



The Bush-Sharon Proposal and the Wall



When President George W. Bush, in his April 14, 2004, press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, declared his opposition to the “right of return” to Israel for Palestinian refugees and endorsed Israel’s desire to keep large Jewish settlement blocs in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian West Bank, he undermined international law and decades of US policy. Under international law, namely the Fourth Geneva Convention, all Israeli settlements are illegal.

Bush also appears to have buried the “road map” for peace, drawn up in 2003 by the US, Russia, the UN, and the European Union. The plan, while inadequate, envisions a “viable” Palestinian state by 2005. But unless Israel dismantles the settlements, along with the wall (see below), military bases, blockades, and (for Israelis only) by-pass roads - all to protect the settlers- Palestinians will be left with isolated towns and villages, Palestinian versions of ghettos, reservations, or bantustans.

UN Security Council Resolution 242, passed after the June 1967 War, set forth a “land for peace” vision of an Arab-Israeli settlement. Resolution 242 has been the basis for the 1993 Oslo Accords, the 2000 Camp David negotiations, and the 2003 road map. The Bush-Sharon position undermines UN Security Council Resolution 242 which emphasizes “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” - meaning that Israel cannot use its superior power to annex parts of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. (Any border changes were understood to be minor rectifications, mutually agreed upon.) Resolution 242 also calls for a “just resolution of the [Palestinian] refugee problem,” namely, the “right of return” - in the context of peace - a right upheld by international law and dozens of UN resolutions.

The **Wall**, or separation barrier, Israel is building in and around the West Bank is justified by Israel as a way to keep out Palestinian terrorists. But Israel’s security concerns could be met by a barrier along the Green Line, the internationally recognized border between Israel and the West Bank. A barrier on the Green Line would not have caused the UN General Assembly to refer the issue to the World Court.

The barrier is cutting off thousands of farmers from their fields and crops, dividing families, and making it extremely difficult for 250,000 Palestinians to reach schools, hospitals, and jobs. The barrier has destroyed over 100,000 fruit and olive trees, and cut off tens of thousands of Palestinians from their water sources. Some Palestinian towns and villages are completely surrounded by the barrier, and movement by residents depends on special permits, arbitrarily granted by Israel.

Amnesty International (www.Amnesty.org), Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org), the International Red Cross (www.icrc.org), the US State Department (www.state.gov), and Israeli human rights groups have strongly criticized the wall as a violation of international humanitarian law.

Although Britain calls the current barrier “illegal,” Washington only finds “problems” with it. Other observers are more forceful:

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• Jessica Montell of B’Tselem (www.btselem.org), Israel’s leading human rights group, notes: “The route Israel has chosen for this barrier turns a legitimate security measure into a land grab.”

• *New York Times* editorial writer Ethan Bronner: “The town of Qalqilya is entirely surrounded by the barrier . . . it has become - there is no other word for it - a ghetto, a term with chilling resonance for Jews.” (Aug. 8, 2003)

• Israeli human rights activists Shamai Leibowitz and David Nir argue the barrier “will turn Palestinian lands into concentration camps, with checkpoints and roadblocks everywhere, civil rights totally abolished, economic resources shattered, lives managed forcibly at gunpoint . . .” (*Houston Chronicle*, Feb. 24, 2004).

• Noam Chomsky summed up the problem and the solution, noting that Israel’s expansionist policies have been possible only with US support and that “any real chance for a political settlement-- and for decent lives for the people of the region-- depends on the United States.” (*New York Times*, Feb. 23, 2004)