

# *Expanding the Conversation*

*A Series by Joseph (Yossi) Alpher*

*Issue 4*

## *Separation Fences: Israel's Unilateral Withdrawal Option*



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Whatever the status is of reaching an end to the conflict in the Middle East today or in the near future, there will still be issues at stake in the months and years ahead.

It is time for the North American Jewish community to step back from the slogans and formulas we are used to hearing and using. The recent violence and setbacks give us an opportunity to reflect on these issues and more deeply understand their nuances and potential for solution.

This is the fourth installment in a series called “Expanding the Conversation.” We hope this series will broaden and expand the way we think about Israel, the Palestinians, and the future for peace in the Middle East.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent months, a campaign to unilaterally withdraw from significant areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and build a separation fence has become a central issue of political debate in Israel. Under pressure from the public, the Israeli government has begun building a system of fences separating parts of the West Bank from Israel. But the primary advocates of these fences have a more far-reaching goal in mind: unilateral withdrawal from much of the territories and the dismantling of the settlements that lie beyond the fence and its defense zone.

Support for and opposition to unilateral withdrawal cuts across the political spectrum in Israel. One can find both support and opposition to the notion of fence building and withdrawal from both the right and the left of Israeli politics. This issue of Expanding the Conversation contains essays and interviews from a variety of Israeli leaders who represent these differing viewpoints.

Following the Q & A with Joseph (Yossi) Alpher, which provides an in-depth analysis of unilateral withdrawal and its implications for the future, are four opinion pieces that argue both in favor of and against

## EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION

*A Series by  
Joseph (Yossi) Alpher*



## SEPARATION FENCES: ISRAEL'S UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL OPTION



The early beginnings of the fence being built along the Green Line, separating Israel from the West Bank. This part of the fence is near the Israeli town of Kfar Saba. July 2002.

this option. These include an interview with Dan Meridor, a Member of Knesset and former leader of the Center Party; an opinion piece by Yisrael Harel, head of the Center for Religious Zionism at the Shalom Hartman Institute and former chair of the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza; an opinion piece by Mr. Alpher; and lastly an interview with Brigadier-General (res.) Ephraim Sneh, a former Minister of Transportation and Deputy Minister of Defense.

*Joseph (Yossi) Alpher is a former Director of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University. In July 2000 he was a Special Adviser to then Prime Minister Barak during the Camp David talks. In September 2001, he and a Palestinian partner inaugurated [www.bitterlemons.org](http://www.bitterlemons.org), an Israeli-Palestinian internet dialogue. Mr. Alpher serves as an adviser to SEEKING PEACE, PURSUING JUSTICE. These remarks reflect his personal views alone.*

***Q: Can you define for us what unilateral withdrawal means? Does everyone in Israel define the concept in the same way?***

Unilateral withdrawal means removing — without a quid pro quo from the Palestinians — most, if not all, Israeli military forces and settlements from specified areas of the West Bank and Gaza. These areas are seen by most Israelis as the future Palestinian state, and are viewed as constituting a security liability and a long-term demographic liability. Some advocates of unilateral withdrawal want to abandon or even physically dismantle the settlements; others suggest leaving an Israeli military presence pending final status negotiations. Most agree that unilateral withdrawal cannot replace a peace process with the Palestinians.

The Sharon government has already agreed, albeit reluctantly, to place a formidable set of physical obstacles, including fences and electronic gadgetry, on or near the Green Line border (1949 Armistice Line) with the West Bank. But there are many proposals for additional fences and obstacles.

One is the creation of heavily patrolled buffer zones along the Green Line that extend at least six and even up to 15 miles deep into the West Bank. Restrictions on movement would apply to the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living within these zones.

Another proposal is to build additional protective fences around each of the settlements. This idea has been suggested to alleviate an anticipated manpower shortage in the IDF since it will not have sufficient forces to patrol the Green Line fence as long as it is engaged in protecting settlements. Many settlers object to this measure, claiming it smacks of ghettoization by delineating a relatively minimalist border for each settlement, and contradicts their notion of Jewish land rights in the Land of Israel. Nonetheless, by the summer of 2002, more and more settlements, fearing attack by Palestinians, were acquiescing and accepting perimeter fences.

Fences and other physical obstacles such as trenches are also being constructed around Palestinian population centers in order to prevent the movement of terrorists within the West Bank.

A school of thought made up of Israelis from both the right and the left, who emphasize Israel's growing demographic threat, advocates unilaterally declaring a border based solely on demographic considerations. Thus, the fence would include within Israel some settlement blocs, but leave to its *east* certain Israeli Arab villages that are near the Green Line — in effect gerrymandering them into a new Palestinian state. Advocates of this approach have no faith in the efficacy of future negotiations with the PLO, and therefore see the fence as a political *fait accompli*.

***Q: Can you explain the demographic threat? Why has it influenced calls for unilateral withdrawal and separation?***

By 2002 it was increasingly obvious to many Israelis that Israel was losing the demographic war. With birthrates among Gazan Palestinians and Israeli Bedouin in the Negev the highest in the world



Construction of new homes in the West Bank settlement of Efrat. May 2001.





Former Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres sits in front of a portrait of slain former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. December 2001.

— over five percent annually — Israeli Jews will become a minority between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, and Palestinian Arabs (including the Arab citizens of Israel, who increasingly identify with Palestinian nationalist aims) will be a majority by 2020.

Due to the growth of Jewish settlements in the territories — some 60 “outposts” or nascent settlements have sprung up under Prime Ministers Barak and Sharon — Israel is fast approaching a point of no return, beyond which it will be virtually impossible to remove outlying settlements and separate the two populations.

A growing number of Israelis recognize that when this happens, Israel will be facing a situation reminiscent of South Africa, wherein a Jewish minority rules directly or indirectly over the entire land, and an Arab majority lives as second and third class citizens, either inside Israel or in the Gaza Strip and areas A and B of the West Bank (the areas currently under nominal Palestinian Authority rule). At that point, Palestinians will cease to call for a two state solution. They will argue that they are living in “Bantustans” and will simply demand “one man, one vote” — majority rule. Israel will no longer be able to convincingly call itself a democratic, Jewish state. The entire Israeli-Palestinian conflict could take on a very different tenor, both internally and internationally. Already hints of a changing Palestinian approach to the two-state solution are surfacing. Arafat has ceased threatening to declare a Palestinian state unilaterally, and Palestinians increasingly identify the objective of the *Intifada* as establishing Palestinian rule throughout the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, including the State of Israel, rather than just within a separate Palestinian state. Palestinians sense that time is on their side.

The perception among large numbers of Israelis that the continued presence of the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza is liable to bring upon the country a political disaster and threaten its status as a Jewish homeland has enhanced the importance for them of demographic realities over geography. A majority of Israelis today support

the unilateral dismantling of outlying settlements as an emergency demographic measure, alongside the more immediate and obvious security imperative.

*Q: How is the notion of separation different from what was pursued under the Oslo peace process? Isn't it essentially the same thing?*

The concept of peace as separation from the Palestinians has accompanied the Israeli-Palestinian peace process since the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993. The late Israeli Prime Minister Rabin saw peace with the Palestinians as a process whereby the two populations would separate themselves into two political entities. As Palestinian attacks on Israelis grew and clouded the process, Rabin emphasized the need for separation to be physical in nature, and Israel invoked closure to prevent Palestinians from entering Israeli sovereign territory. This was possible at the pragmatic level mainly with the Gaza Strip, whose border with Israel (about 30 miles long) was fenced in during the early '90s.

