

Executive Summary

While Israel's right to defensible borders has been recognized most recently by the Bush administration, unfortunately this has been largely overlooked in much of the recent public discourse on Middle East peace-making, which stresses the territorial aims of the Palestinians but rarely gives equal weight to long-held Israeli rights and defensive requirements. Indeed, in certain quarters, including parts of Europe, many of Israel's security needs are dismissed with the argument that in today's Middle East, advanced military technology has rendered obsolete Israeli insistence on achieving defensible borders.

When Israel originally captured the disputed West Bank in the 1967 Six-Day War, it was broadly recognized at the time, from London to Washington, that Israel had acted in a war of self-defense and was therefore entitled to new **defensible borders** that would replace the previous lines from which it was attacked. The main architects of Israel's national defense, from Moshe Dayan to Yitzhak Rabin, all embraced the idea that Israel needed new defensible lines to ensure a lasting peace.

This study concludes that the underlying strategic logic justifying Israel's claim to defensible borders, as well as its international legal validity, is just as relevant today as in 1967, and perhaps even more so:

- Israel's strategic planning for the future cannot be based on a short-term reading of threat assessments after the 2003 Iraq War. It must take into account tremendous uncertainties about the surrounding Middle East in the years that followed. No one can guarantee, for example, that a newly Shiite-dominated Iraq in five or ten years' time will be pro-Western or whether it will resume the hostility towards Israel of the past, with the full military backing of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- No one can be certain whether the setbacks suffered by al-Qaeda in western Iraq in 2007 are

permanent or whether al-Qaeda affiliates in Iraq will simply shift their center of gravity from Iraq to new sanctuaries in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan in the years ahead.

- Similarly, uncertainties exist about Israel's immediate eastern neighbor, Jordan. Israel's peace treaty with Jordan is a vital strategic asset. Nonetheless, though Israel hopes the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan will remain in power for many years, its eventual replacement by a new and potentially more hostile regime, supported by Jordan's Palestinian majority, cannot be ruled out.
- Within the 1967 lines, from a purely military standpoint, Israel loses the ability to defend itself. According to the principles of defense adopted by armies all over the world, an adequate defensive plan allows for sufficient depth to enable defensive forces to be deployed and to preserve a suitable distance between the front and the strategic interior of the country. Within the pre-1967 lines, Israel was only nine miles wide at its narrowest point. Most of its national infrastructure (airports, cities, industries, and inter-city highways) was fully exposed to hostile fire from military forces deployed along the adjacent West Bank hill terrain, which served as an ideal platform of attack for regional military forces.
- After the Six-Day War, 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." Regarding the West Bank, they wrote that Israel should "control the prominent high ground running north-south."
- Since the Joint Chiefs' report, the range of effective weapons fire has grown with the advent of new military technologies, such as precision-guided munitions. Indeed, the minimal defensive depth defined by the U.S. Army as necessary for its own divisions has almost doubled in recent years. In a fully nuclearized Middle East in the future, in which deterrent forces are mutually

neutralized, the importance of these conventional military considerations will only increase.

- According to the 9/11 Commission Report, radical Islamic terrorism is likely to threaten the West and Israel for decades to come. Even if Israel reaches an understanding with its immediate Palestinian neighbors, global *jihadi* forces are likely to continue to target Israeli civilians by infiltrating Palestinian areas and smuggling highly lethal arms. This process already began in Gaza, after Israel's disengagement in August 2005. At present, it is unlikely that the Palestinians themselves will dismantle the terrorist arsenals that have accumulated in the areas under their jurisdiction. In fact, the demilitarization provisions of the Oslo Accords were fully violated by the Palestinian Authority throughout the 1990s.
- **The current West Bank security fence cannot become a future eastern border for Israel.** Israel's security fence in the West Bank was only designed to neutralize the threat of infiltration by suicide bombers; it does not affect the threat from long-range sniper fire, mortars, and other high-trajectory weapons. The security fence would also not neutralize shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles that could pose a threat to all commercial aviation. Defensible borders in the West Bank must include adequate security zones that take into account this terrorist weaponry that has been used in the past and will likely be used in the future.
- Defensible borders must provide Israel with the capability to fight terrorism successfully, as well as to defeat a conventional military assault if Israel is once again attacked. For these reasons, defensible borders must include the following three elements:
 - Control of the external border of the West Bank along the Jordan Valley "in the broadest meaning of that term," as Israel's late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin asserted one month before his assassination. (This applies equally to the border between Gaza and Egyptian Sinai.)

- Broadening the narrow corridor connecting Jerusalem with Tel Aviv from both the north and the south, as well as establishing a defensive perimeter protecting Israel's capital.
- Shifting Israel's boundary eastward so that militarily vital territory does not end up under Palestinian control (e.g., the hills dominating Ben-Gurion International Airport and areas adjacent to Israel's former narrow waist along the coastal plain between Tel Aviv and Netanya).
- The Second Lebanon War in 2006 illustrated that while Israeli air power succeeded in suppressing heavy, long-range rocket fire by Hizballah, it was unable to detect and halt attacks by small rockets, with ranges up to 40 kilometers, launched from populated areas. Clearly, shorter-range rocket attacks against the most vital area along Israel's coastal plain can only be prevented in the future by controlling the ground dominating this area in the West Bank.
- Israel's requirements for defensible borders do not compromise the principle of Palestinian territorial contiguity, in the event that a political solution is reached.
- **Israel must retain the Jordan Valley in any future political arrangement with the Palestinians.** If Israel were to evacuate the Jordan Valley, much of the terrorist weaponry that has been smuggled into western Iraq, northern Saudi Arabia, and Egyptian Sinai would flow to the hills of the West Bank that overlook Israel's major population centers.
- Israel cannot rely on the Palestinian security services to hermetically seal off weapons smuggling to the West Bank. Indeed, the Palestinian Authority arranged for the Karine-A in 2002 to illicitly import 50 tons of weapons by sea, including 20-kilometer-range Katyusha rockets. Even under Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), in March 2005 it was disclosed that Palestinian

military intelligence had smuggled shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles into the Gaza Strip.

- UN and other international forces have been completely ineffective in the past in neutralizing terrorist infiltration along Israel's other fronts (in southern Lebanon, UN forces even colluded with Hizballah). U.S. and other friendly Western forces deployed in a counter-terrorist capacity for Israel's defense could come under a serious terrorist threat from militant Islamist groups (as did the U.S. Marines in Beirut in 1983), which could erode U.S.-Israeli relations over time.
- Palestinian control of the Jordan Valley would facilitate Palestinian irredentism into Jordan and thereby undermine the future of the Hashemite kingdom. It is a paramount Israeli interest that Jordan remains a stable buffer between Syria, Iraq, and a future Palestinian state. Any other development would pose a serious threat to regional stability in the Middle East as a whole.
- Israel's legal rights to defensible borders are enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution 242 from November 22, 1967, that remains the only agreed basis for negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The previous pre-1967 boundaries were only military lines created by the warring parties back in 1949 – they were not recognized international borders. President George W. Bush was the latest of successive U.S. presidents to fully support Israel's right to retain vital territory beyond the vulnerable 1967 lines so that Israel will be able to provide for its own defense.
- President Bush reiterated his commitment to defensible borders for Israel in his April 14, 2004, letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and again on April 11, 2005, during Sharon's visit to Bush's Crawford, Texas, ranch. The Bush commitments were approved by the U.S. Senate (95-3) and the House of Representatives (407-9) on June 23-24, 2004.