

Walled in: Israel's separation barrier

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [August 23, 2003](#) issue

President Bush calls Israel's wall of separation from the Palestinians a "problem" for the road map to peace in the Middle East. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon describes it as a "security fence." Palestinian activist and physician Mustafa Barghouthi sees the wall as a way for Israel "to effect ethnic cleansing and steal more Palestinian land and prevent the creation of a genuine and viable Palestinian state." I suspect that were he alive today, the pioneer Zionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky would agree with Barghouthi's assessment—though he would have taken it as an endorsement, not a criticism of the wall.

Plans to wall off Palestinians from Israel began in November 2000, when Prime Minister Ehud Barak approved a plan to establish a "barrier to prevent the passage of motor vehicles" from the northwest end of the West Bank to the Latrun area. The Israeli government then extended the wall, ignoring the path of the Green Line that under United Nations resolutions legally separates occupied Palestine from Israel. Instead, the wall cuts deeply into occupied Palestinian areas, surrounding or dividing Palestinian villages and farms and placing existing Israeli settlements on the Israeli side of the wall.

At no time during the past three years did the American government object to this obvious land grab. Not until the issue was raised by Palestinian leaders during talks on the road map was President Bush prompted to see the wall as a problem.

In 1923 Jabotinsky wrote an essay called "The Iron Wall." The wall he had in mind was metaphorical—it meant total military control of the native population and any of its surrounding allies. He would have approved of Israel's emergence as the world's fourth largest military power and would certainly have approved of Israel's decision to develop its own nuclear capability.

To the Russian-born Jabotinsky, the iron wall was essential to subdue a native population which possessed the "same instinctive love and true fervor [with which] any Aztec looked upon his Mexico or any Sioux looked upon his prairie." Jabotinsky began his campaign for a Jewish state in Israel in the 1920s. In 1937 he formed the

Irgun, the military wing of his New Zionist Organization, which was quickly branded by the British as a “terrorist” group. Jabotinsky was convinced that “every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement.” Resistance is what indigenous populations do to invaders, some more successfully than others.

Native populations resent outsiders, even if they’ve suffered under their own dictators, which is why the U.S. is eager to convince Iraqis and the world that its takeover of Iraq is temporary. The locals are not easily convinced. If they have not read Jabotinsky—and some probably have—they at least know recent history. And they need only look to the west to see what is happening to Palestinians under Israeli occupation.

Outsiders do not take over a country for altruistic purposes, but for their own benefit. If it is land they want, it is land they take. If it is oil they want, they install leaders who will provide them with that oil. If it is military bases they want, then they reach agreements with subservient governments and sign long-term agreements, as the U.S. did in Cuba and as it will no doubt eventually do in Iraq.

When Jabotinsky was questioned on his view that the Jewish people had a just claim on the land of Palestine, he had this response: “If anyone objects that this point of view is immoral, I answer: It is not true; either Zionism is moral and just or it is immoral and unjust . . . We hold that Zionism is moral and just. And since it is moral and just, justice must be done, no matter whether [others] agree with it or not. There is no other morality.” Jabotinsky words will resonate with the neoconservative architects of Bush’s policy for both Iraq and Israel:

All this does not mean that any kind of agreement is impossible, only [that] a voluntary agreement is impossible. As long as there is a spark of hope that they can get rid of us, they will not sell these hopes, not for any kind of sweet words or tasty morsels, because they are not a rabble but a nation, perhaps somewhat tattered, but still living. A living people makes such enormous concessions on such fateful questions only when there is no hope left. Only when not a single breach is visible in the iron wall, only then do extreme groups lose their sway, and influence transfers to moderate groups.

Ariel Sharon is a leader in the Jabotinsky tradition. His wall of separation is another step toward rendering the Palestinians hopeless. Only then, or so Jabotinsky

believed, will the Palestinian population give up its resistance and allow moderate leaders to cut the best deal they can find, on their side of the wall.