

Original article

## “Fencing policy” of Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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### INFORMATIONS

#### Article history:

Submitted: 6 October 2017

Accepted: 15 December 2017

Published: 16 March 2020

### ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of shaping Israel’s specific fencing policy towards the Palestinians, which was manifested, among others, by the construction of the so-called security barrier and the commencement of building an underground wall preventing the population of the Gaza Strip from entering Israel. The above is a continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, which has lasted several dozen years and whose complexity makes it difficult to achieve a lasting peace.

### KEYWORDS

Israel, Palestine, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, border barrier, underground wall



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## Introduction

Israel and Palestine are indispensably associated with the conflict that was initiated in the last century and, in fact, constitutes an Israeli-Arab problem. That is due to the involvement of Middle Eastern states in many-year conflicts. Doris Bensimon and Eglal Errera point out that “since the proclamation of independence in 1948, Israel is at war with the Arab world. (...) In between explicit crises countless acts of terror take place, in which Israeli civilians and sometimes the Jews from the Diaspora fall victims” [1]. To date, no satisfactory solutions have been found that would allow both parties to reach a lasting settlement. The fencing policy [2] created by Israel since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century against the Palestinians exacerbates the situation, preventing them from moving freely and farming, and even leads to destroying their property. Although officially the construction of the “security barrier” in 2002 was the result of the fight against terrorism, it became a symbol of the permanent and unjust distribution of land and people. At the end of 2016, Israel officially announced the construction of an underground wall that would prevent the Hamas militants from entering the territory of the country responsible for carrying out terrorist attacks on the Israelis. One of the consequences of such action was cutting off the Palestinian population from the supply of medicines or food.

It is not the analysis of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but an indication of its protractedness and complexity, which makes it impossible to find definitive solutions to the dispute between the parties to the conflict, that is the subject of the article. The historical events presented in the article are important from the author's point of view and do not exhaust the subject matter. They only flag up the most essential facts that would require extension in subsequent publications.

The article aims at presenting Israel's activities carried out within the framework of broadly understood fencing policy, the most important of which concerned the construction of the "separation fence" and then the development of an underground barrier at the border with the Gaza Strip. The main research problem expressed in the form of the question was formulated to clarify the afore-mentioned objective: What is the real purpose of Israeli isolation from the Gaza Strip, first using the security barrier, and then the underground barrier being created? Due to the non-reactive research (the source analysis), no main hypothesis corresponding to the question posed has been put forward.

## **1. Historical background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

The beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is associated with the end of the second half of the twentieth century, when the General Assembly of the United Nations voted (in 1947) for the division of Palestine between the Palestinians and the Jews. At the same time, the United Kingdom expressed a desire to abandon the implementation of the mandate in that area, which became a reality a year later. This led to the creation of the State of Israel and initiated a period of prolonged tension between the newly created entity and the countries associated within the League of Arab States. However, Jewish immigration began on a smaller scale several dozen years earlier, when in 1867 foreigners were allowed to acquire land in the territory of the Ottoman Empire<sup>1</sup>. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, this decision and the resulting early Jewish immigration led to the first clashes between the Jews and the Palestinians (1891), as well as the Sultan's proclamation regarding the ban on settling permanently in the Holy Land [3]. It should be remembered that as early as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the period of creating the Zionist movement was initiated, which resulted in the establishment of the World Zionist Organization in 1897.

The end of World War I gave the Arabs a hope of freeing themselves from the Turkish rule and obtaining full autonomy over Palestine. They did not expect, however, that Great Britain and France would decide to take control of the Middle East and share their sphere of influence (according to the secret Sykes-Picot agreement concluded between France and Great Britain). All hopes of the Arabs were finally dispelled when in 1917 the British Minister of Foreign Affairs issued the so-called Balfour's Declaration, which was the statement of the British support for the Jews in striving to obtain their homeland in Palestine. Initially, it was thought that this document had no legal basis, but after the League of Nations had confirmed the British mandate authorizing the United Kingdom to manage the territory of Palestine and included it in the preamble of the mandate, the Declaration became a document legally

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<sup>1</sup> The gradual immigration of the Jews to Palestine is called "Aliyah". According to James L. Gelvin, the first aliyah fell between 1882 and 1903; the second – 1904-1914; the third – 1919-1923; the fourth – 1924-1928; and the fifth – 1929-1939, J.L. Gelvin. *Konflikt izraelsko-palestyński*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego; 2009.

recognized by other states. Although it is noted in the preamble that actions undertaken for the resettlement of the Jews cannot violate the civil and religious rights of the non-Jewish Palestinian community (including political status), the reality turned out to be different. In 1919 at the League of Nations established the King-Crane Commission, whose official task was to facilitate Jewish immigration in such a way that it would not be detrimental to the local population. The Commission, however, did not present any important recommendations, only contradictory information<sup>2</sup>.

