

# Israel's Security Fence

Along much of the frontier separating [Israel](#) from the [West Bank](#), there are either no barriers of any kind, or easily avoidable ones. In response to dozens of [suicide bombings](#), and daily [terrorist](#) attacks against its civilians, Israel decided to construct a [security fence](#) near the "[Green Line](#)" to prevent Palestinian terrorists from infiltrating into Israel.

Israel did not want to build a fence, and resisted doing so for more than 35 years. If anyone is to blame for the construction, it is [Hamas](#), [Islamic Jihad](#), and the other Palestinian [terrorists](#). Now a large majority of Israelis support the construction of the security fence; in fact, both Jews and Arabs living along the Green Line favor the barrier to prevent penetration by thieves and vandals as well as terrorists. The fence has also caused a revolution in the daily life of some Israeli Arab towns because it has brought quiet, which has allowed a significant upsurge in economic activity.

The security fence does create some inconvenience to Palestinians, but it also saves lives. The deaths of Israelis caused by terror are permanent and irreversible whereas the hardships faced by the Palestinians are temporary and reversible.

It is not unreasonable or unusual to build a fence for security purposes. Many other nations have fences to protect their borders (the United States is building one now to keep out illegal Mexican immigrants), and Israel already has fences along the frontiers with [Lebanon](#), [Syria](#), and [Jordan](#), so building a barrier to separate Israel from the [Palestinian Authority](#) is not revolutionary.

A security fence already exists around the [Gaza Strip](#) and, to date, not one suicide bomber from that area has infiltrated Israel, while approximately 250 came from the [West Bank](#) in the last 33 months. Approximately 75 percent of the suicide bombers who attacked targets inside Israel came from across the border where the first phase of the fence was built.

The fence is not expected to be impregnable. It is possible that some terrorists will manage to get past the barrier; nevertheless, the obstacle will undoubtedly make it far more difficult for incursions and thereby minimize the number of attacks. This is already evident from data showing a 30% drop in the [number of terrorist attacks](#) that took place in [2003](#) compared to 2002. Similarly, there was a 50% decrease in the number of victims murdered by terrorists in 2003 compared to the previous year. There were 17 suicide bomber attacks inside Israel that emanated from the northern part (Samaria) of the West Bank during the months April-December 2002. In contrast, since construction began on the anti-terrorist fence, throughout all of 2003 only 5 suicide bomber attacks emanated from the same area. The value of the fence in saving lives is evident from the data: In 2002, the year before construction started, 457 Israelis were murdered; in 2009, 8 Israelis were killed.

Even the Palestinian terrorists have admitted the fence is a deterrent. On November 11, 2006, [Islamic Jihad](#) leader Abdallah Ramadan Shalah said on [Al-Manar TV](#) the terrorist organizations had every intention of continuing [suicide bombing](#) attacks, but that their timing and the possibility of implementing them from the

[West Bank](#) depended on other factors. “For example,” he said, “there is the separation fence, which is an obstacle to the resistance, and if it were not there the situation would be entirely different.”

Critics have complained that the fence is being built beyond Israel's pre-1967 cease-fire line, but the so-called “Green Line” was not an internationally recognized border, it was an armistice line between Israel and Jordan pending the negotiation of a final border. Building the fence along that line would have been a political statement and would not accomplish the principal goal of the barrier, namely, the prevention of terror. The route of the fence must take into account topography, population density, and threat assessment of each area. To be effective in protecting the maximum number of Israelis, however, it must incorporate some of the [settlements](#) in the [West Bank](#).

Most of the fence runs roughly along the Green Line. The fence is about a mile to the east in three places that allows the incorporation of the [settlements](#) of Henanit, Shaked, Rehan, Salit, and Zofim. The most significant deviation from the pre-1967 line is a bulge of less than four miles around the towns of Alfei Menashe and Elkanah where about 8,000 Jews live. In some places, the fence is actually *inside* the “Green Line.”

Another place where it is necessary to deviate from the "Green Line" is near Ben-Gurion International Airport. The fence must be placed far enough away from the airport to prevent terrorists from threatening civilian aircraft. This requires a band of territory of approximately six miles.

The updated route is to run about 32 miles around [Jerusalem](#), but only 25 percent has been completed. The government has set September 1, 2005, as the deadline for completing the Jerusalem barrier. An estimated 55,000 Jerusalem Arabs from four neighborhoods are expected to be on the Palestinian side of the fence while 180,000 Arab residents of the city remain on the Israeli side of the barrier. Thousands of Arabs moved to more central East Jerusalem neighborhoods to stay on the Israeli side of the fence. Representatives of some Arab neighborhoods have gone so far as to petition the Israeli [Supreme Court](#) to order the Defense Ministry to reroute the fence to be on the Israeli side.

To alleviate the inconvenience caused by the fence around [Jerusalem](#), the government approved passages through the barrier to facilitate movement in and out of the city. In addition, the government allocated millions of dollars for the municipality to provide special services to Arab residents of [Jerusalem](#) who will be adversely affected by the fence.

The original route was 458 miles; however, the plan has been repeatedly modified. As a result of the June 2004 [Supreme Court decision](#), the route was altered to move the barrier closer to the 1967 cease-fire line and to make it less burdensome to the Palestinians. The fence is now expected to cover approximately 500 miles and incorporate just 7 percent of the [West Bank](#) — less than 160 square miles — on its “Israeli side,” while 2,100 square miles will be on the “Palestinian side.” To date, more than 320 miles of the fence has been completed, but little progress has been made in the last three years.

