

Israel's Troubling Walls

The Israeli government is planning to build more and more walls to keep Palestinians and Arabs out of Jewish-held territory, a troubling twist on a dark history when walls were used to lock Jews in, Lawrence Davidson observes.

By Lawrence Davidson

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has announced his government's intention to construct another "separation barrier" – a large fortified wall or fence referred to by Palestinians as an apartheid wall – “between the West Bank and Jordan after completing walls on the Egyptian and Syrian borders.”

Netanyahu is doing this for a variety of reasons, such as to keep Arab and other non-Jewish refugees from coming into Israel and, in the case of the West Bank-Jordan wall, to symbolize Israel's ongoing control of the area.

The original Zionist rationale for the state of Israel was that it would serve as a place of safety for the world's Jews as anti-Semitism played out its allegedly inevitable and horrid destiny. Well, the problem today is that the policies of Israel are the major motivators of worldwide anti-Semitism, and because of these same policies, there is no place in the world more potentially dangerous for Jews than Israel.

Thus, the Israeli fondness for walls. It may very well be that when all of this wall construction is finished, Israel will look like the world's largest ghetto. And, within these walls, Israel's leaders are busy making their ghetto religiously pure.

Just this week buildings occupied by 15,000 East Jerusalem Arabs were scheduled for demolition. Those serving the notices to the 200 residential blocs had to be “escorted by Israeli soldiers.” Thus, while the walls discourage the non-Jews outside from breaking in, the home demolitions (along with a host of other nasty policies) encourage the inside non-Jews to get out.

It makes not a bit of difference that all this wall building, to say nothing of the accompanying ethnic cleansing, is illegal. The Israelis don't care. They make their own “law” based on their military capacity to enforce their will, and their perverted psychology – the belief that their past suffering (at least that of the Jews of Europe) somehow justifies imposing suffering on others.

Some Related Walls

Historically, what sort of company does Israel keep with all this wall

building? Here are some examples set down in chronological order:

– The walls of Jericho

Jericho is a West Bank town that, according to the archaeological evidence, has existed for about 9,000 years. It is also a place dear to the hearts of militant Zionists, for it was there, according to the biblical narrative, that the ancient Israelites began the first bloody conquest of Palestine.

According to the legend (but not the archaeological evidence), Joshua led an ancient Israelite army against Jericho and, on God's orders, marched around the town walls six times blowing rams' horns as they went. On the seventh revolution, Jericho's defensive walls "came tumbling down."

Then Joshua burned down the town and, again on God's orders, slaughtered every man, woman, child and animal (except for the family of the woman Rahab, who had betrayed the city by hiding Israelite spies). Finally, Joshua placed a curse on anyone who might try to rebuild the place. From a Zionist perspective, this may mark one of the few times that tearing down walls seemed preferable to building them up.

– Wailing or Western Wall

The Wailing, or Western, Wall was not a defense structure. Rather it was part of a courtyard adjacent to the Second Temple. The courtyard was originally part of an expansion program begun in about 19 BCE during the reign of Herod the Great. The Second Temple was eventually destroyed, along with much of the rest of Jerusalem, by the Romans in 70 CE. The Western Wall is all that is left. This destruction established the fact that it was not only Israelite armies that could bring down other people's walls. Gentiles could do it too.

Nonetheless, this provenance has made the Western Wall "the most sacred site" in the Jewish religion. When the Israelis took Arab Jerusalem in 1967 they turned the sacred site into a nationalist shrine. From that point on, there has been an unspoken assumption among militant Zionists that this holy of holies could stay Jewish only if the subsequently created barrier walls and their accompanying policies of ethnic cleansing stood firm. That makes the "separation barriers" the real symbols of modern-day Israel.

– Ghetto Walls

In modern times some walls have taken on a sinister character for Jews. The archetypal modern ghetto wall was constructed by the Nazis in 1940 to enclose the Jewish quarter of Warsaw, Poland. It was made of brick, stood about 10 feet high and ran for 11 miles. Like the Western Wall, only a fragment of this ghetto

wall survives.

