



# Walling Off the Future for Palestinians and Israelis

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In reality, the Holy Land does not need walls, but bridges.

—POPE JOHN PAUL II

## The Iron Wall of Separation

by Alain Epp Weaver

*We must either suspend our settlement efforts or continue them without paying attention to the mood of the natives. Settlement can thus develop under the protection of a force that is not dependent on the local population, behind an iron wall that they will be powerless to break down.*

—ZE'EV JABOTINSKY

Farmers in Jayyous village unable to get their sheep to pasture. Residents of Falameh village looking on while their trees wither. An owner of a chicken farm in Qalqilya unable to reach his animals for three days, and their subsequent death. The villagers of Budrus demonstrating non-violently to prevent Israeli bulldozers from uprooting their olive trees. Farmers in Habla worrying about continued access to water.

These are only a handful of examples of Palestinian communities that are being devastated by the complex barrier cutting deep into the West Bank that Israel calls a “security fence” but that the rest of the world names, variously, a “separation wall,” an “apartheid wall,” a “segregation zone.” A complex network of fences with features such as electronic sensors, electric fencing, barbed wire, patrol roads, and concrete walls that reach eight or nine meters, the barrier both resembles and—many fear—serves as a de facto border. Psychologically and metaphorically, the barrier functions as a very real wall, a dividing wall that is both the product of and itself engenders enmity (Eph. 2:1–12).

Contributors to this issue of the *Peace Office Newsletter* tackle different dimensions of the separation wall: its impact on the Palestinian economy, agricultural sector,

and access to water resources; the story of a Palestinian Christian family in Beit Sahour practically surrounded by multiple fences; reflections by a Palestinian and by an Israeli about why this barrier will not contribute to peace and reconciliation but will instead intensify injustice and enmity.

In order to understand the current separation wall, however, the wall must be viewed in historical context. The construction of the “separation wall” under the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon can be understood as an extension of the “iron wall” strategy advocated by Ze’ev Jabotinsky, the early-1900s leader of the revisionist stream of Zionism, the ideological forerunner of Sharon’s Likud party. A historical perspective also reminds us that the separation wall is only the latest in a series of legal and physical walls Israel has erected against the indigenous population.

### A Look at History

Jabotinsky’s rhetoric of the “iron wall” must be understood in the context of the challenges that faced the Zionist movement in the early 20th century. Zionism, a late form of European nationalism that arose at the end of the 19th century, believed that life for Jews as minority communities in Europe was untenable and unsustainable (a conviction that would be reinforced by the horrific genocide inflicted on European Jewry during the 1930s and 1940s). Just as the “French nation” had France, so the “Jewish nation” required a Jewish state.

The challenge, for the Zionist movement, consisted in obtaining territory where a Jew-

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## A Viable Palestinian State?

The Road Map promoted by the United States, the United Nations, the European Union, and Russia calls for the phased establishment of a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel. The separation wall, which cuts deep into West Bank territory, diverging significantly from the 1949 Armistice Line (the Green Line), places this vision in jeopardy, as does the “disengagement plan” promoted by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, which envisions the dismantling of settlements in the Gaza Strip, along with a minimal number in the West Bank, in exchange for U.S. recognition that large Israeli settlement blocs in the occupied territories will become part of Israel in any final status agreement. These developments call into question the fate of a two-state solution based on the Green Line, for the wall and the proposed disengagement plan are creating de facto borders for discontinuous cantons that will lack meaningful social, political, or economic viability.

Many Palestinians believe that the minimal requirements for the viability of a future Palestinian state include the land area of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza Strip, which constitutes only 22 percent of historic Palestine; a freely accessible seaport in the Gaza Strip; unfettered air access to airports in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank; and a secure land crossing (analogous to the current secure highways between settlement blocs in the West Bank) to link the West Bank with the Gaza Strip.

Palestinians point out that a precedent for full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in exchange for peace is provided by the earlier withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlements from the entire territory of Sinai in exchange for a peace treaty with Egypt.

—Alain Epp Weaver and  
Mark Siemens

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ish majority might be secured. The problem was, however, that there already was an indigenous Arab population in that section of the Ottoman Empire known as Palestine. If anyone in Europe believed the rhetoric of “a land without a people for a people without a land,” such belief was quickly and necessarily dispelled upon arrival in Palestine: the land was not empty, and there were native Palestinian Arab communities throughout the land, from the Galilee in the north down to the Negev desert in the south.

Establishing a Jewish state in Palestine, Zionist leaders came to understand, would necessarily mean a violent imposition on the native population. Creating a Jewish state in some or all of the portion of the Ottoman Empire that came under British control (“Mandate Palestine”) would have to mean the displacement of at least some of the native population; otherwise, Jews would not be a majority in the “Jewish state” and would simply be replicating the minority existence of the Diaspora.

Zionist leaders from the left and the right spoke of the need to “transfer” some or all of the native Arab population. The leading labor Zionist Berl Katznelson in the late 1930s explained his support for forcibly uprooting Palestinian Arabs by arguing that “A distant neighbor is better than a close enemy. They will not suffer through the transfer, and we most certainly will not.” The “leftist” Zionist Aharon Zisling, for his part, insisted on the “moral right” to “propose population transfer. There is no moral flaw to a proposal aimed at concentrating the development of national life; the contrary is true—in a new world order it can and should be a noble human vision.”

While those on the left of the Zionist movement talked about “voluntary transfer,” imagining that Palestinian Arabs would voluntarily leave their lands, those on the right more clearly—some would say more honestly—recognized that achieving the Zionist aim of a Jewish state would require the use of violent force. In his 1923 article “The Iron Wall,” Jabotinsky outlined the challenges facing the Zionist movement. Any attempt to create a Jewish state in Palestine would mean the dispossession of the indigenous population, and they would resist: “Every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement,” Jabotinsky reasoned.

The Zionist response, he insisted, must be to establish an “iron wall” of force against which the native population would fruit-

lessly bang its head until it acquiesced to the existence of the Jewish state; once that happened, Jabotinsky continued, the Jewish state could negotiate about limited recognition of Arab civil and national rights.

As Israeli, Palestinian, and other historians have documented, the war of 1948, which led to the creation of the state of Israel, involved the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Over 700,000 Palestinians were expelled by Israeli troops or fled in fear during the fighting, ending up as refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank: Israel barred these refugees from returning.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians who remained in Israel were classified by the new Jewish state as “present absentees,” their lands turned over, along with the lands of the Palestinian refugees outside Israel, to the Israeli “Custodian for Absentee Property.” Through force, a Jewish state had been created, and an “iron wall” of military might and discriminatory legislation kept Palestinians separated from their lands.

