

Israel's Requirement for Defensible Borders

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UN Resolution 242: No Restoration of the 1949 Armistice Line

Israel's struggle for "defensible borders" is unique in international diplomacy. It emanates from both the special legal and strategic circumstances that Israel faced in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, when the Israel Defense Forces captured the West Bank and other territories in a war of self-defense. The previous armistice line of 1949 that separated the Israeli and Jordanian armies was only a military boundary and not a permanent political border, according to the armistice agreement itself. The Jordanian occupation of the West Bank occurred in conjunction

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with its illegal invasion of the State of Israel in 1948. In fact, Jordanian sovereignty in the West Bank was not recognized by a single Arab state. This provided the background for UN Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967 which concluded that Israel would need "secure and recognized boundaries" that would necessarily be different from the 1967 lines. The previous status quo was not to be restored. In diplomatic shorthand, President George W. Bush stated on April 14, 2004, that Israel had a right to "defensible borders," in order to convey the same point.

There continues to be a compelling strategic logic underpinning the idea of defensible borders. Israel is in an anomalous situation. It is an embattled democracy that historically has had to defend itself repeatedly against the armies of neighboring Arab states whose declared goal was nothing less than Israel's eradication. The Israel Defense Forces could not afford to miscalculate. While other nations, like France or Kuwait, have been overrun, occupied, and nonetheless have survived to reconstitute themselves, Israel, in contrast, cannot depend on obtaining a second chance. Miscalculation on its part could have had devastating consequences and, thus, its situation is unique.

Why have Israelis been concerned with such scenarios? The backdrop of Israel's historical concerns has been the vast numerical superiority that Arab state coalitions potentially enjoyed against it throughout its history. This

army had to hold a defensive line until Israel's mobilization of the reserves was completed.

Given its narrow geographical dimensions, a future attack launched from the 1949 armistice lines against Israel's **nine-mile-wide** waist could easily split the country in two.

Terrorism has also been added to Israel's concerns, in addition to the threat of a conventional military attack. From a strategic-military perspective, then, the right to defensible borders means that Israel must retain a safety zone in order to contend with a range of threats in the future, even if it reaches political agreements with its neighbors. If aggression is ever resumed, Israel requires a clear ability to defend itself, by itself, based on an appropriate location of its borders with its neighbors.

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problem was exacerbated by the fact that the Arab armies were based largely on regular standing formations that could be battle-ready on short notice. In contrast, the Israel Defense Forces were based mostly on reserve units, meaning that a relatively small Israeli standing

What Makes a Border Defensible?

How is it possible to evaluate whether a border is defensible? To make such a determination, a simple question may be asked: If Israel were to come under attack by a conventional army, or some combination of ground forces, ballistic missiles, and terrorist cells, would the border and the space behind it be sufficient to allow the Israel Defense Forces to fulfill their defensive mission with a high probability of success?

The answer to this question must be based purely on military considerations. Indeed, there are other factors that might be considered as part of the decision-making process when a state's borders are being determined: demography, economics, history, or water resources. But these other factors, that fall under the rubric of national security interests, are not germane to ascertaining

A Continuing Need to Defend Against External Threats

The entire discussion about defensible borders makes sense only if it is assumed that in the future Israel will indeed need to defend itself against an external enemy. If Israel could be assured that it would not be attacked from outside its borders, then there would be no need for defensible borders and no need to examine whether Israel could defend itself from within a certain border. Under such conditions, borders might be based on non-military considerations, such as demography or historical rights. Belgium does not need defensible borders, given the reality of Western Europe today (though it may have needed defensible borders seventy years ago).

The basic assumption in this discussion is that Israel is not about to find itself in a Western European or North American reality

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whether a border is defensible. Moreover, the consideration of other factors in determining borders must not be allowed to obscure the paramount question of whether Israel will be able to defend itself and survive from within those future borders in the event of war.

– Israel is likely to face some sort of external threat in the future. Three such threats should be considered in this context:

1. The threat of classical conventional war, involving armored units, self-propelled

artillery, and attack aircraft; increasingly in the future these platforms will be armed with precision-guided munitions.

2. The threat of long-range missiles – both conventional and non-conventional.
3. The threat of terrorism, either by means of infiltrating terrorists, such as suicide bombers, or through the use of mortars, rockets, and other ground-to-ground fire that employs a steep trajectory.

Since there is no debate that in the future Israel will face the threat of missiles and terrorism, it is useful to ask whether the classical conventional threat to Israel continues to exist. Could the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973 return? It could be argued that conditions have entirely changed; Israel has peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan that have withstood the test of time. After 2003, the threat of Iraq seems to have been

Long-Term Strategic Threats

The determination of defensible borders must be based on an assessment that takes into account potential long-term strategic threats as well. In this context, the following questions need to be considered:

1. Is there any way to guarantee that Iraq will not evolve into a radical Shi'ite state that is dependent on Iran and hostile to Israel (differences between Iraqi and Iranian Shi'ites notwithstanding)? Indeed, King Abdullah of Jordan has warned of a hostile Shi'ite axis that could include Iran, Iraq, and Syria.
2. Is it not conceivable that a Palestinian state will arise in the West Bank that will ultimately take over Jordan? It is worth recalling that just as Iraq has a Shi'ite majority, Jordan already has a Palestinian

Is there any way to guarantee that Iraq will not evolve into a radical Shi'ite state that is dependent on Iran and hostile to Israel? Is it not conceivable that a Palestinian state will arise in the West Bank that will ultimately take over Jordan? Is it not possible that in the future, militant Islamic elements will

neutralized. In addition, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Syria finds it more difficult to arm itself sufficiently. However, this is only a relatively static snapshot of Israel's strategic situation over the last ten years.

majority. Can Israel defend itself if it is attacked by a Palestinian state that stretches from Iraq to Kalkilya?

