

# Strategy and Security in Israel

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## Brigadier General Eival Gilady Head, Strategic Planning Division, Israel Defense Force

Thank you for that very warm introduction. Ladies and gentlemen, it's a great privilege for me to be here tonight and I want to thank you for having me. I think it's a very challenging mission to speak to such a knowledgeable audience, especially if you want to speak about the Middle East which is so complex. I would say the Middle East will play a more important role than ever in the U.S. election this year. What I will try to do is focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, talk about where we are, the possible strategies to adopt in the near future and how and why we've gotten to the disengagement plan.

I'll say a few words about the fence because I understand this is something very important these days following The Hague—we call it decision, but in fact it's an opinion—and we'll open for questions and answers about all around the Middle East.

Let me start with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I'm not going to take you through the hundred years of conflict between the two national movements—the Zionist and the Palestinian national movements. I'm not even going to speak about the last decade, from the Oslo process started in 1993. I will on about what we have now after almost four years of the current conflict known as the second Intifada, which is not the right name, but this is what we call it. Before we get to where we are I would like to say that there are four basic assumptions not valid anymore, that we believed during the last decade but we say today that all four assumptions have passed away.

The first dead assumption is the belief that peace would bring security. For about a decade we used to think that peace would bring security. In fact, we thought that once we achieved peace there would be no more motivation to attack us and, in fact, peace would defeat terror. Once we achieved that peace, there would be no more terror attacks, and as we had terror on the way we used to think, "Well, this is a leakage of terror against the will of the Palestinian leadership, and all we need to do is to help them get over it and be back on track and move forward towards peace. Once we achieve this, that's the end of terror."

We understand today that we were wrong. It is not peace that will bring security, but the other way around; it is security that will bring peace. Now we say, "security first." We'll get to the Road Map in a few minutes, but if you look at it

one of the most important parts of it is it says very clearly what needs to be done first, and what needs to be after that. It focuses on the first stage, on security reform and security steps, so we can move forward to the political part of the process. So, the first assumption that has passed away is that peace would bring security. Now we say security first; it is security that will bring peace.

The second dead assumption is the nature of the relations between the two societies. It was clear to us during Oslo that, at the end of the day, we're going to end up with two independent entities even though you can't find in the papers of 1993—we call it the DOP, the Declaration of Principals—you can't find a statement of an independent Palestinian state. It was clear to us that we were going to end up with two independent entities. But the relations between the two societies were to be very interactive.

It was clear that the Palestinians would keep on coming to Israel. We used to have 200,000 Palestinians workers come into Israel every day—20,000 legal workers and about 80,000 illegal workers—but we didn't do anything to prevent them from coming. We used to go there for shopping, gamble in the casino, and so forth. We thought that we'll have borders only on the maps, so officially it would be clear where Israel ends and Palestine starts. But there would be no fence, no border, and let me make it very clear, until four years ago every Palestinian could get into his car, drive down to Tel Aviv and sit in every restaurant that he wanted to.

This is also a dead assumption. This is not what you're going to see in the near future. We're going to have a fence, we're going to be on one side and they're going to be on the other side. I won't say that you'll never see a Palestinian getting into Israel, but this will be much better controlled and Israel will make the decision of how many, for what reason, for what purpose, what profession and for how long they will stay. This is a sovereign decision of the Israeli state.

It is not only a security matter; it is also the labor market, the economy, the Israeli unemployment and many other considerations to be taken into account when this decision is made. They may come to work in agriculture or in construction, but it is not going to be an open border as we thought during Oslo. So this is the second dead assumption. The relations between the two societies are going to be different.

The third dead assumption is related to the leadership. We never thought that Arafat is an easy one to negotiate with, but we thought that he could deliver. I would say that Israel in 1992, when Arafat was so weak, sitting in Tunisia after the first Gulf War in 1991, and the Madrid process in which he didn't take part — Israel didn't choose victory but peace, and we extended our hands and brought him to the territories believing that he is the one to deliver and we failed to understand that he is not a peace seeker.

We failed to understand that he will never be a state builder and you cannot change the state of mind of a leader of a revolutionary movement for forty years. If you ask me, when I look at the leadership of the Palestinians, not only Arafat, but also Abu Mazen, whom I believe brought greater opportunity, but he failed to deliver. If you look at the current Palestinian Prime Minister, Mr. Abu Allah, who has been in office for nine months, what has he done so far? Nothing. And, if I can speak in free language here in this audience, I would say that I have lost my confidence in this leadership.

I don't believe any of those people can deliver, and I would look for the second generation, from the 45-50 year old guys who have been with us, or next to us, in the last 35 years who know much better the Israeli culture, understand much better what is possible, what is doable, what is visible, what can be done, what should be done. With these people I believe we could cut a deal in the past, and we will cut a deal in the future.