Rabin's approach to peace through separation was by no means universally accepted. For one, the Israeli right initially rejected the entire notion of territorial compromise on the West Bank and Gaza that is at the heart of the separation concept. Then too, Rabin's partner in peace, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, viewed the process as one of integration between the two peoples rather than separation — a marriage rather than a divorce — and advocated modes of economic cooperation that mitigated against separation.

Meanwhile the notion of Israeli-Palestinian integration has been largely discredited due to the collapse of the peace process. On the other hand, nearly all the advocates of unilateral separation emphasize that this move is not intended to replace or postpone the renewal of negotiations toward an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Rather, it is hoped that separation will, by stabilizing the situation, hasten a return to negotiations with a realistic Palestinian leadership.

*“A majority of Israelis today support the unilateral dismantling of outlying settlements as an emergency demographic measure, alongside the more immediate and obvious security imperative.”*

### What the polls say

Two years ago, it never occurred to Israeli pollsters to ask the public what it thought of unilateral withdrawal, fence building, and dismantlement of settlements. But since the Oslo process collapsed and the *Intifada* began, the question has been posed repeatedly, with the percentage supporting this concept rising steadily.

A selection of polling results from recent months generally places support for unilateral withdrawal at a steady two-thirds or more:

- Tami Steinmetz Peace Research Center, Tel Aviv University, "Peace Index" survey of late May 2002: 65% of Israelis (including Jews and Arabs, settlers and kibbutz residents) support removing settlements to create a buffer zone, within the framework of a unilateral separation plan; 27% oppose and 8% "don't know."
- Israeli Peace Coalition poll administered by the Dahaf Institute and published early May 2002: 59% of Israelis believe that a withdrawal that includes evacuating most of the settlements will lead to a renewal of the peace process; 72% feel it would improve Israel's international standing; 67% believe that a withdrawal and deployment of the IDF along the Green Line will generate hope, or great hope, among the Israeli public.

### *Q: What was the impetus to push a significant number of Israelis to advocate for unilateral withdrawal?*

For a good understanding of why unilateral withdrawal has gained support over the past year, one needs to look back at the collapse of the Camp David negotiations in the summer of 2000, and even to the Lebanon withdrawal in May of the same year.

Unilateral separation as a partial security solution and a stabilizing factor in bilateral relations was given a significant boost by Israel's successful unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000. Israelis saw that a unilateral solution, invoked because Israel could not identify a realistic negotiating partner, could improve security, stability, and Israel's international status. Then, as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process reached its peak in mid-2000, it was Prime Minister Ehud Barak who warned that if that process failed, Israel would be confronted with violence. Assuming Israel wished to guarantee its tactical security needs and ensure that it remained a democratic, Jewish country, it would once again have to weigh the need to withdraw unilaterally, this time from parts of the West Bank and Gaza, to a fortified border.

At the time, most Israelis and Palestinians expected a successful culmination of the negotiating process, leading to the delineation of recognized international borders that both separated Israel from and linked it to a Palestinian state, in a normal bilateral mode. But negotiations failed. Their ultimate collapse, coupled with the *Intifada* during the second half of 2000 and January 2001, brought Israel to focus on Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat's lack of credibility and the likelihood that a reasonable two-state solution with the Palestinians might be either impossible or, at the very least, a relatively distant prospect. This brought into focus once again the possibility of a unilateral withdrawal.

Then came the wave of Palestinian suicide bombings. It was perceived by the Israeli public as a quasi-existential threat, in the sense



that it appeared to be targeting the entire Israeli population and not just settlers in the West Bank and Gaza. The Israeli public, along with much of the world, has been deeply affected by the macabre combination of random targeting of Israeli civilians and the Palestinian ritual of sacrificing its youth.

The suicide bombers' near effortless penetration into Israeli population centers reflects the consequences of 35 years of negligence of the Green Line, which since 1967 has been essentially unguarded and is incredibly porous. The June 5, 2002 suicide bombing of a bus near Megiddo in northern Israel in which 17 Israelis were killed was typical. First a car was stolen in the Israeli town of Lod and driven across the Green Line into the West Bank. There it was fitted with explosives. Then, on the appointed day, it was driven back into Israel and exploded next to the moving bus. The youthful suicide driver had been taught to drive the previous day. The ease with which "amateur" Palestinian terrorists could drive stolen cars across the Green Line was of course indicative of the ease with which suicide bombers could cross this border on foot.

Israelis have also become increasingly aware that somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000 Arabs — mostly Palestinians but a few Egyptians and Jordanians as well — have taken advantage in recent years of the country's soft border with the West Bank to immigrate illegally to Israel, where they disappear into welcoming Israeli Arab villages. For Palestinians, this is, in effect, a form of "return" by the children and grandchildren of 1948 refugees. This phenomenon has reinforced Israelis' sense of the demographic threat.

These developments have catalyzed a growing public demand that the government protect it by erecting fences. If the fence around Gaza works — during some two years of the *Intifada* not a single suicide bomber penetrated Israel from the Gaza Strip, and not for lack of trying — then it should be emulated immediately along the border with the West Bank. And because the West Bank fence would be far longer and traverse far more difficult terrain, it would

(continued from previous page)

- Council for Peace and Security poll administered by Market Watch in early May 2002 among 500 veteran Israeli Jews and 200 Russian speaking immigrants: after hearing a detailed explanation of the separation scheme, including dismantling of settlements and the building of a fence, 76% expressed support, including 69% who had voted for right wing parties and 66% of religious voters; 69% believed that such a move would reflect Israeli strength, not weakness; 68% felt that unilateral withdrawal and separation in the West Bank were not similar to the May 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon. Russian-speaking respondents to the survey tended to have the same opinions on this issue as veteran Israelis.

- *Ma'ariv* opinion poll of June 21, 2002: when asked which they prefer, a separation fence along with dismantling of all the settlements in Gaza and another 40-50 in the West Bank, or putting up a fence without dismantling settlements, 52% preferred the first option, and 33% the second.



The burning wreckage of a bus destroyed in a Palestinian terrorist attack. At least eight Israelis were killed and more than 40 were injured. October 2002.

have to be patrolled by large numbers of Israeli security forces. Hence, according to many of the advocates of a fence, it also would be necessary for security purposes to dismantle outlying settlements in the West Bank, and all the settlements in the Gaza Strip, in order to free up the inordinate numbers of forces engaged in protecting small groups of settlers surrounded by hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. In the Gaza Strip, for example, soldiers protecting settlers outnumber the settlers themselves by a ratio of four to one. At Netzarim, in the heart of the Strip, some 50 settler families are guarded by 1000 soldiers, of whom 18 have been killed protecting the settlement since the second *Intifada* began.

All told, then, Palestinian suicide bombings and illegal immigration had the effect of reinforcing growing fears among the Israeli public that the ultimate Palestinian goal was to overrun or “Palestinize” Israel through a combination of political demands made during the Camp David negotiations such as the right of return of 1948 refugees, terrorism, and demography. A fence and unilateral withdrawal could alleviate those fears at least with regard to terrorism and demography.

