

# A Fence for the Foreseeable Future: Security and Political Implications

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## Brief Analysis

A few weeks ago, the Israeli government decided to establish a security fence between Israel and the West Bank in order to stem the tide of Palestinian suicide attacks. This fence has the support of the majority of Israelis for whom daily life has become a harrowing experience and for whom a fence brings some hope of security. This fence should not be seen as a substitute for diplomacy, but rather as a temporary security measure. The fence will not become the permanent border between Israel and the Palestinians. A permanent border can only attain legitimacy if it receives the support of both parties through negotiations.

### Why the Fence?

A fence can stop 80 percent of terrorist infiltrations. That does not stop all terrorism, but it makes a big difference. No matter how good a security system is, some will find ways around it. In Gaza, the fence stops 100 percent of attacks because the militants currently have the option of attacking from the West Bank. The reality of fighting terror is that no system will be perfect. Of course it will still be possible to build tunnels or shoot rockets over the fence, but it will be more difficult to attack over the Green Line than it is now.

Every effort will be made to improve the quality of life for Palestinians on the other side of the fence, even as terrorist attacks continue. As in Gaza, the Israeli government will make an effort to balance the needs of the Palestinians with the Israeli need for security. The Israeli army built the fence in Gaza in response to attacks on Tel Aviv. Although the fence was successful in terms of security, the people in Gaza still had to live and eat; for this reason, the army eased the closure so that Palestinians in Gaza could work in Israel. Similarly, the army will institute checkpoints for West Bank Palestinians working in Israel. However, as Palestinians continue sending terrorists over the Green Line, Israelis will become less willing to hire Palestinians and will continue hiring foreign workers as substitutes. The fence may make life more difficult for the Palestinians, but terror is the root of the problem. When terror stops, the closure will be relaxed. If the Palestinians stop sending terrorists across the Green Line then it will no longer be necessary to keep them out of Israel.

The fence will only be effective if both parties accept it. As a result, a military withdrawal to the fence will not be possible until after negotiations that establish a border; after all, to withdraw before then would give the impression that terror has been successful. But even after a definitive border has been established through negotiations, Israel will still want a fence, both to demarcate the border and to stop what are sure to be continuing attempted terrorist attacks. Until then, the main role of the fence will be to protect the Israeli population within the 1967 ceasefire lines. The fence will enable the army to use a minimal amount of troops that can be stationed along the fence instead of deploying a large military force to guard all of Israel. Small battalions will be sufficient to guard the settlements across the Green Line.

It would be a mistake to view the fence as repeating the Lebanon experience and to think that Israel will withdraw if sufficient pressure is applied. The border between Israel and Lebanon was agreed upon by Lebanon, Israel, and the

UN, which is why Israeli withdrawal to that line made sense as a way to stop terror attacks against Israel. Many Palestinians seem to think that, as in Lebanon, if they use sufficient terror Israel will back down. However, the bloodshed of the last year has shown that they are wrong. Moreover, it would be a mistake to view the fence as a reward for terror. The fence does nothing to advance the goal of a Palestinian state. That there will be a Palestinian state has been obvious since Oslo, if not since Camp David II; it is in the hands of the Palestinian people to make this state a reality. Israel needs a Palestinian state so that Jews can maintain their majority in the State of Israel.

Although it is a herculean task, the fence can be built quickly. In Gaza it took three or four months to build 40-50 km of fence with numerous contractors working around the clock. So far, work on the West Bank fence has proceeded more slowly; the terrain is different from that in Gaza, but the main problem is a bureaucratic one.

### Security and the PA

From 1994 to 1996, Palestinian Authority (PA) forces acted successfully against terror cells because they were ordered to do so by Chairman Yasir Arafat. At that time, when his security forces were cooperating with Israeli forces and arresting terror suspects, Arafat was a good negotiating partner.

After 1996, the Palestinian security forces ceased to do much of anything, and most of these forces have become involved in the terrorist organizations that they are supposed to be fighting. As a result, many Israelis are blaming their government for allowing the PA to stockpile weapons for attacks on Israeli civilians. In addition, the Palestinian security forces have fragmented into at least eleven organizations with no chain of command. Once these organizations show that they are able to stop terror, Israel will allow them to take control again.

During the current intifada, Arafat seems to have decided that he can gain more through terror than through negotiations. As such, he is no longer a good negotiating partner and should be neutralized or replaced. In order to return to the negotiating table, the Palestinian people have to make a commitment to reform and to elect new leaders capable of negotiating a settlement with Israel. Of course, the Palestinian people may choose to elect new leaders from the radical Islamic groups. But it is crucial that they elect their own leaders. The Palestinians will have to decide between terror and negotiations, and Israel will have to deal with whomever they choose.

◆ This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Shoshana Haberman.

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