A few years later, President Winston Churchill stated in the White Book of 1922 that “Balfour Declaration (...) cannot be changed” [4]. In addition, it was emphasized in it that the Jewish population lived in Palestine in accordance with the law and might increase their number through immigration [4]. These endeavors were to be supported by the creation of the Jewish national headquarters, although it was not clarified upon which principles it would function. In this way, while the Palestinians protested against interfering in the fate of their country and opposed general arrangements favorable to the Jewish population immigrating to their territory, the Jews themselves focused on specific activities such as buying land, building schools, creating social organizations or developing agriculture [3].

The incompetent pro-Jewish policy, or rather its ineffectual creation, led to a series of demonstrations and uprisings<sup>3</sup>. Wishing to oppose it, on May 5, 1936, in Jerusalem, the Arab leaders resolved to establish the High Arab Committee, which was to represent the Palestinian Arabs. The Committee demanded from the British authorities to stop the immigration of the Jews to Palestine and prohibit the sale of land to them. What is more, it requested that elections to the legislative chamber should be organized. The response of the mandate administration suppressed the hopes of the Arabs, which is why on May 15 the High Arab Committee announced a general strike. It involved, among other things, the boycott of Jewish shops and the refusal to pay taxes, which was the first attempt at a political fight against the British authorities [5]. The Arabs demanded the establishment of an Arab state and the cessation of efforts to create a Jewish national headquarters. They presented their demands to the Royal Commission, which in 1936 came to Palestine to recognize the prevailing moods and develop a report containing recommendations for actions necessary to resolve the conflict. One of them concerned the division of Palestine into three independent areas: the Palestinian and the Jewish ones and the British enclave, which still was not a solution to the problem because the Arabs did not intend to agree with the decisions of the British authorities [3].

The announced plan of division provoked further Arab occurrences, in consequence of which, on November 11, 1937, the military judiciary capable of “the imposition of the death penalty for armed robberies, possession of weapons or sabotage” was appointed [6]. Six months later, the British Division Commission arrived in Palestine, which identified three possible variants of the division of the area. None of them would provide the Arab state with economic

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with the provisions of the Commission, the United States should take over the British mandate over Palestine, which the state was not ready for. President Wilson – in contrast to the Commission’s recommendations – expressed his approval for the Balfour Declaration, which was previously adopted not only by the League of Nations, but also by the British authorities, D. Cohn-Sherbok, D. El-Alami. *Konflikt palestyński-izraelski*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy; 2002.

<sup>3</sup> In the effect of these actions, the mandate authorities decided to use arrests as well as the introduction of repression and a state of emergency, J. Piotrowski. *Spór o Palestynę*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej; 1983.

self-sufficiency. Furthermore, none of them fully satisfied the Jewish population. The White Paper, presented on November 9, 1938, proposed an Arab-Jewish dialogue rather than imposing a specific plan for partitioning Palestine. However, the talks undertaken during the conference did not lead to a consensus [6].

The outbreak of World War II made the support of the Allied forces and joining them to fight against Hitler's Germany a new priority. With time, however, it turned into a hotspot, because the Jews began to demand even more the creation of a Jewish state throughout Palestine<sup>4</sup>. The above motivated radical Jewish groups to carry out a series of terrorist attacks against the British Armed Forces stationed in Palestine. In the effect of these events, at the beginning of 1947, the British submitted the Palestinian issue to the UN, which directed the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) to the area. Its findings caused that the UN General Assembly voted for the division of Palestine<sup>5</sup>, and the British government decided to withdraw its troops from this area until 1948<sup>6</sup>. As was soon to be found out, it was a prelude to the outbreak of the civil war and the continuation of multiannual disputes.

