

# (The) Fence or Offense? Testing the Effectiveness of “The Fence” in Judea and Samaria

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## INTRODUCTION

A chorus of voices if not a virtual consensus claims that the fence being built in Judea and Samaria since the summer of 2002 has been effective in saving lives in the face of massive Palestinian terrorism. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The building of the anti-terrorist fence has become a vital, urgent, and critical imperative, in order to save civilian lives. Indeed, the fence has proven its effectiveness in reducing the number of successful terrorist attacks in those areas in which it has been already completed.”<sup>1</sup>

No less assured of the virtues of the fence was one of Israel’s leading scholars of the military, Martin van Creveld, who wrote:

Let us for argument’s sake assume that Israel returned to the 1967 armistice lines or somewhere very close to them from the strategic point of view. In the best case, it will bring to the establishment of a centralized Palestinian state which will recognize Israel and will sign with it a peace treaty. In the worse case Israel will have to continue defending itself in the face of terror ... in order to protect itself against terror ... in order to protect itself now that it has returned to the 1967 lines, in order to defend itself against terror one must now build the fence—and at certain places a wall—to act as a barrier between itself and the territories.<sup>2</sup>

So the Israeli public has been convinced of the virtues of the fence. Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann wrote in their summary of the Peace Index in March 2004:

Most Israelis support the fence, despite Palestinian suffering. The construction of the separation fence is overwhelmingly supported by the Israeli-Jewish

public, despite the internal debate and the international pressure against it. The support for the fence is based on the widespread assessment that it can significantly reduce terror attacks, though only a small minority believes it can prevent them completely.<sup>3</sup>

Experts also tend to agree with this perception and the superiority of defensive over offensive measures. Pape wrote in a well-cited article on terrorism:

States that face persistent suicide terrorism should recognize that neither offensive military action nor concessions alone are likely to do much good and should invest significant resources in border defenses and other means of homeland security.<sup>4</sup>

Such a view is based on a much broader and more historically rooted assessment of the virtues of defensive measures over offensive moves:

For enormous periods of time, even in Western Europe, the crucible of the conquering impulse, warfare was not triumphalist but a cautious, local, piecemeal, protracted and indecisive business ... Indeed, if it were possible to quantify in military history ... it would probably be revealed that altogether more money and human labour has been expended, over the whole period of collective military effort before the two world wars, in fortification than in fighting. And to no bad purpose: deprecated though it has been by military academy orthodoxies, fortification has served communities well ...<sup>5</sup>

Of course, not all agree with the assessment of the virtues of defense over offense, particularly in low intensity warfare. Arreguin-Toft in an article that tried to understand why in an asymmetrical conflict there is a growing tendency over time for the weaker side to win, argues that the strong states should escalate in the form of direct attacks against the guerrillas in order to prevail.<sup>6</sup> Orme, in a similar vein, argues that the application of information technology to warfare promises to increase the effectiveness of force while decreasing its moral and economic costs and may also strengthen offense against defense.<sup>7</sup>

Israel's security fence, a massive project being built since 2002 in the midst of many offensive Israeli moves against terrorism in the West Bank, offers a good opportunity to study the relative virtues of offensive versus defensive measures.<sup>8</sup> No one has examined the effectiveness of the the Israeli defensive, security fence compared to the effectiveness of offensive military measures such as targeted killing, penetration into "enemy territory" on search and surprise missions, and most importantly, massive onslaughts and temporary conquest of areas in which terrorist infrastructure has taken root.

The relative effectiveness in reducing Palestinian violence of these two measures is an especially pertinent question for two reasons. First, its role in the Israeli military strategic debate between offensive and defensive measures; second, in the subsequent allocation of resources to defensive and offensive measures in containing Palestinian violence in low intensity conflict. The

latter is especially important since the fence, according to the Ministry of Defense, is the largest project ever undertaken in Israel; initial estimates already place its cost at approximately one billion dollars, but it could easily become a multi-billion dollar project.

This article is divided into three parts. The first covers the offensive-defensive debate in Israel's military strategy and practice. The second section explores the effectiveness of fences in other settings. The third tests the operational and tactical effectiveness of the fence that has been constructed since the summer of 2002.

