The Wall in Jerusalem and Bethlehem

Construction for the Wall in Jerusalem—both north and south—has already begun and in many places is nearing completion, taking place at the northern and southern extremities of the Jerusalem municipal border, the expansionist border set-up by the Israeli government as part of its plans for the establishment—and unending expansion of “Greater Jerusalem.”
The northern Wall, which began in August of 2002, some two months after the commencement of the Wall’s northern “first phase,” is being built alongside the Qalandiya checkpoint. Construction for the Wall is taking place in Rafat and Kufr Aqab, where both the Wall and the groundwork for the Wall are highly visible today (see case study on Rafat).

In the case of the northern Jerusalem Wall, Israel is staying true to its policy of “more land less people.” The actual path of the Wall is a winding path that ensures total proximity to the residential areas, confiscating lands while isolating communities just “behind” the Wall. The Wall in this area will be 40-100 meters wide, with paths for military vehicles, sensors, watchtowers, and additional buffer zones.

The northern Jerusalem Wall spreads on the lands of the northern villages of A-Ram (Khalet A-Sheik), Qalandiya, Kufr Aqab, Al-Bira (Rafat Al-Maysun) and Rafat. It will be, in this area alone, some 8 kilometers in length, stealing 800 dunums of land, 500 which will be isolated behind the Wall and another 300 which will be in the Wall’s “buffer zone” (see map).

Legal actions taken by residents of various communities, such as Kufr Aqab and Rafat, have consistently resulted in the same and clearly complicit role of the Israeli courts, stating that the Wall in these areas—including the land confiscation and threat of demolitions—are justified under the name of “security.”

The northern Jerusalem Wall is isolating 15,000 Jerusalem ID holders living in Kufr Aqab and Qalandiya Refugee Camp from the city, their familial and social ties, and public services. The northern Wall will also bring to the de facto annexation, i.e. further isolation, of Qalandiya village, Judeira, Bir Nabala and A-Ram.

On April 24, 2003, Al Quds newspaper reported that continued construction for the Wall is taking place in northern Jerusalem, while the path of the Wall expands. Confirmed by the A-Ram village council, the construction of the Wall between Dahiat Al Barid and the settlement of Neve Ya’akov, will be linked to the Wall currently nearing completion around Qalandiya.
There are contradictory indications of a plan to build an eastern Wall. The current map of the West Bank clearly indicates that Israel is looking to further divide the West Bank into a northern and southern portion, further inside the West Bank, and within them numerous cantons. Continued colonial expansion connecting Jerusalem settlements to Ma’ale Adumim and the Jordan Valley are taking place, perhaps indicating that the Wall will not completely encircle East Jerusalem.

The newspaper reported that work for the Wall began at the end of April in Al ‘Izzariye and the Mount of Olives as well as in the Ma’ale Adumim. In the case of the settlement, it may reflect yet another face of the walls being built, those that will surround settlements and, with a wide distance between the settlement and the wall, de facto annex lands and expand the settlement areas.

Israel will continue its illegal control of East Jerusalem, deny those east of its municipal border, like the rest of the West Bank, their legal and human rights, while expanding its colonial project eastwards unabated. Settlements like the massive Ma’ale Adumim and beyond continue to grow and Israeli control of the central West Bank until the Jordan Valley remains. The West Bank is guaranteed to be cut into a southern and northern portion.

Notwithstanding the Wall itself, concrete walls can now be found in Kubsa Checkpoint in Abu Dis, as well as on the Atarot settlement by-pass road, and in the Gilo settlement.
The Bethlehem Wall is a minimum 15-kilometer shackle that will consist of fences (including electric), buffer zones, trenches, barbed wires, sensors, as well as an 8-10 meter-high Wall. Most of the Wall in this area will be layers of fences surrounding the northern part of the city, and will include between the fences a major bypass road connecting the settlements in the area. The Bethlehem Wall is annexing entire communities, religious/historical sites, and large tracts of land. A concretization of the illegal annexation of Jerusalem and the continued expansion of the borders of Israel’s “Greater Jerusalem,” this portion of the Wall will affect tens of thousands of people. The view from the center of Bethlehem, where closure and incursions have been constant the past two years, overlooks the winding, razed path that further seals the fate of the entire area.