***Q: If unilateral withdrawal is one proposed solution to the increase in terror attacks, what other options exist for Israel to prevent the infiltration of suicide bombers into Israel and are they effective?***

Military operations, such as reoccupying parts of the West Bank and striking at the terrorist infrastructures in Jenin and elsewhere, have proven effective in killing and capturing terrorists and have enjoyed strong support from the public. But these operations generally reduce suicide attacks for barely a few weeks before terrorist cells, with broad backing from a population of some two million Palestinians, regroup and renew their activities. It is widely understood among Israelis that if more than 30 years of occupation and friction with Israeli settlers and security forces have motivated some Palestinians to become suicide bombers, then reoccupation, with all the hardship and humiliation it implies, may create a larger number

of disheartened Palestinian youth motivated to sacrifice their lives for the cause.

An additional option that has reappeared on the Israeli public agenda under the shock effect of the suicide bombings is the “transfer” of the Palestinian population out of the West Bank, presumably to Jordan. In recent times, nearly 50 percent of Israeli Jews have been prepared to contemplate transfer, which is in effect ethnic cleansing and reflects the desperation gripping the population. Yet it is also understood that reliance on such an option is not only repugnant in the eyes of many Israelis and most of the world, but would be counterproductive insofar as it would likely destabilize Jordan, an essentially friendly neighbor and strategic ally, and it would bring down upon Israel the condemnation and active opposition of the entire international community. Responsible right wing Israelis have joined in cautioning that, even leaving aside moral issues, transfer is not a practical option for Israel.

***Q: What about a return to the political process to end the violence?***

In the minds of most Israelis, there are at present no realistic political options for a renewal of the peace process and cessation of violence. Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat has lost all credibility as a viable peace partner. Neither Arafat nor Sharon appears to have any practical peace propositions to offer one another. The various ideas for an interim agreement put forth by Sharon, Peres, European, and other interlocutors are all unacceptable to at least one of the parties. And the United States, the only third party that could conceivably attempt to impose a ceasefire or a peace process, is not interested in risking its prestige and diplomatic resources at this time.

***Q: Who among the Israeli political leadership and Israeli public support unilateral withdrawal?***

Seasoned Israeli political actors and observers as disparate as Dan Meridor (former Likud minister) on the right and Shlomo Avineri

***“Large portions of the security establishment, from chief of the Shin Bet (Israel's internal security organization) Avi Dichter on down, have publicly and privately advocated unilateral withdrawal for the purpose of radically improving tactical defenses against terrorism.”***



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.  
October 2002.

(former Director General of the Foreign Ministry) on the left have reached the same conclusion regarding the need for separation and, if nothing else works, unilateral Israeli redeployment. Both concur that traditional Israeli political discourse regarding the fate of the West Bank and Gaza is bankrupt. The right's contention that Israel can hold onto the territories and compel Palestinian compliance has failed. But so has the left's advocacy of a far-reaching compromise with the PLO.

In August 2002, Israel's National Security Council issued a strategic net assessment advocating that the government prepare to delineate the country's borders unilaterally, in view of the demographic threat to Israel as a Jewish, democratic state. This was widely understood as a proposal for unilateral withdrawal. The IDF is reliably reported to have prepared a contingency plan for the removal of all 17 settlements in Gaza and a few isolated West Bank settlements in return for Palestinian agreement to postpone final status talks. Large portions of the security establishment, from chief of the Shin Bet (Israel's internal security organization) Avi Dichter on down, have publicly and privately advocated unilateral withdrawal for the purpose of radically improving tactical defenses against terrorism.

By mid-2002, polls (see box on p. 8) consistently showed that a majority of Israelis support not only the construction of a fence on or near the Green Line but also the dismantling of outlying settlements in the West Bank and all the settlements in the Gaza Strip.

***Q: Is the Israeli government in support of separation? Have they made plans to build such a fence?***

The Sharon government feared that the construction of physical barriers would have negative ramifications for the viability of the settlements beyond the Green Line that house some three percent of Israelis. Sharon himself is the father of many of these settlements, which he deployed primarily during the 1980s, when he had responsibility for settlements in a variety of Likud government

ministries. Sharon's goal at the time was to prevent the repartition of the Land of Israel and loss of military control over parts of the West Bank and Gaza. Sharon is not known to have voiced an opinion regarding the demographic argument. He greeted the controversial National Security Council recommendations noted above by declaring that he did not intend to read the report.

In the spring of 2002, the government bowed to public pressure and agreed to construct a fence more or less along the Green Line, while rejecting the idea of dismantling settlements. The government declared that the fence would solely have security ramifications; it would not annex territory, nor would it have any political connotations with regard to a future Israeli-Palestinian border. Of some 200 miles of fencing and other barriers to be laid, the first sector selected was the most vulnerable to suicide bombers: the area bordering Israel's "narrow waist" in the Kfar Saba-Netanya-Hadera region, and the area to its north bordering Wadi Ara and south of Afula. Several Israeli towns and villages, and one superhighway project, have already constructed fences and walls along the Green Line in this sector at their own initiative. The initial 120 kilometers of fencing will link up these sections of existing barriers.

The moment plans for the fence were released, jockeying began among lobby groups representing settlements located near the Green Line, to ensure they would be included inside the fence. It was clear that, government protests to the contrary, the settlers saw in the fence not only a security measure but a potential factor in the delineation of a political border as well.

It is perhaps for this reason that Sharon, who reluctantly agreed to build the fence despite his support for the settlements, does not appear to have given high priority to the project. As of August 2002, actual construction of the first and most critical segment at Israel's "narrow waist" had barely begun, though a fence-building rate of 10 kilometers a week was promised to the Israeli public.

*“The suicide bombers' near effortless penetration into Israeli population centers reflects the consequences of 35 years of negligence of the Green Line, which since 1967 has been essentially unguarded and is incredibly porous.”*



## Separation

*This is a petition being circulated throughout Israel by the Council for Peace and Security, the Movement for Unilateral Separation, and additional non-governmental organizations.*

We the undersigned call for unilateral separation from the Palestinians and the establishment of an effective line of defense.

The separation line will comprise a security fence, barriers and security forces. It will be based on demographic-security considerations. It will be drawn so as to comprise the large settlement blocs in Judea, Samaria, and the Jerusalem area.

Separation will optimize the deployment of security forces, significantly reduce terrorism and ensure Israel's existence as a democratic Jewish state. Most of the Israeli citizens currently living in Judea and Samaria will remain in place; isolated settlements will be evacuated, with fair compensation for their residents.

Greater Jerusalem, the large settlement blocs, the Jordan Valley and the border strip with Egypt in the Rafah sector will all remain in Israeli hands until final borders are determined in negotiations with a responsible Palestinian leadership.

Separation in accordance with Israel's interests will ensure our security and our future.

***Q: What are some of the arguments made in support of unilateral withdrawal in the Israeli public debate? Who are the groups advocating this?***

Advocates of unilateral withdrawal argue that, since negotiations with the Palestinians have ceased and terrorist attacks inside Israel are rampant, a unilateral initiative is needed to improve both Israel's negotiating position and its defenses. They argue that the fence would immediately improve Israel's security situation by enabling Israeli forces to concentrate their efforts along a rational line of defense and cease expending disproportionate energies in protecting outlying settlements.

