

# **Planning in Palestine: The Challenges**

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## ABSTRACT

Regional planning was a necessity to be undertaken with the In spite of political uncertainties, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has long considered physical planning a necessity in the context of growth and future prosperity. Such planning takes into account the creation of a comprehensive and rational territorial organization of land, its uses and the way in which these landmasses are linked together. Forward planning must also balance the requirements for sustainable development with socio-economic objectives as well as environmental protection. However, there are many challenges, not least of which the size of the current Palestinian territories – far smaller than the 48 per cent of historic Palestine, promised under the 1948 UN Resolution 181– and the fact that the land is poor in natural resources. With a burgeoning population and a prospective influx of returnees, forward planning is seen as an important component of a future successful Palestinian state. This paper seeks to illustrate the challenges faced by the PNA vis-à-vis regional planning amid the ongoing conflict with Israel – an conflict which has at its roots land and natural physical resources. Thus, geopolitical realities are, from necessity, at the heart of all development strategies. This paper further illustrates how the Oslo peace agreement - while signed with the best intentions and a genuine wish for a lasting peace on the part of the Palestinian leadership – has, in reality, only brought territorial fragmentation and isolation to the Palestinian people along with a weak economy, dependent upon external assistance. The PNA aims to gradually transform this negative picture into one of sustainable growth, integrating both physical and economic factors.

## INTRODUCTION

Achieving statehood has been a primary goal for Palestinians for the past 54 years. This quest has a long and turbulent history, lately marked by a track record of negotiations followed by Israeli aggression towards the Palestinian people and incursions by the Israeli Defense Forces into the areas under the control of the PNA. As a consequence of repression and the non-implementation of the Oslo agreements by Israel, the current intifada was ignited in September 2000 after an inflammatory visit to one of Islam's holiest sites, the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, by the current Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, accompanied by some 400 armed Israeli policemen. This intifada represents a legitimate Palestinian resistance to occupation in accordance with international law.

However, the ongoing conflict has left the Palestinian territories in a state of extreme uncertainty. Nevertheless, the PNA, since its inception in 1994, has recognized the importance of modern planning in reaching its overarching goal: that of building a viable, independent nation with internationally recognized secure borders.

Over three decades of Israeli occupation has resulted in a technical and administrative void, among other things which has created a grossly inadequate capacity level among current local, regional and national government levels, in the fields of spatial, physical, strategic, socioeconomic and environmental planning. Thus, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) – the shepherd of planning instruments - has not only focused on the development of relevant internal and external physical planning systems, but also upon human resources and sustainable capacity building in all fields of planning.

Two major objectives were addressed by MOPIC: One was to develop routines and systems including cooperation and participation models and procedures within MOPIC and with other planning related entities. The second objective was to draft a unified planning law for the two separated areas that comprise the sought-for Palestinian state.

These objectives related to organizational structuring, the design and development of a legal base, the drafting of policies, guidelines, norms, standards, institutional mechanisms and procedures for management of physical planning process - for all administrative and political levels. (MOPIC) has been mandated by the PNA as the shepherd of the various institutional arrangements in the PNA for expressing physical planning objectives and mechanisms employed for realizing them. The physical planning achievement under political diversities in this field, as described in this paper, encompasses national physical planning policies and framework, regional plans and policies, local level land use instruments and socio-economic developmental framework.