The Wall around Rachel’s Tomb/Bilal Ibn Rabah, which has received some attention, represents a fraction of the Wall that is already surrounding the northern Bethlehem area. From Beit Jala to Beit Sahour, the 15 km electric fence-road with an approximate 100 meter buffer zone will connect Road 60/Gilo Settlement with the Har Homa settlement, while extending further to seal the Jerusalem Ring Road of bypasses and networks. As of April 2003, most of the Wall’s path in the area had been demarcated through the razing of land while the bypass in its current form is already being used by the military and settlers.
The Wall in Jerusalem and Bethlehem
The second portion of the Wall/bypass road is an offshoot of the first Wall. It extends from two portions of the first Wall that converge and completely encircle the area around Rachel’s Tomb. (See map). The new checkpoint for Bethlehem will be some 200 meters further south from the current checkpoint. This area will be a combination of wall, fences, and road and will isolate tens of homes, shops and a church and waqf property into a no-man’s land more akin to a ghetto.

The Bethlehem Wall with its length of 15 km is segregating more than 15,000 dunums of Palestinian agricultural lands planted mostly with olive trees and belonging to Palestinian citizens living in Bethlehem area. The Wall in Rachel’s Tomb area will confiscate for the footprint and buffer zone some 18 dunums of land while isolating “behind” the Wall some 3,000 dunums. Since 1967, more than 14 thousands dunums have been confiscated due to the establishment and expansion of Israeli/Jewish settlements located at the northern portions of Bethlehem. The Wall is therefore a doubling of the (de facto) confiscation of all of Bethlehem’s lands since the start of the Occupation.

For both portions of the Wall, dozens of houses are expected to be demolished and thousands of dunums confiscated. Confiscations have already begun; military orders have already been given.

Over 170,000 Palestinians live in the Bethlehem District, where the majority live in the three main cities of Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala as well as in the surrounding villages and refugee camps. Approximately 16,000 people live in the Bethlehem refugee camps of Deheisheh, Aida, and Beit Jibrin (Aza) while 70,000 out of the 170,000 live in the surrounding villages. The Wall will affect the entire area as a final seal in the iron grip of the Bethlehem District from the north.
The Northern Bethlehem/ Southern Jerusalem Wall extending from Beit Sahour to Beit Jala has reached frighteningly advanced stages as of April 2003, though land razing and paving for the Wall have been taking place since 2002. In portions of it near Beit Sahour, paving for the bypass road seems near completion, while electric fences and fenced in buffer zones are already appearing.

As the Bethlehem Wall looks to seal the fate of the area and expand the Jerusalem Municipal control of Palestinian lands, a number of communities in the area will be on the “Jerusalem side” of the Wall. Beside the 500+ people that will be isolated behind the Wall around Rachel’s Tomb, close to 4,000 people from Bir ‘Ona (southwest Beit Jala), 8,000 in Western Ta’amreh (No’man and Al Khas), and some 3,500 in Al Walajeh will find themselves isolated. In Western Ta’amreh, construction of the Wall has already caused damage to the water network, now there is no water. Their fate is similar to those in the Wall’s first phase that will be between the Wall and the Green Line. The far-reaching hands of the Jerusalem
Municipality and the Israeli military and government have already rendered these areas sealed off to both Bethlehem and Jerusalem since the 1993 closure policy and the extended closures and siege of the past two years. The wall-fence-road further isolates these communities from the city, from public services, from mobility and survival. These areas are to be annexed, but the fate of the people living in them is unsure, while the prospects are frightening.

