

In Defense of a Fence

by [Uzi Dayan \(/experts/uzi-dayan\)](#)

Dec 19, 2003

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Uzi Dayan \(/experts/uzi-dayan\)](#)

Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, IDF (Res.), has served as Israel's national security advisor (2000-2002), head of the IDF Planning Branch, head of Central Command, and deputy chief of staff.



Brief Analysis

After years of frustration in which persistent Palestinian terrorism has held peace negotiations hostage, a security fence may be the first step toward disengagement and a precondition for resuming any political process.

The past three years of violence have resulted in approximately 900 dead and 6,000 injured Israelis, and 2,100 dead and more than 15,000 injured Palestinians. By Israeli standards, each month of the conflict has yielded more casualties than were seen during the entire Lebanon war. Such figures demand that Israel take decisive steps of one sort or another. More than 80 percent of Israelis agree with the vision of two states for the two peoples between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, assuming a way can be found to end the conflict. There has been much discussion of late regarding what these two states should look like (e.g., the Geneva Accord, the Clinton parameters, the principles outlined by Ami Ayalon and Sari Nusseibeh). More important than this discussion, however, is the question of how to get Israelis and Palestinians to arrive at such a final-status scenario.

Within the Likud Party, there are three different approaches to this question. Some are calling for a one-state solution, which is both unacceptable and unrealistic. Others advocate defeating terrorism first and then negotiating. And, most recently, some have called for unilateral disengagement.

The second approach has already been tested. Because the Roadmap was designed to progress toward a two-state solution only after the terrorist infrastructure is dismantled, the process it outlined has continually been held hostage by terrorism. If the Palestinians persist in their refusal to abandon terrorism as a political tool, then Israel will have to abandon its own compromised position. Under these conditions, the only way to facilitate the Roadmap or any other plan is to build a security fence. Such a fence is not an obstacle to peace, but rather the first step of disengagement and a precondition to any political process.

Proven Effectiveness

There is ample evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of, and precedence for, the construction of a security fence. Whenever Israel has needed to provide a defensive measure against terrorists for the security of its citizens, it has constructed a fence (e.g., along its borders with Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon). Indeed, the fence in Gaza has been 100 percent effective in preventing terrorist infiltration. Similarly, Stage A of the West Bank fence has already been successful, forcing terrorist groups to scramble to move their headquarters to areas where there is no fence and greatly decreasing the number of criminal incidents along its route. Eventually, this fence will also eliminate the problem of illegal Palestinian immigration, which has already resulted in 150,000 illegal residents in Israel.

In July 2001, the Israeli National Security Council presented a report to the cabinet calling for a fence in response to suicide attacks. Initially, the cabinet resisted, but in May 2002, following a month of terrorist attacks that killed 131 Israelis, it finally approved the northwestern sections of the fence, slated to run from Salem to Kafr Kassem. This 140-kilometer section was completed around August 2003. At that point, the government called for 55 additional kilometers of fence along the border of Jerusalem; initially, the cabinet approved only two 10-kilometer segments, but soon thereafter approved the remainder, which will be completed in November 2004. The northeastern section of the fence, in the Gilboa region, was approved in November 2002 after an attack on the Likud headquarters in Bet She'an. This segment will be completed in February 2004. In October 2003, the government called for an additional 400 kilometers south of Kafr Kassem and Jerusalem, on or largely adjacent to the 1967 boundary and leading almost to the Dead Sea. Once this segment is approved for construction, it should be completed by the end of 2005; yet, the money to build this segment is not included in the 2004 budget. Taken together, approximately 85 percent of the West Bank is likely to be east of the fence, where an overwhelming majority of Palestinians live. Finally, some have questioned whether Israel will erect an eastern fence in the West Bank. Because such a fence would not provide any significant security advantages, it is unlikely to be built.

Strategic Implications

The security fence is linked to Israel's strategic goals. Currently, 10 million people live between the Jordan and the Mediterranean, and by 2020 that number will rise to 15 million, with a 45 percent Jewish minority. If Israel does not demarcate its borders in a moral and legal way, it will lose its identity as a Jewish democratic state. This does not mean, however, that Israel must consist only of Jews; rather it refers to the Jewish character of the state, just as one refers to "American values." Israel is facing a choice between making territorial compromises or becoming a binational entity. It must choose the former, and it must do so according to two parameters. The first is security, so that Israel can continue to exist within secure borders. The second is demography, which will ensure that the country maintains its identity. When Israel chooses to preserve its identity, it does so irrespective of whether or not it has a partner, and without any further political agenda. Moreover, although Israel's efforts to meet these strategic goals will leave settlers east of the fence subject to terrorism, this situation will have the positive effect of forcing the settlers to reconsider their situation.

Again, if the Palestinians remain unwilling to abandon terrorism, then Israel must make unilateral decisions regarding borders. Under such a scenario, the fence will make disengagement a reality, which must occur before any final-status plans can be considered. Of course, an agreement would be preferable to unilateral action. At a time when such an agreement is not possible, however, unilateral disengagement must be pursued, while still leaving the door wide open to negotiations. Disengagement is necessary because of the threat to Israel's essence, not its existence.

The route of the fence should be based on an effort to both limit its effects on the majority of Palestinians who are not terrorists, and also to preserve the human rights of Israelis. Accordingly, three parameters should shape the route of the fence: security, freedom of politics; demography, which includes incorporating as few Palestinians as possible on

the western side of the fence; and human rights, including those of both Israelis and Palestinians, the majority of whom are not terrorists. Such a route does exist. Even so, Israeli and U.S. policymakers must keep in mind that failure to agree on a route is not an excuse to abandon construction. This sort of disagreement is a poor excuse to delay protecting Israelis from terrorism and giving the political process a chance. Moreover, a completed fence would not be perpetual; it would exist solely in order to create a reality of disengagement, much like the extensive fence that Israel built and dismantled along the Suez Canal.

In conclusion, Israel is working to fulfill the two main policies on its agenda—the Roadmap and unilateral disengagement—both of which require a security fence. This fence will help to safeguard the Israeli people, Israel's national identity, and the prospects for a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Anna Robinowitz. ❖

Policy #437

RECOMMENDED

ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[A Year of War in Ukraine](#)

March 2023



Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/year-war-ukraine)

ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[How Europe Is Quietly Putting 'Strategic Autonomy' into Practice](#)

Mar 9, 2023



Louis Dugit-Gros

(/policy-analysis/how-europe-quietly-putting-strategic-autonomy-practice)

BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Saied's Tunisia Is Politicizing Counterterrorism Again](#)

Mar 9, 2023



Aaron Y. Zelin

(/policy-analysis/saieds-tunisia-politicizing-counterterrorism-again)

TOPICS

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](#)

[Peace Process \(/policy-analysis/peace-process\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Israel \(/policy-analysis/israel\)](#)