3. Is it not possible that in the future, militant Islamic elements will succeed in gaining control of the Egyptian regime?

None of these possible scenarios can be discounted; each of them, and certainly their combination, requires thinking about how to defend Israel against a classical military threat. It is important to remember that during the 1990s, Middle Eastern armies continued to procure new conventional weapons, and did not just devote their resources to missiles and non-conventional armaments alone. In addition, while the Soviet Union no longer exists as a major weapons supplier, the military industries of Russia and Europe may be expected to continue to sell their state-of-the-art weaponry to the oil-rich Middle East, while at the same time the U.S. seeks to modernize the military forces of its Arab partners as well.

Only those who can promise with complete certainty that none of these scenarios will emerge are intellectually exempt from answering the question of how

nuclear power, a development that is already on the horizon. Rather than replacing the traditional conventional threat, a nuclear Iran will only reinforce it. In Cold War Europe, despite being under the umbrella of mutual deterrence, both NATO and the Warsaw Pact nonetheless felt compelled to modernize their conventional armies. Furthermore, the armored corps of each alliance remained the primary military formation for deciding the outcome of wars. Missiles represented an added dimension of firepower, like long-range artillery, but they did not replace the ground armies of either alliance. In a future Middle East where deterrence systems neutralize one another, the conventional military balance on the ground will again become pivotal for determining the overall balance of power.

Nonetheless, despite the experience of Western armies, there is a tendency among



Israel is to defend itself from the threat of a conventional army at its border.

What makes these challenges all the more immediate is the fact that the Middle East as a whole will be fundamentally transformed the moment Iran becomes a

some who analyze Israel's territorial concerns to deflect the discussion from the threat of classical conventional armies to the world of "advanced technology." According to this line of argument, even if a conventional military threat is posed against Israel in the future, the

Israel Defense Forces can employ advanced technological capabilities, including precision-guided munitions, and thereby make up for any geographic inferiority. But those who adopt this reasoning ignore the possibility that eventually Israel's adversaries will become equipped with technologically advanced weaponry as well. Moreover, topography is highly relevant for precision-guided weapons that might require the assistance of ground-based laser indicators. In short, it is erroneous to argue that advanced military technology obviates the need for any geographical advantage, whether this is derived from strategic depth or topography – rather, the opposite is the case.

The Necessity of Strategic Depth

The idea of defensible borders cannot refer only to the actual borderline itself. It must also include the area behind the border – the border area. When Western countries dealt with the question of creating a line of defense in Cold War Europe, their military planners understood that it is not the “borderline” that is decisive but rather the “defensive depth.” From a military standpoint, this defensive area included the entire width of Germany up to the Rhine (over 200 kilometers). This was to provide an area for retreat, were a defensive battle to be waged, so that a line of containment could be stabilized on the Rhine.

In Israel, too, after the Yom Kippur War, military professionals understood that the “line of containment” could never be the border itself. Therefore, establishing

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defensible borders for Israel would also require determining the territories from which its armed forces would conduct their operations and those from which Israeli forces would be able to withdraw. The 1967 borders do not leave a shred of this necessary flexibility. From

a purely technical standpoint, within the 1967 borders Israel loses the ability to defend itself.

According to the principles of defense adopted by armies all over the world, there are three basic criteria for evaluating the adequacy of a defensive plan:

1. A battle space with the necessary depth, so that suitable defensive forces can be deployed in stages.
2. A reserve force of a sufficient level of strength to counterattack in order to restore the situation to what it was prior to the outbreak of hostilities.
3. A suitable distance from the strategic interior, predicated on the assumption that its conquest or serious damage could undermine the army's ability to hold firm.

All of these principles presuppose one cardinal assumption about the conduct of wars:

Since the 1967 lines do not meet a single one of these criteria for establishing an adequate defensive plan, there cannot be any doubt whatsoever that these cannot be said to constitute defensible or secure borders. The 1967 lines may have certain other advantages from a non-military perspective; some might even think, as a result, that they are good lines. But from a professional military standpoint, relying on the 1967 lines to defend the State of Israel entails an enormous risk, because an army that is deployed along them will not be able to guarantee Israel's defense, should there be a war in the future.

From a purely technical standpoint, within the 1967 borders Israel loses the ability to defend itself. There is a necessity for sufficient depth for the reserve forces to mass and for adequate space before enemy forces reach the strategic interior. An army that is deployed along the 1967 lines will not be able to guarantee Israel's defense.

since no defensive system will remain the same as it was at the beginning of an attack – and must break apart – there is a necessity for sufficient depth for the reserve forces to mass and there is a need for adequate space before enemy forces reach the strategic interior of a state.

Is Pre-emptive War an Option in Place of Strategic Depth?

The main alternative strategy which some military professionals advocate to make up for the weakness of the 1967 lines is that of “taking the war to the enemy’s territory” by having Israel carry out a pre-emptive attack, conduct a war on enemy territory, and, by doing so, create the necessary depth for defense. However, this approach makes the acquisition of an adequate defensive capability conditional on a difficult political decision: to launch a war and conquer territory beyond a state’s own political border. There is no guarantee that a future leadership will take such a decision. It is instructive, in this context, to recall that in 1973, Prime Minister Golda Meir had trouble deciding on a limited air strike, even after the Egyptians and the Syrians had already deployed their

from states that formally were signatories to peace treaties, the chances that an Israeli government would violate them with pre-emptive action are nil.

