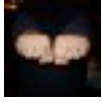


The Palestine-Mexico border



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January's revelations about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers assisting with the design and installation of yet another border wall around Palestine, this one placed under the ground, is just the latest development in a series of relationships between: North American neoliberalism, U.S. domestic and foreign drug policy, structural anti-latino racism in the U.S., the Egyptian government, Mexico's ruling elite and Israel's military occupation of Palestine. To find connections between various international interests is not surprising but the links between, for example, Mexican classism and President Mubarak's aversion to democracy are perhaps less known. How the occupation forces action from one and provides tools for the other is a connection worth exploring as is the potential for joint struggle between individuals and communities focusing on seemingly disparate issues amidst broader struggles for justice.

The first part of this interaction has Egypt using tools and training developed for use on the southern U.S. border to seal off the Gaza Strip. Egypt sees a Hamas-led end to the occupation as detrimental and it pursues a policy of tight closure on the border with Gaza to prevent this. President Mubarak's regime has two main motivations for enforcing the Gaza siege; 1. To ensure the Muslim Brotherhood offshoot Hamas achieves no further success and, 2. To play its role as a U.S. client state with the benefits - political, military and economic support - it brings. Domestically, Mubarak continues a long-term crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood as they currently pose the biggest threat to his family's intended presidential monarchy. Even modest success by a Hamas-governed-Israel-occupied Gaza would add prestige to the Muslim Brotherhood and further weaken Mubarak. To this end U.S. military engineers, deployed to help uncover Palestinian tunnels in 2008, are on the Gaza border with their Egyptian colleagues installing a purportedly indestructible wall. Underground. A wall installed in solid space in the hopes of preventing the ground's perforation by smugglers but only to a certain depth and breadth, beneath or around which smugglers are free to continue their already-proven technique as Israeli security officials have acknowledged. At least until a method of breaching it is developed, almost a certainty as the historical relationships between the occupation and Palestinian resistance is coevolutionary. Perhaps the subversive technology the Palestinians have used to consistently conquer the wall around East Jerusalem, the ladder, could be adapted for use underground. Certainly an underground ladder can be no less functional and no

more absurd than an underground wall. (The sarcasm should not be understood to minimize the danger or effort involved in making tunnels. It's dangerous and difficult work as any tunneling profession is, even in the best of circumstances. Witness the deaths during Boston's Big Dig or more recently, of coal miners in West Virginia. Point being that the underground wall being farcical doesn't mean it's not also tragic.)

The border siege on the Gaza Strip and West Bank has many direct connections, discussed below, to the militarization and escalation on the southern border of the United States. It also shares political analogies with the North American experience of border policies working against existing political and economic structures. One can be found on the outskirts of East Jerusalem in Sheikh Sa'ad. It's part of occupied East Jerusalem's contiguous urban metropolis but lies outside the city's boundary as established by Israel after the Six Day War in 1967. The policies of periodic closure implemented after 1991 caused a severely deteriorating quality of life for Sheikh Sa'ad's residents, leading to permanent relocation inside the city's borders whenever possible. The area faces almost total depopulation due to the wall's construction with most choosing the East Jerusalem option where possible. Both the municipality and national government have policies of trying to limit the Palestinian demographic presence with the municipality of Jerusalem following a policy implemented in the early 1970's of attempting to keep a 72% Jewish majority. The structural anti-Arab racism inside Israel's recognized and unrecognized borders runs into a problem with the construction of the Segregation Barrier throughout the West Bank, which motivates Palestinian migration in the other direction. According to then-Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, "One does not have to be a genius to see that the route of the fence will have major implications for our future border." Thus the 763 kilometer monument to otherness is partially intended to enforce de facto national and demographic borders of Israel while, combined with the other aspects of the occupation, motivating further movement by Palestinians to the opposite effect.

It is in this way, the ethnocentric nationalism working at cross purposes to the occupation, the situation bears similarity to North American neoliberal economic policy, "free trade," producing motivation for migration to the United States from Mexico (and elsewhere) while structural anti-latino racism attempts to police the borders with walls, drones, motion sensors and patrols. The barrier and surveillance network the United States is constructing on the nation's southern border, the centerpiece of the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), is intended to be the North American Free Trade Agreement's people filter by which goods and capital will flow freely but people will find an imposing physical obstruction. Since Mexican and Central American immigrants are portrayed as a brown peril bringing in drugs and crime while "changing the character" of the nation, such border fortifications are of paramount importance for U.S. politicians (witness the populist rhetoric of Arizona politicians in defending the new Juan Crow law that not only legalizes but demands racial profiling). The invocation of national security - equating economic refugees with 9/11 hijackers - is the final part of the political doctrine of the border wall. As much as the U.S.'s racism opposes immigration across the southern border, the country is a strong proponent of the neoliberal

economic policies of privatization, deregulation and government austerity that are the leading cause of undocumented immigration. For example, Mexico's state-owned groceries in the past purchased corn from local farmers at high prices, turned it into tortillas, and sold them at low subsidized prices in the cities. Neoliberal economic policies, implemented under pressure from the U.S., IMF and World Bank, have gutted these expenditures used to support rural incomes. The customs duties that formerly prevented the mass dumping of subsidized U.S. corn on the Mexican market were also removed, leading to lower sums paid to Mexican farmers, a higher-priced product, and competition from cheaper U.S. corn. The ensuing collapse of many rural agricultural economies triggered another wave of migration northwards.

