

Human Rights AWhereeness: GIS and Human Rights Campaigns

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Human Rights AWhereeness

- “Ignorance, forgetfulness, or contempt of the rights of man are the only causes of public misfortunes and of the corruption of governments” (French National Assembly, 1791).

Human Rights AWhereeness

- Ignorance fosters forgetfulness, and the two combined feed contempt.
- According to National Geographic's Roper Geographic Survey 2002 highlights, Americans suffer from more than their fair share of geographic ignorance.

Human Rights AWhereeness

- The report notes that, “Despite the daily bombardment of news from the Middle East, Central Asia, and other world trouble spots, roughly 85 percent of young Americans could not find Afghanistan, Iraq, or Israel on a map, according to a new study.”

Human Rights AWhereeness

- GIS has the potential to improve geographic literacy and thereby improve our knowledge of where human rights violations are occurring, but I also believe it can improve public awareness of human rights by placing them within a geographic context. Hence the term *AWhereeness*.

Human Rights AWhereeness

- According to Birdsall (1986), "We must also be comfortable enough with the underlying concepts and principles of geography that our understanding of places and people will be enhanced, not limited" (Qtd. in Backler and Stoltman, 1986).

Human Rights AWhereeness

- Understanding people makes it harder to be forgetful and contemptuous of their rights.
- Good geographic narratives reduce ignorance, forgetfulness, and contempt.

Human Rights AWhereeness

- In the process of creating a geographic narrative of human rights violations around the world, I believe GIS can help government and non-government organizations establish and enforce international human rights norms by generating broader public support for the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other such instruments.

Human Rights AWhereeness

- GIS provides a set of data collection, analysis and display tools that enables human rights activists to better communicate the geographic context, location and extent of human rights abuses, compare them to the records of other nations, and thereby display world values as a normative benchmark.

Human Rights AWhereeness

- What follows is my attempt to create a rough sketch of the various ways GIS might enhance human rights campaigns.
- I will do so by examining the Israeli fence/wall and the Convention against Torture.

The Israeli Fence/Wall

- In *The Power of Human Rights*, editors Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink construct a model to explain the process by which human rights norms are internationalized.
- The first phase of their so-called spiral model is documentation of violations.

The Israeli Fence/Wall

- According to Amnesty International (2004), "As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Israel has agreed and is obligated to respect, protect and ensure the rights set out in the treaties to all persons within its territory or subject to its jurisdiction" (p. 7).

The Israeli Fence/Wall

Amnesty argues the wall violates many of the rights guaranteed by international treaties Israel is a party to, including:

- Prohibition of discrimination
- Freedom of movement
- Right to work
- Right to education
- Right to food

The Israeli Fence/Wall

- Palestinian government agencies and NGOs are using maps to document Israeli human rights violations.
- The Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA) illustrates the general plight of the Palestinian people in *The Palestine Question in Maps: 1878-2002*.

The Israeli Fence/Wall

- PASSIA's Hadi (2002) points out, "compiling and reviewing the most important historical and contemporary maps ..."

