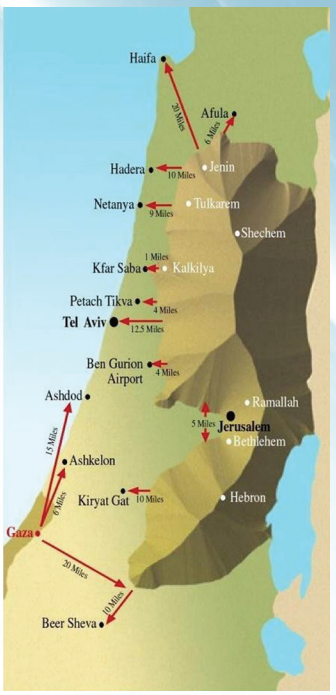
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THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

Bar-Ilan University

The West Bank's Area C: Israel's Eastern Line of Defense

Gershon Hacohen



Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 160

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The West Bank's Area C:
Israel's Eastern Line of Defense

Table of Contents

Introduction 5

The Changing Nature of War and Its Ramifications 14

Evolution of The Syrian-Hezbollah War Doctrine 28

West Bank Jewish Communities as a Security Asset 34

The Jordan Valley: Israel's Eastern Line of Defense 38

Conclusion 48

Notes 56

The West Bank's Area C: Israel's Eastern Line of Defense

Gershon Hacohen

Introduction

This study explores the strategic-military implications of the establishment of a Palestinian state along the pre-June 1967 lines. Its central thesis is that the creation of such a state, on the heels of the IDF's total withdrawal from the West Bank, will not only deprive Israel of defensible borders but will almost certainly lead to the advent of a terrorist entity like the one created in the Gaza Strip - at a stone's throw from the Israeli heartland.

Proponents of the two-state solution predicate their position on two parallel sets of arguments: political-ideological and strategic-military. On the first level, they claim that Israel's continued control of the West Bank erodes its democratic nature, while solving this problem by annexing the territory and making its Palestinian residents Israeli citizens will spell the end of Israel as a Jewish state. As the prominent Labor politician, Haim Ramon, explained to an inquisitive journalist:

> I consider the territories a burden while you view them as an asset, whose evacuation needs to be rewarded by either the Palestinians or the international community… Let it be clear that at the end of the day I will not entrust my fate to the Palestinians or the international community, because I have cancer. The control of the territories is cancer, which is why I will not let my enemy decide for me whether or not to undergo the cancer removal operation.[1]

While this study focuses exclusively on the strategic-military implications of the attempts at conflict resolution rather than their political-ideological dimensions, it is important to note that the end of the Israeli "occupation" and the establishment of a Palestinian

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state along the 1967 lines are not necessarily synonymous. In fact, in embarking on the Oslo process, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sought to delink the two ideas by striving to end Israel's control of the Palestinians while forestalling the establishment of a Palestinian state anywhere, let alone in the West Bank's entire territory.

In his last address to the Knesset on October 5, 1995, defending the interim agreement he had signed a week earlier with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat,[2] Rabin rejected the two-state solution altogether and foresaw "an entity short of a state that will independently run the lives of the Palestinians under its control" within narrower boundaries than the pre-June 1967 lines. The Jordan Valley area, "in the broadest sense of the word," was to constitute Israel's security border, and a united Jerusalem "comprising Maale Adumim and Givat Zeev" was to remain under Israeli sovereignty.[3]

Rabin's vision of ending Israeli control over the Palestinians was fully achieved. In May 1994, the IDF withdrew from the populated areas in the Gaza Strip and transferred control of the territory to the newly established Palestinian Authority (PA). In January 1996, two months after Rabin's assassination, Israel withdrew its forces from the West Bank's populated areas (known as Areas A and B). On January 20, elections to the Palestinian Council were held, and shortly thereafter, the Israeli civil administration and military government were dissolved. Since the beginning of 1996, and certainly following the completion of the Hebron redeployment a year later, 90 percent of these territories' Palestinians have not lived under Israeli occupation but rather under the PA's rule (in Gaza, since 2007, under Hamas's rule).[4]

In other words, the current dispute between Israel and the Palestinians is not about ending the "occupation" but about the future of the territories included in Area C (which contains the entire Jewish population in the West Bank, IDF camps, main highways and topographically important sites), and the necessity of Israel's continued control of this area for its national security.

Israeli proponents of the IDF's withdrawal from the West Bank, including most retired IDF/security establishment senior officials, base their strategic-military argumentation on four axiomatic assumptions:

- Territorial separation between Israelis and Palestinians, including massive evacuation of Jewish West Bank neighborhoods, will delineate borders, reduce friction, and create stability.

- If the security situation becomes completely untenable, the Israeli government will not hesitate to decide to embark on any necessary military operation.

- Should stability deteriorate to the point of an unbearable threat, the IDF will be able to remove this security threat within days.

- Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank and the end of the "occupation" will give any such military operation broad international backing.

This study rejects this strategic-military reasoning altogether. It will show that, given the major changes in the nature of war over the past decades and parallel vicissitudes in the international system (notably the media/communication revolution), withdrawal from the West Bank and the Jordan Valley and the establishment of a Palestinian state in these territories will confront Israel with an unprecedented security threat. By way of proving this argument, it will be argued that:

- Hezbollah's operational doctrine – embraced by Hamas with necessary adaptations to the Gaza context, which will almost certainly be adopted in the West Bank after the Israeli withdrawal – foreshadows a lethal security threat from a Palestinian state in the mountainous terrain overlooking Israel's narrow coastal plain, with its multiple strategic assets.

- This security threat will increase considerably in the event of a parallel conflagration in Gaza, Lebanon, and possibly Syria (after the Assad regime's reassertion of full control, with Tehran's ever-growing influence). Simultaneous fighting in Gaza and Lebanon is already considered a likely scenario. The addition of a West Bank state to the equation (especially since the Strip will form part of this entity) is liable to place the IDF in a dire predicament – not only in terms of resource scarcity (manpower, ammunition, intelligence gathering capabilities, etc.) but also because of the operational-strategic constraints on its ability to launch a decisive offensive in the West Bank.

