

The Palestinians' missing map

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [December 13, 2000](#) issue

When Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered Yasir Arafat new borders for a future Palestinian state, he couldn't show them on a map. There is no such map. But the Palestinians know what Barak offered at Camp David and they didn't like it then and they don't like it now. The Al Aqsa uprising, which by the end of November had led to more than 250 deaths, most of them Palestinians and many of them children, is driven by the unfairness of Barak's offer.

Uzi Benziman wrote recently in Jerusalem's *Ha'aretz* that "disclosure of Barak's proposed withdrawal map is crucial because without [it,] it is impossible both to judge whether the Palestinians were offered enough territory to create a viable state, and to decide whether the current crisis is entirely Arafat's doing." Faisal Hussein, who heads the Palestinian Jerusalem negotiation team, describes Barak's proposal as "a territorial division that rules out the possibility of establishing a viable Palestinian state."

Manuel Hasasian of Bethlehem University chairs a Palestinian task force that is working on the map of a future state. He says that the question of Jerusalem is essential for understanding the Palestinian objection to Barak's proposals, not because of its great religious importance, but because of its geographical location and its importance in guaranteeing Palestinian geographic continuity and viability. "Israel wants to determine the permanent borders based on the settlements—we say that the fate of the settlements will be determined by the borders."

Husseini told Amira Hass of *Ha'aretz* that the principle that drives the Al Aqsa *intifada* is a return to the borders of June 4, 1967, in accordance with United Nations (Security Council) resolutions 242 and 339 to which all parties, including Israel, initially agreed. According to Hussein, "The moment Israel accepts this principle, the Palestinians will be ready to negotiate a flexible implementation of it and of the fate of settlements—evacuation, territorial swaps, granting Palestinian citizenship to settlers who wish to remain."

There are two types of Israeli settlements, all constructed illegally, in violation of the UN resolutions. Construction of the first type was begun immediately after Israel captured the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. These initial settlements were designed as a semicircular wall of permanent suburbs surrounding East Jerusalem and cutting the city off from the rest of the West Bank.

Gilo, built on Palestinian land just south of West Jerusalem, was one of the earliest suburbs. Har Homa, a short distance across the road to Bethlehem, is a more recent project. When completed, Har Homa will contain 8,200 residential units, three hotels, a golf course, shopping malls and a high-tech industry center—all built on what was once a tree-covered Palestinian mountain, Jabal Abu Ghaneim.

Both Gilo and Har Homa border on and take land from the Palestinian towns of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour and surrounding farmlands. Christian tradition identifies Beit Sahour as the site of the shepherds' encounter with the angels who announced the birth of Jesus. According to outside observers, shots fired from Beit Jala into Gilo have brought fierce and excessive Israeli military assaults, leading to the cancellation of public Christmas events in these towns and in nearby Bethlehem.

The second type of settlement is not contiguous to Israel but is protected by a military garrison and linked to Israel by Israeli-only highways cut through Palestinian areas. These settlements are built in the middle of Palestinian populations. Some, like Hebron and Ramallah, are linked to religious sites. Others, including the settlement in Gaza where an Israeli school bus was recently bombed, have no religious connection other than the claim that they are built on sacred Jewish land.

It is well known by both Israelis and Palestinians that Israeli governments have long considered both types of settlements as "facts on the ground" designed to render a future Palestinian state either impossible or at best a weak collection of isolated bantustans cut off from one another by Israeli border checkpoints. Israeli public opinion strongly supports holding on to all of the city of Jerusalem and its settlement suburbs. But now, according to a recent report from Reuters news service, "Some Israelis say the [isolated] settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip endanger the security of ordinary Israelis." The current uprising "has deepened debate in Israel over whether it is reasonable to risk soldiers' lives to protect settlers."

Settlements have long been at the heart of the conflict. In September 1979, when Prime Minister Menachem Begin signed the Camp David Accords, he promised to

halt all settlement construction. Three months later he broke that promise. After he lost the White House to Ronald Reagan, President Jimmy Carter visited Begin in Jerusalem. As Carter recalls in his book *The Blood of Abraham*, “I urged him to make it plain . . . that Israel would observe the basic elements of UN Resolution 242,” which affirms “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war.” Carter wrote that Begin seemed indifferent to his comment.

In 1982, Ronald Reagan reiterated U.S. support for UN resolutions 242 and 338. James Baker repeated this assertion for the Bush administration. Since 1992, however, the Clinton administration has sided with Israel in ignoring the resolutions. Unless the next president returns to the Carter-Reagan-Bush position—that all of the Israeli settlements are illegal—peace in the region will remain only a distant hope.