**Israeli Military 340 acres of village land to Bilin to reroute the new barrier**

**With a Bit of Land Restored, Villagers End Campaign**

Rina Castelnuovo for The New York Times

BILIN, West Bank — Residents of this tiny Palestinian village, along with Israeli and foreign supporters, on Friday held what organizers billed as the last of their trademark weekly demonstrations against the Bilin section of Israel’s West Bank barrier. It was a milestone that illustrated both the success of the unarmed popular movement that was born here, and its limitations.

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The six-year campaign is winding down because the Israeli military has begun to dismantle the fence that separated the village from about two-thirds of its agricultural land. This is in belated compliance with a 2007 Israeli Supreme Court ruling against the country’s influential security establishment.

The court ordered the military to reroute this section of the barrier so it would run closer to the neighboring Jewish settlement of Modiin Illit and take in less of Bilin’s land. The new section of the barrier has already been erected — a nearly two-mile wall of concrete slabs meant to protect the Jewish settlement against sniper fire.

The new barrier route has returned about 150 acres of village land to Bilin, but another 340 acres remain on the “Israeli” side.

“My feelings are mixed,” said Muhammad Khatib, a local leader, shortly before the march. “Even with the new route, not all our land will be returned. But without popular resistance, none of this would have happened.”

Salam Fayyad, the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, came to show his solidarity. He joined the beginning of the march along the main street after noon prayer at the mosque.

“It is a beginning, not the end,” Mr. Fayyad said. The Israeli occupation, he said, was “beginning to be rolled back.”

“It is a victory for this approach of nonviolence,” he added. “A sovereign state of Palestine in the territories occupied in 1967 — that is what this is about.”

The organizers of the Bilin protests say that they are committed to nonviolence, but that they cannot stop youngsters from hurling rocks at the Israeli soldiers. The Israeli military says the antibarrier protests are illegal and violent. Tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets are used to disperse the protesters who reach the fence, and the stone throwers. The military has also cracked down on the movement over the last year, detaining many of the grass-roots leaders.

The Bilin organizers have vowed to continue their struggle. But with the distance to the new wall making weekly marches there less practical, they were discussing alternative strategies like cultivating the newly reclaimed lands or building on them.

The weekly protests here turned Bilin, in the central Ramallah district of the West Bank, into a symbol of Palestinian defiance. Drawing international attention, it became a model for Palestinians campaigning against the Israeli barrier or the expansion of nearby settlements. The localized protests have spread to the nearby villages of Nabi Saleh, Deir Qaddis and others in the Bethlehem area.

With Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations stalled, there has been much talk of a new Palestinian popular uprising and mass marches around September, when the Palestinian leadership says it plans to seek international recognition of Palestinian statehood at the United Nations.

So far, though, there has been little indication of any mass movement taking shape in the West Bank.

In a sign of frustration, Mr. Fayyad said Friday that the Palestinians must have “their freedom from Israel or the right to vote in Israel. We prefer freedom.”

Significantly, Mr. Fayyad was suggesting that if a two-state solution is unachievable, the alternative is a single binational state.

Michael Sfard, the Israeli lawyer who represents Bilin in the Israeli courts, said Israel had “pulled every possible trick,” to avoid carrying out the Supreme Court decision. The state submitted two alternative paths for the Bilin barrier that the court deemed inadequate, finally offering one that the court accepted in April 2009.

Mr. Sfard recently warned the military that if the old fence were not removed by July 1, he would file a contempt of court motion against it.

Still, Mr. Sfard said, this was the first time that the strategy of Palestinian popular struggle had brought “tangible results that can be measured in acres.”

Israel began building the West Bank barrier in 2002, amid a violent Palestinian uprising, stating that it was essential to prevent suicide bombers from reaching Israel.

But most of the barrier runs inside the West Bank, deviating from the pre-1967 boundary, leading the Palestinians to accuse Israel of a land grab. The International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled in 2004 that the construction of the barrier inside occupied Palestinian territory was contrary to international law.