That is why in the political agreement with Egypt, Israel insisted on the creation of demilitarized zones and limited forces areas in the Sinai Desert. This provided Israel with a safety net in the event that there was a change of intent on the Egyptian side in the future. Two hundred kilometers of desert, containing no significant army, gives Israel a certain amount of forward depth, within the territory of a neighboring state. It is clear, however, that there is no possibility of creating a similar space in the West Bank on Israel’s eastern border, which is far closer to the most vital elements of Israel’s strategic interior than is the case with the Egyptian border. In the narrower West Bank, Israel must already be positioned with its forces, utilizing

While a policy of pre-emptive attack could theoretically create the necessary depth for defense, if the threat to Israel were to emanate from states that formally were signatories to peace treaties, the chances that an Israeli government would violate them with pre-emptive action are nil.

forces to offensive positions to Israel’s south and north. Who can guarantee that a future Israeli government would decide in time to pre-empt an enemy attack – especially if there are already political arrangements in place? If the threat to Israel were to emanate

the high terrain available, as well as other unique topographical conditions, in order to create an adequate defense in the event of the emergence of a threat from the east.

In general, from a professional military standpoint, it would be a serious

error by those responsible for Israel's security to rely on a future Israeli decision to launch a pre-emptive strike in order to gain the necessary depth to defend Israel from an imminent threat. Israel's security cannot be based on the certainty that such a "counter-attack in advance" will be conducted. Thus, it is impossible for Israel to rely on its defensive capacity at the 1967 "green line" on its eastern border.

The U.S. Military's View: Control the West Bank Mountain Ridge

The same conclusion was reached by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff back in 1967, when they were asked to express their view about what minimal territorial modifications would have to be added to Israel in order to create an effective defense line against conventional coalition attacks and against terrorism. A memorandum to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara from June 29, 1967, signed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Earl Wheeler, concluded: "From a strictly military point of view, Israel would require the retention of some captured Arab territory in order to provide militarily defensible borders." According to the Joint Chiefs, their determination of the territory to be retained was based on "accepted tactical

In 1967, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded: "From a strictly military point of view, Israel would require the retention of some captured Arab territory in order to provide militarily defensible borders." In the West Bank Israel should "control the prominent high ground running north-south."

principles such as control of commanding terrain, use of natural obstacles, elimination of enemy-held salients, and provision of defense in depth for important facilities and installations."

The main conclusion of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff regarding the West Bank was that Israel should “control the prominent high ground running north-south.” The line they recommended ran “east of the main north-south highway that connects Jenin-Nablus, al-Bira, and Jerusalem.” They explained that “the envisioned defense line would run just east of Jerusalem.” From there the line would run southeast to the Dead Sea at Wadi al Daraja. The Joint Chiefs also voiced their view with respect to the Golan Heights, where they recommended Israel holding on to a line 15 miles east of the pre-1967 line, so that it controlled “the terrain which Syria had used effectively in harassing the border area.”

Nearly forty years have passed since the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared their memorandum for the Johnson administration. Is all of this still relevant? Clearly, the geography and topography have not changed, and military technology has

1. Back in 1967, most Middle Eastern armies were made up of relatively slow infantry formations. Today, Middle Eastern armies are structured around highly mobile armored and mechanized formations that can fight continuously over much longer stretches of time. Today’s military formations, moreover, can envelop and conquer much wider territories than in the past. These changes only reinforce the conclusions drawn by the U.S. military in 1967 about Israel’s need for defensible borders.
2. The range of effective fire has also grown with the advent of new military technologies. This is true with respect to defensive weapons, such as anti-tank missiles, as well as offensive weapons, including aerial-delivered and artillery projectiles. This change lends greater force to the U.S. conclusions about Israel’s defensive needs on the ground. This is also why the minimal defensive depth that the

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not negated their conclusions, either. Indeed, there have been significant developments in the size, quality, and structure of the armed forces of the Arab states surrounding Israel that makes the analysis of the Joint Chiefs of Staff even more compelling today:

- U.S. Army has defined as necessary for its own divisions has almost doubled in recent years.
3. Precision-guided weapons will become a dominant factor for both sides on the battlefield in the future. As long as such

weaponry was in Israeli hands alone, this clear-cut advantage in military technology enabled the Israel Defense Forces to cope with inferior conditions on the ground, such as disadvantageous terrain or inadequate depth. But when Israel's adversaries also possess precision-guided weapons, then defensible borders become an absolute necessity for which there is no possible substitute.

If Israel does not control the defensive line proposed by U.S. planners, the Israel Defense Forces will pay a steep or impossible price in the event of war. Israel will be unable to defend itself since all of its civilian and strategic military infrastructure, as well as Israel's own fighting forces, will be spread out as in a computer game opposite a hostile military enjoying the benefit of the dominant terrain of the West Bank. The opportunities to disperse Israeli

Minister Yitzhak Rabin, as well as Israel's current Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, have all stated that even if Israel will need to make territorial concessions, it must still maintain its ability to defend itself by holding "the high ground" of the West Bank. Rabin would refer to Israel's need to hold on to "security borders." Regardless of the terminology, the conclusion of all these former military commanders was that there is no possibility of defending Israel from within the 1967 lines in case of war, and certainly not against a modern army equipped with precision weapons. No responsible leader can promise that Israel will not have to face such a threat in the future.

