

Sharon regime finalises West Bank land seizure plan

Israeli security wall to encircle East Jerusalem

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17 March 2005

On March 14, Israeli government officials released details of the final route of the so-called security barrier that cuts through the West Bank. The wall, whose construction is expected to be finished by the end of the year, will encircle East Jerusalem and divide the Palestinian city of Bethlehem.

The separation of Jerusalem from the West Bank is a particularly provocative act by the Likud-Labour coalition government. The city's eastern districts have been occupied by Israel since the 1967 war, and its 1980 annexation has never been recognised under international law. East Jerusalem has long been viewed by Palestinians as the potential capital of any future Palestinian state. Their access to the city will now be restricted by 11 heavily fortified crossings.

Israel's wall will also extend deep into the West Bank to ensure that the Zionist settlement of Maaleh Adumim, which lies 8 kilometres east of Jerusalem, falls behind the barrier. The settlement is occupied by 30,000 people and is the largest in the Occupied Territories. Bethlehem will also be partitioned so as to incorporate Rachel's tomb, a Jewish shrine.

The Shuafat Palestinian refugee camp, which is on Jerusalem's northern municipal boundary, will also be cut off from the West Bank. The area, in which more than 11,000 refugees reside, is to be encircled by another fence to ensure its separation from surrounding Jewish neighbourhoods.

These measures provide further confirmation that construction of the wall has not been driven by the desire to prevent terrorist attacks, as Israel repeatedly claims. In reality, the barrier represents the most obvious manifestation of a major land grab conducted by the Sharon government.

From the beginning of the wall's construction in June 2002, the Israeli government made clear that its course

would extend far beyond the internationally recognised 1967 border, known as the "green line." Approximately 10 percent of the West Bank, including much of the most fertile agricultural land, has been seized by Israel. Sharon has shelved—for the time being, at least—his original plan to direct the barrier through the Jordan valley, which would have left the Palestinians with just half of the West Bank.

In July of last year, the International Court of Justice ruled that the wall was illegal and should be torn down. The court found that construction of the barrier on occupied territory breached international law and potentially constrained the Palestinian right to self-determination. The Sharon government simply dismissed the ruling and has carried on with building the wall.

In a report to the United Nations General Assembly last September, John Dugard of the UN's Commission of Human Rights rejected Israel's insistence that the barrier was necessary for its self-defence. "There is no compelling evidence that suicide bombers could not have been as effectively prevented from entering Israel if the wall had been built along the green line—the accepted border between Israel and Palestine—or within the Israeli side of the green line," he declared. "The course of the wall clearly indicates that its purpose is to incorporate as many settlers as possible into Israel."

Israeli cabinet ministers dismissed suggestions that the decision to encircle East Jerusalem would cause concern in the US. "Maaleh Adumim and its industrial zone are an integral part of Israel, and I don't believe the Americans will contest it because President George W. Bush said a permanent settlement must take demographic realities into account," Trade and Industry Minister Ehud Olmert told Israeli public radio on Monday.

The US government's periodic calls for Israel not to engage in any actions that prejudice a definitive settlement between the Zionist state and the Palestinian Authority (PA) are purely for public consumption. There could be no act more blatantly designed to preclude final negotiations than the erection of a 25-foot concrete wall around East Jerusalem and its bordering settlements—but the Bush administration says nothing.

Not a single US official has issued a statement on the latest Israeli move. This silence is indicative of the Bush administration's complicity in the Sharon government's crimes.

An official report issued March 9 by former Israeli state prosecutor Talia Sasson described how there are at least 105 illegal Zionist outposts in the West Bank, all of which were established with secret assistance from successive Israeli governments. The investigation found that "the violation of the law has become institutional and institutionalised" in government agencies, and that there is "blatant violation of the law by certain state authorities, public authorities, regional councils in [the West Bank], and the settlers."

In response, the Sharon government promised to dismantle just 24 of the outposts, without specifying when they would be removed. The Bush administration had no objection to this reaction, and merely repeated its call for Israel to abide by its commitments under the "Road Map" plan. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher described the question of the outposts and settlements as a "continuing subject of discussion and obviously, these days, with the [Sasson] report coming out, a more active subject of discussion."

The settlement expansion and the construction of the wall through the West Bank demonstrate the real nature of the Gaza withdrawal plan. Sharon's "unilateral disengagement" concedes nothing to the Palestinians, and represents an attempt to segregate the Palestinian population from Israel as well as rationalise and fortify the main Zionist settlements.

Sharon has steadfastly refused to negotiate with the Palestinian Authority, despite President Mahmoud Abbas's continual capitulation before Israeli and American demands. Israel will only discuss issues regarding how the PA can more effectively police its own population and suppress any resistance to the occupation. The Sharon government transferred formal

control of the West Bank city of Jericho to the PA on Tuesday, March 15, and is later expected to do the same for Tulkarm and Qalqiliya. The handovers are conditional on the Palestinian leadership arresting anyone alleged by the Israeli security forces to be involved in terrorist activity.



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