



Israel's Security Barrier: A Political Ruse in the Guise of Security

by Maj. Gen. (res.) Gershon Hachohen

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The security barrier between Israel and the West Bank constitutes one of the most prolonged and expensive projects Israel has ever carried out, and its adverse implications for Israel's future borders are of profound significance. The massive crossing of the barrier in recent weeks by West Bank Palestinians offers an opportunity to open the eyes of the public to its real function as a dangerous political ruse in the guise of security.

Thousands of West Bank Palestinians, maybe even tens of thousands, recently crossed the security barrier and arrived in buses to various beaches in Israel. The barrier was mainly crossed in the area of Tulkarem-Qalqilya, where the fence has many breaches. While many were alarmed by this event, it should come as no surprise.

A barrier that is not closely monitored along its entire length, at all times, and with a broad order of battle cannot obstruct those who want to cross it. The IDF and the Israel Police never had the manpower required for this. About two years ago, I published a detailed study of the subject that maintained that the security barrier was built as a political ruse to exploit the fear of terror in order to unilaterally establish a political border.

As an obstacle, a barrier is undoubtedly beneficial to an overall effort at tactical defense. The question of its usefulness arises when this tactical tool becomes a strategic orientation. The most basic question about the barrier is how necessary it really is to prevent terrorism. The success of the IDF and the security forces in suppressing West Bank terrorism since Operation Defensive Shield (2002) indicates that terrorism has been thwarted primarily by ongoing daily efforts deep in the West Bank, not by activity along the barrier. Therein

also lies the important difference between the effectiveness of counterterrorist operations in the West Bank and the IDF's inconclusive activity along the Gaza Strip barrier.

The debate over the barrier is not just about security, especially when its route runs, for the most part, along the Green Line. This was candidly noted by US Middle East Envoy Dennis Ross back when the building of the barrier began. In a tour of the route that was under construction, Ross stopped, looked at the nascent barrier with satisfaction, and said, "It looks like a border, it smells like a border, it is a border!"

The idea of building a security barrier began to emerge in the early 1990s, when there was an outbreak of suicide bombings after the inking of the Oslo Accords, and by 1995 the Rabin government was considering the idea. However, PM Rabin's realization that the barrier's construction would have far-reaching political implications, in effect determining the route of the political border, led him to reject it.

There were others in the then-ruling Labor coalition, however, who saw the fight against terrorism as an opportunity to launch a major move: a simple, quick, and effective way to separate the Israelis and the Palestinians and cede the West Bank by setting in train a process on the ground without having to worry about an Israeli public debate, negotiations, or an agreement.

In the ongoing debate in Israel between those advocates of a withdrawal to the Green Line and proponents of extending sovereignty to part of the West Bank, the decision to build the barrier marked a highly significant shift in the direction of withdrawal. Its architects foresaw a solution in two stages: first, a barrier would be built with the IDF operating on both sides; then the IDF would be deployed only along the Israeli side of the barrier thus creating a *de facto* border.

The security barrier is one of the most prolonged and expensive projects that Israel has ever carried out. Its cost is thus far estimated at more than 15 billion shekels (over \$4 billion), and its adverse implications for Israel's future borders are of profound significance. Its recent massive crossing offers an opportunity to open the eyes of the public to the barrier's real function as a dangerous political ruse in the guise of security.

Maj. Gen. (res.) Gershon Hachohen is a senior research fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. He served in the IDF for 42 years. He commanded troops in battles with Egypt and Syria. He was formerly a corps commander and commander of the IDF Military Colleges.