordinators (settlers responsible for the security of a settlement) to identify Palestinians in the West Bank. These databases are accessed through an application installed on designated smartphones and computers, and they include personal information, previous permit applications and whether they were granted or not, information on bans placed on the Palestinian in question, and more.

Comprador A Palestinian resident of the occupied territories who passes on information to Civil Administration officials. In most cases, passing on information is rewarded by the Civil Administration by expediting the process of issuing permits for the comprador and/or his or her family members and/or friends.

DCO District Coordination Office. The DCOs are the Palestinian Authority's regional agencies that connect between the Palestinian residents of a certain district and the Civil Administration for everything to do with permit requests. Apart from exceptional cases, Palestinians wishing to obtain a permit must submit their requests to the DCO, whose representatives pass them on to the Civil Administration. The approved permits, or rejected requests, are then sent back to the Palestinian residents through the DCO.

Dual Use Materials Materials and goods which serve the needs of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip and which, according to the Israeli security establishment, could also be used for military purposes. The import of these materials/goods – which includes construction materials, mechanical machinery and various other raw materials – is heavily restricted, subject to intensified monitoring by Israeli authorities, and in many cases importing them into the Strip is prohibited entirely. Many sectors of Gazan society – including the public health, industrial, agricultural sectors and more – are heavily reliant on the various items on the dual use list.

Enforcement Unit A unit within the Civil Administration responsible for enforcing construction laws in the West Bank. Most of the unit's work involves tracking and demolishing illegal construction.

Many employees in the Enforcement Unit are settlers.

Erez Crossing A human transit border crossing located in the northern Gaza Strip. It is the only crossing to serve Palestinians who are given permission by Israel to enter Israeli territory or the West Bank.

Hasbara Literally 'explaining' Israel's narrative. In practice, hasbara is pro-Israel PR, in which both the Israeli government and its various agencies (including the IDF), as well as a wide range of institutions, NGOs and charities in Israel and abroad, partake. Much of the time, hasbara involves whitewashing the occupation and blaming the Palestinians for most or all of the ills of the situation in Israel-Palestine while portraying Israel as the victim of Palestinian aggression.

International Organizations (ARBEL) A department within COGAT responsible for the unit's relations with international organizations that operate in the occupied territories.

Kerem Shalom Crossing A border crossing located in the southern Gaza Strip for the transfer of goods. This is the only crossing for the purpose of transferring goods in and out of the Gaza Strip. Decisions regarding which goods,

and what quantities, can be transferred through Kerem Shalom – the limitations on goods – are made exclusively by the Israeli authorities.

Mumarnat A magnetic smartcard that contains the owner's biometric data, including their facial features and fingerprints. Every Palestinian who enters Israel for any purpose, even once, needs a magnetic card in order to obtain a permit (apart from urgent humanitarian cases). Since the magnetic card is required for anything Palestinian residents require from the Civil Administration, many Palestinians apply for and obtain magnetic cards even without needing them for a specific purpose. Thus the Civil Administration is able to collect the personal details and biometric information of the Palestinian population, which is another way for Israel to consolidate its control.

'Operations Room C' A telephone hotline operated by the Civil Administration which Israelis can call to report alleged Palestinian construction which the Israeli right interprets as being a 'takeover attempt' of land in Area C. This was set up as part of Israel's 'Battle for Area C' in an effort to make it easier to monitor and control construction and infrastructure development to serve the needs of the Palestinian population.

PAA Palestinian Affairs Advisor, formerly known as Arab Affairs Advisor. A

department of COGAT that acts as a pseudo-intelligence unit, tracking the general mood, as well as social and political trends, on the Palestinian street.

Permit A document issued by the Israeli military regime in the occupied territories, allowing the Palestinian resident who holds it to carry out a certain action. The 'permit regime', which presides in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, includes over 100 types of permits, including: permits to enter Israel for various reasons (work, medical treatment, religious worship etc), permits for importing and exporting goods, permits for laying infrastructure, trade permits and many more. The Civil Administration is the body responsible for managing the permit regime.

Philosopher's Stone A computerized database used by the Civil Administration and the Gaza DCL that holds information relating to permit applications by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. This includes previous permit applications, whether or not those applications were approved, whether or not any bans have been applied to the Palestinian applicant in question, dates of previous entries into and exits from Israel and more. The system also allows the unit's soldiers to retroactively cancel permits that have been issued to a specific person or to a group of people.

Reception Window Service centers operated by the Civil Administration in the regional DCLs. For the most part, Palestinians come to the reception window to obtain a mumarnat magnetic card (*see below*), and for emergency permit applications. Although operating the reception windows is one of the main roles of the Civil Administration, soldiers generally lack the appropriate training to deal with a civilian population (including the fact that most speak little, if any, Arabic), are unable to provide for the needs of the Palestinian population effectively and in many cases the unit is understaffed.

Resident Information A computerized database used by the Civil Administration and the Gaza DCL that holds personal information on every Palestinian resident in the West Bank and Gaza. The information in the system includes the personal details of the resident in question, their family members, previous permit applications the person has submitted, bans applied to the person, and more.

Seam Zone Land officially within the West Bank but which is situated between the Separation Barrier and the Green Line (the 1949 ceasefire line demarcating the official boundaries of the West Bank). Within the Seam Zone are a number of Palestinian communities, as well as privately-owned Palestinian land. Due to their location on the other side of the Separation Barrier, access to these

areas is restricted and requires a special permit issued by the Civil Administration. As such, Israel restricts the access of Palestinian residents to their land, and in some cases, to their homes.

Separation Fence/Barrier A barrier, parts of which are a fence and parts of which are a wall, separating the West Bank from the State of Israel. Due to Israel's desire to annex a number of settlements de facto into Israeli territory, the barrier's route approximates but does not exactly correspond to (the 1949 ceasefire line demarcating the official boundaries of the West Bank), creating enclaves of privately-owned Palestinian land on the Israeli side of the fence (*see 'Seam Zone'*).

Shin Bet Israel's 'General Security Service.' An agency responsible for collecting and processing intelligence in the occupied territories. Although the IDF is technically the sovereign in the territories, in practice the Shin Bet is in many ways the highest authority for security matters and is involved in much of the decision making process relating to the administration of the Palestinian population's day to day life. The Shin Bet's operations and decision making take place behind a heavy veil of secrecy and are often accepted by soldiers and officers on the ground and in Israeli society in general without question, due to the high regard in which the agency is held.

Staff Officer The Civil Administration's Staff Officers are representatives of Israeli government ministries within Israel's military regime in the West Bank. They are responsible for a wide range of issues, from archaeology to infrastructure (*see chart on page 8-9*). Staff Officers are Israeli civilians (not military personnel) and in many cases are settlers.

Welfare NCO An (almost always female) IDF soldier who is responsible for the welfare of soldiers in a particular unit, particularly those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

'Welfare NCO for the Palestinians'
A derogatory term used to mock soldiers serving in the Civil Administration. The mindset among many soldiers, including those serving within the unit, is that the Civil Administration 'helps' the Palestinians because of Israel's generosity or goodwill. This mindset disregards Israel's legal responsibilities as an occupying power to the population living under its military rule. The soldiers' own use of this term is indicative of low morale among much of the unit's personnel.

'Whitewashing Construction'
Retroactive legal recognition of houses or other structures built illegally. Almost all cases of 'whitewashing' are of structures in Israeli settlements and outposts and sometimes even applies to entire settlements.

Translators' Note:

The testimonies in this booklet, as in all of our previous booklets, were given as part of in-person interviews, which were then transcribed and translated. Translation is always in itself a type of commentary. As part of our mission at Breaking the Silence to amplify the voices of soldiers who choose to share their testimonies, we have tried to preserve and remain as faithful as possible to the exact wording used by the testifiers, at times even at the expense of the texts' readability. All of this is done so as not to put words in the testifiers' mouths, to minimize our role as commentators and to give our readers an unmediated account of what the testifiers told us. For that reason, the texts in this and our other booklets sometimes sound a little unnatural and reflect the specific tone of the Hebrew language in its spoken form. Where necessary, we've added short explanations in parentheses, footnotes and the glossary on page 12.

Breaking the Silence goes to great lengths to protect the anonymity of its testifiers. Therefore, the details of the testifiers provided at the start of each testimony (rank, location, period etc.) vary, so as not to give away information that could undermine these efforts.

The differentiation, and at times apparent inconsistency, between 'area' and 'location' in the details given at the start of each testimony is due to the fact that many of the testimonies were given by soldiers who served in specific locations (e.g. COGAT HQ), but the policy or practice they describe affected a more general area (e.g. the Gaza Strip).

Part 1 — Population

The role of the Civil Administration was set out in 1981 in Order No. 947, issued by the military government of the occupied territories. Section 2 of the order stipulates:

"The Civil Administration shall manage civilian affairs in the area, in keeping with the provisions of this order for the welfare and benefit of the population and for the purpose of providing and operating public services, given the need to maintain good governance and public order."

However, the soldiers' testimonies included in this booklet show that, in practice, this civilian management is not in fact meant to serve "the welfare and benefit of the population" but instead functions as a key tool for maintaining Israeli military control over the territories. The testimonies reveal a highly effective system of control, which is largely bureaucratic in nature.

A central tool used to exert this control is the permit system, which Israel uses as an instrument to control personal, collective, economic and political aspects of Palestinians' lives. A permit denotes approval of a Palestinian carrying out a certain action. The permit regime operating in the West Bank and Gaza Strip includes myriad different types of permits, without which many of the most elementary actions in a person's life cannot be carried out, and many needs cannot be met: permits are needed for passage into Israel (*e.g. testimony 15*) or to access privately-owned land (*e.g., testimony 55*). Sometimes, the system reaches a point of absurdity, requiring Palestinians to ask the Civil Administration to let them into their own home (*e.g. testimony 6*). The permit regime turns basic rights into privileges to be requested from the sovereign, which are then granted (or not) at the sovereign's discretion.

The Israeli authorities claim that permits enable them to give the Palestinians normalcy (a concept known in the IDF as "fabric of life"), but reality is quite the opposite – for millions of Palestinians, everyday activities wholly depend on a vague, labyrinthian system they have no say in or control over, which represents neither their wishes nor their interests. Contrary to the claim that the permit regime is meant to help keep Israeli citizens safe, the testimonies reveal that its true function is the institution of a system for controlling, dividing and managing the Palestinian population on both a collective and individual level. Providing public services is a duty Israel bears as the occupying power, but under the permit regime, the most basic rights and services are provisional, making them a perfect means to control, manage and monitor the population on an ongoing basis. The provision of services is, in and of itself, the means of control.

The testimonies in this booklet reveal that many soldiers perceive the granting of permits as aiding the enemy. This mindset creates an inherent conflict between the soldiers' official function – providing public services for the benefit of the Palestinian population – and their understanding of their job as protecting the State of Israel and fighting the enemy (*see testimonies 1, 8 and 9*). In their testimonies, soldiers describe feeling how serving in the Civil Administration put them in an inferior position compared to other soldiers (*see testimonies 9 and 13*) and how, often, the sense that they were ostensibly providing a service to the enemy was translated into harassment, violence, disrespect or denial of services to Palestinians, including humiliating treatment during interactions with them.

The reception windows at the various DCLs are a central point of interaction between Civil Administration soldiers and Palestinian residents. Soldiers report that these reception windows are often overcrowded, causing long delays in processing of permits and magnetic cards required in order to cross through checkpoints (*see below*). Hundreds of Palestinians arrive at the windows every day. They depend on soldiers for their most basic needs, and the soldiers, in turn, are required to respond to their requests, including filing and approving them on the computer, among other tasks. Both soldiers and commanding officers describe in their testimonies how these working conditions breed antagonism and moral apathy among the soldiers and contribute to their dehumanization of the Palestinian population. Soldiers describe how the human beings they were serving were reduced, over time, to no more than an administrative task, a problem to be filed on the computer system (*see testimonies 13 and 15*). Testifiers talk about how soldiers at the reception window lack sufficient Arabic skills to manage complex conversations (*see testimonies 11 and 12*). As part of their training, they take a brief Arabic course, during which they acquire a rudimentary and entirely technical vocabulary. Once a Palestinian says something beyond the basic bureaucratic jargon, most soldiers are highly unlikely to understand them, which often leads to aggressive communication, as soldiers resort to shouting and verbal abuse.

The testimonies reveal that even soldiers and officers who wanted to serve in the Civil Administration and understood the importance of their jobs eventually became worn down by their working conditions, the intensity of the work and the Palestinians' dependency on them. Accordingly, many describe how all these factors directly resulted in a disrespectful attitude, reluctance to help, abuse and bureaucratic violence (*see e.g. testimonies 9, 14 and 16*).

Digital data systems also serve as a key tool for controlling and surveilling the Palestinian population (*see testimonies 20, 21 and 22*). They contain a wealth of personal information that is classified and sorted based on the Palestinian population registry – which Israel controls. Israel also collects biometrics, including facial features and fingerprints, which every Palestinian must provide as a prerequisite for obtaining a permit (apart from permits for medical treatment). For instance, Palestinians are required to have a smart magnetic card, known as 'mumarnat', which contains their biometric data, in order to approach the Civil Administration in the first place. Many obtain this card regardless of any specific need and regularly renew it. This is one way the Civil Administration uses Palestinians' dependency on the occupier's permits to steer them into Israel's control and monitoring apparatuses. Access to basic rights hinges on providing one's identity and personal information.

These information systems have morphed over the past few years into a biometric database. Soldiers serving in the Civil Administration, soldiers staffing checkpoints and even settlement Civilian Security Coordinators (settlers responsible for the security of a particular settlement, appointed by Israel's Defense Ministry) can access the information stored in this database in various ways. Soldiers are required to take pictures of Palestinians or their mumarnat cards on a designated smartphone and input their personal information into the database, which includes photos and a list of permits and bans pertaining to the person. This is how Palestinians' identity documents function as a constantly updating surveillance tool and help tighten Israeli monitoring of the Palestinian population.

Bans are the flip side of permits. A ban means a restriction on a certain Palestinian's ability to receive a specific permit – most often, a movement permit for entry into Israel. There are three types of bans – security, police and Operations Branch. A security ban is entered into the system by the Shin Bet due to suspicion that the individual in question or their family members are involved in terrorism. Security bans are the most common type of ban, and estimates put the number of Palestinians with Shin Bet bans at hundreds of thousands. Palestinians find out about bans from Civil Administration soldiers, who usually do not know the reason and cannot explain it to the Palestinians (*see testimonies 24 and 25*). Police bans are issued by the Israel Police over suspected criminal activity. Operations Branch bans are entered into the system by Civil Administration officers for various reasons, ranging from fees owed to Israeli authorities to punishment for conduct at the reception window deemed to be aggressive or inappropriate. Palestinians are not automatically informed of a ban issued against them and have extremely limited options for challenging

them or receiving information about the reasons for the ban. In some cases, a ban means the person in question is denied the right to freedom of movement, the ability to work in Israel or even to visit a dying relative.

Bans are not necessarily a “surgical” tool to be used specifically and accurately. The Civil Administration apparatus also controls the Palestinian population on a collective basis through blanket permit denials carried out at the push of a button (*see testimony 4*). Bans are implemented with the push of a button against Palestinians who are not suspected of anything, based on family relations or geographic proximity to other Palestinians – from relatives of a Palestinian suspected of terrorism to the hundreds of residents of the suspect’s village (*see testimonies 3 and 26*). In some cases, the neighbors of a Palestinian suspected of terrorism are denied permits (*see for example, testimony 22*). This clearly indicates that bans are not just meant to prevent potential terrorist activity. The soldiers are not required to arrest a person who has a security ban. Rather, the ban serves as a form of deterrence, intimidation and collective punishment.

A ban is a punitive measure that has dramatic repercussions for an individual’s life, and it is done in secret, without trial, without any real possibility of appeal and often for reasons with a dubious connection to security. The threat of the Shin Bet, the police or the Civil Administration denying a permit constantly looms over every Palestinian’s head, producing and preserving a sense of arbitrariness and uncertainty in the face of the force the military regime can wield. In this way, permits and bans serve Israel’s control through a complex system that turns rights into ‘privileges’ and then extends or withholds them at its discretion.

Another way the military uses the permit regime as a means of control is through in-built favorable treatment awarded to cronies and interested parties, whom the military calls ‘compradors’ – Palestinians who collaborate with the Civil Administration and supply it with information. These Palestinians are rewarded with preferential treatment, easier access to permits and a direct line of communication with Civil Administration officers. Compradors are often Palestinians with clout and influence, members of the political, social or economic elite, such as business people and heads of local councils or other Palestinian Authority bodies and security agencies, and the special treatment they receive translates into economic advantages and personal benefits (*see testimonies 28, 29 and 30*). Thus, the Civil Administration leverages the benefits it has the power to extend in order to put compradors at the service of the Israeli security establishment.

Contrary to popular belief among the Israeli public, Israeli control is not limited to the West Bank. After the Israeli military withdrew from the territory of the Gaza Strip, Israel retained control over critical aspects of Gaza residents' lives. It controls all land crossings (with the exception of Rafah Crossing and Salah a-Din gate on the Egyptian border), as well as Gaza's sea, air and digital spaces. Control is exerted by COGAT, the Gaza DCL and the Shin Bet, which monitor and regulate almost all movement of people and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip according to Israeli considerations.

Any Palestinian wishing to travel from Gaza to Israel or the West Bank via Israel and vice versa must pass through Erez Crossing, which requires a permit. These permits are only given to people who meet a narrow list of criteria, officially designed to reduce Palestinian travel between Gaza and the West Bank as part of Israel's separation policy. Even those who do meet these narrow criteria may discover they are prohibited from exiting Gaza due to security bans. Some of the testifiers describe intractable, inaccessible bureaucratic mazes on the way to receiving an exit or entry permit, not just for Gaza residents, but also for staff members of international organizations (*see testimonies 5, 34 and 37*).

Routine flow of goods is a condition for Gaza's two million residents' basic standard of living. Until 2018, Kerem Shalom, an Israeli-controlled crossing, was Gaza's only crossing for goods, and it remains the only commercial access point between Gaza and the West Bank, even after the opening of Salah a-Din gate between Gaza and Egypt. All goods passing through the crossing require Israeli approval, provided by COGAT, the Gaza DCL and officials representing the Israeli government (*see testimony 35*). Israel's control over Gaza's crossings gives it the ability to manage and control the volume of goods flowing in and out of the Strip.

The testimonies indicate that often, the final decision on what goods may exit or enter is in the hands of the Shin Bet – an agency that does not answer to the public and, unlike COGAT or the Civil Administration, is tasked with preserving Israeli security rather than maintaining normal civilian life. In the name of security, Israel limits the entry of various goods and items on a list of what it calls “dual-use” materials, that is, items that can be used for both military and civilian needs (*for more, see glossary*). In this way, Israel prevents and delays the entry of goods needed for normal life in the Gaza Strip. For the most part, when the Shin Bet bans people or goods, COGAT and Gaza DCL soldiers are not informed of the reasons. Since the Shin Bet has the final word on the entry of goods into Gaza, there are often long delays in answering local residents' requests, a major contributing factor to Gaza's humanitarian and sanitary crisis (*see testimonies 36 and 38*).

Israel's policies vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are components of a single mechanism. The soldiers' testimonies demonstrate how the military regime has inevitably resulted in the IDF's management of day-to-day aspects of civilian life being turned into a tool with which to maintain and perpetuate military control over the Palestinian population residing in the occupied territories.