In 1974, seven years after the memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a similar study was undertaken by the U.S. Army's Command and Staff College. It reached the same conclusion. In order to

In 1974, a study undertaken by the U.S. Army's Command and Staff College reached the same conclusion as the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In order to defend itself, Israel must control the high ground east of the central axis along the West Bank's mountain ridge.

defensive assets that might become the targets of an adversary's precision-guided munitions would be extremely limited.

In light of all these factors, it is clear why U.S. military experts and the late Prime

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The Erosion of Deterrence Increases the Likelihood of War

Finally, in the context of a discussion over classic conventional war, there is one further consequence to consider from a full Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines: after such a withdrawal the chances of war would actually increase, as Israel's ability to deter war would be eroded. A post-withdrawal Israel would offer a very tempting target, since it would be a narrow country with no strategic depth whose main population centers and strategic infrastructure would be within tactical range of forces deployed along the commanding heights of the West Bank. Whoever believes that war is impossible does not have to take this consideration into account; but all who think that it is possible, even if unlikely right now, must then understand that by returning

The Value of Territory Has Grown in the Missile Era

Some have argued that the advent of ballistic missiles has made the entire discussion about defensible borders irrelevant. In fact, the missile era creates an entirely new strategic situation precisely because missiles in flight cannot be stopped at a country's borders. In the face of such a threat, the dispersal of infrastructure installations and weapons systems, as well as command and control mechanisms, becomes critical. Only guaranteeing their dispersal ensures the survival of these systems after a missile attack. Missile defenses can blunt a missile attack, but cannot be relied upon to provide completely hermetic protection, especially if the size of the initial attack is considerable. Moreover, in the event of a nuclear missile threat, it is the survivability of a state's "second

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strike" capability that determines the level of deterrence it enjoys. Only a wider space will enable Israeli forces to have the necessary level of redundancy to survive a missile strike.

Therefore, the wider the space that a state has at its disposal for dispersal

and concealment, the greater the chances of preventing war. Conversely, the more an opponent sees that there is a realistic possibility of paralyzing Israel's response capability with a first strike, the greater are the chances that it will be tempted to launch such a strike. Thus, the value of territory and space has, in fact, grown in the missile era. This phenomenon is almost the same in the field of classic conventional warfare; the more the other side perceives its chances are greater, the more likely it is that it will risk an attack. Even if the borderline itself is irrelevant in the missile era, it is the size of the space behind the border that determines the ability of a state to disperse its forces and infrastructure in order to reduce their vulnerability and prevent them from being damaged.

In the Israeli context, there is another component of national defense affected by the vulnerability of national infrastructure to

of exceptional importance, since without them, the Israel Defense Forces lack sufficient power to defend the country. Clearly, the more the deployment sites of the reserve forces are dispersed and distant from one another and from the border itself, the greater the chances of completing the reserve mobilization and arming their formations before going to a war zone, even in the event of a missile attack. Moreover, in the borderline area itself, if the reserve mobilization is delayed in any way by a barrage of ballistic missiles, then the initial terrain conditions for the small, numerically inferior, standing Israeli forces to hold back an initial assault will be absolutely critical, especially if they must fight for an extended period of time without the benefit of reinforcement.

Since most of Israel's population is located just west of the West Bank, this is where the mobilization points must be located.

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missile attack. As noted earlier, the bulk of Israel's ground forces are reserve formations. The Israel Defense Forces only reach their full strength after approximately 48 hours when reservists reach the battlefield. For this reason, the successful mobilization of the reserves is

It is not possible to relocate them to the south, in the Negev. For this reason, the location of the border along the West Bank is critical to Israel's ability to mobilize and equip its reserve forces, and to assure they reach the battlefield as an organized military force.

Defending Against the Threat of Terrorism

In the past, when permanent borders for Israel were under discussion, the threat of terrorism was not considered a major factor. Some have argued that in the modern era there will be no more classic conventional wars but only “low-intensity wars” involving guerrilla attacks and terrorism. Terrorism may involve firing curved-trajectory weapons (mortars or rockets) at Israeli population centers or dispatching terrorists to plant explosives or suicide bombers to blow themselves up among civilians.

With regard to terrorism by means of curved-trajectory fire on civilian centers, it is clear that the distance of population centers from the borderline is of critical importance. Only the difference in distance explains why the Kassam rockets fired by Hamas from the

city from the Lebanese border. If Israel’s eastern border becomes the 1967 line, this will enable terrorists to fire on the suburbs of Tel Aviv even without Katyusha rockets. And should Katyusha rockets arrive in the West Bank, no Israeli city will be immune from them. Since it is impossible for Israel to stop curved-trajectory fire from a territory that is no longer under its military control, sufficient distance is the only limiting factor preventing harm to Israeli population centers (see Map 4).

With regard to penetrations by terrorists, the line created on the ground – whether a security fence or a barrier – is only one component of an effective defense. No less important is the distance on both sides of that line. If a terrorist has penetrated a security fence, the greater the distance he has to traverse before conducting his attack, the greater the chances of stopping him.

If a terrorist has penetrated a security fence, the greater the distance he has to traverse before conducting his attack, the greater the chances of stopping him. The chances of preventing a penetration also increase if the Israel Defense Forces control an adjacent zone that provides them with space, time, and the ability to act against those approaching the fence.

Gaza Strip reach the Israeli Negev town of Sderot and not the coastal city of Ashkelon – in this case, two kilometers makes all the difference. If there is a future war against Hizballah, it will fire rockets on Haifa and not on Tel Aviv, due to the distance of each

The chances of preventing a penetration of a security fence also increase if the Israel Defense Forces control an adjacent zone that provides them with space, time, and the ability to act against those approaching the fence.