## **THE OFFENSE-DEFENSE DEBATE**

Israel's strategic posture has always been ridden with paradox. On the grand strategic level, Israel tends towards restraint; in military strategy it adopts an offensive posture. This paradox is rational given the common factor responsible for both forms of collective behavior—the severe asymmetry that exists between Israel's small size, meager resources, and lack of strategic depth compared to the superiority of numbers, territory, and potential resources on the Arab side.<sup>9</sup> The perception of this asymmetry has led Israeli decision-makers to adopt a policy of staving off war as much as possible, yet when war is perceived to be imminent, the devised military strategy exacts maximum punishment in minimum time. The former component is necessary to deter Arab foes from engaging in a second round, the latter because Israel and its limited resources cannot endure a protracted effort.<sup>10</sup>

Given this predicament, one can easily see why preemptive war has become Israel's hallmark when its leaders perceive an Arab intention to change the status quo. Preemptive war increases the State's probability of achieving military superiority. It also inflicts great punishment on Arab states before the superpowers bring about a cease-fire. Israeli military strategy, as opposed to its political grand strategy, follows the well-known maxim that "if you want peace, prepare for war," or even more specifically, that offense is the best form of defense.<sup>11</sup> If the Sinai campaign only accorded partial validity to this doctrine, the triumph of 1967 seemed to have validated it beyond doubt.<sup>12</sup> The famous conceptual trilogy—deterrence, intelligence, attack—weds grand strategic visions with strategic and operational concerns.

Yet as often is the case in history, the very event that seemed to prove the sagacity of the doctrine also sowed the seeds of the doctrine's replacement. Israel's new cease-fire lines had vastly increased the State's strategic depth, decreased vulnerability to its major population centers, and increased the vulnerability of Israel's foes to Israeli retaliation, leading to a greater reliance on fixed defense. The Bar-Lev line was the most palpable indication of the growing reliance on such defensive measures.<sup>13</sup> But this is not to say that Israel has abandoned its offensive doctrine altogether, as the Israeli-led escalation in the

Israeli-Egyptian war of attrition proved. But it does demonstrate reliance on defensive components as well.

The Yom Kippur War should have indicated the shortcomings of a defensive strategic posture. Instead, it further opened the debate on the validity of offensive strategy.<sup>14</sup> Post-1973 critics point to failed intelligence, one of the central components for an effective posture. They also question to what extent preemption is a valid option in light of Israel's heavy dependence on the United States in international and security affairs. The failure of the attempted offensive of the night of 11–12 October demonstrates the poor results of offensive measure.<sup>15</sup> But the most important element of the offensive posture is deterrence, and its failure to stave off an effective Egyptian attack is the greatest criticism of all.

Critics of Israel's offensive posture have also argued that technological advances, principally Arab and Iranian ballistic delivery capabilities have also created the need for a more defensive doctrine.<sup>16</sup> Not only do Israel's foes have a weapon that deters her from attacking, but Israel has a corresponding need to defend its population from an attack by such missiles and the payloads of mass destructive material that they carry. Though one may debate whether the decision not to react to Iraqi ballistic attacks reflects a more defensive posture, the decision to embark on the "arrow" project definitely reflects a tilt towards defensive thinking.<sup>17</sup>

New intellectual currents propagated within Israel's elite have also influenced Israeli strategic culture. Neo-liberal, constructivist, and even idealistic currents have risen at the expense of geo-strategic thinking, particularly after the signing of the Oslo Accords.<sup>18</sup> Ethel Soligen provides a convincing materialist account for these changes, which she also perceives in other conflict settings where at least one side is heavily integrated in the global economy.<sup>19</sup> Israeli elites are willing to take the risk of growing class differences and a loss of collective solidarity in order to champion capitalism at home and dovish policies "abroad" in an attempt to assure their more effective integration into the global economy.

Such integration cannot take place within a state that seems aggressive and at odds with the prevailing norms and agreements of the world community. Israel's scientific and business elite argue that a more "defensive" posture and such integration will assure Israel's long-term qualitative-technological edge and more specifically, better ties with the American security and military establishment, whose cooperation is deemed crucial in securing the country's technological edge.<sup>20</sup>

Critics also assert the importance of defensive measures in low intensity warfare, perhaps the most prevalent arena of operations since the 1982 war.<sup>21</sup> Compared to interstate wars, low intensity warfare usually involves smaller and less intensive operations across longer periods of time. Usually a state and "liberation movement" engage in a war of attrition.<sup>22</sup> Presumably,

the state is usually more pampered and institutionally complex, though as Avi Kober has demonstrated this may not be so for Israel at least<sup>23</sup> The state becomes vulnerable unless morale and political solidarity are ensured over time. The case of Algerian resistance to French rule proves that even the state's complete military victory can lead to complete political defeat.<sup>24</sup> In conducting a war of low intensity conflict, investing in the home front on the political level is relatively more important than the combat theater is in conventional wars.

Media reporting, the scrutiny of human rights organizations, and the pressure of domestic lobby groups also contribute to the importance of the political conduct of the conflict.<sup>25</sup> Concentrating on the political and the need to legitimate the conflict creates a tilt towards defensive measures, which are more justifiable.

Yet a tendency to become defensive does not necessarily justify defensive action. In an article that attempts to explain why the incidence of weaker sides prevailing over the stronger in asymmetrical conflict has increased worldwide, Arreguin-Toft argues that the strong states usually escalate the direct attacks against the guerrillas, who then prevail.<sup>26</sup> Thus Israeli success against Palestinian insurgents depends on acting offensively while taking into account the lessons distilled from the Algerian experience.