To a large extent, it is argued, unilateral withdrawal would also end the evils of occupation for both Israelis and Palestinians. It would reduce the destructive humiliation of the Palestinian people. This separation plan could create for the first time a public consensus in Israel regarding the nature of future territorial coexistence with a Palestinian state. It would restore the clarity that characterized Israeli society prior to 1967, when it had "undefensible" borders and knew exactly what it had to do if attacked. Like the case of the withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, the public would judge that, on balance, it was a good idea long overdue. Any new Palestinian attack on Israel would be considered an act of war by a neighboring sovereign state.

Another growing sector of the Israeli public, right and left, reiterates the demographic concerns mentioned earlier. These advocates go on to argue that unilateral withdrawal would constitute a major step toward breaking Israel's current demographic slide toward either a bi-national state or apartheid, and that in the long run improved physical security is not enough if the State of Israel is neither democratic nor Jewish.

Supporters argue that if the new fence follows the Green Line in most places, but includes the major settlement blocs — or the settlement

blocs continued to enjoy IDF protection even if left beyond the fence — it would create for the first time a clearly delineated border. The areas remaining in Israeli hands, Greater Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, would constitute adequate territorial incentives for the PLO to negotiate a final status agreement. The Palestinian refugee question and most strategic security issues would also remain for future talks.

The most active advocates of unilateral withdrawal include representatives of the Israeli villages and towns that are located near the Green Line and that have suffered the most over the years from problems of theft and terrorism. More than a thousand retired senior security officials, organized in the Council for Peace and Security, have organized a petition to force the issue onto the Israeli political agenda (see box on p. 14). The Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem published a study in summer 2002, directed by two senior peace negotiators in the Barak government, Gilad Sher and Major General (res.) Uri Sagui, which proposed a detailed map of unilateral withdrawal. Both the Van Leer and the Peace and Security plans call for removing all 17 settlements (and 6000 or so settlers) in the Gaza Strip, along with some 40 to 50 small, isolated settlements (housing 20-30,000 settlers) in the West Bank. All advocates emphasize that Israel should reserve the right to send the IDF back through the fence into the evacuated West Bank and Gaza whenever security needs justify such a move.

Another Israeli school of thought suggests that, before proceeding with the dismantling of settlements, an attempt should be made to negotiate a redeployment plan with the Palestinian Authority. In other words, instead of withdrawing unilaterally, Israel would withdraw within the framework of an agreed “third further redeployment” or interim agreement as called for by the Oslo Accords. This would ensure that in return for the additional 20 or 30 percent of the West Bank that it turns over to the P.A., Israel would receive certain Palestinian concessions and reassurances regarding Palestinian measures against terrorism, as well as international support in the event Palestinians violated their commitments.

***“One of the central arguments made against unilateral withdrawal is that it creates the illusion of a solution while in fact it does not solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”***

A variation on this theme is the proposal of Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna, a former IDF general and head of the Labor party, to offer the PLO one last round of non-conditional negotiations before proceeding with unilateral withdrawal.

Some advocates of separation, like Labor’s Haim Ramon, would declare the fence along the Green Line together with the settlement blocs as a de facto political border, but would still negotiate, in the future, over the Jordan Valley and Greater Jerusalem. Others would keep all land on the negotiating table, and would argue that unilateral withdrawal and the building of fences should not be confused with the drawing of borders. In any case, most advocates of separation now assert that Israel does not currently have a peace partner on the Palestinian side, and must therefore act unilaterally in accordance with its own needs, but that most or all territorial issues should remain open for final status negotiations with a realistic and responsible Palestinian partner.

***Q: What are the arguments made against unilateral withdrawal?***

One of the central arguments made against unilateral withdrawal is that it creates the illusion of a solution while in fact it does not solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Key issues such as the refugees and Jerusalem would still remain open areas of dispute between the two parties, and violence could continue.

Others are concerned that unilateral withdrawal is liable to be seen by some Palestinian militants as an act of Israeli weakness, as was the case with the Lebanon withdrawal, thereby provoking further attacks and making future negotiations harder. They argue that unilateral withdrawal, “territories in return for nothing,” constitutes proof that Palestinian patience, or Palestinian terrorism, pays off. Why should Palestinians negotiate if more terrorist atrocities will force Israel to deliver yet more territory without concessions on their part?

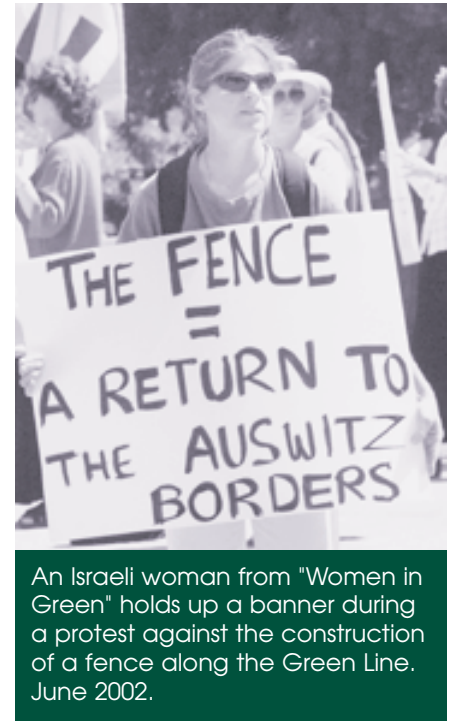
There are numerous other reasons why unilateral withdrawal is opposed. One criticism made against unilateral withdrawal is that the international community is liable to accuse Israel of de facto annexation of the West Bank if the fence does not adhere to the Green Line. Another is that Palestinians could drill new wells in the Yarkon-Taninim Aquifer under Western Samaria, east of the new fence, that adversely affect Israel's access to vital water resources. Even those who argue that Israel should have ended the occupation years ago might hesitate to end it at this present time in the face of the current terrorist offensive.

The occupants of isolated settlements, some 5-8,000 Israeli families, and their supporters, would argue that they are being removed without Israel even receiving a Palestinian quid pro quo. The entire settler movement, and their supporters in the Israeli body politic, would oppose such a move aggressively. A minority of the settlers would invoke violent opposition.

While supporters reference Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon, one could argue that the jury is still out regarding the efficacy of Israel's move there. Hizbullah, with Iranian and Syrian help, is building fortified emplacements and acquiring long-range rockets. If the situation on Israel's northern border deteriorates, Israelis may wish to reconsider whether their withdrawal there was a good idea. This could have implications for unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank.

***Q: Would a separation fence in Jerusalem be effective at stopping terror? Is such a fence even possible given the intermingling of Arab and Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem?***

Separation fences and barriers are currently being built in and around Jerusalem to prevent entry to the city from the West Bank, in an effort to reduce suicide bombings. But building a single fence to separate the two communities is impossible in Jerusalem, where Arab and Jewish communities form a scattered mosaic. Moreover, no Israeli government wishes to construct fences that



An Israeli woman from "Women in Green" holds up a banner during a protest against the construction of a fence along the Green Line. June 2002.



Construction is being done to prepare the ground for an electronic security fence between Bethlehem and southern Jerusalem. The fence will stretch 50 km. (30 miles) and surround Jerusalem on three sides. July 2002.

might be construed as physically repartitioning Jerusalem, as in the period 1948-1967. In view of these constraints, the building of fences in and around Jerusalem is not nearly as systematic as in the West Bank. In some places, the new fences and checkpoints in Jerusalem may be effective in reducing terrorism, while in others, these measures are liable to be counterproductive, and to create pockets of terrorism within the city itself among the many disgruntled Palestinian Jerusalemites whose access to the West Bank and/or to the rest of the city has been barred by fences.

