

Opinions

The Security Establishment Has Learned Nothing, and the Mistakes of the Separation Barrier Will Be Repeated in the Jordan Valley

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20:00 • April 23, 2026

Twenty-four years after the decision by Ariel Sharon’s government to construct the separation barrier along the Green Line, the time has come to judge it by its results. It turns out that the gap between promise and reality is not merely technical or budgetary, but a deep conceptual gap: the barrier, which was built in the name of security, does not fulfill its purpose because it was never designed as a security project. This insight should have guided the security establishment when it mapped out the route of the new barrier now being constructed in the Jordan Valley, as part of the “Blue Thread” project — but it appears that nothing has been learned.

When the decision to build the barrier was made in 2002, at the height of the Second Intifada, the logic behind it was clear: to create a system that would provide early warning, delay infiltration, and enable security forces to respond quickly. However, already then, as was written and presented before the High Court of Justice in petitions submitted over the years, the chosen route did not reflect this logic, but rather a combination of political, settlement-related, and strategic considerations. What began as deviations from security logic gradually became the method itself.

To understand the depth of the problem, one need only look at the data and official statements, which outline three consistent systemic failures:

Lack of physical continuity. According to State Comptroller reports, only about 61% of the route has an actual built barrier. In other words, dozens of kilometers are not fenced at all, for example in Gush Etzion, East Jerusalem, and southeastern Mount Hebron. The main reason is political pressure exerted by leaders of the Yesha Council and their representatives in the Knesset, contrary to the position of the security establishment. This is compounded by hundreds of breaches — sometimes small, sometimes wide enough for vehicles — through which tens of thousands of people pass daily. Even replacing the fence with a high wall, as was done in southwestern Mount Hebron at a cost of billions of shekels, has not provided an adequate solution to infiltration. For years, security officials have warned that in practice “there is no barrier.” A barrier that is not continuous is not a barrier — as the security establishment itself determined in 2003.

Lack of an effective operational response. Official data indicate that less than one percent of infiltrations through the barrier are met with a response from forces on the ground. And even then, when response times reach tens of minutes, as testified by a Border Police representative in a Knesset committee, the operational system loses its relevance. The reason is a shortage of forces, as many battalions are occupied with securing settlements. Even in light of the Chief of

Staff's warning last month ("I am raising ten red flags"), the situation does not appear likely to improve.

Lack of enforcement and deterrence. In Knesset discussions and official reports, enforcement authorities admitted that a shortage of detention facilities leads to the release of suspects and the cancellation of indictments. When there is no effective punishment, there is no deterrence. When there is no deterrence, the barrier has no meaning.

These three failures create a situation in which each component underlying the operational logic — detection, response, enforcement — is compromised. When all three are compromised, this constitutes a deep systemic failure.

Here another dimension of the problem emerges — the legal dimension. Over the years, the security establishment consistently argued before the High Court of Justice that the route was determined by security considerations, and that the harm to Palestinian rights was a proportional and necessary byproduct of these considerations. On this basis, petitions against the route were examined and large portions of it were approved (full disclosure: I submitted a security expert opinion on behalf of the petitioners).

However, during the hearings it became clear that the route was not primarily driven by security considerations but by considerations related to expanding settlements. This led the court to invalidate the route in many cases and to criticize the security establishment for concealing these considerations from the court.

The fact that the barrier does not provide the security benefit attributed to it requires the High Court of Justice to reexamine the balance between security considerations and harm to Palestinian rights; not because the court erred in the past, but because the reality presented to it no longer exists. When the benefit does not materialize, the claim of proportionality also collapses. This lesson should stand before the court now in discussions on the construction of the new barrier in the Jordan Valley.

This is compounded by the international dimension. Israel has long presented the barrier as a purely security tool. Indeed, international law recognizes a state's right to defend itself and to build a barrier within its territory. But when it becomes clear that the barrier, built beyond Israel's borders, does not provide the protection it was claimed to provide, the question arises whether the primary consideration was security or the attempt to determine the borders of future annexation. This question is present in international deliberations and decisions and affects how other countries assess Israel's policy.

Operating the separation barrier along the Green Line according to political considerations harms security. And this is exactly what is being done with the new barrier being constructed in the Jordan Valley.

Here we return to the root of the problem. The separation barrier is not merely a security project. It is part of a broader policy based on three historical principles for determining Israel's borders: security, demography, and settlement. These principles, established already in the 1930s, have

guided Israeli policy for decades. But when they clash, a decision must be made. In the case of the separation barrier, no such decision was made. Instead, a hybrid was created: a route that seeks to be both a security border and a political tool. Such a hybrid is inherently unstable. This lesson has not been learned, as evidenced by the construction of the new barrier in the Jordan Valley, intended to strengthen settlement there and, as recently stated by Defense Minister Israel Katz, to separate it from the rest of the West Bank and annex it.

Already in the settlement plans of the 1970s, Israel sought to create “security zones” that would establish political facts on the ground. The barrier, built decades later, largely adopted this goal. The point is that a security barrier should be built according to principles of operational efficiency, while a political route is built according to principles of agreed sovereignty. When the two are mixed, the result is a compromise that harms both. Security is undermined, and no political decision is achieved.

Twenty-four years after construction began, it can be stated unequivocally: the failure of the barrier is not only due to its incomplete construction or lack of budget. It stems from the gap between its definition and its implementation. As long as the barrier is presented as a security tool but operated partially due to political considerations, it cannot be expected to provide full security.

There is a certain irony in the fact that the original idea — physical separation that would reduce friction and allow better security control — remains valid. But to realize it, one basic condition is required: consistency. If it is a security tool, it must be physically completed, enforced, and properly resourced. If it is a political tool, this must be stated openly and its consequences addressed.

The cynicism is fully revealed in the intensive construction of farms and outposts east of the existing barrier. The Jewish violence they generate indicates that there is no truth behind the claim of a desire to “reduce friction,” and that the goal is to exclude Palestinians from the seam zone and displace them from Area C east of the barrier.

Meanwhile, reality is not waiting for a decision. It crosses the barrier through physical breaches and conceptual breaches alike. Whether these are undocumented workers, criminals, or terrorists, the conclusion is one: a barrier that is not maintained and not enforced does not protect; it merely creates the illusion of protection.