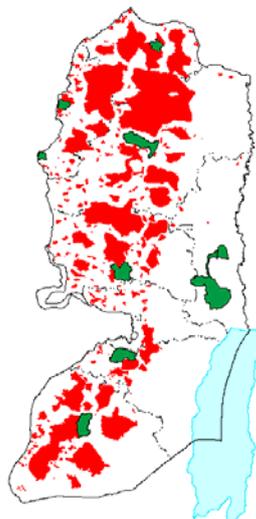
## Constraints

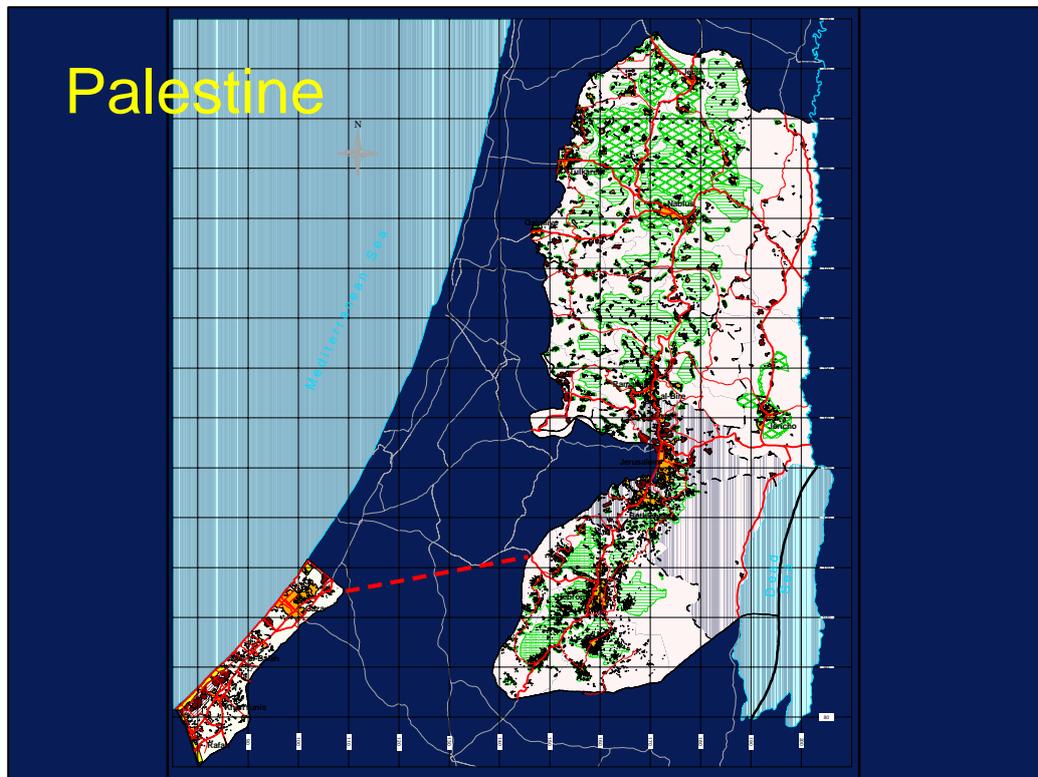
Almost all the constraints upon the PNA in relation to physical planning can be traced back to the occupation of Palestinian land by Israel since 1948, and Israel's subsequent land-grab in 1967.

Historic Palestine is the area that is delimited by the Lebanese Mountains in the north, the Gulf of Aqaba and the Sinai desert in the south, the Jordan Valley in the east and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. However, for the purpose of this article, the term Palestine is used when we are talking about the Palestinian territories of the West Bank (including eastern Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip.

Palestine is a divided area, i.e. if one wants to go from Gaza to the West Bank, you have to travel through Israel. Gaza Strip (G.S.) is a very small area, only about 360 sq. km. The West Bank is about 5,800 sq. km. In Gaza Strip, there are two centers, Gaza City in the north and Khan-Yunis City in the south. Gaza City is the biggest Palestinian City with close to 350,000 inhabitants. The West Bank has four regions. In the north we have the cities of Jenin, Tulkarm and Nablus. In the middle we have Ramallah/al-Bireh, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, in the south Hebron, and in the Jordan Valley Jericho.

The Oslo Agreement divided the West Bank into three categories, Area A, B and C. The A areas are Palestinian areas with full Palestinian National Authority control. This is the area of the main cities, about 3% of the total area of the West Bank (shown in green on the map below). Area B, roughly 24% of the area, is under joint Israeli and PNA control. The Israelis are responsible for its security while the Palestinians have the civil authority. The rest, area C, is completely under Israeli control.





The map above clearly shows how difficult it is to produce plans for these areas. In particular, the following challenges should be emphasized.