In the low intensity conflict in Lebanon, Israel adopted a defensive posture for the first time. This decision came in the wake of the Kafr Kanna incident in 1996, in which Israel accidentally killed over 100 Lebanese civilians; from that point on Israel, both pressured and brokered by the international community, entered into an informal "understanding" with Hizbullah that both sides would refrain from attacking civilian localities unless civilian populations under the two sides' control were attacked first.<sup>27</sup> Though Israel fought well against Hizbullah, several widely publicized incidents and an effective campaign waged by the Four Mothers' Movement eventually led to withdrawal.<sup>28</sup> (This is not to say that there may not be other strategic arguments for the withdrawal from Lebanon. Prime Minister Ehud Barak may also have been influenced by Syria's weakening international standing and aging army.)

But reacting to terrorism and low intensity conflict defensively has not yet become the rule of IDF strategy. On the contrary, during the present conflict the IDF has operated offensively by deliberately escalating firepower in reaction to Palestinian violence. This was especially true at the beginning of the conflict, as indicated by casualty ratios between Israel and the Palestinians. In the first month of the conflict there were 109 Palestinian fatalities in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza compared to ten Israeli fatalities, a 10:1 ratio; the ratio was subsequently reduced to 3.45:1 by the end of 2005 as Palestinians responded with increasingly lethal measures including shooting ambushes and suicide bombers that proved quite effective in the Lebanese situation.<sup>29</sup> All in all, in five years of conflict, 982 Israelis were killed by Palestinians compared

to 3,386 Palestinians killed by Israelis. Once again Israel escalated the conflict. Adopting the strategy employed in Lebanon and against the terrorists in the Jordan Valley in the late 1960s, Israel attacked a strategic address, the Palestinian Authority, hoping that it would not only abstain from sponsoring terrorism but would also restrain those engaged in terror. Israel's offensive-escalating military strategy culminated with two massive drives against the Palestinians, Operation Desert Shield in March 2002 and Operation Determined Path three months later.

No armed forces or state security apparatus will act either in exclusively offensive or defensive fashion in the face of violence, particularly in the case of the recent conflict, when the violence has penetrated repeatedly into Israel's most populous and economically most vital areas. Defensive measures include the mandatory placement of guards outside all public institutions and privately-owned establishments serving the public, roadblocks within Israel, and fencing and cordoning designated public areas. Building the fence, however, is by far the biggest project, and thus it raises the question: which of the two modes of action, the offensive measures or the defensive measure of creating the fence, is more effective in reducing terrorism?

To respond to this question, we look at the historical security role of fences and other physical obstacles against external attack elsewhere. These fences are then compared to the security fence around Gaza and then the West Bank. Finally, tests are devised to judge the effectiveness of the fence in Judea and Samaria.

## **PHYSICAL OBSTACLES: AN HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW**

Thousands of years ago the famous strategist Sun Tsu wrote in his classic *The Wisdom of War*, "A country with steep cliffs and rushing water between them, natural and deep depressions, concealed inaccessible areas, thick foliage, swamps and ravines is a country that should be abandoned immediately." Natural obstacles have always been regarded a strategic asset and states that enjoyed them were far easier to defend. States without natural obstacles have created artificial alternatives, as many examples in China and Europe attest.

Israel's recent fence-making is heavily based on the French precedent in Algeria with the completion in September 1957 of the Morris Line, named after the then French Minister of Defense at the height of the French Algerian war. The main purpose of the fence, which extended over 320 km, was to divide Tunisia that had served as a safe haven for the Algerian Liberation Army from its theater of operations within Algeria. The obstacle consisted of an electrified fence with the lethal charge of 5,000 volt two and a half meters

high. The French placed landmines along a swath of fifty meters on each side of the fence demarcated by extensive barb-wire reminiscent of defensive positions in World War One.<sup>30</sup> Parallel to the demarcation barbed wire ran a patrol road with access at set intervals to the fence itself. The fence was also outfitted with sensors that would alert artillery placements which responded to intrusion attempts with 105 mm. howitzer artillery barrages.

The French spent lavishly on the line both in terms of manpower and equipment; 80,000 troops consisting of mechanized troops, and four paratrooper regiments and helicopter squadrons were allotted to thwart infiltration. The FLN was no less insistent on foiling French plans committing thousands of men to the effort. Raids of up to 400 ANL members to bring down the fence and promote large scale infiltration were not uncommon in the winter of 1957–8 when the fight over the line reached its greatest intensity. Despite purchases of special electrically absorbent German shearers, the establishment of mobile ramps to climb over the fence, arduous training that enabled the Algerian fighters to move across vast distances with the purpose of setting decoy attacks, the line proved its effectiveness. Algerian losses were massive; in the major single attack by eight squadrons on the line during the course of three days of fighting at the end of February 1958, 620 of an estimated force of 800 were either killed or captured.<sup>31</sup>

But there are several other more pertinent experiences concerning security fences in the history of Zionism and the establishment of Israel itself. They are more pertinent, because Israel would never be able to create an electrified fence separating itself from the populated West Bank without invidious propagandistic comparisons to the Jewish Holocaust in the Second World War.