While Zionists consider any comparison between their “separation barriers” and the walls that separated out Europe’s Jews anathema, some other very knowledgeable Jews see a connection. For instance, Sygmunt Bauman, a well-known Polish-Jewish sociologist who once taught in Israel but now lives in England, has likened Israel’s present-day barriers to those that surrounded the Warsaw ghetto. He believes that successive Israeli governments have not been interested in peace and “a younger Israeli generation was being raised on the understanding that the state of war and military alert was natural and unavoidable.” That would certainly fit well with a culture of walls.

– The Berlin Wall

Comparisons have also been made between Israel’s “separation barriers” and the infamous Berlin Wall. Constructed by communist East Germany starting in 1961, the Berlin Wall separated the East German population from West Berlin. The Berlin Wall ran for some 87 miles and at its completion was almost 12 feet high. On its eastern side it was paralleled by a 110-yard “death strip” offering a “clear field of fire for the wall guards.” By comparison, the Israeli wall will at completion run over 400 miles, be 26 feet high, and be paralleled by a 200-foot “exclusion zone.”

Like the Berlin Wall, Israel’s walls are designed to separate populations, but unlike the one in Berlin, the Israeli version also facilitates the systematic ethnic cleansing of elements of the Palestinian population. It is perhaps for this reason that the musician Roger Waters, a strong supporter of the boycott Israel movement, called the Israeli separation barriers “100 times more horrifying than the Berlin Wall.”

Walls on the ground reflect walls that already exist in the mind. The Zionists came to Palestine with a wall already fixed in their minds. That wall existed as a conviction that anti-Semitism was inevitable and eternal. Only possessing their own state could protect the Jews from this incessant danger.

Subsequent Palestinian resistance was almost instinctively seen by the Zionists as anti-Semitism. In time this led to 26-foot walls, which one can understand as the physical manifestations of the mental wall all Zionists carry with them. In this sense a culture of walls comes naturally to the Zionists.

From a historical perspective, no physical wall can be permanent. Things change and walls crumble. The walls in our minds might prove more resistant to erosion. They can be very deep-rooted and passed on for generations. Yet even these barriers eventually give way. That suggests that Israel’s culture of walls will

someday be breached. It is just a matter of time and suffering.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.

Neocons Still Hoping for US-Iran Clash

Exclusive: The Israelis, the Saudis and U.S. neocons are thrilled that the latest plan for limiting (but not ending) Iran's nuclear program collapsed, thus reviving hopes of an eventual U.S. military strike, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

American neoconservatives are delighted that France, acting as something of a paid lobbyist for the Saudi-Israeli alliance, sabotaged a possible breakthrough between the West and Iran over its nuclear program, thus preserving the military option against Iran that the neocons have long cherished.

Of course, the neocons say they want a peaceful settlement to the dispute essentially Iran's total and humiliating capitulation but no one should be fooled over how the French maneuver is keeping the neocons' hopes alive for an eventual crisis that will let the bombs fly and regimes change.

The neocons were bitterly disappointed last summer when President Barack Obama failed to follow through on military threats against the Syrian government. They were then alarmed at the prospect of an international settlement that would impose tighter constraints on Iran's nuclear program but not force its complete shutdown.

So, with an interim deal within sight, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on his American backers to get to work undermining President Obama's diplomatic strategy. Meanwhile, the Saudi monarchy, which has joined Netanyahu in pushing for a more belligerent U.S. approach toward Syria and Iran, was busy granting lucrative financial contracts to France and its struggling economy.

Between Israel's lobbying skills and Saudi Arabia's petro-dollars, Obama found himself facing stiff resistance to his negotiations. He also had in Secretary of State John Kerry a befuddled point man who appears to have carried into his new job the fuzzy rhetoric and padded elbows that made him a popular member of the

Senate club. But those characteristics have left many international observers shaking their heads at his failure to talk straight or act decisively.

In rounding off the sharp edges as he explained how the Iran deal collapsed, Kerry left out how French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius insisted on extensive last-minute revisions that were unacceptable to the Iranians. Instead, Kerry shifted blame onto the Iranians, apparently to soothe tensions among the “P5-plus-one,” the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany, the six countries negotiating with Iran.