[1]

“No, You Can’t Have Your Most Basic Needs Met”

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Location: Nablus DCL Base | Period: 2019

You tell residents, on a daily basis, “No, you can’t have your most basic needs met,” and it could be your grandmother, it could be your grandfather. At a certain point you also become violent, you can’t take the [Palestinian] residents’ ‘chutzpah’ (insolence), “How can you ask for something you can’t ask for?” And add to that the soldiers’ racism, not everyone is a “bleeding heart,” I’m saying this in air quotes. [The soldiers] see that an IDF soldier who was in [A Palestinian’s] house two years ago was killed by terrorists during an operational activity in the Gaza Strip, so they put two and two together – here’s the terrorist, I’m giving a permit to a terrorist. I had lots of stories around that, I remember there was one soldier who was just yelling at this resident who was fifty-something who just didn’t understand her because she didn’t speak a word of Arabic. We learn some kind of minimal level of Arabic and you get [that this is] a crazy situation – you’re not [on an] arrest mission, you’re not telling someone, “Jib al-hawiya, waqef” (give me your ID, stop), you’re actually at a reception window (*see glossary*). Imagine your clerk at the bank, or [an official from] a government office, started yelling at you over something you asked for, [it’s a] terrible situation and over something very very basic. You don’t even go to the bank for your most basic need, which is your freedom of movement, you go to the reception window because you have to, not [because you] want to, and then you encounter a situation where you’re like slapped in the face, [and] she’s telling him: “How do you not understand? Shut up!”

————— Imagine your clerk at the bank, or an official from a government office, started yelling at you over something you asked for, it’s a terrible situation and over something very very basic. You don’t even go to the bank for your most basic need which is your freedom of movement, you go to the reception window because you have to, not because you want to.

[2]

Bureaucratic Violence

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Gaza DCL | Area: Gaza Strip | Location: Gaza DCL Base | Period: 2014

When you were at Erez Crossing, did you have any doubts about what you were seeing?

Back then, I don’t think I had any doubts. I was convinced I was on the humane side. I was happy that I, as a good soldier who wanted to help people, got to be in the place that gives the permits.

Was that your goal for serving in the DCL (see glossary) in the first place?

I didn't choose it, but yes, I was happy that I wasn't in something combative. I didn't want to be violent.

And do you see it differently today?

Absolutely, yes. I think it might not look like the violence we're used to hearing about, violence at the checkpoint, or soldiers abusing Palestinians. But it's a different kind of violence. It's bureaucratic violence. We use a great deal of violence against Gaza. During the rounds [of fighting] themselves, we use a lot of violence and sow destruction, and it's part of the same strategy. Now, I see [those rounds of fighting] as having to 'mow the lawn' every few years, and in-between, Gazans have to be kept on a very short leash, not allowed too many exits and entries, not allowed to do many things we'd take for granted, like being able to fish wherever we feel like, or being able to fly. It's a prison.

———— Gazans have to be kept on a very short leash, not allowed too many exits and entries, not allowed to do many things we'd take for granted, like being able to fish wherever we feel like, or being able to fly. It's a prison.

[3]

Delete, Delete, Delete

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Ramallah
Location: Civil Administration HQ, Beit El | Period: 2017

There was a prisoners' strike in one of the prisons. There was this incident where that's it, everyone started to strike, and they (the security establishment) wanted to pressure them to stop this strike because it was getting a bad name all over the world, because people abroad started to find out what was happening in the prison. Usually our daily schedule was to start at 8 AM and finish work at 5 PM, and on that day, they called everyone into the office after 5 PM and asked us to work on something. They gave us a file with tons and tons of ID numbers and divided it among the different work stations and told us that these were IDs of people who were in the prison and were part of this strike, and they asked us to just go one by one into the IDs and their relatives in the system, and simply delete any prisoner visit by relatives.

What does that mean?

It means that any relative who wanted to come visit a prisoner who participated in the strike or whatever it was, they asked us to delete the permit, to just cancel it so it doesn't happen, so they couldn't go visit them, in order to pressure them so that they stop doing the strike. That's what happened and in the moment I didn't think about what I was actually doing. They just told

us: you're not leaving the office until you finish with this file, like until there's not a single relative remaining, like so that we cancel their permits. And then we started to fight among ourselves because the people who'd been there longer, who got it a bit more said: No, we're not going to do that. But I don't think it was for moral reasons but more in terms of, "We want to go to bed, we don't want to stay in the office after working hours and deal with these permits." So we did all think together about ways to get through it as fast as we could so we could finish it and go to bed, and it really was like one by one, endlessly, going in, canceling. Going in, canceling. And I'm just seeing, mother, father and sisters and cousins, and just delete, delete, delete. And then like, only when I went to bed, I stopped to think about what I had done in that moment and what it means. I thought that if these guys had got to the point of deciding that they want to go on strike in prison, that means something. It's still prison, right? But I thought that it's just from a moral standpoint a terrible thing to do, it's just done in order to break them, and I think that was the goal, to just make them stop the strike. I was an instrument in this whole story, I pushed buttons and helped the military break these people morally and physically. And that's why it really kind of scarred me because I was 19, and what do I understand about the conflict at all? When I talked about it with the soldiers, about what we'd actually done here, they told me that nothing can be done, it's the IDF and they were, at the end of the day, prisoners, they're criminals and an order is an order, and you have to do [it], and there's nothing to think about beyond that.

———— I was an instrument in this whole story, I pushed buttons and helped the military break these people morally and physically. And that's why it really kind of scarred me because I was 19 and what do I understand about the conflict at all?

[4]

We'll Hurt the Whole Family

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Period: 2017

Can a terrorist's cousin be banned (see glossary)?

Yes, yes. For instance, often after some kind of terrorist attack, and this is something we would do, you automatically place a ban on the [person's] entire first and second [social] circles. Sometimes on the whole village, depending on how big the thing was. It would happen quite a lot.

What's the idea behind something like that?

To show the terrorist that he has something to lose and that his actions have repercussions. That he's not the only one getting hurt – if a terrorist attack is

carried out now, we'll hurt the whole family. Like, take responsibility for the actions you undertake, because a lot of people are going to get hurt from this.

How many people is it, for example?

Palestinians have large families, so, say, [in] the second circle, more than 50. When it's the whole village, it comes to hundreds of people, lots of people.

How does it work in practice?

There's a permit system, [called] 'Philosopher's Stone' (*see glossary*). There's an option to filter and select people from a certain age range, from a certain area, and then, with the push of a button, you place a ban on all of them.

When you click on the person, does his whole family appear?

Yes.

Say you want to see the entire village – you write “Nabi Saleh,” it gives you all the people who have a permit in Nabi Saleh and you press “delete”, and then everyone’s permit is removed?

Yes.

Now, how does a person know his permit has been removed?

He doesn't know. He's probably going to arrive at the reception window (*see glossary*) to ask for a permit next time, and he'll suddenly find out he has a ban. Or he'll come to the crossing to exit and will be told that his permit has been canceled.

———— **Often after some kind of terrorist attack, and this is something we would do, you automatically place a ban on the entire first and second social circles. Sometimes on the whole village.**

[5]

She Had to Go Back to Gaza

Unit: COGAT | Location: Allenby Bridge Crossing | Period: 2018

Do you (COGAT soldiers at the Allenby Bridge Crossing) have any way of knowing if a person was Palestinian and went abroad and lost his residency?

[Even] if he's abroad, he'll still be in our records. I had this case, for instance, of someone who was born in Gaza and left as an infant, and like, she doesn't live in Israel, or the [Palestinian] Authority (the testifier is referring to the West Bank) or Gaza. She lives abroad, and she didn't know when she came back here that she's from Gaza. She didn't even know that she had [Palestinian] citizenship and an ID that her mother got for her when she was an infant in Gaza. When she got here, she wanted to visit family that lived in the [Palestinian] Authority itself.

In the West Bank?

In the West Bank, yes. She came to visit them, and when she arrived, we told her: wait a second, you don't have the forms. She was stopped. They stopped her [from entering the West Bank].

She didn't have the forms for what?

She didn't even have the forms for entry. She had the forms for a foreign national (based on citizenship that isn't Palestinian), and she was a Gazan. There are different forms for Gazans, people from the [Palestinian] Authority and people from abroad. So, she brought the forms for abroad. As far as we knew at the time, [we thought that] she was Palestinian [from the West Bank]. Later, it turned out she was Gazan. She was a Gazan that allegedly escaped abroad.

What do you mean, escaped?

She didn't go through Israel; she went through Rafah (the border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt).

So she went through Rafah, why 'escaped'?

The officers, the NCOs, the soldiers would all say "escaped" when they (Palestinians) go through Rafah.

I'm trying to figure out whether this term means something.

First of all, we're more irritated with them.

Why? There's a border crossing at Rafah that Palestinians are allowed to use.

It's true that there's a border crossing, but, in theory, we have records of exits and entries, and when you exit but we have no record of you going through us, it messes up the system, the computer system. It irritates us too because there's this situation where it's treated as if they're trying to cheat Israel by going through Rafah. People who go through Rafah don't go through Israel, but through Egypt.

But it's allowed.

What do you mean allowed?

It's allowed. There's a border crossing there, with a country – the country allows people to exit through there.

Right, but the way it's treated is that there's an Israeli closure, and this guy, I forget what it's called, closure or?

Blockade.

Blockade, he's breaking the blockade, or breaking the siege, that's what we called it. He, like, escaped, and once he does that, he can't go through Israel anymore, [rather] he has to go through Rafah. When he wants to go back to Gaza, he has to go through Rafah, and he can't go into the Palestinian Authority at all, never, ever, ever, ever.

I got it, okay. So, Israel has no records of people entering and exiting through Rafah?

No, there is no record at all. In her specific case, she...

————— She was registered as a Gazan, a Gazan who hadn't gone through us, but went through Rafah. So, not only can she not get in to visit her mother, she'll never be able to enter the territories unless there's some special permit.

How old was she approximately?

When she came back? Late 20s, early 30s. When she came back, she came to visit family; I can't remember if it was an aunt or a mother, or something like that, who lives in the [Palestinian] Authority. She, the mother, was a Gazan who had gotten permission to live in the [Palestinian] Authority, and when she (the daughter) came back, she didn't even think she was considered Palestinian. We realized she was considered Palestinian because she appeared in the computer system. When we checked, she was in the system; we discovered she was registered as a Gazan, a Gazan who hadn't gone through us, but went through Rafah. So, not only can she not get in to visit her mother, she'll never be able to enter the territories unless there's some special permit. As far as we were concerned, we were supposed to tell her she had to go back to Gaza.

You were supposed to tell her she had to go back to Gaza?

Yes, we say: You can't [enter] until you go to Gaza and get permission through a Fatah committee over there – this Fatah committee they have that takes care of permits for people from Gaza to enter the [Palestinian] Authority in the [occupied] territories, in the West Bank, or travel abroad. So, like, she had to go back to Gaza through Rafah and then come back with a permit she'll never get. That's something she'll never get because, as far as we're concerned, as far as the IDF is concerned, the way they told us about it, this is something that's a big no-no – going from Gaza to Rafah.

So what ended up happening?

Ultimately, she came to visit her mother, and she was sent back to Jordan. I know she came back another time to try and get in, but in principle, she'll never be able to get in there, not a chance.

[6]

“Hello, This is Nijam, I Want to Enter My House”

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Ramallah
Location: Har Adar | Period: 2013

There's a guy whose name is Nijam. He's Palestinian. His house is like in the middle of nowhere, but his house is on the Israeli side [of the Separation Barrier], which is near Giv'on (an Israeli settlement). This guy, in order to get into his house, would call the operations room to have the gate opened for him. He has no control over the gate that opens and closes to his house. He has to call the operations room.

What do you mean?

His house is on the Israeli side. His house is fenced in.

Okay.

He wasn't moved from there, the fence was built, so they fenced him in too. Instead of just giving him citizenship, or leaving him be. Nijam Faqia, I think, was his name. So he would call the operations room every morning, say "Hello, this is Nijam, I want to enter my house." The operations room would call the Border Police officers in the area, and they would open the gate for him. Crazy.

How many times?

Once a day, twice a day.

————— ***This guy, in order to get into his house, would call the operations room to have the gate opened for him. He has no control over the gate that opens and closes to his house.***

[7]

Palestinians are Constantly Subject to Psychological Abuse

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Nablus

Location: Nablus DCL Base | Period: 2014

The things I'm talking about are not uncommon. The way this whole thing works and how the Palestinians are constantly subject to psychological abuse. Just the fact that you can be walking on your street, in your village, in your city, and have the feeling that you are worthless and that any second someone can come and take your things and search you. People have this awareness all the time. And this is when they already have institutions, when they have representation, when they have control in the field. They are constantly sucking up and diminishing themselves. There was the story during Eid al-Adha, the Sacrifice Feast. The Civil Administration decided last minute – also as a mind game following Operation Protective Edge – to announce [that they would be issuing] tons of permits, as a gift. We ended up in a situation where, the day before the holiday, they announced that there would be 6,000 permits to visit Israel for every district during the holiday. Wherever they want: Al Aqsa, family. Entry into Israel for the Sacrifice Feast.

They let the Palestinian side know one day prior. Lots of young people came. Like someone my age born in Nablus, if he's 20 years old, he has probably never stepped foot in Israel, unless it was illegally. Then, suddenly, one day before the holiday, they 'go for it'. And they also told them, "there's a quota." Hundreds of people came; they damaged the reception window [at the DCL] (*see glossary*), climbed over fences. The first moment you see that and everyone is angry at them: how

————— ***It's really like they're a zoo and they held a lottery, "run for your lives, run and ask for this favor from the Administration," to go into Israel for one day. Hundreds of people arrived trying to get a permit. There was lots of damage done because there was chaos.***

primitive, look how they act. And then you understand why they behave that way. It's really like they're [in] a zoo and they held a lottery, "run for your lives, run and ask for this favor from the Administration," to go into Israel for one day. Hundreds of people arrived trying to get a permit. There was lots of damage done because there was chaos. The officers gave up. They couldn't assume control of what was going on.

A huge amount of people?

Yes. Who didn't stand in line; who broke the door, who didn't go through security, so they just closed the window. There was such a crazy mess that they closed the window, and lots of people were really bummed out, and the older people couldn't compete with the younger ones who climbed fences to cut people in line. The Nablus DCL didn't distribute the entire quota of permits because the window was destroyed.

They closed the window? Anyone who didn't get it before then went home?

Yes. They broke the ceiling and jumped over it. We had cameras there too. You couldn't not laugh. They laughed too. People took it lightly, happily, laughing, it wasn't clear what was going on there. Afterwards I spoke to one of the soldiers in the window, and he told me, "It's a ghetto, for real, they live in a ghetto," that's what he said. The unit perceives itself as really generous. "Look what a favor we're doing for them." We're sitting by these windows feeling super ethical. In the end, they only handed out 1,000 [permits] in total.

How long did this go on for?

Within hours of when they announced it.

Do you think there was proper preparation? More people behind the counters, opening new ones?

There's no possibility to do that. There are a limited number of soldiers in every DCL. Like in every unit, the officers themselves weren't prepared at all, and they didn't care. They chose to provide them a lack of control.

[8]

Cognitive Dissonance

Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank

Do you think it's at odds with the objectives of the [Civil] Administration that there are soldiers who don't want to be in the unit?

I think that when you have soldiers who don't want to be in the unit, who hate Palestinians, who think they're dirty or disgusting n****rs, or just like aren't in tune with the unit's mission, whether they're soldiers or officers, and the Civil Administration's purpose is ultimately for Palestinians to get permits to enter

Israel, and they (the soldiers) can just take them away – it's totally at odds with the security purpose, and the whole rationale is "thinking civilian; doing security."

So why do they let them stay there?

What happens at the bottom is that soldiers know they're going into a unit that [has a reputation for being, and is called] the Palestinians' 'Welfare NCO' (*see glossary*) – but it's not the Palestinians' Welfare NCO, it's the settlers' Welfare NCO, but everyone's sure it's the Palestinians' welfare NCO – so it's this cognitive dissonance trying to convince yourself that you're actually alright, you're actually right-wing, you're pro-security. So it makes sense, psychologically, for you to deny Palestinians permits for no reason and yell at them because you won't vibe with the unit's civilian rationale. You're obviously going to try to prove in all kinds of ways that you're not the Palestinians' Welfare NCO. The Head of the Civil Administration does it by being the settlers' Welfare NCO, and the soldiers do it by not giving a fuck about the people (Palestinians) coming to them, like they're not human beings.

————— **So it makes sense, psychologically, for you to deny Palestinians permits for no reason and yell at them because you won't vibe with the unit's civilian rationale.**

[9]

We're Not Welfare NCOs, We're Not Caring for Them

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Hebron | Period: 2016

Many times when you talk about the occupation, you talk about interesting stories: they (the soldiers) entered the house and did this and that. Of course I don't have these [stories], but I think that that's also something important: at the end of the day the problems of the occupation are the routine, the restrictions themselves, the restrictions on movement.

The power over another population.

Over another population, my soldiers are the soldiers who had to give permits to Palestinians. To stand at the window, to be the Interior Ministry. And it's kids who are 18, 19, 20 years old. And what really caught me then, when I would come down to the [reception] window in order to talk with my soldiers, suddenly to see the crowdedness on the other side, and there's no communication. Most of the soldiers – I think they even do some

————— **Burned in my mind is an American soldier there, sweet, really young, screaming at the other side, from a place of misunderstanding in my opinion, of the role and what she's doing.**

kind of super basic course there in Arabic – there were many soldiers there who were lone soldiers or new immigrants for whom even Hebrew is not really their language, who have difficulties in Hebrew, don't know Arabic. And on the other side are Palestinians and some of them must know Hebrew but it's also not their language. The communication is through shouting, communication that's violent and also the atmosphere that I felt is that the soldiers didn't want to be there. The soldiers from the Regional Brigade would laugh at them that they're 'Welfare NCOs for the Palestinians', and it was very hard for them to feel that.

Did they talk to you about it?

Not serious talk but like from the vibe, the stuff they talk about. This kind of proof: we're not Welfare NCOs, we're not caring for them. Also burned in my mind is an American soldier there, sweet, really young, screaming at the other side, from a place of misunderstanding in my opinion, of the role and what she's doing. She like immigrated to Israel a year ago.

Frustration?

It's frustration. She doesn't like the role she's doing, she doesn't understand what she's doing there.



جدارين لانه للحدايق
والاراضية

Line Outside a Checkpoint

[10]

You Have Absolute Power

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Period: 2016

How much do you think the specific situation of the person standing at the [reception] window (*see glossary*) impacts the Palestinian's permit?

You have absolute power. You have an officer at the window, but he doesn't really watch you all that much. You have insane power. The stamp is the officer's, but the stamp is in your drawer. The officer can say no too, but if you say no before, then there's no system to really check up on you that you're doing everything right. If someone pisses you off, you can tell them to get lost. Not that I've done that, but I've seen it.

Someone getting pissed off during an interaction [with a Palestinian]?

Yes. And then he (the soldier) tells him (the Palestinian), okay, get out of here, take a new number, I don't want to talk to you, in the hopes they'll end up with someone else in the end. Yes, there are very cruel soldiers at the window. Like I said, it's power, and that's what power does to a person. Now, it's funny, because in other situations, you have no power at all. When you get to a field, where settlers burnt someone's field, you have no power there. But at the window, you do.

Is there some kind of protocol that explains why you'd say no to a person?

There are the reasons [to issue a permit] which are, allegedly, accepted, justified, and it's all in the computer system. Generally speaking, if it doesn't fall under one of these reasons, then it's either forwarded to the officer to have him approve it with his stamp or [the person] just doesn't get the permit.

These cases, is there a protocol for them or is it up to the soldier to decide?

No, the soldier isn't supposed to make any decision.

[11]

I Felt I Couldn't See the Person Behind It

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Ramallah

Location: Ramallah DCL Base

Is there any way for ordinary Palestinians to check what's happening with their permit?