The biggest problem in making a security fence effective for Jerusalem lies in the eastern part of the city, where a series of Arab villages annexed to Jerusalem by Israel in 1967, such as a-Tur, Sur Bahr, and Jebel Mukaber, spread into the surrounding desert and in some cases are cut in half by the border. Here Israeli security authorities are blocking connecting roads with anti-tank barriers to keep out vehicles that could be used as bombs. This leaves tens of thousands of Jerusalem Arabs who live east of the barriers unable to commute by car within the city. A similar situation prevails in north Jerusalem, where the fence has cut off the 20,000 residents of Kafr Aqab and effectively attached them to the West Bank.

These arrangements reflect past strategic decisions. The annexation map of East Jerusalem was drawn up hastily in the aftermath of the Six-Day War in June 1967, and approved by the Knesset so as to create facts on the ground before the international community could pressure Israel to withdraw to the pre-war Green Line. At the time it was assumed that the West Bank would be returned to Jordan, and Israel might still have to fight wars to defend Jerusalem against Jordan or other Arab enemies from the east. So Arab villages to the east that sit on commanding ridges but had never been part of Jerusalem were annexed to Israeli Jerusalem, regardless of the demographic considerations. Now, in constructing fences against terrorists, Israel must deal with the human and security consequences of a set of annexations that are largely anachronistic since the establishment of peaceful relations with Jordan, and the rise in demographic concerns.



The building of new Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem also poses both security and demographic problems, insofar as they are not contiguous with West Jerusalem. Hence the need, for example, to fence off the Jewish neighborhood of Pisgat Zeev, with its 60,000 residents, from adjacent Arab neighborhoods, and to secure its approach roads, which are crossed by roads used by Arab neighborhoods and are the target of frequent suicide attacks on buses.

Jerusalem's Arab residents have maintained a remarkable degree of calm and quiet throughout the current *Intifada*. Nearly all of the terrorist incidents in Jerusalem were "imported" from outside the city. But Arab Jerusalemites also have a great need to maintain close links with the cities and villages of the surrounding West Bank. If not handled with due attention to the social and economic needs of Jerusalem Arabs, the building of fences in and around the city, while reflecting an urgent security imperative, poses a danger of increasing unrest within the city, and ultimately could increase rather than reduce terrorism.

***Q: What are the cost implications of building a fence?***

According to the Israel Ministry of Defense, a sophisticated fence constructed on or near the Green Line separating Israel and the West Bank will cost around \$1 million per kilometer (about \$1.5 million per mile), including electronic early warning gadgetry, etc. The total length of the fence will be around 350 kilometers (around 220 miles), hence the total cost will come to about \$350 million.

According to a research group led by Professor Haim Ben Shachar, a former president of Tel Aviv University, the cost of removing a family from a settlement and constructing a similar home for it inside Israel — is about \$150,000, including development costs and assuming land is supplied by the state. If 25,000 settlers were removed from some 40 outlying settlements as part of the unilateral withdrawal plan and resettled on state-owned land, the cost would come to \$750 million.

***“Building a single fence to separate the two communities is impossible in Jerusalem, where Arab and Jewish communities form a scattered mosaic.”***



Israeli reserve soldiers stand guard outside the West Bank settlement of Emmanuel. July 2002.

### *Q: Are there any financial benefits to building a fence and removing isolated settlements?*

A fortified border that radically reduces suicide bombings inside Israel reduces the national insurance costs — medical attention, disability insurance, compensation for the families of victims — that the government of Israel absorbs. While no rational estimate of savings involved here can be made, it could come to hundreds of millions of dollars.

On the other hand, assuming suicide terrorism continues, no fortified border is constructed, and the IDF eventually remains in reoccupation of the West Bank, it may eventually have to renew the Civil Administration to attend to the daily needs of the Palestinian civilian population of 3.3 million people. Conservative official estimates place this cost at around one billion dollars annually.

If a fence and unilateral withdrawal succeed in reducing violence and stabilizing the situation — even short of a renewed peace process — renewed confidence in the Israeli economy could generate renewed investments in Israel's high tech sector and other parts of the economy. Based on the past experience of the early and mid-'90s, the payoff could be in the billions of dollars.

The settlements that will be abandoned also have considerable value. Since these settlements may be taken over by the Palestinians, the dollar value of their infrastructure can be deducted from any compensation to 1948 refugees that Israel undertakes to pay under a final status agreement.

Finally, Israel is currently spending hundreds of millions of dollars to call up and support reserve forces needed to guard both the border and the settlements. Removal of the outlying settlements, including those in the Gaza Strip, and construction of the fence would save considerable IDF manpower and render these call-ups largely unnecessary.

*Q: What do Palestinians think of a fence going up between Israel and the West Bank? Do they support the idea?*

With or without dismantling settlements, the fence will have significant ramifications for Palestinians, both politically and economically. They already attack the idea as a unilateral act that contradicts Israel's obligation to negotiate its differences with them. Illegal commuters (some 20,000 have continued to cross the border daily even during the worst security situations of 2002) will be barred physically from work in Israel, thereby contributing yet further to the collapse of the Palestinian economy. Advocates of the fence argue to the contrary, that it could generate sufficient stability to renew Palestinian commuter traffic to Israel, with proper security arrangements to allow passage through gates in the fence, as in Gaza.

Palestinians argue that the fence being built does not address the economic and civil rights concerns of those Palestinians — tens or hundreds of thousands, depending where the fence is placed — whose villages are included within the newly fenced in borders. They fear the de facto annexation of the Jordan Valley, the West Bank's gateway to the Arab world. They warn that resettlement in the Jordan Valley of settlers removed from isolated settlements elsewhere in the West Bank or Gaza Strip will reinforce this possibility.

Palestinians also oppose the fence because they see it within the broader context of Israel's attempts to restrict Palestinian freedom of movement within the West Bank and Gaza and even within Greater Jerusalem for security reasons. While these measures are intended to render it more difficult for potential terrorists to move about, communicate, and arm themselves, the Palestinian population sees them as attempts at cantonization or even apartheid. The fact that dismantling settlements would provide the Palestinians with far greater territorial contiguity, far less friction with the IDF, and a radical reduction in the use of the roadblocks and other barriers to which they currently object, has been generally ignored by them. Only when the unilateral withdrawal idea is presented as part of a



An Israeli soldier on patrol near part of the fence separating Israel from the West Bank. August 2002.

package that also includes renewed final status negotiations is it treated with less suspicion. On the other hand, as Palestinians (like many Israelis) increasingly despair of any agreed solution in the near future, they accept the need to examine the benefits as well as the drawbacks of an Israeli unilateral withdrawal.

***Q: What has been the reaction to unilateral withdrawal from the international community?***

Reactions to the idea of unilateral redeployment within the international community generally range from lukewarm disinterest to open opposition. Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, and the U.S. — all of whom have an interest in any step that might relax tensions and stabilize the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — express apprehension that it could turn into a step toward unilateral determination of borders and make renewal of negotiations harder rather than easier. European countries that for decades have declared the settlements and the occupation to be illegal, now recoil at the notion that Israel might take steps on its own to reduce their scope because these steps are not part of a negotiated agreement. Parties that supported Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 point out that that step was taken in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 425 and involved return to a UN-delineated international border, whereas no agreed international framework exists in the case of unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank.