The land used in building the security fence is seized for military purposes, not confiscated, and it remains the property of the owner. Legal procedures are already in place to allow every owner to file an objection to the seizure of their land. Moreover, property owners are offered compensation for the use of their land and for any damage to their trees. Contractors are responsible for carefully uprooting and replanting the trees. So far, more than 60,000 olive trees have been relocated in accordance with this procedure.

The Bush Administration was resistant to the idea of including the second largest Jewish [settlement](#), Ariel, because it would require the fence to extend about 12 miles into the [West Bank](#). Excluding Ariel, however, places about 20,000 Jews who have already been subject to multiple terrorist attacks to further danger. Israel decided to build a fence around Ariel, but said in February 2005 it would be incorporated within the main fence at a later stage.

Every effort is being made to exclude Palestinian villages from the area within the fence and no territories are being annexed. The land used in building the security fence is seized for military purposes, not confiscated, and it remains the property of the owner. Israel is providing agricultural passageways to allow farmers to continue to cultivate their lands, and crossing points to allow the movement of people and the transfer of goods. Contractors are responsible for carefully uprooting and replanting the trees. So far, more than 60,000 olive trees have been relocated in accordance with this procedure.

Legal procedures allow every owner to file an objection to the seizure of their land. In addition, Israel has budgeted \$22 million to compensate Palestinians for the use of their land. As of September, Palestinians had filed \$2.2 million in compensation claims.

Despite Israel's best efforts, the fence has caused some injury to residents near the fence. Israel's [Supreme Court](#) took up the grievances of Palestinians and [ruled](#) that the construction of the security fence is consistent with international law and was based on Israel's security requirements rather than political considerations. It also required the government to move the fence in the area near [Jerusalem](#) to make things easier for the Palestinians.

Though the Court's decision made the government's job of securing the population from terrorist threats more difficult, costly, and time-consuming, the Prime Minister immediately accepted the decision and began to reroute the fence and to factor the Court's ruling into the planning of the rest of the barrier.

Palestinians continue to challenge the route of the fence and the Court has issued a number of decisions, some favoring the existing route and others, the petitioners. For example, in June 2006, the Court ordered Israel to tear down a two-mile stretch of fence around Zufin, a settlement near the [West Bank](#) town of Kalkilya and reroute it to accommodate Palestinians in the area.

The Palestinians will also benefit from the fence because it will reduce the need for Israeli military operations in the territories, and the deployment of troops in Palestinian towns. Onerous security measures, such as curfews and checkpoints, will either be unnecessary or dramatically scaled back. The fence may also stimulate the Palestinians to act against the enemies of peace because the barrier has shown them there is a price to pay for sponsoring terrorism.

Only a tiny fraction of the barrier (less than 3% or about 15 miles) is actually a 30 foot high concrete wall, and that is being built in specific locations where it will prevent Palestinian snipers from shooting at cars as they have done for the last three years along the Trans-Israel Highway, one of the country's main roads. The remainder is a fence similar to that used throughout the United States, but with a network of barriers, underground and long-range sensors, unmanned aerial vehicles, trenches, land mines and guard paths. Passage through the fence will only be permitted through guarded gates.

A growing number of Israelis have come to the conclusion that the best solution to the conflict with the Palestinians is separation. Once the fence is completed, Israel *could* decide to unilaterally withdraw behind the



fence. Should Israel take unilateral action, the fence still need not demarcate a permanent political border. The Palestinians could negotiate a settlement whereby the fence would be moved or torn down. If the Palestinians live in peace with Israel, people and goods could flow freely back and forth; however, if the Palestinians remained committed to violence and unwilling to coexist with their Israeli neighbors, the barrier could be sealed.

Palestinians complain that the fence creates “facts on the ground,” but most of the area incorporated within the fence is expected to be part of Israel in any peace agreement with the Palestinians. Israeli negotiators have always envisioned the future border to be the 1967 frontier with modifications to minimize the security risk to Israel and maximize the number of Jews living within the State.

Palestinian charges that a fence would have the effect of creating a ghetto are nonsense. Prime Minister [Sharon](#) accepted the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian state on their side of the barrier.

After the fence is finished, Israel will have to decide whether to allow Jews to remain in [communities on the “wrong” side](#) of the fence (where they would not benefit from the security the fence provides), offer them compensation to move, or forcibly evacuate them to the Israeli side.

The security fence is expected to run approximately 500 miles. The fence will snake just east of the "Green Line" and incorporate the largest Jewish cities in the [West Bank](#). As of July 2009, only about 300 miles (60%) of the barrier was completed and much of the rest was tied up by petitions to the Israeli [Supreme Court](#) and Justice Ministry deliberations. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, work is now being done on mostly constructed sections of the fence and areas that have to be rerouted in response to court rulings. The number of fully completed sections has not increased in 15 months and the barrier's overall length has increased by only about 25 miles in the last two years. The Defense Ministry previously projected the fence would be completed by 2010, but now it does not give an end date.

The United States is building a fence along part of its border with Mexico and that is to prevent illegal immigrants from coming into the country, not terrorists who seek to murder American citizens. Ironically, the [UN](#), which passed a resolution condemning Israel's barrier, is building its own fence to improve security around its New York headquarters.