They can call. There are numbers on the website, or I don't know what, where it's posted. They call, and sometimes it would come through to our office, but telephone service was really lacking. For one thing, the soldiers would work really hard, and they didn't always have time to answer the phone, and also,

there were few lines and lots of phone calls. It was really problematic. It's not like there was a telephone receptionist who'd sit and take phone calls. The soldiers had to sit and do this tedious work on the computer and take phone calls at the same time, so they'd often answer rudely. They had no patience for these phone calls. So, the Palestinians wouldn't really get their answer.

Do these soldiers know Arabic?

Very basic.

So how would they communicate with the Palestinians?

It's a problem. For the most part, they would just speak Hebrew. We (the officers) all learned Arabic. In this long training, we learn both spoken Arabic and English, with more of a focus on the Arabic, because we really have to know it. Not everyone manages to learn Arabic in four months, but the training is really long, and the truth is, it's also good, so at least the basics, to answer Palestinians, most officers do know. And there was also always someone around who knew, but the soldiers themselves didn't always know.

And isn't it strange that the place Palestinians are supposed to turn to with any questions they have, the people giving them the service don't speak Arabic?

It's very strange.

What does it tell you?

It's definitely a failing. I often felt that the Palestinians were really caught in a bind. The person they had to turn to was a soldier who's bummed and doesn't have the patience to do his job, and people there would, like, beg for their lives, telling him, "please, my daughter is sick, we have to leave [the occupied territories] for treatment." And for the soldiers, it's another case, another person going on and on over the phone. He's just dying to go home. They had no patience or sensitivity. It's Palestinians, so what do they care. I had to call them out on it many times, but it was very hard to actually make that happen, because they are, after all, soldiers. These aren't people who chose to be there and provide service, and it was really hard. I often felt like I was putting out fires and like apologizing for the soldiers, or telling a soldier off for being rude. It was a very frustrating situation. Often, even the officers, even me, there were lots of times I felt I couldn't see the person behind it. We'd just process so many applications each day, so it's hard to stay compassionate in a situation like that. And there are lots of things I realized only after my [military] service. When you're there, you're inside a pressure cooker, and it's not always possible to see or understand what the implications of the things [you do] are.

———— I often felt that the Palestinians were really caught in a bind. The person they had to turn to was a soldier who's bummed and doesn't have the patience to do his job, and people there would, like, beg for their lives.



Line to Enter the Checkpoint

Our Level of Arabic is Basically Zero

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration

Location: Ramallah DCL Base | Period: 2016

I didn't emphasize enough, our level of Arabic is basically zero, like we know how to tell them: put your finger on the scanner, we're scanning your finger – as basic as it gets. If we come up against some kind of problem, then there isn't really any way of progressing.

Because you don't know what the problem is?

We don't know. Someone has a broken finger, how are we supposed to know? And then he tells us, my finger is broken, I can't put it on, and we tell him, put it on, what's up with you, put it on. And then if we're lucky, the officer comes and says, oh, he's telling you his finger hurts, he can't put it on.

Are these things that happened?

It happens, if not every day, then every hour, that some case arises that we don't know how to operate because we don't speak Arabic. People come with problems, most people have a complicated problem, "I have a permit but it has expired, but in fact the validity period wasn't correct from the start, but my daughter is there." Those are things you need to know Arabic [for], it's not a café.

Complex issues.

Yes, very complex issues.

And how do you think it affects the work?

It completely affects the work. Even if you thought the treatment they receive at the DCL's is fair and good, they never get this treatment at the DCL, because we don't speak Arabic.

————— **It completely affects the work. Even if you thought the treatment they receive at the DCL's is fair and good, they never get this treatment at the DCL, because we don't speak Arabic.**

For Me the Palestinians Were a Burden

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Location: Qalqilya | Period: 2013

How, according to your understanding, does the Regional Brigade understand and see the role of the DCL (see glossary)?

I think many times they saw us as sort of a pain in the ass because we voice the Palestinian side, and they didn't care at all about the Palestinian police officers who need to pass from place to place. Every time the [DCL] passes on

some complaint made by Palestinians [to the Brigade], even coordinating [the passage of] Palestinian police officers, [the Brigade would say]: “We can’t be bothered with the Palestinian police officers right now, we’re dealing with [our own] forces.” They didn’t treat it... didn’t treat [it] as important. After all they were above us, you could say. Anything we do, we need their authorization. They were our commanders essentially.

So you felt that they disrespected the civilian needs of the Palestinians you supposedly represented?

Yes, I felt disrespect all the time, in every little thing. For the Palestinian at the checkpoint, for any coordination for Palestinian police officers for school sports competitions. [DCL] officers, when they had meetings with officers at the Brigade, also would say how reluctantly they (the officers at the Brigade) do this work, with this sense of unwillingness. They don’t want to deal at all with Palestinian police officers who want to do security for school sports competitions. There was a specific case where the Palestinian police officers, the Palestinian DCO, complained about [an IDF] force which was in Qalqilya without our knowledge. It was a force from the Kfir Brigade, and when they were in the [occupied] territories in general, in our deployment, our area, they always caused a lot of trouble. So it turned out that one time, they just entered Qalqilya (a Palestinian city in Area A), [with] some military vehicle, they just felt like entering. Palestinian police officers walk around there, armed, and they called [the DCL]. In that instance, I’d also developed a kind of indifference to these claims. [So] they called up the Brigade, which said: Yes, a Kfir force was there, we’re questioning them (the soldiers), we’ve reprimanded them, they’ll probably be court martialed. That, for example, is a specific case of something that happened, but the point here is the general disrespect towards Palestinians. I can’t say it was only in the Brigade. When a Palestinian calls me from a checkpoint, I can’t be bothered talking to him, and he really does seem to me like a nuisance who is far less important than other things that I had to do at the time. I’d also developed this sort of very casual hatred of Palestinians. For me, they were simply a dataset in a system, that either has a Shin Bet ban (*see glossary*) or doesn’t have a Shin Bet ban, and it was very hard for me to keep myself in check. To keep myself in check and tell myself that these are human beings. They constantly need things, [and] for me it meant [more] work, it wore us down, it was something I was dealing with all the time and didn’t want to deal with, so for me the Palestinians were a burden.

**———— You see
Palestinians only
in the context of
the apparatus that
controls them. You
see them as part of
an apparatus, and
it wears you down.**

What causes you to become worn down?

The fact that you deal with people as a [mathematical] function and not as human beings. You see them as a dataset. The function is how many tomatoes he's bringing through, the function is what he's bringing through, the function is whether he has just thrown stones or not. You see Palestinians only in the context of the apparatus that controls them. You see them as part of an apparatus, and it wears you down.

[14]

“Ruh, Ruh, Bara, Bara”

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: East Jerusalem
Location: Jerusalem Periphery DCL Base

You undergo a whole process there. I joined the military, I was very right-wing, I got there, the first month at the [DCL reception] window, I became a radical leftist. I hated myself, I hated the country, I hated the military.

Why?

Because I thought, “Come on, they're miserable, people my grandfather's age come with tears in their eyes, and I have to tell them whether they're allowed to move around in the country or not.” After a month or two, you hate this job, you start to develop a loathing and hatred toward everyone around you, both the soldiers and the Arabs. They (the Palestinians) keep coming, and they can't take no for an answer, and they make a scene. The situations are unreal, you get into situations where they manipulate you emotionally. You get a mother who comes up to the window with eight children. “You bitch, you're standing in this line with them for eight hours now. You need the permit, why do you bring eight children to show me?” They come with miserable children wearing sandals with holes in them, you want to die. No 20-year-old kid is emotionally prepared to be in this thing. 18-year-old kids with no idea about anything, shouting, humiliating some 60-year-old Arab who doesn't understand them just because he doesn't speak Hebrew or English and they don't speak Arabic. So they (the soldiers) just scream at him, “Ruh, ruh, bara, bara” (go, go, out, out).

———— 18-year-old kids with no idea about anything, shouting, humiliating some 60-year-old Arab who doesn't understand them just because he doesn't speak Hebrew or English and they don't speak Arabic. So the soldiers just scream at him.

Did you learn Arabic in the DCL course?

You learn very basic Arabic, bro.



[15]

He Made a Mistake

Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank | Period: 2021

I remember one day some [Palestinian] guy was supposed to cross [the checkpoint] on Tuesday, [but] he came on Wednesday. And when his permit didn't allow him [to pass the checkpoint], because it was written for a different day and a different time. One of the commanders had contacted us, because we kind of set up an operations room during the time everyone is crossing. He (the Palestinian) wasn't allowed in. He made a mistake.

Why?

Because he came at a time that wasn't agreed upon. That's it, and it was quite literally at the tips of [the officer's] fingers, his decision. He in that moment could have said yes or no. He said no. Because that's not the way it was supposed to be.

So, you have to come at the specific time and specific...

It must be at a [specific] time on a [specific] day.

If you're not, then you miss your chance to work.

Yeah.

How do you explain this behavior?

These people don't care. These people view Palestinians as less important or view them as lower class. They are dehumanized in the eyes of a lot of individuals that work with the Civil Administration. Like, a complete lack of empathy for Palestinian well-being.

————— **These people view Palestinians as less important or view them as lower class. They are dehumanized in the eyes of a lot of individuals that work with the Civil Administration.**

[16]

Hang Up On Them

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: Gaza DCL | Area: Gaza Strip | Location: Gaza DCL Base

The [phone] number for our operations room, it was [listed] online, so loads of times when the Palestinians wanted to coordinate a crossing, Gazans would want to coordinate a crossing or wanted to cross into Gaza, they would call us at the operations room, and it was really unacceptable to us, we really didn't like it. It really interrupted the very important things we were doing. And we're not Coordination, there really is essentially no way for us to help them, I can transfer them to the Coordination Department, but the mindset was less to

transfer them to the Coordination Department and more to hang up on them, let them find the number they need to call themselves. It's very much not my job right now, you know, to be their receptionist. I also remember that we had a lot of talk of like, "So that we don't make them get used to this." So we don't get them used to calling us and us working for them and transferring them to the relevant people.

————— Let them find the number they need to call themselves. It's very much not my job right now, you know, to be their receptionist.

Those were the procedures?

I don't remember that it was a written procedure, but that was the talk, that was the spirit, even if it wasn't a written procedure.

Would this happen a lot?

Yes.

[17]

We Don't Want Them to Enter

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Location: Ramallah DCL Base | Period: 2018

One of the things we deal with is a woman or man who is married to a Palestinian, but they themselves are not Palestinians but internationals. It usually happens with the US, but also Germany, Europe, Africa, any other country. When it happens, they basically need to be listed through Israel, that they're married, through the Palestinian Authority. That the Palestinian Authority recognizes them as married. Now, it's very hard to do this if they got married overseas.

Even if they got married abroad and live abroad?

Even if they got married abroad and live abroad. How do we know that they're married? Because they told us that they're married when they enter [the West Bank, through the Allenby Bridge]. If someone tells me: I'm married – not to me but to the person who checks him there – then we see that he's saying that they're married, but they're not married.

Again, they're not married according to what you have in the population registry.

Yes. According to the information we have, they're not married and they're claiming they're married. At that moment what happens is...

They're claiming [that they're married], and on the face of it they have proof.

And on the face of it they're married, but from abroad, not by the Palestinian Authority, they didn't marry there. Now, a marriage permit from the Palestinian

Authority [means that] they were supposed to get married in the Palestinian Authority.

Territorially within the territory of the [Palestinian] Authority?

Yes. Inside the [Palestinian] Authority's territory, or the second option is that he enters there (the West Bank) and does it [there].

And list them as married?

And list them as married, a process that could take between a few hours to a few days in extreme cases. According to what we were told, [there's] internal politics there, like fights between families, it can take weeks when they don't want her to enter. What happens is that she comes to visit his family or on a kind of heritage trip, and she's simply thrown back out to Jordan without knowing that that's what's going to happen, it's not something that they all know.

Because they're married?

Because they're married. Now, imagine that she didn't say that they're married [at the crossing], [that] they didn't say it, [then] she can enter. She just needs the permits that she has to have as an American, European, [someone from] any other country. Those permits. And then she can enter. Because they said they're married, because they like got married abroad, they need to be listed by the Palestinian Authority as married.

Why does this interest us?

The reason this interests us is simply because as far as we're concerned it changes her status here, she can stay – if they're married – she can stay within the Palestinian Authority.

In the [West] Bank, not in Israel.

Right, in the [West] Bank, longer. She can get permits to stay in the [West] Bank almost indefinitely, and the permits are permits that you need to extend every two or three months but supposedly you can extend them each time and then stay here loads and loads of time. And as far as Israel is concerned, the fact that she says she's married, that's a concern that she'll stay here and that they won't just come to visit, but that she will want to stay here.

On the one hand, Israel insists that they be listed as married. The significance of them being listed as married is that she can stay here longer.

Right.

On the other hand, Israel is concerned that she'll stay here for a long time, but Israel itself requires her to list herself as married.

The thing is that like the Palestinian Authority itself, it might allow her to stay here, even only with a marriage [certificate] from abroad, that could happen too. Like, the Palestinian Authority will say: I recognize your marriage even though you got married in Germany. And then she can stay even if she's not listed on our side

————— ***As far as Israel is concerned, the fact that she says she's married, that's a concern that she'll stay here and that they won't just come to visit, but that she will want to stay here.***

as married. We get the data from them, so they like won't list her as married and she'll be here like...

They will list, if they let her, they'll list her as married, that's why she's received the permit.

Right, but it like creates a complicated situation for her because it's...

Bureaucratically complicated.

Yes.

And listed on the computer.

It's a situation that they want because they don't really want her to stay or to accept her too much, really it's just an IDF decision, and I don't really know what the thinking behind it is, what we were told is that we don't want her here too much, we don't want them to enter.

[18]

Just for the Laughs

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Location: Ramallah DCL Base | Period: 2018

I remember that just for the laughs with the soldiers we would put in *** *****'s (a very high ranking Palestinian Authority official) ID number and would read every detail about him. It was funny for us to see [that he was] in the system too.

Why is it funny?

Because it's just weird. I'd enter it in the system, and I can see everything about him, just crazy. Me, a 19-year-old kid, having all this information.

Which details were funny?

His photos, for example, there was the option to see the photos according to time because the photo has to be renewed, and you (Palestinians) have to go to the DCL and get new photos more or less every time. So we'd see photos from like years ago. Here he was fatter, here older, here less so. We'd just go into the [records of his] relatives. Okay, you can see the photo of his wife. We go into [the record of] his wife, and here are his kids and his family, and it's just such boredom, you know, this way you can get to really know *** *****', really meet him.

You know him better than he thinks you know him.

Exactly.

———— We'd just go into the relatives. Okay, you can see the photo of his wife. We go into his wife, and here are his kids and his family, and it's just such boredom.



Entrance to a DCL Reception Window

[19]

“Come Back Tomorrow, Eight Thirty”

Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Jericho and the Jordan Valley

Location: Jericho DCL Base | Period: 2013

One of the roles at the DCL is the [reception] window (*see glossary*): to issue magnetic cards to Palestinians. They need this in order to pass through crossings and in order to request an entry permit into Israel. I was at the window for a month, and in this month I saw loads of times that printers didn't work, loads and loads of times they (the computers) stopped. It's not that important to soldiers. Say there are 100 Palestinian people who are sitting inside a room, printers have stopped working, there's no pressure. If it works – it works, if it doesn't work – people come back tomorrow. Once or twice I saw [that there were] a few problems with the printers, [so the soldiers] said, “Let's close up at four thirty,” not at five, which is the usual hour. What do I care? People can come back tomorrow. Of course sometimes Palestinians shout and all that, want to enter and make a bit of noise, and the soldiers respond too, but a little bit because of that, too, the soldiers don't have the patience to begin with. Sometimes people (Palestinians) don't want to leave. I saw a few times that people come, sometimes wait two to three hours in order to get the [magnetic] card, and in the end they don't get it and are simply told, “Come back tomorrow, eight thirty.” Sometimes you get to 100, and that's it, “We've reached 100,” it's not important to do much more. There's no cap, it's just that that's the goal, so if they do it they already think, we've done what we had to do.

[20]

It's Another Tool That Helps Control the Population

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank

Location: Jenin DCL Base | Period: 2015

Why would they even get a biometric card (*see glossary under 'mumarnat'*) to begin with? Because we required it for most permits. To enter Israel, you need the permit for the specific, one-time purpose, and you need a biometric card, like, for an eight-year period or whatever it is. But, if it wasn't some urgent humanitarian need where you'd go through in an ambulance, we required it.

Because they wanted what?

Because as far as we're concerned, we want as many people in our system as possible.

Why?

Because we, because we want information. It's control. It's another tool that helps control the population.

And that's how it's explained to you?

No, but it's pretty obvious.

I'm assuming it was part of your objectives.

Could be. It was very obvious we had an interest. We wanted to put people in the system.

**———— It was
very obvious
we had an interest.
We wanted to put
people in the system.**

[21]

They Scan the Face

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank | Period: 2021

“Resident Information” is the system, it’s one of the systems we use, in addition to which there’s also a system that issues the permits and also has more information that relates to permits. There’s the ability to cancel permits, to enter information on permits and so on. Only people in the unit are exposed to [the data in the system]. And then, they invented two other systems, one of which is ‘White Wolf’, which is used by the CSCs (Civilian Security Coordinators, settlers in charge of the security of a settlement, appointed by the Ministry of Defense), Border Police forces at the crossings (checkpoints) and so on. They (these systems) have everything to do with [movement] restrictions and permits, but in a very limited way. Meaning, does he have a work permit for a settlement or Israel, and [does he have] a restriction of some kind. [There isn’t] any explanation about the restriction, only [whether it was instructed by] the Shin Bet Security Service, the Police or IDF Operations Branch (*see glossary*).

So [the Palestinians] actually encounter it at the entrance to a settlement.

Exactly.

A [Palestinian] laborer turns up, they have the White Wolf [system], they check him.

Exactly. Now, Blue Wolf is actually a system with very low classification in terms of the information, which works using a scan. I can either scan the person’s face or the barcode that’s on the mumarnat, the smartcard (*see glossary*). And on this basis I can just retrieve information very very easily. A year ago, say, that forces on the ground needed to make a call to the company’s operations room. The company’s operations room checks with the brigade. The brigade checks with the DCL (*see glossary*). By the time this whole procedure happens, it’s been around twenty minutes, half an hour, in order to determine whether the person can pass through the Gush Etzion Junction or not, if there’s some kind of indication on him [in the IDF’s systems]. But now this thing is quite simple. With the ‘Blue Wolf’, I can just check if there are restrictions, if there are permits. It happens in a very simple way.

The forces on the ground can know.

Yes.

How do they check this? Do they photograph him, or do they photograph his document? Or do they do both?

They simply scan the small barcode that's on the mumarnat. And if there's just the ID, and [he doesn't have a] mumarnat, then they scan the face.

The physical face.

Yes.

And then what does the soldier know?

Very very basic information, whether he has restrictions, whether he has permits, that's it.

So he (the soldier) doesn't need to go on the two-way radio anymore with the operations room.

It simplifies the process for him, yes, exactly.

And in what circumstances do they scan people? If he's not in Israeli territory, then why does it matter if he's walking around with restrictions?

Because there are places where Palestinians aren't allowed to walk around. Like, Gush Etzion Junction, in the last three months, there were three attempted stabbings. At Tapuach Junction too, by the way, a Palestinian can't simply pass. [For example,] a Palestinian simply walks from Rami Levy (a large supermarket) at Gush Etzion Junction in the direction of the traffic circle, where he simply wanted someone to pick him up. Suddenly I see a platoon commander aiming a weapon at him, shouting at him, "don't move." He's trying to explain, the guy just wants to pass, and he (the officer) is literally pointing a weapon at him and really waiting for approval on whether he can let him continue because he didn't have this 'Blue Wolf', he had no way of checking whether this resident can or can't pass. It's such a crazy situation. There are places where Palestinians can't go because of the security situation, because of the fear that something will happen.