In the case of Bilin, the Supreme Court rejected the state’s argument that the route was created according to security considerations. The court determined that it had been routed to allow for the expansion of Modiin Illit.

Several hundred protesters — many more than some recent protests here have drawn — marched off the main street Friday along a path toward the old fence. This time a bulldozer drove at the vanguard, intending to dismantle it before the Israelis could.

The bulldozer and several protesters with wire cutters managed to damage the fence in a few parts. But the bulldozer was soon disabled after soldiers shot at its tires from across the fence, puncturing two of them and shattering a window.

There was some stone throwing, and protesters were driven back by repeated volleys of tear gas and a foul-smelling liquid known as Skunk.

Mr. Khatib, the local leader who was among those trying to cut the fence, was badly affected. Eyes and skin burning, he ripped his clothes off, wrapped himself in a flag, and had to be driven back to the village.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/25/world/middleeast/25palestinians.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>

**Developments**

**Israel reroutes West Bank barrier at Bilin**

Israel’s army has begun dismantling a section of the West Bank separation barrier near the village of Bilin, four years after the Israeli Supreme Court ordered them to do so.

The rerouting on Sunday marked a major victory for residents of the town and activists who have held weekly demonstrations at the site for years.

Not all activists were satisfied with the move, however, with many demanding that the structure be removed entirely from the village.

The Israeli Supreme Court had ordered the structure be torn down in 2007, after it rejected the military’s argument that the route was required to secure the nearby Modiin Illit settlement.

Colonel Saar Tsur, the regional Israeli brigade commander, said the military had begun taking apart a 3.2km stretch of the barrier and had replaced it with a 2.7km-long concrete wall adjacent to the settlement.

Tsur said that the new route gave the military less response time in case of any unauthorised crossings.

"This is a new threat but we can handle it," he said. Tsur said that work would be complete on the project by the end of the week.

Carter and Tutu

Bilin had lost half its land after the erection of the barrier, and the weekly protests in the village frequently turned into clashes between activists and Israeli troops.

Israel said that it built the barrier in late 2002 to keep out Palestinian attackers, after a wave of suicide bombings hit its cities.

The barrier, however, juts into the West Bank, and critics say the route of the fence is designed to take over land that Palestinians say is part of their state.

When completed, the barrier is projected to take over between six and eight per cent of the West Bank.

Tsur said that the new route would put about 140 acres back into Palestinian hands. He said the total cost of the project was $9m, with the military allocating $1.4m for the rehabilitation of farmland in the area.

"During the project, the Israel Defence Force relocated and replanted tens of Palestinian olive trees in order to protect them during the industrial works," a military statement said.

The weekly protests on Friday at the farming village have attracted several well-known international figures over the years, including Nobel Peace Prize laureates Jimmy Carter and Desmond Tutu.

Two Palestinians have died and hundreds of others have been wounded since the protests began in 2005.

Tsur termed the protests acts of violence, saying that he doubted that the rerouting of the barrier would lead to their cessation.

On Friday, activists had tried to use bulldozers to tear down the fence before the army began its project.

"We are going to continue until we get all our rights. This barrier isn’t for security. It’s to steal land and build settlements," said Rani Burnat, a 30-year-old resident paralysed in a separate demonstration 10 years ago.

<http://www.bilin-village.org/english/articles/press-and-independent-media/Israel-reroutes-West-Bank-barrier-at-Bilin>

Bilin's next battle: Settlement

Palestinian village decides to build illegally on land ‘liberated’ by successful anti-fence battle

by Elior Levy

Following the IDF’s dismantling of a separation fence running through Bilin, residents of the West Bank village have decided to adopt a new battle.

Ynet learned Tuesday that the Popular Committee of Bilin will replace its weekly anti-fence protests, which take place Fridays, with the construction of new structures on the land added to the village when the fence was dismantled Sunday.

Around 170 acres of land were added to the village with the removal of the fence, 130 of which are privately owned Palestinian lands.

