

The Seventh Generation

"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

-From the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy

Gaza and the Green Zone: *Urban Apartheid and Occupied Territories*

by TOM ANGOTTI

City planning and military strategy are indistinguishable in the occupied territories of Palestine and Iraq, where together they rob Palestinians and Iraqis of basic human rights and freedoms. Yet city planners in the United States, the nation that provides financial and military support for this ugly urban apartheid, are mostly silent about the abuse of both professional ethics and human rights.

Gaza is the ghetto and Baghdad's Green Zone is the gold coast in a Middle East that is being reshaped by a new mixture of global capitalism and military power. They are the extreme cases of sheltered enclaves, surrounded by walls, military checkpoints and exclusive highways. But the imposing fortifications around Gaza make it a dreadful urban prison while the Green Zone is somewhat of a country club.

Gaza: The City As Prison

Gaza is a tiny strip of land on the Mediterranean with 1.5 million people, one of the densest human settlements in the world. The majority of its population has lived in refugee camps since 1948. United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights John Dugard calls Gaza a prison. All roads and commerce in and out of Gaza are blocked by the Israeli military. Israel's economic blockade has resulted in an unemployment rate of 40%, while 80% of the population relies on food aid. While the Israeli military withdrew from Gaza in 2005 along with the few Israeli settlements there, since the abduction of an Israeli soldier in June 2006 Israeli tanks, helicopters and missiles have repeatedly entered in reprisal for sporadic rocket attacks against

Israeli towns, most of which cause mild damage. Israeli warplanes destroyed Gaza's main power plant and sewage treatment plant, creating a critical public health crisis. Many of Israel's European allies have denounced the Israeli siege and economic blockade as disproportionate responses to the threats against Israel's security. The Israeli human rights group B'tselem states that over four years 13 Israelis were killed by rockets while in only the last two years over 1,000 Palestinians died, almost half of them civilians. B'tselem claims that withdrawal of the military from Gaza did not mean a fundamental change in the occupation because Israel maintains "effective control" of Gaza. Many groups consider this to be collective punishment or ethnic cleansing in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel's vindictive policy against the civilian population is summed up in a wry statement by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert: "We will not allow them to lead a pleasant life."

The anger of Gazans boiled over in January of this year when protesters broke down the barriers at the Rafah crossing to Egypt and hundreds of thousands rushed over the border to secure food and other necessities. This forced an easing of the Israeli siege and has led to promises by Israel that some border checkpoints would be lifted.

Will Gaza Be The First Bantustan?

The siege of Gaza is bad enough in itself, but it appears to be Israel's test case for a two-state solution that would produce a string of Palestinian urban prisons with the formal trappings [Cont. on page 15]

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a sovereign state. While Palestinian negotiators following the U.S. “road map” to peace have in mind a sovereign state with towns and cities in the West Bank and Gaza that are connected to each other, Israeli policy has produced “facts on the ground” that would make these connections impossible. Israel already has 580 military checkpoints in the occupied territories that make movement from one town to another, and within some towns, an ordeal. Israeli settlers, on the other hand, move about the occupied territories on an exclusive highway system.

Land use and building regulations administered by Israel, and the wall built around the occupied territories, are instruments that came out of the urban planner’s toolkit for the creation of apartheid regimes. Land use and building codes create obstacles for Palestinian residents to build and

rebuild, and are a pretext for Israeli confiscation of Palestinian land. According to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), between 1967 and 2006, Israel has demolished 13,147 Palestinian homes. Israel continues to build the giant Separation Wall, most of it on land that belongs to the Palestinians. The wall separates Israel and the West Bank in a way that produces significant advantages to Israel, including 85% of the territory and most of the water supply in the West Bank.

ICAHD’s Jeff Halper believes that Israel is moving towards the “cantonization” of the occupied territories, which would mean three isolated and self-contained enclaves in the West Bank and one in Gaza, all of them completely dependent on Israel for their sustenance and subject to periodic military incursions. According to Halper, “The problem in the

Middle East is not the Palestinian people, not Hamas, not the Arabs, not Hezbollah or the Iranians or the entire Muslim world. It’s us, the Israelis. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the single greatest cause of instability, extremism and violence in our region, is perhaps the simplest conflict in the world to resolve. For almost 20 years, since the PLO’s recognition of Israel within the 1949 Armistice Lines (the “Green Line” separating Israel from the West Bank and Gaza), every Palestinian leader, backed by large majorities of the Palestinian population, has presented Israel with a most generous offer: A Jewish state on 78% of Israel/Palestine in return for a Palestinian state on just 22% – the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.”

