

FACTSHEET

7 MYTHS ABOUT

ISRAEL'S 'SEPARATION WALL'

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Cover: A picture showing a side of the Israeli separation wall around Jerusalem
[Apaimages]

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7 myths about Israel's 'Separation Wall'

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7 myths about Israel's 'Separation Wall'

In 2002, Israel decided to build the so-called Separation Wall. By 2003, it had already [constructed](#) 143 kilometres of the colossal structure, most of which cut deep into the West Bank, the Palestinian territory that Israel has occupied since the Six Day War of [1967](#). Its route through occupied West Bank territory means that the Wall [infringes](#) directly on the rights and lives of 210,000 Palestinians residing in 67 villages, towns and cities.

In the 16 years since construction began, the lives of almost [three million](#) Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem have been transformed almost beyond recognition. Military checkpoints are now a part of people's daily routine. The Wall cuts Palestinians off from their land; Jerusalemites are separated from family members in the West Bank; ambulances and patients cannot reach hospitals; and babies are born in the street.

Despite all of this, myths abound about the Separation Wall that minimise its impact on Palestinians and paint it as just one aspect of an allegedly "benign occupation". Sections of it have become spectacles, daubed with street art and marketed as a tourist attraction. The language of "security" is frequently employed to justify its existence.

Here are just seven of the most common myths about Israel's Separation Wall and the reality they conceal.

1. It follows the Green Line

It is a common conception that the Separation Wall follows the Green Line, the armistice line drawn between Israel and Jordan after the [1948 War](#). However, the Wall actually runs more or less well inside the occupied West Bank. According to Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, "Eighty-five per cent



A picture showing a side of the Israeli separation wall around Jerusalem on 9 July 2013 [Saeed Qaq/Apaimages]

of the Wall runs inside the West Bank,” often weaving deep into Palestinian territory to capture the illegal settlements on the Israeli side of the structure.

The Separation Wall is also longer than the Green Line. [B'Tselem](#) notes that “the route of the barrier – including the sections already built, those under construction and those awaiting construction – is 712 kilometres long. That is more than twice as long as the Green Line, which is 320 kilometres long.”

A case in point is the area surrounding Khan Al-Ahmar, a Bedouin village situated east of Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank. Slated for [demolition](#) since 2011, much of the reason Israel is so keen to see the village’s 173 Jahallin Bedouins transferred forcibly to another location is to complete its [plan](#) for a contiguous belt of Israeli settlements from Jerusalem to Jericho. Khan Al-Ahmar is situated between [E1](#) — an Israeli-controlled industrial zone — and several illegal Israeli settlements such as Ma’ale Adumim and Kfar Adumim, the whole of which is [earmarked](#) to be surrounded by the Separation Wall. If Khan Al-Ahmar and the other Bedouin villages in the area are demolished, the barrier will cut yet deeper into the West Bank.



Participants run along Israel's separation wall on 31 March 2017 [Wisam Hashlamoun/Apaimages]

2. It separates Israelis from Palestinians

The declared aim of the Separation Wall was to prevent Palestinians without permits from crossing into Israel and thus boost Israeli “security” in the midst of the [Second Intifada](#). Yet while large portions of the Wall have been carefully mapped to keep as many illegal settlers as possible “inside” Israel, all the while keeping as many Palestinians as possible out, in fact the Wall often separates Palestinians from other Palestinians.

This is particularly the case in occupied Jerusalem, where several Palestinian communities within the Jerusalem Municipality are caught between the Green Line and the Wall. Isawiyeh, sometimes dubbed “Little Gaza”, is just one example. Squeezed between the barrier and the Green Line surrounding the Hebrew University (an Israeli enclave in Jerusalem since the 1948 War), Isawiyeh is often subject to curfews and the entrance to the village is closed-off by Israeli soldiers at will.

What’s more, several neighbourhoods that belong to the Jerusalem Municipality have been severed from the rest of the city by the Separation Wall. The Shu’afat refugee camp, east of Sheikh Jarrah, and Kafr ‘Aqab, near Qalandia checkpoint, are two prominent examples. [B’Tselem](#) notes that these two neighbourhoods are home to some 140,000 Palestinians who can neither enter Israel nor participate in West Bank Palestinian society. In addition, there are some 11,000 Palestinians living in 32 other communities trapped between the Separation Wall and the Green Line, which are outside the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem.

3. It’s only a fence

It is true that some parts of the Separation Wall consist of an electrified fence with paved paths, barbed wire and ditches on either side. Though this fence-style barrier is used in rural or sparsely-populated areas, Palestinians still suffer the consequences if they venture too close.

In 2013, for example, 16-year-old [Samir Awad](#) was shot in the back by Israeli soldiers outside his village of Budrus, north-west of Ramallah. Samir was playing with his friends when he climbed over a low iron fence, finding himself trapped between this and the Separation Wall. Israeli soldiers first shot him in

the knee, then as he managed to free himself and tried to flee, he was shot at close range with live ammunition.