I can tell you that in July 2000 at Camp David I could see who was for cutting a deal and who was against it and it was divided the same way. There are many names but I don't want to put any of the Palestinian future leaders on the spot. I'm confident that with this group we may be able to move forward. In fact, if you ask me what is one of our Israeli mistakes during the last two decades, it is that we didn't think of how we could create conditions or an environment or atmosphere for these people, if not to take over, at least to get a way so their voices would be stronger and they'll take more influence.

This is something, I believe, we will do better in the near future. So the third point, as I said, is leadership. The real problem today is the lack of leadership on the Palestinian side—we don't see real leadership. Even as we speak about the disengagement plan when we expect the Palestinians to take responsibility over Gaza once we evacuate it, you don't see real leadership even now in that regard. I'll get to that later.

The fourth dead assumption is that we thought until July 2000 that we could get a final status agreement in one step. This is what Ehud Barak, in fact, tried to do in July 2000 when he went to Camp David, and he failed to do it. It is clear to me that we cannot get a final status agreement in one step today. Both sides are not mature enough for that. I believe the Israeli society is much better prepared than the Palestinian, but I don't think that even the Israeli society is prepared to accept a final status agreement today. When I say that the Israeli society is much better prepared I look at what happened during the 1990s in our society and what happened on the other side.

In the early '90s you couldn't find any Israeli who would support a Palestinian independent state. It wasn't even the Labor Party's idea. In the late '90s, most Israelis would have supported it. I would say that today the majority of the Israeli

people support the idea of an independent Palestinian state. It is in the Israeli interest they have an independent state. The best way to understand this is if you look at the election in 1999 when the Israeli people voted Barak rather than Netanyahu; there was a clear message sent out there: go get peace, we're willing to compromise. Land for peace, whatever it takes. Go get it.

What happened on the Palestinian side during the '90s since Oslo? Did Arafat prepare his society for peace and concession? Or did he maintain the struggle atmosphere for future fighting? So, as I said, both sides are not prepared, but there is no doubt that on the Palestinian side there is a lot more to be done in order to get to final status discussions—and I'm not even talking about implementing them.

If we understand these four changes, which are very important, we ask ourselves, well, if we cannot get to final status agreement, and if we do not have a real partner on the other side because of the lack of leadership, should we stay where we are in the current situation with that level of terror, with that lousy security where we bleed, kill and die, with that lousy economy, with that bad political situation? Or, can we move to a better situation that is not a final status agreement, but something in-between, that may create the conditions necessary for the Palestinians to get those reforms. This is the logic behind the disengagement plan.

Let me say something about the word "disengagement," and it is not because my English is so good but because I'm trying to say what I understand from this word. Disengagement doesn't mean that you don't care, that you turn around, that you have no interest. Not at all. Disengagement from my understanding is the best policy to be adopted for a given period of time to create the changes necessary to re-engage.

We believe that disengaging from Arafat, for example, which was carried out by the current U.S. administration, was a very effective tool to apply pressure on the Palestinians to get a Palestinian prime minister. Yes, we're not very satisfied with the reform process there, but nothing had happened before the U.S. disengaged from Arafat. So I would say that disengagement doesn't mean that we don't care. Disengagement means that for the time being this is the best tool to promote whatever needs to be promoted in order to re-engage.

In fact, we could see three different possible strategies to be adopted at this time. The first one would be, we don't need to do anything, things will get better, in time things will be solved by themselves. The level of terrorism has been declining very effectively, the fence, as was mentioned before, is very effective. I can give you numbers. We started it in the north, where it was very easy because this was more or less on the Green Line, not exactly, but more or less. And you probably haven't heard of a terror attack in Afula for a very long period of time.

Now this is not because the people in Jenin started to like the people of Afula. This is just because they can't get there as easily as they could before. I don't know how many of you know the story that I've told before of the school of a terror group preparing itself in Jenin and they were preparing to attack a high school 27 kilometers from there.

What they did in the past was they just took a cab, a 30-minute drive—two suicide bombers with explosive belts on their bodies, one goes to the first floor, the other to the upper floor, and the rest is well known. Now they can't do it because of this fence. Instead of 27 kilometers they have to go 157 kilometers. Not only that, instead of 30 minutes, we, the Israel Defense Forces, have five or six hours. The major change was that they couldn't do it taking one car and taking one ride. They had to coordinate with one car and then they had to walk part of it and then they had to use a tractor and then they had to use another truck, and the more people they had to coordinate with the more chances we had to get some information.

In this case, we did get this information from one of the associates, and we could intercept this event. So if you ask me if the fence is effective, my answer would be "very effective." Route 65, the road that goes to Nazareth, Tiberius and the Sea of Galilee, was one that suffered most of the bad explosions. Why? Because people from Jenin could get together via a small village named Anin, which is in the Palestinian territory, all the people to prepare the operation, cross into Israel in two minutes, get on a bus and the rest is history. In 2002 we have lost 58 people on this road. In 2003 we lost three people, in 2004, zero. So if you ask me if the fence is effective, my answer is "very effective."