———— I can either scan the person's face or the barcode that's on the mumarnat, the smartcard. And on this basis I can just retrieve information very very easily.

[22]

Information on Palestinian Residents

Rank: Corporal | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank | Period: 2021

There are the softwares that collect different types of information on Palestinian residents so that we can keep track of their movement. When you type in someone's ID number or name, you have instantly pulled up all their private

information as long as the Israeli military has collected it. And the Palestinians are incentivized to do so. So, their full names, relatives – brothers, sisters, mom, dad, grandfather, grandmother, cousins, second cousins, place of residence, the type of permit that they have in terms of what industry they're working for, what crossing they're allowed to cross at, their last crossing – [meaning] the last time they went across a checkpoint, and in what direction they were going – and if they're refused entry, and what type of refusals they had. And then of course, related to the story, in the course, they also taught us how the permit can be blocked. And that can be anything from being refused by the Israeli Police or the Shin Bet. Someone can have a refusal if they are involved in criminal activity, if they're wanted by the Palestinian Authority, they're wanted by the Israeli Police. If they have family members who are criminals or suspected terrorists, they can be banned. If they live in the same building as someone who is convicted of or suspected to be involved in terrorist activity, that was another way how Palestinians are collectively punished by the Israeli military. It's completely out of their control if they find themselves in a situation where family member or a friend or someone in their building is involved in activity that Israel views as terrorist. How innocent Palestinians have their lives affected by being denied freedom of movement.

———— It's completely out of their control if they find themselves in a situation where family member or a friend or someone in their building is involved in activity that Israel views as terrorist. How innocent Palestinians have their lives affected by being denied freedom of movement.

[23]

It is Necessarily a Violent Act

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Bethlehem
 Location: Bethlehem DCL Base | Period: 2021

Were there any times when you would punish Palestinians at the [reception] window (see glossary)?

Yes, there's the whole area of forgeries. People forge papers they got for a hospital referral, [they would] fake "I got a referral because I've had an eye infection for the past month..."

And in fact they want [to enter Israel] to work or something?

Exactly. So there was a ton of pressure both from the commanders and from the soldiers to apply an Operations Branch ban. There's a Shin Bet [Security Service] ban, a police ban and an Operations Branch ban, which is a ban that I can apply. I avoided it, I so didn't want to, [but] at some point I gave it some kind of moral rationalization and

entered two-month bans [in the database] on about 100 people, in groups of about 30. A person who has forged documents, after two times, [I] give him a two-month Operations Branch ban, and it was on my own initiative. The moral rationalization I gave it is that they go in to work, and then (when the documents are fake) they have no insurance, and they could get hurt, and there's no one to protect them.

On the one hand, he doesn't have insurance, but on the other you said this in the context of exerting violence.

I, as an 18- to 23-year-old, have the power to make decisions about the life of a person who's 40 years older than me, whether he can enter [into Israel], go through the crossing for any purpose, it doesn't matter what purpose. It's an inherently, I wouldn't say violent tool, but definitely a coercive tool. Let's put it into context for a second, there are half a million settlers who live in the Judea and Samaria area, [for them] it's no problem getting in and out, no one checks you, no one cares about you. A Palestinian has to go through the crossing, has to go through a security check. Now, you could rationalize it somehow, [you could] say, "Okay, they're terrorists," like, "You saw what happened during the Intifada," but in a reality where there's person A, who lives in the same area and can always go through the checkpoint freely without being checked, without getting stopped, without having to wake up much earlier in the morning in order to get through the crossing, and there's person B, who needs to go through this torture every morning, okay? Now, you could say that the Crossing Points Authority has made it more efficient, we demilitarized the crossings and instead of three hours, they get through quickly and that, [but] still. And another thing – that same Palestinian, he has no way of influencing the reality in which he lives at all because he doesn't live under democratic rule; he has no way of influencing the military control in Judea and Samaria like I can. So, it is necessarily a means of power; it is necessarily a violent act to give a person a two-month ban.

———— That same Palestinian, he has no way of influencing the reality in which he lives at all because he doesn't live under democratic rule.

[24]

So Many Banned People, it's Surreal

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank
Location: Hebron DCL Base

What is a security ban?

The military and the Civil Administration have shared computers, where in order to issue a permit, to enter into Israel, you can't have a security ban, you have to have the Shin Bet (*see glossary*) approve it. Loads and loads and loads of people (Palestinians) have security bans, loads.

What do you get it for?

The Shin Bet has never published what gets a person a security ban, there are rumors. For example, I know that if a relative of yours has carried out a terrorist attack, your chance of having a security ban is very very high. And the Palestinians will always say they didn't do anything. I don't know, it looks very arbitrary from the outside, but the Shin Bet might know better than us.

What other criteria are there?

Obviously if you threw stones and were caught. If you're wanted for questioning, and you didn't turn up for questioning then obviously. I don't know, I don't know, nobody knows. It's very complicated and hard to get a ban removed, we fought with the Shin Bet over this. There are people where it's clearly in our interest for them to enter [Israel] from the [occupied] territories, leaving humanitarian [cases] aside for now. [Permits issued on] humanitarian [grounds] are very hard [to get], but entry [permits] for businesspeople too. [Businesspeople] ask to have bans removed, sometimes it's approved and sometimes it's not. You'll never be told the grounds for why not. And it's a process, there's a crazy bottleneck over there.

———— The military and the Civil Administration have shared computers, where in order to issue a permit, to enter into Israel, you can't have a security ban, you have to have the Shin Bet approve it. Loads and loads and loads of Palestinians have security bans, loads.

Say you're a rich businessman, a rich Palestinian, do you have better chances of having your security ban removed than the chances of a construction worker having a ban removed?

Here I don't think there's something that the military is doing wrong or that the [Civil] Administration is doing wrong. Like in any country, there are state interests. A businessman, we have more of an interest for him to enter, as a country, so we'll push more. I'll push the Shin Bet to finish his review faster.

To finish checking whether he's a security threat or not?

Exactly.

First a person gets a ban, and only later they check whether he's a security threat or not?

When a ban is applied, no one is told. It's someone in the Shin Bet that enters the ban into the computer. He clicks 'ban,' and that's it. And then when you go to issue the permit, it says 'security ban' in red, and you can't issue a permit. So you contact the Shin Bet and say to them: I want to put in a request to remove a ban. And then they check. The Palestinian himself can't go to the Shin Bet and ask for the ban [removal], he has to do it through us, we have to do it. We do it for the people for whom we have an interest for this (the ban removal) to happen. There are some for whom we don't have [an interest].

Is it possible that bans or ban removals are used as some sort of leverage for the Shin Bet to put pressure on Palestinians?

There's always a chance, but not as far as I know. But there is the feeling that the Shin Bet is very very trigger-happy with this. And in fact, that's how it does prevent, that's its easiest, best tool for prevention. There are so many banned people, it's surreal. Using it as leverage? I don't know how they can use it as leverage. By removing [bans]? The process is through us. We used it as leverage occasionally, [on] the person you request a ban removal for.

What does that mean?

It's much more acceptable in Palestinian society to talk to the Civil Administration. We'd use it sometimes: "You want your ban removed? Talk to me" or "look how much I've done for you."

[25]

"You're Banned by the Police"

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: East Jerusalem
Location: Jerusalem Periphery DCL Base | Period: 2013

Can a Palestinian person know why he's been banned (*see glossary*) [and] for how long?

No, no. You're not allowed to say. You can say, "You're banned by the police." And then if you're a Palestinian and you're banned by the police, you can submit an application to the police to have the ban revoked. And they do approve [requests], it does happen. But it's the worst bureaucracy, good luck getting the police on the phone, asking them to remove the ban when you're a Palestinian from Hebron who doesn't speak Hebrew. Most of the time, if you're banned by the police or the Shin Bet (*see glossary*), you won't know why. Like, a person who stole a car and sat in prison in Israel, knows he stole a car and sat in prison in Israel.

———— It's the worst bureaucracy, good luck getting the police on the phone, asking them to remove the ban when you're a Palestinian from Hebron who doesn't speak Hebrew.

Yes, so that person knows.

But the Shin Bet is a totally different thing because if your little brother is known to be in Hamas in Qalandiya, then the whole family will probably be banned. That's the vibe.

And do you know? Can you see it on the computer?

Some things you can see, and some things you can't.

Just a Way to Put Pressure on the Person

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Ramallah

Location: Ramallah DCL Base | Period: 2018

For what reasons do people get banned?

[Being] a terrorist's relative, someone who hasn't repaid a debt, someone who treated a soldier at the Civil Administration's [reception] window (*see glossary*) badly or like did something that's considered unacceptable. They can just apply a ban whenever they feel like it.

What do you mean, someone who has treated [a soldier] badly?

Violence, physical violence, or maybe swearing or something like that. But to me it felt kind of like if a person just does something I wouldn't consider a big deal, he could get a ban for it. I think that as a Palestinian civilian you just have to be very careful about how you treat the military and Israelis in general, and I imagine that if a person, whether it's raising their voice, then no, they wouldn't get a ban for that. But if it's threats or physical violence or something like that, then it's possible.

And who decides on a ban?

It could be from our branch (Operations Branch) because there were Operations Branch bans and that's usually the officers who decide.

You said a terrorist's relatives, what does the military consider to be terrorism?

From stone-throwing to actual terrorist activity.

Why do Palestinians get bans from entering Israel?

In general, it was simply to prevent the person from entering Israel because if he enters Israel he could put the lives of Israeli civilians in danger.

What's the connection between this and if, say, someone owes Israel money [or] if someone wants to visit their son in prison? Or what does it have to do with whether someone was unusually rude to a soldier? All these things [that could lead to a prohibition on entering Israel].

A ban is just a way to put pressure on the person. If there's a ban on someone who, say, hasn't paid a debt, then it's a good way to just put pressure on him to get his act together and pay the debt as quickly as possible. You're not paying the debt? Fine, then you're not coming into Israel, no matter what you have. If you need to go to hospital in Israel, then that's not going to happen either if you don't pay your debt. For example, if I got an application from someone who wants to enter Israel for treatment in a hospital, then I would receive the documents and I'd have to send it to the Health Office of the Civil Administration, and they would either approve it or not. If the person was banned, then he

————— You're not paying the debt? Fine, then you're not coming into Israel, no matter what you have. If you need to go to hospital in Israel, then that's not going to happen either if you don't pay your debt.

could still get service through [the fact that] the Shin Bet (*see glossary*) which was reviewing the ban could approve or not approve [his travel]. It doesn't matter if the person was a cancer patient or not. They would tell us: Don't get too worked up about the documents you receive because sometimes they just fake papers in order to enter Israel.

[27]

Deny This Person Entry

Unit: COGAT | Location: Allenby Bridge Crossing | Period: 2018

What about political activists [who come to Allenby Bridge Crossing]?

How does that work?

It says something about them in the system, like the person is a BDS activist, [he's] coming to give a lecture on such and such, blah-blah-blah.

What's blah-blah-blah?

The person is a BDS activist, [he's] coming to give a lecture at the school...

Birzeit University.

Yes, something like that, or some event of foreign nationals against the occupation, something like that. And then, they essentially write to us, like the person from the airports (a border control officer from the Israeli Airports Authority) will write: deny this person entry; in those words.

These things that are written, do they appear on your end too or on his?

The text you just said.

It might not even be written on his end.

How does he (the border control officer) know?

Because he spoke with him (the activist), or because there's information about him from somewhere.

Life in a digital world.

Right, what I mean is that he doesn't pull up the documents and see a BDS activist. It's that when he enters something in the computer, some information about him could appear from somewhere.

You, as COGAT, don't have this information?

I've never seen this information.

It doesn't appear on your computer? That's what I'm essentially asking.

It doesn't appear on our computer.

And so, what would the border control officer tell you? You say the border control officer says to deny entry.

The border control officer would write: deny this person entry.

And then what do you tell him?

“You can’t enter; like, you don’t have...” What we often do is go interrogate them, like the NCO (non-commissioned officer) really loved interrogating them, or taking another soldier and the two of them would interrogate them, very amicably, ask what they’re doing, they’ll say such and such... Maybe expose other people, and those other people are sent to the desk, to, like, intelligence.

Other people who came with them?

No, other people who come later. Or he’ll tell us about the event’s Facebook or something. Like that.

And then you’ll actually check the event’s Facebook?

The desk or whatever will find more people.

The desk is in Beit El (the location of the Civil Administration’s headquarters), we said?

Intelligence, intelligence is in Beit El, I think, something like that. In Beit El and the Kirya (COGAT’s central base, in the IDF’s headquarters in Tel Aviv). And then it’ll take these things and find more people who are also BDS activists and deny them entry later too.

Do you have any idea if the issue is BDS or whether, for example, if someone comes right now to volunteer with Preachers for Peace?

So, volunteering is prohibited. You’re not allowed to enter to volunteer. You need a permit to volunteer.

A permit from Israel?

A permit from Israel. And you’re only allowed specific places, and the places need permission to have foreign volunteers.

[Meaning,] the organization located there?

Yes, if he tells me: I’m here to volunteer, then I’ll write, under ‘movement,’ the guy came to volunteer and was denied entry.

I got it, okay. And if he doesn’t tell you anything?

I came to visit and see the Church of the Nativity.

Awesome. Entry denied.

That’s if you have prior information about him.

If I have no information about him, then why did I get the [ban]? If there’s no information about him and there’s no reason to deny him entry, and I don’t have any notes saying he’s supposed to be denied entry, then there wouldn’t be a [ban] like that.

Your interrogation, is it a show or is it real? You might do an interrogation and say: I have been persuaded that this person really did just come to see the Church.

Theoretically, we have the freedom to just approve it. But no, it never happens. We have the approval, and then the individual soldier would take the blame. Entry is approved, like, if it happens, then this soldier might be [blamed], because he approved something without consulting the Shin Bet and all that stuff.

————— *The non-commissioned officer really loved interrogating them, or taking another soldier and the two of them would interrogate them.*



Entrance to a DCL Reception Window

A System of Interests

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank

Location: Jenin DCL Base | Period: 2015

The unit's officer training course is an important part because that's where you really learn the unit's worldview.

So what's the unit's worldview?

I remember, say, I don't remember in what context, but we were told that everything, and they repeated this as well, that everything is a system of interests, everything that we do specifically in the [West] Bank, and in Gaza too, but everything we do in the [West] Bank, is [about] interests. We work with people who can give us something back, and we, they didn't say punish, but it was kind of obvious what the opposite [of that] is... And that's it, everything is a system for what we can get. They talked about it in the context of meetings that we may have with Palestinian officials, like to see what I can make him say so that I can better understand what's going on there inside their (the Palestinian Authority's) apparatus. That's something I remember.

On the face of it, a relationship based on interests is appropriate in relationships between any two countries. So why do you still say this? What made you think about it, and why do you think it's relevant to a Breaking the Silence interview?

Okay, because maybe I didn't think about it at the time as something problematic in any way, but I understood when I arrived in Jenin and saw how it works, which means in practice that we prioritize all kinds of people. What does it look like in practice? Say businesspeople we had relationships with, Palestinian businesspeople, where we wanted to better understand, say, who's in charge in Jenin or in the area, through them. We would give people like that permits, or to Palestinian police officers, the security apparatus of the [Palestinian] Authority, give them all kinds of permits. Permits are a very important tool that we have.

Why?

Because the ability to enter Israel is something that's very sought after.

Yes, is it worth money?

Yes. So I came to understand how this thing works: on the basis of a system of interests. Like during the time I was in Jenin, even now I still get messages from him – a Palestinian businessman who for every Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) and Passover sends me [a message]: Happy holidays to you and to all the people

———— We work with people who can give us something back, and we, they didn't say punish, but it was kind of obvious what the opposite is... And that's it, everything is a system for what we can get.

of Israel. Or something like that. Now, these are people who have realized that they need to have a good relationship with the Israelis because they get the permits or they get the direct contact with the decisionmakers, those who make the decisions in Israel. What's important here, is that that same person, I have his name written in my phone [along with]: "Do not answer during a coordination meeting." Now, a coordination meeting is what I had every day, with my counterpart in the Palestinian Authority. Right? They get all the requests from the regular people, the Palestinians who are just any old residents of the village or city who need to travel to Israel for some reason. And then I meet them almost every day and we go over everyone.

[You go] over all the requests.

Exactly. Now, they emphasized to me, the senior officers on my base in Jenin, that they (the Palestinian Authority representatives) can't know that we have a relationship with that same businessman, because it must have been the case that it would lead to some kind of showdown between them or undermine the power structure in the village or the city.

On the Palestinians' side?

On the Palestinians' side.

Between the [Palestinian] Authority's people and the businessman?

Yes, exactly.

[29]

They Give Us Information

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Bethlehem

Location: Bethlehem DCL Base | Period: 2021

The unit is obligated, by virtue of us being in control of the West Bank, to give Palestinian residents living in the West Bank very basic rights. This includes humanitarian aid, or, generally, their basic right to movement into Israel. In addition to this, a unit that has control of permits has very significant power, mostly for the purpose of gathering intelligence, understanding what's going on on the ground. So, it's split into two, what I told you, which is the humanitarian need, which is a resident who just wants to go see his mother who lives in Jaffa, or wants to go to a hospital in East Jerusalem to receive treatment he can't get in the West Bank. That's the basic need, and that's most residents who come to the reception window. In addition, the permits also give you the ability to talk to Palestinian residents who would not have wanted to talk to you without this tool, without the permits you can give them. In other words, I can give a comprador (*see glossary*) a permit. That's something the Palestinians

are very interested in, because it's also what gives them the ability to provide for themselves. In fact, that's how a Palestinian resident comes to me, for the sake of the matter, senior media figures, people in the [Palestinian] General Intelligence, the [Palestinian] Military Intelligence, people in the Palestinian intelligence [community] in general, Authority officials. The mayor would talk to me on a daily basis, and that's the shit that was hardest for me, because the unit essentially gives and really helps these people, because we have an interest in keeping in touch with them, a security interest, because they give us information, collaborate with us.

To keep things quiet in a sense.

Yes, totally, totally, but what actually happens, and COVID really drove this too, is that a situation is created where an ordinary person wants to enter [Israel] to go to the hospital, and that mayor, or some other person who has a ton of money, calls me, sends his documents to me on WhatsApp, and I have to give him [a permit], because it's in the unit's interest.

Is that a directive?

There were times when I didn't do it, and I got a lot of flak from my commanders. Like: "What, are you stupid? Like, of course you have to..." When you start the job, you understand who the people you're supposed to talk to more are, and who aren't. The head of a Palestinian mechanism (law enforcement or security agency run by the Palestinian Authority), it's obvious you need to save a few permits in the quota available for his family, because we need him to be with us, because, the moment there's a riot, he won't come and tell us, "but wait a second, there's no permit quota, so I won't send the General Intelligence to talk to the guys who are throwing stones."

Was that something that would happen, for that matter, that there was a riot, and you'd give him a call?

Sure, lots of times Jews entered Area A (*see glossary*), to evacuate the settler who went in by accident. A lot of good stuff comes out of it too, right? But, it has to be said that ultimately, you face this daily reality, and you hold your head and say, "jeez, this is a person that just has money. That's why he's getting more," and it messes with your head. Even more so during COVID, when all the reasons for permits were reduced to humanitarian reasons only. There were really hard times when only cancer and dialysis patients were allowed to go into Rambam, Hadassah Ein Kerem and Wolfson (Israeli hospitals), say, the major hospitals. And then, suddenly, you meet this person who wants to go in for a brief visit to close some deal here in Tel Aviv, with his 16-year-old son, who has no business there – they're obviously going to the beach or something, and you feel the injustice, you feel how shitty it is.

———— ***The permits also give you the ability to talk to Palestinian residents who would not have wanted to talk to you without this tool, without the permits you can give them.***

You say this because this happened, and you signed this permit?