***Q: Without dismantling settlements, will the fence have any ramifications for the settlements that lie beyond it?***

Through late 2002-early 2003, the first and most sensitive section of the fence is scheduled to be built in the northern and western Samaria area. While the Sharon government opposes the dismantling of outlying settlements, the emerging new reality is nevertheless likely to have far-reaching ramifications for those settlements that lie far from the

fence's perimeter defenses. Some 40 isolated settlements in the West Bank alone are likely to be affected in a number of possible ways.

First, to the extent that the fence proves its effectiveness against penetration into Israel by suicide bombers (even without dismantling the settlements), Palestinian militants are likely to direct their terrorist energies against the isolated settlements. Thus far Palestinian attacks on settlements have generally been limited to attempts at penetration by a few terrorists. If these attacks are amplified, the security situation of the isolated settlements could deteriorate.

Second, in these and similar circumstances, the IDF will be hard pressed to muster sufficient forces to protect everyone — the 99 percent of Israelis who live within the fence and in the settlement blocs, as well as the one percent of Israelis who live in outlying settlements and require a radically disproportionate defense outlay.

Third, a dynamic may develop within Israel whereby those settlements that are literally “beyond the fence” will also become ostracized in the consciousness of the public. The fence as a definitive line of reference could take on significance politically as well as militarily. A number of conceivable events — e.g., a more realistic Palestinian leadership returns to the negotiating table, Israel is pressured internationally to offer concessions, the left registers gains in Israeli elections — could combine to amplify the effect of such a dynamic.

One way or another, the fence, with its inevitable merits and drawbacks, is likely to become a major new feature on the Israeli-Palestinian strategic landscape and in Israeli internal politics.





## CHANGING THE AGENDA: NOT PEACE BUT DEMOGRAPHY

*An Interview with  
Dan Meridor*



Dan Meridor

Photo Courtesy of the Israeli Knesset web page.

*D*an Meridor, former leader of the Center Party, is a minister in the Israeli Cabinet. He served in previous governments as Minister of Finance and Minister of Justice.

***Q: Coming as you do from the political right and the Greater Land of Israel movement, how do you view the idea of dismantling settlements without a peace agreement?***

Even if Palestinian terrorism and violence cease tomorrow, we cannot maintain control over the entire land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, even though it's our national homeland, because we will lose a Jewish majority. Even the *aliyah* [immigration] over the past decade of one million from the Former Soviet Union cannot blunt the demographic trend — both the [high] Palestinian birthrate and migration trends — which is the only area in which time is working against us. If Arafat sees what we see, he will refuse to reach an agreement with us, unless we give him the right of return, which means the end of Israel, until he can simply ask for “one man, one vote” throughout the entire land. Thus, painful as it is, compromise is needed to ensure the continued success of the Zionist endeavor. I reached the conclusion that we have to give up part of the land — we don't necessarily have to go back to the '67 lines — to ensure a Jewish majority.

***Q: How do you advocate doing this?***

Since June 11, 1967, Israel's policy has been to withdraw from territory only in the context of peace agreements: land for peace. This was originally a Labor Party idea, adopted by the Likud in the peace treaty with Egypt. Now we have to reconsider this principle regarding Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. Ehud Barak did a great service to the Israeli people when he offered everything to the Palestinians and Arafat refused. Now the goal is no longer peace at all costs, but a border.

I see three alternative courses of action. Option one: a peace agreement would be best but is the least probable.

A second option: a new interim agreement. This would enable us to withdraw from lands in the West Bank and Gaza and allow the Palestinians to create a state. We would then have a two-state situation, not a “two-state solution,” with a border conflict, something similar to what we have with Syria. We could have peace negotiations. However, the Palestinians are likely to cheat on the agreement and continue to fight us. Or, we could have something in between, some negotiations and some clashes. But we would manage this situation from behind defensible borders, without the demographic threat hanging over us, and with lots of support from the international community. Note that Ariel Sharon is the first Israeli prime minister to advocate for the creation of a Palestinian state through an interim agreement; his predecessors all insisted on a peace agreement as a condition. It's hard to believe the Palestinians won't buy such a proposition, though I don't attach much credibility to their promises.

***Q: With whom do you negotiate? Arafat? And where are the isolated settlements in this scheme?***

Let's not condition everything on personalities. We should try not to interfere with the Palestinian leadership setup; things are happening there. As for the fate of the isolated settlements, we can decide this as we approach negotiations. They could stay in place as enclaves in a sovereign Palestinian state, with the issue left for final status, or they could be removed. The main issue is not the settlements — we offered solutions on settlements at Camp David and Arafat turned us down — but the interim agreement.

***Q: You mentioned three alternatives. What happens if negotiations for an interim agreement fail? After all, you'll be talking to the same Arafat who has lost all credibility with Israel.***

***“The goal is no longer peace at all costs, but a border.”***

***“Compromise is needed to ensure the continued success of the Zionist endeavor. We have to give up part of the land to ensure a Jewish majority.”***

The third alternative is effectively to “withdraw under fire.” This is worse for Israel’s deterrence. But it’s still better than the fourth option, doing nothing, which is the status quo and is really a decision to stay in the territories.

***Q: If an interim agreement is reached with Arafat and, as you predict, he violates it and violence resumes, doesn’t this constitute damage to Israel’s deterrent profile?***

In that case, Arafat will once again be breaching an agreement. This could be the coup de grace that’s needed to remove him. In any event, the international community will line up behind Israel. This is a major benefit compared to a withdrawal and dismantling of settlements that is entirely unilateral.

***Q: What has to happen for an Israeli government to adopt your program?***

We have to change the agenda: not peace, but demography — even without peace and without an interim agreement, if necessary. It’s up to us; it depends on our leadership in Israel.



*Yisrael Harel is the Head of the Center for Religious Zionism at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem and is former Chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. He writes a weekly political column for the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz.*

The Palestinians can take credit for two significant strategic shifts among the Israeli public as a result of their successful war of terror and attrition against Israel over the past two years. First, the Israeli government, which for 27 months did not succeed in suppressing Palestinian terror, bowed to the pressure of hysterical public opinion and is constructing a separation fence along a line nearly identical to the Green Line. Secondly, well-placed and influential Israelis, mostly from the political left, can no longer bear the strain of the terror, and are pushing the idea of unilateral separation: Israeli withdrawal from Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip which would include the dismantling of most of the Jewish settlements and a return to the 1967 lines with minor adjustments.

This is unequivocal proof that the left has despaired of peace with the Palestinians. Otherwise, why not delay the withdrawal until after Israel has won the war on terror, and an agreement is achieved from a position of strength? A unilateral withdrawal will only prove to the Palestinians that terrorism pays, and that even after separation they can register more and more gains until — in accordance with the Palestinian strategy of destroying the State of Israel in stages — the Israelis are fed up with endless attrition and they pack their bags and disappear, just like the Crusaders disappeared a millennium ago.

Unilateral separation as the “solution du jour” of the left is no less dangerous than the Oslo Accords, which brought upon us the current war of terror. Some 670 dead (these days we have to add a reservation, “at the time of writing”), including the extermination of entire families, parents and children, and thousands of wounded, are the outcome of the Oslo blindness. Given the population ratio between Israel and the United States (around one to fifty),

## **WHOEVER RUNS FROM TERRORISM, TERRORISM WILL KEEP PURSUING**

*By Yisrael Harel*



Yisrael Harel

Photo Courtesy of the Shalom Hartman Institute web page.