Furthermore, an Israeli withdrawal

**Map 4: Threat to Israeli
Population Centers from West
Bank Terrain**



will greatly restrict Israel's ability to fight terrorism on its home ground, as it did so successfully in the West Bank when it had full control of the territory.

For many years there was no penetration of Israel's northern border fence and no attacks on Israeli civilians until the Israel Defense Forces withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000. A short time later, a Hizballah force crossed the fence, set up an ambush inside Israel, and murdered six Israeli civilians. This has not been repeated because of the use of effective Israeli deterrence against one of Hizballah's main backers – Syria. But if someone in Damascus decides to resume such attacks inside Israel from southern Lebanon, the chances of preventing this are small as long as the Israel Defense Forces are not on both sides of the fence.

Similarly, the success of the security fence around the perimeter of the Gaza

freedom of movement of the Israel Defense Forces to thwart impending attacks from inside Gaza has contributed as well to the success of the Gaza fence. If an effective Palestinian security service does not emerge that prevents attacks from Gaza after Israel's disengagement from the area, it remains to be seen if the Gaza security fence will be able to stop hostile infiltration as successfully as it has in the past.

In short, security zones and the creation of tactical space are critical for combating terrorist infiltration; thus, territorial considerations are an inherent part of the war on terrorism, as well.

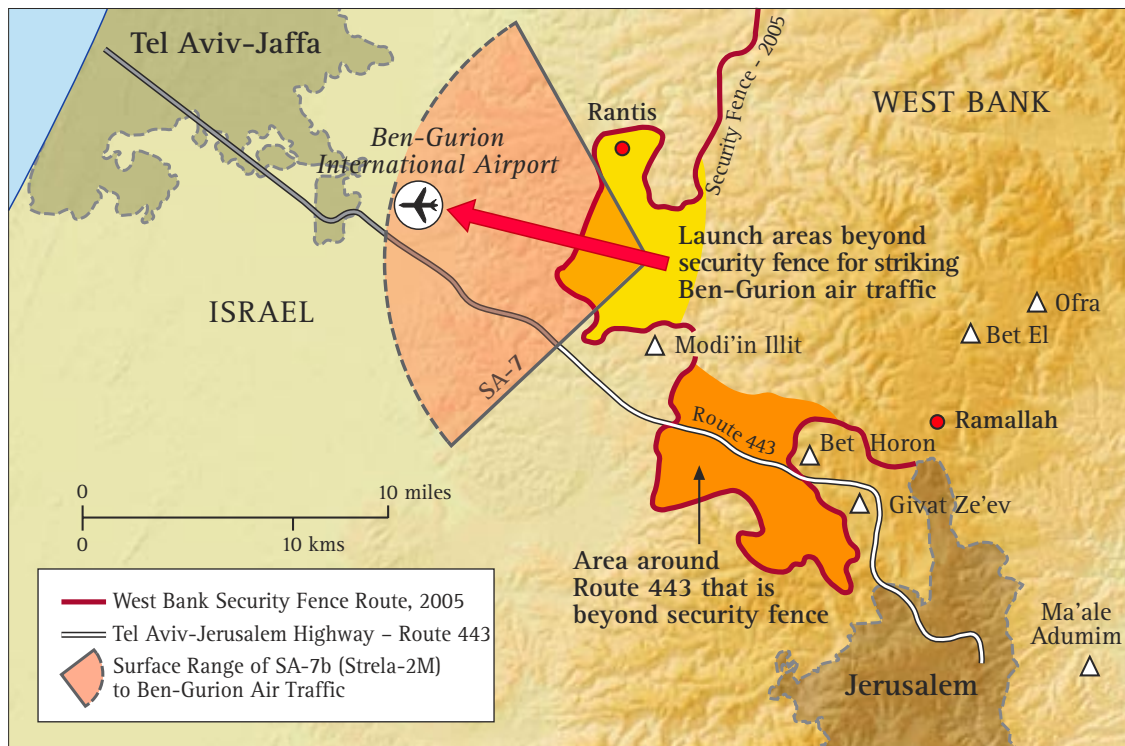
In combating terrorism, one further factor must be taken into account that directly involves the issue of defensible borders. The ability of terrorist groups to attack Israel depends to a large extent on the quality of the weaponry they possess. There is

Without Israeli control of the relevant territory east of the 1967 line, there is no way the Israel Defense Forces can prevent the firing of rockets and mortars from the hills dominating Ben-Gurion International Airport. One mortar shell per week in its vicinity will be enough to stop air transport completely.

Strip in preventing the infiltration of suicide bombers in the past four years emanated from the creation of a security zone inside the Gaza fence, where the movement of terrorists could be stopped even before they reached the fence itself. Additionally, the

no doubt that one of the greatest successes in the war on terrorism in recent years has been Israel's ability to isolate the West Bank and prevent the introduction of more escalatory weaponry to the Palestinians through Jordan. In comparison, Israel's efforts to prevent the

Map 5: Vital Israeli Interests Threatened from Strategic Terrain Beyond the Security Fence: Protecting Ben-Gurion Airport and the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem Highway



smuggling of weapons from Egypt into the Gaza Strip have not always been successful. Redeploying the Israel Defense Forces along the 1967 lines would change this situation fundamentally.