Yes, for sure, tons and tons of times. And that's it, and then you go mental, because I want everyone to have the right to go to the beach if they want to, but here, it's obvious to you that it's for specific people. Say entry to Temple Mount has been limited by the Jerusalem District Commander to 10,000 people who can enter the Temple Mount, vaccinated people only. So now there's a quota for the Bethlehem DCL of 1,100 Palestinian residents who can go in. Our Head of Liaison said, "leave a quota of 100." Thousands of residents came to the reception window, like, the moment we reached a thousand, permits are shut down, no more permits. And then this guy asks for his family; the mayor of Efrat (an Israeli settlement near Bethlehem) asks for a few [permits] for some laborers working for him at the municipality that he has to get them for, and then the CSC (Civilian Security Coordinator, a settler in charge of the security of the settlement, appointed by the Ministry of Defense) needs [a permit] for two Palestinians for him. *** *** has a factory. He needs one for his daughter, so like...

[30]

Compradors are Like Collaborators

Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank | Period: 2019

There were lots of meetings with compradors. Compradors are like collaborators, but [they're] not collaborators. You develop a quid pro quo relationship with them. You help them with the permits, whether it's giving them a higher BMC ranking – which is [either] a Businessman Card – or [giving them] VIP1 or VIP2 – those are degrees of how easily you can get a permit. You give him a VIP, BMC [permit], and in return, he gives you some information about the mood among Palestinians, tells you how much the Palestinians hate Jews this morning and what the Civil Administration has to do to prevent riots. I'll even take it up a notch, at the political level, inside the military, what information could help the Civil Administration and COGAT to become important for the IDF. That's something that really preoccupies the Civil Administration.

It's an attempt to really hear senior Palestinian officials, especially rich people, or mukhtars, which are heads of villages, who would say what the general sentiment was and what was annoying them. And in return, the Civil Administration would give them perks and permits, them and their family members.

To [improve its] status within the IDF.

To [improve its] status within the IDF. The whole story with the Palestinian Affairs Advisors, PAAs, is probably the dumbest thing around. There's a giant room there. PAA is like the Civil Administration intelligence, your way of getting sophisticated

information. How do you do it? Facebook, genius. It was a very low level of sophistication. It's Facebook and Palestinian news sites, and there were some guys there who spoke Arabic, some Druze officers from the IDF and also some soldiers who took Arabic at school, who would go over [social media posts] and sniff out the Palestinian mood.

From what they read on Facebook?

Yes, it was about how Palestinians were doing financially, where something might be starting up, the head of which settlement they hated now all of a sudden. The Civil Administration really tried to show the IDF that we were the civilian entity that knew the most, when every intelligence [agency] had access to exactly this information. So compradors are the other side of it. It's an attempt to really hear senior Palestinian officials, especially rich people, or mukhtars, which are heads of villages, who would say what the general sentiment was and what was annoying [them]. And in return, the Civil Administration would give them perks and permits, them and their family members.

Was this something that was known?

Yes. It was on the table starting in the training course. There was no need to say [anything] to make it clear the Civil Administration could take away the permit at any moment, because they had done it before. They took away people's BMCS and VIPs, and there were entire villages where all the permits were revoked in one go because there was some specific incident. So it was obviously on the table, this whole relationship is a power relationship. It's clear from the whole dynamic that one side gives the permits, and one side provides information.

I understand.

It's as if you're going to your dealer, he's not going to tell you, you give me the money, and I'll give you what you came here to buy. It's a classic quid pro quo relationship.

[31]

There are Some Who Call Them Bantustans'

Unit: COGAT | Area: West Bank | Period: 2016

Were there discussions you know of about whether the Palestinian Authority could collapse?

The Palestinian Authority? No, I didn't encounter any discussion like that.

A few days ago, Abu Mazen (Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas) announced that he's putting the Oslo Accords on hold.

He's not upholding them anymore.

Makes sense.

From what you know of the umbrella [structure], does it make sense?

I don't think it's something that can happen because Israel holds all the cards in this story.

Can you expand?

If the Oslo Accords were intended to give the basis for nation-building and to turn the Palestinian Authority into a body that would be able in exactly five years (the period after which the Interim Agreements – the Oslo Accords – were supposed to lapse, and a permanent agreement was supposed to come into effect) to turn into the real government, it also provided the basis to do that. But inside Area C, Israel really promotes the policy of letting in as many people (Israeli citizens, i.e. settlers) as possible and removing as many Palestinians as possible. Whether they move into Areas A and B – there are some who call them Bantustans¹ - and that way they're concentrated in separate bodies and you can control them from outside – or whether they leave, which from Israel's perspective is the best solution (*see glossary for details on Areas A, B and C*). So today inside Areas A and B, Israel also controls the ability of the Palestinian Authority to be a body that really has this role, which was supposed to be temporary, [that was supposed to be] the temporary governing body for the majority of the Palestinian population. In the meantime, all the ministers that have roles in the Palestinian Authority work for Israel, because their interest is both to stay in power there and [maintain] their ability to operate. They're in quite good relations with our unit. Supposedly the Major General of the unit (the head of COGAT) is the counterpart of Abu Mazen. But all the Palestinian ministers – in order to do what they want to do and also in order to stay in power and I don't know what, to be able to operate – it's in their interest to have good relations with our unit, which at the end of the day [has to] grant a permit for every project they want to do, as well as for security coordination with them. [So] even if tomorrow, someone, whether it's Abu Mazen or whether it's someone else in the Palestinian Authority, wakes up and says: Listen, this situation with the Palestinian Authority is not heading toward establishing a state but rather toward running matters forever for the Israelis so that they won't have to – [even still,] they (the Israelis) are the ones who at the end of the day need to grant the permit, even if we want to go overseas as individuals, but also if we want to really build an independent economy.

**———— Inside
Area C, Israel really
promotes the policy
of letting in as many
Israeli citizens as
possible and removing
as many Palestinians
as possible.**

1. Bantustans: the unofficial name given to the 10 territories that the Apartheid regime in South Africa created for the black indigenous population whose freedom of movement was restricted to portions of the country's territory. This system was created as part of an effort to sustain the Apartheid regime, which discriminated based on race.

How Much Bulgur Goes Into the Gaza Strip

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Gaza DCL | Area: Gaza Strip | Location: Gaza DCL Base | Period: 2014

In the office across from me, there was [an officer] who coordinated the goods that were brought to Kerem Shalom (*see glossary*). They'd give the permits that would go to Kerem Shalom, where the trucks arrive. They're either approved or not. And I remember once, they made fun of some soldier who was a recently-arrived immigrant and didn't understand the guy talking to him on the phone, trying to coordinate passage for bulgur. He didn't understand the word bulgur; he said bulbul (Hebrew slang for penis). It was very funny. The thing I have to say about it is just that I didn't think at the time [about] the significance of the fact that we approve passage for bulgur, that it's like one of the things we control, how much bulgur goes into the Gaza Strip. And I know there are very detailed lists of what can and cannot go into the Gaza Strip, and we have full control over it. And it's as specific as bulgur, yes, no, how many trucks. "On such and such a day, there are three trucks of bulgur, five trucks of flour," I don't know, but the list of what is allowed in and what isn't is something that changes occasionally. I don't know how often.

What's funny was that he mixed up the word, but no one thought about the fact that the guy on the other side is at your mercy.

Exactly. The passage of bulgur is actually very important for Gazans. I remember they (the unit) were really proud of it, on some visit to Kerem Shalom Crossing, the message from the unit was, look how humane we are, we're allowing them, we're making sure all these goods go in and that they have food.

And what do you think about it today?

Today I think that if we really were humane, we wouldn't put Gaza under siege, and we'd probably let them import and export from a seaport they could run themselves. If we were humane, we probably wouldn't control the entire air space over there.

Yes.

The fact that we allow five trucks of bulgur in instead of three one day doesn't make us humane. It means we have a lollypop we give them, but there's a string attached to the other end of the stick so that we can pull it out of their mouth at any given moment. And that, by the way, is something that came up a lot in reports about the fishing zone. Because every once in a while, it would expand, contract, depending on what the State of Israel wanted. And I remember, if it

———— ***The fact that we allow five trucks of bulgur in instead of three one day doesn't make us humane. It means we have a lollypop we give them, but there's a string attached to the other end of the stick so that we can pull it out of their mouth at any given moment.***

was in response to rockets or something like that, the fishing zone would get reduced or totally shut down. At the time, I didn't think about the fact that there were fishermen in Gaza who depended on it and might not have any connection to the rockets [being fired at Israel], who get punished because Hamas, or whoever was firing these rockets, was doing it.

[33]

The Shin Bet's Position is to Say No

Unit: COGAT | Area: Gaza Strip | Location: Gaza DCL Base

Suddenly we get approvals [from the Shin Bet (*see glossary*)], we release loads of equipment, and then it prevents something like 10,000 Gazan entries into Israel because then you can do cardiac catheterization in Gaza. I had [requests for] equipment for an eye hospital which [would have] prevented entry of Palestinians into Israel and their exit into Jordan because you could do eye treatment, eye surgery in the [Gaza] Strip, and people wouldn't need to leave, so this would also supposedly benefit the Shin Bet to approve things like that, it would save them work, but they don't do it.

Do you have any idea why?

Because "you can't bring things into Gaza because it's too scary, because I don't want to take responsibility for saying yes." What if someone in Hamas finds a way to use an eye laser surgery machine for a cool, more developed missile?

Do you think that's the Shin Bet's only consideration?

The Shin Bet's position is to say no, we don't want to. No, no, no.

Why? Don't they understand what you understand about it being in their own interest?

Because they can explain to you why a disposable plastic cup can be used for terrorist objectives. That's all the Shin Bet is interested in, to prevent terrorism, that's the Shin Bet's mission. It's not interested in what's happening in Gaza. If a thousand people die every day, that doesn't interest it.

Unemployment, say, is not something that relates to terrorism?

That's the story there, what do I (as the Shin Bet) care? I also approve who's going to leave the Strip, and if I see that someone is involved somehow in terrorism,

————— They can explain to you why a disposable plastic cup can be used for terrorist objectives. That's all the Shin Bet is interested in, to prevent terrorism, that's the Shin Bet's mission. It's not interested in what's happening in Gaza. If a thousand people die every day, that doesn't interest it.

I don't approve him, as far as I'm concerned, everyone can stay there. That's the position of the Shin Bet or what we understand as the position of the Shin Bet as far as COGAT is concerned. And COGAT usually, the good thing in this comparison is that it will say: No, listen, we need this, we need this.

It (COGAT) considers the civilian and humanitarian considerations.

Yes.

[34]

Waiting for Shin Bet Approval

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: COGAT | Area: Gaza Strip | Period: 2011

When an organization wants to submit an application [for a permit], [say] it wants a particular staff member to enter into Gaza, then there's a particular format. It fills in a request form like you fill in for any office where you want to submit an application. You fill in your first name, you fill in your reason for wanting to enter, what organization you're working for, entry dates, and all your details, a copy of your passport. All the documents that you could imagine could be needed, whether it's forms that are related to your projects, or whether it's a particular approval for the organization, and your whole identity in fact. All this you enter into a format that you send via email. It's fed in, whether it has been submitted to the Shin Bet (*see glossary*) or not submitted to the Shin Bet, and if it has been, [its] status: pending, canceled or approved. And we also have a record of things going several years back. As long as its status is pending, it's in our folder.

Applications that were held up for months by the Shin Ben – why [does this happen] in your opinion? There were some that [were approved] within days, and some that took months.

One, sometimes there was a mess on our end in the office. Sometimes we would chase our own tail until we found out why the application wasn't approved, what's happening with its status. It could be because of applications that we couldn't find the email for or their form and it was just, someone would call, and we would tell him, "Okay, its status is pending," and we didn't know where the application itself was... So sometimes we would ask them to submit it again, then their response would be, "We've already submitted it a second time," so like we felt bad to ask, "Submit it again," they've already been waiting so many months. It was confusing sometimes. Sometimes by the time we worked out that we can't find the request – even though it had been entered into the computer – so either it's somewhere and it's waiting for Shin Bet approval, or it hasn't been entered into the computer, and sometimes it's just, in most cases it was just waiting a really long time for the Shin Bet.

I don't understand then, the application wasn't there, so they'll continue to wait... forever?

Then we would ask, but sometimes there was a situation where you're just waiting for an answer from the Shin Bet, that's most of the cases.

[35]

It's Bureaucracy

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: COGAT | Area: Gaza Strip | Location: COGAT HQ

You said that you gave permits for donors?

Yes, it was a weird system. I think you would get the initial approval from the office in the Kirya (IDF headquarters), which was my job. You get the approval from the office in the Kirya. Then once the actual equipment, aid, whatever is ready to be brought into Gaza, it required additional approval from all these Israeli bureaucratic agencies, like Agriculture, Health and Engineering. Because there's the dual-use list (*see glossary*) in Gaza, everything that goes through into Gaza, we need to make sure that nothing is on the dual-use list. So, it's more red taped. Things are obviously stalled and brought in much later than they need to be. Not enough things are brought into Gaza.

You have the general approval, and then they come to the DCL, and you give them another approval.

I think so. They would get the second approval. It's kind of like just a quick stamp. But it's bureaucracy. Things take time.

When you say that this is a donation, is there a separation between agricultural, food and construction agencies?

I think there is one from [the] food [department] and one from the health [department].

You said that there is an Israeli branch for each type. Is that a civil thing or is that military?

I think it's a civil thing actually, because COGAT is essentially a de facto government to the Palestinians in a sense, or at least they control what goes in and out of Gaza. So, those are the civilian branches of government, these agencies. Another example is when I was in the Kyria, I worked with the Israeli customs and Palestinian customs. Because things need to go into Israel. They got an exemption from that tax. So, I needed approval from customs to get an approval to get an exemption for that tax to import it into Israel to later import it into Gaza and the West Bank. They needed approval from all those civil bureaucracies, like Agriculture, Health, Infrastructure.

————— COGAT is essentially a de facto government to the Palestinians in a sense, or at least they control what goes in and out of Gaza. So, those are the civilian branches of government, these agencies.

But we're not talking about the [Israeli] Agriculture Ministry, right?

I think it's a representative of the Agriculture Ministry. Another example, and this is something I remember clearly, is if you bring medicine into the Palestinian Territories, they must be approved for use in Israel. So, nothing that is brought into those territories can be not approved in Israel for use. I don't know what the specific agreement is. I don't know how negative that would be because I think Israel has a robust healthcare system. So, they approve very good medicine. So, maybe that's a good thing. I don't know. But that's just an example of the involvement of civil bureaus in the military occupation that I've seen.

[36]

The Entire Gazan Sewage System Will Collapse

Unit: COGAT | Area: Gaza Strip | Period: 2017

What work is produced inside COGAT from the data that UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East) or the [other non-government] organizations provide about the objective humanitarian situation in Gaza?

It comes up as a report from the lower ranks, usually it goes up to the General's office (referring to the head of COGAT), he reads it and gives his recommendations to the Minister of Defense, and from there I have no idea, and it happens on a daily basis, reports like these happen on a daily to weekly basis and very long reports with recommendations for action and what will happen otherwise, happen on a monthly, bimonthly basis. It happens quite a lot, but sometimes I feel like COGAT is standing naked and waving a really large red flag about what's happening and is going to keep standing naked and waving [the flag] because...

Did you encounter, and if so can you give an example, where Israel – I'm saying Israel on purpose because I don't know where it would come from specifically – behaves in a way that says, that there is some kind of humanitarian red line, to always be close to the red line, but not to cross it?

The Water Authority's generators.

The sewage?

Yes, the sewage. There was the case of the Water Authority's generators, it took more than a year I think to approve them, even though they're not necessarily on the list of dual-use goods (*see glossary*). For all sorts of Shin Bet (*see glossary*) reasons. In the end, they were approved and were brought in because it got to the point where particular places in Gaza, and in Israel too, were flooded with sewage from Gaza, which is of course a public health disaster.

Israeli [public health].

Gazan too. Israel's problem wasn't that people in Ashkelon can't go to the beach,

the issue [is] with the State's desalination facilities: we could take a certain amount of contamination before they don't work anymore. A certain point was reached where if they didn't let in [the generators], the entire Gazan sewage system would collapse, and then it's like, okay, fine, you can bring them in. So it was at a certain stage, and certain pressure was applied, there was work [done], samples of sewage were taken, from the Water Authority to the Ministry of Health representative, to give a professional report [on] what's in it, what damage it can do to the population, to the environment. And then it was sent to the Shin Bet.

The findings?

Yes, the findings and also the samples, so that they have a bit of poop in their life. So, like, after so much pressure and nagging and so many requests and instructions, at a certain point, it's released (given approval) after you see that if it isn't [approved], then X will happen, and this X will make it impossible to operate and you won't be able to do anything.

Only at the point where it really reaches this line, they release what was stuck.

More or less, yes.

————— There was the case of the Water Authority's generators, it took more than a year I think to approve them, even though they're not necessarily on the list of dual-use goods. For all sorts of Shin Bet reasons.

[37]

That's Just How it is

Unit: Gaza DCL | Area: Gaza Strip | Location: Gaza DCL Base | Period: 2011

For several years now, the Gaza DCL hasn't been located inside Gaza [City]. I was at the International Organizations [department] (*see glossary*), and most of our job was giving permits to employees of international organizations who were asking to enter the Gaza Strip. Sometimes people from the UN, other times the WHO (World Health Organization)... Anybody who wanted to enter Gaza via the Erez Crossing would go through us. There were two offices at International Organizations: We oversaw the people, and there was another office that oversaw all the equipment [being moved through the crossing]. The system was so slow. Say you're working at the UN, and you want to enter

————— There were cases where they didn't respond for six, sometimes nine months. There was one woman from India who wasn't allowed to enter, she'd waited almost an entire year for a permit. Most of the time the Shin Bet would say, "It's being looked into, it's being looked into," and then we'd have a pile of unanswered requests waiting.

Gaza. You send us [a request for] a permit. It's online. We print out the request, then take it to an IDF computer and type it all in, print it out again and then send it to an officer, and then we send all the details to the Shin Bet (security service) through the IDF computer. And then when they feel like it, they send it back – entry permitted, or not. There were cases where they didn't respond for six, sometimes nine months. There was one woman from India who [wasn't allowed to enter], she'd waited almost an entire year for a permit. Most of the time the Shin Bet would say, "It's being looked into, it's being looked into," and then we'd have a pile of unanswered requests waiting. They would call in every day, the organizations: "Hello, I want to check on a request." Ninety percent of the time none of us would answer the phones because we knew we didn't have any answers for them, and also no explanations, either.

Were the delays a result of a bureaucratic failure, or due to an attempt to block certain organizations from entering?

Fifty-fifty. If there was someone with an Arab or Muslim name, it was a lot harder to get a permit, that's for sure. An Arab or a Muslim, even if he was from Croatia, even if he worked for the WHO – they'd have to send in [the name of their] father and also of their grandfather, and if the name of the grandfather was, say, Ahmed, then they'd have to wait a long time to get a permit, and most of the time they wouldn't get it. And the reason [for that]? That's just how it is. I remember noticing a particular name, Sheehan – it's an Irish name, but they thought it was 'Shahan,' so they didn't let that person enter.

What details does a person who works at one of the UN agencies and wants to enter the Gaza Strip have to provide?

First name, surname, father's name, grandfather's name, passport number, a photo of their passport, a contact from the organization you're with. If you forget a single one of these things – they'll send it back and you'll have to fill it in. I suppose they check all the angles. But if it's not to their liking – they don't give [a permit].

Which organizations wanted to work in Gaza?

Mostly well-known organizations – UN, OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) – so you don't even ask what it is, you already know. Here and there, there were cases of tiny organizations, and we'd need to do some research on them.