These economic policies also called for the privatization of state-owned businesses, like the Cananea mines in the northern province of Sonora. The mines' takeover by the giant Grupo México led to hundreds of jobs lost and a concerted effort to crush the miners union. The union's efforts to resist the job cuts and wage reductions led to firings, physical attacks and confrontations with the police and army. It's a main reason why Mexico's elites favor a porous northern border and emigration; if people face a deteriorating quality of life and are denied the right to contest it, the emigration option is a necessary pacification mechanism. This same policy of free movement northward has also led to a threat to the political and economic elite, the increasing power of drug cartels smuggling narcotics to and weapons from the U.S. market. What Mexican officials call the "Iron River" - the continual flow of guns from the north side of the border - enables the cartels to outgun the very police forces entrusted with reigning them in and the incredible profits from the drug trade helps them to recruit lower paid police and army personnel to "their side." The U.S. Army War College in May, 2009 published a paper calling this conflict the "Mexican narcoinsurgency" and laid out in detail the threats it posed to the Mexican state. And on April 27, the head of the US Southern Command told reporters, "The biggest concern I have within the region is not a ... conventional military threat. It's illicit trafficking. ... Drugs, human trafficking, weapons, bulk cash." The conflict's thousands of deaths have triggered yet more northward migration but also an increasing deterioration of the image of the Mexican state amongst its peoples due to official state corruption and an inability to stem the violence.

To turn the tide the Mexican government had been procuring unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from Israel. These drones were developed for and carry out, depending on the model, surveillance, tracking and air-to-ground missile strikes. The same platforms to be used in surveilling and targeting the cartels - the Hermes, Skylark-I, Skystar 300 and Orbiter - are in regular use over the Gaza Strip and West Bank and were used in the 2008-2009 Operation Cast Lead for both surveillance and air-strikes. The Mexican government is joined in the use of Israeli UAVs along the northern side of the border. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection pioneered the use of UAVs in border surveillance, deploying the Hermes in 2004 as part of the Arizona Border Control Initiative. The maker of the Hermes & Skylark-I, Elbit Systems, is further connected to the Mexico-U.S. border through its participation in the SBI. Haifa-based Elbit is providing its Long Range Reconnaissance and Observation System, integrated with UAVs, towards the

project while providing the same materials and technology along Israel's Segregation Barrier. The Mexico-U.S. border comes back to Israel and Palestine again with Egyptian engineers deploying to the U.S., during Operation Cast Lead, to train on the southern border in tunnel detection. Additionally, in August, 2009, Israel deployed staff to a geology lab in the U.S. to find a method of tunnel detection that would meet the needs of the Israeli military. The Israeli army has deployed in the past a tactic imported from the United States, controlled random explosions below ground. (The need for tunnel detection training should raise questions about the security efficacy of walls as the peoples of both Palestine and Mexico are in possession of "the shovel," technology used for digging into the ground, including beneath walls, with which the Israeli and American security apparatuses are apparently unfamiliar.) Skepticism about the permeability of "security walls" goes back much further as the story of the Trojan Horse exemplifies.

A more defined feedback loop for these relationships would be:

1. The Egyptian government deploys the products of North American neoliberalism, drug policy and structural racism on the border with Palestine to shore up the Mubarak regime by hampering Hamas and perpetuating U.S. support.
2. The United States government deploys the products of the occupation on the border with Mexico to enforce structural racism and for the interdiction of smuggled goods, including drugs and weapons.
3. The Mexican government deploys the products of the occupation along the border with the U.S. to shore up its power by striking against the drug cartels that threaten it and to interdict arms smuggled from the United States.
4. The Israeli government deploys the products of North American neoliberalism, drug policy and structural racism to enforce occupation and apartheid against the Palestinians.

This is, in effect, an uncoordinated and unorganized network that, in bits and pieces and often clumsily, produce stools that other actors deploy to preserve their status quo. It's a pacification industry. The connections are clear and profound, that these individual structures of inequality are global in effect, no matter how localized their original intent. This is true even though none of the structures described are reliant on or instigated by the others, they merely benefit from the existence of others structures of injustice. Texas governor Rick Perry has even made statements about how Israel's experience would be useful. He told the Jerusalem Post that a Texas delegation visiting Israel last August was "trying to find ways to secure that border, because just like it's important to Israelis to keep heavy security on their border with Gaza, it's important to citizens of Texas to keep out the illegal activities that are going on with drugs [in Mexico]." These issues have become intertwined in their structures and agents for change cannot ignore this. (If we think of these exchanges as products of the pacification industry then there is an interesting side note in that the Mexican Special Forcers as well as many tactical units from police forces have received

U.S. or Israeli police, antiterrorism and counterinsurgency training, sometimes both. The cartel Los Zetas - until recently mere enforcers for a cartel - are made former special forces and tactical police who switched sides. The pacification industry too has externalities!)

The history of activists working across the Mexico-U.S. border is long and filled with some remarkable efforts. Mexican mine and railroad workers on both sides of the border, led by the Magón brothers, launched an insurrection against the "Copper King of Cananea" in what turned out to be a precursor of the Mexican Revolution. Later labor efforts in the U.S. southwest and the Mexican north, by mine workers and others, were strengthened by delegations sending aid in both directions. Organizing across national borders these days is not uncommon, especially in the worlds of environmentalism and globalization, but organizing across the perceived borders of causes is unfortunately quite rare. Borders are ideally infrastructures of connectivity that create a transitional zone between peoples and cultures. Here we have a situation where military occupation, neoliberalism, drug policy, dictatorship and racism all intersect, overlap and reinforce. Activists should be willing to think about borders between causes as the zones of connectivity they are and a great place to do so is on the rich landscape of the Palestine-Mexico border.