

## “Like a Knife in the Heart of the Village”: Testimonies from the West Bank Riven by Gates and Checkpoints



While the world watches weather forecasts and currency prices, the Palestinian tracks a different forecast: road conditions. His daily question: “How’s the road? Is the gate closed or open?” A question that seems simple yet carries enormous weight.

A steel gate reminds Palestinians that their freedom is not theirs to hold. It hangs on the whim of an Israeli soldier one who controls their movement and breath. A button press may open the way to life or delay it for another day. Thus, the road becomes a daily test of willpower, patience, and hope.

### The Alon Plan and the Partitioning of the West Bank

Salah al-Khawaja, assistant to the head of the Palestinian Authority’s Wall and Settlement Resistance Commission, told Noon Post that the fragmentation of the West Bank began in 1967 with Israel’s occupation of the territory.

The Israeli “Alon Plan” was designed to divide what remained of historic Palestine into seven cantons. It included the separation of Gaza from the West

Bank, isolating Jerusalem, seizing the Jordan Valley, and turning the rest into segregated enclaves.

Al-Khawaja explained that the plan later evolved within the Israeli military, dividing the West Bank into 176 disconnected cantons—effectively creating “open-air prisons” in which Palestinians are trapped by walls, settlements, settler outposts, and iron gates.

He drew historical parallels with the policies of fascist regimes and U.S. practices against Native Americans, describing it as part of a deliberate system to destroy Palestinian life and suppress people’s ability to plan even their most basic daily routines through the widespread use of gates and checkpoints.

This is not a series of isolated events, he said, but rather a comprehensive strategy involving settler outposts, bypass roads, and the separation wall—all working in tandem to entrap Palestinians and crush their aspirations for nationhood.

He emphasized that this represents a dangerous shift in how Israeli sovereignty is being imposed across the West Bank including Area C, per the Oslo Accords encompassing towns, villages, and refugee camps. According to him, there are over 950 Israeli military checkpoints and gates suffocating Palestinian areas, as well as additional iron gates near settler grazing outposts in places like Deir Nizam and Deir Mishal near Ramallah, and Beit Dajan near Nablus, where farmers are prevented from reaching their land part of an effort to draw a new settler-dominated map of the territory.

The strategy goes beyond territorial control, Al-Khawaja argued. It facilitates forced displacement, particularly of Bedouin communities, stripping Palestinians of villages and towns—especially those near settlements or bypass roads like Route 60 and the Alon Road. This, he said, constitutes a form of systematic apartheid among the most severe in modern history.

### The Color-Coded Gates of Occupation

In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Israeli affairs expert Emad Abu Awad outlined the meaning behind the colors of gates installed across the West Bank:

Yellow: Sometimes open, under conditions

Green: Open, but with intense searches

Red: Completely closed

Blue or Black: Military gates, permanently closed to civilians

Al-Khawaja added that this color system is used by the Israeli military to designate “hot zones” or depopulated areas, and that the symbolism is

increasingly used as a psychological weapon. Posts about gate colors circulate widely on social media, a daily reminder of how power controls access to life.

These gates, he said, allow for easy Israeli military raids into Palestinian villages and impose persistent restrictions on residents possibly laying the groundwork for gradual annexation by making life untenable and driving people to leave.

He warned that Israel promotes the idea globally that the West Bank is not “occupied territory,” but rather “Judea and Samaria” that must be “liberated” from Palestinians echoing Zionist biblical narratives. This, he said, is not merely a conflict over solutions it is a battle for existence. He called for stronger international support for the Palestinian struggle to end the occupation.

### Smotrich’s Plan: Annexing 82% of the West Bank

In line with this policy, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who also oversees settlement affairs, recently unveiled a plan to annex nearly the entire West Bank. In a meeting with settler leaders, he clarified that the plan would not only annex the large settlement blocs or Area C (which already makes up 60% of the West Bank), but would include 82% of the territory leaving out only major Palestinian cities and their surrounding neighborhoods.

The plan seeks to ensure complete Israeli control and block the creation of any future Palestinian state. It encourages the “voluntary” transfer of Palestinians and threatens military force against those who resist. The proposal aims to increase the number of settlers to two million and connect settlements via an expansive network of bypass roads.

### Sinjil: A Village Choked by Settlements and Barbed Wire

The village of Sinjil is encircled by five settlements (Ma’ale Levona, Eli, Haroeh, Givat Haroeh, and Shilo), as well as three grazing settler outposts to the north. This tight noose suffocates the town’s roughly 16,000 dunams of land. Today, less than 5,000 dunams remain available for residential and agricultural use while Israel has seized more than 8,000 dunams.

Beyond land theft, the town is fenced off with barbed wire and blocked by iron gates, forming a deadly serpent’s grip around the village.