Moving Israel's eastern border from the Jordan River to the 1967 line will enable terrorists in the West Bank's hills to obtain whatever weapons they seek, increasing the threat to Israel. Quite apart from the durability of the new border, Katyusha rockets will make their way into the territories and their effect will be felt immediately. Indeed, just one mortar shell per week in the vicinity of Ben-Gurion International Airport will be enough to stop air transport completely. Without Israeli control of the relevant territory east of the 1967 line, there is no way the Israel Defense Forces can prevent such firing. Moreover, the introduction of shoulder-fired, anti-aircraft missiles in the hills dominating Ben-Gurion

Lessons of the Second Lebanon War and Unilateral Withdrawal

Two events – the Second Lebanon War and the results of the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza – made clear how important it is to have secure, defensible borders.

The Second Lebanon War began because the IDF did not guard the border fence and operated only on the Israeli side, and for the same reason an Israeli soldier was abducted into Gaza and made a prisoner of terrorists. The ambush prepared by Hizballah for the IDF force in the north and the abduction of the two Israeli soldiers into Lebanon, like the abduction in Gaza, and the IDF's slow response at the beginning of both events, proved to those who did not already understand that if there was no permanent activity on the other side of the fence, in the

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Airport would change the strategic equation completely (see Map 5). This development would also alter the ability of the Israel Defense Forces to use attack helicopters in the areas in question.

end the enemy would infiltrate. When that happened, it would be difficult for the army to respond quickly in enemy territory on the other side, because of political considerations before and after the event. Anyone who thought the fence by itself protected us from

terrorism learned the hard way that that was not the case. While it is possible that the abductions could have been carried out in territories under IDF control, and there have been a few such abductions in the West Bank, in those cases the events have ended very quickly because the army could respond quickly and on the basis of good intelligence, which is not the case if the IDF is not in control, even if the territory is very small, such as the Gaza Strip.

Beyond the importance of controlling the other side of the fence to guard it and prevent it from being exploited, there is another consideration. The terror groups in the north and south, protected by the fence which prevented the IDF from operating, made extensive preparations for the abductions, again proving the prime importance of territory and geographical depth. All of Israel's ingenuity did not prevent

of the war, it was possible for Hizballah to approach the border and fire 122 mm rockets from mobile launchers with sufficient range to strike Israel. Five kilometers, half the width of the previous southern Lebanon security zone (before the May 2000 unilateral withdrawal), would have been enough to drastically reduce the number of Katyushas fired at Haifa.

If Israel loses control of the other side of the fence in the West Bank and the small strategic depth its western hills provide, the center of the country, led by Tel Aviv, will suffer the same fate as Haifa and Sderot. For that to happen, there is no need for a hostile regime fighting Israel on the other side of the border. All that is necessary is to have a weak, helpless Palestinian government which allows terrorist organizations to acquire military capabilities without interference, which has been an exact description of the Palestinian Authority since its inception.

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a hundred rockets from falling on Haifa, Israel's third largest city and the center of its heavy industry. Hizballah's success was made possible by the IDF's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon. Because the IDF did not occupy the relevant regions at the beginning

Unfortunately, it does not seem that the danger will disappear the morning after an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, and this should be taken into consideration when conducting negotiations.

However, an examination of the

unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and the resulting loss of control over the border between Egypt and Gaza, like the description of the process of Hizballah's buildup in the north, illustrates another danger, which in the long run is liable to be more dangerous than that of the Kassam rockets. The Hizballah build-up over the years – before, during, and after the Second Lebanon War – was made possible only due to Lebanon's open border with Syria, which allowed a steady flow of weapons and fighters who had gone to Iran for training, as well as specialists from Iran's Revolutionary Guards who came to supervise and help Hizballah in Lebanon. The Hamas build-up, which is turning it into the same kind of guerilla army as Hizballah, was made possible the moment there was no longer an Israeli presence on the border between Gaza and Egypt, and Israel could no longer block the arms smuggling, which went from

of the attacks were launched after Israel completed its August 2005 disengagement (there were 1,729 attacks from early 2006 through November 2007, alone). The reasons why these organizations failed to export this activity to the West Bank, as well, were twofold. First, Israel was able to thwart the domestic production and deployment of such shorter range rockets in the West Bank due to its continuing military presence in the area. Second, because of Israel's control of the Jordan Valley, the Palestinian organizations were unable to import even-more threatening 20 kilometer range Katyusha rockets into the West Bank as they did in the Gaza Strip.

The lesson of the importance of IDF control of the Jordan Valley between the Palestinian entity (should it be established) and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is thus also clear. If the IDF loses its control, we will witness two situations which will

Because of Israel's control of the Jordan Valley, the Palestinian organizations were unable to import Katyusha rockets into the West Bank as they did in the Gaza Strip.

episodic to daily occurrences.

According to Israeli military sources, from late October 2001 until late November 2007, Palestinian terrorist organizations launched 2,383 rocket attacks against Southern Israel from the Gaza Strip. Most

be extremely dangerous for the State of Israel and which will also threaten regional stability: first, the region will be used to smuggle weapons into the West Bank from the east, from Iraq (and no one knows what will happen when the American forces leave),

and from Syria. In addition, terrorist groups from the Sunni al-Qaeda and Hamas, as well as groups supported by the Iranians and Hizballah, will try to infiltrate the area, and increasing pressure will be exerted on Jordan to permit them to do so. It is impossible to predict whether the Jordanian royal house will collapse under pressure, stubbornly resist, or collaborate, but it is clear that its situation will worsen. The temptation to turn the West Bank into another Gaza could destroy the Hashemite kingdom's stability.