- Unstable and uncertain political situation,
- Lack of sovereignty over resources,
- Impediments created by the spread of numerous Israeli colonies and related by-pass roads,
- Deteriorated physical environment purposely neglected by Israel through its years of occupation, The anticipated, but at the same time uncertain increase in population in regard to returnees,
- The demographic structure of the Palestinian population where the young generation constitutes the majority of the people,
- Limited availability and accessibility to natural resources, e.g., water,
- High rates of unemployment coupled with limited job opportunities, and
- Lack of unified planning laws and regulations.
- It should be noted that during the period between the inception of the PNA and the Winter of 2002, the PNA made considerable progress towards the planning construction of infrastructure compatible with a modern state with the assistance of overseas and local investment. However, Israeli incursions and aggression have since then been stepped-up in contravention of UN Security Resolutions 242 and 338 as well as the Oslo Accords and the Fourth Geneva Convention. As a consequence, all of the PNA institutions have been destroyed or seriously damaged, including

furnishings and equipment; roads have been made unusable by bulldozers and the PNA security apparatus of police

stations and prisons no longer exist. At the same time Gaza Airport terminal was the subject of missile attacks along with its runways, which have to be completely renewed. The seaport of

Gaza was also subject of Israeli attacks and destruction. The attack on the seaport buildings and preparatory works, which Israeli forces pounded with tank missiles and heavy machine guns before full bulldozing of the 95 offices, reflects Israeli's anxiety not to allow the Palestinian plans for the regional/ national projects.

### **Israeli's Wall**

At the time this paper on the challenges to physical planning was prepared, giant Israeli diggers began tearing up olives trees and goat tracks freely crossing the areas around the invisible 1967 Green Line between Israel and both of Gaza Strip and the West bank. A giant wall is on its way, plunging Palestinian villages on both sides of the wall into gloom. The wall will include trenches on both sides and razor wire. Its first stage will run 115km inside the West Bank north-western edge, to Kofr Qasem, but eventually will run its entire length and then around Gaza strip. Palestinian land that is allocated according to the regional plan in question in this paper has been confiscated by Israel for the purpose of erecting this giant wall.

## **Goals and Objectives**

It is the intent, purpose and scope of this physical Plan for Palestine to arrange the urban structure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip regions, so as to be suitable for future social and economic development and for the expected population growth. This requires the protection of the most valuable and sensitive natural resources and simultaneously to ensure positive conditions of the future development environment.

The main objectives of the plan are:

- To provide for the future needs of a growing population including repatriation of about 1/2 million returnees as well as the improvement of the living conditions of the camp populations.
- To provide a long-term plan that will be economic in its use of land resources, providing development opportunities after planning period.
- To stop random and environmentally harmful development and provide an efficient urban structure at the regional level.
- To provide areas for development without endangering important natural resources.
- To protect agricultural land as a part of natural resources which will be an asset for economic production, business activities and job opportunities.
- The regional and urban objectives of the plan are:

- Provide sufficient housing and public services with appropriate standards throughout the region.
- Provide the required land needed for residential, commercial, recreational, green areas, public services and private services development.
- Provide regional grading of settlements according to economic and functional roles.
- Location of future urban development should take place on land of marginal values in terms of natural resources and environmental protection.
- Ensure the opportunities for development of tourism and recreational utilities.
- Land requirements for development and protection

The Regional Plan will be facilitating the utilization and exploitation of natural resources as economic assets, whether materialized in nature reserves, exceptional natural resources, important natural resources, cultivated areas, recreational, tourism, archaeological sites and cultural heritage. Hence the following proposals are addressed:

- The application of this definition on the plan for the protected areas to be protected under regional planning regulations. From the natural conservation point of view the total area of 135.3 km<sup>2</sup> according to protection priority and to give space for various kinds of development which are needed till the year 2015.
- The protected areas are proposed for Nature Reserves, Important, exceptional natural resources, and recreation, these areas shall be protected from any polluted development, i.e. hazardous exploitation, pollution and contamination of natural resources deteriorating their future sustainability for human purposes.
- Protecting the above areas against conversion or destroying and protecting their future as assets for economic resource and job opportunities.
- Any kind of development within the cultivated areas will take place under consideration of the guidelines and regulations.
- Archaeological and cultural heritage sites are considered as possible tourism attractions in the future. Potential areas and sites are presented in maps and developing procedure in order to create viable economic activities.
- Utilization of wastewater to irrigate certain agricultural areas, proposing conceptual strategies for developing wastewater networks and treatment plants.
- Giving options for relocating of hazardous and polluting activities from environmentally sensitive areas to areas, which will sustain heavier loads of environmental stress. Special industrial areas are designated for these purposes.
- Proposing environmental standards development for environmental pollution control.