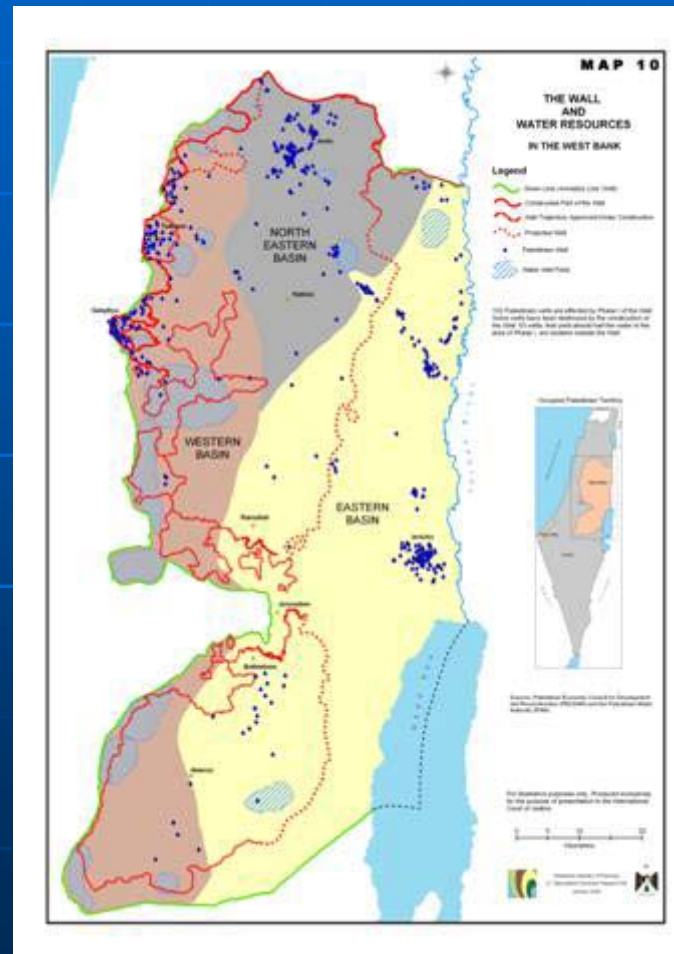
The Israeli Fence/Wall

- offers researchers, readers and concerned individuals the opportunity to understand the geographic implications and motivations guiding the political and military aspects of the Palestinian Question for over a hundred years" (p. i).

The Israeli Fence/Wall

- One of PASSIA's maps reminds us of the approximately 6.6 million Palestinian refugees in the region.

The Israeli Fence/Wall



The Israeli Fence/Wall

- More recently, to make the Palestinian case to the International Court of Justice, the Palestinian Ministry of Planning published *Maps Submitted by Palestine For The International Court of Justice* (2004).

The Israeli Fence/Wall

- This slim, tab-sized volume contains 23 maps detailing the route of the wall, its impact on Palestinians, and the location of Israeli settlements in Palestine.

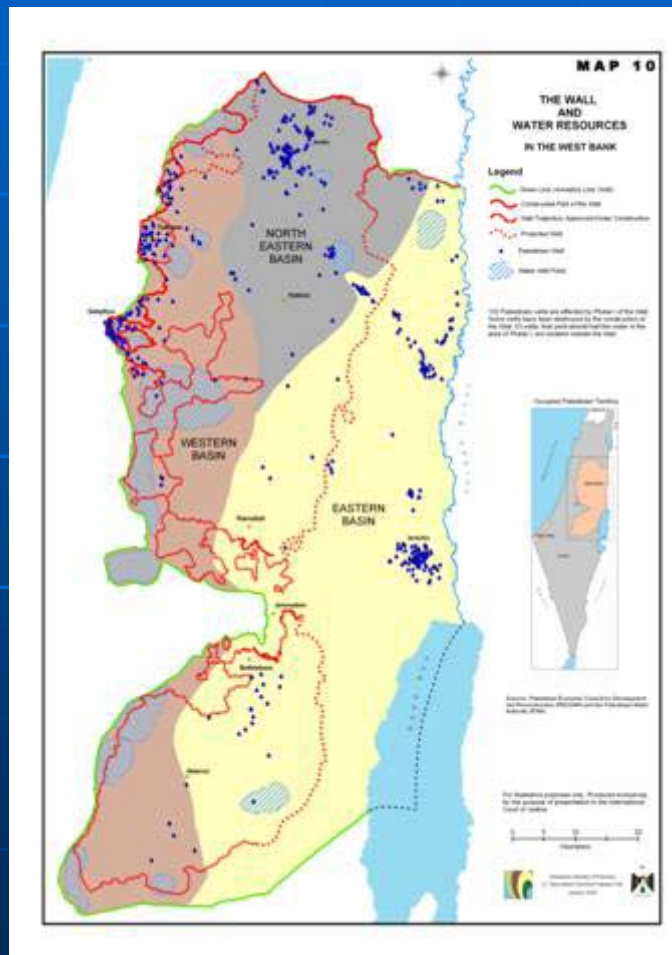
The Israeli Fence/Wall

- Omnipresent in all the maps is the Green Line (Armistice Line 1949), constantly showing the conflict between the route of the wall and the security of the legal Israeli border.

The Israeli Fence/Wall

- Perhaps the most dramatic map in the collection is Map 10: The Wall and Water Resources in the West Bank.

Map 10



Courtesy of the Palestinian Planning Ministry.

The Israeli Fence/Wall

- According to the Palestinian Ministry of Planning, "102 Palestinian wells are affected by Phase I of the Wall. Some wells have been destroyed by the construction of the Wall. 53 wells, that yield almost half the water in the area of Phase I, are isolated outside the Wall" (2004, Map 10).

The Israeli Fence/Wall

- As Chomsky points out (2004), "The wall ... extends Israel's control of critical water resources, which Israel and its settlers can appropriate as they choose, while the indigenous population often lacks water for drinking"
(http://www.pchrgaza.org/special/wall_by_noam.htm).