While Israel’s victory in the 1967 war gained territory—East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria—it also brought with it a difficult dilemma. The left and the right of the Israeli political spectrum (not the far left) favored Israeli control over all of the “land of Israel” (Eretz Yisrael), with the religious right viewing “Judea and Samaria” (the southern and northern West Bank) as the biblical heartland and the secular left and right considering the Jordan Valley, the aquifers of the northern West Bank, and large areas around Jerusalem and the western edge of the West Bank to be strategic military assets. Annexation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, however, was not an option, as annexation would mean that the Palestinians in the territories would become Israeli citizens, endangering the Jewish demographic majority in the state.

The Israeli dilemma since 1967 can be seen as a struggle to maximize control over Eretz Yisrael while minimizing the number of Palestinians under its direct control. Israeli military and political leaders have forwarded various plans to minimize Israeli responsibility for Palestinians in the occupied territories by granting some form of “autonomy” to those Palestinians in specific enclaves: the Allon Plan, which would have created northern and southern enclaves in the West Bank, separated by Israeli-annexed territory from Jerusalem to Jericho and up and down the Jordan Valley; the “Village Leagues” plan

## A Wall against the Possibility of a Palestinian State

Settlements, closed military zones, and, most recently, the separation wall allow Israel to control the occupied territories economically, socially, and politically.

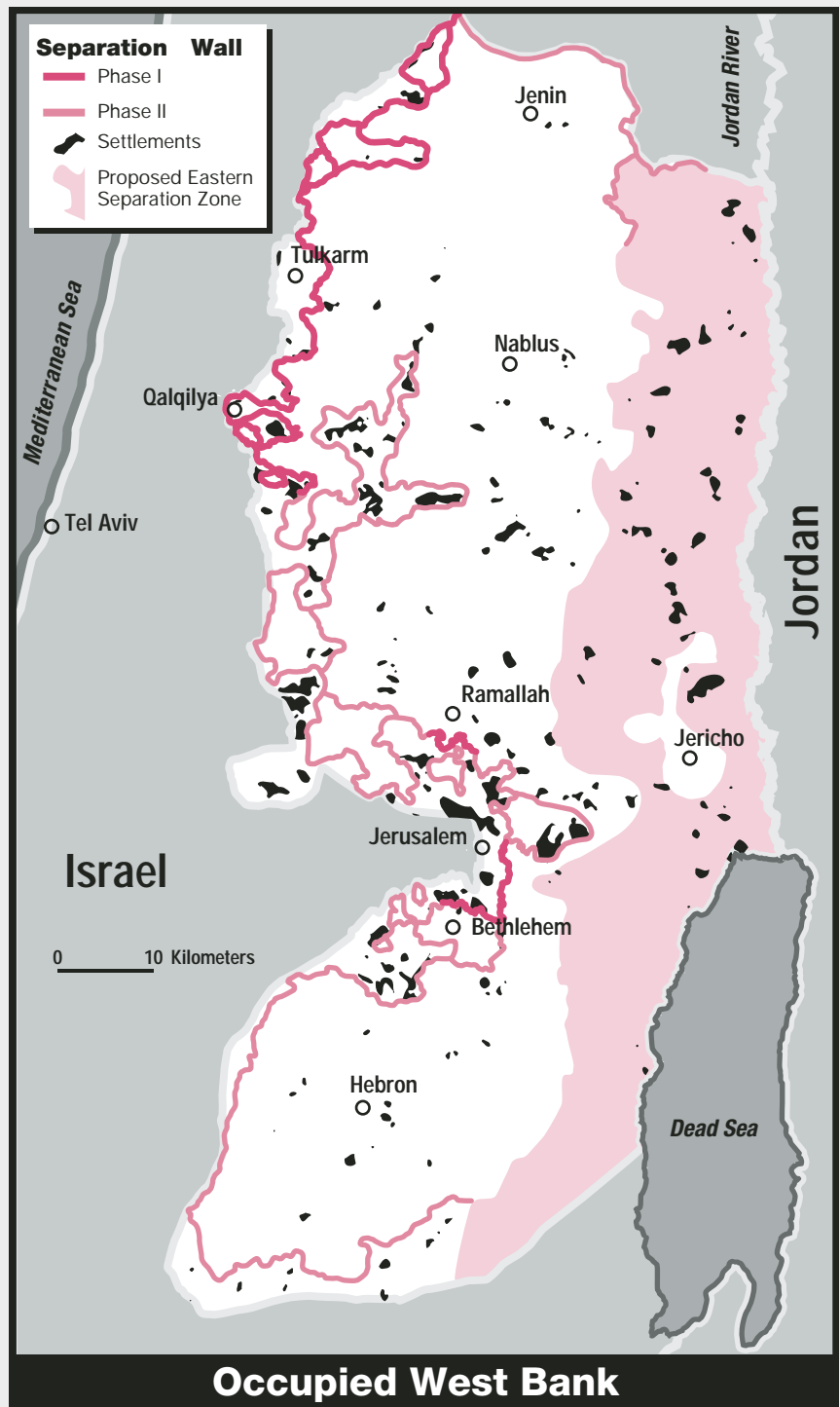
Phase I of the wall's construction began in June 2002 and finished in 2003. During the first half of 2004, construction of the wall east of Ramallah and around Jerusalem and Bethlehem quickened, while confiscation orders for Phase II of the wall continued to be issued. Israel hopes to finish Phase II by the end of 2005.

The wall cuts off East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied West Bank, while dividing the West Bank into northern and southern sections. Tens of thousands of Palestinians are additionally trapped between the wall and the 1949 Armistice Line (the Green Line).

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had at first also planned to construct an "eastern fence" down the Jordan Valley. Israeli military orders and settlements, however, already make the Jordan Valley essentially off-limits to Palestinians, and access to the eastern zone can be controlled by key checkpoints without a wall.

Even if the settlements inside the wall would be removed—and the Israeli government has made no indication that it is prepared to remove any but a handful of isolated settlements deep in the northern West Bank—the wall alters the geography of the occupied territories so as to make an economically and politically viable Palestinian state impossible.

—Alain Epp Weaver



You can destroy a very high building in a couple of days but to build it you need years. The same with peace and violence. You need more work to build peace between the people.

—ABDEL-LATIF KHALID, PALESTINIAN HYDROLOGY GROUP

Israel has made it abundantly clear that it is completely opposed to the creation of a viable Palestinian state in any part of the occupied territories.

Even the planned “withdrawal” from Gaza will leave Israel in exclusive control of the borders, air space and even coastal waters. Gaza would be one big prison—its 1.6 million inhabitants, mostly refugees from other parts of Palestine, completely surrounded on all sides.

The West Bank and Gaza together constitute only 22% of pre-1948 Palestine—and yet Israel and the United States are not even willing to accept the Palestinian compromise of using just this land as a new state.