## **Water and Sanitation Planning**

During the Israeli occupation period for the region of Gaza Strip, all economic, social, and political indicators refer to a continuously deteriorating quality of life of the population in Gaza Governorates (G.G.) Therefore, its appeared through the regional plan clear objectives to improve the water sector as follows:

- Provide effective regional management of available water resources

- Supply water in adequate quantity to required quality
- Provide efficient water distribution network
- Provide a comprehensive system for collection, treatment and reuse of waste and storm water.
- Improve the capacity and quality of solid waste disposal sites.

The directions for sanitation planning in the regional plan include the following topics:

### **Water Supply**

The following directions are followed through the water supply planning in the regional plan:

- Reduce pollution of the ground water through protection of areas, which includes the water resources or the rainfall lands by land use control. Propose a regional solution for the necessary infrastructure needed to produce transfer and distribute.
- the regional amount of water in the long term for domestic, agriculture and industrial use.
- The first phase of the plan proposes immediate solutions to handle the existing water supply deficiencies.
- The proposed water supply and distribution network will be integrated with, and implemented in sequence with the water development to ensure an efficient water supply to all parts of the region.
- The planned water supply and distribution system is seen as an important means to improve public health.

Resources of potable water are the main problem facing sanitation services planning, which, can be covered through desalination of ground water and also seawater desalination, which was totally refused by MOPIC as an alternative resources for the Palestinian natural resources, in order to regain the Palestinian legal control on those resources. Furthermore, transferring water from the West Bank to Gaza Strip is another option but it will be under discussion in the final negotiations between Israel and the PNA

### **Waste Water and Storm Water Collection**

There are significant health impacts as a result of poor sanitation, improper disposal of treated and untreated wastewater. This mainly results in polluting the soil and ground water. The goals of the plan are:

- Reduce pollution through development of an efficient regional wastewater treatment system that will lead to improvements of the public health.
- Recommend a system of treatment and location of treatment plants that will reduce the negative environmental effects form.
- Implement a system that can distribute the treated wastewater to meet the demand for irrigation.
- The regional collection network shall provide the capacity to serve the existing built up areas as well as being integrated and implemented in sequence with the proposed urban development.

- Provide separate system for storm water drainage to prevent pollution and the destruction of the roads and private property in addition to the development of collection systems to facilitate an efficient recharge of storm water to the aquifer.

## **Solid Waste**

The Palestinian strategy in solid wastes management - as stated in the “Emergency Action Plan for Solid Wastes at the Gaza Strip” study prepared by MOPIC in 1995 – has based on the following main points:

- Centralization of disposal and transportation should be considered as soon as possible. The municipalities should monitor and control their own activities.
- There should be national overall monitoring in addition to the local monitoring activities.
- Private sector involvement in the sector.
- Minimization of wastes for ultimate land filling.

The solid waste disposal sites constitute the main problem due to land availability and environmental aspects.

The goals for the development of the sanitation regional plan with regard to solid waste are as follows:

- Develop solid waste disposal sites in order to ensure that operational efficiency can be combined with adequate environmental standards and through this system initiate the need for local operation with regard to management and operation of solid waste disposal system.
- G.G will be served by three sanitary landfills located in the east near the delimiting line. One disposal site established in eastern Gaza City serves the Northern and Gaza Governorates. The second site established in eastern Deir Al- Balah town serves Deir al- Balah Govern orate (the middle). And the last disposal site serves Rafah and Khan-Yunis Governorates and located in eastern Rafah (the south).

## **Energy Supply**

Currently, the main source of energy is the Israeli electrical corporation. There is a need to establish an independent source for the provision of energy for G.G. The proposed location for the power station is in the middle of G.S. at Nussirat and near the seashore. The main reasons for determining a regional site is being far from the residential areas, therefore reduces the side environmental effects, near to the seawater that can be used for cooling the turbines which in turn reduces construction and connections costs, and In addition, the power station will be linked with the proposed seawater desalination plant. Two other sub stations are also suggested, the first to serve the Northern Governorates, Gaza Governorate, and the Middle Governorate and the second to serve Rafah and Khan-Yunis Governorates, and regarding the main supply line (High transmission line), it will pass from Gaza to Khan-Yunis close to the eastern delimiting line.

## **Lands for Infrastructures and Utilities**

The main elements of regional sanitation planning are, water and waste water main lines, pumping stations, desalination plants, waste water treatment plants locations and solid waste disposal sites. The other item of infrastructure is the energy supply, which consists of power station, sub- stations and the main distribution lines. The land needed for these facilities are as follows:

The total land needed for 6 reverse Osmosis treatment plant are 20 dunums. The total land needed for reservoirs 18 dunums.