The resignation of the British from the mandate and the final withdrawal of their troops meant that on May 14, 1948, the newly elected prime minister proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel, which gained the support of both the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The position of the Arab population was unequivocal: the decision taken by the UN General Assembly was unfair and unrighteous as it deprived the Arabs of a part of their national economy and the very territory of the state, which consisted of the best arable lands. Jerusalem (*corpus separatum*) was also taken away from them, henceforth under UN supervision [3]. The day after Israel declared independence, the Arab states decided to enter the areas granted to the Palestinians and support the Arab population living in the area, which had been imposed unacceptable solutions<sup>7</sup>. It was an action for which the Jews had been prepared. While the Arab forces numbered 46,000 soldiers, there were more than twice as many Israel's enemies – almost 98,000 better organized and trained soldiers [3]. The effect of the war was predictable and was associated with the defeat of the Palestinians<sup>8</sup>. As a result of the military operations, the Israeli army took "(...) 77% of Palestinian territories and the greater part of the city of Jerusalem" and "over half of the Palestinian people were fled or displaced" [7]. And although almost a year later a ceasefire took place, thus initiating the construction of a peace process, the number of the Palestinian refugees in other Arab countries was nearly a million people, and the Palestinians demanded their return.

The cease-fire was not tantamount to concluding peace for the Arabs, since, as Mahmoud Riyadh points out, "a ceasefire is one thing, but entering into peace with you would mean that we agree that you stay here. (...) We cannot live with you yet in peace" [3]. The following

<sup>4</sup> According to the so-called Biltmore Program announced in 1942 by the World Zionist Organization, J.L. Gelvin. *Konflikt izraelsko-palestyński...*, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> See: the UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/181 (II) of November 29, 1947.

<sup>6</sup> According to the UNSCOP report of August 31, 1947, the territory of Palestine should be divided into a Jewish and Arabic part, excluding places of worship, which were to remain an international area, D. Cohn-Sherbok, D. El-Alami. *Konflikt palestyński-izraelski...*, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> The first Israeli-Arab war lasting from May 14, 1948, to February 24, 1949, Y. Gelber. *Palestine 1948. War, Escape and the Emergence of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*. Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press; 2000.

<sup>8</sup> The course of this war may be the subject of research in a separate publication, however, due to the quantitative limitations of the text, only its most important effects have been signaled.

years passed on conducting negotiations, mainly on the issue of the return of Palestinian refugees, but they did not bring the expected results. In 1964, during the first National Palestinian Congress, the Palestine Liberation Organization was established, striving to support Palestine in gaining independence and taking part in terrorist attacks against Israel [5]. The so-called Six-Day War<sup>9</sup>, described as the armed aggression of Israel against the Arab countries, turned out to be the turning point<sup>10</sup>. It was anticipated then that Egypt, Jordan, and Syria had undertaken joint actions to start the war with Israel. As Palestine was then under the control of Egypt and Jordan (the Gaza Strip and the West Bank), Israel decided to get ahead of the opponent’s attack and occupy this area [7]. The War ended with an undoubted defeat of the Arab states and, above all, a significant blow to the Palestinians, because during the war activities, the Israelis took over, among others, the area of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. To regain the occupied lands, the Arab states were to recognize Israel’s independence and conclude peace treaties with it [4]. The Members of the Arab League, however, did not intend to agree to these conditions and during the summit in Khartoum they announced joint opposition to the occupant [1].

The Egyptian-Syrian attack carried out on October 6, 1973, after the beginning of the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur, proved to be a surprise for Israel. Not only did it begin the next Israeli-Arab war but also the clash between two powers – the United States supporting Israel and the Soviet Union clearly siding with Egypt and Syria. The states later turned to the United Nations for help. In response, the UN Security Council issued the Resolution No. 338 of October 22, 1973, which imposed a truce on the parties to the conflict and called for negotiations to bring the lasting peace to the Middle East. Five years later, in Camp David, the system concerning the agreement between Egypt and Israel was worked out, but it did not in fact change the situation of Palestine. It only took account of the plan to establish Palestinian self-government in the area of Gaza and the West Bank, that is, the area occupied by Israel [1]. The Palestinians started leaving their homes since the Six-Day War and eagerly settled in Lebanon, though they also faced a war in the area during which the large-scale bloody massacre of the Palestinian refugees occurred<sup>11</sup>. The dispute between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Israeli authorities, which did not recognize the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians, did not improve the situation. Finally, in August 1986, the Israeli parliament forbade, under the Act, the Israelis to establish contacts with the representatives of the PLO, and at the end of 1987 the First Intifada broke out [1]. Due to the fact that the image of Palestinian children throwing stones at Israeli tanks was drawn during the uprising, the event was called the “war of stones”. The beginning of the First Intifada, in the Arabic language: “the Palestinians’ shaking off”, dates back to December 9, 1987, when the Gaza Strip was affected by riots and demonstrations, which later extended to the West Bank and East Jerusalem. For many years of occupation, the Palestinians felt controlled in all aspects of life by the Israelis who made decisions on their employing and moving, as well as using the land belonging to

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<sup>9</sup> The Six-Day War – a preventive war launched on June 5-10, 1967, initiated by Israel, which through air and land operations led to the occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, the Sinai Peninsula and the east of Jerusalem, K. Kubiak. *Wojna sześciodniowa*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Altair; 1992.