Clearly, the threat to Israel from turning the hilly territory to its east into another, very large Hamastan, together with the possible scenario of hostile forces entering the Hashemite kingdom, make it necessary for Israel to insist on borders which can be defended, not only in the context of preventing terrorism from the West Bank from reaching Tel Aviv, but also in the

Summary

Looking at the question of Israel's borders strictly from a professional military standpoint, a withdrawal to the 1967 lines will put Israel in a grave situation for the following reasons:

- Israel will not have the ability to defend itself against a conventional military threat should it materialize in the future; given the current state of the Middle East, no one can promise that such a threat will not materialize.
- Israel's ability to prevent the destruction of its national infrastructure in the event of a missile attack will decline greatly, and its second-strike capability will significantly diminish.

Because of these two weaknesses, the chances will increase that Israel's adversaries

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has emphasized that Israel needs defensible borders and that Israel must not be pressured to withdraw to the 1967 lines.

context of strengthening IDF control of the Jordan Valley.

will decide to exercise their capacity to attack, in one of those two ways or in a combination of both.

- With respect to terrorism, when facing curved-trajectory weapons – from mortars

to rocket fire – the distance of a future border from essential areas of vital Israeli infrastructure is a critical factor affecting the success of such attacks against Israel. Moreover, to prevent other terrorist attacks against Israel, security zones add a critical element to any security fence in order to make it effective against infiltration.

The importance of geography and defensible borders has been voiced by leading international figures from different political camps. During a conversation with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, when the Barak government was contemplating a full withdrawal to the 1967 lines (with minor adjustments), I explained that the Israeli government hoped to rely on international guarantees and U.S. backing. Kissinger responded lividly that he tells everyone that Israel needs defensible borders and he

South Vietnam, no country took Kissinger's telephone calls. His implication was clear: do not rely on guarantees and risk withdrawing to the 1967 lines.

In Israel, the same conclusion has been voiced by others. Shimon Peres told *Ma'ariv* in June 1976: "One must ensure that Israel will not only have length but width. We must not be tempted by all kinds of advisers and journalists to return to a country whose waist is 14 kilometers wide."

The late Mordechai Gur, as Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces, told *Newsweek* in May 1978 that as a military man he had no doubt that to defend Israel it was necessary to remain in the high ground of the mountains of Judea and Samaria – from Hebron to Nablus. He also explained that Israel needed to remain in the Jordan Valley. And the late Moshe Dayan, Israel's former Chief of Staff, Minister of Defense, and Minister

adds that Israel must not be pressured to withdraw to the 1967 lines – and then Israel considers such a withdrawal and relies on guarantees. He explained that South Vietnam had international guarantees from twenty countries. Yet when North Vietnam invaded

of Foreign Affairs, was unequivocal in this regard: "Whatever settlement is reached with the Palestinians and the Jordanians, the key positions that guarantee Israel's defense must be left to the free and exclusive use of the Israel Defense Forces. Those positions are the

Jordan Valley and the mountain spine.”

And finally, the words of the late Yitzhak Rabin in his last appearance in the Knesset, one month before his abominable murder: “We will not return to the lines of June 4, 1967 – the security border for defending the State of Israel will be in the Jordan Valley, in the widest sense of that concept.” It was no surprise that this was Rabin’s security legacy, for already in 1980 he determined: “Our evacuation of the West Bank would create the greatest threat we can possibly face.”

Y*itzhak Rabin, in his last appearance in the Knesset, said: “We will not return to the lines of June 4, 1967 — the security border for defending the State of Israel will be in the Jordan Valley, in the widest sense of that concept.” In 1980 he determined: “Our evacuation of the West Bank would create the greatest threat we can possibly face.”*