Were there specific people or organizations that were barred from entry?

There were people who were banned.

On what grounds?

It's the Shin Bet, they decide. I wasn't given any reasons from them.

Was the entrance limited to a certain timeframe?

We would recommend that requests be sent a month and a half before they wanted to enter [the Gaza Strip]. Often they wouldn't get an approval before they needed to enter, and when they did get the approval it was for certain dates. They needed to specify the general dates they planned to be there.

And then could they ask for an extension?

Yes. In the month and a half when I was there, we didn't get any answers from the Shin Bet. We had such a stack of papers. Each request could be at least four pages long, and we had a stack. We had dozens of requests, hundreds of pages. There was a period when the Shin Bet barely communicated with us.

Who has the final say, the Civil Administration or the Shin Bet?

The Shin Bet, one hundred percent.

[38]

The Shin Bet Controls Everything That Happens There

Unit: COGAT | Area: Gaza Strip | Period: 2016

The non-commissioned officer who received the [Palestinian businessperson's] request, has dealt with the request, he sends it to the Shin Bet (*see glossary*) via email, and many times the Shin Bet loses requests.

And then what happens?

And then you need to send it again. And again. And again.

Then the handling [of the request] is actually stuck.

Yes, then several months can pass, so you approach [the Shin Bet] with [a] status [request]: What's happening with all these requests? "I never received this, I never received that," and then you, as the DCL (*see glossary*), need to act like a lawyer. You received it on such and such a date because I sent it, and I confirmed with you that you received it on the phone and in writing, and here I have the email where you said you received it.

———— We sent a request for cardiac catheterization equipment for a catheterization lab for children to the Shin Bet and six months passed, we would call the Shin Bet every week and we'd send them status.

Does that change anything?

No. That's how we ended up being contacted by Zehava Galon (former leader of the left-wing Meretz Party).

About what?

We sent a request for cardiac catheterization equipment for a catheterization lab for children to the Shin Bet, and six months passed, we would call the Shin Bet every week, and we'd send them status [requests]. In the end, Zehava Galon contacted [the Minister of Defense].

But what were you told? You were sending [status requests] every week and asking what's happening.

It's being dealt with, it's being dealt with, it's being dealt with, everything is okay. And [after] a certain number of months, there was a request (sent by Zehava Galon). I don't know what to tell you, it's the Shin Bet.

But then what did 'it's being dealt with' mean?

So the [DCO's] public inquiries officer there deals with it, and then she comes and says: What's going on with this? And what's the response? The Shin Bet. And that's the end of the conversation. She knows that when something goes to the Shin Bet, you have no idea what happens there.

But COGAT is the one responsible for it, supposedly.

Right, but the fact that supposedly, according to the law, COGAT is responsible, you can go one more step, understand what the situation in practice is and understand that the Shin Bet controls everything that happens there.

But if someone, Zehava Galon, sends a request like this about the Shin Bet, then why wouldn't the Shin Bet say: What do you want from me? It's COGAT's responsibility.

And then she approaches us, and we say: What do you want? It's being dealt with by the Shin Bet. So it's a great thing that the system has created for itself, no one takes responsibility. It's not my business, it's not my business, it's not my business.

What happened in the end in this case, for example?

A month later we received approval, it was let in.

[39]

Bureaucratic Oppression

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: COGAT | Area: Gaza Strip | Period: 2014

I think the biggest part of the occupation to me is bureaucratic oppression, where you have like for building permits, you lost your permit so your building is going to be destroyed. Or you can't see your family because you don't have the right permit. It's a form of bureaucratic oppression. I don't want to say it's the worst thing in the occupation, but it's part of the occupation that I saw, the bureaucratic oppression and how ridiculous all this is. Because if I'm still coming in as like, I'm pro-Israel and everything Israel does is great, and Israel doesn't mistreat the Palestinians. And I come with that mentality, and I look at the bureaucratic oppression, I'm like, this doesn't make sense. This should be quick. We say that we're so great to the Palestinians. Why are we denying them? Why are we making it hard for them to get medicine? Why are we making it hard for them to get food? So, my opinion on it was, sure, there are things that could be dangerous. Sure, I get the security concerns. I get it. I'm

———— We say that we're so great to the Palestinians. Why are we denying them? Why are we making it hard for them to get medicine? Why are we making it hard for them to get food?

not saying that there are no security concerns with some major equipment. But when it comes to basic necessities, why do they need to be approved over and over and over again? Whereas all of a sudden, because you have international pressure and you're bombing a civilian population, you're like okay, yeah, just bring everything in.

[40]

At-Risk Permit

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank

How many people [who need a permit to stay in Israel because they are 'at risk' in the occupied territories] are we talking about more or less?

Very few. The committee¹ would convene once a month, and each committee, it's like between fifteen and ten.

And a permit like that, how long is it valid for? A few months, or years?

No, no, it's a few months. I think it's for six months, and every time the permit expires, it doesn't get renewed automatically; it has to be brought up at the committee again. So, my responsibility, or the responsibility of the officer whose region it is, [is] to pay attention to the fact that the permit is about to expire, to bring the guy up for discussion at the committee again. Otherwise, he'll be an illegal alien [in Israel].

That's very few, isn't it?

That's not the number of at-risk people there are. First of all, not every at-risk person knows about this option, receiving an at-risk permit. Second of all, this permit isn't given to just anyone. They're very, very strict about it and don't give it easily.

Of 15 applications the committee has, how many will be accepted, more or less?

Fewer than half. I felt the tendency was to work on the premise that he (the Palestinian applicant) won't get it, and then you have to convince the Head of the Division why he should. He didn't approve these permits easily at all.

Who needed to convince the Head of the Division?

The arguments made by the representatives had to be convincing.

The Palestinian who asked for the permit – is he present at the committee meeting himself?

No, no way.

————— *That's a bit messed up, even a lot. They can't. As far as the army is concerned, they don't want to take any responsibility for this person. As far as they're concerned, they've saved his life: "You won't be in the territories. You'll go into Israel, but we take no responsibility for you."*

So how does he make arguments before the committee? Is he represented by a lawyer?

Sometimes there are people who are represented by lawyers.

And then the lawyer attends the committee?

No. It's a closed-door committee. We had this system that kept records about the person, their entries and exits. For example, if you see that while his permit was active, he entered the [occupied] territories, his permit would get revoked right away. Like, he's told, "you're not at risk if you're going into the territories." Sometimes they (the Palestinians) say, "No, I just went to see my family, I missed them," and stuff like that. The permit is canceled on the spot.

But he could have really gone to see his family because he missed them, couldn't he?

Right, but then the permit gets canceled.

When the permit is canceled, does that mean he has to go back to the territories or else he's an illegal alien [in Israel]?

Yes. For the most part, these people don't really go back to the territories, but then they're illegal aliens, and they run the risk of getting caught. Many of these people have been in Israel for a long time, and I'm assuming they develop some sort of underground life here, because they're not really allowed to work.

How are they supposed to support themselves if they're not allowed to work?

That's a bit messed up, even a lot. They can't. As far as the army is concerned, they don't want to take any responsibility for this person. As far as they're concerned, they've saved his life: "You won't be in the territories. You'll go into Israel, but we take no responsibility for you."

But it's sort of willful ignorance, isn't it? Obviously, the guy has to work to make a living, or he'll steal.

Yes, that's a problem in its own right. I don't know what they expect them to do.

¹ The 'At-Risk Committee' is a committee within the Civil Administration that is authorized to issue temporary residency permits to Palestinians who have collaborated with Israeli security or law enforcement agencies or officials and whose lives are at risk as a result. This permit does not grant the recipient the right to work, receive health insurance or many other basic rights. The committee is made up of representatives of the Shin Bet (see glossary), the police, the Attorney General's office and the IDF Advocate General's office.

To Govern

Unit: COGAT | Period: 2016

Before I joined the unit, I thought that there's no way that the occupation could keep going forever, it's unsustainable. In practice, it's very very sustainable. But we, like, organized ourselves very well on the ground, [so that] this thing can keep going without a problem. But in fact, the only place where the Palestinians are winning is in the international media, the fact is that they basically stopped putting a lot of effort into getting direct negotiations with Israel and [instead] they put a lot of emphasis on the international media, and there they're very much winning.

So the motivation here is in fact to do hasbara (see glossary)?

They call it hasbara.

Inside COGAT?

Yes, there's a hasbara department in COGAT.

The spokesperson's office?

The spokesperson's office, yes, they do hasbara.

Why does a military unit feel that it needs to do hasbara? How does it understand that as being a part of its role?

Because it's a military unit whose mission is a political one, isn't it?

Of course, but it can just do its mission. When a soldier needs to do an arrest, he just goes and does an arrest, he doesn't go do [hasbara] around it at the same time.

He doesn't think about how it will be perceived.

Yes, how it will be perceived. If you told me: you know what, people at the Foreign Affairs Ministry are thinking about Israel's hasbara in the world, I would say: okay, that makes sense. I don't understand why it makes sense for a military unit to understand its role as, and actively go do, hasbara?

First, on the face of it, it doesn't make sense, you're right. It's not supposed to be the military that stipulates political policy. It's supposed to be the political level that stipulates policy, and then the military goes and implements it. But also many times, I think it's not only in COGAT that it happens, where the military in fact has responsibilities for a very political situation, and it understands [this]. The real question is what the mission of the unit is, what the mission of the unit that operates the occupation is. Its mission is to implement Israel's policy, but it's also to run the occupation so that it can keep going until there's a

———— The real question is what the mission of the unit is, what the mission of the unit that operates the occupation is. Its mission is to implement Israel's policy, but it's also to run the occupation so that it can keep going until there's a political solution, if there's going to be one.

political solution, if there's going to be one. And in order to do that, it's a political mission, and the nature of the activity of the unit is not fighting, it's not war, it's to govern.

So what you're saying in fact is that the unit understands that in order to be able to rule, it actually needs not to have too much pressure applied on it from outside? Meaning to keep the pressure from the international community at a certain level, on a pressure valve like you said earlier?

Yes, I think that that's exactly it. And also beyond that, they want active intervention by the international community in this matter, and not just for them not to apply pressure to stop the occupation but also for them to use power and money to sustain the occupation, and they want to push them (the international community) to do it. In order to do this, they need to send the message that Israel is acting in the interests of the simple Palestinian civilians, it has a conflict with Hamas, a conflict and problems of course with security threats from rockets, but that it is good-hearted and wants the best for the Palestinians. That message has to be sent and this image has to be reinforced, [but] the Palestinians are very successful in sending the opposite image. [So] if all the publicity in Europe on the Civil Administration and on the activity [undertaken by Israel] is about the demolition of villages and the demolition of houses, and if you want to keep working with these countries, and COGAT also wants these countries to support the activity of the occupation unit – it needs to also have an image of...

That they are also helping.

Yes, a body that also helps, [that's] humanitarian and empathetic.



Part 2 — Land

In the 1990s, the occupied West Bank was divided into three types of areas: A, B and C – based on a temporary administrative division carried out as part of the Interim Agreements agreed upon in the Oslo Accords. This division was intended to facilitate a gradual transfer of powers to the Palestinian Authority. Area A is under the policing and administrative responsibility of the Palestinian Authority. It includes the major Palestinian cities and their immediate vicinities. In Area B, the IDF is responsible for security matters, while the Palestinian Authority holds responsibility for administrative matters. Area C, which was meant to be transferred in a gradual process to the Palestinian Authority apart from specific areas whose status was to be decided in final status agreements, is under Israeli security and civilian responsibility. Area C accounts for 60% of the West Bank and contains all Israeli settlements, as well as many Palestinian communities.

Despite the Accords, Israel effectively controls the entire area of the West Bank (and the Gaza Strip). Through COGAT and the Civil Administration, Israel has exclusive control over every land crossing – with the exception of Rafah and Salah a-Din on the Gaza-Egypt border – giving it the ability to control and monitor nearly every person and commercial item entering the occupied territories. Additionally, soldiers' testimonies show that, contrary to the limitations stipulated in the Oslo Accords, the Israeli military carries out routine operations throughout the West Bank including in Area A. A good example of this can be found in a practice known as “folding PPOs,” wherein Civil Administration soldiers order PPOs – Palestinian police officers – to vacate an area where the Palestinian Authority has security responsibility (Area A) ahead of operational activities by IDF soldiers in the area (*see testimonies 58 and 59*).

The policy guiding the actions of the Civil Administration is rooted in the perception that Area C is meant to serve Israeli interests first and foremost. The soldiers' testimonies demonstrate how this perception permeates the unit, from the highest-ranking officers to the most junior ones (*see testimonies 42, 48 and 52*). With this as its guiding principle, Israel makes consistent efforts to reduce Palestinian presence in Area C and further entrench its hold on it.

In recent years, this policy has received an extra push by COGAT and the Civil Administration, where it is framed as “the Battle for Area C,” meaning Israeli efforts to control and limit Palestinian presence in Area C while increasing Israeli presence and tightening the State's control over the area. Soldiers' testimonies reveal that the Civil Administration is under political pressure to serve this ‘battle,’ and, in practice, it does direct many of its resources to the ‘Battle for Area C,’ demonstrating how Israel's policy has been internalized. And

so, rather than fulfilling its official function – ensuring the welfare of everyone living in the occupied territories – the Civil Administration has become a civilian-military arm in service of the battle over land in the West Bank and employing various measures – from declaring firing zones and holding military training exercises on Palestinian land to laying the groundwork for the development and expansion of settlements – in order to support long-term occupation and pave the way for annexation.

The Civil Administration's perception of the situation in Area C as a battle for land results in a consistent policy of discrimination and dispossession designed to limit Palestinian construction in Area C and shrink Palestinian presence in the area. Any Palestinian construction in the area – a private home, an agricultural structure, an infrastructure facility – requires a permit from the Civil Administration, which are nearly impossible to obtain. The vast majority of Palestinian communities in Area C have no Master Plans, without which no building permits can be issued, and Palestinians who, nevertheless, submit building permit applications almost never receive them. To illustrate the situation – between 2010 and 2020, Palestinian residents submitted 5,155 building permit applications. Only 69 were approved. With no realistic option to build with Israel's permission, much of the Palestinian construction in Area C is unauthorized.

This means many Palestinians have no access to basic infrastructure, and demolitions and confiscations are an everyday occurrence (*see testimony 48*). In Palestinian communities located in Area C and unrecognized by Israel, the Civil Administration prohibits laying water and electricity infrastructure (*e.g. testimony 44*). Soldiers' testimonies indicate that demolitions and confiscations are frequent and consistent. These actions are often based on "security" needs, as determined by the senior commander of the area (the Brigade Commander). Such 'needs' are usually connected to the location of settlements or outposts whose protection is the IDF's main mission in the occupied Palestinian territories (*see e.g. testimonies 43 and 53*).

Access to land in the Seam Zone is another issue where the effort to push Palestinians out of Area C can be seen. The Seam Zone is the part of the West Bank trapped between the Separation Barrier and the Green Line, which is home to Palestinian communities and privately-owned Palestinian land. The Civil Administration restricts Palestinian access to this area and requires Palestinians to obtain an individual permit or Seam Zone resident certificate in order to access it, cultivate land in it and even live in it (*see e.g. testimony 55*).

Two separate planning and building systems operate in Area C. One serves the settlers and the other Palestinians. Unlike the policies restricting Palestinian development, Israeli settlements benefit from detailed planning, generous land allocation and infrastructure connections. As opposed to Palestinians, settlers are represented in the Civil Administrations planning committees and procedures. Over the years, the Civil Administration planning bodies have approved hundreds of new Master Plans for settlements. In addition to these, more than 100 outposts have been built in Area C without Master Plans or official State approval. Still, in the vast majority of cases, the Israeli authorities turn a blind eye to this illegal activity, allowing these outposts to connect to advanced infrastructure while refraining from demolishing them (*see e.g. testimony 49*).

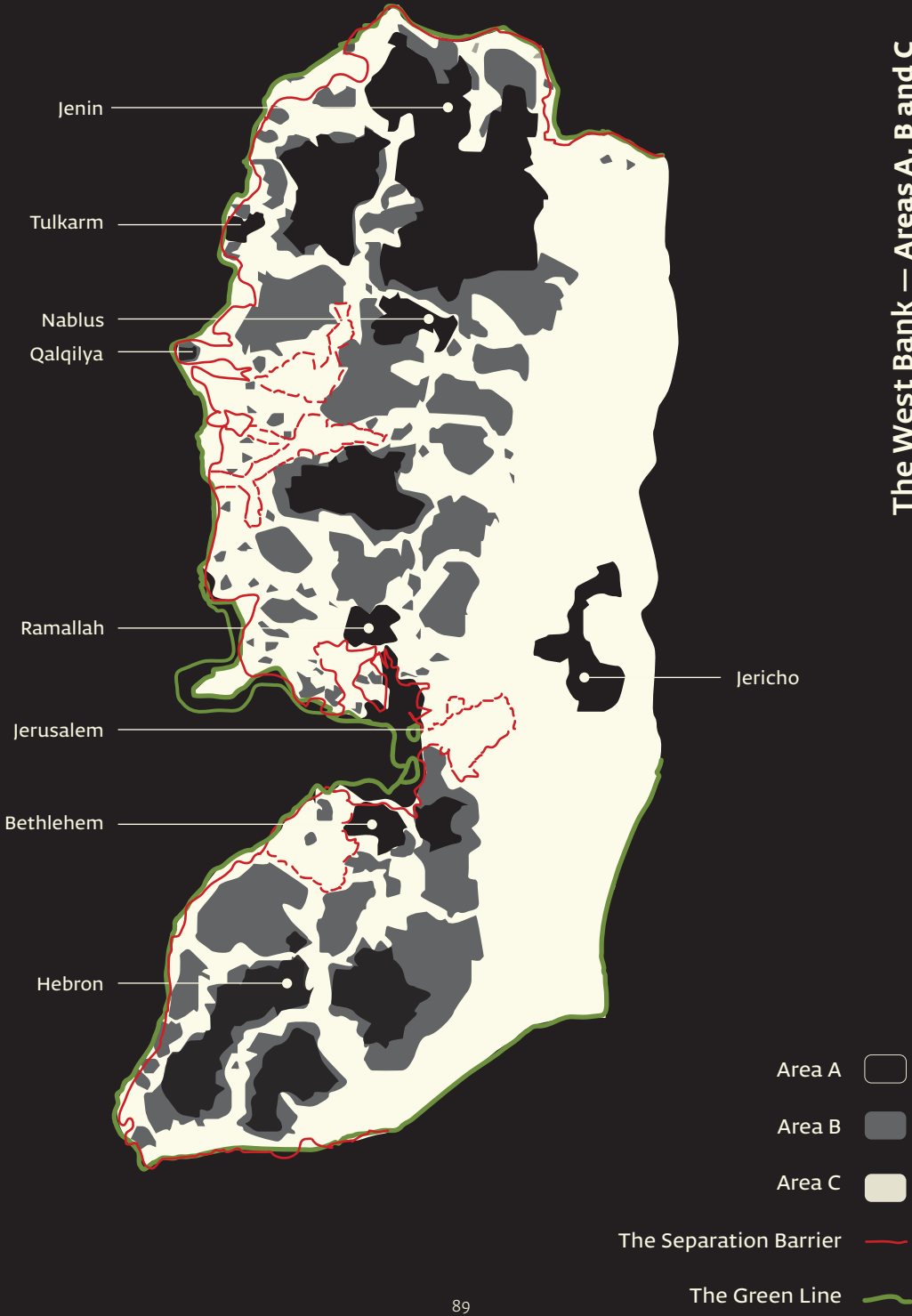
Establishing facts on the ground is the most effective way to secure de facto control of the land. This is pursued chiefly through construction but also through infrastructure development, particularly paving roads. Since the Interim Agreements were signed, countless bypass roads have been built in the West Bank. They are meant to provide settlers and other Israelis quick, safe, Palestinian-free access between settlements and other locations inside the West Bank, as well as between the occupied territories and Israel proper. Road and infrastructure construction drives the settlements' future prosperity, further cements Israel's hold on the land and supports its de facto annexation. This is one of the ways in which the Civil Administration contributes to and actively purses further entrenchment of Israel's control of Area C and actively pursues it (*see e.g. testimonies 45 and 46*).