<sup>10</sup> These include Egypt, Jordan and Syria, which on June 5, 1967, were attacked by Israel, K. Kubiak. *Wojna sześciodniowa...*, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> It is about the massacre carried out in the Sabra and Shatila camps, *Kwestia palestyńska*, [online]. Ośrodek Informacji ONZ w Warszawie. Available at: <http://www.unic.un.org.pl/palestyna/tlo.php> [Accessed: 7 September 2017].

the Palestinians before the occupation. The result of such actions was a long-term war, during which in the fights 1400-1700 Palestinians lost their lives, 18 thousand of their countrymen were injured, 175 thousand imprisoned, and 23 thousand tortured [4].

Finally, on September 13, 1993, the parties to the conflict managed to work out – with the support of the Norwegians – the agreement known as the Oslo Accords, and then the Cairo Agreement on May 4, 1994. The Israeli authorities and representatives of the PLO (under the leadership of Yasser Arafat) approved the formation of the Palestinian National Authority, also called the Palestinian Autonomy. Although it may have seemed that this was the solution to the several-decade-long Israeli-Arab conflict, the sustainable peace was not achieved and on September 28, 2000, the war broke out again [5].

## **2. The construction of the “security barrier”**

The Second Al-Aqsa Intifada was the follow-up to the dissatisfaction with the effects of the peace process, whose failure was highlighted by the Camp David summit in July 2000 [8]. The outbreak of the uprising was provoked by the visit of Ariel Sharon to Jerusalem on the Temple Mount (a Muslim holy site) and showed the bitterness of the Palestinians caused by the deteriorating conditions of their lives. The participation in the fight against the Israeli oppression was clearly marked by Arab political and military organizations (such as Fatah and Hamas), also considered as terrorist organizations after they had carried out a series of suicide bombings in Israel [9]. Hence, when a year later, on September 11, 2001, the United States of America fell the victim of terrorist attacks, and George W. Bush announced the beginning of the “Global War on Terrorism”, Israel also decided to seize the opportunity to justify violence against the Palestinians and take a similar fight. Just a day after the attack on the World Trade Center, the Israeli Defense Force began firing at the headquarters of the Palestinian security forces in Jenin and then entered Ramallah, the informal capital of Palestine. [10].

Shortly afterward, the Israeli authorities decided to build the “security barrier” to separate the parties to the conflict physically, and its construction commenced in 2002. At the very beginning of its characteristics, doubts arise as to the name of the Israeli structure. That stems from the fact that various sources – both Polish and foreign – provide at least several terms for the same fortification. The most well-known include the security barrier, the security fence, and the security wall [11]. Other terms, however, are used by the Palestinians who use the phrases “Apartheid wall” or “racist wall of separation” [2]. In the article, these terms are used interchangeably, because all of them, on the one hand, indicate the existence of a physical “wall” dividing the disputed territory into two parts, and, on the other hand, show the Israeli mentality, based on a kind of “division policy”. It should be noted that only the Palestinians feel a sense of harm in separating them from the lands they have been associated with for generations. The Israeli side indicates that the Palestinians should blame themselves for creating the anti-terrorist barrier. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs also emphasizes that only a small part of the 720-kilometer barrier announced in 2004 will be built of concrete [12]. The specified length of the fence was achieved at the turn of 2014/2015. However, the work has not been completed, as it was planned to extend the existing structure by another 70 kilometers [13].

Currently, the wall consists of a set of walls (up to 8 meters high), various types of barriers, fences, and trenches [14]. To increase effectiveness, the border is also protected by guards,

thermal imaging cameras, drones, and other security measures. It is estimated that the construction of the barrier and its maintenance may cost Israel up to 3.2 billion dollars [15]. Figure 1 shows both the already made wall elements (marked with a solid black line) and those planned to be built (solid red line)<sup>12</sup>. As announced by the Israeli government, the construction was meant to respond to terrorist attacks attributed to the Palestinian terrorists from the West Bank. Although it was planned that the structure would take place along the demarcation lines of 1949, it also intervenes in occupied territories [4]. Israel justified this action with the issues of protection of its citizens against terrorist attacks, which primarily pose a threat to the security of people living in cities. According to the Israeli authorities maintaining the frontiers from June 1967 would be only a political statement, not a response to real threats [12]. As a result, the construction is more than twice as long as it was initially intended<sup>13</sup>. The Palestinians and the United Nations expressed a different position.