Deputy mayor Baha Faqha told Noon Post that after October 7, 2023, Israeli forces blocked Sinjil’s eastern and northern entrances with mounds and gates. They then built a 1,500-meter barbed-wire fence, four meters high, after confiscating 30 dunams and uprooting centuries-old olive trees and other crops.

He said the fencing has turned Sinjil into a prison. Israel plans to add another wall to the north, seizing another 10 dunams, completely isolating the area from neighboring villages.



This eastern fence also cut off 47 homes along Route 60 from the town itself—“like a guillotine severing head from body,” said Faqha. Settlers have intensified attacks in the area, pushing families to evacuate their homes at night for safety. The municipality advised families—especially those with children or individuals with disabilities—to sleep inside the village proper.

Some complied, while others feared that settlers would seize their homes in their absence.

Faqha recalled a 2013 incident when a settler ran over two schoolgirls crossing Route 60. One was killed; the other suffered permanent disability. A similar fatal car-ramming occurred at the village’s northern entrance involving an elderly man.

He stressed that Sinjil’s gates impact not only its own residents but at least ten neighboring villages that depend on its roads including Jaljilia, Abwein, Arura, and Mazari’ al-Nubani.

He recalled a 70-year-old patient who needed urgent hospitalization earlier this year. Because the gates were closed, the journey took over 90 minutes instead of the usual 20. Even pedestrians are turned away or attacked by Israeli soldiers and settlers.

Since the war, Sinjil’s economic situation has worsened. With most Palestinians banned from working inside Israel, many returned to farming, especially during olive and grape harvests.

But last year’s harvest was brutal. Faqha described it as “terrifying.” Settlers blocked access to the groves, and the village lost some 3,000 jerry cans of olive oil—about 54,000 liters.

### Hundreds of Millions Lost Every Year

According to a study by the Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem (ARIJ), Israeli checkpoints cost the Palestinian economy about 60 million work hours annually, translating to \$270 million in losses. Fuel waste from longer detours adds another 80 million liters per year costing over \$135 million.

The Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) estimates Palestinians lose nearly 191,000 hours of labor every day due to detours over 4.2 million hours per month, the equivalent of 526 workdays across the public labor market.

### Kafr Malik: A Village Sliced Apart

In Kafr Malik, Israeli gates have changed the geography of the village. One gate cut the village off from its farmland in Ein Samia, severing residents from their crops and natural springs. A second gate closed the main entrance “like a knife in

the village’s heart.” A third blocked access to olive groves.

With the olive harvest approaching, villagers fear they won’t be able to reach their land unless Israel opens the gates making this the hardest year in memory.

Deputy village head Majed Maadi said that travel to nearby Deir Jarir, once a few minutes by car, now takes 15 minutes and costs 20 shekels. A trip to Taybeh, where many children attend private schools, has quadrupled from 10 to 40 minutes.

“Imagine going to Ramallah,” he said. “It used to be 15 minutes, 10 shekels. Now it’s a draining one-hour trip 30 shekels round-trip, if you’re lucky enough to avoid checkpoints.”

Workers, students, merchants, and teachers all suffer. The detour adds 20 kilometers to daily commutes. To ease the burden, villagers built an internal road to reduce the time and cost of movement.

Maha Ayoub Shani, a teacher who lives in Jalazone refugee camp, described the physical and emotional toll of her now-hour-long commute to Kafr Malik Girls’ School. She has at times been forced to miss work, requesting a transfer to a closer school.

“Transport costs have doubled. I’m spending over 600 shekels a month now. I get home late to my children,” she said. “I’m a single mother and live in a camp that’s raided constantly. When I hear there’s a raid, I can’t focus. My mind is with my children.”

### Turmus’ayya: A Choked Artery of the West Bank

Turmus’ayya mayor Lafi Adeeb Shalabi told Noon Post that the repeated closure of the town’s iron gate is a form of collective punishment—not just for its residents, but for the entire West Bank.

The town’s entrance is a vital artery connecting the north and south of the West Bank, especially when main roads from Ramallah are closed. When blocked, hundreds of patients lose access to Hugo Chávez Hospital the only specialized eye hospital in the territory.

Some patients must walk long distances or take dangerous detours near the gate. Others face risks from soldiers or armed settlers.

Shalabi noted that 85% of the town’s residents are U.S. citizens, yet face total isolation. He cited recent violent attacks and the killing of 12-year-old Palestinian-American boy Amer Saadeh an incident that shook local and international public opinion.

All interviewees agreed: the proliferation of Israeli gates is designed to cement



control over the West Bank and prevent the emergence of a geographically viable Palestinian state. This is part of the “E1 project” to fragment the territory cutting off the southern West Bank from its center and north, laying the groundwork for annexation.

Regardless of international recognition, they argue, the reality on the ground tells a different story: the occupation continues to carve up the West Bank like a cake into pieces small enough to control and dominate.

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