- The demilitarization of the future Palestinian state – a precondition for its establishment in the perception of those favoring this option – is a pipedream, as evidenced by the resounding failure to demilitarize the Gaza Strip despite the PLO's commitment to this step in a number of signed agreements.[5]

- The absence of an Israeli presence along the Jordan Valley will create a land continuum between the Palestinian state and the Arab world east of the Jordan River (a scenario that troubled Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion as early as 1948),[6] thus making it exceedingly difficult to prevent the arming of the (supposedly demilitarized) new state. Small wonder that in his above speech, Rabin defined the Jordan Valley area, "in the broadest sense of the word," as Israel's security border. However, within five years of the speech, Rabin's political-security outlook had been emptied of all substance when Prime Minister Ehud Barak agreed (at the July 2000 Camp David summit and the January 2001 Taba summit) to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the entire Gaza Strip and 95% of the West Bank, which would also control the Jordan Valley. Similarly sweeping concessions were made by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in the November 2007 Annapolis conference.

- Massive evacuation of West Bank Jewish neighborhoods will not ameliorate the conflict, as argued by proponents of the two-state solution. Quite the reverse, in fact. As starkly demonstrated by Palestinian-Israeli relations during the Oslo years, especially after the 2005 disengagement from Gaza, such a move is highly counterproductive. In the "Gaza mode" of total separation ("they are there and we are here," in leftist jargon), counterterrorist warfare necessitates considerable resources: tanks, fighter aircraft, and occasional large-scale ground operations, not to mention the huge investments in countering the tunnel threat (or even such low-tech measures as incendiary kite terrorism). In the West Bank, by contrast, the partial separation between Israelis and Palestinians (in areas A, B, and C) has created a hybrid balance of intertwined infrastructure/transportation systems and daily friction, which in turn considerably facilitates counterterrorist warfare (and puts the standard of living in these areas way above that of the Gaza Strip). The removal of the

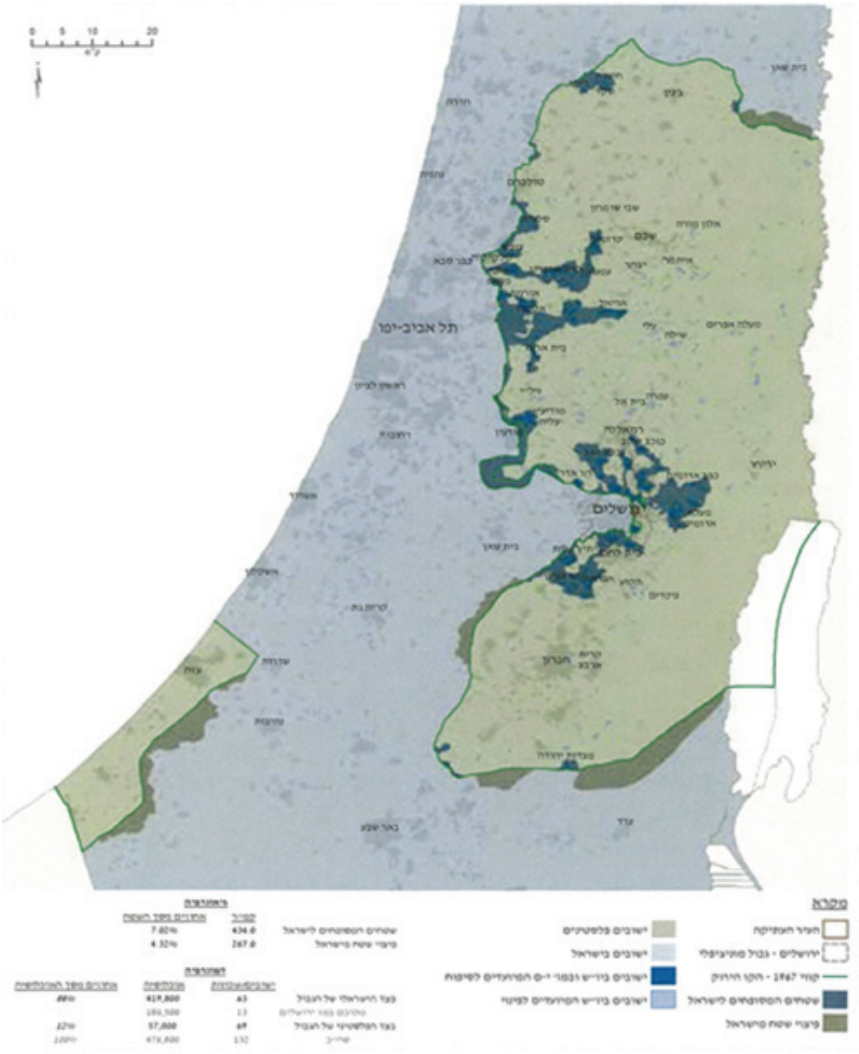
well-integrated Jewish neighborhoods from the West Bank will force all counterterrorist activities to be launched from inside Israel into the Palestinian population centers, where they will be met with tough resistance, which – as taught by the Gaza experience – necessitates the employment of massive military force.

- The claim that the IDF will be able to remove the threat of a full-fledged West Bank terrorist entity within days, along the lines of the astounding June 1967 victory, cannot be further removed from reality, even if Israel is not forced to fight on several fronts simultaneously. Suffice it to say that the operational difficulties faced by the Western armies in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, especially in densely populated, built-up areas like Mosul and Aleppo, illustrate the callousness of ignoring the existential security-strategic threat attending total West Bank withdrawal and the establishment of a Palestinian state in this area.

- Judging by the experience of the three Hamas-Israel wars (2008-9, 2012, and 2014), not only would the West Bank's recapture not receive international legitimacy but Israel would face heavy international pressure to immediately withdraw its forces. Even Russia was not immune from international sanctions following its recent occupation of the Crimea, which is but a small part of the Ukraine. The recapture of the West Bank would constitute the conquest of a sovereign state.