The system of total Israeli control in the form of fences, curfews, closures and checkpoints, has resulted in a Palestinian unemployment rate of 60%. Seventy percent of Palestinians live on less than US\$2 per day. Thirteen percent of children in Gaza suffer from malnutrition. Israel’s aim is to expand its borders and make the living conditions of Palestinians so critical that they will either be forced to leave their land or accept a life of total deprivation in small, isolated and fenced-in communities.

... When Sharon returned to Israel on April 17, after securing US support for his vision, he told reporters that his plan was a “lethal blow” to the Palestinians and “will bring their dreams to an end.”

This is not the first time that Israeli leaders have made such claims. Resistance to Zionism’s colonial project has never been more steadfast and the worst excesses of Israeli expansionism [have] only ever made Palestinians more committed to their cause. No Israeli leader can ever decide the fate of their dreams.

... A serious effort is required of the populations of countries that provide material and political support to Israel to make their governments accountable for the crimes being committed in their name. Without this, Israel will only ever escalate its assault against the Palestinian people.

—Rihab Charida and Nikolai Haddad, *Green Left Weekly*, April 29, 2004, <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2004/580/580p17.htm>

of the late 1970s that would have granted semiautonomous status to Palestinian cities in the West Bank; and most recently, the Oslo Accords, in which the newly created “Palestinian Authority” was given semiautonomous control over 40% of the West Bank and 60% of the Gaza Strip. None of these plans came close to minimal Palestinian demand for a state in all of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, or 22% of Mandate Palestine.

### The Wall in Historical Perspective

The separation wall now being built is best understood in this historical perspective. The wall will allow Israel to maximize its control over the occupied territories while avoiding any responsibility for the Palestinian population, separated by walls and fences: enjoying the fruits of occupation without any of occupation’s responsibilities. Ehud Olmert, former mayor of Jerusalem and a Likud party leader, considers the wall to be part of an Israeli “unilateral solution” whose parameters are: “To maximize the number of Jews; to minimize the number of Palestinians; not to withdraw to the 1967 border and not to divide Jerusalem.” This formula means the de facto annexation of large settlement blocs around Jerusalem and in the northern West Bank and the Jordan Valley.

The wall and the “unilateral separation” plan are Israel’s attempt to separate itself from Palestinians while controlling Palestinian land. Israeli political scientist Yossi Alpher observes that Sharon’s map of Palestinian enclaves may now be “termed a ‘state,’ but it has not changed in 25 years: it embodies the 42 percent of the West Bank currently included in areas A and B [of the Oslo Accords], perhaps with a little extra territory and special roads and overpasses to give it ‘contiguity,’ but it is essentially fragmented, with Israel controlling key axes that link the coast with the Jordan valley. Conceivably, a few settlements may indeed have to be moved to make it work. The Palestinian ‘state’ can be fenced in on all sides.”

Sharon’s proposal in late winter 2004 to evacuate most of Israel’s settlements in the Gaza Strip and a couple of settlements deep in the northern West Bank was consonant with this long-term vision. The rejection of Sharon’s “disengagement plan” by his own Likud party in early May might not mean its end: not only Sharon, but also U.S. President George W. Bush, who endorsed Sharon’s plan in mid-April, has significant political capital invested in the plan’s success. However, a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from a couple of isolated West Bank settle-

ments will not, Palestinians fear, be the initial step in a gradual end to the Israeli military occupation; the wall means that the disengagement plan will, in the end, amount simply to a military redeployment that will solidify rather than end the occupation.

Alpher dismisses Israeli claims that the fence does not mark a border, correctly noting that Israeli moves mean “de facto annexation.” Ali Jerbawi, professor of political science at Bir Zeit University, explains that “instead of a practical transfer, [Sharon] wants to implement the ‘legal transfer’ of Palestinians. Legal transfer means that while we live inside ‘Eretz Israel,’ we will not be part of the state of Israel. . . . Basically, he has in mind that part of the West Bank will be incorporated into Israel. The wall is the marker; it is not a security barrier, but the border. Put the Palestinians into cantons and let them call that a state, but that state will not be sovereign, will not be independent.”

Aluf Benn, diplomatic correspondent for the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, describes the wall and “unilateral separation” more bluntly: the plan, he notes, is to “close the territories in the West Bank and throw away the key.”

The preferred Israeli term for the wall it is erecting is “security fence” (or “terror-prevention fence”). Much of the Israeli public’s nearly universal support for the wall stems from a belief that it will bring security from the suicide bombings and other violent attacks by Palestinians that have claimed the lives of over 700 Israeli civilians over the past four years. (Well over 2,000 Palestinian civilians have been killed during this period.)

Israeli feelings of insecurity, however, are not limited to concerns about physical safety, but also relate to demographic fears, fears about becoming a minority. Yossi Alpher observes that for many Israelis the “fence” appears “to offer a means of at least mitigating the demographic threat.”

Arnon Soffer, a professor at Haifa University, argues that, counting foreign workers inside Israel and non-Jewish Israeli citizens (Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and immigrants from the former Soviet Union who had a Jewish grandparent but who do not identify themselves as Jews), Jews are already a minority in the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

More and more Israelis and international observers view a situation where Israel rules over all of this land while denying citizenship rights to nearly 3.5 million Palestinians to be one of apartheid (literally “apartness,” a separation, an exclusion of Palestinians

from political life). In such a reality, some Israeli Jews are voicing fears of a binational reality emerging. Avraham Burg, a leader in Israel's Labor Party, states, "I am not afraid of weapons and terrorism. I am afraid of the day that all of them will put their weapons down and say, 'one man, one vote.'"

Israeli public-opinion researchers Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann found that "The strong desire for a separation, even a unilateral one, is connected to a fear among the overwhelming majority of the Jewish public regarding the emergence of a de facto binational state." The separation wall, in this context, can be viewed as an attempt to keep such a binational state from emerging.

Israel believes that the separation wall will consolidate its colonization of the occupied territories and its control over natural resources while managing Palestinian unrest by confining it behind walls. With the nearly unequivocal support of the United States, Israel will feel free to ignore world public opinion and possible negative rulings about the wall's legality from The Hague.

The long-term sustainability of Israel's approach, however, is highly questionable. No Palestinian political leadership—present or imagined—will be able to end the conflict in exchange for a "state" with little to no territorial contiguity and no economic viability. These walls and fences may be long-lived but, as with the physical and legal barriers in Berlin and apartheid-era South Africa, the walls will one day come down.

The signs of hope in the present, then, are in the groups of Israeli Jews who join with Palestinian communities under siege in demonstrating against this separation wall, living and acting as witnesses to the possibility of binational coexistence. Pope John Paul II has poignantly noted that the Holy Land desperately needs bridges instead of walls: even in these grim days of the iron separation wall, we can be thankful for those Israeli and Palestinian groups building bridges that surmount checkpoints and roadblocks, fences and walls.