Let me take this opportunity to say a few more words about this fence and then I'll get back to where I was. Many people think that the route of this fence was dictated by the government as a political route. Wrong. It was never dictated top-down, but it was developed bottom-up by us, by the security forces. We went to the area, and when I say "security forces," not only the Israel Defense Force but the security service and the police and the border police and whoever is involved, and we were standing on every hill looking at the area and trying to define where the fence should be constructed in this area.

And there are many considerations on how to do this. It is not only going to the Green Line. We usually started with the Green Line as the reference line, but then we looked for topography, for example. If you want to be effective against terrorism you should be on the high ground. And then we looked for the legal status of the land, and if we can avoid using private land by moving it 200 or 300 meters and go on public land we will do that.

Then there are a number of considerations I would call operational considerations. Let me try to explain that. The fence is not something that no one

can cross. Everyone can cross it. The idea is that you cannot cross it without sending a signal. There is a lot of technology, many sensors, whether you cut it, push it, touch it, whatever, there is a signal sent to one of our operational booths and the name of the game is who gets to the point faster—the one who tries to get into Israel or our patrol. Now, had I been a patrol commander the best would be if I could head straight, so no one could observe me or alert the one who tries to get in.

No one can shoot at me, I can get there very quickly, there is no surprise when I get there. But it tends to be that by having a straight road we cut fields on the way so we ended up by having it like stairs going around the fields. So it is not only security but we have to take into account humanitarian considerations as in those fields and topography and the legal status and the real question is if we take the right balance of each and every place, and my answer would be “absolutely yes.”

Now as I said, this route was never dictated by the government, but in fact it was built bottom-up, segment after segment after segment, and in the end you have the combination of many segments. This is the route. Now, many people ask tough questions. For example, why do we take some land away from the roads? I would say the role of the fence is not only to protect Israel but to protect Israelis who use that road. I don't know if you know that the second [highest] cause of killed people is shooting at vehicles.

The first cause, of course, is suicide bombers. It's very easy. You just go out of your village, lie next to the road and shoot at five, six, seven vehicles and before the military gets there you're back in your village. You don't need to kill many—one or two and you're done. The goal of the terrorist is not to kill as many people as possible, but to terrorize the population—to bring fear, kill, create uncertainty. Now if I can make this fence 200 meters away, make it much harder to hit a vehicle, if I can even cut the line of sight, should I do it or not?

Well, some people may say you may not, and excuse me for giving you this example but I have no doubts after getting to one car, seeing a four-year old girl trying to wake up her killed mom—you don't have any more questions. You take that fence 300 meters away. So when you ask me how we did this, I would say that the real challenge is to balance the security needs, the legal aspects, the humanitarian needs and to find something which is reasonable.

And that brings me the Hague and the Israeli Supreme Court. There were two decisions in the last month. One was taken by the Supreme Court, which said that in some specific part they believed that we could find a better balance maintaining security on one hand and minimizing the hardship on the day-to-day lives of the Palestinians. We accepted this decision and just today we presented a new route to the Minister of Defense and it would be approved and we will

change it in a way that will fulfill the decision of the Israeli Supreme Court. We believe that the Supreme Court is not an enemy of the defense system but part of it, and we will do whatever it takes to do it on a legal basis. But when we look at The Hague, this was a totally different story. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) was requested by the U.N. to provide their opinion for what we do with this fence. We didn't have any doubts what would be that opinion.

Kofi Annan didn't need the ICJ's opinion. He had his opinion stated very clearly. The challenge we faced was how, on one hand to be part of the modern world and accept the international institutions, including the International Court of Justice, but on the other hand we do not accept its right to bring this case to court because this is a political problem. So, we're not going to follow any of the recommendations of the U.N. We don't have to and we will not. But we will do whatever it takes on our Supreme Court decision to make this fence provide security, but on a legal, moral and ethical basis, and this is what we're going to do with this fence.

Lets get back to the three possible strategies. As I said, the fence is very effective. Terror is declining and the first strategy that was proposed was well, we don't need to do anything. This idea is very simple: we can fight terrorism, let's just wait. I don't think this is a real strategy. We have lost so far 3,000 people. Usually we talk about the 969 Israelis that were killed, but there are 2,000 people killed on the Palestinian side, there are thousands of wounded people, the economy is in a very bad situation and I don't see any good reason to wait.