The area of Jabal Al Dik in Beit Sahour has been severely targeted for the Wall. A number of homes have already received military orders of annexation and have been demanded by the government to re-apply for permission for their homes. As many are located in the Wall’s buffer zone, demolitions seem highly likely, including for the Greek Orthodox Housing Complex in this same area already received demolition orders in September 2002. The Complex houses 120 families who will be rendered homeless. Legal actions through the Israeli/Occupation courts have brought no relief. In this area, for the path of the wall-fence-road alone, hundreds of olive and apricot trees have already been uprooted.

Some 500 dunums of Palestinian land belonging to some 65 families from Beit Sahour have already been confiscated. Thirty houses located on Jabal Al Dik between the Har Homa (Jabal Abu Ghneim) settlement and Beit Sahour are threatened with demolition. These houses are within the planned buffer zone.

This, the longest portion of the Bethlehem Wall, will also be a road and a major link in Road 5, also known as the Jerusalem Ring Road, connecting two major bypass roads in the east and west of Bethlehem that lead to the southern West Bank settlements, and connecting the southern West Bank settlements to Jerusalem, the northern Jerusalem settlements and the rest of the northern West Bank settlements with the Israeli network of roads. The Wall will therefore also be a long stretch of road to facilitate the travel and growth of the settlements surrounding Bethlehem and beyond.

The mayor of Beit Sahour, Mr. Fu’ad Kokali, confirms that the Bethlehem Wall draws the new boarders of Greater Jerusalem in order to isolate Palestinian residential blocks from Israeli settlements linked to Jerusalem. According to him, Israel is drawing the map of the Palestinian state according to its vision, while further suffocating the entire district.

Izzat Mosleh (Abu Reyad) a 65 year-old man working as a craftsman, is one of Jabal Al Dik’s residents who received a house demolition order during September 2002. Although Abu Reyad, like many others who have received such orders in the same area, built their homes years prior, such orders began to appear in the area once plans for the Wall surfaced. In the demolition order it is highlighted that, being in area C, no building can take place without Israeli permission. The ownership of land or that it is Palestinian territory, or the fact that Abu Reyad went through all the necessary paper work with the Beit Sahour Municipality is deemed nonexistent.
The Wall around Rachel’s Tomb: History and Heritage; Communities and Refugees Suffocated by Massive Concrete

The Wall around Rachel’s Tomb/Bilal Ibn Rabah Mosque will affect hundreds who will be isolated between two walls, will confiscate lands, and further Israeli control of Palestinian lands and historic, religious and deep-rooted sites.

On September 11, 2002, Israel’s Security Cabinet approved keeping Rachel’s Tomb behind the Wall, as part of the advancing—or so-called “new”—separation zone, part of the “Jerusalem security envelope.” On February 9, 2003, Moshe Kaplenski, Chief Commander of the Israeli military in “Judea and Samaria” (West Bank), issued a military order (number 03/14/T Judea & Samaria 2003) to seize land in the north of Bethlehem to construct the Wall that will enclose and annex the Rachel’s Tomb vicinity to Jerusalem. The map that the military made publicly available and was later received by the area residents shows that 18 dunums will be seized and confiscated, but Israel will actually segregate around 3,000 dunums of land behind the Wall. Kaplenski detailed in the order the parcels of land that are to be seized, with no explanation other than “military reasons.” He also declared that the Israeli military has “absolute control over it.”

On February 16, 2003, the military distributed to the residents the above military orders that confirmed for the community and for Bethlehem the plan to strangulate the city by confiscating its northern entrance and annexing it to Israel. This order threatens 40 residential buildings that house some 500 people, a small industrial complex, a gas station, and commercial shops. Soldiers in the area have told the residents that they will have to pass a checkpoint in order to enter into Bethlehem.