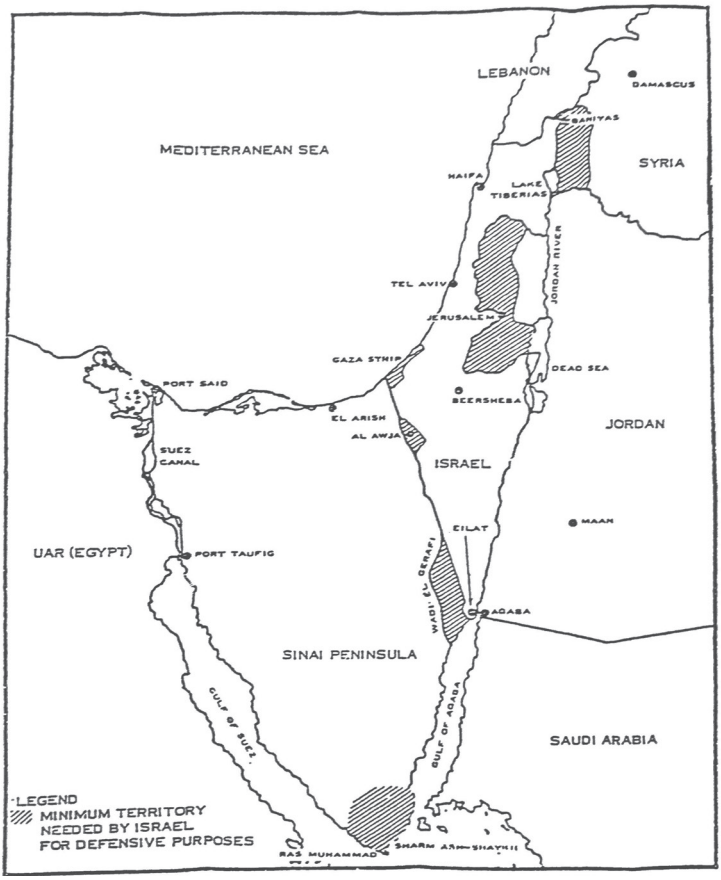
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The Israeli map presented to Annapolis (2008). Prepared by Dan Rotem and presented in the research of Omer Tzanani "Annapolis Process: Oasis or Fata Morgana?" Steinmetz Center, Tel-Aviv University and Molad (2015).

In this map, the separation between Palestinian and Israeli territory does not give Israel any security zone from which to inspect that the Palestinian state will remain demilitarized.

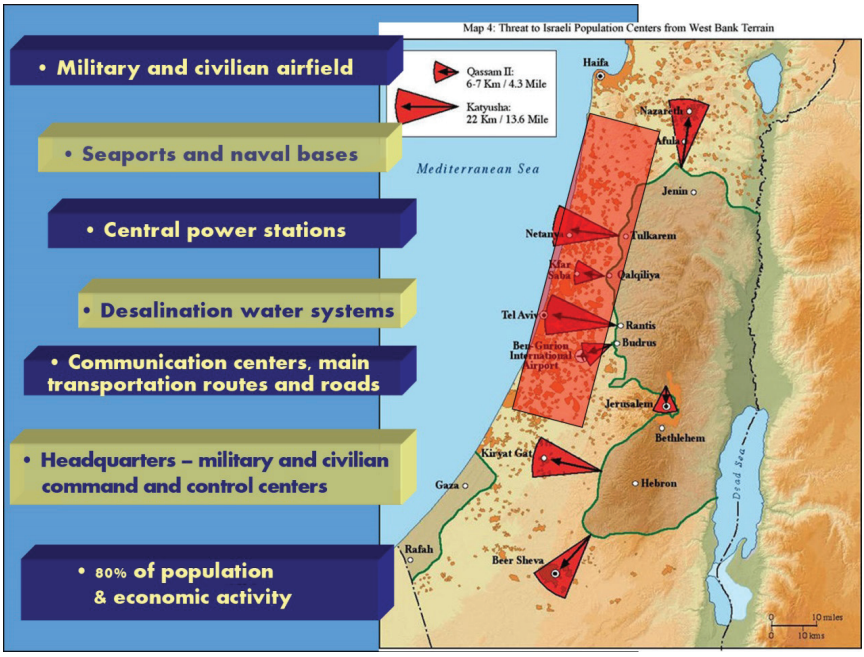
Map Accompanying the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum of November 1967 on Israel's Minimum Security Requirements



This map was discussed and presented by US Undersecretary of State Eugene V. Rostow, who analyzed the significance of UN Resolution 242. With his help, the Israeli request for defensible borders was supported.

In his article, he said, "In fact, all studies of the Israeli security problem reached the same conclusion – from the security point of view Israel must hold the high points in the West Bank and areas along the Jordan River."

The Central Strategic Asset of the Narrow Seashore



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The Changing Nature of War and Its Ramifications

The blatant disregard by proponents of the two-state solution of the dangers attending the creation of a Palestinian state is based on the belief that Israel will be able not only to defend itself from within the pre-1967 lines, but will also be able to repeat the astounding Six-Day War victory and recapture the West Bank within days should the need arise. In their view, the IDF's overwhelming military superiority eliminates the need for the "secure borders" demanded by successive Israeli governments ever since the Allon plan of the late 1960s and required by Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967, which established the "land for peace" principle.[7] In the words of former IDF Chief-of-Staff Lt. Gen. (res.) Dan Halutz, "The IDF will be able to defend every line defined by the political leadership. It is worth noting that the greatest military victory (after the War of Independence) was won in 1967 from within the border that the current leadership describes as indefensible."[8]

For his part, Maj. Gen. (res.) Amram Mitzna relied on his own personal experience. He claimed that "when we went to war in Sinai, we did not think that it was impossible to defend the state; and indeed within six days the IDF scored its greatest achievement and proved that the [national] home could be defended from within the 1967 lines."[9]

Haim Ramon expressed his firm belief in the stability of the 1967 borders by reverting to a standard argument by two-state solution advocates:

> I believe that quiet will prevail [after the creation of a Palestinian state], but let us assume that war will ensue. What kind of war would it be? The IDF, with all its capabilities against 3,000-4,000 Hamas fighters armed with nothing? Should the Palestinians endanger me, I'll occupy the West Bank in 24 hours. And how do I know that? Because this is what I did in Operation Defensive Shield [March-April 2012]… I reoccupied the area and collapsed the Palestinian Authority within a day.[10]

This statement, of course, cannot be further from reality. Not only did Operation Defensive Shield confront a far weaker terror infrastructure than that built by Hamas in Gaza (the likes of which will most likely exist in a future West Bank confrontation – in addition to Gaza, which will be

included in the prospective Palestinian state), but it took the IDF over two weeks to blunt the edge of the Palestinian terrorist war (euphemized as the "al-Aqsa Intifada"). Even then, without a sustained follow-up campaign lasting two years and involving daily counterterrorist activities throughout the West Bank, a decisive strategic victory would not have been achieved.

