

How to Build a Fence

David Makovsky

PARTITION WITHOUT PARTNERSHIP

THE IDEA of a fence separating Israelis and Palestinians is, on one level, an admission of failure. Yet it is also realistic: with little trust between the two sides and a history of bitterness and bloodshed, a negotiated partition is out of reach (at least for the foreseeable future). Israel's decision to build a "separation barrier," therefore, makes sense, given that a majority of both Israelis and Palestinians favor a two-state solution that includes an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank—but they don't know how to make this happen. Israelis do not trust the Palestinian Authority (PA) to fulfill its security obligations and halt terrorist attacks, and Palestinians remain convinced that Israel will never voluntarily cede the West Bank and Gaza.

A properly constructed fence could cut through these problems and facilitate a final agreement. A poorly constructed barrier, however, would impede such an end. The United States should therefore back a version of the fence that boosts Israeli security without unduly hurting the Palestinians or foreclosing a future return to diplomacy. Washington should also support vigorous, innovative moves to minimize whatever Palestinian suffering even a legitimate fence would cause. And the United States must oppose Israeli fence plans that focus more on politics than on security.

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How to Build a Fence

A properly constructed fence could achieve multiple objectives: reduce violence by limiting the infiltration of suicide bombers into Israel, short-circuit the deadlock on achieving a two-state solution, advance the debate in Israel about the future of most settlements, and perhaps even provide an incentive for Palestinians to return to the negotiating table. Even without negotiation, the fence would function as a provisional border and could be modified in the future if Palestinians make real progress in halting terrorism against Israel and agree to restart talks.

The good news, moreover, is that a fair, workable fence is already being built by Israel's Ministry of Defense. Projected to stand largely on the western side of the West Bank, this fence will potentially leave 85 percent of the West Bank to the Palestinians—not radically less than the 95 percent proposed by Bill Clinton at the end of his presidency. If the Palestinians assume their security responsibilities in the territory from which Israel withdraws, this land could become part of the state of Palestine in fairly short order. Already, the construction of this fence has helped spur responsible political discussions in Israel, and a full-blown debate is now underway on the futility of retaining remote settlements in the West Bank. Even Ehud Olmert, the usually hawkish Likud cabinet minister, has declared that Israel should evacuate all settlements east of the new divide.

The bad news, however, is that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has not ruled out a more restrictive and invasive version of the security fence, one that would carve up the West Bank into Palestinian cantons. A major battle within the Likud over where the fence should run is just beginning. Territorial maximalists are pushing hard for an “encirclement fence” that would close the Palestinians in on all sides. Such a barrier, which would give the Palestinians control of just 53 percent of the West Bank, would choke any future state, not help create one. Palestinians, not to mention most of the rest of the world, would never accept such an arrangement.

Hence the need for U.S. involvement to push for a pragmatic fence is now more urgent than ever. In evaluating proposed paths for the fence, the United States should be guided by issues of security, demography, and the minimization of hardship on all sides, and by whether the fence allows for or precludes a contiguous Palestinian state. The buffer fence currently under construction would pass these tests. The encirclement fence advocated by some in Likud, however, would not.

David Makovsky

AN OLD IDEA

THE MODERN IDEA of Israeli and Palestinian disengagement is not, as some believe, the product of the current intifada, and support for it has transcended party lines over the years. In fact, the idea of partitioning Palestine—dividing Arabs from Jews in separate geographic entities—goes back to the British government’s 1937 Peel Commission report on Palestine. A decade later, the 1947 UN partition resolution called for the establishment of Arab and Jewish states in Palestine linked with some form of economic union. In each instance, the idea was accepted by the mainstream Zionist movement (although not by the forerunners of the Likud) and rejected by the Palestinians, and it later reemerged as a staple of Labor Party policy in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War. When Labor lost to the Likud in 1977, however, the idea was largely abandoned until Labor regained power some 15 years later.

In many ways, the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was the intellectual father of the current fence. Many believed his 1992 electoral victory was traceable to his pre-election comments after the fatal stabbing of a teenage girl by a Palestinian terrorist in Jerusalem. Rabin declared at the time that Israel must “take Gaza out of Tel Aviv”—that is, create two distinct entities, so the two populations could avoid what he called “*chikuch*” (friction). This approach led him to the signing of the landmark Oslo accords with the PA more than a year later. Although Rabin hoped Yasir Arafat would fight terror as he promised, the prime minister remained skeptical. It was this skepticism that drove Rabin to begin imagining a physical, complementary mechanism for peace.

