



Agitate

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THE GREAT WALL OF ZION

Last month this newsletter elaborated a theory that walls are a technology of exploitation and oppression rather than a means of protection. If there is ever an example to illustrate this theory it is what has become known as the apartheid wall being built by Israel in the West Bank. Israeli officials describe the wall as a security fence, necessary for defending the citizenry from hostile Palestinians. Upon examination, this 'security fence' is a tool of expansionism and exploitation. What is being sold to the world as necessary for securing the borders is actually a tool being used to redraw the borders. A wall that is intended to make Israel more secure has become a locus for resistance and a threat to Israeli security.

The history and position of Israel suggests that building a security fence along its border is a legitimate endeavor. Israel's relationship with its neighbors in the Middle East is hostile with all sides spewing threatening rhetoric and even taking military action against each other. Extremist groups, like Hamas and Hezbollah, deny the right of Israel to exist and continue to use force of arms to empower themselves at the expense of Israel. Terrorists and suicide bombers target Israeli civilians. Middle Eastern politicians use anti-Semitism as effective political rhetoric. Surrounded by hostility, it's easy to understand how Israel could adopt a fortress mentality.*

The Apartheid Wall, however, has a more sinister function than simple self defense. In the name of security the Israeli government is using the wall to further its imperialist aims. "It would seem that anything in Israel today is justified as long as it is labeled a 'security matter.'" (Haley, Digital Journalist, 3/04) But the wall is not strictly a 'security matter.' It's a technology used to disenfranchise, harass and oppress a subordinate group. As such, it has been condemned by the United Nations and the International Criminal Court as a violation of UN resolutions, international treaties and the Geneva Conventions. (Carter, Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid)

Perhaps Israel would have a better claim of security if...the wall was actually being built along the border. Israel's border was established and defended in 1949 shortly after the British pulled out of the Palestine Mandate. After the 1967 war the established border of Israel was affirmed by UN Resolution 242. Israel, however, occupied territory outside of its established border, known as the Green Line. According to the Geneva Conventions, lands cannot be acquired by conquest. (Carter) Accordingly, UN Resolution 242 mandates that Israel must withdraw from occupied territories outside of the pre-1967 borders. Israel must also remove any subsequent settlements within the occupied territories.

The wall being built in the West Bank, however, is clearly a breach of international law. Most of the wall itself is built as much as 6 km inside the territory of the West Bank. It meanders through Palestinian territory like a serpent displacing villages and homes. Along a 200 mile border, this wall is over 700 miles long!

As construction of the wall approaches Palestinian settlements, the citizens are informed that, for 'security purposes' their homes will be bulldozed to create an adequate perimeter along the wall.

The same does not hold true for Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Conspicuously, the wall winds around these settlements to place them on the 'Israeli side' of the security perimeter. Remember, Israeli settlements in the West Bank are against international law and a breach of international treaties. The same is true in East Jerusalem, where the wall isolates Palestinians and Christians from visiting holy places in what is intended to be an international city. At the same time, a special road system has been established, accessible only for Israelis and ethnic Jews. (Palestine Monitor: Chomsky, ZNet, 2/23/04)

Palestinians caught on the 'wrong side of the wall' or between the wall and the Green Line, are in a special bind. This area has been declared by Israel as a 'closed military zone.' Palestinians in this area must file for legal permission to remain in their own homes. Of course, the red tape involved in acquiring permission is daunting as applicants are suspect of terrorist ties. Israelis and ethnic Jews are not required to go through this process. (Haley, Carter, Chomsky, Palestine Monitor)

In many cases, Palestinian villages, towns and neighborhoods are cut off from their fields, workplaces, schools and even water supplies. The wall relegates some of the most productive agricultural land and artesian water systems on the 'Israeli side.' These resources are, by international law, the property of the people of the West Bank. (UN Res. 242) Instead, Palestinians must pass through numerous checkpoints and a handful of gates, all controlled by the Israeli military, just to nurture their own fields or educate their children. Many report that they sometimes wait for days before permission to pass is granted. Often the gates are closed for 'security purposes.' Sometimes rules are enacted such as 'males under thirty-five years old are not allowed to pass.' Consequently, unemployment has increased while productivity and agricultural yields have dropped. (Haley)

Palestinian cities are often completely engulfed by the wall, like the city of Qalqilya, and cut off from the rest of the West Bank. Most notably this has blocked access to health care for thousands of Palestinians. Health care in the West Bank is disseminated through a network of providers in different cities. It was designed by the World Health Organization to provide cheap and easy access to health resources. The wall effectively severs this efficient network and blocks the Palestinian people from a vital resource. (HDIP "Health and Segregation", 1/04)

Exploitation

As horrendous as the reality above is, this story gets even more repulsive. After all, what good is oppression without a little exploi-

tation to go along with it. As if the destruction of Palestinian homes and harsh control of Palestinian movement isn't bad enough, there's always good, old fashioned greed. For greed, look under the World Bank; there you will see bureaucrats rewriting the very definition of avarice.

