

The Strategic Logic of Israel's Security Barrier

Jerusalem Issue Brief

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Col. (Res.) Danny Tirza

The IDF's Chief Architect for the Security Fence

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- The main reason for the delay in building the security fence was because the line of the fence was a major issue of political debate inside Israel. The government didn't want to build it, out of concern that any line on the ground would have a political meaning in future negotiations. In all government decisions it was emphasized that the line the army was building was only a *security line* and it would not be the line for future negotiations.
- We had to consider Israel's security needs, and also the rights of the people who live in the area in order to minimize the disruption of their lives. Israel's Supreme Court said we had to give greater weight to the daily life of the Palestinians, so we changed the route in some places, and in other places we changed the procedures that enable people to cross from one side of the fence to the other.
- Ben-Gurion International Airport is only eleven kilometers from the "green line," and Israel has real concerns over the potential threat of missiles launched against aircraft. Al-Qaeda tried to shoot down an Israeli Arkia aircraft with a missile in Mombasa, Kenya, in 2002 and it was a miracle that nobody was killed at that time.

- Due to weather conditions, there are seventy days a year when aircraft flying in and out of Israel must fly above the West Bank. We wanted to build a double fence in the area near the airport in order to secure it from missiles, but there are 19,000 Palestinians living in this area and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Israel could not leave people to live in enclaves.
- Why wasn't the fence built on the "green line" – the 1949 ceasefire line? From a security perspective, mountains dominate valleys. To provide security, Israel must control the high ground in order to dominate the area and not have others dominate us. The "green line" leaves Israel in a fragile security situation.

The Debate Over Where to Build the Fence

The government of Israel took a decision to build a fence between the West Bank and Israel in 1996, but its construction was delayed, first of all, because of the costs involved. At the time, the project was expected to cost about 2 billion shekels; today we know that it will cost about 10 billion shekels – about \$2 billion.

But the main reason for the delay involved the political implications of the route of the fence. Some Israelis believe that the fence should be built along the Jordan River between Jordan and Israel. Others believe that the fence should be built along the "green line" – what had been the border between Israel and Jordan between 1949 and 1967. Still others believe the fence should run inside Israel and separate Israeli Arabs who live near the fence from Israel. There are also those who believe it should run deep inside the West Bank and include most of the settlements. There is a big debate going on about where the line should be, and initially the government took no decision, trying to stay away from the debate.

At the end of September 2000, the Palestinians started a campaign of violence against Israel that resulted in the murder of 1,148 people, most of them civilians, in acts of terror committed inside Israel. It was very easy for terrorists to pass from the West Bank to Israel because there were no natural or man-made obstacles to stop them. The terror acts mounted until Israel saw 139 people murdered in one month, in March 2002. The public pressed the government to build a barrier between Israelis and Palestinians, and although the

government didn't want to do it, out of concern that any line on the ground would have a political meaning in future negotiations, it was forced by public opinion to build the fence.

The government ordered the army to find a route for the fence between Israel and the West Bank that would stop the terror but would not be a political border. In all the government decisions it was emphasized that the line the army was building was only a security line and it would not be the line for future negotiations. The line of the fence is not going to set the borders of Israel. We understand that at the end of the day the only line will be the one agreed upon by the two sides.

Major Concerns to Protect Palestinian Rights

In drawing the line of the fence, we had to consider Israel's security needs, and also the rights of the people who live in the area in order to minimize the disruption of their lives. We did not just draw lines on a map. We went out with the commanders and the village heads to find the right line on the ground.

After we had built 145 kilometers of fence, Israel's Supreme Court instructed us to give greater weight to the daily life of the Palestinians. So we changed the route of the fence in some places, and in other places we changed the procedures that enable people to cross from one side of the fence to the other. The Supreme Court ruled that Israel has the right to build a fence to defend its population, but we cannot take all the land that we want for the sake of security. There has to be a balance of security and humanitarian concerns, taking into account the needs of those most affected by the fence.