Sustained fighting against Palestinian terrorism, without the ability to achieve a swift and decisive knockout, is emblematic of the substantial changes in the nature of war over the past two decades. Notable among these have been the relocation of the fighting to the civilian urban space with the active participation of the local population, and the considerable "privatization" of warfare, which gives non-state paramilitary groups unprecedented strategic influence. These two trends develop in a complex, dynamic, and constantly changing relationship.

Urbanization of the fighting space

It is not the necessity to fight in a built-up urban space that underlies the change in the nature of war. Major urban battles occurred in World War II (Stalingrad and Caen, to give two major examples) as well as in the Arab-Israeli conflict (Jerusalem in the 1967 war, Suez in the October 1973 war). However, the logic of the fighting and the focus of efforts in these battles remained essentially military, with fighting conducted between two regular armed forces in a civilian area that had largely emptied of its residents and become a battlefield. Consequently, the problem of fighting focused primarily on the physical characteristics of the built-up area.

In the new war phenomenon, on the other hand, the fighting takes place inside the civilian fabric of life. This was the case in Donetsk, in northeastern Ukraine; in the IDF's operations in the Gaza Strip over the past decade; and during the seven years of the Syrian civil war. In these circumstances, military planners have to incorporate the needs of the civilian population into their operational planning while being fully attentive to humanitarian, political, legal, ethical, and media considerations, among others. In the words of British General Rupert Smith, who coined the term "war amongst the people":

> War amongst the people is both a graphic description of modern war-like situations, and also a conceptual framework: it reflects the hard fact that there is no secluded battlefield upon which armies engage, nor are there necessarily armies, definitely not on all sides. To be clear: this is not asymmetric warfare, a phrase I dislike invented to explain a situation in which conventional states were threatened by unconventional powers but in which conventional military power in some formulation would be capable of both deterring the threat and responding to it. War amongst the people is different: it is the reality in which the people in the streets and houses and fields – all the people, anywhere – are the battlefield. Military engagement can take place anywhere: in the presence of civilians, against civilians, in defence of civilians. Civilians are the targets, objectives to be won, as much as an opposing force.[11]

In the new organizing rationale of the space, the distinction between the military and the civilian domains is largely blurred as the combat zone has shifted to the labyrinthine built-up area, necessitating the attacking party to use large-scale forces. Clearing a multistoried building of enemy forces may require an infantry squad, and an infantry battalion may need one full day to clear an average street. The use of heavy weapons and aircraft to assist the ground fighting is liable to harm many noncombatants, and it is not always possible to ensure timely evacuation of the civilian population. In these circumstances, the attacking force may suffer many casualties, not to mention massive civilian losses in a manner that may lead to the loss of domestic and international legitimacy for the operation, to the point of endangering the attainment of the campaign's objectives.

In the Gaza Strip, in Lebanon, and in ISIS-controlled areas, as in the nine-month fighting over Mosul, military formations blended openly and covertly in the fabric of life and civilian infrastructure. Most of Hamas's and Hezbollah's rockets and missiles are hidden in civilian areas, as are their command and control centers. This creates a situation fraught with operational ramifications that make fighting in these areas extremely complex, first and foremost by necessitating the attacking force to penetrate the heart of the built-up area and to fight within the civilian environment. Gone are the days when the mere encirclement of cities would lead to their surrender. In 1917, the deployment of British forces in controlling areas around Jerusalem led to the withdrawal of

the Ottoman army from the city and its surrender. The same happened in the June 1967 War, when the Old City fell without fighting after its encirclement by Israeli forces. By contrast, in Operation Defensive Shield, the encirclement of the West Bank's urban centers did not spare the IDF of the need to fight its way into the heart of the Palestinian cities and refugee camps, just as the capture of controlling areas outside Gaza's population centers during repeated Israeli operations failed to achieve a military decision.

Indeed, the Israeli experience in the three major Gaza operations over the past decade starkly illustrates these difficulties. According to the American strategist Edward Luttwak, the nature of the Gaza combat zone precludes Israel from gaining both international and domestic legitimacy for its operations at the same time. The widespread employment of airpower, for example, helps ground forces achieve their missions with fewer casualties, which would be welcomed domestically – but it generates collateral damage that is bound to reduce international legitimacy. Lesser reliance on airpower, on the other hand, may increase IDF casualties and spark domestic criticism yet be viewed favorably in the international arena.[12] Such difficulties, and far worse, will face Israeli decision-makers when contemplating the use of IDF forces in the territory of a prospective West Bank Palestinian state.

Moreover, their intermingling with the civilian population makes the intervening armies vulnerable to terrorist attacks, as evidenced by the heavy losses sustained by US and NATO forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. A modern, regular army can readily penetrate the depth of fighting terrain, including built-up areas. However, as shown by last decade's experience, turning initial successes into real military-political achievements often requires prolonged and sustained activity within populated areas, which is bound to expose the weaknesses inherent in the nature and routine of regular armies. The widespread use of new weapons systems by terror and guerrilla groups intensifies the effectiveness of these threats. Here lie the seeds of the paradox whereby a regular army can win all battles yet lose the war.

