

*Once again a big thank you to everyone for sharing the blog and the [link](#) to the fundraiser. Please keep this going. So nearly there - £9945 - so just £55 to go.*

I have just returned from a protest held under the shadow of an Israeli settlement near where I am staying. Its wealthy buildings contrast rudely with the simple spaces available for Palestinians. Entry to the road by the settlement is constantly disturbed by army checkpoints - and now there are even more as it is the eve of Passover.

We were stood on a promontory, about 500 metres down from the settlement. Soufian, the organiser, sweeps his arm across and tells me:

“See that green sign just before the settlement entrance? All from there to there is Palestinian land.” But it’s all Palestinian land I quip, trying to be clever clever.

“Of course, but this is what was agreed at Oslo and look... I am no politician ‘

I take this as a polite way of throwing scorn on what happened.

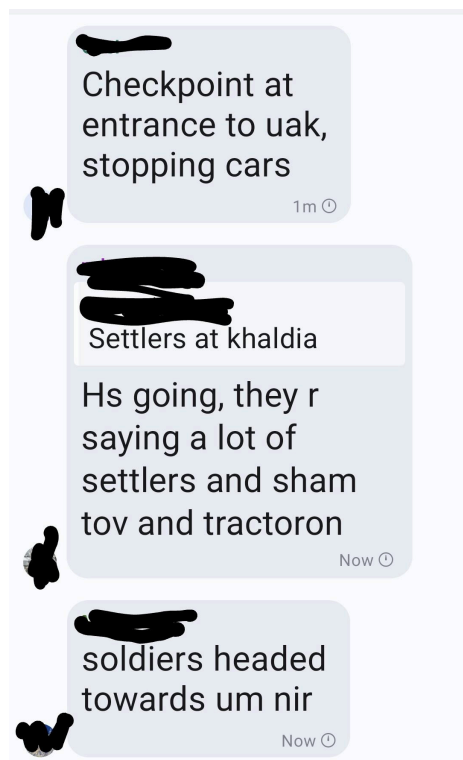


He then says that across all this land settlers rampage, harassing, bringing sheep on to Palestinian land, damaging trees. "Enough," he says, "it has to stop." He tells me how the day before on the other side of the road settlers brought their sheep, mixed the herds and stole Palestinian sheep. The Palestinians tried to retrieve their sheep, the police were called and of course Palestinians were arrested. "Blaming the victim as always," he says.

The protest goes on without a sign of police, army or settlers and we are thankful for that. It becomes a joyful social assembly instead, with activists from outside Palestine mixing and meeting Palestinians.

The activist groups are varied. Each has a set of places and farmers they support. But, depending on their numbers, at any time they might ask for others to do a shift (often staying overnight or shepherding in the morning or harvesting or all three).

There is a constant spin of messages on different channels- what's happening on the ground (checkpoints, settlers etc), coordinating support rotas or local news.



I love the Italians - their group is called the Doves in English. They are so friendly, joyful and ebullient - but serious when they have to be. They are so well dressed, their flat has a kitchen to die for and they eat very well! I tell this to NB, an Israeli activist. 'Oh he says - of course you like them. Who doesn't like Italians?' It is a nice moment of humour.

In addition, there are activists not attached to groups, staying around and about. One night I was given a hair-raising lift to a remote farm in the military firing zone (I was here last week too) by an American woman who had driven her Subaru as if it was a Jeep. She has a codename potatobug (everyone uses something other than their legal name) which makes us all laugh.

My codename is shimshun. It is my Hebrew name and I want to use it with pride. We had a very good laugh at one family when I found myself renamed mishmish. This means apricot! Or more colloquially 'it will never happen' - presumably because the season is so short.



As we approached Passover, we wondered how the situation would pan out. All advice was more tension and it is true there were more roadblocks and flying checkpoints. But we had no idea how the violence might increase and where. This put us in a quandary about our rota and how to manage it. But we concluded that we will never have enough resources and we cannot dash from one place to another. That is not our role.

As it turned out, while there seemed to be more army and police around there were not the violent confrontations we had feared - or not so far: Passover has a few more days to run as I write this. Instead the seemingly never ending cycle of harassment and intimidation, geographical restrictions and legal impediments, police ignorance and military arrogance remain.

One evening we are staying at one of the more remote farms (where we encountered the settler Amichai [last week](#)). When we arrive we look for M and find him in a cave he is digging out. I want to find out more, but immediately there is a settler we need to track. This is frustrating work. We do not engage and we watch and record as they wander with their sheep close by across M's land. The police are called, they don't come. While we have no faith in any action they would take, it is a ritual we just go through. Eventually the settler goes.