The regional plan is to have three central treatment plants and the total land needed for this purpose is around 1,000 dunums, while the total land needed for pumping station is 50 dunums.

The land needed for storm water basins are considered to be 2,200 dunums.

The land needed for solid waste disposal is determined to be 40 dunums per year

Land requirement for the proposed power station = 100 dunum

Land requirement for two sub stations = 20 dunum for (Gaza & Khan-Yunis)

Land requirement for safety is about 1,572 dunum

## **Inter and Intra Regional Planning**

The Transportation plan aims to solve the existing problems and satisfy the future demands in the transportation sector by the following main objectives:

- Provide a transportation system that is integrated with the needs of the future urban development patterns in the region.
- Minimize the negative impacts of transport development of the environment and the built up areas.
- Provide a system that serves both the economic development and personal transportation needs.
- Encourage the use of public transportation and reduce the use of private cars.

## **Transportation Network and Facilities**

The main strategy of the regional plan as shown in the plan map depends upon the following:

- Optimize the use of existing network:
  - Propose new hierarchy and standards for the regional network this helps to increase the capacity of the existing network without or with the minimum possible investment.
  - Upgrade the structure and geometrical condition of the existing network. This will help to improve traffic flows (capacity) and safety in the road network.

- Upgrading - expansion of the roads from 2 to 4 lanes or to 6 lanes. The land is already reserved for this purpose and the investment will be minimum.
- Additional Links
  - The Eastern Highway, the main function is to connect Gaza Governorates to the west Bank and to easily connect Industrial Zones, port and the Airport. Most of the investment will be in this Highway.
  - The outer ring road for Gaza City.
  - The middle area ring road.
  - The Khan Yunis ring road, the main function is to by-pass the crowded built-up areas and to ease the connection between the built up areas and the special terminal as well as Industrial Zones , port and Airport.
  - The new road parallel to the coastal road (the coastal parkway). This part of the road will serve mainly the transportation demands between the two core cities, for recreation and tourism purposes. Some parts of this road are existing, and the required investment should therefore be relatively low.

- Use of public Transportation:

Create a regional and local system of bus lines.

- To construct a new light railway in the old track between Gaza city and Rafah. In spite of this it seems reasonable to reserve the old line for a future train. Light rail system is environmentally friend solution. For the purpose of the regional plan a combination of the two option is consider as the best solution for public transportation, light rail will be used to connect the main cities and bus system will be more flexible inside the cities.

## **Industrial Development**

The main objective of the Industrial Development regional plan up till the year 2015 is to establish the needed functional industrial areas in G.S. with a total area of 4,809 dunums.

This is in order to absorb the new industrial investments and to relocate some existing industries to these areas. Doing so is expected to control the environmental problems, improve the reusing of the industrial wastes, make use of transportation facilities, control the overreaching in the agriculture land, offering the needed infrastructure in a specified area, facilitate the co-operation between the similar industries, and to gain the profits obtained from complementary factories

The locations and the areas of the proposed industrial zones' distribution are based on the number of returnees, their natural growth, their local concentrations and their employment nature. In addition, the control in population mobility among Gaza Governorates, and the industrial development strategy in term of physical planning is to locate the planned industrial areas out-side of the urban development in open spaces of marginal agricultural value, with

expansion possibilities, as well as low prices, links to the transportation network and near to the borders with neighboring countries.

The first phase of Gaza Industrial Estate (GIE) included the construction of

30,000 square meters of standard factory buildings, which were finished in March 1999 and have already been fully occupied. Forty companies, including Palestinian, Israeli and international joint ventures, have already obtained permits to operate in the GIE. The GIE currently hosts various types of industries including food and beverage, seventeen clothing manufacturers, gold and jewelry, high tech and others.

The second phase, completed in January 2000, included a further 60,000 square meters of standard factory buildings. The third and last phase of the GIE will include 60,000 square meters of standard factory buildings and 32,000 square meters of multi-story buildings.

The GIE is equipped with all the logistic services needed by investors including banking facilities, insurance, legal services, post offices, training, clinics, etc...

In relation to all these factors the following 4 Industrial Areas are proposed for G.S.