This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that the fighting is not only conducted in urban areas but is also led by local forces. In the 1956 Sinai Campaign, for example, a relatively small armored force (an armored battalion followed by a reserve infantry brigade in buses) captured the entire Gaza Strip as the Egyptian soldiers fled the scene and/or were taken

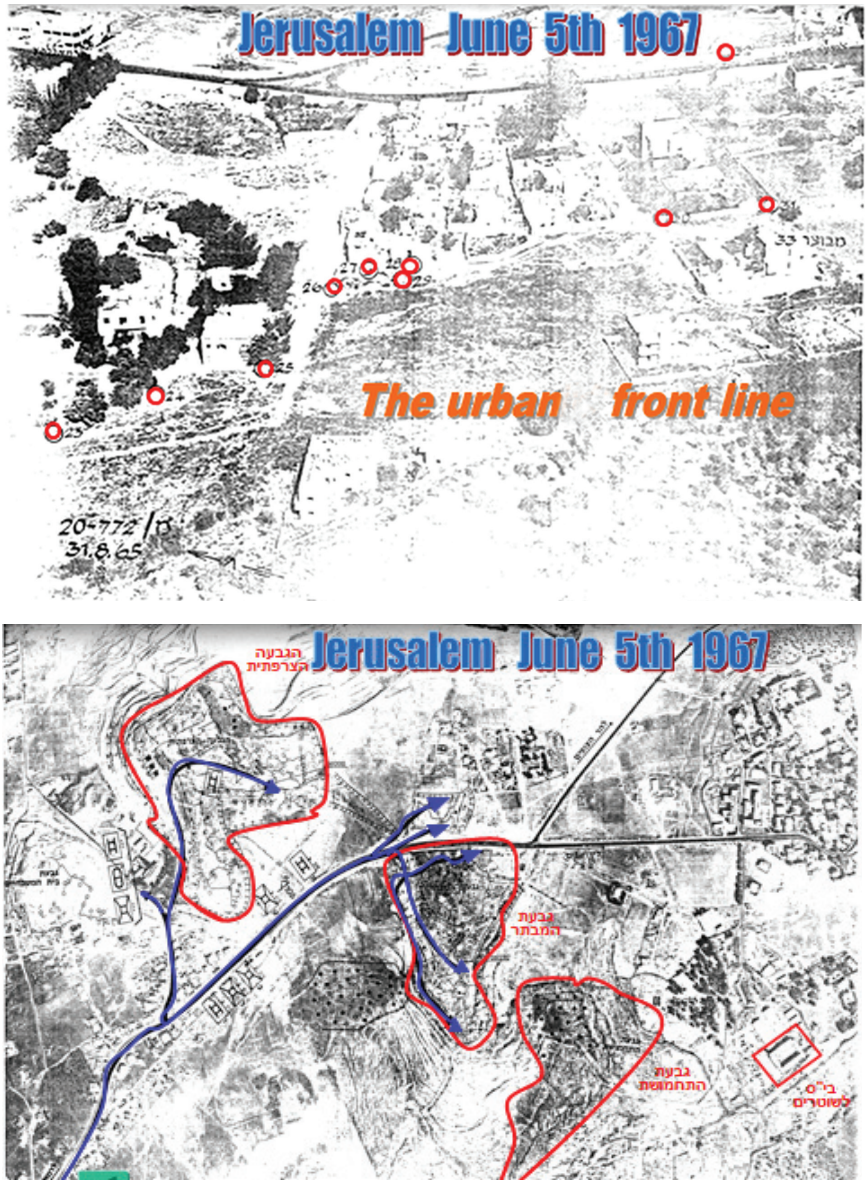
prisoner once the Egyptian commander of the Strip had surrendered. They were not Gaza natives and functioned like a foreign expeditionary force, and the largely unarmed local population took no part in the fighting. In the new Hamas-ruled Gaza reality, by contrast, the military force is organized in regimental and brigade formations manned by local fighters and commanders (e.g., the Shuja'iyya Brigade is based on residents of the Shuja'iyya neighborhood). Should IDF forces succeed in penetrating the depth of the area, Hamas fighters could abandon their posts and assimilate into their native environment. They could then reemerge with their weapons at an opportune moment, operate against the Israeli force, and disappear again within the population.

This was, in fact, the source of the US failure to suppress the Afghanistan insurgency and the widespread Iraqi insurgency attending the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. In the candid words of Lt. Gen. (ret.) Daniel Bolger:

> We did not understand the enemy, a guerrilla network embedded in a quarrelsome, suspicious civilian population. We didn't understand our own forces, which are built for rapid, decisive conventional operations, not lingering, ill-defined counterinsurgencies. We're made for Desert Storm, not Vietnam. As a general, I got it wrong. Like my peers, I argued to stay the course, to persist and persist, to "clear/hold/build" even as the "hold" stage stretched for months, and then years, with decades beckoning. We backed ourselves season by season into a long-term counterinsurgency in Iraq, then compounded it by doing likewise in Afghanistan.[13]

As with the American experience in Iraq, the shift of fighting to built-up areas deprived the IDF of its superior mobility and maneuvering capabilities, brought to fruition in large armored encounters in the vast and open spaces of the Sinai desert. In this type of warfare, an armored brigade of some 100 tanks and 400 fighters can deploy and/or hold a wide arena. The fighting in built-up areas, by contrast, requires the employment of substantial infantry forces within narrow spaces: an infantry battalion of more than 400 fighters can be easily tied up in less than one street. This type of warfare exacerbates the IDF's chronic manpower shortage, from which it has suffered from its early days, and provides a relative advantage to the enemy. This is why any widespread Gaza operation or attempt to dislodge Hezbollah from its south

Lebanon bases, let alone an overall assault on a prospective West Bank Palestinian state, would require a large order of battle and would take a long time for the attainment of a real and lasting achievement.



Air photographs from the 1967 War in Jerusalem show the capability of separating Jordanian military positions from civilian areas.





Aerial photographs of a refugee camp in Gaza and the center of Nablus City show coexistence of civilians and fighters in the same areas. In the past 15 years, in Lebanon and Gaza, military headquarters, rockets, and ammunition stores have been interwoven among civilian neighborhoods for the express purpose of concealment.

Warfare "privatization" and its consequences

In recent decades, there has been a steady decline in the number of interstate wars and a dramatic rise in the volume of internecine wars and armed conflicts between states and non-state actors.[14] The Middle East has not escaped this trend, with all violent outbursts rocking the region over the past decade triggered by ethnic, sociocultural, and religious factors and conducted among non-state actors as well as between them and incumbent regimes.

This process gained considerable momentum as a result of the geopolitical global vicissitudes of recent decades. Following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the disintegration of Libya, to give two prominent examples, vast quantities of weapons and military hardware fell into the hands of local and global terror groups and subversives. At the same time, the operational potential of low-cost, simple-to-operate weapons with minimal maintenance requirements, such as rockets, mortars, and anti-tank missiles, has substantially increased. The exploitation of this potential by terror groups and subversives has led to a change in the rationale for, and manifestations of, warfare.