The construction of the “security fence” was officially launched in 2002, however, at the end of 2003 the UN General Assembly demanded that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) give an advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the construction of the wall by Israel in the occupied Palestine [17]. The International Court of Justice’s reply, received on July 9, 2004, stated that the wall being built by Israel violated the rights of the Palestinians and the provisions of international law [18]. According to information collected by the ICJ, the wall restricts the right of the Palestinians to move, to use the health care system and public education, to take up employment (limited access to the cultivated land that provides livelihoods) or to access water intakes [19]. In addition, the Palestinians’ property that is located in the area designated for the construction of the fence is being destroyed, which leads to the Palestinians’ loss of ownership of the previously occupied land. As the ICJ points out, these actions violate the provisions of the Fourth Hague Convention of 1907<sup>14</sup> and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949<sup>15</sup>. Though the facts reveal that instead of complying with the recommendations of the International Court of Justice, Israel decides to further expand the fortifications not only along the areas inhabited by the Palestinians, but also on the border with Egypt and Jordan. It is estimated that the border barrier being built makes life difficult for 500 thousand Palestinians, of whom 200,000 live in the area under the jurisdiction of Israel. Thus, Israel’s actions are sometimes seen as “the first step towards a milder and more subtle form of ethnic cleansing” [4].

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<sup>12</sup> According to the map published on April 10, 2017 by the Palestinian organization – the Negotiations Affairs Department.

<sup>13</sup> The initial plans assumed the construction of a border structure along the former demarcation line (the so-called green line), being 320 kilometers long. The actual barrier is more than twice longer – 750, and ultimately even 790 kilometers, A. Rykała. *Zmiany usytuowania geopolitycznego i struktury terytorialno-relijijnej (etnicznej) Izraela*. Prace Geograficzne. 2013;242:145-79.

<sup>14</sup> The ICJ points to Article 46, which states that private property should be respected during a war and not subject to confiscation, and requisitions may be collected for the occupation army if they are not related to participating in hostilities against the homeland (Article 52), *Konwencja dotycząca praw i zwyczajów wojny lądowej (IV konwencja haska)*. Haga, 18 października 1907 r. (Dz. U. z 1927 r. Nr 21, poz. 161).

<sup>15</sup> In the ICJ’s opinion, Article 53 states that “the occupying power may not destroy any movable or immovable property constituting individual or joint property of private persons, the state or legal persons, public law, social or cooperative organizations, except in those cases where such destruction would be strictly necessary for military operations”, *Konwencja genewska o ochronie osób cywilnych podczas wojny (IV konwencja genewska)*. Genewa, 12 sierpnia 1949 r. (Dz. U. z 1956 r. Nr 38, poz. 171, załącznik).