Map 6: Israel's Strategic Vulnerability from the West Bank



Appendix 1

Military-Strategic Aspects of West Bank Topography for Israel's Defense

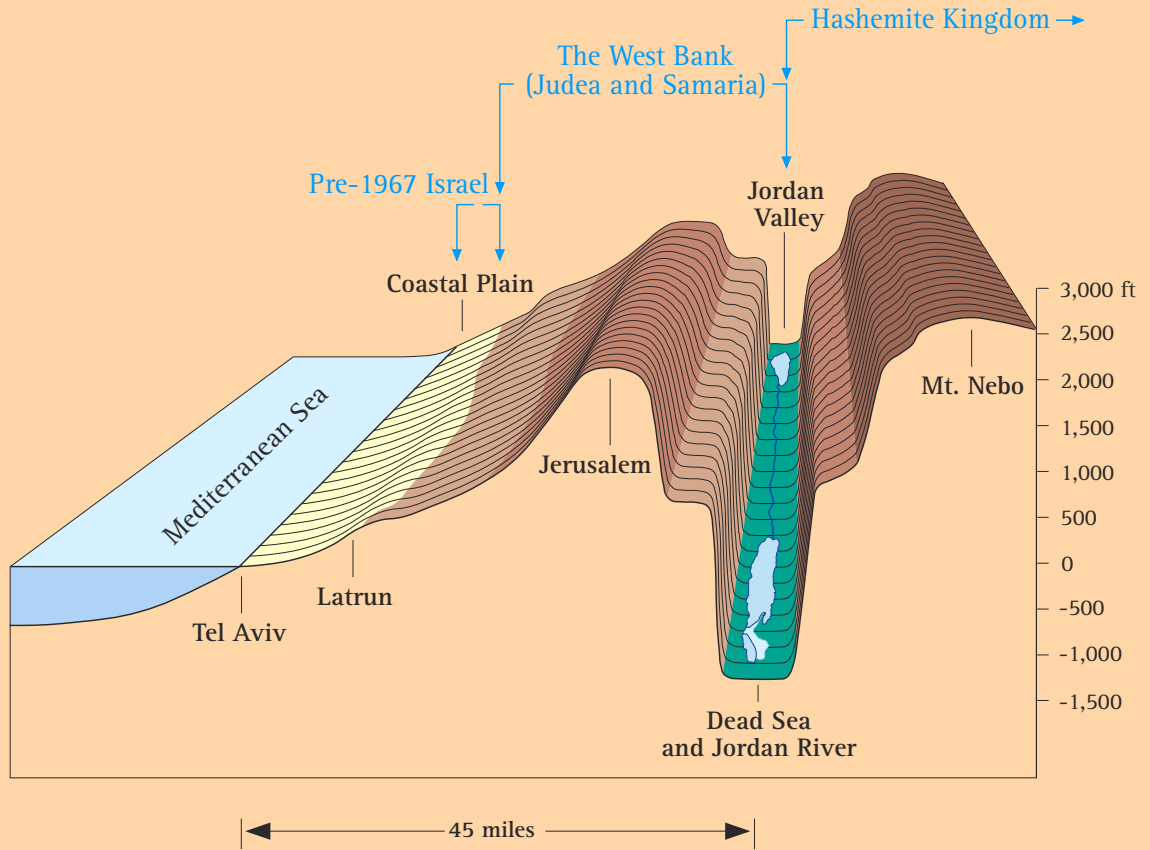
Due to its location and topography, the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) has played a vital role in Israel's national security since it was captured by the IDF in 1967. The West Bank is relatively small, covering 2,123 square miles (5,500 square kilometers), but it is situated immediately adjacent to the Israeli coastal plain where more than 70 percent of Israel's population and 80 percent of its industrial capacity are located. Moreover, the West Bank is comprised largely of a north-south mountain ridge that dominates vital Israeli infrastructure along the coast, including Israel's international airport, high-tech companies, and most of the major highways connecting Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. Rainwater flows down the slopes of this mountain ridge into underground aquifers in western Samaria that provide Israel with approximately 30 percent of its water supply.

In short, a hostile military force located in commanding positions along the West Bank could pose a threat to the center of gravity of the State of Israel, cripple or even bring to a standstill its economic life, and put at risk large portions of its population (see Map 6). The same cannot be said about other territories that Israel came to control as a result of the 1967 Six-Day War. Sinai is adjacent to the Israeli Negev. The Golan Heights dominates the Sea of Galilee and northeastern Israel. Military losses in these areas would seriously undermine Israeli security, but the State of Israel would continue to exist. Incapacitating and overrunning the coastal plain would terminate Israel's very existence. This is the primary factor affecting the strategic importance of the West Bank for Israel from a military perspective.

Another aspect of the strategic importance of the West Bank emanates from its role as a barrier protecting the vulnerable coastal plain from armed attack from the east. The West Bank mountain ridge may reach only 3,000 feet at its highest point, but to its east is the Jordan Rift Valley which is the lowest point on earth, dipping down to 1,200 feet below sea-level. This means that the West Bank mountain ridge forms a 4,200-foot barrier facing eastward that is relatively steep for an attacking ground force (see Map 7). The distance from the Jordan River to the apex of the mountain ridge is roughly 8 to 12 miles (the entire West Bank is about 34 miles wide). Given that Israel deploys mostly small, active service units that are numerically inferior to the sizable standing armies of its neighbors, the eastern slopes of the mountain ridge provide the only practical alternative for a defense line for the Israeli army while it completes its reserve mobilization to deal with an impending threat.

The West Bank mountain ridge contributes to Israeli security in other ways. Israel's

Map 7: Topography and Israeli Security: Utilizing the 4,200-Foot Mountain Barrier to Protect Israel's Vulnerable Coastal Plain



military control of the Jordan Valley allows it to prevent the smuggling of advanced weapons to Palestinian terrorist groups. Israel has only to patrol an area that is 62 miles long as opposed to the 1967 line which is 223 miles. While the Jordanian armed forces seek to halt the flow of illegal weapons across the Jordanian kingdom, they do not always succeed. Hizballah is active in trying to move illegal weaponry from Lebanon through southern Syria.

Additionally, the West Bank is crucial to Israel's air defense. During a period of elevated alert, Israel can deploy its air defense systems along West Bank hilltops in order to intercept enemy aircraft from forward positions and not from the heavily populated coastal plain. Short-range radar and early-warning systems situated on the coastal plain would have their line-of-sight blocked by the West Bank mountain ridge (this is not a problem for missile-interception radars). Therefore, for years, Israel has deployed these facilities on the high ground of the West Bank. It goes without saying that if the airspace above the West Bank was in hostile hands, Israel would have no warning time to intercept attacking aircraft. Today, it would take three minutes for an enemy fighter bomber to cross from the Jordan River over the West Bank and Israel (42 miles) to the Mediterranean. If Israel had less than three minutes to react, the provision of adequate air defense by means of fighter interceptors or anti-aircraft missiles would be doubtful.

It may be asked who is going to pose these threats to Israel from the east if Israel has a peace treaty with Jordan and Saddam Hussein has been removed from power in Iraq. The answer to this legitimate question is that national security planning must be based not only on the current political situation, but also must take into account possible changes in the intentions of Israel's neighbors. Israel will need defensible borders to protect it for decades, not just for the next five years.