***“A unilateral withdrawal will only prove to the Palestinians that terrorism pays, and that even after separation they can register more and more gains.”***

this is the equivalent of some 33,000 American dead — about one-third the number of Americans killed in Vietnam. Imagine what the U.S. would do to anyone who killed 33,000 Americans.

The Oslo Accords, we should remember, opened the gates for some 40,000-armed Palestinians, under the command of Nobel Peace prize winner Yasir Arafat, to enter the territories to establish the Palestinian Authority and destroy, as a main task, the terror organizations. Instead, Arafat ordered them to develop an infrastructure to perpetuate a war of terror, the *Intifada*, that has killed more than 670 Jews to date.

I advise anyone who seeks security for Jews and peace for Israel should completely reject the idea of unilateral withdrawal. Arabs, and particularly Palestinians, will interpret it — just as Hizbullah viewed the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon — as a victory in their war of terror. It was indeed necessary to withdraw from Lebanon, but should only have happened within the framework of an agreement secured by the U.S. We never should have run away from Lebanon unilaterally, as we did. Hizbullah leader Sheikh Nasrallah has since declared repeatedly that the Jews lack stamina. If an average of 13 dead soldiers a year caused us to flee, then we are like a spider web, destined ultimately to disappear from Palestine too, like the Crusaders in their day. IDF Intelligence has since assessed that Nasrallah’s words reflect the prevalent view in the Palestinian Authority as well.

The IDF Intelligence Directorate and the Central Command anticipated that at some point Arafat would initiate violence in order to wear Israelis out. But their assessment held that this would not happen before 2002, one reason being that he needed time to prepare his forces, including the recruitment of collaborators among the Israeli Arab community. The Palestinian decision to begin the terrorist war earlier, in October 2000, is explained by many senior IDF officers with reference to the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon that Ehud Barak compelled the IDF to carry out due to electoral considerations. Arafat believed



that Israel, following its imbroglio in Lebanon, was worn out, had lost the will to fight, and would surrender to him too if he initiated a Hizbullah style war of attrition.

Many experts believe that the separation fence that is currently under construction will not prevent suicide bombers from entering Israel and blowing themselves up in shopping malls and cultural centers. A similar fence separates Israel from Lebanon and yet the Hizbullah has managed to penetrate it and carry out several attacks against civilians along the northern border. The Palestinians, in short, see the fence as a military and political victory for them. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, has declared so as well as many other Palestinian leaders. The Palestinians know that despite the facile statements of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that the fence will not determine Israel's borders, in actuality, the border will be wherever the fence is constructed. The government is telling themselves that Israel, under pressure from its own exhausted public, is giving in to them, even though in its heart of hearts it knows that the fence causes yet further damage to Israel's prestige and to its deterrent profile especially now, on the eve of a potential American operation in Iraq.

The IDF Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Moshe Ya'alon, says that before any political or territorial move, Israel must first defeat Palestinian terrorism. Any other solution, he emphasized to a recent convocation of rabbis, is tantamount to surrendering to terrorism. "If we give in to terrorism, other groups, for example Israeli Arabs, will conclude that terrorism pays." Indeed, less than 24 hours after his address, yet another terrorist team of Israeli Arabs was uncovered, the 27<sup>th</sup> thus far. It stands to reason that if Israel were the winner in the war on terrorism, Israeli Arabs would not call themselves "Palestinians" — certainly not in numbers exceeding 85 percent — and so many of them would not be joining the terrorist war against their state.



Israeli protesters demonstrate against the construction of the new Israeli security fence that will run along the Green Line. June 2002.

*“Anyone who seeks security for Jews and peace for Israel should completely reject the idea of unilateral withdrawal.”*

## IN SUPPORT OF UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL

*by Joseph (Yossi) Alpher*

The option of unilateral withdrawal is attracting a growing camp of adherents in Israel. Advocates of this approach are convinced that a negotiated peace agreement or even an interim agreement with a responsible Palestinian leadership is not possible in the foreseeable future, while the current bloody conflict must not be allowed to continue. Hence, the support for unilateral withdrawal has grown. The government's decision to construct the first and most important section of a fence on or near the Green Line between central and northern Israel and the Samaria/northern West Bank region, and bordering parts of Jerusalem, is a direct result of popular pressure from within the country to carry out the first stage of unilateral withdrawal.

The second stage of unilateral withdrawal is intended to involve the dismantling of isolated settlements in the West Bank and all the settlements in the Gaza Strip. Given the absence of a viable Palestinian peace partner, the security and particularly the demographic advantages for Israel appear to outweigh the possible drawbacks. In this regard, two arguments in favor of unilaterally dismantling settlements appear to be decisive.

First, in both civic and security terms, the minimum obligation any government has toward its citizens is to protect them. A fence that protects over 97 percent of Israelis against suicide bombers is thus an imperative; its efficacy has been proven beyond any reasonable doubt in the case of the Gaza Strip, which is surrounded by a relatively unsophisticated fence that has prevented the incursion into Israel of even a single suicide bomber throughout the past two years. But in the West Bank reality, a fence will not be effective unless the outlying settlements in the West Bank and the 17 settlements in Gaza are dismantled in order to free up forces currently employed in securing these settlements to guard the fence.

Second, the emerging demographic reality in the Land of Israel between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is so

frightening as to render the dismantling of these settlements an existential imperative not only for Israel, but for the interests of the Jewish people as a whole. It is simply mind boggling that in the current era of severe budget cuts across the board in Israel, only settlement expansion appears to be immune. Successive Israeli governments and many of Israel's Jewish supporters have gotten their priorities hopelessly scrambled, with the settlements dragging the country willy-nilly toward an apartheid situation. In the beginning, settling Judea, Samaria, and Gaza seemed to many a noble idea, reflecting the loftiest Zionist principles. Now we are in proximate danger of sacrificing either our soul as a Jewish state or our identity as a democratic state — all on the altar of *Eretz Yisrael*. So compelling is the demographic imperative that it outweighs any and all of the disadvantages of unilateral withdrawal.

The most telling argument against unilateral withdrawal is that it will weaken Israel's deterrent capacity and encourage unilateral Palestinian actions such as terrorist attacks, building up armed forces and declaring an independent state. Undoubtedly there is some validity to this argument: Palestinian militants will draw encouragement from the withdrawal, as they and others did after Israel withdrew unilaterally from Lebanon.

Yet the Lebanon withdrawal is universally considered a success story; a West Bank withdrawal can succeed too, if accompanied by a strong Israeli show of force, including a readiness to operate beyond the fence whenever necessary to prevent terrorism or Palestinian attempts to build up military forces. Meanwhile Israel will gain far shorter and more efficient lines of defense. And even if Palestinians declare a state unilaterally in response to Israel's withdrawal, they will still be surrounded by Israeli-held territory and will still confront the necessity of negotiating over the Jordan Valley, the Gaza-Egyptian border, and Jerusalem — all territories not proposed for a unilateral withdrawal — if they have any hope that their state will be viable.