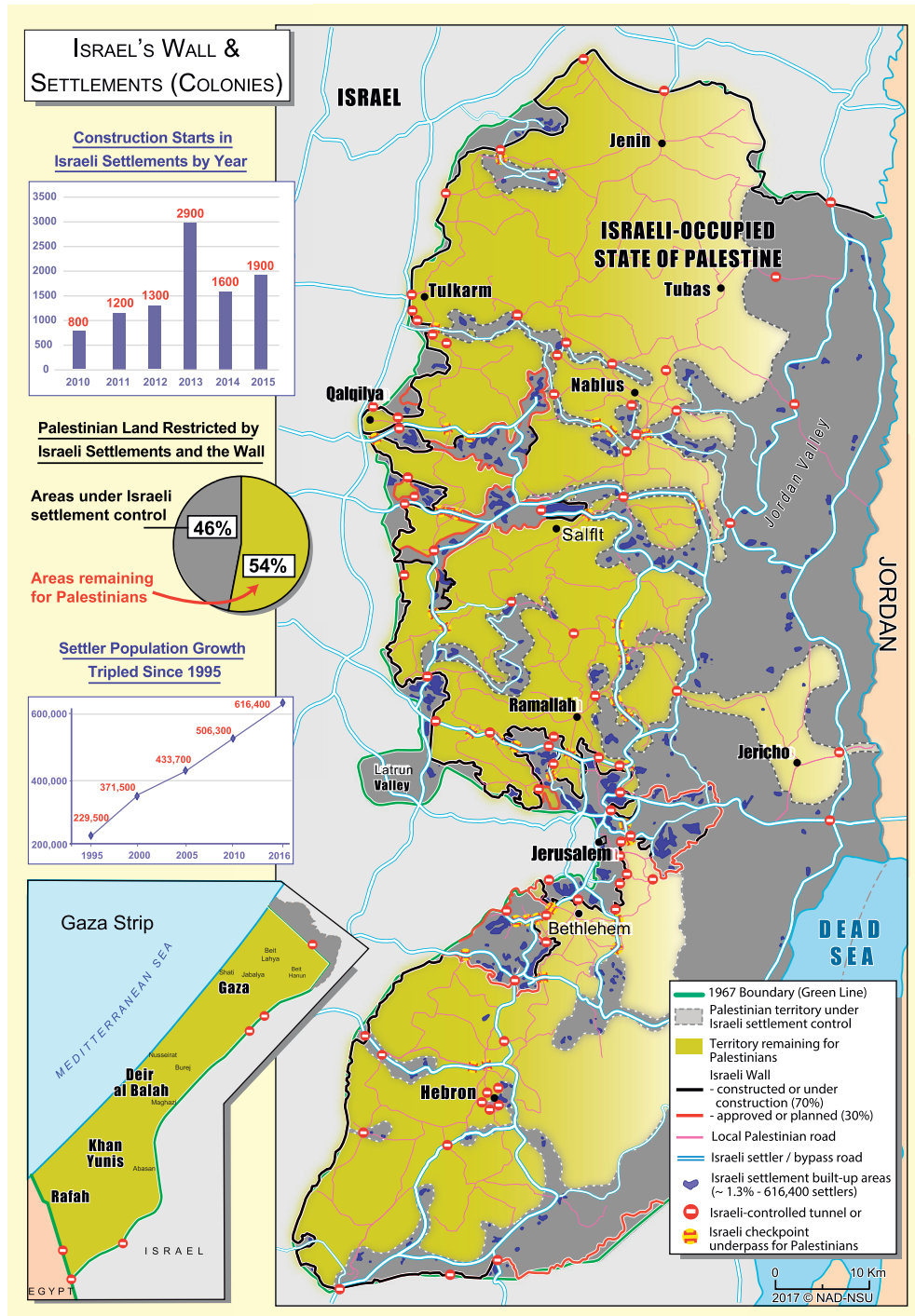


Fig. 1. The course of the Israeli security barrier  
Source: [16].



It can be pointed out that in 2002 Israel entered the third phase of the policy aimed at the occupation of Palestine. The first began in 1967 and lasted until 1994, when the second phase began, which was completed with the construction of a border barrier. However, these are not separate stages of shaping the Israeli “fencing policy”, but rather overlapping activities, ultimately leading to the seizure of power over the entire area of former Palestine and controlling the lives of its inhabitants. The creation of a permanent border structure allows the Israeli authorities not only to supervise the movement of the population, but also creates the possibility of extending the territory to other areas that formally belong to the Palestinians but are located on the Israeli part of the wall and are occupied by the Israelis [2]. As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pointed out, Israel intends to block off all its neighbors<sup>16</sup>, calling the Arabs “wild beasts”<sup>17</sup>. These activities are to relate not only to land borders, but also underground ones, which is officially connected with the infiltration of Hamas fighters through infiltration tunnels leading from the Gaza Strip into Israel [20].

It was Egypt that previously decided to build the underground barrier on the border with the Gaza Strip, and at the end of 2009, it began to construct a 20-30 m deep and 10 km long steel barrier preventing the Palestinians from entering the Egyptian territory through underground tunnels. The increased movement of the Palestinian population was caused by constraints imposed by the Israeli authorities at the border with Palestine and blocking the supply of food, medicines, or fuels. The response to the restrictions of the Israeli side was the intensification of smuggling taking place underground, also focused on the acquisition of weapons and drugs. Initially, the Egyptian authorities tried to fight to smuggle, blowing up tunnels and adding gas to them. When these actions did not take the desired effect, it was decided to build an underground wall, the construction of which lasted over a year [17]. The interruption of the work was related to the removal of Hosni Mubarak from power, and – according to Israel – enabled the Hamas militants again to get outside the Gaza Strip and smuggle weapons. A few years later, a similar fight with underground tunnels was undertaken by Israel.