It is on this land that the residents plan to construct a new neighborhood, called West Bilin. Organizers of the protests against the fence are still fuming, however, at the fact that some 330 acres belonging to the village remain inaccessible, because they lie to the west of the wall that surrounds nearby Israeli towns such as Modi’in.

"The popular protest has decided to adopt a new strategy," announced Mohammed Khatib, the leader of the Popular Committee. "The idea is to set facts on the ground and begin building homes on our lands located between the dismantled fence and the wall."

He claims the construction will replace Friday’s protests, which have generated many violent clashes with security forces over the years.

"We will begin at first by building small rooms every Friday, on every plot of land belonging to the village, and finally there will be a park for the welfare of residents," he explained.

The construction has not been approved by Israel, and is considered illegal. However the residents are certain that demolitions will require orders from the court, which will embroil petitioners in a lengthy legal battle.

"These are our lands, we have liberated them and now we are determined to use them for our purposes," Khatib said.

Left-wing activists from Israel and the world plan to help the residents with their cause. Jonathan Pollak, an Israeli man who regularly attended the anti-fence protests, said it was "the right move" for residents.

He added that the IDF will not be able to prevent construction without using violence. "If the army prevents construction on Friday, we will come back and build on Saturday," he said. "It will become a war of attrition and we’ll see who wins."

<http://www.bilin-village.org/english/articles/press-and-independent-media/Bilin-s-next-battle-Settlement>

**Separation Barrier**

**29 June 2011: Separation Barrier moved, but some 1,300 dunams of Bil’in land remain on other side**

In the past week, almost four years after the Israeli High Court order on the matter, the army dismantled the section of the Separation Barrier built on land of the Bil’in village within the West Bank. The route of the barrier has been moved westward, with a new section already in place, thereby returning to the village 745 dunams of farmland that had been taken by the previous route. However, 1,300 dunams of village land remain west of the barrier, within the borders of the Modi’in Illit settlement.

  
Parts of the dismantled section loaded onto a truck. Photo: Oren Ziv, activestills, 28 June 2011.

The barrier was first erected in the Bil'in area in 2005, close to the built-up area of the village. Part of it ran through a valley, along a “topographically inferior” route, as the High Court put it. The route was set to enable expansion of the Matityahu East neighborhood of the Modi’in Illit settlement, although plans for the expanding the neighborhood had not yet been approved. This action violated the High Court’s ruling requiring prior approval for such plans (on the building offenses committed in constructing the neighborhood and the theft of Palestinian land to build Modi’in Illit, see here).

In September 2007, the High Court ordered the state to create a new route that would run, to the extent possible, on state land and not on the land of Bil'in. The alternate route proposed by the state still left large swaths of villagers’ land on the western side of the barrier. The villagers petitioned the court again. In December 2008, the court ordered the army to carry out its 2007 judgment “without further delay” and “as soon as possible.” The new route has been approved by the court, even though some 1,300 dunams of village land remain west of the barrier.

Since 2005, when construction of the barrier began in the area, the Israeli authorities have taken various measures to make to stifle villagers’ protest against the theft of their land. The army has begun to enforce a military order issued in 1967, defining a procession of ten or more persons as unlawful; every Friday, when the demonstrations are regularly held, it declares the area around the barrier a closed military area; and soldiers exercise their authority to disperse demonstrations, even when demonstrators are not violent.

  
Route of the dismantled Separation Barrier; behind is seen the new section, and behind it construction in Matityahu East. Photo: Oren Ziv, activestills, 28 June 2011.

The planning of the Separation Barrier’s route in the Bil’in area totally disregarded the resulting extensive infringement of the villager’s human rights. It was governed by extraneous considerations with no bearing on the protection of Israeli civilians. The route was primarily chosen to annex de facto as much land as possible for the Modi’in Illit settlement. Consequently, the route is unlawful..

<http://www.btselem.org/topic-page/29611-1300>

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