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BUILDING IN THE WEST BANK: An Interview with Bashar Masri

Michael Lame

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Bashar Masri is a Palestinian, born and raised in Nablus, educated in Egypt and the United States. Trained as a chemical engineer and with a background in management consulting, Bashar moved back to the West Bank from the Washington DC area in the mid-1990s, establishing himself in Ramallah. He was the founder and first publisher of the Palestinian daily newspaper *Al Ayyam*. A successful businessman, Bashar is CEO of Massar International, which engages in a variety of business activities across the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Europe. He is married, with two teenage daughters.

By far, Bashar's largest undertaking to-date is the project of planning and building a new Palestinian city from the ground up. It's called Rawabi, and it's located north of Ramallah.

I interviewed Bashar regarding Rawabi, the economic conditions in the West Bank, and the evolution of his own thinking about the future of Palestinian-Israeli relations. The interview was conducted by phone on October 24th. Bashar spoke with me from his home in Ramallah.

As a personal note, I should mention that I have great respect and affection for Bashar. He and I have been friends for almost 25 years. We worked closely together in the latter half of the 1980s when he served as vice president of the Foundation for Mideast Communication and I served as the organization's president. Twice we traveled together to Tunis, in 1987 and 1988, to meet with Yasser Arafat, Khalid al-Hassan, Yasser Abed Rabbo, and other PLO leaders. I attended Bashar and Jane's wedding twenty-some years ago and I have periodically visited Bashar in Ramallah in recent years, most recently last December.

Bashar's is an important voice to listen to as Americans, Palestinians and Israelis grapple with

a complex set of issues. The first part of his interview focuses on the Rawabi project. The second part deals more with the larger economic, political, and personal dimensions of Palestinian life in the West Bank. To listen to Part One of the interview, [CLICK HERE](#) [2]. For Part Two, click [HERE](#) [3].

NOTE: This is the first in a series of *Re-Think the Middle East* interviews with individuals whose words and deeds demand our attention, whether we agree with them or not. Who else deserves more notice than they have received? Who should we be listening to about the future of the region? RTME invites your suggestions.

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