

Opinion: Who is the Palestinian Authority protecting? Not us.

Opinion by Mariam Barghouti

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On the afternoon of June 24, I watched, shaken and still, as Palestinian special police fired tear gas at Palestinian protesters demanding accountability for the killing of Nizar Banat, a vocal critic of the Palestinian Authority's policies and corruption. I had been here before. I have witnessed Palestinian security forces beat Palestinians in the streets and target dissidents in August 2012, July 2013, April 2014, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

In 2017, I witnessed Palestinian riot police and national guard forces impede Palestinian protesters near the illegal settlement of Beit El. I have seen Palestinian police spit at women walking in Ramallah city center, because they previously protested against the violence of the Palestinian Authority. The horrors, like those of Israeli crimes, are too ubiquitous to describe. The only consistency is that the violence, in all of its forms and different uniforms, sustains Israeli colonialism.

In the early hours of June 24, Banat — previously threatened for his commentary — was dragged from his home in Hebron by Palestinian Authority forces in the middle of the night and beaten with batons and metal rods. His autopsy revealed an “unnatural death,” according to a human rights group.

After his political assassination, messages of shock, grief, horror, fear and rage quickly spread far and wide. I could not bear to see the images of his dead body, with purple and blue bruises that seemed to cover his entire frame. He was a father of five. Palestinians speak up when we want to transform our reality to something better. If not for ourselves, we take the risk for our sons and daughters, nieces and nephews.

Today, Palestine resembles a war zone. What we are witnessing today reminds me of the stories I heard from older generations who lived through 1948, 1967, 1987. From Jerusalem to Haifa to Gaza and Ramallah, Palestinians are facing some form of violence, either from Israeli settlers, police and army, or from Palestinian authorities.

The Palestinian Authority was a creation of the 1994 Gaza-Jericho Agreement brokered between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel. It was meant to serve as a five-year interim governing body responsible for civil administration of Palestinian affairs. Today, despite its representatives speaking in the name of the Palestinian struggle for justice and liberation, there is a clear contradiction between their words and actions.

For years, the Palestinian Authority has solidified its position by repressing and torturing Palestinian dissidents, reportedly with Israeli coordination. Though the Authority's leader, Mahmoud Abbas, threatens to cease security coordination whenever Israel escalates its colonial project of ethnic cleansing, the relationship has continued. More recently, in July 2020, the Palestinian Authority halted security coordination with Israel. By November, the coordination had resumed

These agreements are nothing more than attempts to gain political power at the expense of protecting Palestinians. For years, Palestinian activists, analysts and dissidents have warned of unprecedented violence from both Israel and Palestinian authorities, which prioritize their own political agendas. Palestinians are left isolated and exposed, without protection or support, except from each other.

On June 27, I watched a group of youths — bruised, beaten and heartbroken — seek refuge near a church in Ramallah. [Fatah loyalists](#) and [Palestinian police](#) were rampaging across the city, beating up protesters. This raises the question: What is the Palestine that the Palestinian Authority claims to represent and fight for, if its members are also a source of violence?

Like Israel, the Palestinian Authority is frightened by unity. Like Israel, it is terrified by the fact that most Palestinians protesting in the streets are not under a factional banner. It claims that its fear is Hamas, echoing the speech of former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli colonial discourse. Hamas has its own track record of abusing Palestinians and attempting to consolidate its own grip on Palestinian politics. Experiencing repression from all sides, it feels as though Palestinians have become pawns in a game of chess.

We have resorted to documenting the daily violence, hoping to expose the crimes and testify against the criminals. Justice and freedom require a complete unearthing of both, the crimes that were committed in the dark, and those being committed now.

Meanwhile, Israeli and Palestinian authorities are increasingly attacking Palestinians, including journalists. Israeli forces beat [an Al-Jazeera correspondent](#) in Sheikh Jarrah, bombed media offices in Gaza and [killed four Palestinians \(including two children\)](#) in Beita, near Nablus. Palestinian forces [sexually assaulted female journalists](#), attacked and even [detained](#) Palestinians arbitrarily.

These are calculated attacks on the right of the oppressed to hold their oppressors accountable. It is denying Palestinians their right to self-determination, which includes the refusal to being ruled either by colonial powers or despots. After bearing the abuse in whispers for so long, we are saying it is time for change. We are refusing to die in silence, but we are also refusing to *endure* in silence.

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