“The French signed off on it [the final proposal], we signed off on it,” Kerry said. “There was unity, but Iran couldn’t take it.”

That prompted a Tweet from Iran’s Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, saying “No amount of spinning can change what happened within 5+1 in Geneva from 6PM Thursday to 545 PM Saturday. But it can further erode confidence.” Zarif blamed the French for substantially rewriting the proposal, forcing the changes on the P5-plus-1 side, and thus scuttling the impending deal.

Of the P5-plus-one countries, France was the most susceptible to inducements from the Saudi-Israeli alliance, especially financial payoffs from Saudi Arabia. The global power and/or wealth of the United States, China, Russia and Germany mean that they have many other interests beyond making commercial deals with Saudi Arabia. And the United Kingdom is a close ally of the United States.

But France is both more independent of the big powers and more vulnerable because of its faltering economy. Relatively modest commitments of money by Saudi Arabia to France could have more impact. France, in effect, was the weak link in the P5-plus-one.

So, in October, French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian concluded a \$1.5 billion deal with Saudi Arabia to overhaul six of its navy ships. In July, Saudi Arabia’s ally, United Arab Emirates, signed a \$913 million deal with France to buy two high-resolution Helios military satellites.

Other lucrative arms deals are reportedly in the works between France and Saudi Arabia (and its Sunni allies). Saudi Arabia also has invested in France’s sagging agricultural and food sectors, including a Saudi firm buying a major stake in Groupe Doux, Europe’s largest poultry firm based in Brittany.

Neocon Praise

Beyond pleasing the Saudis and the Israelis, France also won praise from neocon U.S. lawmakers who have criticized France in the past, like when it opposed President George W. Bush’s 2003 invasion of Iraq. Then, France was derided as a

“surrender monkey” and Republicans renamed French fries as “freedom fries” in the Capitol’s restaurants.

But the tone was entirely different after France sank the Iranian nuclear deal last weekend. “Vive la France!” Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, exclaimed on Twitter. “France had the courage to prevent a bad nuclear agreement with Iran.”

“Thank God for France and thank God for push back,” said the hawkish Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, on CNN’s “State of the Union” program. “The French are becoming very good leaders in the Mideast.”

Despite Kerry’s acquiescence to the French sabotage and his dissembling that shifted the blame to Iran, the Secretary of State still got pummeled in the neocon press. For instance, Washington Post deputy editorial-page editor Jackson Diehl ridiculed Kerry’s supposedly outlandish optimism over negotiations with Syria and Iran.

Over the past week, Diehl said, Kerry was floating through “a fantastical realm created by his billowing vision of what he can accomplish as secretary of state.” Diehl added that Kerry’s “Magical Mystery Tour” ended in his “failed attempt to close a deal with Iran on its nuclear program. Kerry’s conclusion: ‘I can tell you, without any reservations, we made significant progress.’”

Backfiring Strategy

In effect, the American neocons along with the Saudi-Israeli regional alliance are playing for time, hoping that some change in the political alignment might bring the U.S. military off the sidelines and make the end game for Iran and/or Syria another “regime change.” That appears to have been the Saudi/Israeli/neocon plan since 2009 when Iran began expressing a readiness to curtail its nuclear program.

The irony of the obstruction strategy, however, has been that each time the neocons succeed in thwarting a deal with Iran to limit its enrichment of uranium, the country makes further progress toward having the capability to fashion a nuclear bomb, if the leaders in Tehran ever decided to do so.

In 2009, Iran was refining uranium only to the level of about 3-4 percent, as needed for energy production. Its negotiators offered to swap much of that low-enriched uranium for nuclear isotopes for medical research.

But the Obama administration and the West rebuffed the Iranian gesture because it would have left Iran with enough enriched uranium to theoretically refine much higher up to 90 percent for potential use in a single bomb, though Iran insisted it had no such intention and U.S. intelligence agencies agreed.