This policy did not appear out of thin air. It is rooted in the Israeli government's political agenda and the close ties between settlers and Civil Administration personnel – from the most senior officers to the soldiers on the ground. In their testimonies, soldiers speak of standing meetings between senior Civil Administration officers, including the head of the Civil Administration himself, and settlement council heads and leaders, including even with the heads of overtly pro-occupation NGOs. These meetings would often produce specific action items (*e.g. testimonies 42, 50 and 51*). The testimonies clearly indicate that the senior command of the Civil Administration sees complying with settlers' demands as a goal in its own right and even a professional requirement. In addition, settlers attend regional meetings and weekly situation assessments held by the Civil Administration (*see for example testimony 53*).

The Civil Administration Enforcement Unit is a significant, strategic focal point for the joint efforts of the Civil Administration and settlers. The unit is meant to monitor and enforce the law on everyone living in the occupied territories, but soldiers' testimonies indicate the main thrust of its activities is directed at Palestinian construction (*for example, testimonies 42, 43 and 51*) and that many of the unit's staff are themselves settlers. Another example of the efforts and resources that the Civil Administration puts into the "Battle for Area C" is the "Area C Operations Room," a Civil Administration hotline through which settlers can report on Palestinian construction (*see testimonies 47 and 54*). Based on these reports, soldiers are sent into the field to confiscate equipment, instrumentalizing them in the service of the settler agenda. In this manner, the Civil Administration engages in a joint, coordinated effort with the settlement enterprise designed to establish Israeli control over as much West Bank territory as possible, while continuing to deprive the Palestinian population of its land.

As the soldiers' testimonies show, the result on the ground is a clear, strategic joint effort by the Civil Administration, the settlement enterprise and successive Israeli governments, designed to push out Palestinians and limit their presence in Area C while simultaneously promoting Israeli construction and expansion in the area, thus pushing the possibility of Palestinian statehood ever further into the distance, while paving the way for future annexation of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The West Bank — Areas A, B and C



It's Not a Battle if You Know in Advance Who's Going to Win

Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank

Location: Office of the Head of the Civil Administration

Describe, from your perspective, what the 'Battle for Area C' is.

Area C feels stupid to me. It's not a battle. Calling it a battle is where the stupidity begins, and that's what I felt as a soldier too.

Why?

Because it's not a battle. Palestinians build a little more in Area C, and the Jews, like, build settlements in Area C. When Palestinians build houses for themselves in Area C, it's because they need somewhere to live, and they have no other option, while we're building outposts over there. There is no battle, there's a takeover by us, and like, a pathetic attempt by Palestinians to try to grow. There's no real strategic challenge to Israel. Like, what's the deal? The idea is that Palestinian ministers and senior Palestinian officials have decided to expand toward Area C to prove Palestinian presence there and paint as much of it as possible green (Palestinian) instead of blue (Israeli). But it just isn't, in terms of quantity. Like, we're settling a lot more than they're building. It always felt stupid to me, the Battle for Area C.

————— *Sometimes, there were these conferences, about twice a year, I think, conferences of all the heads of the settlements, where the Head of the Civil Administration would present the strategic plan to them, and they'd sometimes raise issues.*

Ostensibly, there are two entities here that want areas within a single geographical unit. There's a battle here. Why not?

Because we have an enormous army, and every attempt they make is exterminated, while every attempt [to remove settlers] needs approval from the Deputy Minister of Defense. That's where it's at. It's not a real battle. We have an army; we have Enforcement Units (*see glossary*). It always felt to me like it's not a battle if you know in advance who's going to win.

And why would we win?

We have a big army, and we're the Government of Israel, while they're the Palestinian Authority. It felt stupid to me, but for the sake of the matter, like, the Head of the Civil Administration would deal with the Battle for Area C. He had meetings about the Battle for Area C.

What's the purpose of the battle as far as the Civil Administration is concerned?

Going back to the Enforcement Units, it means doing more enforcement on Palestinians, keeping a closer eye on illegal Palestinian construction in Area C than illegal Jewish construction. Aside from the political story of always talking about the Battle for Area C, you look a little more for illegal Palestinian construction, because you presume it's part of a larger conspiracy to take over Area C.

Area C is not the State of Israel.

They didn't think of it that way. To them, Area C is Israel.

To the Head of the Civil Administration?

Obviously, in the same way as the settlements are [considered] Israeli territory.

Even [the State of] Israel doesn't consider it Israeli territory.

Yes, legally, but in terms of conduct, the settlements are communities (meaning Jewish communities in Israel). They are Israeli communities, and they have to get the best service. Every once in a while, there were secret meetings, and there was very obvious monitoring all the time. The secretary had a table showing how long it's been since you last met with an Israeli [settlement] community. Sometimes, there were these conferences, about twice a year, I think, conferences of all the heads of the Jewish [settlement] communities, where the Head of the Civil Administration would present the strategic plan to them, and they'd sometimes raise issues. And there was this forum that would get together, and they'd book the expensive room from the Division for it, and there were lots of refreshments. Like a fun day. It was clear that they were the ones it was more important to serve, and it was clear that it was Israel, and it was clear, there was no question whether Area C was Israel or not. The battle for Area C is to make sure they (the Palestinians) are not encroaching on us.

That's the frame of mind.

Yes, now, what even is illegal construction? Illegal construction by Palestinians is 'an attempt to encroach on Israel'. Illegal construction by settlers is 'naughty', 'not cool'. They are treated differently. The more strategic feeling was: keep a closer eye on Palestinian construction.

* According to research by NGOs Peace Now and Bimkom, between 2010-2020, Palestinians living in Area C submitted 5,155 requests for construction permits, of which only 69 were approved. During the same period, the Civil Administration approved 20,301 permits for construction in settlements.

[43]

The Settlers Come to the Meetings

Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Hebron | Location: Carmel

How do you decide what to demolish? There's so much illegal construction, why demolish one house and not another?

You look at a map of the demolitions, and you can see that they demolish where it's close to a settlement. There are a lot of Khirbes (small Palestinian villages) in the South Hebron Hills, there are so many illegal villages in Area C (*see glossary*) in the South Hebron Hills, and they demolish in [Palestinian] Susiya or

in Khirbet a-Tuwani. It's a political discussion. Let's say, of the 70,000-140,000 Palestinian residents who live in Area C, the vast majority live in illegal villages. [If] there's a village in Area C without a Master Plan – that means it's illegal. Near Carmel, one of the most successful settlements in the area that is expanding a lot, they (Palestinians from the village of Um al-Kheir) make their food on a serious tabun oven (outdoor stove) that apparently creates a burnt smell for the residents of Carmel. The story was that it really bothered the settlers, and since it (the tabun) was an illegal structure, then it was okay to demolish it, destroy it, and take [it]. I don't remember whether this story was of demolishing or taking, or they just didn't provide them with authorization. And the international organizations – this story really occupied them a lot [because] they (the residents of the village) had no way to eat and things like that, and they tried to offer all kinds of new solutions. And every time it would happen, the residents of Carmel would call us. It was a huge story that we dealt with.

In demolitions, why do they demolish this house and not that house in one village?

The considerations are either security-related – that's the deal with firing zones for example – or civilian-related, for that matter. In many cases, the Brigade commander pushes proceedings to be implemented against locations that bother him. [A structure] located on a certain route, places that overlook a certain area [or] a settlement, and he doesn't want them, all kinds of things like that. He told us more than once: Ask ***** (a civilian working for the Civil Administration's Inspection Unit) what's going on with this illegal structure or that illegal structure.

He asked you about a specific illegal structure?

Exactly. A specific illegal structure for which they want to follow proceedings to completion so that they can demolish it, because it bothers them in something security-related, or because it strategically overlooks a settlement. The Brigade commander is in touch with the settlers, and they come to the meetings. The weekly situation assessment is with all the CSCs of the area (Civilian Security Coordinators, settlers in charge of the security of their settlements, appointed by the Ministry of Defense), and they exert pressure there.

The brigade commander is in touch with the settlers and they come to the meetings. The weekly situation assessment is with all the CSCs of the area, and they exert pressure there.

* According to UN data, between 2010-2021, the Civil Administration demolished 6,416 structures in Palestinian communities in Area C.



Demolition of an Agricultural Structure



No Village Gets Water from Mekorot

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Hebron

There is a Mekorot (the Israeli national water company) pipe which directs water, a huge pipe that runs parallel to Route 60 (a main road that runs through the West Bank from the north to the south). And it turns out that stealing this water is really simple. The Palestinians don't see it as a crime anymore, not only because it's against Israel, [but because] they've been doing it for fifteen years. They're used to it already, they didn't know, didn't realize that they're committing a crime.

The Palestinian communities which are situated along Route 60 in Area C (see glossary) – aren't they supposed to get their water from Israel in the first place? The civilian control is Israeli.¹

Good question. But the Mekorot pipe doesn't get to these villages.

Why?

Great question. It's the first time I've ever thought about it, that you're right, the whole area of Route 60 is supposed to be Area C. What's the story exactly? Don't know. In Ramallah you always have running water.

But Ramallah is Area A (see glossary). That's the point, are Palestinians in Area C supposed to get their water supply from the Palestinian water authority?

I don't know. They don't. No village gets water from Mekorot in all of Area C. Maybe except for very very particular cases. But if you don't have a Master Plan – you don't get water, you don't get sewage, don't get electricity. So they steal.²

In the Israeli unauthorized outposts, where do they get water from?

I don't know, I don't remember. There are settlements that do have [a connection to water]. When I think about it, loads of settlements do.

You said that the Palestinian villages don't get water because they're illegal construction. But on the face of it, the unauthorized outposts are illegal construction, too.

True.

So how is it that they do get water?

Good question. I don't know. There are unauthorized outposts connected [to water from Mekorot]. How does it work exactly? I don't know.

1. The Civil Administration is the sole body responsible for civilian infrastructure, in Area C, including water pipe lines. In most cases, the Palestinian communities in these areas which are recognized by Israel are authorized to connect to the Israeli water pipelines using pipes laid by the Palestinian Authority humanitarian aid agencies, subject to the Civil Administration's consent. In many cases, the water supply to these communities falls below the necessary amount for the needs of the local population, and thus the residents have no choice but to connect to the Israeli water supply illegally. In Palestinian communities in Area C which are not recognized by Israel, the Civil Administration actively prevents the residents from laying water pipes. In these cases, the residents are forced to have their water delivered in mobile tanks, which costs significantly more and worsens its quality.

2. From the point of view of the Israeli authorities, the main indication for testing the legality of a community in the occupied territories is whether it has a Master Plan which has been approved by the Civil Administration.

Regular Meetings With the Heads of Jewish Settlements

Unit: Civil Administration | Location: Office of the Head of the Civil Administration

One of the interesting things was that in his (the Head of the Civil Administration) calendar, there were pretty regular meetings with the heads of Jewish settlements [in the West Bank]. Every so often, he'd have... The last time he met with the head of Efrat or Mevo Horon, tasks would come out of those.

Out of those meetings?

Out of those meetings. These meetings were also respectable, whether they [the settlement leaders] came to him or he went there. There was usually a point at which he was alone in the meeting, but he'd often have this meeting with all kinds of specific branch heads, that the settlement leaders would even ask to attend so they can address specific issues they wanted to advance. And because all of this was properly organized, then these things would really happen, because there was task management and oversight, and we'd have to remind the branch heads they had to take care of the settlements' issues.

Could a topic for a meeting like that be infrastructure, roads?

Yes, often. Sometimes it was about issues from a meeting with a specific community, it would be with the Custodian Staff Officer (an office in charge of managing state land and absentee property), or a staff officer responsible for the settlement's outline (Master Plans). There was a lot of talk about settlements' [official] outlines – expanding them, specifying them, expanded building permits. The settlements would get into the Supreme Planning Council's business and push to advance certain building plans. And there was the business with the roads. It would come up a lot. How to make sure there's more organized infrastructure. Usually, the most sought-after person for these meetings was usually the Head of the Infrastructure Office.

———— One of the interesting things was that in the Head of the Civil Administration's calendar there were pretty regular meetings with the heads of Jewish settlements.



Civil Administration Soldiers In the Nablus Area

[46]

A Bypass Road

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: COGAT | Period: 2019

Lately, there has been all this infrastructure development concerning roads, say, the Huwara bypass road. What do you think is the rationale for all this development?

These roads, it's like a very very simple answer, the way I see it anyway, through political eyes. Passing through Huwara isn't pleasant, and even quite dangerous for many of the Jews who pass through there, the Israelis; it's dangerous for soldiers; it's dangerous for Israeli civilians. The solution is a bypass road, a solution for people who don't want to go into these areas. Now, allegedly, it's supposed to serve Palestinians too.

Why allegedly?

It'll serve Palestinians, people who don't want to go into Huwara, but Huwara is the financial center of the villages in the area, after Nablus, of course. Where will it go around from? The Mountain Ridge settlements, [meaning] the settlements in the

Nablus area will be able to use these roads so as not to go through Huwara. These things are like hiding the occupation, like driving on Road 443, where you have a wall with a mural on the right. That's how I see it. When they want to do something for the benefit of the whole public, land will be confiscated. That's something that happens. Does it strengthen Israel's hold? Sure. Every Israeli citizen who moves to live in this area strengthens Israel's hold on the territories. And if you make it easier for Israelis to move, Israel's hold over the territories is made easier. The moment you hide the occupation from the eyes of Israeli civilians, make moving to the territories easier, then you increase Israel's hold on Area C, such that there are more Israeli residents in Area C.

———— The moment you hide the occupation from the eyes of Israeli civilians, make moving to the territories easier, then you increase Israel's hold on Area C.

[47]

Settlers Can Call In and Report

Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank | Period: 2021

Did you hear about something called the 'Battle for Area C?'

Was that something that was talked about on the official level?

No, but it was pretty clear, we're aware of what the Infrastructure Department means and what they do. Towards the end of my service, it was even advertised

on the screensavers on the computers. There was a new project where settlers can call in and report on...

Illegal construction.

Precisely. And it just makes that much more clear that Israel's war for Area C is intensifying, because before this, the operations room was [used] for other reasons. And now, they open up another operations room and are putting more resources and more money in, more soldiers, into specifically identifying "illegal" construction in Area C. I assume no Palestinian would call in and report illegal settlement buildings.

[48]

I've Confiscated Loads and Loads of Things

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Bethlehem | Period: 2021

The 'Battle for Area C' is like a war. It's surreal. Area C is 60% of the West Bank. A lot of it is firing zones, but also a lot of Area C is Palestinian villages or potential locations for the next settlement. And the Battle for Area C means, essentially, our opposition, or our ability to prevent illegal expansion of Palestinian communities. Say, [the village] of Nahhalin sits partly in Area C. We'd constantly drop by Nahhalin because of a cement mixer that had shown up, because of construction, even [of] an additional floor.

When it was settlers too, or just when it was Palestinians?

To approve the demolition of illegal construction by Palestinians, you need the approval of the Head of the Civil Administration, an officer with the rank of Brigadier General. To demolish illegal construction by Jews, you need approval from the Minister of Defense – that's government level, not just army level. Do you understand the extent of the discrimination? Now, you can say, "wait a second, but the Palestinians build illegally a lot more," but where are the Palestinian Master Plans? What's the land allocation for Palestinians? You're not going to approve an expansion of Nahhalin in Area C because you want Jewish (Israeli) sovereignty.

But, in principle, the military isn't a political body, so it's not meant to deal with...

But the military is a political body. The Head of the Civil Administration meets with Regavim (a right-wing organization that works to promote the demolition of Palestinian structures in Area C). There's a designated operations room that's

————— ***You can say, "wait a second, but the Palestinians build illegally a lot more," but where are the Palestinian Master Plans? What's the land allocation for Palestinians? You're not going to approve an expansion of Nahhalin in Area C because you want Jewish (Israeli) sovereignty.***

[been] opened, Operations Room C, they call it. It gets calls from inspectors that work for regional councils, local councils, the Gush Etzion council, belonging to the settlements, whose job is essentially to monitor what's going on... The Battalion commander says, guys, you can't take this lightly. Our mission isn't just preventing terrorism, [it's] the Battle for Area C.

On paper, the military isn't supposed to care whether Area C is more Jewish or more Muslim, right?

So, in practice, it does. You can see it on the ground too. Who alerts you about farming on State land? The company commander on the ground. If it's a 'kippa sruga' (crocheted yarmulke-wearing company commander from the Religious Zionist movement), he'll probably call you twice on Saturday to tell you, "listen, DCL, there's someone here plowing land. I don't think it's cool." So you go out on a Saturday, totally bummed, and you have to confiscate equipment, you have to confiscate his backhoe loader, his bobcat, whatever it is.

Was there an incident you were at where you confiscated equipment?

Of course, of course, more than ten times. There was this one time I went, right at the Brigade Junction, there was this guy who just made his porch a little bigger, and I went there. We confiscated some spades. That was small time, but I've confiscated a cement mixer, a backhoe loader; I've confiscated loads and loads of things.

[49]

There's No Such Thing as "an Illegal Outpost"

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Hebron

Was there a systematic distinction between an authorized settlement and an unauthorized settlement?

No. There's no such thing as "an illegal outpost." Except, maybe, Mitzpe Yair, which has a private water line. It's a private water line that they laid on Palestinian private land. [But] Mitzpe Yair has utility poles of the IEC (Israel Electric Corporation). In Avigayil (an unauthorized outpost), I'm almost sure they don't have electricity [supplied by the IEC], but there is generators equipment.¹ Someone set up that infrastructure [there]. There was illegal work in Asa'el (an unauthorized outpost), they laid water and electricity lines from the [Mount Hebron] Regional Council, building all the way to the illegal outpost. Of course, we stopped the work a few times, but I assume that afterward the outpost was connected to electricity and water.

And it wasn't work carried out by the IEC?

No, no, someone's private work. Illegal work. We get a phone call from Palestinians

or from left-wing organizations reporting illegal work carried out around X: we hop over, arrive, see that there is illegal work. Apart from getting the tractor out of there at that moment in time, we have no ability, authority [to halt the work]. But it's enough to have an officer whose job it is and who sees work and documents it, or without documenting it. He is authorized to confiscate a machine, to stop the work. In Asa'el, the inspector (who works for the Civil Administration's Enforcement Unit) sent a directive halting the work. How did it unfold From there? I have no idea. I assume nothing happened as the outpost was connected to water and electricity, and life goes on. Most of the [illegal] work in outposts take place on Friday and Saturday. [The settlers] use the time when the IDF is convening or preparing for Saturday morning demonstrations (the testifier is referring to Israeli activists escorting Palestinian shepherds in the South Hebron Hills area) and push forward these processes. We would see that work had been carried out on the ground. We would pass on every such report to the Enforcement Unit Coordinator, [and] he is supposed to issue a directive to halt the work. A directive for halting construction work usually becomes a demolition order.

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1. As of June 2022, the two unauthorized outposts mentioned in this testimony are connected to the Israel Electric Company's power grid and the Mekorot water corporation's pipeline. Breaking the Silence is not able to say definitively who connected them to or financed the infrastructure.

[50]

The Secretary General Would Meet With the Head of the Civil Administration

Unit: Civil Administration | Location: Office of the Head of the Civil Administration

There's the Secretary General of Amana (an organization specializing in construction projects in settlements), Zambish. He (the Head of the Civil Administration) would meet with him too. To me it felt like the biggest dissonance between my sense that I was doing something good and the fact that I didn't like what was actually going on there. And Zambish, who was the Secretary General of Amana, would meet with the Head of the Civil Administration.