One such precedent which Israel would scarcely like to emulate is the Tegert line, named after Sir Charles Tegert, a prominent counterinsurgency expert who proposed on tour of duty early in 1938 to investigate ways of reducing the Arab rebellion, the establishment of a fence to prevent infiltration over the border from French-controlled Lebanon. The fence, which was only partially built, included patrols and both a ground-to-ground and ground-to-air communication system with the RAF for reconnaissance and strafing purposes. A key characteristic of the line was that it was almost entirely defensive; for political reasons the British refrained from operating beyond enemy lines. The results were soon plain to see; the fence was effectively dismantled by inventive locals only to be sold in the markets of Beirut and Damascus.

A similar fate befell the fence which Israel built around Gaza in 1995. Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin was under significant pressure from Israeli towns bordering Gaza to deal with massive theft of infrastructure, livestock, and equipment that threatened their livelihood. The towns especially feared that, based on the precedent of the 1950s, infiltration for the purpose of theft would soon encourage the Palestinian factions to infiltrate in order to commit

acts of terror. Suicide bombers were already crossing from Gaza into Israel with increasing frequency.

It is important to stress that Rabin made the decision to build the fence alone, arousing no political opposition even though the bulk of it ran along the green line. The fence was a continuous obstacle, 45 kilometers in length from Netiv Haashara to Kerem Shalom.<sup>32</sup> The fence perimeter was interrupted by four border crossings, Erez, Karni, Kisufim, and Sufa, Kisufim being used exclusively by Israeli civilians and army forces. Most of the fence was equipped with sensors. Bordering the fence on either side was an area of three-hundred meters which the IDF leveled and cleared of all foliage. The fence was both manned with troops sitting in watch towers and other means of scouting terrain as well as patrolled.<sup>33</sup>

The importance of active defense was brought to light in the first six months of the recent conflict, when the Palestinians dismantled and destroyed the fence much like the precedent of the British security fence built along the Lebanese border during the 1936–1939 uprising. In March 2001, Israel began rebuilding the fence and a subsequent augmentation of troops to “defend” the fence took place. The cost of rebuilding the fence was estimated at 10 million shekels, a relatively paltry amount suggesting that the IDF was relying on low tech active defense more than on a high-tech fence.<sup>34</sup> One of the major changes to the fence was increasing the security perimeter to one kilometer and ensuring effective patrol, which was critically lacking before the outbreak of the intifada.<sup>35</sup>

Though the fence was relatively successful, it was not fool-proof, especially in preventing infiltration to Israeli villages on its perimeter. In January 2002, a group of eight Hamas terrorists reached the fence facing Kerem Shalom.<sup>36</sup> At that point, the group split, with six remaining behind to cover the two that infiltrated. The infiltrators reached the IDF’s perimeter base and killed four soldiers in a heavy skirmish until they themselves were killed; the investigation conducted after the event revealed that the sensors had worked, but the soldiers disregarded the alarm after the terrorists had repeatedly touched the fence in the area.

Nevertheless, it is also important to realize that it is only after the destruction of the settlements in Gush Katif and the total withdrawal from Gaza in September 2005 that the effectiveness of the fence was tested; up to that time the Gush Katif settlements and the troops defending them offered the terrorists easier targets. In the literature on terrorism this phenomenon is known as the substitution effect. The guerrilla, indeed even a conventional army, will always seek minimizing costs and maximizing damage; attacks on Gush Katif as well as primitive ballistic attacks both against Jewish settlements within Gaza and settlements behind it assured better results than forays across the fence from Gaza. Indeed, fatalities within Gaza increased in 2003–2004 long after the incidence and the effectiveness of Palestinian violence decreased in the West Bank.



## THE DEBATE OVER AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FENCE

Creating a continuous obstacle separating Israel proper and and Palestinians in the West Bank proved far more complicated than erecting the fence in Gaza, though plans for both were in place since 1995. Some of the hesitation over the fence in the West Bank was technical and tactical; any continuous obstacle would have to be ten times longer than the fence in Gaza—450 kilometers. The fence in Gaza covered flat ground along its entire length and was easy and cheap to build. By contrast, most of any proposed fence along the Green Line would be constructed in hilly country—a complicated and expensive task. Building an obstacle in a heavily urban area such as Jerusalem also presented legal and technical difficulties, especially given the importance of assuring safe, quick, and expedient passage to Arabs bearing Israeli identity cards.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, in certain areas, the West Bank barrier would actually have to be an expensive wall, including parts of the Jerusalem area, Tulkarem and Qalquilya. This is because the close proximity of an Arab urban population on the east side of the barrier, coupled with the fact that Arabs inhabited the Israeli side as well, would make it easy for terrorists to neutralize the fence's early-warning capabilities and thus reduce its overall effectiveness, simply by using the local population as cover.