Along with widespread proliferation of standard weaponry, a major technological revolution in the cellular and Internet fields has taken place over the past two decades, creating new potential for the use of simple weapons systems such as cellular-operated improvised explosive devices (IED) and remote-controlled rockets. New-generation technological components, as well as miniature flying craft and computerized GPS-operated drones, can be purchased off-the-shelf in the civilian market. These components are of a quintessentially civilian nature, and it is difficult to envisage future bans on their sale despite the general awareness of the adverse implications of their military uses for the balance of power between regular armies and guerilla/terrorist forces.

Readily accessible information on the Internet gives anyone know-how and guidance for self-producing military devices (e.g., practical training in using ordinary materials such as iron pipes, nails, and chemicals for the production of bombs, IEDs, and firearms). Moreover, with computerized lathes available for purchase in the civilian market, a small workshop in the basement of a family home can produce standard firearms, including

rockets. Such capabilities have long been available in the Gaza Strip and, more recently, in the West Bank as well. The organizing of significant combat activity has also become far easier, allowing for the advent of new threats that are mobile and difficult to monitor and detect.

But the most revolutionary change in the logic of modern warfare took place in the innovative exploitation of the potential of high trajectory weapons: rockets and missiles. This revolution was largely conceptualized and operationalized by Hezbollah, which sought to overcome the IDF's overwhelming superiority by developing a new operational logic that would enable it to bypass the need for classic weapons systems (e.g., tanks, artillery, and fighting aircraft) that had been considered necessary, indeed indispensable, components of modern warfighting capability. This has inspired other non-state groups to adopt new, cheaper weapons that are more suitable to the cultural-political contexts in which they operate.

Even national governments have internalized the advantage of outsourcing fighting to local groups and militias so as to reap the gains of proxy warfare without being directly implicated in the conflict. Cultural and doctrinal differences between the US and Russian defense establishments notwithstanding, one can detect identical perceptions of the changes in the nature of war, with each superpower observing and drawing operational lessons from its counterpart's recent experiences. Thus, for example, Moscow's military intervention in Syria – based on the combined use of Russian air power and ground fighting by local forces (the regular Syrian army and foreign Shiite militias) – effectively replicated the US operational pattern used in the first weeks of the 2001 Afghanistan intervention, with necessary adjustments to the Syrian arena. Washington then assimilated the Russian experience into the campaign to retake Mosul from ISIS (October 2016-July 2017), which was executed by local ground forces (the Iraqi army and Kurdish militias) with US air support.

The two superpowers' consistent abstention from committing regular ground formations to the Syrian and Iraqi war (as opposed to directing and training local armies by a handful of special forces) reflects not only their aversion to casualties but also a recognition of the new nature of

war as an ongoing engagement that is difficult to end, partly because of the state's slipping control over its planning and execution.

The privatization of the fighting, and its outsourcing by the state to non-state groups and militias, has effectively obscured the dividing line in the laws of war between regular and irregular soldiers. Thus, for example, the availability of weapons and the flexibility of their operation enable a farmer to go about his daily work while carrying a mortar, an anti-tank missile, a roadside bomb, or a rocket in his car. While harvesting his olive grove, he can use these weapons for an attack and then continue his agricultural work as if nothing had happened. Such a person is not a soldier. He is a civilian involved in combat, but one of a hybrid identity that eludes unequivocal definition. Whether he should be described as a terrorist or a freedom fighter, a criminal or a soldier, depends on one's cultural and political vantage point.

This phenomenon raises many philosophical, legal, moral, and social questions regarding the conduct of war that have far-reaching implications for those engaged in military planning and execution, as well as those involved in the buildup of military forces and their adaptation to the changing nature of war. Among other things, these questions address:

- To what extent is it legitimate for a state that is attacked by non-state forces to attack infrastructure assets of the state that employs these proxy forces?
- To what extent are the international laws of war relevant in light of the outsourcing of war and the limited ability of existing legislation to deal with non-state forces?
- In what ways and to what extent does this phenomenon affect the idea of state sovereignty and responsibility at a time when the state's government employs non-state proxy militias for external intervention?

Any proposed security arrangements for Israel after a full withdrawal to the 1967 lines and the establishment of a West Bank Palestinian state must address these issues and their implications for the post-withdrawal strategic reality.

The crisis of ground forces

The growing superpower reliance on local "subcontractors" is also indicative of their dissatisfaction with ground forces' response to the changing nature of warfare, to the extent of questioning these forces' organization and modus operandi and even, indeed, their continued relevance. These doubts manifest in three interconnected dimensions:

- **Time and space.** The deployment of conventional armies in fighting zones necessitates a complex and cumbersome logistical system of transport and organization. By the time these forces have completed their deployment, within days or weeks, the political and military circumstances may well have changed to the point of losing the opportunity for action.
- **Potential risks for decision-makers.** Finding themselves at a crossroads, in a tangle of strategic uncertainty, leaders seek to avoid as much as possible decisions with uncontrollable implications. By its very nature, the massive use of ground forces contains the potential for developments that are liable to get out of control.
- **Sociocultural relevance.** Despite all technological innovations, land warfare remains firmly rooted in the industrial age. It is an "old world" low-tech activity involving quantitative mass in constant physical friction with terrain conditions and an enemy. For societies that are now accustomed to the high-tech Internet information age, such a sharp change can be difficult to adjust to.

Given these difficulties, policymakers have been increasingly disposed toward other operational modes, thus further eroding the relevance of traditional ground forces.

Air power, for example, offers an almost irresistible temptation, if only because it is the only force with immediate availability for action and because the decision on its employment does not appear to inexorably lead to war (and isn't perceived by the public as such). In contrast to a declaration of mass mobilization, with its heartbreaking farewell scenes of soldiers sent to battle without knowing whether they will return, fighting aircraft operate from their bases, essentially out of sight. Above all, the decision to use air power does not seem to be irreversible, as it can be stopped at any moment – unlike ground operations, which involve disengagement and withdrawal.

Reality, however, is more complex. Keenly aware of the effectiveness of air power, especially in the era of precision-guided munitions, enemy forces have progressively and systematically improved their concealment and survival capabilities, using multidimensional systems in both built-up areas and underground. This trend has restored the need for boots on the ground. The logistical complexity attending the use of traditional ground forces has turned the special forces over the past decade into a panacea in the eyes of military planners. The combined use of airpower and special forces has thus become the dominant principle in great-power intervention in regional conflicts, forcing the traditional ground forces to look for creative operatiosnal modes if they are to keep their relevance.