How many times?

At least three times while I was there. Also, tasks would come out of these meetings, and we'd have to make sure they got done. And it's not his (the Head of the Civil Administration's) boss.

Do you remember any of the tasks?

From Zambish, no, but I remember there were some, and I remember it bugged me.

Because he'd come have a meeting, and then there would be tasks as a result?

Why does the Secretary General of Amana have to steer the Civil Administration's policy? The head of a settlement movement?

[51]

So the Land Stays as Clear as Possible of Palestinians

Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank | Period: 2019

What is 'the Battle for Area C'?

Generally speaking, it's a sort of war over whose territory it is and who gets the territory. Essentially, from the Israeli point of view, the idea is, like, prevention or enforcement against illegal Palestinian construction, so the land stays as clear as possible. Meaning, that Area C, which is currently ours, stays as clear as possible of Palestinians and Palestinian construction stays inside [Areas] A and B and doesn't expand to C (*see glossary*). On the other side, there's actually a Palestinian ministry too, they're also dealing with the Battle for Area C, which is to build as much as possible in Area C.

———— I don't think anyone will say, "our goal is to build in Area C," because that's a problem with the international community, but it was definitely more obvious when Bennett was Minister of Defense.

Are you saying this because that's what you were told?

Because I was told. I didn't look into it.

And were you also told that the attempt to get as much of Area C as possible is the Israeli objective?

I probably have it written somewhere. I don't think anyone will say, "our goal is to build in Area C," because that's a problem with the outside [international] community, but it was definitely more obvious when Bennett was Minister of Defense. We're really holding on to these territories. We're really fighting. It was a war. That's how they defined it, as a war.

Like all the senior officers?

Yes.

And what do you do in this 'battle'? How do you fight?

It's a ton of things. It's the Civil Administration Enforcement Unit going into the field, looking for illegal structures, infrastructure, and enforcing (issuing demolition orders and demolishing) against whatever it finds. They kept complaining – the Enforcement Unit – all the time, that they didn't have enough manpower, that they needed more money. Every demolition is a lot of money.

You have to rent equipment, you need all sorts, so they needed way more funding and way more manpower, a lot more attention, way more approvals, like, to make their work smoother. That's as far as the Civil Administration is concerned.

And they (the Enforcement Unit personnel) are civilians?

They're civilians.

And did they get more people?

When I was there, they didn't. They mostly complained. They mostly whined. In reality, they have a huge budget. The way I see it, they have a huge budget, because enforcement is really expensive. Like, I don't have the professional data, but each day like that costs money. There are trained professionals there that cost money. In terms of staff officers (*see glossary*), it's the biggest unit.

Is he (the head of the Enforcement Unit) a settler?

Many of them are, from the staff officers and generally in the Enforcement Unit, I'm pretty sure, 90% sure, they are. Every staff officer also has several staff working for them, so therefore many of them, just for convenience, just live close by...

You mean close to work.

That's their job.

[52]

A Different Law for Different People

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: West Bank | Period: 2017

[You] have to understand that a lot of times the military can't deal with the settlers because it's a different law for different people. For settlers, it's likely that the police will deal with them; [for] Palestinians, it's the military that deals with them.

Who says that?

It's certain. It's said during training, to that extent.

That the military can't deal with the settlers?

You can't really deal with the settlers.

Why is that?

Because they're Israeli. You can declare a closed military zone and kick everyone out of there, but you can't really arrest them, that's also a problem.

Is that something that the officers of the DCL are taught?

Correct, you have to call the police immediately.

When a soldier is on the ground and he witnesses a violation of the law on

————— ***It's obvious to any critical eye that more Palestinian structures are demolished than settlers', that's the story. But in general the process is supposed to be more or less the same process.***

the part of settlers, what is he supposed to do?

What will happen in practice is that nothing will be done with it. That's a likely assumption at least. A complaint can be filed, but the police is supposed to handle it, not the military.

If an officer in the [Civil] Administration sees illegal Palestinian construction, what does he do?

Someone from the Civil Administration who's responsible for land turns up and checks: if it has really violated [the law], all those things, then there's an internal procedure for going and breaking down the building.

And when the illegal construction is in a settlement?

In general, the Civil Administration is supposed to take care of it exactly in the same way, and it has the authority to break settlers' things, and that happens too. Many times, they come and demolish specific things, although in places that are more political, more contentious, like Amona for example, they didn't evacuate [it] immediately.

All the unauthorized outposts in the [West] Bank.

Totally. I can't say exactly, but it's obvious to any critical eye that more Palestinian structures are demolished than settlers', that's the story. But in general, the process is supposed to be more or less the same process.

[53]

Illegal Palestinian Construction in Area C is Much More Severe from the Administration's Point of View Than Illegal Jewish Construction

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Hebron

Regarding illegal Palestinian construction, there's a kind of struggle between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to create facts on the ground in Area C (*see glossary*). Everyone knows where this land is going – this land is moving toward a diplomatic agreement. And everyone wants to keep Area C as their own land. [That's why] illegal Palestinian construction in Area C is much more severe from the [Civil] Administration's point of view than illegal Jewish construction in Area C. It's not officially declared.

Just in practice?

That's right. It means that the Enforcement Unit inspectors, if they go to an illegal [Israeli] outpost to check out what goes on there, [then that would be] once every two weeks, once every never. To Khirbet X (a Palestinian village) they would come, practically every week. I don't know how many Palestinians live in Area C, but most [of the residents in Area C] are Jews. I haven't seen the figures, but in my

humble opinion, something like 75% are illegal Palestinian construction cases [in the Civil Administration's files] and 25% are Jewish cases.¹ This number seems strange to me – that the [Palestinian] minority is responsible for the majority of illegal construction cases.

What if a Palestinian wants to get a construction permit?

He can't. He won't get one because they don't Master Plans plans for them. They have just started working on Master Plans [for Palestinians] after many years of disagreement between the Civil Administration and the Palestinians regarding the Master Plans for communities in Area C. The problem is that the [Palestinian] Authority itself is holding it up, because the Authority wants [for example] the Master Plan to be 4,000 dunams (1,000 acres), and the Administration wants 1,000 dunams (250 acres). Throughout an entire year, I came across only one illegal [Palestinian] construction case that was whitewashed. "Whitewashed" means that it was retroactively approved. It was the school in [the village of] a-Ramadin, near [the settlement of] Eshkolot. Why was it whitewashed? Because it's a school.

Are there humanitarian considerations in regard to demolitions?

Yes, yes, yes. There were quite a few instances where the Infrastructure Officer or the head of the DCL canceled demolitions because they didn't see the need. For instance, a house that sat on Route 60 and was built before Route 60 [was paved], and all of a sudden, it's an illegal structure (the testifier is referring to the Israeli ban on Palestinian construction near Route 60, the main road crossing the West Bank from north to south). It's in Area C, it's illegal, and it will never be legal because suddenly the road goes right next to it. The road has been passing right next to it for fifteen years already, so we didn't demolish it.

Is there someone whose job is to look for illegal construction?

Yes, yes. The Enforcement Unit. Just like you have municipal inspectors who locate illegal balcony-closings (the testifier is referring to the practice of closing a balcony to create additional indoor space, which is often illegal) and issue warrants – same thing, except they do it with an armored Defender (military jeep) at their side. There are [Master] Plans that were made by the Civil Administration in the eighties and the nineties. [The Administration] went to the Mukhtars (Palestinian village leaders) and said, "Here's a red square [on the map] in which you can go wild, build whatever you like. But everything outside the square is illegal construction." There are maps like that to this day, [created] knowing that you can't suffocate the population completely.

Just a bit?

Just a bit.

1. According to figures provided to the Kerem Navot organization, as of 2017, the Civil Administration had 8,001 cases of illegal construction in Israeli settlements in Area C and 16,798 cases of illegal construction in Palestinian villages in Area C.



Photo: Itai Feitelson

Demolition of Structures in the South Hebron Hills, 2021

The Area C Operations Room

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Bethlehem | Period: 2021

Often on Saturdays, you're just chilling, doing your thing, then suddenly you get a call from the soldiers at the Area C Operations Room (*see glossary*) or one of the representatives from the local council. There are these representatives who are responsible for monitoring things on the ground and ensuring there's no illegal construction and so on.

Are they (the representatives) from the [settlements'] regional councils?

They're from the councils, exactly.

Settlers?

Settlers, yes. [They're] really in constant contact with the military. And by the way, they have authorization to fly drones too, from the military. You won't see a Palestinian flying a drone, checking the same thing on the other side. But they fly drones, and then they suddenly call the operations room. You get a report from the operations room, there's a truck now or there are some workers now with an excavator, plowing a field in an area they're not allowed to plow, state-owned land. Or there are some Palestinians with a cement mixer truck, pouring a new balcony. You immediately head out to the field, have a conversation to clarify things, check with the infrastructure officer whether to confiscate – no, yes, what, put that resident's truck in the impound lot – and that's it. It's like a routine event.

———— You immediately head out to the field, have a conversation to clarify things, check with the infrastructure officer whether to confiscate – no, yes, what, put that resident's truck in the impound lot – and that's it. It's like a routine event.

I Don't Want You Bringing This Thing Through Here

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Qalqilya | Period: 2012

There was the story of a village that's located behind the [Separation] Barrier (*in the Seam Zone – see glossary*). So this one time, someone was about to pass through [the separation Barrier] with two gas cylinders, and a soldier called the operations room of the DCL, [who answered], "Yes, we know of this, he's allowed to pass." Then he (the soldier) said: "Why? What if there's some kind of explosive device in it that I don't know about? How do I know I can trust that he's not planning to get it into Israel and carry out a terrorist attack?" They argued with him, and the soldier wasn't convinced. The soldier was a bit of a pest, so [we had to call] the crossings

officer and tell him that there's a problem at that checkpoint and that he has to deal with it now. He said okay, I'll head over there, and in the end, he solved the problem. But that's the issue, the Civil Administration develops a long-term relationship with the villages and sees what their needs are, but it's enough that one soldier at a checkpoint is the one with the de facto power to suddenly decide who goes through and who doesn't – he can create these problems. That's why because there are [combat soldiers who] do deployments rather than military police soldiers, for every battalion coming in, a crossings officer has to give a briefing on what's allowed at this checkpoint, what's prohibited at this checkpoint, etc. Even though there were briefings, there were still problems.

————— ***The Civil Administration develops a long-term relationship with the villages and sees what their needs are, but it's enough that one soldier at a checkpoint is the one with the de facto power to suddenly decide who goes through and who doesn't – he can create these problems.***

You're describing a very strange reality. You're saying the guys on the ground are the ones who have the power, they decide what happens, but [the Civil Administration and the DCLs are] the ones who issue the permits and decide on the procedures.

That's exactly the gap between the theory and what happens on the ground or what you're supposed to do and what's enforced. The issue is enforcement. It's not the DCL soldiers who are at the checkpoints to make sure everything is enforced. The soldiers who go there aren't in the Civil Administration, they're not familiar with the world of permits and the Seam Zone and all that. Some new thing that he (the soldier on the ground) doesn't know surprises him, and he has the power, even though he's not from the Civil Administration.

These villages that are in the Seam Zone, is there a list of what can be taken in and in what quantities?

There are lists at the DCL. I don't remember if we gave the soldiers on the ground sheets for them to see, to know. It wasn't posted at the gate (a minor checkpoint through which the Seam Zone is accessed), that's for sure, but it may have been handed out to soldiers. That's something that the crossings officer did.

Are the lists at the level of detail of like, 10 eggs are allowed, a kilo of tomatoes is allowed?

Yes, totally, but it wasn't always up to date. I remember one time, at the checkpoint between Qalqilya and Tzofim, beyond which there's a Bedouin village in the Seam Zone, they always passed through with donkeys, horses and all kinds of things like that. So one time, the crossings officer says, right now, only men aged 40 and up or up to 40, I can't remember, can pass through this checkpoint with a horse. And then, each time, the soldiers [or] the military police at the checkpoint would say [to the DCO operations room]: We heard there's a directive, does it still apply? [And they

would be told that] it does. And then at some point, the crossings officer decides to cancel this directive. That's it, it doesn't apply anymore. Ask me what happened here, I have no idea. That's an example of the uncertainty in these things.

Can you tell if these changes are the result of some kind of incident that occurred or whether it's sometimes just a periodic update?

I think in some cases it was because of an incident that occurred. It's hard for me to recall something really specific, but I remember that sometimes a Palestinian would show up with something that seemed like too much [of a certain product] to the crossings officer, and he (the officer) told him: Okay, you can't bring this thing through here anymore. Not a sweeping ban for the rest of your life, but you're always causing trouble for me, I don't want you bringing this thing through here, I can let you take this amount, claiming that that's what he (the Palestinian) needs, that he doesn't need any more than that.

[56]

One of the Unit's Missions is to Normalize the Occupation

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: COGAT | Period: 2020

There are areas where Palestinians harvest their olives, and they need a permit from the IDF, the IDF needs to open some particular [gate in the] fence for them.

It's mostly along the route of the Separation Barrier.

I just remember, which is a little bit absurd too, that we came and leveraged a task where you deny them entry to their own land, and then after that, you essentially leverage the fact that you...

Open for them?

Yes. Like "COGAT helps farmers during the olive harvest," etc., etc., like, it's absurd.

Why do you think this is relevant to an interview with Breaking the Silence?

You have an occupying system, and then when it does something obvious, like letting Palestinians harvest their olives, then you leverage it. It's a system that takes advantage of the very fact that the Palestinian population is weaker and disempowered, that it needs, due to the circumstances, it needs the IDF, and then you produce this false image of like, "we're the good guys, we're the nice guys."

————— *It's a system that takes advantage of the very fact that the Palestinian population is weaker and disempowered, that it needs, due to the circumstances, it needs the IDF, and then you produce this false image of like, "we're the good guys, we're the nice guys."*

Did you feel like you were creating a false image in that moment?

I don't think so, I don't think I thought about it at that moment, I think... Like, in

the back of your mind, there's always this cynical feeling about everything, but little by little, you also develop some kind of indifference. Like, little by little, the larger context fades, dissipates, disappears. One of the unit's missions is to normalize the occupation, we do it through media and hasbara (*see glossary*) too, and it works.

[57]

Strips of Control

Unit: COGAT | Area: West Bank | Period: 2016

People often say that the [Palestinian] Authority is dependent on Israel, etc., and people don't always understand how it's dependent on Israel. The question is whether there are elements you can point to, you can highlight, that demonstrate the Authority's complete dependence on Israel.

So listen, anything, however boring, stuff we don't even think about as something our government does because the government simply does it – if the government wants to build a road – it builds a road. If the government decides a certain place needs more electricity, it builds an auxiliary power station, and there's electricity. So, the Palestinians don't have much capacity to build big things without Israel noticing and saying something about it. If they don't like the project, and if they don't want a big Palestinian population increase in Hebron, it can stop these things. But even at the most basic level, the Palestinian Authority doesn't control its own borders. In the whole West Bank, nothing goes in or out without approval from Israel. So, if it (the Palestinian Authority) wants to build a power plant, it can't do it without Israel knowing where it's going to be and approving the entry of the materials, and the entry of the contracting company too, if it's not a Palestinian company, which presumably, there aren't too many Palestinian companies that know how to build stuff on the scale of a power plant, right? So they need Israel to approve this thing, even if it's inside Area A or Area B. And the fact that every bloc of Area A and B is separated by Area C (*see glossary*) – that means Israel is deliberately keeping strips of control between each area. It means that Israel has to approve the most essential, basic things. And the Palestinian Authority understands this, and also, because of that, it doesn't do anything without letting Israel know it's doing it. Sometimes, it makes a big deal about it if it wants to do something that isn't within Israel's interests. It can go talk to the international media, try to play that card to scare Israel into agreeing, but at the end of the day, Israel has to agree, and doesn't have to if it doesn't want to.

————— At the most basic level, the Palestinian Authority doesn't control its own borders. In the whole West Bank, nothing goes in or out without approval from Israel.

Even if the Authority succeeds with one project, in the next one...

Right, it'll give them trouble.

Exactly.

Every Palestinian minister understands this too. And every Palestinian minister also enjoys lots of very simple things, like being able to send his kid to university abroad and [getting] all the personal permits he wants. And if he doesn't work with Israel, he really really doesn't [get to] enjoy the projects he's supposed to implement in his job, in his portfolio in the government, and also in his personal life.

[58]

We're the Commanders of the Palestinian Police

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Qalqilya | Period: 2013

When the IDF wants to do an action in Area A (*see glossary*), does it have to coordinate with the Palestinian police? Is there any way the Palestinian police will say no, the action isn't approved?

No such thing. We're the commanders of the Palestinian police. We run the Palestinian police. They don't make a squeak without us telling them.

Can you give an example that illustrates this power dynamic?

It's the experience you'd have the whole time, that every little thing the Palestinian police officers wanted to do, it could even be if they wanted to drive from Qalqilya to a village south of Qalqilya, which administratively isn't considered Qalqilya, then they'd need coordination for it, but there aren't even any settlers in between, which means it really seems weird that they'd need to coordinate something like that, [even if they] travel without their uniform or weapons. They're only going to investigate a traffic accident. They'd still need to coordinate with the Brigade. In other words, everything, we're breathing down their necks.

So there's a relatively limited presence of Palestinian police officers in Area B, and certainly Area C.

No, there are several coordinations a day usually, at least one a day. I find it hard to believe there's a day without coordination with Palestinian police officers. They call three, four times a day, and the brigade approves, and it isn't such a big deal. I can say that as far as they're concerned, if it were up to them, they'd [go] freely. They'd like to have a free hand to take care of all their criminal activity, because they're always calling us to coordinate. That's something that happens on a daily basis. The fact that we need to approve it certainly makes it harder for them. I don't know how much it impacts the crime rate. I don't know how it impacts the day-to-day situation.

We're the Masters

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Jenin | Period: 2015

Every few days, I had to be the officer on duty, and as the officer on duty you need to always be in contact with the operations room every time there's some kind of incident on the ground, in your region, which was Jenin in our case. An incident means in operational terms that our forces need to enter on the ground, whether it's an arrest or a mapping or some kind of patrol. When our forces enter Areas A-B (*see glossary*), then the officer on duty needs to call our counterparts in the Palestinian police and tell them to "fold the PPOs." PPOs are Palestinian police officers and to fold them, I just had to tell [the Palestinian police] to enter their police stations and they knew, "Okay, no problem, we're entering our police station and not going outside while the IDF does its operation." [The force] leaves [once the operation is over] and I call [the Palestinian police] again to update that we're done, and they can go on with their routine.

How long does this happen before our forces actually enter the city?

From what I remember, it's very short notice. It's not that we would say, "in X hours fold the PPOs," but [rather], "fold the PPOs," meaning – do it now.


And say they're in the middle of some kind of activity?

I don't remember ever having resistance or objections to this thing. We said it, and they did it.

How many times did you happen to do this thing?

I can't say exactly, but it was common. It was like this kind of relationship where we're the masters on the ground, we give the orders and they carry them out.



A black and white photograph of a concrete wall with a metal grate in the upper right corner. The wall is the main focus, showing its texture and some faint markings. The metal grate is made of parallel bars and is partially visible in the top right corner. The lighting is even, highlighting the rough surface of the concrete.

"I'd also developed this sort of very casual hatred of Palestinians. For me, they were simply a dataset in a system, that either has a Shin Bet ban or doesn't have a Shin Bet ban, and it was very hard for me to keep myself in check. To keep myself in check and tell myself that these are human beings. They constantly need things, and for me it meant more work, it wore us down, it was something I was dealing with all the time and didn't want to deal with, so for me the Palestinians were a burden."

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Location: Qalqilya | Period: 2013

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