The Israeli Fence/Wall

- Israel continues to deny that any of the conventions it is a party to apply to the occupied territories
- The second phase of the spiral model is state denial.

Torture

- The Bush administration appeared stuck in the second phase, but public pressure following the documentation of the torture and ill-treatment of prisoners in U.S. custody prodded the Justice Department to rewrite its legal advice for U.S. interrogators.
- Phase 3 – tactical concessions.

Torture

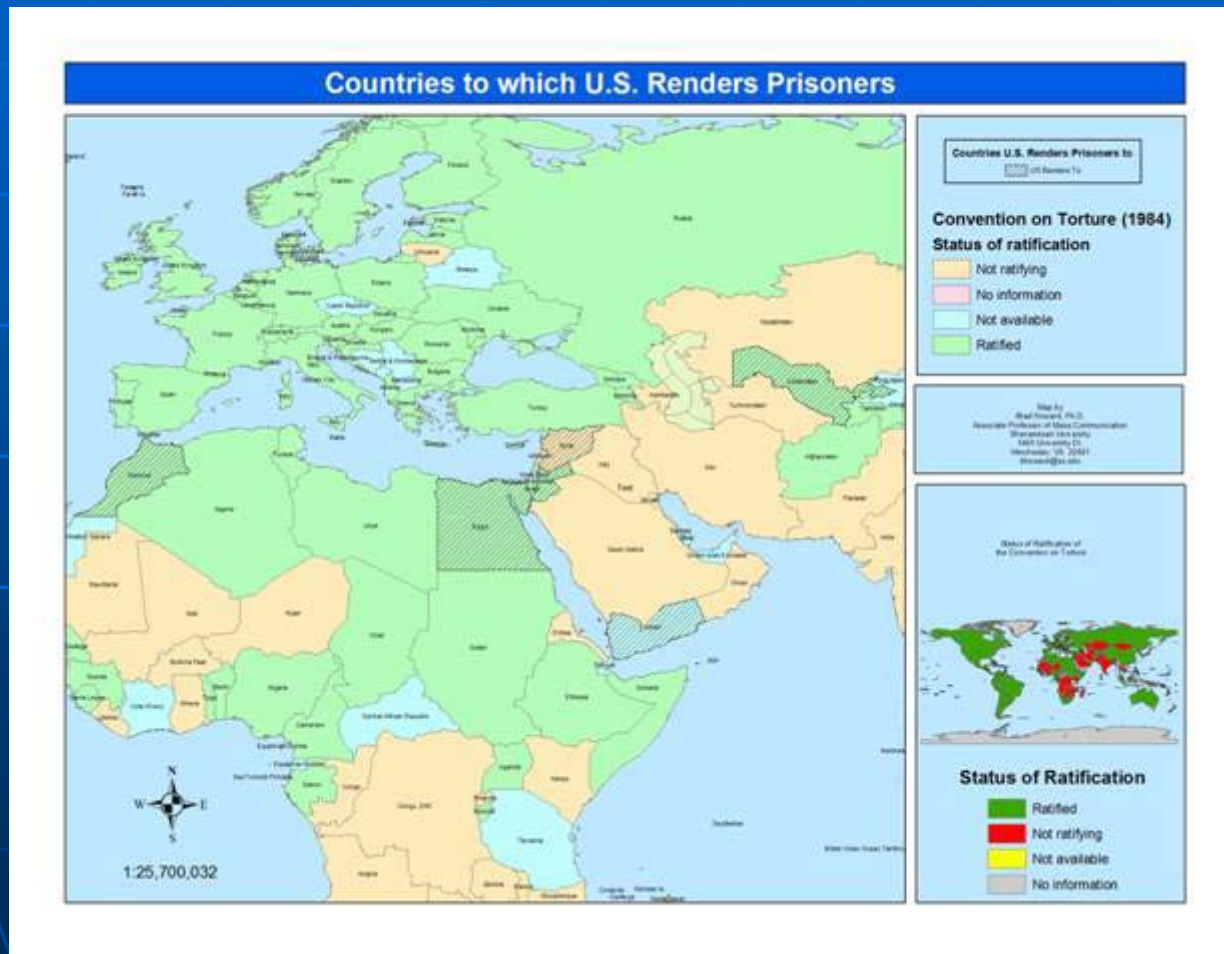
- A concern remains, however, about the U.S. practice of “rendering” prisoners to other nations with fewer limits on interrogations, a practice specifically prohibited by Article 3 of the Convention against Torture.

