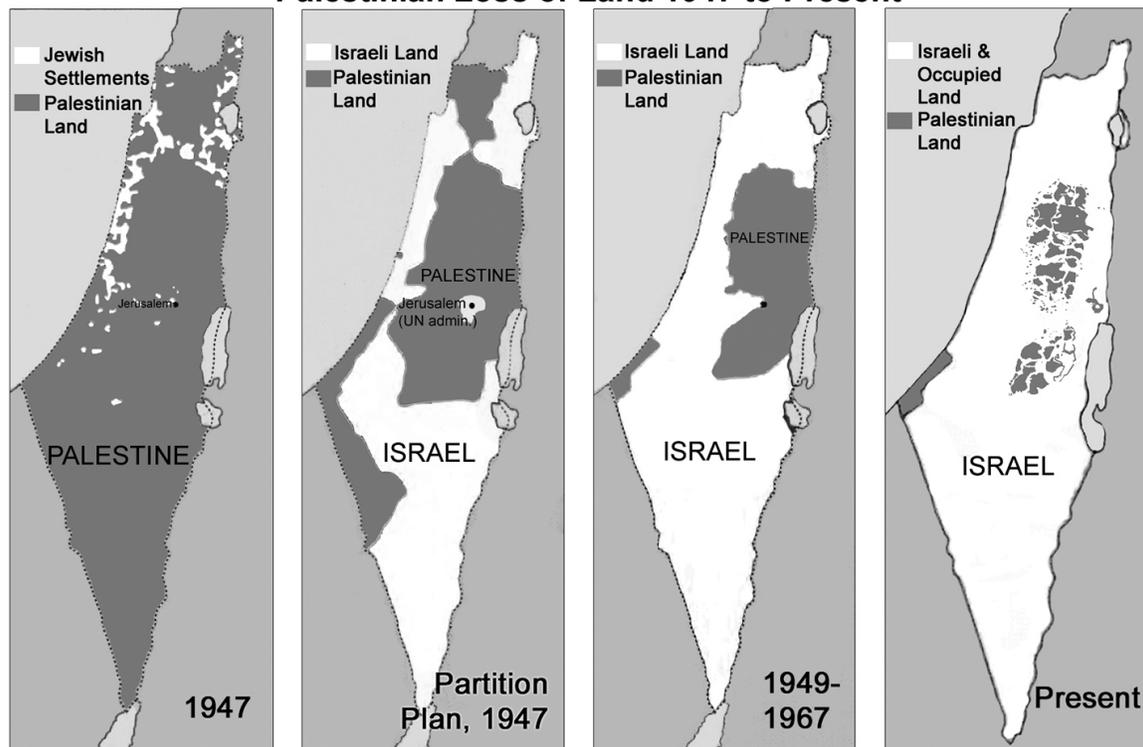


Realities in Palestine: An Eyewitness Report

We returned recently from an eye-opening journey to Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories. We went because of the troubling news coming from Gaza about collective punishment, because of images of a 300-mile wall of separation between Israelis and Palestinians, and perhaps most of all because of our desire to understand the nature of this occupation of Palestinian lands, the longest occupation in recent history, in place since the 1967 Israel-Palestine war.

We traveled with the Interfaith Peace Builders (IFPB, www.ifpb.org) and thirty US delegates, of various ages, religions, and occupations. We traveled mainly along the “Green Line,” which is not green at all but dusty and rather desolate. This line was the boundary between Israel and the West Bank created by the 1967 war. While this boundary remains very real to the Palestinians, it under-represents the division of land between Israelis and Palestinians. The sequence of maps in the figure shows that since 1967 continuous land confiscation east of the Green Line and west of the Jordan has markedly reduced the land remaining in Palestinian control. Whether taken by the military or by settlers, the remaining small and isolated parcels of land barely constitute a viable second state.

Palestinian Loss of Land 1947 to Present



We visited UN offices and an NGO (nongovernmental organization) with expertise on the refugee health, housing, and economic status. Six and one-half million Palestinians now live abroad, displaced by war or by systematic removal, as villages are demolished,

land confiscated, families forced out of their ancient homes. One and a half million Palestinians remain in the occupied territories. We learned about and saw crowded, impoverished refugee camps, with poor sanitation, sparse water, and weak infrastructures, more than fifty years after the war.

We saw the new Israeli settlements strategically placed on hilltops, with trees, fountains, and swimming pools, towering above and surrounding the low lands where Palestinians have their farms, olive trees, and fields. And we saw the Wall, at least twenty feet high, often passing close to Palestinian homes, separating Palestinian farmers from their lands. The farmers would have to walk many miles each day simply to get to their fields. As a result the lands often lay fallow. According to Israeli policy, when a field is not planted for three years, it can be confiscated, so loss of Palestinian income, land, and traditional livelihood is occurring continuously.

We passed through the gates and channels that are called checkpoints. Palestinians in the West Bank must pass through these to enter what is now Israel proper. The system of chutes and gates is weirdly reminiscent of cattle yards. Each day adults and children must show identity cards, be questioned and searched by the military. Some people do this on a daily basis, some only for emergencies. For all it is a degrading and sometimes dangerous restriction of mobility

Much of life within the refuge camps and or in the traditional villages is shaped by Israel's permitting policies: Permits: NOT! In all of our travels we never met one Palestinian living near or beyond the Green Line who has ever since occupation been granted a permit. No matter what the request or issue was, no permit has been granted to make physical improvements in living conditions. No cisterns for water collection. No wells can be dug. No buildings can be renovated. No updates in electricity or plumbing. No solar. No wind collectors. No sewer improvements. Essentially almost nothing can be improved or changed. The message seems clear. There is no future for Palestinians, under Israeli control.

Every Palestinian family is affected by the occupation. In the name of Security, all Palestinians are suspect. They are subject to imprisonment as "administrative detention" for up to six months without charges. Nearly every Palestinian family has had members arrested. Every adult male that we spoke seriously with, the professors, the community elders, the water experts, the landowners, all had spent some time in prison. Every one of them had experienced torture. We cannot let this continue . . . Not in our name.

Lest you think the entire trip was negative, it is important to talk about the Palestinian families we met and their hope. They consistently speak of nonviolent solutions. They know that "they shall overcome." They want the occupation to end, the land confiscation to end, and the return of their confiscated lands. They want to manage their own water and electricity and roads and schools. They are spurred on by support from the many Israeli citizens who are at their sides, defending Palestinian equality and human rights, creating solar and wind power solutions, standing against expansions of the Wall.

Palestinians repeatedly asked us to help Americans to question the use of US tax dollars, \$3 billion annually, for Israel's military. They ask that we tie US investments in Israel/Palestine to progress in human rights and justice for Palestinians, to a fair share of land, water, education, and opportunity.

We know that to some, any criticism of Israel is equated with anti-Semitism. But we saw with our own eyes the unacceptable results of more than fifty year of occupation. We want to share our concerns with those who can envision other ways for Israel to protect itself. We would like to share in more detail what we saw and learned in a community presentation in the near future. If you are interested in learning more about our experience, please contact us, drpatsalomon@gmail.com.

*- Carol Husten, Julio Rodriguez, Pat Salomon
For the Granny Peace Brigade*