



Barbed-wire Screen / Smoke Screen

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A LOT OF "SEPARATING" can be achieved with 3,000 km (2,000 miles) of barbed-wire: separating livestock from its owners, olives from their harvesters, vines from their pickers, a doctor from his patients, a worker from his place of work, a teacher from his students. Especially the farmer from his land. One kind of separation will not be obtained by the thousands of barbed kilometers: Separating the suicide-bomber from his victims.

Three thousands kilometers of barbed-wire have been stretched along the "first phase" of the "separation fence". Three million meters. Equal to the distance between Israel and Switzerland. A lot of "separating" can be achieved with 3,000 km of barbed-wire: separating livestock from its owners, olives from their harvesters, vines from their pickers, a doctor from his patients, a worker from his place of work, a teacher from his students. Especially the farmer from his land.

Only one kind of separation will not be obtained by thousands of barbed kilometers: separating the suicide-bomber from his victims. He – as we have learned from the State Comptroller's report on security procedures – will continue to reach his objective as he does today: through the checkpoints, usually in a motor vehicle, in appropriate disguise, in possession of false identification. And he will continue to storm his way towards his wretched loss, taking with him the lives of innocents. The fence will not stand in his way. Quite the contrary: the criminal will go to his death reassured that thanks to this fence, his dispatchers will easily recruit his potential successors. The fence will supply them with the infrastructure of despair, loss of hope, and fortify hatred, frustration, madness. It will hand them the infrastructure for terrorism.

No need for anger at the separation-wire that does not separate the suicide-bomber from his murder victims. This has only been its alleged aim. In reality, its aim is very different. In reality, its purpose is invisible. In reality, the barbed-wire screen is enveloped in a smokescreen.

But if the purpose of the fence is invisible, its deeds are quite visible. And one can no longer turn one's eyes westward only, and stubbornly continue to ignore the horrors taking place in the east.

For clarity's sake: an honest-to-goodness fence, reasonable and humane, would be received with relief and open arms by people on both sides. Israelis and Palestinians. It would not have robbed anyone of anything. It would not have shut tens-of-thousands in cages. It would not have suffocated the livelihood of tens-of-thousands. And who knows, perhaps it would have helped to create neighbors who are just a wee-bit better, the way high fences are supposed to (although one could continue to doubt its effectiveness in blocking suicide-bombers). Only the route route selected for it, the snaking, evil line that has been laid down for it by the cult of zealots holding the country by the throat and their servile footmen in the government, turns it into such a loathsome abomination.

About 200,000 people live in the immediate vicinity of the northern part of the fence. Hardly any of them have not been hurt by it. The entire town of Qalqilya, with a population of over 40,000, is hermetically sealed off. Only one gate connects it to the world. Tulkarm is cut off from the west by a wall, and from the east by closure checkpoints. 18 villages, with all their inhabitants, are completely surrounded with barbed-wire fences. Their residents live in a genuine pen. 3,000 families (at least) have already been separated from their lands. The "farming gates" which they were promised – do not exist.

About 25 wells have been destroyed, another 14 face destruction. 36 other wells have been separated from the communities that used their water. These wells would yield 6.7 million cubic meters of water.

The entire system, consisting of double razor-wire coils on both sides, an "intrusion tracking path", a lurking path, a petting path, an obstacle-ditch and watchtowers, is at least 50 meters wide. It runs through 15,000 dunams of confiscated land, and the route assures another 120,000-150,000 dunams that have suddenly attached themselves to the State of Israel, separate from the West Bank.

Annexation? God forbid. Why annex when you can simply snatch?

The Tulkarm-Jenin-Qalqilya region is the "fertile basin" of the West Bank. About 45% of its farm produce used to be grown there, according to the World Bank. No longer. At least half of this produce, perhaps much more, will not grow there now. Tomatoes have a hard time growing among fences and soldiers, checkpoints and non-existent gates.

About 4,000 of Qalqilya's residents, nearly 10% of its population, have already left. Hunger and unemployment have done their job, as expected. About one-third of the 1,800 teachers living in this besieged city and teaching throughout the region, are not likely to be able to reach their classrooms (this too, follows World Bank data).

About 200 houses, mostly shops, have been demolished by bulldozers. Several hundred more have demolition orders pending. The entire market of the village Nazlat Issa, known far and wide for its lively trade, has been razed to the ground. The pretext, as usual, is illegal construction. This is a highly useful pretext, since the Palestinian villagers have not a chance in a million to ever receive construction permits, and whatever they build is "illegal" and demolishable at any given moment, to begin with.

So far, about 110,000 olive and fruit trees have been uprooted along the northern path of the fence. One-hundred and ten thousand! For centuries olive trees have grown there, yielded fruit and livelihood for their harvesters. No longer. The separation fence has separated them from their land. One-hundred and ten thousand trees.

And this is just the tip. And only the beginning.

In the Jerusalem area, the fence has gone completely haywire. According to the planned route, it will cut villages and communities in half, separate students from their schools, congregations from their mosques, village residents from their own cemetery. Half a neighborhood will be cut off from the east, its other half cut off from the west, and both cut off from each other. As though some blind Parkinson-stricken sadist has drafted this route.