The Israeli context

Changes in the nature of warfare and the difficulties they pose to traditional ground forces necessitate that the IDF rethink and redefine the new operational reality, beginning with the objective of the land maneuver. Only a decade ago, the IDF's basic military doctrine maintained that "offensive strives [are] to enforce a change in the existing political-strategic reality **through the application of the occupying state's sovereignty over the occupied territory.**"[15] It is clear that in current strategic and political circumstances, with the growing international illegitimacy of occupation and the imposition of sovereignty, and given the multiplicity of possible purposes for the maneuver, the offensive as an idea and a conceptual category has become diverse and context-dependent.

The taking of the Jenin refugee camp during Operation Defensive Shield, for example, was aimed at destroying local enemy forces rather than prolonged occupation (let alone applying sovereignty over the area). Had the camp been captured without a battle with enemy forces escaping unscathed, the operation would have failed to achieve its objective. By contrast, had the Jordanian forces vacated east Jerusalem without a fight in the June 1967 war, allowing the city's capture at a far lower human cost, success would have been complete. In this multifaceted reality, force-building cannot be guided by a single compass.

As for the operational level, the IAF's continued dominance notwithstanding, it cannot remove the rocket/missile threat on the Israeli home front without a ground operation, as demonstrated by the Second Lebanon War (2006) and Operation Protective Edge (2014). Special forces, however important, can provide vital support for air operations in certain dimensions, but their current order of battle precludes them from upsetting the operational equilibrium of such enemy forces as Hezbollah or Hamas. In these circumstances, future confrontation will most likely involve large-scale and prolonged employment of ground forces. This in turn necessitates that the IDF rethink the role and objectives of these forces, especially in light of the lingering "Six-Day War fixation" described above.

Those indulging in nostalgic memories of that great victory and who consider its West Bank repetition a foregone conclusion tend to forget that the 1967 war was a unique confrontation at a unique historical juncture, not a prototype for future wars. It was the last confrontation in which the IDF encountered regular armies that rigidly adhered to British and Soviet doctrines, which enabled it to win tactical and operational superiority at any given engagement. Since then, the Arab armed forces have undergone far-reaching changes that have adjusted their fighting to the sociocultural advantages and weaknesses of the Arab soldier: from Anwar Sadat's revolutionary conception of the October 1973 war to Hezbollah's strategy in the 2006 Lebanon war, which combined sustained rocket/missile attacks on the Israeli home front with stubborn fighting in the villages and along the roads in the thicket of a mountainous grove.

In changing their fighting patterns, the Arab armies and the non-state armed groups developed distinct local operational modes. This poses a significant operational challenge to the IDF, whose standard ground fighting capabilities are ill-prepared for the operational requirements attending rapid shifts of effort between fighting zones. Even at the height of the IDF's greatest victory in 1967, the need to prepare for fighting on several different fronts slowed its ability to move forces between the fighting zones. The opening of a new front in the West Bank after a comprehensive withdrawal will require the IDF to further diversify its operational toolbox.

On top of these specific operational difficulties, the IDF will need to pay close attention to the changes in the nature of war described above – especially the blunting of the ground maneuver's edge by growing urbanization, as the US and allied forces learned in Afghanistan and Iraq. This issue is crucial for the IDF, whose operational conception since 1948 has been largely predicated on the maneuvering approach. In the words of Maj. Gen. (res.) Israel Tal, doyen of the IDF's armored corps: "The maneuvering approach is the approach of the State of Israel and the IDF, because it is smaller than its enemies and because of Israel's sensitivity to the continuation of the war."[16]

According to the IDF's basic combat doctrine, "maneuvering is the main means of achieving a decision. The approach is essentially identical to creative thinking… Its main characteristics are: momentum and speed, which together shock and surprise the enemy."[17] In essence, this approach strives to apply concentrated force to the enemy's centers of gravity so as to achieve a quick decision and avoid prolonged attrition. In the words of Chief-of-Staff Gadi Eizenkot's August 2015 doctrinal pamphlet *The IDF's Strategy*: "The IDF's main approach to achieving a decision is the creative approach, based on focused offensive elements that target the enemy's weak points while exploiting relative advantages, notably momentum, pace of action and initiative, whose integration achieves shock and surprise."[18]

However, as shall be shown shortly, Hezbollah's and Hamas's reorganization in a way that compensates for their inherent inferiority to Israel's air and armored superiority has provided them with operational survivability that enables them to sustain operational activity even in the event of IDF penetration of their territories. Moreover, the gearing of both organizations toward decentralized warfare – expressed in the nature of their defensive systems and the logic of their command and control systems – makes it difficult for the IDF to implement its traditional maneuvering attack against their centers of gravity. The seeming resilience of Hamas's and Hezbollah's defense systems to a maneuvering offensive is nothing short of a conceptual transformation that the IDF can ill afford to ignore.

Evolution of the Syrian-Hezbollah War Doctrine

In the wake of Israel's May 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon, Hezbollah comprehensively transformed its war strategy having realized that the modus operandi that served it well against IDF forces in Lebanon had outlived its usefulness. In so doing, it adopted the offensive-defensive doctrine developed by Syrian Chief-of-Staff Lt. Gen. Ali Aslan, while adapting it to its operational needs and capabilities as well as the unique conditions of the Lebanese arena (e.g., mountainous terrain, multiplicity of villages, winding roads traversing built-up and/or forested areas).

Aslan's war doctrine

In contrast to the traditional Syrian strategy, formulated by President Hafez Assad after the conclusion of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, which strove to achieve "strategic parity" with Israel, Aslan sought to confront the Jewish state with a new kind of strategic threat that would offset the Syrian army's inherent inferiority to the IDF.