Yet these were hardly the factors that explain why the fence in Gaza was in place by the end of 1995 and why no continuous obstacle was in place in the West Bank by the summer of 2002, save for two walls over several kilometers facing Qalquilya and Tulkarem. The contrast to Gaza was all the more remarkable since by 2002, the conflict had waged for nearly two years, and the rise in Palestinian terrorism had taken its toll in Israeli population centers close to any potential route.

Political and ideological factors, far more than either economic or security considerations, were responsible for the delay in the construction of an obstacle that was fully adumbrated by then-Minister of Police Shahal in 1995.<sup>38</sup>

All of the prime ministers from the time the plan had been introduced—Rabin, Peres, Netanyahu, and even Barak (who first introduced the concept of separation) procrastinated in its implementation. Many Israeli politicians, especially on the right, felt that the creation of a continuous barrier would compromise Israel at the negotiating table with the Palestinians.<sup>39</sup>

Peres was lukewarm to the idea because of his innate hostility when he was incumbent to a partition solution, and Netanyahu was opposed on ideological grounds to a project that almost by default would leave most of Judea and Samaria outside the fence.

Political pressures were so strong that the security fence program, approved by the Defense Cabinet in July 2001, still conceived of the obstacle

as discontinuous to be constructed in three separate areas: Um al-Fahum, Tulkarem, and Jerusalem, a total of 80 kilometers.<sup>40</sup>

The original plan underwent modifications based on the principle of continuity when, in April 2002, the responsibility for building the security fence was placed with the Ministry of Defense. Yet it was only in June 2002, nearly two years after the outbreak of hostilities and after the death of over 500 Israelis, more than half of them within Israel proper, that the government in June 2002 approved, with minor reservations, the plan based on the principle of a contiguous obstacle. Finally, two months later Israel began physically constructing this continuous obstacle. By that time, the estimated extent of the first part of the route, running from Salem, the northern most point of the Arab Triangle to Elkana, east of Kfar Saba, exceeded 100 kilometers.<sup>41</sup>

The choice to begin on that specific stretch of a project intended to cover much of the western perimeter of the West Bank all the way down to the southern Hebron Hills was obvious. Northern Samaria, principally Jenin, Nablus, and Tulkarem, were the major centers of terrorist operations, especially suicide bombings, while the inhabitants of Israeli towns closest to the former Green Line in that area such as Netanya and Hadera were their principle victims. This was also a stretch—unlike the northeastern reaches and south of Jerusalem—in which a sizeable and dense Arab population lived within the Green Line, facilitating the movement of terrorists into Israel. Indeed Salem, the northern point of stage one of the project, was the northernmost Arab locality of a nearly continuous stretch of Israeli Arab localities, just as Elkana roughly paralleled Kafr Kasem, the southernmost point of the Arab Triangle.<sup>42</sup>

Three government decisions thereafter extended the fence in principle to the entire perimeter of the West Bank. In December 2002, the government decided on “Stage B,” from Salem through the Jezreel Valley and the Gilboa Mountains, originally to Taysir in the Jordan Valley south of the Green Line, but then modified under international pressure to end just south of Kfar Rupin, southeast of Beit Shean along the former armistice line. The stretch was completed in December 2003. The extension created a barrier between the West Bank, principally Nablus and Jenin and two Israeli towns, Afula and Beit Shean that had suffered several suicide attacks. In August 2003 the government decided on the creation of a 68 kilometer stretch of fence and wall around Jerusalem, and in October 2003 a preliminary decision was made to create a continuous barrier from Elkana towards Carmel (Um Daraj) in the southern Hebron hills.<sup>43</sup>

Even after the government made these decisions, the gap between intentions and actual facts on the ground proved wide. Again, it stemmed from political realities, though this time it emanated mainly from a government that wanted to avoid placing the route along the green line in order to include as many settlements as possible on the west side of the fence. This went against an international constellation of forces that supported the fence only if it went along the green line, if at all.