In October 1994, after a string of violent incidents including a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, Rabin declared, “We have to decide on separation as a philosophy. There has to be a clear border. Without a border demarcating the lines, whoever wants to swallow 1.8 million Arabs will just bring greater support for Hamas.” Thus in early 1995, Rabin established the Shahal Commission, an interministerial committee headed by his police minister and Labor colleague Moshe Shahal, to discuss how to build a security barrier separating Israelis and Palestinians. And a fence was erected around Gaza to coincide with the handover of control there to the Palestinians under the Oslo accords.

How to Build a Fence

The idea of disengagement soon receded, however, and the recommendations of the Shahal Commission died along with Rabin in November 1995. His next two successors decided not to implement the idea, although for very different reasons. Shimon Peres, who took power after Rabin's assassination, occasionally paid lip service to the concept but feared that it would impede Israeli-Palestinian economic integration, which he viewed as the key to peace. Peres, who saw himself as a Middle Eastern version of Jean Monnet (the spiritual father of the European Union), dreamed of a "New Middle East" that was more about integration than separation, and hoped that borders would eventually become less necessary.

Binyamin Netanyahu, who followed Peres (and who would later become a vocal proponent of separation, once Sharon came to power in 2001), avoided the idea during his own tenure due to the opposition of the settlers in his coalition. Most Palestinians, meanwhile, also remained cool to the idea. Some officials, such as Nabil Sha'ath, said that they did not oppose it outright, but they insisted that it should occur only after a Palestinian state was established. This opposition owed partly to the tragic zero-sum politics that too often afflict the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: if Israel favors it, the Palestinians automatically oppose it. Yet Sha'ath was also concerned that disengagement would mean a loss of access for his people to Israeli jobs. In fact, however, the Palestinians had lost access to their jobs in Israel for long stretches in the 1990s, well before the idea of a fence took shape. After a series of knifings and suicide attacks in 1993, one year before the Rabin speech, Israel had imposed rules that limited the ability of more than 100,000 Palestinian laborers to work in Israel, and it had begun importing replacement workers from Thailand and Romania.

The notion of disengagement was revived when Ehud Barak came to power in 1999. As the promise of Oslo continued to sour—and as the PA's state-run media and government textbooks continued to inveigh against reconciliation with Israel and deny the moral legitimacy of the Jewish state—the idea of a cold peace between the two sides began to seem more likely. Most Israelis also became convinced that they could not trust their security to Arafat, since (with the exception of one fleeting period in 1996) he had avoided any confrontations with Hamas or Islamic Jihad. For their part, the Palestinians

David Makovsky

complained that their standard of living was declining and the pace of Israeli settlement-building was continuing unabated.

As mutual mistrust mounted, both sides started to think of peace as a divorce rather than a marriage. Barak, running as Rabin's heir, vowed before the Camp David summit in the summer of 2000 to build "a physical separation" between the two sides. Apart from being good for Israel, Barak said, such a fence would be "essential to the Palestinian nation in order to foster its national identity and independence, without being dependent on the State of Israel." The subsequent failure of that summit, followed by the Palestinians' rejection of the even more generous Clinton parameters and the eruption of the al Aqsa intifada, destroyed any remaining Israeli hopes for peace. But the new crisis also made the idea of partition seem all the more urgent.

It is somewhat ironic that Sharon, Barak's successor as prime minister, has been the one to finally oversee the construction of Israel's fence—an idea originally favored by Israel's liberals. As an architect of the settlement movement, Sharon had long agreed with the settlers that a fence would create a de facto Palestinian state in the West Bank and would mean abandoning those settlements that ended up on the wrong side. He thus publicly opposed the creation of a barrier, at least at first. But two months after Sharon rode the al Aqsa intifada into office in February 2001, Barak warned him, "When there are 70 dead Israelis, you can resist the fence, but when there are 700 dead Israelis, you will not be able to resist it." (By the start of this year, the figure had grown to more than 900.) As the number of suicide bombings from the West Bank increased, popular support for a fence grew as well—and forced Sharon's hand. According to Tel Aviv University's Steinmetz Center, popular support for separation among Israeli Jews had grown to 83 percent by October 2003, leaving the prime minister no choice but to get on board.

IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

SEVERAL FACTORS have shaped Israel's current debate over the fence. From Israel's perspective, there are two main reasons to build it: to reduce terrorism, and to find a way out of the settlement morass that lets Israel keep a Jewish majority within its borders

How to Build a Fence

(while abandoning the settlers' dream of control over all of the biblical land of Israel). Other factors, however, have to be brought into the mix when designing the fence. The planners must try to minimize Palestinian hardship, create incentives to bring Palestinian negotiators back to the table, and assure the contiguity of a future Palestinian state.

First and foremost, however, comes security. Although there is no doubt that a fence will impose genuine hardships on those Palestinians living adjacent to it (indeed, it already has), the lack of a fence has produced irreversible hardships for Israelis: the loss of many lives. Throughout the three years of the current intifada, terrorists have repeatedly penetrated Israel's frontier and found their way into its vulnerable cities. According to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), there have been 53 "successful" suicide infiltrations during this period, killing 472 Israelis, and another 70 suicide bombers have infiltrated Israel but have been stopped before they reached their targets.

The proximity of the bomber's home to the target is often incredibly close. At least 15 of the suicide bombers who killed Israelis traveled fewer than ten miles to do so. The three successful suicide attacks from the West Bank town of Tulkarm were all directed against the Israeli town of Netanya, located seven miles away. Seven of the eight attacks from Bethlehem were perpetrated against Jerusalem, just two miles away. And according to a top official in the IDF Planning Branch, Brigadier General Eival Gilady, on seven different occasions during 2002, suicide bombers stayed overnight at a "terrorist bed-and-breakfast" in Anin, a Palestinian village in the northwest corner of the West Bank, before walking into Israel to perpetrate the mass murder of innocents.

Meanwhile, since early 2001, not a single successful Palestinian suicide bomber has infiltrated Israel from Gaza, and mortar shells fired from within the territory have failed to kill any Israelis. Given that Gaza has been surrounded by a fence since 1994, this fact has had a heavy impact on arguments for a barrier around the West Bank: many Israelis see it as proof that a fence can stop terrorism. Proponents also cite IDF reports that the first stage of the West Bank fence has already stopped bombings from that area. There have, for example, been no successful attacks from Tulkarm or Qalqilya since the fence around those areas went up in July 2003, and in November, Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said that the number of attempted

David Makovsky

infiltrations from areas of the West Bank where the fence has been erected is a twentieth of what it was before the fence was built. Of course, terrorists may still find ways to circumvent it; indeed, no measures could hermetically seal the border. Moreover, if Gaza is an example, attacks on settlers in the West Bank east of the fence could increase once it is completed. Yet the fact that it may not be foolproof has not deterred the Israeli public from pushing for the fence. After all, even a 95 percent success rate would still save lives.

On a different note, the fence, if built correctly, could also act as a spur for peace. For one thing, without the destabilizing effects of terrorism, negotiations will have more of a chance. Terrorists have tried to undermine the peace process at every stage; now, the presence of the fence should catalyze a passive alternative. Israeli liberals also hope the fence will be seen by the Palestinians as an incentive to fight terrorism. If Palestinians start helping to eliminate terror, this could strengthen their bargaining position once final borders are drawn. For years, Palestinians have debated whether the best way to obtain Israeli concessions is through compromise or through terror. To vindicate the “terrorism pays” school of thought by retreating to the pre-1967 border (known as the “Green Line”) would virtually guarantee that the Palestinians will resort to violence in future disputes with Israel.

Some have argued that the best way to give Palestinians an incentive to fight terror is to delineate in advance the terms of a final-status deal. This strategy seems unlikely to succeed, however, so long as Arafat remains the true leader of the Palestinians. It should be recalled that the current intifada broke out when the terms for a final-status deal were presented. Moreover, it is objectively hard for the PA to confront and disarm fellow Palestinians—in Hamas and Islamic Jihad—who, for religious and nationalist reasons, do not accept Israel’s existence on any terms. To make matters worse, not only has the Palestinian leadership never laid the intellectual groundwork for recognizing the moral legitimacy of Israel, but Arafat has exhorted his people to become one of a “million martyrs” for the Palestinian cause. Thus it seems unlikely that any agreed-upon security terms would be enforced by the Palestinians, even after maximum Israeli concessions were obtained.