As of April 2003, a portion of the Wall around Rachel’s Tomb was evident in the form of land razing and paving for a portion of the road that will connect with the larger road/bypass surrounding the city. This portion alone is some 1 km in length and 20 meters wide. This portion of the road is not complete and the buildings in the vicinity fear upcoming demolitions. The area surrounding the Tomb is already partially fortified but continued fortification through the Wall and the completion of the road have yet to be undertaken. The road in this area is expected to be surrounded by an 8-10 meter high wall.

This portion of the Wall, being built just south of the current Northern Bethlehem/Tantur checkpoint past Rachel’s Tomb, will be like the Wall in Qalqiliya in its massive structure, while guaranteeing Israel’s annexation of the holy site. Access to the Muslim cemetery adjacent to the Tomb will be denied. Affected by this wall will also be the Aida Refugee Camp (see Aida Refugee Camp Case Study).

The significance of Rachel’s Tomb is cultural, religious and economic. A holy site for the local Christian and Muslim communities, the Tomb has a long history far preceding the existence of the Jewish state. The significance of the site also ties into Bethlehem’s commercial role in tourism, furthering the Israeli grip over important locations. In the past two years, the Tomb has been limited, by the Israeli military and government, to Jewish visitors only. The tomb has also been turned into a military camp. It is therefore no surprise that many in Bethlehem predict that part of the Tomb and the isolated areas will be turned into a Jewish religious school, a “prime” location for a settlement.
The fate of the 500 people that will be behind this portion of the Wall, or better said between the two walls, is alarming. Though once again propagating claims that permits will allow for travel between areas, the experience of the past ten years, lived by 3,000,000 non-permit holders, confirms that such a guarantee is baseless. The people living in these areas are an integral part of Bethlehem, whether for work, school, familial and social ties, or some semblance of mobility. They are also dependant upon the Bethlehem Municipality for services that will no longer be reachable behind Israel’s Wall. There is little doubt by those living in this area that they will have no choice but to leave their homes, or face starvation within this ghetto.
The Confiscation of the Mayor’s Lands

Hanna Nasser, Mayor of Bethlehem, and his family are one of some 10 families whose lands will be confiscated to build this portion of the Bethlehem Wall. Mr. Nasser states that, without any other options, those receiving orders filed suit in Israeli courts during February 2003 in an attempt to stop the military orders that isolate Bethlehem from Jerusalem through the Wall’s construction. At the same time, he and others appealed to all the churches and embassies to stop this Israeli measures against their land and property. Additional attempts have also been made to invite and mobilize Israeli peace groups to demonstrate with them against the new/old Israeli discriminatory policy.

As of yet, there are no signs that the Wall in the entrance to Bethlehem will not be built. As Hanna Nasser confirms, the aim of constructing the wall/ fence is to separate Jerusalem (east and west) from the Bethlehem district, “They will secure their dream of Greater Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel.”

Bethlehem since the Intifada, and since Oslo

Since the breakout of the Intifada, which started in September 2000, Bethlehem district as the other Palestinian communities has been subjected to heavy siege and closure as daily measures imposed by the Israeli military. Such closure and the repeated reoccupation of Bethlehem have severely affected the Bethlehem area communities in loss of lives and livelihoods. The Israeli closure on Bethlehem, which has remained since 1993 and worsened in the past two years, has ensured, among other things that the major source of income in the city—tourism—would be controlled by an Israeli market, with little benefit for Palestinians. The story goes that when there were tourists, even the bottled water would be brought from Israel. The water, of course, was most often West Bank or Golan Heights water. The majority of Bethlehem residents are relying for their main income resources on tourism. Some 60% of Bethlehem’s economy is based on tourism, while with no tourists and endless military incursions, it is now at 0%.

Bethlehem section sources: Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ); Alternative Information Center, “Will Bethlehem annexations lead to Hebron like H1/H2 disaster situation?”; Interview with Ahmad Jaradat-Alternative Information Center; Interview with Hanna Nasser, Bethlehem Mayor; Interview with Fu’ad Kokali, Beit Sahour Mayor; Al Quds Newspaper.
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