

The Matrix of Control¹

The matrix which Israel uses to control the lives of Palestinians can be pictured as a vast net covering the occupied territories. The matrix consists of five interlocking elements:

- **physical “facts on the ground”;**
- **discriminatory laws and bureaucratic policies;**
- **economic de-development;**
- **military controls and military strikes; and**
- **imprisonment and torture**

Some of the strands of the net might appear benign, but in real life they perform like razor wire. When Palestinians brush up against almost any strand of the net, they are humiliated, wounded, arrested, and tortured or killed.

The Matrix of Control in Gaza includes a near-total blockade-siege (B'Tselem, the highly respected Israeli human rights organization, calls it the biggest open-air prison in the world) of 1.5 million Palestinians who have no access by land, sea, or air to the outside world. Since the election of Hamas in 2006 Israel has choked off supplies of food, water, fuel, medicines and medical supplies, and many other necessities. Even before Israel's 2008-2009 war on Gaza the humanitarian crisis had led to the death of many of the most vulnerable.

The physical facts on the ground in the West Bank include

- 1) 250 illegal Israeli colonies constructed on confiscated land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem with a Jewish settler population of almost half a million;²
- 2) a massive “separation barrier” that chops the West Bank into isolated enclaves and which, when completed, will measure 450 miles (twice the length of the Green Line) and annex to Israel almost half of the West Bank;
- 3) an infrastructure of Israeli roads and highways that crisscross the West Bank but are off limits to Palestinians and separate them from their fields, their schools, their hospitals, and one another;
- 4) a grid of over 600 permanent checkpoints, “flying checkpoints,”³ and roadblocks on Palestinian roads that restrict freedom of movement and have devastated the Palestinian economy; and
- 5) Israeli control over the major Palestinian aquifers and other vital natural resources.

¹ “Matrix of Control” is the term Israeli anthropologist Jeff Halper uses to describe the system Israel uses to imprison, impoverish, and humiliate every Palestinian who lives in the occupied territories. See Halper's *Obstacles to Peace* (2007), Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, 12-20, and *An Israeli in Palestine: Resisting Dispossession, Redeeming Israel* (2008), Pluto Press, 141-174.

² Halper (2008) 161; B'Tselem, *2008 Annual Report*, “Human Rights in the Occupied Territories,” 15.

³ “Flying checkpoints” are those set up on an ad hoc basis and may be here today and gone tomorrow.

Discriminatory laws and bureaucratic policies include military orders and administrative measures regarding IDs, travel permits, land ownership and usage, zoning, building construction, access to one's own farm land, as well as policies of house demolitions, planting and harvesting restrictions, and family separation designed to displace and "transfer" Palestinians to other countries.

Economic de-development includes barring Palestinians from working in Israel; restrictions on Palestinian financial and credit institutions; the economic blockade of Gaza since 2007; the confiscation of taxes due to Palestinian authorities; economic closure of the West Bank via control of imports and exports, thus making the Palestinian market a captive to Israeli products; and the destruction of Palestinian infrastructure like the Port of Gaza and the Gaza airstrip.⁴

Military controls and military strikes include targeted assassinations, mass arrests and administrative detention for months or years without charges or trial, torture of prisoners, the use of Palestinian collaborators through threats, extortion and "incentives," as well as large-scale attacks on civilian populations such as the 2008-2009 war on Gaza and the 2002 Operation Defensive Shield in which every Palestinian urban center was bombarded from the air and invaded on the ground by the full force of Israel's military prowess.

Imprisonment and Torture

Incarceration in Israeli prisons is a common experience for Palestinians. Since 1967 about 40% of today's entire male Palestinian population has been imprisoned.⁵ Despite a 1999 High Court order prohibiting the use of physical abuse, arresting officers often "soften up" detainees prior to handing them over to the Israeli Security Agency for interrogation with torture or the threat of torture.⁶ The most graphic example is the order of Yitzhak Rabin, Minister of Defense during the first Intifada (1987-1993). Rabin commanded the military to break the bones of Palestinians caught resisting the Occupation. Many a Palestinian youth was maimed for life for throwing a stone or writing a slogan on a wall during curfew.⁷

⁴ Professor Sara Roy of Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies has worked in the Gaza Strip and West Bank since 1985 conducting research primarily on the economic, social, and political development of the Gaza Strip and on US foreign aid to the region. Her book, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Pluto Press, 2007) documents this process of de-development.

⁵ Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out*, Norton & Co., 2008, 79.

⁶ *Absolute Prohibition: The Torture and Ill-treatment of Palestinian Detainees*, HaMoked[?] Center for the Defense of the Individual, May 2007.

⁷ *Occupation 101* (2007), an award-winning film BY Sufyan and Abdallah Omeish and available on DVD and at www.MYSPACE.COM/OCCUPATION101 depicts these scenes of maiming. See also www.hanini.org/thebonebreakers.html. Presbyterian volunteers from the San Francisco Bay Area who planted olive trees in the Bethlehem area in February 2008 met one of these victims whose ankle was broken by soldiers during that era.

Israel arrested 40,000 Palestinians during the second intifada (2000-2006) and still holds almost 10,000.⁸ Of these, about 550 are “administrative detainees” who can be detained for 6 months, released, and then rearrested, without charges or trial. Almost three quarters of these have been held in administrative detention at least twice; some have been held in this legal limbo for five years.⁹

Conclusion

Jeff Halper draws two conclusions: the “Matrix of Control is intended to perpetuate Israeli control forever.” “The Palestinians...now have no hope of a viable state of their own. The Iron Wall (the doctrine of dispossession proposed in 1923 by the Zionist leader Vladimir Ze’ev Jabotinsky) has prevailed.”¹⁰ These fact sheets are designed to provide an overview of this Matrix of Control with the hope that Halper is wrong, that a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians is still possible, and that American Presbyterians have a peacemaking opportunity and responsibility in this Land we all call Holy.

Additional Resources: Human Rights and Peace & Justice Organizations

Israeli: www.batshalom.org, www.breakingthesilence.org, www.btselem.org, www.coalitionofwomen.org, www.gush-shalom.org, www.icahd.org, www.rhr.israel.net; www.stoptorture.org.il .

Palestinian: www.addameer.org, www.alhaq.org, www.arij.org, www.arabhra.org, www.imemc.org; www.palsolidarity.org; www.mitfah.org; www.passia.org. www.pchrgaza.org, www.sabeel.org .

⁸ Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out*, Norton, 2008, 167.

⁹ 2008 Annual Report, B'Tselem, 13.

¹⁰ Halper (2008), 145, 174.