How to Build a Fence

THE PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVE

ALTHOUGH THE ABSENCE of a fence has created hardships for Israelis by allowing the infiltration of suicide bombers, this does not mean that the converse can be ignored. The fence is already making life difficult for the fewer than one percent of West Bank Palestinians who live on its Israeli side, including for farmers who have suddenly found access to their fields restricted. And transit routes have been disrupted for thousands of others, making access to schools, for example, much more difficult.

Even Palestinians living adjacent to the fence or on its immediate east will encounter problems once it is built. This has already happened to the more than 38,000 residents of Qalqilya—which, thanks to the fence, now has only one main road in and out of the city (although there will soon be another), which passed a much-loathed IDF checkpoint (taken down in December 2003) that slowed commerce, delayed doctors and students, and generally infuriated residents. The value of such checkpoints needs to be continually reassessed in order to ensure they are not punitive.

As the example of Qalqilya suggests, the challenge will be to minimize Palestinian hardship while maximizing Israeli security. One clear lesson from the past is that every time Israeli security is threatened, Palestinian jobs in Israel are jeopardized by closures. Economic opportunities in the West Bank therefore need to be created. The number of people working at industrial parks in Gaza has almost doubled during the three years of the intifada, but much more needs to be done to create local economic opportunities.

Another good way to minimize hardship will be to dismantle Israeli settlements east of the fence. Sharon must therefore adhere to the promises he made in his Herzaliya speech last December, when he pledged to shut down unauthorized outposts and to close the loophole for “natural growth” of existing settlements.

Fortunately, resolving the settlement question may not be as difficult as is often supposed. Approximately 74 percent, or 164,000, of the Jewish settlers in the West Bank live on 5 percent of the land, most of it adjacent to the Green Line. The fence will probably be built to include these settlements, but it will exclude many of the smaller,

David Makovsky

scattered settlements that are home to the most hard-line and ideological settlers. Such a move would have been anathema to the Likud of the 1970s, but as Olmert's recent comments suggest, some members of the party seem to be coming to grips with reality. Furthermore, the fence will likely hasten a change in the wider Israeli political debate over the outlying settlements. Few Israelis will be willing to risk their sons and daughters to protect die-hard Jewish settlements inside a Palestinian state.

Apart from security, demography has been the second most important factor contributing to Israeli support for a fence. More and more Israelis have started to realize that if partition does not happen soon, within a decade (at least according to current projections) Jews will be a minority in a de facto binational state stretching from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. Minority status, moreover, would erode the moral authority of Israel's Jewish government both at home and abroad. As Olmert has explained, even U.S. backing for Israeli policies would not be enough to secure the country if "the Arabs form a majority from the Jordan [River] to the [Mediterranean] Sea."

To remain Jewish and democratic, therefore, Israel needs to avoid absorbing areas or population groups that will undermine its Jewish majority. Despite the million immigrants who came to Israel from the former Soviet Union in the last decade and despite government subsidies that encourage ultra-Orthodox Jews to have more children, the percentage of Jews in the population between the river and the sea dropped from 60 percent in 1985 to 55 percent in 2000.

Finally, if partition is going to work, all sides have to ensure that it is done in a manner that guarantees the formation of a contiguous Palestinian state. A fence such as the one Sharon seems to favor (and which the Israeli cabinet voted for in the wake of a terror attack in June 2002, although it has not been implemented), which cuts the West Bank up into cantons and encircles its population, will guarantee only Palestinian hopelessness and despair.

So far, the fence has not been built to hem in Palestinians on all sides, and senior Israeli security officials insist that they oppose such a design. One can only hope that Sharon, who cherishes his close working relationship with the Bush administration, will not

How to Build a Fence

risk jeopardizing it with an encirclement fence that Washington would certainly oppose. But nothing is guaranteed, especially if terror attacks continue.

FOUR FUTURES

AS ISRAEL grapples with the question of what sort of fence to build, four scenarios are likely to be considered. The figures for each scenario are based on tabulations of the West Bank's population (neither Jerusalem nor Gaza is included), with its 638 Palestinian towns and villages and 128 Israeli settlements.