***“The construction of a fortified border fence, and even the removal of settlements, cannot replace a peace process between Israelis and Palestinians; indeed, it could even help promote such a process by generating greater stability and reducing violence.”***

In this sense, the construction of a fortified border fence, and even the removal of settlements, cannot replace a peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. Nor is the grassroots agitation inside Israel in favor of these measures intended by and large to negate a renewed process; indeed, it could even help promote such a process by generating greater stability and reducing violence. Conceivably, Palestinians will agree to discuss an orderly and agreed upon dismantling of settlements when they recognize the advantages for them.

Opponents of unilateral withdrawal also claim that in view of the growth rate of the Israeli Arab population of some one million, separation from the West Bank and Gaza will offer only a temporary respite from the Palestinian demographic threat. But reducing the Arab population under Israeli control to the 18 percent or so constituted by Israeli Arabs is a far cry from the 51 percent anticipated by 2020 if the settlements remain! If this buys the Jewish, democratic State of Israel another 50 or more years in which to rationalize its relationship with its Arab minority, then unilateral withdrawal is worthwhile for this reason alone.

The international community, led by the United States, has failed thus far to promote a new peace process or even to bring about a reduction in violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

Accordingly, it should not condemn unilateral measures taken by Israelis who seek to provide a modicum of security against Palestinian terrorism and to guarantee Israel's long-term status as a Jewish and democratic state. On the contrary, it should examine the possibility of promoting these measures as a means of catalyzing renewed positive contacts between Israelis and responsible Palestinians.



**B**rigadier General (res.) Ephraim Sneh (Labor Party) is Minister of Transportation in the Sharon government. Among his impressive security credentials are service as Deputy Minister of Defense in the Barak government, and as head of the IDF Civil Administration in the West Bank from 1985 to 1987. He gave this interview (here slightly abridged) to [bitterlemons.org](http://bitterlemons.org) in February 2002.

**Q: What is your position on unilateral redeployment?**

I'm very strongly in favor of building an effective fence and other barriers along the Green Line, mainly in the central part of Israel, say from Mei Ami to Latrun. This would be a technical defensive measure to make the movement of terrorists into Israel more difficult. It would be a partial but necessary measure.

**Q: Can this be effective if the Israel Defense Forces are busy defending the settlements beyond that fence?**

As Deputy Minister of Defense I headed a project in the year 2000 to prepare a unilateral separation plan for Prime Minister Barak in case the Camp David talks failed. This did not include dismantling settlements, but it examined the practical implications, so I'm very familiar with the facts. I drew the map. I can speak about it authoritatively.

**Q: Could you relate, then, to a plan that involves withdrawing to the settlement blocs near the Green Line and dismantling the settlements in Gaza and the West Bank heartland, while remaining in the Jordan Valley and Greater Jerusalem?**

The plan means the de facto annexation of 30 percent of the West Bank, half in the Jordan Valley, which you have to keep if there is no agreement, and half in the settlement blocs. Once you put an effective fence on the eastern side of the settlement blocs, this is de facto annexation. It makes you the total sover-

## A NEGATIVE VIEW: “IT WOULD BRING ABOUT A TERRIBLE RESPONSE”

*An Interview with  
Brigadier General  
Ephraim Sneh*





***“Withdrawal would send a very bad message regarding deterrence. The Palestinians have no incentive to negotiate and every incentive to keep fighting.”***

eign in the settlement bloc areas. It includes around 70,000-100,000 Palestinians who reside in these areas. All the experts on international law told us that this would bring about a terrible response. The international community, let alone the Arab world, would accuse us of annexation. Terrorism wouldn't stop; it would use the de facto annexation as a pretext to continue. Indeed, terrorism would increase to show that it doesn't work for us to take Arab territory and Arab population by force. Terrorism would gain more legitimacy from the international community. The fence would prevent penetration into the settlement blocs but wouldn't stop the annexed Palestinians from fighting from inside. Nor would the fence stop rockets and mortars, for example fired from Salfit toward Ariel. So even settlements included inside the fence would be easy targets.

***Q: How would unilateral redeployment affect Israeli deterrence?***

The withdrawal would send a very bad message regarding deterrence. The Palestinians would have no incentive to negotiate and every incentive to keep fighting.

***Q: Even a negotiated and agreed plan for Israel to keep the settlement blocs, such as was discussed at Camp David and Taba, would leave some Palestinians inside Israel.***

The agreed maps I know would reduce this number to a few thousand. But under unilateral withdrawal, what do you do with them? You can't annex them, you don't want to make them citizens, and you don't want to impose a new military government.

***Q: Won't your plan of building a fence directly along the Green Line be seen as a de-facto border also?***

No. I would not redeploy the IDF. It would remain in the West Bank and Gaza to secure the settlements. Having said that, I have no problem declaring that long segments of the future

Israeli-Palestinian border will be identical with the Green Line that I'm fortifying, for example between Kfar Saba and Qalqilya, where in any case we have no room to maneuver.

***Q: If you leave 50,000 settlers and the army beyond the fence this isn't separation at all.***

I don't believe there is an Israeli government that has the political power to dismantle settlements against the settlers' will and without an agreement.

***Q: Do you believe that an Israeli government could dismantle these settlements if it did have an agreement?***

Yes. The public is ready to pay the price if the reward is peace, but not if the conflict continues under different conditions.

***Q: Opinion polls show that around 50 percent of Israelis already favor unilaterally dismantling settlements. Why shouldn't the Labor Party consider this as its policy?***

A serious party cannot take something non-implementable and make it a slogan. This idea has become popular due to public despair. When you give the public the details, it reconsiders its support. Look, I'm a medical doctor. This is like a patient with terminal cancer suggesting that he drink hydrochloric acid to burn out the cancer. This is not a solution. I don't agree that there's no hope. Things are not static.



***“I don't believe there is an Israeli government that has the political power to dismantle settlements against the settlers' will and without an agreement.”***

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### **Summary: Unilateral Withdrawal and Fence Building**

- Unilateral withdrawal means removing — without a quid pro quo from the Palestinians — most, if not all, Israeli military forces and settlements from specified areas of the West Bank and Gaza.
- In the spring of 2002, the Israeli government agreed to construct a fence more or less along the Green Line (the 1949 Armistice Line) with the West Bank, while rejecting the idea of dismantling settlements. The fence has slowly begun to be built.
- Supporters of unilateral withdrawal argue that, since negotiations with the Palestinians have fallen apart, a move such as this is necessary in order to improve Israel's defenses from attack by Palestinian suicide bombers.
- Some advocate in favor of unilateral withdrawal as a means to protect Israel's Jewish majority. Due to the burgeoning birth rate of the Palestinian Arabs, from both within Israel and the territories, Israel is in danger of losing her Jewish majority unless attempts are made at separating the Jewish and Palestinian population into separate and sovereign entities.
- By mid-2002, polls consistently showed that a majority of Israelis support not only the construction of a fence on or near the Green Line but also the dismantling of outlying settlements in the West Bank and all the settlements in the Gaza Strip.
- One of the central arguments made against unilateral withdrawal is that it creates the illusion of a solution while in fact it does not solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Key issues such as the refugees and Jerusalem would still remain open areas of dispute between the two parties, and violence could continue.
- Opponents are concerned that unilateral withdrawal is liable to be seen by Palestinian militants as an act of Israeli weakness, thereby provoking further attacks and making future negotiations harder.
- The option of unilateral withdrawal, including the building of a fence, despite its merits and drawbacks, is likely to become a major feature on the Israeli-Palestinian strategic landscape and in Israeli internal politics.