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## The More Things Change . . .

For decades it has been practically taboo within Israeli politics and society to say the word "Palestinians" or to talk about the emergence of a "Palestinian state." The native inhabitants of the land were called "Arab," any separate national identity denied.

While the Israeli far right still avoids use of the term Palestinian, the name is now freely used by most politicians of the Israeli Likud and Labor parties. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon talks about the inevitability of a Palestinian state.

On the one hand, these linguistic developments might be viewed as an improvement, a gradual end to the Israeli denial that another nation has rights in and on the land. On the other hand, however, these developments suggest that rhetoric can mask realities of power, because when Ariel Sharon tells his Likud Party colleagues that the occupation must end and a Palestinian state arise, he does not mean a withdrawal to the Green Line, with a Palestinian state in all of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, but rather that the disconnected parcels of land surrounded by Israeli fences and walls might be called a "state."

—Alain Epp Weaver

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## Israel's Unilateral Separation Plan

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by Jad Isaac

On June 16, 2002, Israel began implementing a unilateral separation plan in the West Bank and issued military orders to seize Palestinian lands under the pretext of security. In most areas the separation zone consists of a 40–100-meter-wide fence that comprises barbed wire, trenches, military roads and footprint detection tracks, as well as a 4–5-meter-high electrified metal fence with security cameras. In areas with sizable populations or in close proximity to the Green Line, as in the case of the Palestinian city of Qalqilya, the separation wall is a 6–8-meter-high concrete wall equipped with rigid concrete cylindrical military watch-towers lined up 200 meters apart.

The separation zone is built on Palestinian land east of the 1949 armistice borders, the so-called Green Line, and penetrates deep into the occupied Palestinian territories, looping like a snake in depths from 0.3 km to 23 km into the heart of the northwestern part of the West Bank.

### Construction of the Wall

The first phase of the separation wall was completed in July 2003, with a length of 123.3 km. It extended from the village of Salem in the Jenin governorate to the village of Masha in the Salfit district, isolating 112 km<sup>2</sup> of Palestinian agricultural land and open spaces from neighboring cities, towns, and villages. The wall has segregated 496,606 dunams (a dunam is 0.1 hectare or about 0.25 acre) of Palestinian agricultural lands, which form 29.9 percent of the total cultivated area in the West Bank, from Palestinian communities. Over 701,000 fruit trees have been trapped between the separation zone and the Green Line, severely damaging the Palestinian agricultural sector.

Fifteen Palestinian villages with more than 12,000 inhabitants have been fenced in by the wall on one side and the Green Line on the other, while another 69 villages located east of the wall have been cut off from their lands to the west of the wall. Israeli military orders render the fate of these communities uncertain at best. On October 18, 2003, the

### In the occupation, I have no future.

—ILTEZAM MORRARR, 15-YEAR-OLD PALESTINIAN STUDENT FROM BUDRUS VILLAGE

Israel's non-negotiated disengagement from Gaza will cause many Palestinians to conclude that violence, and not negotiations, is the only option for securing their rights. The majority of Palestinians who support a peaceful, negotiated two-state solution now see that Palestinians are no longer even welcome at the negotiating table. Israel is now negotiating peace with the United States—not with the Palestinians. It is impossible to describe how deeply this has undermined Palestinian moderates, such as myself, who have continued to argue for a solution that is based on reconciliation and negotiation and not on revenge and retaliation.

The primary beneficiaries of these developments are extremist groups throughout the Middle East. The leaders of such groups could not have invented a better method of recruitment than the Bush-Sharon press conference. The reality is that as a result of the positions taken by the Bush administration, we are farther away from a permanent peace than we have ever been, and many innocent people on both sides will die in the coming months and years as a result.

My role as chief Palestinian negotiator may have been taken from me, but I retain my role as a Palestinian father. I am determined to teach my children that violence is not the answer. President Bush has not made my job any easier.

—Saeb Erekat, chief negotiator for the Palestine Liberation Organization, *Washington Post*, April 25, 2004

### Sharon's fence is a crime against humanity.

—YOSSI SARID, ISRAELI MEMBER OF KNESSET

Israeli authorities issued orders stating that no Palestinian can enter the area between the separation zone and the Green Line without a permit from the Israeli military government and imposed multiple conditions on the granting of such permits.

Palestinians living in the segregated towns and villages now face substantial hardships in reaching Palestinian urban centers, where most social services such as educational facilities, health care, and trade centers are located. Travel to nearby urban centers for socioeconomic interaction is jeopardized, as the Israeli-controlled gates open irregularly and for limited hours. Under Israeli military orders, villagers in these isolated towns will have to get permits simply to go to their homes, to cross through the gates in the fences to tend their crops, to bring a bride or groom to the village for marriage, or to return to the village after attending university or receiving health care on the outside.

During the first phase of the separation zone's construction, Israel began building walls and fences around Jerusalem aimed at disconnecting East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and at solidifying Israeli control over its settlement blocs south, east, and north of the city. Work in Qalandiya in northern Jerusalem and Bethlehem to the south started in September 2002 to implement the "Envelope of Jerusalem." A 17.5-km segment of the separation barrier was completed by July 2003.

To the north of Bethlehem, more than 15,000 dunams of Palestinian agricultural land, planted mostly with olive trees and belonging to Palestinians in the Bethlehem area, were cut off from Bethlehem by the separation zone. Palestinian communities that are tied into Jerusalem's economic and social life through commercial and familial ties are being severed from the Holy City by fences, barbed wire, and, in the case of Abu Dis, 9-meter-high concrete walls.

An eastern separation zone was announced in December 2002, one that would penetrate to a depth of 15 km into the West Bank from the Jordan River, cutting off 1610 km<sup>2</sup> (or 28 percent) of the West Bank.

In July 2003 (ironically following the Aqaba summit, at which the United States' Road Map for peace was unveiled), Israel issued military orders to seize Palestinian land for implementing the separation zone's next phase. Then, on October 8, 2003, the Israeli cabinet approved the route of the separation

wall. The western flank of the wall will be 728 km long and will segregate 1073 km<sup>2</sup> (19.3 percent) of the West Bank's total area. The separation zone will imprison 87,589 Palestinians living in 79 Palestinian localities between the separation zone and the Green Line. The final separation zone will isolate an additional 183,986 Palestinians within secondary separation walls and fences.

### Analysis

In its final shape, the separation wall will include both eastern and western flanks and will ultimately cover an area of 2,683 km<sup>2</sup> (47.3 percent of the West Bank). The eastern flank of the separation zone can, and probably will, given Israeli budget constraints, be implemented without walls or fences but rather via control over roads and checkpoints. The map on page 3 shows the ultimate separation plan.