Later, just as we are falling asleep - a distant buzzing sound gets nearer. My buddy is quicker off the mark and realises what is happening. He opens the window and sees a drone spotlighting the farm. For about 10 minutes it zips in and out, spraying its light and generally disturbing the peace. The farmer is up too in shirtsleeves in spite of the cold night, and he says this is the first time it has happened. Eventually the drone flies off to the settler outpost, and we see in the pool of light cast by the powerful spotlight two people collecting it.

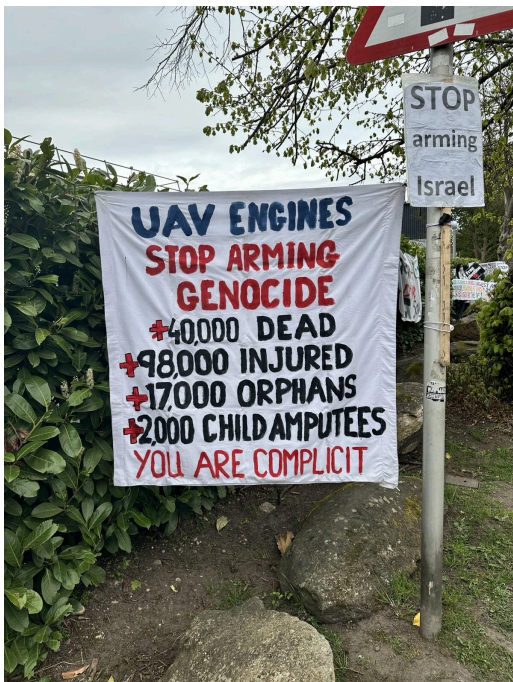
I crouch down and watch. My eyes are as tense as they can be but the rest of me is surprisingly calm. I wonder if we will get an attack. I wonder if we should be visible. I wonder what the settlers across the valley think they are doing.

After about 30 minutes of watching we are fairly sure no attack is coming tonight. We go back to bed. This time I set my shoes in a position so I can just slip into them as needed and arrange my phone and glasses for easy pick up. Finally I fall asleep only to jerk upright and as alert as you can be. I manage to pick up my phone and slip on my shoes. There is an ATV coming along the road. I see it on the dip as I go to the door. I climb upwards to the edge of the farm as I am concerned it will turn off the road and come down along the perimeter fence (mostly destroyed by settlers anyway). As I do so I lose sight of the road and the ATV. This time my heart is racing. I am expecting a shadow to descend across my path. But as I get to the top of the farm there is no sign of it nor any shadows. It is a lesson in harassed and precarious living. I notice that our host is still in bed asleep. Maybe he did not hear or maybe he did and knew something we did not.

I wake up early and the hill is a curtain of tightly drawn mist. I stand and watch the greyness enjoy the welcome of one of the watch dogs. As the sun comes higher the mist lifts and reveals a soothing rocky green. And also how close the settlers are.



Two days later I get some heartening news from home. A bus load of people from Sheffield is going down to the Israeli arms company, Elbit, at Shenstone to protest. It feels important, to me at any rate, to tell people here. To let them know wherever we are, we are fighting in different ways for Palestinian liberation; it is one struggle. We do what we can do.



I put together a short statement I hope will be read out. Another person in our group, from the Panther Party in the States, puts a short video together. And someone else, an [Acorn International](#) member, puts a long statement together which is a speech really. There is lots in there which I really value, and some of it is copied below.

*"We all know we will not see change without a push; we must work together in our different ways to force change - activists supporting Palestinian resistance on the West Bank and you in England campaigning and demonstrating for change in government policy and in your neighbourhood."*

*"When we are asked to justify why we are here in the West Bank, we simply ask people to consider how they would feel if this situation were their own and if they were here, would they like support."*

*"We ask them to consider what their home is to them. These homes may not look like your home, but they are homes just like yours. A place of sanctuary and rest, where you wash your dishes and do the laundry. A place where you argue and laugh and grow. A place to raise a family."*

*"As a Palestinian, If you are lucky enough to survive this genocide, unfortunately, you will find that not only has Israel killed your countrymen, but it has taken away any chance of education, erased your history and is currently doing its best to snub out your future."*

*"Do not think that the fight for sovereignty and existence here is separate from your own. It is the same people who are exploiting our planet and exploiting our labour who are conducting and condoning a genocide in Palestine. If we continue to allow this barbarism to go on uncontested, we will see it happening again and closer to what you call home."*

*"We have a long way to go, keep up the fight."*

*"Solidarity"*