Then, in spring 2010, Iran agreed to another version of the uranium swap proposed by the leaders of Brazil and Turkey, with the apparent backing of President Obama. But that arrangement came under fierce attack by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, considered a hawk on Iran, and the plan was derided by leading U.S. news outlets, including the New York Times and the Washington Post.

On May 17, 2010, the Washington Post's editors mocked the leaders of Brazil and Turkey who had spearheaded the initiative. The Post called the plan "yet another effort to 'engage' the extremist clique of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and [then-President] Mahmoud Ahmadinejad."

On May 26, 2010, the influential New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman weighed in, excoriating the leaders of Brazil and Turkey for negotiating an agreement with Iran to ship about half its low-enriched uranium out of the country. To Friedman, this deal was "as ugly as it gets," the title of his column.

The ridicule of Brazil and Turkey as bumbling understudies on the world stage continued even after Brazil released Obama's private letter to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva encouraging Brazil and Turkey to work out the deal. Despite the letter's release, Obama didn't publicly defend the swap and instead joined in scuttling the deal.

In June 2010, a New York Times editorial praised a new round of anti-Iran sanctions from the UN, but complained they "do not go far enough." The Times also took a swipe at Brazil and Turkey, which voted against the sanctions from their temporary seats on the Security Council.

"The day's most disturbing development was the two no votes in the Security Council from Turkey and Brazil," the Times wrote. "Both are disappointed that their efforts to broker a nuclear deal with Iran didn't go far. Like pretty much everyone else, they were played by Tehran."

Though this Times point of view fit with neocon orthodoxy that any reasonable move toward peace and away from confrontation is a sign of naivete and weakness the fact is that the Iran-Turkey-Brazil deal was torpedoed by the United States, after Obama had encouraged it. This wasn't a case of the two countries being "played by Tehran."

But the curious bottom line is that each time the West rebuffs an offer from Iran to limit its nuclear program, the Iranians then advance their capabilities. After the proposal to swap low-enriched uranium for the medical isotopes fell through, Iran increased its level of enrichment to 20 percent to fill its own research needs. The 20 percent meant that Iran was much closer to reaching the

refinement level needed for a bomb.

Yet, this pattern continues, with American neocons and Israeli hardliners disparaging every proposal to constrain Iran's nuclear program as insufficient. Then, after each plan collapses, Iran gets closer to a nuclear-bomb capability. That, in turn, prompts even more hysterical cries from Netanyahu and the neocon media and spurs greater public suspicions about Iranian ultimate intent.

Iran has repeatedly declared that it has no interest in building a nuclear bomb, a claim supported by U.S. intelligence agencies since a National Intelligence Estimate in 2007. It should be noted, too, that Israel possesses a highly sophisticated and undeclared nuclear arsenal of its own.

But where this strategy of obstructing negotiations between Iran and the West ends is the big question. Some American neocons, who never faced accountability for tricking the American people into the Iraq War, apparently still hope for one or two more violent "regime changes."

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

US Ignores Iran's Nuke Rights

France, serving as a [cat's paw](#) for Saudi Arabia and Israel, sabotaged an interim agreement on Iran's nuclear program, but another problem is the U.S. refusal to recognize Iran's right to enrich uranium, say Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett.

By Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett

Notwithstanding France's simultaneously arrogant and craven grandstanding over Iran's Arak heavy water reactor, the main reason for the failure of last week's nuclear talks between the Islamic Republic and the P5+1 was the Obama administration's imperious refusal to acknowledge Tehran's right to enrich uranium under international safeguards.

On this [point](#), we want to highlight a recent [post](#) by Dan Joyner on *Arms Control*

Law, titled, "Scope, Meaning and Juridical Implication of the NPT Article IV(1) Inalienable Right."

Dan opens with a favorable reference to our recent post on the issue; he then focuses on how to interpret the NPT Article IV(1) right to peaceful nuclear energy, a subject he has already written about at some length. He usefully inserts an excerpt from his excellent 2011 book, *Interpreting the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty*, Interpreting the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Pages 79-84.