In highly-populated areas, the Separation Wall is an eight to nine metre-high concrete wall. This concrete section of the barrier is about 70 kilometres long and encompasses major population centres such as Jerusalem and Bethlehem, as well as Qalqiliya and Tulkarem, both west of Nablus. Qalqiliya in particular is almost completely surrounded by a concrete wall, as the route snakes around the city to envelope the illegal settlements of Alfei Menashe and Zufin “inside” Israel. Two out of three of Qalqiliya’s checkpoints are [closed](#) to Palestinians.

4. It doesn’t restrict Palestinian freedom of movement

It has been argued that a number of gates have been built into the Separation Wall to minimise the impact on Palestinians’ freedom of movement and ensure they still have access to their land. [B’Tselem](#) notes that Israel did install 84 gates in the barrier but, in practice, these “are largely there for the sake of appearances, making a show of enabling life to go on undisturbed as before.”

The rights group adds that in 2016, “only nine of these gates were opened daily; ten were opened only a few days a week and during the [olive harvest](#) season; and 65 gates were only opened for the olive harvest.”

Furthermore, according to a 2014 [report](#) by Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), the Palestinians’ right to health is regularly denied by Israel’s Separation Wall. In denying Palestinians access to healthcare, MAP notes that Israel is in violation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Fourth Geneva Convention, under which it is bound as “the occupying power [which] has the duty of ensuring and maintaining [...], the medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory.”

According to MAP, in 2011 only five per cent of Palestinian Red Crescent ambulances were allowed to enter Jerusalem from the West Bank to attend the six Palestinian hospitals in the city.



Participants run along Israel's separation wall on 31 March 2017 [Wisam Hashlamoun/Apaimages]

In addition, Palestinians must obtain an individual permit to travel to hospital. MAP adds that between 2000 and 2005, 67 Palestinian women were forced to give birth at checkpoints, leading to the deaths of 36 babies and five mothers.

5. The Wall is just a case of a state protecting its borders

Israel argues that the Separation Wall was built for security reasons to stop Palestinians from entering its territory. Yet, as explained above, the fact that the Wall does not follow the Green Line means that the structure has been declared illegal under international law.

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the occupied Palestinian territories ([OCHAoPt](#)) points out that on 9 July 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an Advisory Opinion which recognised that although Israel faced "indiscriminate and deadly acts of violence" in the midst of the Second Intifada, the barrier "violates Israel's obligations under international law and should be dismantled."

On the tenth anniversary of the ICJ's decision, in 2014, the then-UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon [said](#) that “the implications of the wall go far beyond its legality” and that “the wall severely restricts Palestinian movement and access throughout the West Bank, cuts off land and access to resources needed for Palestinian development, and continues to undermine agricultural and rural livelihoods throughout the West Bank.”

6. It has nothing to do with settlements

The Separation Wall is routinely used as a tool to further Israel's policy of illegal settlement building and expansion. Much of the logic behind the Wall's route is that it keeps as many Israelis “inside” Israel and as many Palestinians outside as possible.

A case in point are what have become known as Ariel's Fingers, two strips of illegal Israeli settlement that stretch deep into the occupied West Bank and will be surrounded by the finished barrier. The first “finger” is located just east of Qalqiliya and would encompass the settlements of Nofim, Karnei Shomron and Immanuel. The second “finger” is located just south of the first and would encircle Ma'ale Yisrael, Ariel and several other settlements.

Immanuel and Ariel in particular are of great importance to Israel. Ariel – [comprising](#) some 20,000 illegal settlers — is 20 kilometres beyond the Green Line, but as one of the biggest settlements in the occupied West Bank is slated to be surrounded by the Separation Wall. Israel's keenness to declare both Immanuel and Ariel Israeli territory under any future peace agreement serves to demonstrate the utility of the Separation Wall in forcing “facts on the ground” in the state's favour.

7. The Wall is already complete

Although construction of the barrier began in 2002, it isn't yet complete. According to [OCHAoPt](#), only around 65.3 per cent (465km) of the projected 712 kilometre-long structure has been completed. [B'Tselem](#) believes that, “If construction is completed along the entire planned route, 52,667.7 hectares of land – an area that is equal to 9.4% of the West Bank and includes the

territories that Israel annexed to the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem – will be cut off from the West Bank.”

Given that Israel already controls over 60 per cent of the West Bank through its administration of [Area C](#) under the [Oslo Accords](#), an additional 9.4 per cent will take its share of the occupied territory up to almost 70 per cent. The remaining 30 per cent is far from a viable space on which to build any future Palestinian state, with these enclaves cut off from one another by Israel's system of walls, barriers, roads and checkpoints.

The time scale for the completion of the barrier is unknown. What is clear, however, is that though Israel began to build the Separation Wall as a solution to the temporary problems of the Second Intifada, it has no intention of ever removing it.

Palestinians hold flags and release balloons during a protest against the Israeli separation wall in the West Bank
21 May 2015 [Shadi Hatem/Apiimages]



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