Yet what is the logic of such an evil, mad fence? Allegedly it tries to separate "us" from "them". But in reality, it connects tens of thousands of Palestinians to Israel. It allegedly tries to stop murderous suicide-bombers, but in fact it creates for them a magnificent hothouse and does not impede them in any way from their current mode of action.

And to what purpose are billions of shekels, 3 billion so far (nearly three times the price of a fair and reasonable fence), spent – all dedicated to ruin the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinians, to crush their dignity, destroy their property, dispossess them of their land?

Tragically, this is probably the idea. This is the secret of the wall: not security, nothing like it. Not war against terrorism, war against reason. A slow-motion nakba (catastrophe, the 1948 Palestinian expulsion, tr.). Gradual strangulation. An evil illusion that an entire people can be made to surrender and become a nation of slaves, to make Sharon and Mofaz' wet-dream come true.

In this week's paper (Akiva Eldar, Ha'aretz 28.10.03), we read that the first villagers living on the eastern part of the "separation fence" have received demolition orders for most of the houses in their village. The mosque and kindergarten are to be demolished as well. Of course they may appeal within three days, but they better have the moving trucks ready. For the first time one can establish with amazement that the nightmare is indeed coming true: an eastern fence that will turn the future State of Israel into the past South Africa. A mono-ethnic community in control, and surrounding townships of another people. Gigantic prisons of cheap labor. Soweto-south, Soweto-north. Privileged masters, transparent slaves.

That's the target. That's the objective.

But such an objective is hard to market. Even Israel's indifferent and exhausted people would start to bubble if it were told outright the billions of its shekels are not invested in its security, but rather in fulfilling the impossible hallucination of a Messianic cult and an aging general. No wonder, then, that a combination of deceit and subterfuge is doing its best to camouflage the real reason and rhyme of the "separation fence".

It seems that since the days of the war in Lebanon, no one has tried to sell Israel's citizens such a lie. Seeming "security", seeming "war on terrorism", seeming limited tactical objective, seeming general accord between coalition and opposition. In fact – another attempt to reorganize the world according to Arik Sharon. Another attempt to hide behind ambiguity, blurred maps, snaky deals and endless doses of brutality, in order to do away with the Palestinian issue and extend the longevity of the "settlement mission" at any price. Total deja-vu.

The Comic relief of the blurring efforts is supplied by the web site of "The Seamzone Administration". It instructs us that the entire project has been conducted in a "humanitarian and environment-friendly spirit". Landscape architects have joined the team and utmost attempts have been made to protect nature and vegetation. Indeed 60,000 olive trees have been uprooted, (in fact, that is about half the real number), but "an inner mechanism has been set up to replant them in appropriate sites". "Inner mechanism" indeed: an external contractor received money for the uprooting job, then most of the trees were stolen and sold to the rich and nobles of Kfarshemaryahu, Hertzliya-Pituach and other posh Israeli communities. The trees certainly enjoyed their upgraded residence.

And when bulldozers crushed tens of thousands of dunams and destroyed entire groves, "The Seamzone Administration" did not fail to delicately pick some thousands of iris bulbs and send them (in an ambulance?) to another meadow, so that the beauty of the land shall not be spoilt.

But the most instructive and explicit of messages is the section in the English version of the site, proudly declaring that this land expropriation is absolutely legal and conducted according to clause 23G of the Hague Convention that has laid down rules and procedures of war since 1907. The world will surely be delighted to learn that Israel is so meticulous about war procedures. In the Hebrew version there is no lingering on such folly. War procedures and international conventions are worthless to Hebrew speakers. And the clause, according to the site, allows the seizure of "private land" if this seizure be absolutely crucial for "self defense needs".

I, however, am a suspicious creature. So I turned to the Hague Convention, and to my great un-surprise, discovered that the legal wisemen of "The Seamzone Administration" did to this clause what they do so well with Palestinian property: they fixed it with a bulldozer. To be more exact – they simply falsified it. The clause does not refer to land, certainly not private, and does not even mention "self defense". It only says that enemy property must not be seized or destroyed unless this is absolutely necessary for the needs of war. This is also the clause that forbids the use of poison, execution of war prisoners, the use of outlawed ammunition, and other such matters that regard conduct in the storm of war. Perhaps it permits the crushing of an old car in the kasbah, when there is no other way to get to the target, or temporarily take over a balcony and turn it into an observation post. But to conclude from this clause that hundreds of thousands of dunams may be expropriated, probably permanently, for the needs of "self defense"... For this a special capacity for historic counterfeit and legalistic trickery is required.

And the extent of truth in this section mirrors that of the entire site and the entire fence.

Many politicians, some innocents, others cynics, have lustily fallen into the "security" trap laid down for them. And every time some bulldozer stalls for a moment, they quickly raise a bitter cry over "neglecting security". Many figures in the media, too, gladly and dedicatedly chew this tale, and share their cud with their audience. Most of them have always been inclined to lose professional and public consciousness upon hearing the word "security".

But they all may finally have to understand. One cannot go on looking away, shutting eyes, ears, mouths, and wallowing hypocritically in acquired and insistent unknowing. Because the State of Israel, on the other side of its eastern border, is conducting a harrowing sequence of evil deeds, callous deeds, robbery, deceit and barbarity. According to the Geneva, Hague and Rome Conventions many of these deserve the label of Crimes of War and Crimes against Humanity. And rightly so.