The sum of the western and eastern flanks will affect 146 Palestinian communities with a total population of 288,000 Palestinians. The number of settlers in the two flanks who are essentially annexed into Israel totals 390,134. Thus, it becomes obvious that the aim of the separation plan is the de facto, if not de jure, annexation of Palestinian land and the geographic incorporation of the majority of settlements in Israel.

A look at the route of the separation zones clearly shows that the driving force behind the Israeli plan is a systematic land-grab policy, rather than security considerations. The separation zone deprives Palestinians of their natural resources and confines them to enclaves under Israeli control with little room for urban expansion, cut off from vital land and water resources. Such an arrangement guarantees that the Palestinian entity will be neither viable nor sustainable. Pressure on already scarce natural resources will increase, and the Palestinian ecosystem will become increasingly vulnerable to collapse. Poverty and despair will prevail, and the reservations enclosed by the separation zone will be inherently unstable.

A security fence, Palestinian leaders have repeatedly stated, would have been built along the Green Line. The walls and fences of the separation zone, however, are not about security, but are about strengthening Israel's colonization of the occupied territories.

*Dr. Jad Isaac is the director of the Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem, a long-time MCC partner organization.*

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# The Israeli View of the Separation Wall

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by Jeff Halper

The question inevitably arises whenever I take people to view the wall, the “separation barrier”: How can the Israeli public allow this? Don’t they see what’s going on? Don’t they care about the suffering this wall is causing?

These are good questions. No one encountering the wall and its tragic consequences to tens of thousands of ordinary Palestinians who have nothing to do with the conflict—virtual imprisonment within cities, towns, and neighborhoods; the permanent separation of parents from their children, husbands from wives, friends, teachers, pupils, and business associates one from the other; house demolitions and massive land expropriation; impoverishment caused by an inability to farm one’s ancestral fields; and in general living in a suffocating atmosphere of fear, anxiety, hopelessness, and an ever-present gnawing of anger, frustration, and sadness—can avoid asking and wondering.

Tellingly, Israelis whom we cajole to come see the wall are equally moved and dumbfounded, although Israelis resist being confronted by the barrier that is built, for the most part, out of their sight. The question touches on a much deeper issue: How do Israelis, how do Jews, live with a repressive occupation affecting millions of people just a few miles from their own homes?

Some 80 percent of the Israeli Jewish public supports the wall project, a consensus going far beyond political lines of right and left. While its stated justification may be security, it reflects something much deeper, touching on the very claim to the land made by the Zionist movement. It is the end-product of a kind of equation accepted by most Jewish Israelis, as follows:

- An exclusive claim to the land. The Land of Israel, with Judea and Samaria (the “West Bank”) at its heart, is the exclusive patrimony of the Jewish people. Unlike western democracies whose civil societies are based on citizenship and thus can incorporate people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, Zionism adopted the tribal nationalism that privileges the group that “owns” the country at the expense of “intruders,” the Palestinians.
- A studied disregard for the rights and even the existence of Palestinians. In the Jewish conception of Israel, the Palestinians appear, if at all, merely as back-

ground, as an undifferentiated mass of “Arabs,” as foils and enemies. In a kind of autistic nationalism, the Zionist movement saw a lot of “Arabs” living in the country but not a people with a national identity, legitimate claims to the land, and a right of self-determination.

- The entrenched notion that the “Arabs” are and always will be Israel’s enemy. Palestinians are not negotiating partners, and if we talk to them it is certainly not as equals, but as a population living in “our” country on sufferance and not by right. No matter which direction one comes from—the religious claims of the settlers, the tribal claims of the secular right wing Likud, or the security concerns of Labor Party generals—it is inconceivable that a sovereign and viable Palestinian state could arise in the very belly of the Land of Israel. They cannot be “given” a viable state; Israel must control the entire country from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River forever.
- “Occupation” is denied and minimized. Since the “Arabs” (Israelis seldom say “Palestinians”) have no legitimate claims to the country and never enjoyed sovereignty over the West Bank or Gaza, there is no Israeli occupation. How can one occupy one’s own country? Occupation is thereby removed from the discussion as a causal factor in the conflict. Israel reserves for itself the right to rule over the occupied territories, notwithstanding international law prohibiting it from taking any steps that render its occupation permanent.
- Conclusion: The only “solution” is an imposed security one. Lacking any political formulation that might resolve the conflict, the Israeli public has given up on the notion that peace is possible. All it seeks is “peace and quiet.” “Whatever works.” If the creation of a Palestinian state “works,” then do it. If we must put the Palestinians on trucks and ship them out of the country, do it. If the Palestinians cooperate, Israel will be “generous” and give them a ministate (since Israel wants to relieve itself of a Palestinian population of almost 4 million to which it can neither grant citizenship nor deny it).
- Irrelevance of Palestinian suffering. Since the “Arabs” refused to accept a ministate and started an *intifada* (an uprising), their suffering and the fate is of little concern to the average Israeli. “We offered them

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In principle, the consequences of Bush’s adoption of Sharon’s plan are indeed momentous. By approving Israel’s erasure of the Green Line, annexation of West Bank settlement blocs and denial of the Palestinian refugees’ right to return, the sole superpower has officially abandoned international legality and UN resolutions as the guidelines for an eventual settlement. And by acceding to this being done by unilateral Israeli fiat, it has broken with the idea that a solution should be arrived at by negotiation and mutual consent, rather than imposition and “might makes right”.

... [I]n one sense, Bush has merely abandoned pretences and formalized existing, if undeclared, US policy. But with a crucial difference. He has made his move in the absence of either a peace process or a blueprint worthy of the name. It thus ceases to be about pragmatically shelving legal and moral considerations—and dispensing with other people’s land and rights—in the interest of brokering a historic if lop-sided compromise, or even maintaining the intolerable status quo. It becomes, plainly, a licence for Israeli territorial expansion.

... The US has now ... given Israel a free hand to complete the construction of the West Bank Wall, pen in the local Palestinians, grab more of their land, and create more facts on the ground for the US to later deem “new realities” that it would be “unrealistic” to challenge. ...

Although it is the Palestinian moderates who the Bush Administration has harmed most with its policy shift, it has left none of the international players interested in promoting a peaceful settlement with anything to work with, either. The search for alternatives or new beginnings is likely to be long and painful.

—Excerpted from editorial, *Middle East International*, April 29, 2004, <http://meionline.com/editorial/223.shtml>

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a state and they refused in violence,” the formula goes. “They deserve no sympathy. They deserve anything they get. The hell with them. They brought their suffering on themselves.”