In urban areas where there is not enough space, we are building a concrete wall, but the wall is only 5 percent of the total project, which will be about 726 kilometers long. We also understand that we have to take the needs of people into consideration, and we sometimes have to build new roads for the villagers. At the end of the project there will be fewer than 7,000 people with Palestinian IDs on the Israeli side of the fence, but there will be a lot of Israelis living east of the fence.

The army is seizing the land for the fence only temporarily. The owners will receive compensation annually for the use of the land, and we try to build on public land wherever possible. We have also replanted more than 90,000 trees in the area to try to minimize the damage to local farmers. Israel is not fighting against the Palestinian people; we are fighting the terror organizations.

Protecting Jerusalem

In Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, 423 people were killed and about 6,000 were wounded in terror acts. The line of the fence in Jerusalem follows largely the municipal boundaries. It will have eleven terminals for people to cross. One terminal is already working between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. It looks like an airport terminal and people can cross from one side to the other in minutes.

We have also provided services for people living east of the fence. In one place we gave land for a school so pupils won't have to cross a checkpoint every day. In other places we have to build clinics so the population won't have to cross into Jerusalem. We deal with these questions every day, everywhere along the fence.

Protecting Israel's International Airport

Ben-Gurion International Airport is only eleven kilometers from the "green line," and Israel has real concerns over the potential threat of missiles launched against aircraft. Al-Qaeda tried to shoot down an Israeli Arkia aircraft with a missile in Mombasa, Kenya, in 2002 and they missed. It was a miracle that nobody was killed at that time.

In Israel, all the aircraft come from the west and land from west to east, then take off from east to west over the Mediterranean Sea. But due to weather conditions, there are seventy days a year when the aircraft must fly in the opposite direction, above the West Bank. We wanted to build a double fence in the area near the airport in order to secure it from

missiles, but there are 19,000 Palestinians living in this area. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice saw the maps and said Israel could not cause people to live in enclaves, so the government decided not to build a double fence in this area at this time.

Route 443 is the only alternative road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in addition to Route 1 – the main road. But we had to consider the 47,000 Palestinians living west of the road, and we will have to find ways to defend this road without creating an enclave.

Some Israeli political leaders wanted to build an additional security fence to the east, between the West Bank and the Jordan Valley, because we believe the Jordan Valley is a strategic area that Israel needs to control. But the way to accomplish this is not by building a fence. The fence is solely a defensive issue and is not a way to claim land.

Israel is building a security fence in order to defend itself. Its route reflects a balance between security and humanitarian considerations. We look forward to a future when there will be no need for such measures. We will be glad to tear down the fences and live in peace with our neighbors. But until that time comes, we are determined to carry through with this defensive project.

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Col. (Res.) Danny Tirza is in charge of planning the security fence between the West Bank and Israel, Israel's largest infrastructure project. Since 1994, Col. Tirza has headed a special staff in the IDF Central Command in charge of regional strategic planning. He has taken part in formulating Israel's security positions in negotiations with the Palestinians and has participated in various stages of the negotiations. Col. Tirza specializes in the geography of Judea and Samaria, the Jordan Valley, and Jerusalem. This *Jerusalem Issue Brief* is based on his presentation at the Institute for Contemporary Affairs in Jerusalem on January 26, 2006.

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Dore Gold, Publisher; Yaakov Amidror, ICA Program Director; Mark Ami-El, Managing Editor. Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (Registered Amuta), 13 Tel-Hai St., Jerusalem, Israel; Tel. 972-2-5619281, Fax. 972-2-5619112, Email: jcpa@netvision.net.il. In U.S.A.: Center for Jewish Community Studies, 5800 Park Heights Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21215; Tel. 410-664-5222; Fax 410-664-1228. Website: www.jcpa.org. © Copyright. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Board of Fellows of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

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