- Al-Montar Industrial Area, 505 donums, under development in the east of Gaza City.
- Al-Mansura Industrial Area, 863 donums, sited east of Gaza city, so it can be easily linked to the needed facilities of al-Montar Area.
- Eastern Deir al-Balah Area, 740 dunums, in the middle area of Gaza Governorates, at the eastern borders.

Ash-Shoka Industrial Area in Rafah Governorate, 2,701 dunums, at the Southern part of Gaza Governorates close to the eastern borders.

## **Trade Development**

The economy of the Gaza Strip and West Bank performed well in 1999 with growth of 6.1 percent, which was driven by increased private sector activity, donor assistance, construction, and improved economic activity with Israel. However, two areas showed weakness: the level of approved private investment projects declined and the value of Palestinian exports was stagnant. The overall economic performance was a marked improvement over 1997 when two comprehensive border closures by Israel had a severe impact on economic activity in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Some of the major challenges facing the economy are:

- The need to achieve high growth in order to raise living standards (GDP per capita) for a growing population;
- The need to develop and expand the export sector of the economy;
- The high rate of population growth, which for the foreseeable future will place pressure on social services and infrastructure and generate a large annual net increase in the labor supply;
- The restrictions on movement of people and goods between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which holds back economic integration of the two areas and raises costs in the economy; and

- The additional import and export costs arising from the transit process over Israeli ports.

The main objective of the trade development plan is to establish the needed free trade, export processing zones and commercial passages in Gaza Governorates and the safe passages between Gaza and the West Bank.

In order to serve the future trade growth, the following free trade and export processing zones are proposed by the plan adjacent to the main trade and communication nodes in the region namely, the Airport and the Seaport:

- The Seaport free trade and export-processing zone of 1,700 dunums, located near to Gaza Seaport.

The port will have a relatively small local market, limited container handling facilities in the initial phases of development and in the long-term shortage of land (unless alleviated by expensive landfill) to provide the size of berthing and yard area required to compete with the neighboring large and established transshipment ports. Gaza Port is expected to remain a local gateway port for imports and exports. As a local port situated in close proximity to major transshipment centers, Gaza can expect to receive a large share of its containerized cargo by feeder vessel over these transshipment ports and only a smaller share from larger line haul vessels.

- The Airport free trade and export processing zone of 1,000 dunums, located near the Airport and close to neighboring countries, it is designed for light industrial products, which can be loaded by air or through a regional land transportation network.
- Gaza Cargo Terminal of 30 dunums including the Cargo building of 18 dunums parking yards, apron and taxiway, located at Gaza International Airport, designed to provide Palestine with direct access to regional and international markets, promotion of private investment in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, and to facilitate the global integration of the Palestine economy.

Due to the future growth in trade with the neighboring countries, there is a need for commercial passages with sufficient capacities. In order to match this need the following projects are proposed within the G.S. regional plan:

- Up-grading Al-Montar commercial passage with Israel to match future trade activity requirements and needs.
- Up grading Al-Awda commercial passage with Egypt. That in addition to keep the other existing borders crossings (ash-Shijaiya and al-Matar under operation).

## Classified Land Categories

The population of the region is forecast to increase by 1,350,000 inhabitants by the year 2015 about 1,300,000 inhabitants are expected to settle in urban areas. The number of returnees from 2005 expected till 2015 is 450,000 expected to increase 589,000 inhabitants by 2015. Sufficient housing and public services with appropriate standards will be provided using suitable densities. The proposed densities are important in achieving sustainability with regard to the balance between development and protection. The plan proposes a gross density of the built up area of 25 persons per dunum, equivalent to a net density for neighborhood of 37 person per dunum. The plan proposes the following:

- The development pattern in G.S. will form the structure of two core cities. This means that another regional centre will develop in the South, in addition to the existing centre in the North.
- The new centre in the south will be Khan-Yunis City while the existing one in the north is Gaza City. The concentration of development in the proposed pattern is the most appropriate since it is based on sustainability development and reasonable land use.

The distribution of population will be changed in which the population of the Khan-Yunis City will be raised to create the equilibrium between the two centers.