Although it is a dramatic development, the separation barrier/wall, understood in this context, is accepted by the Israeli public as merely a technical solution to the problem of security. It is viewed as nonproblematic and, again, the suffering caused to the Palestinians is considered a just reward for their campaign of terrorism. “They brought it on themselves.”

This creates a convenient situation for Israeli governments seeking permanent control of the entire country. A “deal” has been struck with the public: We will bring you peace and quiet by constructing the barrier, and in return you will give us carte blanche as to the route and the wall’s political consequences.

Thus the Israeli public becomes complicit in a project that is likely to lock it into an intractable conflict for years to come.

*Jeff Halper is the coordinator of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, an MCC partner organization. He can be reached at [icahd@zahav.net.il](mailto:icahd@zahav.net.il).*

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## A Gated Community?

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by Ed Nyce

On July 9, 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion in which it ruled that Israel’s separation wall in the Occupied Territories is in violation of international law. The ICJ called on Israel to halt construction of the wall, to dismantle those sections already constructed, and to make reparation for destruction of land and property caused by the wall’s construction. While welcoming this legal victory, Palestinians wait to see if the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council will act on the court’s advisory opinion.

The ICJ ruling followed close on the heels of an Israeli High Court ruling on June 30, 2004, that rejected 30 km of the wall’s planned route northwest of Jerusalem. The High Court ordered the Israeli military to develop alternative routes that would take the humanitarian conditions of Palestinian villages into consideration. Most Palestinians are skeptical of the court’s ruling, fearing that at best it will mean minor, cosmetic changes in the wall’s path.

—Alain Epp Weaver

The roving gate scrambled into position. Deftly discerning the passageway’s narrowest point, he took shallow root.

Stretched to their limits, the gate’s doors nearly spanned the distance between couch and wall. Alas, traffic managed to penetrate the gate, answering the invitation to dine.

His efforts going for naught, four-year-old Sulieman Sahouri rested his arms, ceased his gate keeping, and joined the table.

It is a fun game, which children anywhere might play. Gate activity also increasingly portrays reality in Sulieman’s Palestinian town of Beit Sahour.

### Gates and Fences

Sulieman lives with his parents, William, 37, and Wafa, 32, and sister Janet, 7. Beit Sahour, on Bethlehem’s east side, is where the shepherds learned of Jesus’ birth.

Their home is in a Greek Orthodox Church-initiated housing project. Well inside the West Bank, it is a target of Israeli governmental actions as the latter builds its separation wall/fence system.

Since spring 2002, partial installation of the system has occurred here. Two to three layers of fencing exist, each with securely closed gates. The inner ring of fencing is electrically charged. Signs in Hebrew, Arabic, and English warn about the lethal consequences of touching the fence, which apply even if one is too young to read.

The morning of the gate game, December 30, 2003, William Sahouri pointed out the

latest activities in the small area around their home. A new road was graded, not yet paved. Heading south, it turns sharply westward. “They’re threatening to connect more roads to these. Doing so would completely enclose us,” said William. Neighboring homes, now in the path the road claims, have Israeli military demolition orders.

William gestured toward two trees in an attractive, sometimes green area. “They want to put the gate here,” he said. “The gate” would be part of a fence that would isolate the housing project. It would be staffed by Israeli soldiers—no one knows how regularly. It would be the only way in and out.

Will residents really need permits to go from home to school, work, church, emergency room? What about visitors? Imagining the possibilities can be cause for despair. Not imagining them seems almost impossible.

### The Housing Project

In 1993, the Greek Orthodox Church floated an idea of a housing project, to be on land that it owns in Beit Sahour, for members with limited income, without land, and who were mostly young families. The idea was well received, and the project began in 1995.

The vision was for 15 buildings, each containing 8 units, thereby providing space for 120 families. Each family would contribute monthly, finally owning its unit.

The Sahouris eventually entered the program, initially as an investment. In 1999, they decided to make their unit their home when space needs grew at their extended family house. They completed the unit, and moved in September 2002.



In February 2002, the Israeli army came with a bulldozer, drove adjacent to a retaining wall behind the houses, and hit one. Damage to a corner of the home remains.

Spring and summer brought military orders for land confiscation and house demolitions, and Palestinian legal action to challenge them. The Israeli High Court froze the orders temporarily.

As part of the freeze, Palestinians are prohibited from continuing the project. At the time, seven buildings had been completed on the outside. The eighth was underway. Israelis came several times a week to make sure nothing changed, even on finished buildings. Believing it is their right, and noting ongoing Israeli seizure of land, the owners' group at the housing project nevertheless began construction on Building #8.

#### "We're under a Microscope"

When asked what goes on inside of them given these realities, William and Wafa place their house issue in the overall context of life under occupation.

"We are used to this situation," said William. "If they demolish the house, it's finished—take it! We [Palestinians] don't have anything on our land. During the holiday, we didn't go anywhere. We can't go anywhere. I can't take the kids to the zoo. There's no place to go rest the mind.

"Even if there is permission [to travel], the roadblocks are inside of us. [The soldiers and other Israelis] will look at us as terrorists. We're under a microscope. They've put this mind-set in us."

"But we're losing our lives," said Wafa. "I'm 32, and we can't do anything normal.

"When I was young, my father took us to the Dead Sea or Jericho every week during the winter, a 45-minute drive from here. But I can't do that for my children. Janet saw the sea on TV. 'Where is this?' she asked. 'Take us to it.'"

"All my children know is home and school," said William. "We dream of taking a vacation, what normal people dream."

On December 23, 2003, Israeli officials raided Building #8, took construction materials, and photographed the workers. A week later, work was nevertheless continuing. Fearful that the buildings might be destroyed if empty, some families have moved into unfinished units in recent months. Such fears are based on incidents elsewhere in the West Bank.

Meanwhile, investments of those whose buildings are not completed are going nowhere. And life for the people who live there already is hardly the realization of a dream. The gates ensure it.

*Ed Nyce lived in Bethlehem from 1999 to 2004, serving as MCC's peace development worker in the occupied Palestinian territories.*

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## The Palestinian Fear of Thirst

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by Jad Isaac

Water is one of the main sources of conflict between Israel and its surrounding neighbors, particularly the Palestinians. The acute water crisis facing Palestinians is a direct result of Israel's control over Palestinian water resources. The Israelis utilize 85 percent of these resources while allowing only 15 percent for Palestinian use, denying them access to the Jordan River water and control over most Palestinian aquifers.