Torture

Maps have the potential to illustrate

- contradictions of rhetoric and practice
- the geographic extent of those contradictions

Second-Hand Torture



Rhetoric vs. Practice

- Mapping human rights violations would promote increased awareness of the gap between internationally accepted norms as evidenced by the number of nations that have ratified key human rights conventions and international and internationally accepted practice as evidence by the number of states that violate those conventions.

Torture

- Since it is unlikely any of these countries will be providing photos to the Western media, I think maps should help show the U.S. public what kind of nations we are allying ourselves with and why.
- Perhaps then the U.S. might enter phase 4 – the prescriptive phase.

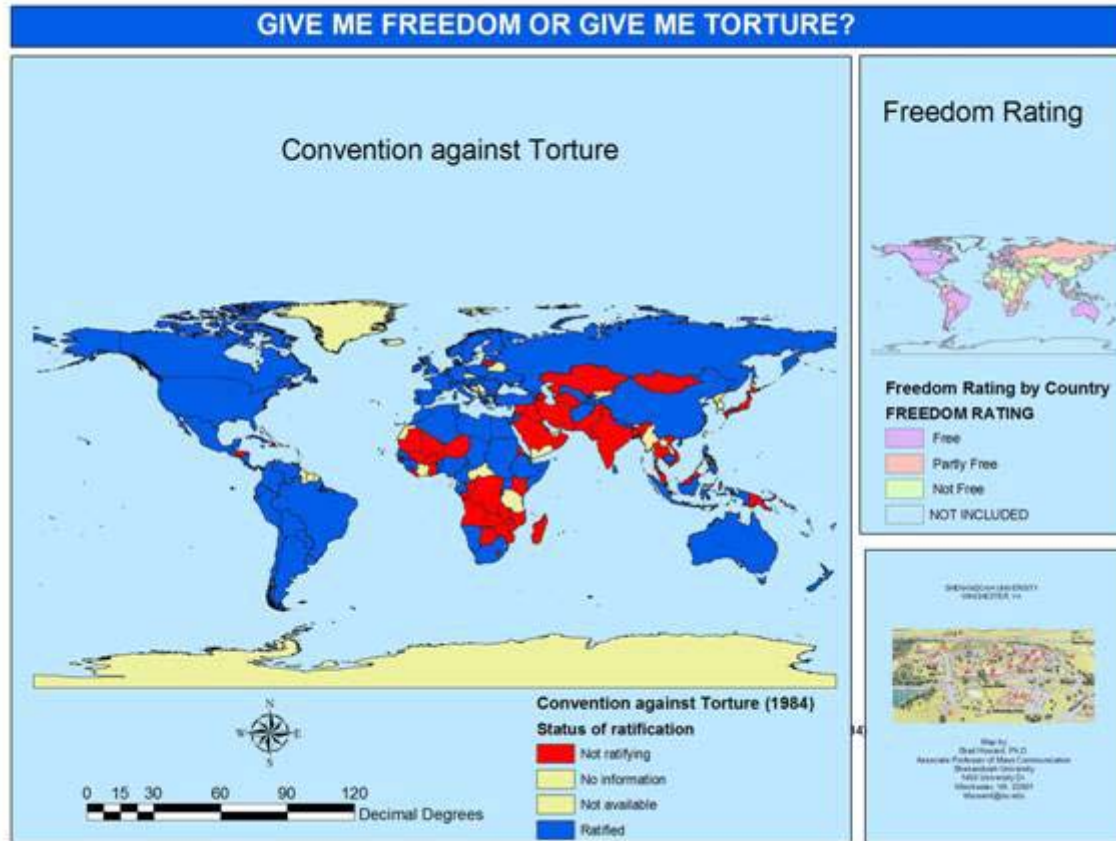
Torture

- Maps also allow us to ask important geographic questions, such as why do human rights violations occur where they do?
- What, for example, is the relationship between a nation's political system and its human rights record? Its economic situation and its political system?

Torture

- Mapping certain human rights violations can have the additional positive effect of “placing the data in an appropriate context for assessing cause and effect” and “making quantitative comparisons” (Tufte, 1997, pp. 29-30).

Torture



Human Rights AWhereeness

- The ultimate goal of human rights AWhereeness is to reach phase 5 of the spiral model – rule consistent behavior – a world in which all nations abide by the letter and the spirit of the international treaties devoted to protecting human rights.

Human Rights AWhereeness

- I believe GIS has contributed and can continue to contribute significantly to promoting a greater AWhereeness and thereby promote greater understanding, longer memory, and more enduring sympathy among peoples of all nations.

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