- Consequently, Khan-Yunis City will absorb 70% of the returnees, while Gaza City will absorb 30%. In addition, the two cities will absorb the expected internal migration from the other Governorates, which projected to be about 12,000 inhabitants from each. The total number of population in the region will be 2,204,000 Khan-Yunis Governorate will have 716,300 inhabitants, while the population of Gaza Governorate will be 831,700 inhabitants. The other Governorates will absorb the increase by natural growth of their residents.
- Large-scale projects can be classified into three categories:
  1. Projects under construction or implementation.
  2. Projects in planning stage.
  3. Projects under study that are (25) project in the planning stage and distributed all over the Gaza Governorates. Some of them are housing projects but are in conflict with the goal of natural resources protection especially in the Northern Governorates. These projects include housing projects, industrial areas, treatment plants, and expansion of municipal boundaries and new village councils. Expansion of municipal boundaries and new village councils will not be in conflict with resources with some good attention. Large-scale projects have been created and studied in order to solve the existing problems or to provide new services and facilities lacking at present. They were prepared and studied by local institutions in the Palestinian National Authority as individuals and weren't planned as part of a comprehensive plan.
- Some of the large scale projects will not be in conflict with the future development or natural resources, such as; airport, industrial parks, treatment plants and some housing projects. They are seen as an integrated part of the first phase of the plan. Others will

be in conflict with natural resources, such as; two housing projects in the Northern Governorates, they measure about 340 dunums, four housing projects in Khan-Yunis Governorate measure 420 dunums, two housing projects in the Deir al-Balah Governorate measure 570 dunums. These should be stopped before it's too late.

### **Nature reserves, Agriculture and Natural Resources**

In a restricted geographical area regions like Gaza Strip the natural resources, the nature areas, and the landscape must be considered among the most precious land use elements. They should therefore be strictly protected against inappropriate development. With the assumed growth in population, areas outside towns as well as under-utilized and unoccupied urban areas will come under heavy pressure for development or use. Thus, strict planning regulations and guidelines are proposed to direct future development to areas of less value with regard to conservation of the vital natural resources, nature protection, and vital landscape areas.

The application of this definition to the plan for the natural resources and nature conservation define the areas to be protected under regional planning guidelines. From a natural conservation point of view, the total area proposed for protection by the regional plan, is 134 km<sup>2</sup>.

### **Protection areas**

For selecting and prioritizing areas for conservation and protection, the following criteria are used:

- Ground water basins are in need of protection, in order to ensure natural recharge of high quality ground water
- Remnants of nature are in need of conservation, as examples of Gaza's natural heritage
- Cultural heritage sites of high significance are in need of conservation and protection, as examples of Gaza's cultural heritage, of importance for the people in Gaza, and tourism development
- The beach landscape is in need of protection. A selection of other typical landscapes will be protected, when overlapping with other protection or conservation interests

Protection should, however, be determined according to category of protection and balanced against needs for urban development. In this balance, it should be taken particular concern to the pattern of remaining agricultural land, and an effective urban pattern. In the regional plan categories proposed for protection are natural resources protection areas, nature reserve areas, landscape protection areas, and protected areas for tourism and recreation activities.

## **Results and Discussion**

The Palestinian economy is fragile and cannot withstand severe blows. The main socio-economic challenges affecting the Palestinian economy are mainly related to a lack of stable political conditions in Palestinian areas, which has a significant negative impact on internal and external investment.

The Palestinian economy is highly subordinated to the Israeli economy, where Israel's share in the total Palestinian external trade stands at 90% of the Palestinian total Imports, and 85% of Palestinian total Exports. This subordination coupled with the lack of the available natural resources such as water, land, raw materials and energy and added to it the low efficiency of the available infrastructure services such as drainage systems, treatment plants, transportation facilities is contributing to the mounting problems in the basic infrastructure services provided to the public.

The physical regional planning has considerable challenges, which have resulted mainly from the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conflict with Israel is mainly over land and natural resources. Therefore, the planning process in Palestine faces many challenges to produce and implement physical plans on local, regional and national levels.

### **These challenges can be summarized as follows:**

Development of both GS and the WB is charged with uncertainties. The most crucial of which are those related to the political situation and to the stalled peace process. A notable obstacle is the absence of a final status agreement that can insure the prospects of the future plans. As a result, the Israeli colonies and by-pass roads, have in effect killed all plans in their infancy. The imposed Israeli physical separation between and within GS and the WB and their determination to keep it as separate as possible, is making it nearly impossible to plan for major urban areas without being harassed during implementation.

