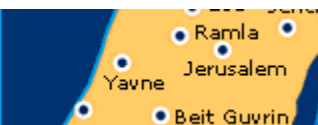


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The controversial video capture: an intentional humiliation by the IDF, or a staged event by the Machsom Watch activist who filmed it?

**Frimet Roth** is a New York-born Israeli whose daughter Malki, 15, was murdered by Palestinian Arab terrorists in the massacre at the Sbarro restaurant on August 9, 2001.

#### Previous views

- The Violin and the Guitar
- Children in the Bullseye
- No memorial, not even a plaque...
- Remember the victims while you celebrate
- The ugly truth



Abdallah Barghouti, convicted this week on 67 counts of murder. In an interview, he confessed that he filled a guitar with explosives. "In a guitar? Why in a guitar?" a shocked TV interviewer asked. "This is war," he answered.

## The Violin and the Guitar

By Frimet Roth December 2, 2004

The past week saw a flurry of harsh accusations and lame defenses hurled between the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) and Machsom Watch, a self-appointed watchdog of Israel's security checkpoints.

The catalyst was a video taken by a Machsom Watch volunteer. It shows a Palestinian playing a violin at a checkpoint while a line of Palestinians stands behind him, waiting. This appeared on the cover page of the November 25 edition of the Israeli daily, Haaretz. The accompanying account, written by Akiva Eldar, begins with this: "An officer and soldier ... forced a Palestinian youth to play his violin for them." The article mentions that the volunteer's "shocked" reaction to the scene was related to her status as "the child of a holocaust survivor."

Eldar quotes the official response of an IDF spokesman. While conceding that the incident demonstrates "insensitive treatment by soldiers contending with a complicated and dangerous reality", the IDF adds that everything is being done "to improve the situation at roadblocks". The Palestinian, according to Haaretz, was asked to remove his violin to confirm that no explosives were concealed within it. To that extent, the inspection was deemed acceptable. However, requiring the man to play his violin was, in Haaretz's view, abusive and demeaning.

Three days later in Haaretz's pages again, the veteran left-wing Knesset member Yossi Sarid devoted an op-ed to the 'outrage' in which he speculated on possible justifications the army might have had for demanding the music. Ever the cynic, he writes: "Perhaps the soldiers decided to entertain those waiting on that stationary line so they wouldn't grow impatient or angry ... perhaps the soldiers are classical music fans, in particular of solo violin...."

The violinist is 28 years old and clearly balding in the photo. But for Haaretz and Sarid he is, eternally, a Palestinian "youth".

Also responding in a letter to Haaretz was a former principal violinist for the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. He writes: "Over a decade ago, I found myself in a very similar situation. During a concert tour in Great Britain, we arrived at Belfast airport and at border control I was asked to open my violin



What Barghouti's guitar did: 17 dead, more than 100 injured.



Malki Roth z'l

case and immediately afterwards even to play for them? It is appropriate to point out that musical instrument cases have been used at times to hide weapons." (He cites a movie and television show as examples.) In letters to the Jerusalem Post, other musicians described similar requests to play their instruments at overseas airport inspections.

Nevertheless, the notion that the request of this Palestinian to play was humiliating and unjustified could not be laid to rest. Even the IDF bought it in revising its statement to deny that the request had been made at all. The Palestinian had volunteered to play, was its claim now.

One of the Machsom Watch activists present at the scene originally agreed with the IDF's amended version. However, she retracted her testimony on learning that the Palestinian insisted he had played only because he had been ordered to play and that he had felt humiliated as a result.

The activist decided she liked his version better. She explained her see-sawing to the press: "I gave my first version before I read the Palestinian violinist's testimony which appeared yesterday.... I was prepared to believe the soldier's version but when I learned that the Palestinian rejects it, I had no reason to favor the soldier's version."

It's worth noting that the Machsom Watch activists at the roadblock all conceded that they hadn't heard the actual conversation between the soldier and the Palestinian. Even if they had, it was in Arabic, a language not one of them (by their own account) understands.

The story of the soldier and the violinist has been blown way out of proportion to its significance. I too would like it removed from the media burner. But not before another musical instrument gets its deserved mention.

I'm referring to a guitar. One that also grabbed a few headlines on 9th August, 2001.

On that morning, Izzadin Al-Masri, the newly-religious son of a well-to-do Palestinian restaurateur, passed through a machsom -- a checkpoint -- on the edge of West Jerusalem. Accompanied by a Palestinian women dressed as an Israeli to allay suspicions, he strode into the center of the city. A guitar case was slung over his shoulder. At 1:45 pm, he reached the intersection of King George and Jaffa streets. **The restaurant was packed with mothers and children.** This was lunch time, and the country's schools were closed for summer vacation. Al-Masri entered easily -- there was no security guard. Seconds later, he activated the explosives in his guitar and murdered fifteen Israelis in cold blood. My daughter Malki, 15, was one of them.

Has Machsom Watch forgotten that terror attack? Did Haaretz as well? And what about the apologetic IDF spokesperson? Or does the meddling Machsom Watch have them all

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shivering in their pants?

The person who truly ought to make them shiver is **Abdullah Barghouti**. On Tuesday, this senior Hamas operative was sentenced to 67 life terms in prison for his responsibility in terror attacks that resulted in the deaths, by murder, of 66 Israelis. Barghouti lived in his native Kuwait until five years ago when he moved to Ramallah. An engineer, he built the bomb that murdered the Sbarro fifteen as well as the victims of two other lethal attacks in Jerusalem and another in Rishon Letzion.

I watched him on television confessing that, yes, he did fill a guitar with explosives. "In a guitar? Why in a guitar?" a shocked TV interviewer asked.

"This is war," the stone-faced Barghouti answered.

It seems to me that far too many people have forgotten that basic truth. This is war. We are under attack. Machsom Watch volunteers have a problem acknowledging that. It is a dangerous problem.

One day, an IDF soldier on machsom duty, distracted and intimidated by those camera-clicking, note-scribbling activists, is going to cut short a routine security check to appease them.

The results might be very far from routine.

*Views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect those of israelinsider.*



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