### Water Resources in Palestine

The occupied Palestinian territories contain three major sources of water: the Jordan River system, the West Bank aquifer system, and the coastal aquifer system. Since 1967, Israel has prevented Palestinians from utilizing any of their rightful share of the Jordan River. The West Bank aquifer system, for its part, comprises three basins:

- The Western Basin is the largest and has an annual safe yield of 362 million cubic meters (mcm). Palestinians consume only about 7.5 percent of its safe yield.
- The Northeastern Basin has an annual safe yield of 145 mcm. Palestinians consume about 18 percent of its safe yield.
- The Eastern Basin has an annual safe yield of 172 mcm. Palestinians utilize 50 percent of the basin's water.

The Gaza coastal aquifer has a safe yield of 55–60 mcm annually, but is being over-extracted at an annual rate of 120 mcm, causing intrusion of seawater.

The annual Palestinian domestic and industrial water shares are estimated at 93 mcm, less than 30 m<sup>3</sup> per year per capita, while the 435,000 Israeli settlers residing in the West

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## New Resources Available from MCC

In *The Dividing Wall*, a new video from Mennonite Central Committee, you can meet families and farmers whose lives have been devastated by Israel's separation wall and be inspired by Israelis and Palestinians who are working for a future of bridges instead of walls.

The video explores the humanitarian, social, and political impact of the Israeli-built "security fence." The barrier, which will run about 700 kilometers (430 miles), is a series of walls and electrified and razor-wire fences meandering through the West Bank. It separates Palestinians from their land, water, jobs, families, and friends. Increasing numbers of Israelis are questioning if this "separation wall" will actually bring lasting security to Israel.

*The Dividing Wall* is available in DVD or videocassette format. It can be borrowed at any MCC office or purchased for \$30 Cdn./\$20 U.S. at MCC offices in Alberta, British Columbia, East Coast (Akron, Pa.), Manitoba, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. The DVD includes the video *Walking the Path Jesus Walked*. Either version comes with a study guide with advocacy suggestions.

Also available soon is a full-color 64-page book written by Sonia K. Weaver, *What is Palestine/Israel? Answers to Common Questions*. Written in an easily accessible, question-and-answer format, this resource introduces readers to the complexity of Palestine/Israel and to Palestinians and Israelis working for peace and reconciliation. It will be useful for Christian education classes, for church libraries, and for all Christians who pray and yearn for justice and peace to reign in the land of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection.

To get your copy of *What is Palestine/Israel?* contact any MCC office or ask for Tina Klassen at 717-859-1151.

Also, the September/October 2004 issue of *a Common Place*, MCC's bimonthly magazine, covers the separation wall. Subscribe online at [www.mcc.org/acp](http://www.mcc.org/acp), e-mail [acp@mcc.org](mailto:acp@mcc.org), or phone 717-859-1151.

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## Resources on Israel and the Palestinians

### BOOKS

Aruri, Naseer, *Dishonest Broker: America's Role in Israel and Palestine* (Boston: South End Press, 2003).

Carey, Roane, and Jonathan Shainin, *The Other Israel: Voices of Refusal and Dissent* (New York: New Press, 2002).

Davis, Uri, *Apartheid Israel: Possibilities for the Struggle Within* (London: Zed Books, 2004).

Hass, Amira, *Reporting from Ramallah: An Israeli Journalist in an Occupied Land* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

Pappe, Ilan, *The History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Qumsiyeh, Mazin, *Sharing the Land of Canaan: Human Rights and the Israeli-Palestinian Struggle* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

### ARTICLES

Abu-Odeh, Lama, "The Case for Binationalism" (*Boston Review* 26/6; available at <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR26.6/abu-odeh.html>).

Ateek, Naim, "'Hafrada' or a Genuine Peace" (*Cornerstone* 29 [Summer 2003]; available at <http://www.sabeel.org/old/news/cstone29/hafrada.html>).

Judt, Tony, "Israel: The Alternative" (*New York Review of Books* 50/16 [October 23, 2003]; available at <http://www.nybooks.com/contents/20031023/>).

Pappe, Ilan, "As Long as the Plan Contains the Magic Word 'Withdrawal,' It Is Seen as a Good Thing" (*London Review of Books* 26/9 [May 6, 2004]; available at [http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n09/papp01\\_.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n09/papp01_.html)).

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Bank consume annually 70 mcm of Palestinian water, or 281 m<sup>3</sup> per year per capita. This discrepancy between water consumption was not established through negotiations but reflects the asymmetry of power between Israel and the Palestinians.

During past Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Palestinian water rights were a contentious issue. In the Cairo Agreement (Oslo II) of 1995, Israel recognized Palestinian water rights in principle, but details of actual access to water were deferred to the permanent status negotiations, which have been on indefinite hold since early 2001. The Cairo Agreement included arrangements for an additional 28.6 mcm of water to be delivered annually to the Palestinians to meet their immediate water needs during the interim period. However, the Palestinians have up to now received less than 15 mcm of additional water each year, far less than the agreed-upon quota.

### Impact of the Separation Zone on Palestinian Water Resources

The Israeli separation zone will trap large tracts of Palestinian agricultural land between the walls and fences being erected on these lands and the Green Line separating Israel and the West Bank. The separation zone endangers the agricultural sector as well as other Palestinian economic and natural resources. The Palestinian communities located inside the separation zone are mainly communities dependent upon agricultural produce for the bulk of their income.

The western part of the Israeli separation zone will endanger fertile agricultural lands located in the semicoastal region of the northwest portion of the West Bank in addition to parts of the central highlands running through the middle of the West Bank. The semicoastal zone receives a relatively high average annual rainfall of 600 mm and is mainly planted with fruit trees, vegetables, and field crops. The western part of the anticipated separation zone of the West Bank includes 496,606 dunams of fertile agricultural lands, or 29.9 percent of the total cultivated area in the West Bank. The annual production of the areas threatened by the separation zone reaches 190,299 tons, with value of US\$111 million, equal to 29.9 percent and 22.8 percent of the West Bank's agricultural production and agricultural income, respectively.

Phase I of the separation plan severely affected Palestinian water resources. The northwest portion of the West Bank contains the richest Palestinian ground water aquifers, supplying Palestinians with water

for domestic, agricultural, and industrial uses. Thirty-one artesian wells producing 5.5 mcm annually have been separated from the farmers and villages dependent upon them, trapped between the separation zone and the Green Line. The enclosed area also contains several smaller wells.

Palestinians will lose nearly 16.5 percent of their share of the Western Basin, as the Israeli separation zone means the de facto annexation of these artesian wells to Israel. The separation zone, in brief, involves Israel depriving Palestinians of their water rights and creating severe problems for the Palestinian agricultural sector, which depends heavily on those wells for irrigation.

As the southern portions (down from Bethlehem and the Gush Etzion bloc of settlements to the Hebron district) and the eastern flank of the separation zone are constructed, the Palestinian water crisis will be further exacerbated. A total of 165 wells with an average annual pumping rate of 33 mcm will be cut off from the Palestinian villages that rely upon them; another 53 springs with an annual discharge of 33 mcm, meanwhile, will be isolated from communities that use them by the separation zone. The separation plan will further solidify Palestinian deprivation of their rightful share of the waters of the Jordan River.

