

# A West Bank story : Life in occupied Palestine

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When crossing from Israel into Palestine's occupied West Bank, the obvious contrariety in infrastructure and economic levels is intense. From the seaside skyscrapers and trendy boutiques of Tel Aviv, life in the West Bank's refugee camps is anything but. Life goes on here with deliberate normalcy, but a cognizance of deep-rooted occupation lingers in the air. Palestinians living under occupation are forced to familiarise themselves with rampant human rights abuses at the hands of the Israeli military.

A daunting grey wall snakes through the historical Palestinian city of Bethlehem, cutting it off from the suburbs of Jerusalem. Dubbed by the locals as the "apartheid wall", its post-apocalyptic features are decorated with Palestinian graffiti demanding freedom and international recognition. On one side lie clean streets, European style cafes and opportunity - while it hides the oppression, poverty and uncertainty of the future on the other side. The Arab-Israeli conflict affects even the most mundane activities of daily life here, and the Palestinians experience this in ways not comparable to the average Israeli citizen.

For residents of Aida refugee camp near Bethlehem, this polarity is experienced daily. Refugees in Aida are

unfortunately well acquainted with political strife and abuse. On any given night, Israeli Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's military performs raids on the camp, often ransacking homes and abducting civilians on arbitrary accusations. While this practice is clearly illegal, the Israeli military regards this custom as both routine and rational.



*Le Mur dans le camp de réfugiés de Aida*

Walking the streets of Jerusalem, I spot a “dual citizens for Trump” T-shirt. Clearly a fan of walls, Trump’s us vs. them rhetoric hits home to many here. I wonder if I am somehow looking into the future of the United States, as chants to build a wall and halt Muslim immigration are becoming increasingly ordinary. The unconditional and distinct support of the Israeli regime is something that crosses partisan lines in contemporary American politics. At the recent American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference leading American candidates expressed their unrestricted support of Israel’s any means necessary approach to national security. AIPAC lobbyists do their best to insure Israeli military interests are met in American politics, and they are doing a good job.



In lieu of Obama's recent decision to provide Israel with \$38 billion in military support over the next ten years, Americans are beginning to question why our government chooses to support foreign militaries rather than spending it here at home. This is the largest sum ever pledged by the United States to a foreign country, and it demonstrates that even our most liberal president to date endorses a government which uses human rights abuses as a platform for policy.

For the people of Palestine, American foreign policy regarding Israel has a direct and astounding effect on their daily lives. Could it be that the United States is the de facto catalyst for which Israeli military policies in Palestine are exercised? It is unquestionable that without American support conventional Israeli practices in Palestine would not be sustainable. Both presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have exemplified their unquestioned support of Israeli security policies, frightening local Palestinians about what is to come. Depending on what happens in November, the United States may very well soon have an apartheid wall to call its own.



*La vieille ville de Béthléem*



*Le marché du centre de Béthléem*



*Panneau typique à Béthléem*

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