It is from the attack of fighters using underground tunnels to move from the Gaza Strip to Israel that another fight between Israel and Lebanon and Palestinians began. Although a few months earlier it seemed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was coming to an end and the “security barrier” would be transformed into the official border between Israel and the Palestinian Autonomy, the reality turned out to be much less optimistic. As a result of the attack of the Palestinian fighters on June 25, 2006 against Israeli soldiers and the subsequent activities of Lebanese Hezbollah, Israel carried out an air attack on the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, followed by land attacks. The destruction of these areas was so great that more than 3,500 Palestinians and about a million Lebanese had to leave their homes, and 300 Palestinian, 1,200 Lebanese and 44 Israeli civilians were killed, while, respectively, over 1,200, 400 and 5,000 of them were wounded. When in March 2006 Hamas took power in the Palestinian Autonomy, the European Union and the United States decided to force the Palestinians to recognize the State of Israel, primarily by stopping financial support and imposing fines on banks providing such support to the Palestinian Autonomy. Already at that time it was

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<sup>16</sup> “At the end of the day as I see it, there will be a fence like this one surrounding Israel in its entirety. We will surround the entire state of Israel with a fence, a barrier”, *Netanyahu plans fence around Israel to protect it from ‘wild beasts’*, [online]. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/10/netanyahu-plans-fence-around-israel-to-protect-it-from-wild-beasts> [Accessed: 7 September 2017].

<sup>17</sup> Another translation indicates the term “predators”, *Netanyahu plans fence...*, op. cit.

possible to predict that Hamas would not comply with these conditions and intensify its attacks on Israeli targets. The group took actions, and Israel faced a new challenge, which was controlling not only the land border with the Gaza Strip, but also underground passages [4].

### **3. Construction of the underground barrier and the isolation of the Palestinian population**

The idea behind building an underground barrier appeared already in 2014, when Hamas militants started using tunnels under the “security wall” to organize attacks on military posts in Israel. About 32 tunnels were detected and liquidated at that time, however, at the beginning of 2016, the subsequent ones were found. At that time, the Israeli authorities decided to flood the underground corridors with concrete to create an underground barrier that would be connected in some places with the above-ground wall. The planned construction time is to be two years, but it is possible to shorten it to several months. The Israeli soldiers do not hide that not all tunnels within the 60-kilometer section of the border will be cemented. This is due to the fact that the Israeli authorities are aware that they will not be able to stop the Hamas fighters, who will find another way to get into the enemy’s territory. For this reason, it is planned to use parts of existing underground tunnels between Israel and the Gaza Strip to make them a “death trap”, for example through flooding, for people trying to defeat it.

The about 60 kilometers long and even a few dozen meters deep structures will also be 6 meters above the ground, constituting a firewall against Short Iron Dome missiles that Hamas uses to fight the Israeli army. The cost of this construction is expected to amount up to 1.1 billion dollars. Israel realizes that the development of an underground barrier may exacerbate the situation and lead to the outbreak of another war. The question then arises whether these actions do not constitute a kind of provocation that will lead to the escalation of the conflict. The more so because Israel emphasizes its full readiness to engage in another war. The Palestinian civilians would be the victims of such a policy, and the members of Hamas would be blamed for the attacks. Israel has mapped the Palestinian civilian facilities that could be used to carry out attacks on the Israeli forces. That is another excuse to start a conventional war if the conflict escalates. As the Hamas spokesperson points out, Israel’s actions are aimed at creating a bad image of the Palestinians and justifying the mass killing of thousands of them [21].

When analyzing the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and especially its course after 2000, one should consider what the effects Israel’s policy towards the Palestinians can bring. The Israeli authorities must be aware that it will not provide any party with lasting peace. What is more, it will not stop the actions taken by Hamas and other parties that will try to find a different way to fight Israel and free themselves from the Israeli occupation. Why, then, are they undertaking actions that may lead to a dangerous escalation of the conflict?