The intransigence of Israel and its policies of apartheid have been met with acquiescence by the U.S. Planners in the U.S., even many ⇨

RIGHT: *Palestinians stand inside their home in the Jabalya refugee camp, damaged recently during an Israeli incursion and airstrikes which left about 115 Palestinians dead in Gaza over five days*



Wissam Nasar/IRIN

who opposed the uprooting of viable communities by the federal urban renewal program in the 1960s, have also failed to raise their voices against the use of U.S. aid to support these policies. Therefore, it is important that Planners Network members revive the call we made at our 2004 conference to build bridges and not insurmountable walls. One way of doing this is to support the courageous work of ICAHD (for more information go to www.icahdusa.org).

The Green Zone: Gated Community and Imperial Bunker

As if following the model of the illegal Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory, the U.S. set up its own luxurious enclave in Baghdad. After the 2003 invasion by the U.S., the Green Zone became a luxurious oasis of peace in a country that the U.S. military proceeded to devastate over a five-year period. This miniature Disneyworld is a slice of Northamerican life, a few square miles of quiet office buildings, shopping and night life, while the rest of the city goes without power and safe drinking water much of the time. Tightly protected by high concrete walls and military checkpoints, this modern version of an imperial city is the command center for an occupation that has destroyed the fabric and infrastructure of a modern Arab nation, resulting in the deaths of over 100,000 Iraqis and two million refugees. It has been referred to as “the bubble,” more Midwest than Mideast. It is home for the largest U.S. Embassy staff in the world, and a new embassy building now under construction will be a giant

fortified bunker, the largest in the world. It will have 21 buildings, its own power, water and waste water facilities, a gym, cinema and swimming pool.

There were urban planners in the U.S. who thought that working on rebuilding projects in places like Iraq could make a small contribution to a change in U.S. priorities. But the evidence is all too clear that reconstruction funds made contractors rich and Iraq’s urban infrastructure is still worse than it was a half decade ago. And it is impossible to engage in any open, transparent and democratic planning process as long as you’re part of an occupying force with the most powerful military in the world, a force that is on display every day on the streets and in the air.

In the U.S. long-term strategic plan for Iraq, the Green Zone is to be the political and administrative center for a permanent occupation, eerily similar to Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories. Despite criticisms from a minority in Congress, the U.S. is preparing to stay by hunkering down on 14 “enduring bases” throughout the country. While the bases would play a strategic role in maintaining U.S. power in the Middle East, replacing some of the bases in Saudi Arabia, they would also allow for the continuing sorties that have destroyed the fabric of towns and cities such as Fallujah throughout the country. City planners should be outraged that the military has built entire Northamerican cities in the Middle Eastern deserts – with Burger Kings and Pizza Huts, shopping centers, hospitals,

miniature golf courses, and distinct neighborhoods – behind walls that shelter its residents from the rage caused by the utter destruction of Iraqi urban life.

But the grass may not be so green in the imperial command posts. Rockets and mortars have now reached Baghdad’s Green Zone. Reports are there are squatters and perhaps 5,000 poor Iraqis hanging on there, according to *Time Magazine*. The Iraqi government may change and maybe, just maybe, a new administration in the U.S. will not only get out of Iraq but stop supporting apartheid throughout the Middle East and the world. Progressive planners should continue to demand it.



Gentrification, Social Struggles and Academic Freedom

When professors and students adopt a friendly and supportive attitude towards urban social movements struggling to come to grips with gentrification and displacement resulting from speculative real estate markets and pliant local governments, they sometimes face risks themselves. They are considered to be on the fringe, not serious, too radical and too “political.” This is especially true when the urban movements are militant in their resistance – for example, the Black Panthers and Young Lords in the 1960s. Research that engages urban social movements that challenge local and national centers of economic and political power is rarely funded, and foundations never anoint them with accolades for being “best practices.”