The first of these scenarios is the plan currently backed by the Ministry of Defense: a buffer fence that would protect Israeli citizens inside sovereign Israel plus 170,000 (about 76 percent) of the West Bank settlers in the main settlement blocs near the Green Line, who sit on 14.5 percent of the West Bank. This fence would leave 1.9 million Palestinians, or at least 94 percent of the population, on the remaining 85.5 percent of the West Bank. Another 98,800 Palestinians would live in five enclaves west of the fence, which would be connected to the West Bank by underpasses or checkpoints. These enclaves would reflect several Israeli concerns: security (a special, double-fenced zone is planned for the area near Israel's main airport), ease of transportation (Israel wants to keep intact Route 443, a Tel Aviv traffic artery into Jerusalem that cuts into the West Bank), and demographics (some of the Palestinian villages that will become enclaves are located near settlement blocs that Israel wants to keep without absorbing more Palestinians). When the Palestinians in these enclaves are added to the total of those east of the fence, the number reaches 99.4 percent of the West Bank's population.

As for the encirclement fence, which is mapped out on the Palestine Liberation Organization's website (www.nad-plo.org), this would leave the Palestinians only the territory already allocated to them under the Oslo process (approximately 40 percent of the land) plus another 13 percent, for an approximate total of just 53 percent of the West Bank. Such a fence represents the Palestinians' worst nightmare, as was explained by PA negotiator Stéphanie Khoury to National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice in a June 2003 meeting, and to

Ministry of Defense Fence



SOURCE: Israeli Ministry of Defense.

The Encirclement Fence



SOURCE: PLO Negotiations Affairs Department.

The Clinton Parameters



SOURCE: Based on news reports of Clinton proposals and interviews with former U.S. Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross.

The Geneva Accords



SOURCE: www.heskem.org.il.

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Israelis on Israeli Side of Fence

<i>Scenario</i>	<i>Land</i>	<i>Settlers</i>	<i>Israeli Pop.</i>	<i>Settlements</i>
Encirclement	47%	98%	219,050	118
Ministry of Defense	14.5%	76%	169,861	52
Clinton Parameters	5%	74%	164,496	45
Geneva Accords	1.5%	51%	114,014	18

Palestinians on Israeli Side of Fence

<i>Scenario</i>	<i>Land</i>	<i>Palestinians</i>	<i>Pal. Pop.</i>	<i>Pal. Cities and Villages</i>
Encirclement	47%	14%	271,378	147
Ministry of Defense	14.5%	0.6%	10,940	32
Clinton Parameters	5%	0.4%	7,076	5
Geneva Accords	1.5%	0%	0	0

Palestinians on Palestinian Side of Fence

<i>Scenario</i>	<i>Land</i>	<i>Palestinians</i>	<i>Pal. Pop.</i>	<i>Pal. Cities and Villages</i>
Encirclement	53%	86%	1,669,239	491
Ministry of Defense	85.5%	99.4%	1,929,677	606
Clinton Parameters	95%	99.6%	1,933,541	633
Geneva Accords	98.5%	100%	1,940,617	638

Israelis on Palestinian Side of Fence

<i>Scenario</i>	<i>Land</i>	<i>Settlers</i>	<i>Israeli Pop.</i>	<i>Settlements</i>
Encirclement	53%	2%	4,535	10
Ministry of Defense	85.5%	24%	53,724	76
Clinton Parameters	95%	26%	59,089	83
Geneva Accords	98.5%	49%	109,571	110

SOURCES: Israeli figures from the Israeli Ministry of the Interior; Palestinian figures from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics' 1997 census (updated with an estimate of 3.3 percent annual population growth) and the *CLA World Factbook*.

President George W. Bush by then Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas later last summer. But for the Likud, such a fence would have the benefit of remaining true to Sharon's commitment to retain the Jordan Valley. Sharon, who served as an infantry commander during much of his 25 years in the IDF, has always believed that the

David Makovsky

Jordan Valley is critical for the defense of Israel. He justifies this belief by citing the fact that Iraqi, Jordanian, and Syrian armies have all attacked the Jewish state over this eastern frontier in the past.

Indeed, many Israelis of both parties have long considered the Jordan Valley essential to their security. There are, however, ways to deny Israel's enemies access to it other than through Sharon's imagined encircling fence, which would give Israel a widened slice of the valley. Moreover, as former IDF Strategic Division Head General Shlomo Brom and others note, there has not been an interstate war against Israel since 1973, and Israel has since signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. Syria's military prowess has been greatly weakened by the loss of its Soviet patron and the end of the Cold War, and the U.S. toppling of Saddam Hussein has removed the Iraqi threat. The Jordan Valley is therefore no longer a likely gateway for an invading Arab army. Just about the only people who would actually benefit from an encirclement fence, then, would be the settlers, since it would include hardly any of them (only 2 percent) in Palestinian areas.