This excerpt lays out Dan's argument that the right to peaceful use of nuclear technology should be interpreted as "a full, free-standing right of all NNWS [non-nuclear-weapon states] party to the treaty, and not as a contingent right, contrary to the interpretation of some NWS [nuclear-weapon states]." After elaborating this basic point, Dan continues:

"The question of the *scope* of this right is one that continues to be debated. I have looked to the *Lotus* principle in international law (see the excerpt from my book) to show that the lawfulness of NNWS', and in fact all states', indigenous nuclear fuel cycle activities can be shown to derive from the absence of any prohibition of these activities in international law.

"This observation will, I have argued, serve to legally justify the full nuclear fuel cycle of activities within a NNWS, subject only to the positive requirements of Articles II and III of the NPT, i.e. no manufacture of nuclear explosive devices, and the conclusion of a safeguards agreement with the IAEA.

"The question of just what exactly is the nature and scope of the right recognized in Article IV(1) of the NPT, and what are its juridical implications (e.g. in tension with the UN Security Council's order in Resolution 1696 for Iran to cease uranium enrichment), is a subject that I have been thinking/researching about recently. These questions actually raise some very deep issues of international law, and analyzing them properly requires serious work. But let me say this here.

"Article IV(1) of the NPT states that 'Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of this Treaty.'

"In my view, the recognition by over 190 states parties to the NPT that all states have such an inalienable right, which I interpret to include all elements of the full nuclear fuel cycle including uranium enrichment, strongly suggests that the right to peaceful nuclear energy research, production and use is one of

the fundamental rights of states in international law. In my view, both fundamental and acquired rights of states should be understood to create in third parties, both states and international organizations, a legal obligation to respect those rights.

“This means that other states and international organizations are under an international legal obligation not to act in serious prejudice of states’ rights. In the case of fundamental rights, this reciprocal obligation is of a *jus cogens* order, meaning that all states and international organizations are under a *jus cogens* order legal obligation not to act to seriously prejudice the fundamental rights of other states.

“When states or international organization do act in serious prejudice of a state’s fundamental rights, that action is an internationally wrongful act, and implicates the international responsibility of the acting state or international organization.

“According to this analysis, UN Security Council Resolution 1696, which commands Iran to cease uranium enrichment, constitutes a violation of international law, at least as to this particular command, and is void of legal effect (See Article 25 of the UN Charter).

“Note that the often heard rebuttal to this argument, which references Article 103 of the UN Charter, is in fact erroneous and inapplicable. Article 103 of the UN Charter provides that ‘In the event of a conflict between the obligations of the Members of the United Nations under the present Charter and their obligations under any other international agreement, their obligations under the present Charter shall prevail.’

“My analysis, which is based on the recognition of a fundamental right of states in international law, and the juridical implication of an obligation in other states and international organizations to respect that right, is unaffected and unanswered by this provision, which merely recognizes that in the case of a conflict between UN member states’ international legal obligations under the Charter, and their obligations deriving from other sources, the Charter obligations trump.

“It does not speak to the legal obligations of the Security Council as an organ of an international organization. Nor does it speak at all to conflicts between the obligations of the UN Charter, and the rights of states in international law. So again, Article 103 of the UN Charter is inapposite and inapplicable to this question.”

Dan’s work on these issues is both breathtakingly clear and, as far as we are

concerned, definitive. (For more of his analysis on the illegality of Security Council resolutions calling on Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, we refer everyone to his brilliant article, "The Security Council as Legal Hegemon," published last year in the *Georgetown Journal of International Law*, [see here.](#))

More immediately, Dan's work underscores an important reality: the Obama administration's hegemonically abusive refusal to recognize Iran's right to safeguarded enrichment is not just diplomatically and strategically counter-productive, it is illegal.

Flynt Leverett served as a Middle East expert on George W. Bush's National Security Council staff until the Iraq War and worked previously at the State Department and at the Central Intelligence Agency. Hillary Mann Leverett was the NSC expert on Iran and from 2001 to 2003 was one of only a few U.S. diplomats authorized to negotiate with the Iranians over Afghanistan, al-Qaeda and Iraq. They are authors of *Going to Tehran*. [This article previously appeared at [GoingtoTehran.com.](#)]