Spatial planning in Palestine gains precedence over all other types of planning due to the political situation. In other words, all priorities in physical and economic planning, and the implementation of larger development projects have to be examined and assessed in terms of their geopolitical implications. As an example, physical plans necessary to establish the seaport and the free transportation Corridor between GS and WB were delayed on purpose due to the Israeli security claims. Also, the industrial zone areas, which have great affect on the economy by absorbing large number of employees is being faced with a number of constraints. Even with substantial aid to industry, deriving mainly from the USA and Germany, the industrial sector is plagued by a number of chronic problems, including the lack of industrial areas, free zones and the inadequacy of energy resources.

The most pressing of these is the absence of direct and free access passages to the external world markets, even with the aid of preferential treatment treaties. The growth in the main production sectors such as agriculture, tourism and industry has not escaped unharmed from the above constraints.

The agriculture sector is characterized with lack of irrigation water, lack of access to cultivated land, and close proximity of large areas to colonies that makes attending to it a hazardous task. Tourism is an important money-generating sector in Palestine as it has a great potential both for Western World and for Arab and Islamic Worlds. This sector is suffering from poor infrastructure and low efficiency of the network leading to these sites. The priority given to enhancing the larger tourists' magnets such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Dead Sea, and Gaza beaches are specified within National Physical Plans but faced with lack of private investments due to the political uncertainties (Shaaf, 2002).

The Environmental Impact issues of the large economic projects are used by Israel as a reason for stopping these projects on grounds of unsubstantiated transboundary effects. Locations and EIA for treatment plants are identified within the physical plans but the implementation would be subject to Israeli approval as per Agreements signed. An approval they have not granted, unless it serves their water strategy or it serves some of their neighboring colonies.

Contrary to the Geneva Conventions, Israel is transporting water from the scattered colonies within GS and WB to inside Israel. These colonies were strategically located on top of fresh aquifers for such purpose and others of its nature. As an integral part to this regional plan, MOPIC has drafted a number of planning documents that deals with water, wastewater and water reuse master plans that remained ink on paper due to the above constraints.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion it is quite clear that the planning process in Palestine faces many challenges to produce and especially to implement plans on local, regional and national levels. Nevertheless, the Palestinians, have tried to plan for their scattered communities in spite of the diverse technical and logistical difficulties facing such an endeavor. Plans produced have reflected longstanding aims to achieve prosperity and improve political and socio-economic welfare in a well planned and prioritized manner. Unfortunately, the plans were confronted with numerous and diverse obstacles most of which are attributed to practices of the consecutive Governments of Israel, especially those related to colonization and confiscation of more Palestinian lands. Notwithstanding, tackling planning within such hard political and conflicting environment is a national priority to the PNA as it is considered an integral part of the peace process.

Physical Planning under such diverse and volatile political conditions in the Palestinian territories were a fundamentally difficult task due to the many variables, uncertainties and complex issues.

The geographic separation between GS and WB has made it difficult to create the kind of continuity and streamlining needed for plans to be realized and implemented on the ground with ease.

In addition, one of the reasons attributed to the local obstacles was the lack of unified laws and regulations, controlling the planning processes, which, in turn, have hindered the execution and application of plans. A Scarcity of resources has also resulted in unfinished physical planning products.

The Palestinian National Authority is doing its best to enhance its physical planning process thereby setting the stage for ease of implementation and success, with attention to national strategy, policy and priority.

At the time this article was prepared, tourism has reached a complete standstill in the PNA territories, while agricultural land, orchards, almond and olive groves have been decimated by IDF bulldozers and tanks and citizens are being physically prevented from reaching their employment and further education by long waits at checkpoints often running into hours and even days. Private homes and vehicles have further been the subject of the IDF's destructive occupation severely reducing the numbers of skilled personnel available. At the same time, goods and foodstuffs from Israel, which normally take a matter of hours to arrive to the West Bank and Gaza Strip are now taking days to arrive, and often have to be hand-carried across checkpoints to an awaiting vehicle on the other side of the barrier.

Further, almost all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip towns are currently locked down and under strict curfews which entail the sick being unable to receive medical treatment, ambulances being prevented from reaching their destinations and the deceased cannot be buried. In other words, the entire PNA territories are currently at a complete standstill in contravention of human rights treaties and basic humanitarian norms.

Therefore urgent assistance is needed to realize the goals of the physical plan, which are directed towards raising the living conditions of the Palestinian people and improving the economic self-sufficiency of the Palestinian territories.

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