So, the second possible strategy which you may find some people even in the Israeli administration supporting is try to get back to the old strategy, let's try to get back to the mutual negotiated process with the Palestinians. You hear many Europeans on that strategy, the Quartet believes this is the right thing to be done. They don't like the unilateral approach of the Israelis. They would like to get back to the mutual negotiated process. I don't think that's going to work. We've tried that for the last four years. You probably all remember the names of Zinni, Tenet, Mitchell, whomever you want. We've tried. I was personally involved in developing all those plans. I used to meet with my colleagues on the Palestinian side. You do this and we'll do that. It didn't happen and it won't work now.

The only way to move forward and change the situation—it takes real leadership and I believe our Prime Minister provided that leadership—was to try to change the situation. No one could ever think Ariel Sharon would legitimize the evacuation of Gaza, and he did. Now, it's not going to be easy on the Israeli side. I don't know how closely you follow the details.

We had a human chain the day before yesterday, from Gaza to Jerusalem, of people who are against it. Sharon has lost the referendum within the Likud Party. There are many internal political problems, but I've never seen him so

determined to push a plan forward, and if you ask me it will be implemented. Yes, it was restructured, I would say repackaged, and we have changed some of the sequence—things that were planned to be earlier might be later and so forth—but at the end of the day, whatever we've committed ourselves to the U.S. administration to be done by the end of 2005 will be implemented—all of it. Now, it's going to be hard but we're going to do it, we're going to do it because we believe that this is the way to change the situation.

Just imagine that you're going out of Gaza. Not only the military troops, not only the Israeli tanks, but also the settlers and they are free to run their lives on a day-to-day basis. We're not going to be in Gaza in any final status agreement so why should we stay there until the very last day? We're going to evacuate four settlements in the northern part of the West Bank. The reason that we start there is because we're done with the fence at that spot.

This will minimize the day-to-day friction, this will not only minimize the number of troops that we have deployed there but the mode of operation is going to be totally different. We're not going to be as visible as we are today. We're not going to have so many checkpoints. I would like to see the Palestinians having a lot more freedom of movement of goods, of people, and I would like them to run their lives. It is possible. Security will not decrease but increase, and if a Palestinian would be able to get on his car in Jenin in the North and drive down to Hebron in the south without seeing any Israeli checkpoints, this is much better.

We can do it only if we have that fence and we can deploy our troops along this fence and this is what's going to happen. And we will have to relocate some settlements, but at the same time, if you look at this route you are going to see that at the end of the day—and the numbers may shift a little but take my numbers up to five points of a percent—we have, at the end of the day, 76 percent of the settlers from the west side of the fence getting free access to Israel more or less using 11 percent of the land.

At the same time, we're going to have 99 percent of the Palestinians on the east side of the fence having free access to their territories with no Israeli checkpoints and no necessity for all those security needs. They'll be able to run their day-to-day lives much, much better.

Now we say that once we achieve a final status discussion we will negotiate the route of this fence, but at this time we must have an effective anti-terrorism fence. It is not a fence that you can put on the Green Line, because if you put it on the Green Line you spend so much money, you bring so many problems to the people that are living next to it and if at the end of the day it does not provide security, why do it? You have to do it on an effective line you have to make it as hard as possible for any terrorist to succeed. I wish I could say that we have to make it impossible for any terrorist to succeed. We can't make it impossible.

And it is a lot more than just preventing them from getting into Israel; it is in many ways making them believe that whatever they try, there's no way they'll succeed. I would like every terrorist to think that if he's going to try he will fail. If we get back to this strategy, this is where we are right now, we're going to implement it. I'll end with my expectations from my Palestinian colleagues. I called formally Abu Allah the Palestinian Prime Minister to develop a Palestinian unilateral plan.

We have the Israeli unilateral plan, as I believe only a unilateral plan now can change the situation. He must develop a Palestinian plan. What's going to happen in Gaza once we're out? There's no plan. Who's going to take care of the health system? Who's going to take care of the education system? Who's going to provide services? Who's going to establish law and order? And I ask the Palestinian leadership to prepare their plan.

It will not be negotiated with them, but it would be coordinated. If we have a real partner taking care on the other side, we'll coordinate it. But if you ask me what have we seen so far—we haven't seen a plan. If there will be no plan of Abu Allah, there will be another plan—the plan of Arafat, and his goal will be to destroy the Israeli plan, to show the world there's no way to move forward without him, to bring chaos. If you see what's going on in Gaza in the last two, three or four weeks, you understand what Arafat wishes to see.

So, let me end here by saying that this is the plan. It is going to be implemented and is strongly supported not only by the U.S., but by the Europeans, by Arab moderates. You will see the Egyptians involved, the Jordanians involved, and I believe this will create the necessary conditions for the Palestinians to take reforms. It's a great opportunity for them to establish their own state. They don't have to do it for us. It is not that they're expected to serve the Israeli interest. It is their chance to do it for themselves.

Let me stop here and take questions. Thank you.

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