Including the bloc of settlements adjacent to and including Ariel, Israel's second largest settlement became the major point of contention between the Israeli government and the United States and Europe.<sup>44</sup> But opposition related not only to "macro" issues such as the Ariel settlement bloc, but to almost every deviation from the green line along the fence's route. Pressures at this juncture were exerted through the prism of legal politics, internationally through the decision to test the legitimacy of the barrier and its route before the International Court at the Hague, and locally in the numerous petitions filed by Palestinians and human rights organizations against the fence's route with the Israeli High Court of Justice.<sup>45</sup>

On June 30, 2004, Israel's Supreme Court ruling called for better balance between Israeli security and Palestinian humanitarian considerations. The court accepted the State's claim that the fence was built for reasons of national security and thus justified sequestering private plots of land in the West Bank, contrary to the position of the Council for Peace and Security (a private organization composed of retired military commanders that submitted a brief on the appropriate security aims, and hence the proper path, of the fence). But the court ruled that even if the government had the authority to build the fence, the IDF commander still has a legal duty to balance security and humanitarian considerations. This duty relates to the question of proportionality rooted in both Israeli administrative law and public international law. Despite the grave security considerations at stake, the court felt that the fence, both along stretches already built and stretches still in the planning stages, from Salem to Elkana and from Elkana to Jerusalem, infringed on the lives of 35,000 local inhabitants by separating landowners from tens of thousands of dunams of land. The court ruled that changes in the existing route must be made even at the cost of reduced security. All in all, the High Court of Justice ruled that the state had to reroute thirty of a forty kilometer stretch of the fence northwest of Jerusalem, and that reparations be paid to Palestinians harmed by its construction.

In the Hague, Israeli intentions and actions over the fence faced a much worse verdict whose ramifications transcended either its designated route or the impact of its implantation on the Palestinians. The International Court of Justice demanded that since the barrier built on Palestinian land was illegal, it should be torn down. A vote at the United Nations Assembly also demanded that Israel pay reparations for damages caused by construction of the barrier.<sup>46</sup>

Despite assertions to the contrary, international pressure bore fruit. Government approval of the new route on February 20, 2005, presented a route considerably closer to the green line and considerably shorter as well. Divorcing the continuous barrier from fencing efforts in the Ariel bloc was the major emendation, but so was the dismantlement of much existing fence southward along the Elkana-Jerusalem route placing Highway 443 outside of the fence.<sup>47</sup>

Both rulings, including that of the Israeli High Court of Justice, whose authority the government obviously accepted, soon translated into numerous petitions over “proportionality” issues. These petitions have delayed the implementation of the fence significantly, to the point that its completion may be in jeopardy.

As for the structure of the barrier itself, for most of its length, it is a multi-layered obstacle consisting of a ditch and a pyramid-shaped stack of six coils of barbed wire on the eastern side of the structure and barbed wire only on the western side (the ditch is intended to prevent movement of vehicles across the fence); a path enabling the patrol of IDF forces on both sides of the fence, a fence in the center with sensors to warn of any incursion and a smoothed strip of sand that runs parallel to the fence, to detect footprints.<sup>48</sup> Command and control centers along the security fence receive online data, from the various observation systems and devices provide troops at the control center with an up-to-date situational map of every sector. Once a change in the pattern is detected, an alert is directed to the patrol to inspect the cause for the alert and deal with it appropriately. In urban concentrations, where a forty meter-wide obstacle is impossible and the ability to render sensors is useless, a five-to-eight meter concrete wall has been erected instead. The wall is bordered by a patrol road and concrete-reinforced tower pillboxes attached to the wall.

Both for economic and political reasons, the erection of the wall had been kept to a minimum. Needless to say, pro-Palestinian groups have succeeded in setting the nomenclature, as the International Court of Justice’s use of the word indicates.

## **OFFENSIVE MOVES TO COPE WITH TERRORISM**

Despite the massiveness of the fence project, one must not lose sight of the fact that Israel engaged, particularly after 9/11, in an aggressive offensive war to root out Palestinian terrorism. And even more crucially, major offensive moves *preceded* the building of the fence.

By far the most dramatic of these offensives were Desert Shield and Determined Path, in which Israel reacted to an unparalleled increase in Palestinian terrorism, the likes of which Israel had never encountered before. In the month of March 2002 alone, 135 Israelis were killed, most of them civilians within the Green Line. Especially painful were the closing days of the month, when a suicide bomber killed 31 civilians attending a Seder night meal in a modest hotel in Netanya. This was the most lethal attack in the conflict.<sup>49</sup>

In Operation Desert Shield Israel amassed 20,000 troops, mostly reservists, and the largest order of battle since the 1982 war. The purpose of this operation was to temporarily reoccupy the cities in the West Bank, root out terrorist infrastructure within the cities, and set up semi-permanent bases just outside them. 33 Israeli soldiers were killed during the operation, most of

them in the Jenin refugee camp, where Palestinian militants put up a stiff fight. It took crack Israeli infantry troops ten days to conquer Jenin, partially because Israel insisted on a house-to-house combat in an attempt to minimize Palestinian civilian casualties.