According to Project Censored the World Bank has a plan for the Apartheid Wall and a use for all of the displaced and dispossessed Palestinians so victimized. The World Bank proposes the development of a Palestinian Middle East Free Trade Area. Among the projects proposed is the establishment of export oriented industrial zones built on Palestinian land that runs along the wall. The industrial zones will be financed by the World Bank and controlled by the Israeli occupation.

And just where do you suppose the World Bank will find laborers to work this industrial zone? If you guessed, *among the desperate Palestinians imprisoned by the wall* you would be correct. What a perfect set up. First, the wall is used to steal land and water resources, dispossess the Palestinians in the West Bank and destroy the region's economy, leaving millions without land, education, health care or work. Then foreign businesses move in and offer the dispossessed an opportunity to work at slave wages. The products are then shipped out of the region while the profits are sent to the occupation forces and the World Bank. How very...well...Third Reich!

According to an article in the Nation, the very technologies being used to man the Apartheid Wall also happen to be Israel's greatest export. Israel in the post 9/11 security frenzy has sired some of the world's most profitable security technology industries. These companies will bring in \$1.2 billion dollars this year. Perhaps the Apartheid Wall and its Closed Military Zones also make the perfect testing grounds for Israel's fastest growing exports. (Klein, The Nation 7/2/07)

Resistance

In effect, the Sharon plan for the Apartheid Wall aims to destroy the viability of a free Palestinian state in the West Bank. Palestinian Gaza was set up to fail after Israel pulled its settlers from this territory then turned around and closed the borders in response to democratic elections in which Hamas won huge political gains. East Jerusalem, recognized as a multicultural hub of three major religions and the expected capital of an independent Palestinian state has been co-opted by Israel. Now Palestinians in the West Bank are being dispossessed and Israeli settlements are expanding. The Apartheid Wall divides the West Bank into isolated enclaves reminiscent of the Bantustans of South Africa. A viable Palestinian state in the West Bank cannot exist under these conditions.

In 2002 the Arab League developed a peace plan which would recognize the legitimacy of Israel contingent upon the establish-

ment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as the capital. This plan is consistent with UN resolutions 242 and 338 as well as the much vaunted Roadmap to Peace. All major Middle Eastern nations have accepted the Arab League Peace Plan. Israel's clear response is the Apartheid Wall. So long as this wall stands, it is unlikely that Israel or the United States can negotiate a meaningful peace in the Middle East. What is billed as a necessary security measure actually makes Israel less secure.

According to Thomas Haley, "one farmer angrily asks if the Israelis really believe that they will just sit back and let their families starve to death without taking any action. What would any normal human being do?" Every inch of the Apartheid Wall is a slap in the face of the Palestinian people and a locus for resistance against their enemy. The wall will only serve to further radicalize Palestinian politics and push more and more people to militaristic extremes.

Recognizing the destructive nature and illegality of the wall the international community, including the United Nations, and the International Criminal Court, has demanded that the wall be dismantled. Even the militaristic Bush Administration recognizes the wall as an

obstacle to peace in the Middle East. So long as this wall stands and so long as Israel maintains hegemony over Palestinian lands a viable peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved. Any wall that stands in the way of justice, freedom and peace is a wall that must be torn down!

*This paragraph offers an Israeli perspective of the crisis in the Middle East. Certainly, much could be said about abuses committed by Israel against its neighbors and against Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

Rabbis for Human Rights

Rabbi Arik Ascherman is not only committed to tearing down the Apartheid Wall, but also in tearing down the cultural and emotional walls that have been erected between the Israeli and Palestinian people. He and his group, *Rabbis for Human Rights* are diligent advocates for the Palestinian people and steadfast opponents of the wall. In fact, Rabbi Ascherman has been arrested many times for obstructing the construction of the wall. During his trial for obstructing the demolition of Palestinian homes he is quoted, "I did not arrive at the events which are the subject of this trial with much faith that those interested in carrying out demolitions were even respecting international law. They certainly were not respecting international law or the Torah that I as a rabbi swore to uphold." He was convicted and sentenced to, of all things, community service. He and many Israelis like him, see the wall for what it is, an abuse of basic human rights and an obstacle to peace in Israel and the Middle East. (Hirschfield, The Progressive, July 2007)

**To learn more about Rabbis for Human Rights:
www.rhr.israel.net**

Take Action!

In addition to using the US government sites on the Dynamic Sociology "Links" page, try contacting the Israeli government and let them know how you feel about the Apartheid Wall. For contact information on all national Israeli politicians go to www.knesset.gov.il

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See Also:
www.stophthewall.org