Still two other options exist. First is that proposed by President Clinton in December 2000, when time was running out for the negotiations then underway. These "Clinton parameters" reflected the Americans' best judgment of what both the Israelis and the Palestinians felt they had to get from a deal. In order to prevent Arafat from treating the parameters as something to be rejected and then later used as a point of departure, Clinton insisted that the proposals were personal and would expire when he left office. Nonetheless, they have remained relevant. Clinton called for an Israeli withdrawal from somewhere in the range of 94–96 percent of the West Bank; the remaining land would accommodate 74 percent of the settlers.

In fact, the Clinton parameters are close to those of the fence now under construction (Clinton proposed including 164,000 settlers on the western side of the fence, whereas the Ministry of Defense's version will encompass 170,000). The key difference is that Clinton envisioned Israel's annexing just 5 percent of the land (with no enclaves), not 14.5 percent.

Despite Clinton's insistence that his proposals were personal, they have since served as a point of departure for the fourth scenario: that promoted by Israel's leading dove, Yossi Beilin—an architect of the

How to Build a Fence

Oslo accords. After working with Palestinian Information Minister Yasir Abed Rabbo for two years, Beilin recently unveiled the so-called Geneva accords. Instead of giving the Palestinians 95 percent of the West Bank, however, under their plan Israel would yield 98.5 percent of the territory. So far, public opinion polls show that such a scenario has not been accepted by either the Israeli or the Palestinian mainstream. One reason for Israeli opposition is that, although the Geneva plan would leave 100 percent of the Palestinians in the Palestinian area, 110,000 settlers—or just under half the West Bank total—would remain outside Israeli territory.

Both the encirclement fence and the Geneva plan, in fact, would create lopsided outcomes in terms of people stranded on the wrong side. Under the encirclement plan, 270,000 Palestinians would find themselves on the Israeli side of the fence, while only 4,500 Israelis would end up on the Palestinian side. As many as 98 percent of the settlers, sitting on 47 percent of the West Bank, would be untouched.

By contrast, both the Ministry of Defense and the Clinton plans would distribute the demographic pain of separation more evenly. The first of these would leave approximately 43,000 more Israelis on the wrong side than Palestinians, or a total of 11,000 Palestinians in 41 villages, versus 54,000 Israelis in 90 settlements. According to the Clinton parameters, approximately 52,000 more Israelis (59,000 total, in 83 settlements) would end up on the wrong side than Palestinians (7,000 total, in 5 villages).

In light of these numbers, the United States should back the buffer fence currently being built by the Ministry of Defense. This fence will give the Palestinians an incentive to fight terror (since if they do, Israel could make the fence more permeable), while also making it clear that if they do not comply with their obligations, they will suffer real consequences. Washington should also insist that Israel not build a fence to the east of the West Bank, since that could impede a contiguous Palestinian state.

In addition, the United States should push the parties to ease the hardships the fence will cause those living adjacent to it. This will mean creating more Palestinian jobs in the West Bank, through industrial zones and other creative strategies. And finally, the United States should broker a set of bilateral U.S.-Israeli and U.S.-Palestinian

David Makovsky

understandings covering what will happen to the 85.5 percent of the West Bank that will fall east of the fence. These understandings would relate to the status of the settlements, territories, responsibilities that each side would assume, and how quickly Palestinian statehood could be achieved. The contiguous land could, in relatively short order and by mutual agreement, become a Palestinian state. Subsequent issues, such as border modifications, Jerusalem, and refugees, could then be dealt with on a state-to-state basis.

Historically, ever since they accepted the Peel Commission report in 1937, Zionists have chosen demographics over geography whenever the two have clashed. Similarly, most Israelis today prefer the notion of a Jewish, democratic state involving partition of the land to one that includes all the West Bank and Gaza. Which scenario now comes to pass depends on how the fence is constructed. If it is not done properly, the fence will not assure partition but rather enshrine a de facto binationalism that will destroy Israel as a Jewish state. The fence should be built so as to make it safe for Israel to leave much of the West Bank—not to stay there.

Whether done unilaterally or by negotiation, only partition can guarantee the democratic and Jewish character of Israel. Israelis and Palestinians will eventually have to sit down together to solve their problems. Since such negotiations are unlikely for the time being, however, a properly constructed fence could serve as an interim measure. Given the traumas both of these peoples have endured, especially over the last three years, keeping Israelis and Palestinians apart now is the only way to bring them together in the future. 🌐