One of the potential answers to this question may concern the desire to exterminate the Palestinian people. The prolonged occupation of the areas inhabited by the Palestinians and the conduct of conflicts and wars led not only to the destruction of their possessions, but also cut them off from humanitarian aid from outside. As the British organization Save the Children indicates that a million Palestinian children live in tragic conditions, which, among others due to the lack of electricity, are deteriorating. Moreover, since 2007, two million Palestinians have lived on the territory of about 360 km<sup>2</sup>, which leads to the deepening of

the humanitarian crisis [22]. At the turn of 2011/2012 the unemployment rate was 29%, while in 2016/2017 it increased to 42%. The water crisis is also very strong on the territory under the Israeli occupation, as only 3.8% of the available water resources are suitable for consumption. It is estimated that by 2020 these statistics will reach 0%. As far as healthcare is concerned, there are only 1.58 hospital beds and 1.42 doctors per 1,000 people [23]. It leaves no doubt, therefore, that Israel’s actions are deliberate and aimed at the destruction of the Palestinian people, which will be condemned to slow dying out of access to clean water, food or medicine. The whole process accelerates the sealing of borders, which are used to smuggle the mentioned measures.

The restrictions concerning the movement of the population of the Palestinian Autonomy and the crossing of the border with Israel are also significant. In 2016, more than 80% fewer goods were exported from the Gaza Strip than it was before the outbreak of the 2007 War. The above resulted both from the limitations imposed on the carriage of goods abroad, as well as the shortage of materials and equipment imported from Israel, used for production. Subsequent statistics indicate that approximately 40% of the Palestinians live in poverty, and 47% have limited access to food. The inhabitants of the Gaza Strip also receive almost four times less electricity than required by the conditions in which they live. All these data show a deteriorating level of their lives. The economy in the Gaza Strip has weakened in recent years, and the unemployment rate has increased. The infrastructure, essential services, and the private sector are being gradually destroyed, leading to the devastation of life in the Gaza Strip, whose inhabitants require humanitarian aid (in 2017 their number is expected to amount to 1.2 million) [23].

The cited United Nations report clearly indicates that it is necessary to direct the Gaza Strip towards the sustainable development, boost the production sector, abolish restrictions on the movement of people and transport of goods, as well as respect human rights. Without this, the Palestinian Autonomy may collapse, and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process will be doomed to its final defeat. If one combines these recommendations with the actions taken by Israel, they will find the real goal pursued by Israel’s fencing policy. Instead of destroying the walls, the Israeli authorities are striving to build more. As the Israeli media reported in August 2017, the plan was also to create an underwater barrier in the Mediterranean Sea, isolating from Israel the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip traveling by sea [21]. It is not possible to state unequivocally what plans Israel creates towards the Palestinian Autonomy; however, all speculations concern the desire to destroy it. Being aware of their military power and the weakness of the economic opponent, they take even the riskiest activities. And this was undoubtedly the first construction of the “security barrier”, and currently the underground border barrier.

## Conclusions

It is not an easy task to obtain the answer to the research problem presented at the beginning of the article, nonetheless, the analysis of the sources suggests that the real objective of Israel’s fencing policy towards the Palestinians is to bring about the collapse of the Palestinian Autonomy and the total takeover of the occupied territory. Israel is aware of the military and economic advantage over the opponent and gradually uses it. The construction of the security fence and the underground border barrier limits the lives of the Palestinians

and the functioning of the Gaza Strip, thus leading to its destruction. In turn, the Palestinian Autonomy clearly indicates that its goal is to gain independence, which Israel does not want to agree to. The intentions of both parties to the conflict suggest that attempts to establish peace for many years are impossible. All the more so because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is part of a larger whole, namely the Israeli-Arab conflict. As Prime Minister Netanyahu pointed out, the construction of an underground wall is only part of the long-term plan of surrounding Israel with security barriers that are to protect this country against the entire Middle East. It can, therefore, be assumed that in the following years Israel will deepen, not blur the existing divisions.

### **Acknowledgement**

No acknowledgement and potential founding was reported by the author.

### **Conflict of interests**

The author declared no conflict of interests.

### **Author contributions**

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

### **Ethical statement**

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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### “Polityka podziałów” Izraela w konflikcie izraelsko-palestyńskim

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#### STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł podejmuje tematykę kształtowania przez Izrael specyficznej polityki podziałów względem Palestyńczyków, czego przejawem była między innymi budowa tzw. muru bezpieczeństwa oraz rozpoczęcie budowy podziemnego muru, uniemożliwiającego przedostawanie się ludności ze Strefy Gazy na teren Izraela. Stanowi to kontynuację trwającego już kilkadziesiąt lat sporu izraelsko-palestyńskiego, którego złożoność utrudnia osiągnięcie trwałego pokoju.

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**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** Izrael, Palestyna, konflikt izraelsko-palestyński, bariera graniczna, mur podziemny

#### How to cite this paper

Kotasińska A. *“Fencing policy” of Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*. Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces. 2020;52;1(195):41-54.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0014.0259>



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