Operation Desert Shield's effectiveness in weakening Palestinian resistance was attested by the second campaign, Operation Determined Path. In late June all the major towns in the West Bank were reoccupied, but this time Israel met little resistance and incurred no fatalities. Yet Determined Path achieved much the same objectives as Desert Shield without drafting the reserves or deploying the equipment and weapons necessary during the first operation. An example of the second operation's relative ease, it took more than an entire brigade to enter Jenin in March-April. In June, a battalion sufficed to take over Jenin and its refugee camp. In the following three months, 38 Israeli civilians and 4 soldiers were killed in terrorist attacks, a considerable achievement in light of the bloodletting of the preceding three months, when 240 Israelis, an overwhelming percentage of whom were civilian, were victims of Palestinian terror.

But these operations were not only a matter of thwarting Palestinian action. They were also the cause of a profound debate and reassessment of the strategy the Palestinians ought to take.<sup>50</sup> These voices grew perceptibly stronger after Israel's wholesale invasion during Operation Desert Shield, and blatantly so after their semi-permanent reoccupation in the second offensive in June.

## DEFENSE OR OFFENSE: TESTING THE FENCE'S EFFECTIVENESS

Having analyzed both Israel's offensive and defensive deployment in the recent Israeli-Palestinian low-intensity conflict, we are now in a position to address the question of the fence's relative effectiveness compared to offensive moves.

Before demonstrating the means to tackle the question, it is important to realize that the relative importance and effectiveness of offensive as apposed to defensive measures became a political issue in the course of the low intensity conflict with the Palestinians. The right wing side of the spectrum, particularly the settlers, raised the slogan "let the IDF win" to express their support for offensive measures as a means of reducing terrorism. By contrast, Israel's center-left reflected a more defensive outlook expressed mainly through lobby groups pressing for the initiation and speedy completion of the fence; "the border seam has become a broad walk for terrorists" was one such slogan, "until when" was a terser one—shorthand for a longer question how long will Israel suffer fatalities in procrastinating from building the fence.

There are three ways one can test the fence's relative effectiveness:

**The First Test** is to compare the number of fatalities and wounded during the period between the two large offensives and the completion of the first

part of the fence, from June 2002 to August 2003, with a similar period after the completion of the fence. If the reduction in casualties is greater in the first period before the fence was completed than in the second after the completion of the fence, one can surmise that offensive moves are more effective than the fence. This does not rule out the possibility, as analyst George Will claimed in an article in August 2002 entitled “A war and then a wall” that both moves could be sequential, the offensive onslaught to clean out the terrorist infrastructure, *then* a fence is necessary to better maintain the homeland, albeit, supplemented by offensive moves on the other side of the fence as the fate of the first Gaza fence proved.<sup>51</sup>

**The Second Test** is to compare Israeli casualties in Judea and Samaria before and after the completion of the fence with Israeli casualties within the Green Line during the same period. Israelis in the West Bank did not enjoy the protection of a sophisticated defense perimeter. The effectiveness of offensive measures compared to defensive would be vindicated if the reduction of casualties within Judea and Samaria were equal or greater than the overall reduction of casualties with Israel. In the event that the reduction is greater in Israel, the effectiveness of defensive measures, principally the fence, is vindicated. There were three reasons to assume that after the building of the fence Palestinians would focus on settlers,

1. since attacks in Israel proper would seem to indicate to the world that the terrorists are irrational and intent on Israel’s destruction, while attacks within the territories lead some to conclude that perhaps the groups only want Israel to withdraw from the territories themselves,
2. that attacking within Israel yields consensus amongst the Israeli public to continue the fight when the Palestinians’ interest is to increase division in the opponents’ ranks,
3. the saliency of the substitution effect – Palestinians were likely to focus on the easier target rather than engage in overcoming the fence.

Recall that settlers’ opposition to the fence rested on fears that the terrorists would follow “substitution” logic and focus on them as the easiest target once the fence was built.<sup>52</sup>

**The Third Test** is to test casualty patterns in the areas parallel to the existing fence within Israel compared to casualty figures in areas in Israel in which the fence has yet to be completed or even initiated. Based on substitution logic, one would expect that terrorists, deterred by the fence would aim at areas in Israel where no continuous barrier existed.

Comparing overall casualty patterns before and after the establishment of the fence in the stretch from Salem in the north to Elkana in the south reveals

few differences. Fatalities decreased from 274 deaths in the period of the two large assaults to 107 just before the completion of the fence, a 61.5 percent reduction in the course of the year.<sup>53</sup>

In the subsequent two periods after the building of the permanent obstacle it declined from 107 to 42, a 60.1 percent reduction. In terms of the wounded, the reduction was 60 percent and 76 percent respectively for the two periods. The continuous decline of fatalities and wounded in all four periods suggests the importance of both measures, yet since the decline in the latter two periods cannot be attributed totally to the fence, it would suggest the primacy of offensive moves

Regarding the second, more rigorous test, where casualty patterns within Israel proper are compared to those in Judea and Samaria, an analysis of the data (Table 1) reveals that the greatest declines in violence both within Israel and in Judea and Samaria occurred during the time period from beginning of the two offensives until the completion of the first continuous part of the first part of the fence from Elkana to Salem and the same time span after its completion of that stretch of the fence. There was a decline of 62 percent in deaths and a 67 percent reduction in wounded in the West Bank between the period of March to August 2002 (during the two offensives) and the six months immediately afterwards (September 2000 to February 2003) and a reduction of 67 percent and 56 percent in the two categories within Israel. This finding suggests that in retrospect the settlers were right in raising the slogan “let the IDF win”; massive offensive measures were indeed very effective in reducing terrorism.