Satellite image analysis shows that 769,286 dunams of fertile agricultural land will be endangered by the Israeli separation plan. This means that 46.3 percent of the cultivated area in the West Bank will be lost or will become inaccessible for the Palestinians, due to the Israeli restrictions on the movements of farmers and produce and the threat of land confiscation. The Palestinian agricultural economy will suffer as the total annual income from agricultural production will be reduced by 41.7 percent. This will mean that threatened communities will lose their main source of income, as they become increasingly unable to access their land and required water resources.

In summary, in addition to serving as a land grab, Israel's separation zone is allowing it to solidify control over Palestinian water resources. Over 200,000 Palestinians in the occupied territories currently lack running water. Residents of West Bank towns such as Hebron and Bethlehem cope with having running water for only a handful of days each month. The reservations being created by the separation zones will thus not only lack room for population growth and contiguity for normal economic life, they will be increasingly dry areas where the fear of thirst becomes very real.

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# The Wall

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by Samia Khoury

“Good fences make good neighbors” is an English saying. But this so-called “security fence” is neither good nor is it a fence. It is an evil barrier that will exacerbate the dehumanization of a whole population. Israel uses the word “security” because it has very skillfully put its security as a priority on the agenda of the world conscience. Israel thus avoids being challenged.

Humans erect psychological barriers between themselves based on looks, religion, race, or social class. The separation wall might be the first physical barrier that Israel is erecting, but in reality the process of putting up legal and psychological walls started with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and continued with the occupation of the Palestinian territories in 1967.

## Many Walls

The decision for the state to be a Jewish state, rather than a state of all of its citizens, was in itself a decision to establish a wall between the Jews of the new state and the non-Jewish population, the indigenous Palestinians. Those Palestinians who were dispossessed of their land and identity by the creation of the state of Israel found themselves to be either stateless refugees or second-class citizens of the new Jewish state. Through “legal” legislation many more walls were erected within the state of Israel—laws that restricted Palestinian access to land, that limited the possibilities of developing Palestinian cities and towns—turning it gradually into an apartheid state with different sets of laws for Jews and Arabs.

Using biblical texts to justify confiscation of more land after its military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in 1967, confiscation that paved the way for building exclusively Jewish settlements, spelled another chapter in the building of walls and barriers. The separation wall now being built is but the latest, and most obvious, of Israel’s discriminatory walls.

It is amazing how the world community can stand helpless against the new reality of the separation wall. Though European countries were critical of Israel for constructing the separation wall, they abstained when the United Nations voted to take the case to the International Court of Justice at The Hague. How hypocritical! The U.N. resolution

passed, but its impact was watered down by the abstentions and by the usual U.S. vote against any resolution condemning Israel.

I cannot help but recall the words of Edmund Burke: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.” That is exactly what the story of our dispossession as a people as well as the story of this wall has been about. Good and responsible people can understand the discriminatory realities but are often afraid to expose the truth for fear of being labeled anti-Semitic. The truth of the wall has nothing to do with anti-Semitism, and it is the duty of good people not to allow the triumph of evil. “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32).

Will the world community continue to be intimidated? Some refuse: think of the many activists, Israelis and Palestinians, as well as members of the international solidarity movement, who, with their relentless efforts, have been able to expose the truth regarding the separation wall. They have been putting themselves in places of danger to emphasize the gravity of building such a wall and its impact on the soul of the people on both sides of the wall.

Israel claims to want this “security fence” in order to separate the Palestinians from the Israelis, and to prevent the infiltration of Palestinians to Israel. This justification might have been acceptable if the wall were erected on the 1967 border, with a full withdrawal from the occupied territories in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. But as it is now, and with Israel defying all U.N. resolutions, the wall is actually separating Palestinians from Palestinians. It is also separating Palestinians from their land, work, hospitals, schools, churches, and mosques, and from their families and the center of their lives. The wall, in brief, makes normal life practically impossible for the Palestinians.

I sincerely hope that Israel will realize that to guarantee its security, it has to see the other as a human being. It was the inclusive theology of Jesus and the face-to-face encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John 4:1–42) that pulled down the walls between Jew and Samaritan when Jesus asked for a drink of water.

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## Resources on Israel and the Palestinians (continued)

### WEB SITES

Al-Haq: <http://www.alhaq.org/>. The leading Palestinian human rights center in the West Bank provides reports and position papers on Israeli human rights abuses in the occupied territories.

Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem: <http://www.arij.org/>. Leading source for case studies treating the impact of the ongoing construction of settlements, bypass roads, and the wall.

The Electronic Intifada: <http://www.electronicintifada.net/>. News updates, analysis, opinion pieces, diaries from Palestine, and more, on this Web site for activists.

International Middle East Media Center: <http://www.imemc.org/>. Media service operated out of Beit Sahour, with regular news updates and analysis.

Palestinian Center for Human Rights: <http://www.pchrgaza.org/>. The leading human rights center in the Gaza Strip produces regular reports on Israeli human rights violations.

Stop the Wall Campaign: <http://www.stophewall.org/>. Case studies, maps, fact sheets, links, and many more resources for activists opposed to the separation wall.

—Compiled by Alain Epp Weaver

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**This wall will not bring peace. This wall will not make good neighbors. This wall will not bring security to the Jewish people.**

—REV. ALEX AWAD, EAST  
JERUSALEM BAPTIST CHURCH



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### Other Options

Putting up a barrier and excluding the other might provide temporary security for Israelis but it does not solve the long-term problem and it increases Palestinian insecurity. Healing and reconciliation will not be possible from behind walls and barriers, for each will only see a monster on the other side, and it will only exacerbate the animosity, and create physical ghettos for the Palestinians and psychological ghettos for the Israelis as well.

It is ironic that Israeli power is leading the Jewish people back to psychological ghettos, when there would be other options. The Israeli soldiers who are refusing to serve in an occupying force have made their choice, rather than compromise their humanity.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14).

How can the two peoples destined to live side by side in this Holy Land overcome the wall of hostility and live in peace? Certainly not through a reinforced concrete wall eight meters high or through barbed wire and electrified fences. Nor by military occupation, oppression, and harassment at roadblocks.

If only we could reflect on the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matt. 7:12), a common ethical code among practically all faiths. If this code were adopted as the principle for all human relationships, then no walls would be necessary and security and peace would prevail. Dare we hope! Or will power and greed continue to govern the actions of political leaders, losing all humanity in the process?

*Samia Khoury is a Palestinian Christian laywoman and a member of the board of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem.*