

## Up Against the Wall

How Israel's Separation Wall  
Blocks the Road Map to Peace

The Road Map for Peace has strengths that give it promise. It calls for an independent, democratic, viable Palestinian state living in peace with a secure and recognized Israel; mutual rather than contingent steps; international monitors; improved Israeli security through increased Palestinian autonomy and improving economic conditions. The Road Map is weak, however, on specifics, and among its most glaring omissions is any mention of the massive Separation Wall that is under active construction in the West Bank. The Wall is creating a political message and facts on the ground that have been opposed even by George Bush and Colin Powell.

Because it does not follow the Green Line (Israel's pre-1967 borders) but zigzags into the West Bank, incorporating Israeli settlements and valuable agricultural land, up to three hundred thousand Palestinians in seventy-two communities, according to the World Bank, will be isolated from their lands, markets, social services and schools, and up to ten percent of the West Bank will be annexed, de facto, to Israel. The World Bank has stated that this massive construction project is liable to bring economic and social catastrophe to villages in the western part of the West Bank. Already, eighty-three thousand olive and fruit trees have been uprooted during construction, and thousands of acres of agricultural land, property and infrastructure have been confiscated or destroyed.

A recent article in Yedioth Ahronoth quoted a "very rightwing settler" as saying: "The fence is a death sentence for the Palestinians. . . . This fence is a mistake, it will only exacerbate the problem, and it will make people more frustrated. People here want to work, and you are creating more hatred instead of the possibility of living together."

For the thousands of Palestinians sandwiched between the Wall and the Green Line, issues of border crossing remain unresolved. Separated from their families and resources in the West Bank, and with no intention of being incorporated as Israeli citizens, these people face economic and personal tragedy beyond the years of trauma that they've already experienced.

To date, more than one hundred and twenty kilometers have been constructed, at \$1.6 million per kilometer. The Wall is a construction of fencing, barbed wire, and concrete barriers up to eight meters high with a two-lane military patrol road, guard towers, four-meter-deep trenches on either side, and electronic warning fences. Ariel Sharon has announced support for an extension to the eastern side of the West Bank, which would encircle Palestinian lands, creating three separate enclosed cantons, and increase Israeli control over land and water resources. (Some critics argue that the Wall's design will encircle the forty-two percent of the West Bank that Sharon has identified as the future Palestinian state.) In mid-August, however, under pressure from the Bush administration, Israel announced the temporary delay of eastward extensions of the Wall until security and political considerations have been resolved.

The Road Map calls on Israeli leadership “to improve humanitarian conditions, lifting curfews, and easing restrictions on movement of persons and goods. . . . [and] an immediate end to violence against Palestinians everywhere.” It directs Palestinian leadership to pursue “an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to end armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis everywhere.” Would resumption of Wall construction around multiple Jewish settlements in the West Bank signal a willingness to end the occupation and build a contiguous Palestinian state? Does increasing the poverty, restricted movements and hopelessness of Palestinians improve Israeli security?

We are now at an historic moment. Western, Arab, and Muslim countries have all expressed interest in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. President Bush needs a peaceful resolution to justify his war in Iraq. There is increased understanding that support for the political, economic and social aspirations of the Palestinian people will lead to a more secure and viable Israel. Both peoples are tired of decades of bloodshed and disappointment and face enormous social and economic challenges in their own communities. The Road Map calls for an end to occupation and for the rebuilding of Palestinian civil society. While obstacles abound, the success of this effort will partially depend on the willingness of all parties to face the Wall and take bold political steps to bring it down.

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