Looking at the patterns in all four periods provides us with one more important insight. The substitution thesis is partly corroborated by the increase in casualties in the West Bank after the completion of the fence, compared to a continuous reduction of casualties within Israel. It is a partial corroboration because the deviation was only temporary.

**Table 1:** Israeli (and Foreign) Fatalities and Wounded: A Comparison between Israel within the Green Line and Judea and Samaria.

Within Israel		J and S		Time Period
W	D	W	D	
989	183	158	91	3/2002/8/2002
433	73	52	35	9/2002/2/2003
<b>-56</b>	<b>-60</b>	<b>-67</b>	<b>-62</b>	Percentage Change
432	86	42	21	3/2003/8/2003
<b>-23</b>	<b>+18</b>	<b>-19</b>	<b>-40</b>	Percentage Change
272	67	14	10	9/2003/2/2004
<b>-37</b>	<b>-22</b>	<b>-67</b>	<b>-52</b>	Percentage Change
149	34	7	8	3/2004/8/2004
<b>-45</b>	<b>-49</b>	<b>-50</b>	<b>-20</b>	Percentage Change
3491	598	411	272	Total

Nevertheless, even if offensive measures were more relatively effective than defensive measures, there is no doubt from the findings of the third test, in which we compare casualties within the green line parallel to the fence and those areas where the fence had yet to be built, that the fence was an important supplemental measure in achieving greater security. While fatalities within declined to significantly less than half in areas parallel to where the fence existed, they more than doubled in areas bordering Judea and Samaria where no border existed. The third test also corroborates the substitution effect thesis that terrorists, all other factors being equal, will seek the path of least resistance. Obviously, the fence was an impediment the terrorist organizations wanted to avoid.

Looking at data regarding the means of violence employed by the Palestinians in the Gaza arena also confirms the importance of tactical substitution; as penetration both across the fence into Israel and penetration into the heavily fenced Gush Katif settlements in Gaza became more difficult, Palestinian ballistic and mortar activity increased significantly compared to the other means (side bombs, suicide and car bombings, road side shooting); from 2003 to 2004 mortars and qassam rockets increased by fifty percent, mortars by twenty, with declines registered for other types of violence.

Corroboration of the substitution effect has another important implication on the fence as well. One can rest assured that the opponent will try to circumvent the fence in the future as he has done in the past. So far, the qassam rocket and the mortars have been poor substitutes compared to other means of violence the Palestinians have pursued at least when measured by fatalities; between 2001–2003, mortars and qassams were not lethal; in 2004, they killed two little small girls in one incident, and killed two more in 2005 in two separate incidents (until August 2005) attesting to greater accuracy but at a moderate rate.

In Judea and Samaria such substitution is likely to be more lethal if Israel withdraws for at least two reasons,

1. fatalities, analysis of the data suggests, is strongly related to density; suffice to say that of the 230 qassams that fell within Israel in 2003 and 2004, seventy alone fell in the vicinity of the town of Sderot, the remainder on isolated and small Israeli villages. Yet the two fatalities were from Sderot,
2. this vulnerability was true even if the villages in question were nearer.

Thus, density is a more important variable than is distance. In the concentrated Israeli settlement along the green line, especially in the Dan metropolitan zone, the problem is two-fold; Israeli towns such as Kfar Saba and Hod Hasharon, for example, are both very close to the former green line and appreciably more dense than Shderot. Nor should one forget that Israel's major highway, route six, runs partially parallel to the green line in a stretch just where use of the road is probably most intensive.



One can conclude then that offensive measures are the most effective way of reducing casualties in Israel's conflict with the Palestinians. The IDF, on the military strategic level, would be well advised to regard the fence as a supplementary measure only in achieving security whose value in the long run will continuously depreciate in the face of Palestinian attempts to circumvent it by other means (the inevitable substitution effect).

Assessing the offensive-defense tactical balance in low intensity warfare might also have grand strategic level implications. In the event that Israel fails to make peace with the Palestinians, offensive measures beyond the fence will be crucial at the very least in assuring the supplemental security value of the fence. Israel will have to press its case to be assured politically relatively unrestricted movement in Judea and Samaria even if it decides to make future unilateral withdrawals. In the case of formal peace, Israeli deterrence will be crucial in maintaining the peace. The fence thus can only be a barrier whose effectiveness is much dependent on offensive action or the threat to use it.

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