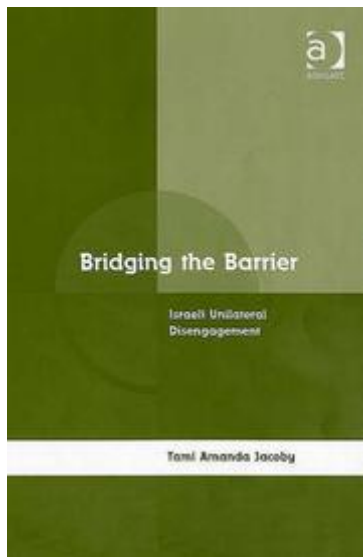




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Tami Amanda Jacoby, *Bridging the Barrier: Israeli Unilateral Disengagement* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007, 157 pages, £55.00 hard bound)

Reviewed by Khinvraj Jangid

Do good fences really make good neighbours? This is one of the germane questions that Tami Amanda Jacoby puts forwards in *Bridging the Barrier* as she examines the utility and repercussions of the Israeli separation barrier in the West Bank. The subject matter of this book is the much-contested issue of the construction of a separation barrier by Israel in the occupied West Bank since 2002.

The separation barrier is being built as a fence with wide margins and sophisticated electronic surveillance. Israel calls it a 'security fence' to prevent terrorist attacks. The controversy stems mainly from the Israeli decision of not adhering to the 1949 Armistice lines (Green Line) but rather to build the barrier *within* the West Bank – in some stretches, deeply within. The purpose, utility and necessity of the barrier are contentious. Israel argues that the barrier is necessary for its security, but the route of barrier is invasive, annexing parts of the West Bank over which Israel has no sovereign authority.

It earned the ire of the International Court of Justice, which in --- 2004 ruled that Israel had the right to fortify its own border but that building a barrier inside an occupied territory constituted a violation of International Law. The State of Israel, however, disputes this interpretation and refuses to abide by this ruling. The Israeli Supreme Court has held that building inside the West Bank is not illegal in itself; but it has ordered some changes to the route of the barrier where it considered the original route to cause severe damage to the Palestinian daily life – especially in separating Palestinian villagers from their land. The second chapter in this book highlights major disputes upon routing the barrier. However, maps and photographs illustrating the disputed route would have helped more.

Jacoby not only throws light on these innumerable and intertwined issues but also provides insights into the deeper ramifications of the barrier. She argues that the construction of the barrier is the continuation of the unilateralist policy of Israel towards the Palestinians which is a concern reflected in the book's subtitle: *Israeli Unilateral Disengagement*. Jacoby explores the incongruent narratives of Israelis and Palestinians with regards to Israel's separation barrier and the policy of unilateral withdrawal.

This detailed and well-researched study not only includes the Israeli and the Palestinian perspectives on the barrier but also deals with the international and legal dimensions of the separation barrier. Jacoby questions the stated purpose of the security of Israel for constructing such a dividing barrier. While the barrier solved the immediate issue of infiltration and suicide bombing, she argues, it is unclear whether it would provide security in any permanent and lasting way. For stable peace and normalcy, Jacoby suggests that Israel has to involve the Palestinians through negotiation rather than dictating policies unilaterally.

To substantiate her thesis that Israel's unilateral method of operating is a problem, Jacoby refers to the case of Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. She does not question the decision of disengagement but doubts the unilateral manner in which it was implemented. A much better way of disengagement, she conjectures, could have been bilateral – involving the advice and consent of the international community. Jacoby suggests that Israel missed the chance to earn support abroad against the Hezbollah due to its unilateralist approach. Thus, it is neither beneficial nor pragmatic for Israel, she argues, to pursue a unilateral policy in the West Bank.

Jacoby concludes that a physical structure such as a barrier may provide a short-term response to insecurity dilemmas but does not provide a long-lasting solution to societies undergoing a protracted conflict. The barrier system must have a more effective and

humane way of distinguishing between innocents and terrorists. The present fence is not conducive for peace between the neighbours.

The book is a detailed and thorough investigation of the issues related to the separation barrier. The analysis is exhaustive and provides an excellent starting point for readers unfamiliar with the subject. Her examination of the construction of the separation barrier as a part of the larger unilateral policy of Israel is very valuable. Previous works on the subject have been hampered by debates between right and wrong. But as an ‘involved outsider’ (p.ix) in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Jacoby presents a balanced account of the impact of the barrier on both sides.

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The views expressed in the Book Review are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the MEI@ND.

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