



The "Separation" Fence: A Political Border Disguised as a Security Measure

By: Major General Gershon Hacohen

Edited by: Itzik Tzarfati

This paper seeks to address the practical question of whether or not to continue construction on the security fence along the so called "Green Line". Its main goal is to warn decision makers that the discussion surrounding the fence in terms of security has always been intertwined with the political discussion on Israel's strategic objectives regarding the future of the Judea, Samaria and Jordan Valley regions.

This paper will make the case for why construction should be terminated, pointing out the political agenda fueling it; refuting the claim it prevents terrorism; and illustrating its negative repercussions on: IDF operations in the region; Israel's global image in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and Jewish settlement.

The **first chapter** describes how the project of erecting a barrier in the West Bank, called the "security fence", or more tellingly, the "separation fence", was a political scam disguised as a security concern.

The **second chapter** demonstrates how the fence does not prevent terrorism, despite the common conception that it halted the wave of suicide bomber attacks.

The **third chapter** points out the absence of a methodical, operational military conception regarding the fence and **the fourth chapter** describes how the fence actually disrupts the IDF's ability to operate in the area.

The **fifth chapter** addresses the fence as an "icon" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The **sixth chapter** discusses the question of whether extending the fence's construction is financially or operationally proportional, and **the seventh** makes the case for halting the construction in the Gush Etzion and South Mount Hebron section.

Finally, a breakdown of the national interests in Judea and Samaria is provided in an **epilogue**.

Summary:

Israel's project to build the West Bank barrier, or fence, began as a response to the hundreds of Palestinian terror attacks on Israeli civilians, but the inception of the idea was earlier. It is, in fact, simply one more iteration of the foundational disagreement on whether Israel's future is a withdrawal to the "green line" or an annexation of the territory beyond it. As a large scale engineering initiative, the fence was always a costly national effort, and construction on the ground caused friction and resistance, dragging Israel into strategic and legal struggles (both international and domestic). It was, however, sold to the Israeli public as vital to their security.

The question of whether to continue the project of fence construction leads back to two foundational issues: What is the national objective in completing the fence, and to what degree does such a fence actually constitute the outline of a future border, aimed at promoting a Gaza-style withdrawal and creating a binary division of the region?

It is commonly accepted that the fence project along the "Green Line" is based on security considerations; however, this is a smokescreen - the real objective is explicitly political. At the heart of Israeli culture, the fence represents the deep desire for a clearly defined border separating "here" and "there", rejecting any intermediate ground with frontier-like friction. The desire to grant perfect and equal security to all citizens from Tel Aviv to the border makes it difficult to accept intermediate border areas. The first pioneers were amenable to a frontier lifestyle, and equipped to deal with the friction common to border areas. Unfortunately, Israel has for the past two decades been moving away from that approach, moving away from security strips and border towns and attempting instead to transform border areas into an integral part of a seamless continuum. This approach does not recognize the national importance and necessity of frontiers, but rather sanctifies the idea of turning the State of Israel into a contiguous urban entity, complete with the spatial logic that entails, resulting in lawlessness in the Negev, demographic inaction in the Galilee and the Golan, and the fence built to sever Judea and Samaria from the State of Israel.

One of the common assumptions is that the fence contributed to the decrease in the suicide bomber attacks. It is indeed a fact that the terror attacks subsided dramatically with the advent of the fence's construction. However, the main contributing factor for this was the series of offensive operations conducted by the IDF and the ISA (Shabak) deep within the territory beyond the fence in the years following the "Defensive Shield" military operation. The fence served as a ground barrier within the framework of a systemic, largely offensive endeavor. In other words, it was not the protective effort along the fence that created the conditions that suppressed the wave of terror attacks, but the consistent, active effort conducted through a wide variety of measures in the territory beyond it. Central command's conception of use of force was correct in

deploying most forces to securing roads and towns deep inside the territory beyond the fence, alongside ceaseless efforts to thwart terror organizing activity inside the cities, rural towns and refugee camps.

Another contributing factor to the decrease in terror attacks was a shift in the Palestinian leadership. Mahmoud Abbas, who replaced Arafat, saw the intifada as a losing strategy for Palestinians and began the cooperation between PA forces and Israel to combat terroristic activity.

The fence was erected as a panacea, the very existence of which would create a stable separation that could eliminate terror. Consequently, military commanders ignored the necessity for an overall strategy for the security of the area, including principles for coordination between the IDF and other security branches. But the fence is merely a technical tool, and while a physical barrier is a good solution for some security threats, it is completely inadequate for mass incursions or concentrated efforts by an enemy force to systematically learn its weaknesses and overcome it. The lack of planning an overarching system accompanied the project from the very first. Decision makers acted like technicians, simply taking what worked on the border and transferring it to the fence without considering the differences; assuming that keeping Palestinians behind a fence would keep the problem on their side. This misconception has continued to guide policy - every failure of or challenge to the fence is solved by technical rather than strategic thinking and solutions.

The fence impairs the IDF's mobility and defensive capabilities in the area, both practically, as forces are concentrated around the barrier and operations beyond it become more irregular and costly, and mentally, as instead of dynamic operations covering the region, military forces engage mostly in routines around a specific location.

Beyond the negative implications for security, the fence was a tremendous boon for the Palestinians in their struggle for swaying international opinion. Instead of sites of suicide bombings, the central image of the Israel-Palestinian conflict became the fence, with all the cultural connotations of oppression and struggle for freedom that come with it. In practical terms as well, the fence became a point for friction, protests, provocations, propaganda and restraints on IDF soldiers.

Aside from the fact that the fence has become a source of economic interest for the wide range of contractors working on its construction, the push to continue the project is fueled by two controversial presuppositions, two dominant paradigms:

1. The tactical approach entrenched in the IDF as it was first formulated in the War of Attrition, transposed to other borders and become the cornerstone of border security activity;

2. The strategy of working towards a geopolitical separation from the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria.

Decision makers find it hard to face senior security officials who warn of terrorist infiltrations in any area left open. There is social and political risk and difficulty to object to the separation paradigm.

A paradigm shift can only occur when a level of crisis is reached, wherein too many anomalies or failures can no longer uphold the existing one. That isn't currently the case in Israel, but inevitably the fence will fail – all fences are consistently vulnerable in certain ways. The more the IDF pulls back from operations within the territory beyond the fence and focuses on barrier activity, the potential for a crisis grows.

Recommendations:

1. Discontinue further construction of the fence.
2. Policymakers in Israel should thoroughly examine their expectations from the fence project in terms of politics and security, particularly in light of the frequent frictions at the fence in Gaza that have turned it into a point of conflict, demonstrating that even if the fence is tactically an efficient physical barrier, it is not strategically a guarantee for conflict resolution or stability. The difficulty with the "terror kites," as well as violent clashes during mass protests at the fence, demonstrate how a fence that is not controlled on both sides is insufficient as a security measure. Politically, the very existence of the fence, and particularly the completion of further sections, is a clear delineation of which areas Israel views as separate from its sovereign territory; a move that is detrimental to the legitimacy of IDF operations beyond the fence, and puts Jewish presence there in question, strengthening the political position that objects to such presence.

[For the full Hebrew paper](#)