The roots of Aslan's conceptual change can apparently be traced to his encounter with the US war doctrine (known as the AirLand Battle) with its emphasis on massive, accurate deep strikes against enemy forces, during his tour of duty as commander of the Syrian expeditionary force in the anti-Iraq international coalition during the January 1991 Gulf War. Fearing that the adoption of this strategy by the IDF, which at the time was busy expanding its long-range firepower and intelligence-gathering capabilities, could render the Syrian war doctrine irrelevant, Aslan abandoned traditional offensive thinking in favor of an innovative and groundbreaking approach that reversed the interrelationship between maneuver and firepower.

According to the traditional Syrian doctrine – a qualitatively and quantitatively improved version of the October 1973 war plan – the main effort was to be borne by the armored and mechanized divisions that would attack across the Golan Heights, with long-range firepower (rockets and missiles) playing a supportive and complementary role. In Aslan's new thinking, these roles were reversed: massive firepower strikes across all ranges, including against strategic targets in Israel's hinterland, became the main operational effort while the maneuvering forces were relegated

to supportive and complementary missions, primarily in deploying in well-prepared defensive positions across the frontline for stubborn resistance against Israeli offensives/counterattacks.

Within this conceptual framework, the defensive effort assumed two major roles: creating a graduated defense system that would ensure the survivability and sustained operation of firepower assets throughout the campaign; and exacting a high price from IDF forces, spurred into a premature ground offensive by the sustained rocket/missile attacks on the Israeli hinterland. And to make matters more difficult for the IDF, the firepower and defense systems were augmented by enhanced commando regiments. Nearly twice the size of regular regiments and armed with effective, portable anti-tank weapons, these formations were charged with two operational goals: to launch preemptive strikes at Israel's front positions on the Golan at the outbreak of war; and to rapidly deploy along the front to prevent Israeli penetration into the depth of the Syrian defenses. The commander of the Syrian campaign was thus vested with three operational components for simultaneous use: firepower assets, ground defense lines, and commando forces.

Through this doctrinal shift, the Syrians hoped to avoid the inherent operational weakness of a linear offensive: the vulnerability of their ground forces to massive Israeli firepower as they lined up in bottlenecks on their way to the front. Consequently, the Syrian ground forces were assigned a primarily defensive role during the first stage of the campaign, if not in the subsequent phase, when they were deployed in a fortified and camouflaged defense system across the entire depth of the front from the first line of engagement along the Golan Heights to Damascus. From there they were to conduct a stubborn defensive battle, in what was termed by Aslan "the near battle."

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this new operational logic. In contrast to the classic conception of war, with its binary distinction between defense and offense as the two basic forms of warfare, the merger of these two basic operational components into a hybrid form of operation, sometimes dubbed offensive-defense, confronted the IDF and the Israeli government with a conceptual challenge of the highest order. In the new type of warfare, the two belligerents can attack each other with massive

firepower strikes deep in enemy territory without a single act of border crossing by ground forces, thus making it at times difficult to define which side is on the offense and which on the defense.

It is of course possible to ignore the dilemma and claim that the distinction between the operational concepts of offense and defense is little more than intellectual sophistry, but the problem has confounded the IDF and the Israeli leadership for quite some time in their attempt to gauge the continued relevance of the traditional interrelationship between firepower and maneuver. Thus, for example, Prime Minister Barak justified his readiness to surrender the Golan Heights on the grounds that the new Syrian doctrine makes war futile from Israel's point of view. For even if the IDF successfully breached the Syrian defense system all the way to Damascus, the Israeli hinterland would continue to be pounded by long-range strikes perpetrated from deep in the Syrian hinterland. In these circumstances, not only would the heavy cost of the war drive the Israeli government to seek a ceasefire, but it would also increase the Israeli public's inclination to give up the Golan Heights.[19]

Hezbollah's and Hamas's war doctrine

Even before the Syrian civil war rendered the Aslan doctrine irrelevant to this arena in the foreseeable future, Israel had to contend with the successful implementation of this doctrine by a terrorist organization operating from within a state and under its protection. In the Second Lebanon War (July 12-August 14, 2006), the IDF found itself fighting an enemy that engaged in two combined efforts: sustained, extensive rocket/missile attacks on the Israeli home front, and stubborn fighting in the villages and along the roads in the thicket of mountainous terrain. In order to find an effective response to these challenges, the IDF was forced to conduct an air and ground offensive deep into the fighting zone – one that failed to defeat the enemy.

Eight years later, the IDF fought a similar war in the Gaza Strip, which has been ruled since 2007 by Hamas. As in Lebanon, Israel was confronted with a determined Islamist terror organization, structured and organized along conventional military lines (battalions, brigades, standard weaponry, command and control systems, etc.), which had

adopted the key components of Hezbollah's doctrine. These included stubborn resistance from fortified defenses, both above ground and in a complex underground tunnel system, combined with sustained and wide-ranging mortar/rocket/missile attacks on civilian targets and accompanied by high visibility commando raid operations crossing the front to attack Israeli settlements.

Though subjected to constant air and ground attacks, Hamas managed to hold its ground for fifty-one full days, sustaining its rocket/missile attacks on the Israeli hinterland all the way to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem even as the IDF penetrated deep into its defense system. Hamas even managed to briefly neutralize Ben-Gurion Airport, Israel's primary international outlet. As MK Ofer Shelah put it:

> Operation Protective Edge was the longest military confrontation since the War of Independence. For fifty-one days Israel and Hamas clashed in a campaign that had very little movement... and many question marks… Israel emerged from the campaign without achievements and with many questions about the IDF's preparedness for the real tasks at hand. The campaign's dubious achievements in all spheres, including the use of force, attest to the existence of a deep problem... Wherever we look, Operation Protective Edge represents a deep conceptual failure.[20]

Beyond the operational problems attending the IDF's wars with Hezbollah and Hamas, the hybrid warfare adopted by the two organizations creates an inherent difficulty in identifying the operational-strategic situation in the event of major deviations from the security routine, such as intensive fire exchanges or abduction of soldiers. This in turn makes the decision on the nature of the response, with its possible escalation to war, ever more difficult and complex. Thus, for example, even with the benefit of hindsight it is not entirely clear whether the wide-ranging Israeli response to the abduction of two soldiers on the northern border on July 12, 2006, which acted as the opening move of the Second Lebanon War, was fully justified. Similarly, the difficulty in diagnosing the strategic situation in the summer of 2014 leaves a question mark over the inevitability of the 51-days-long Operation Protective Edge.

Under these circumstances, decision-makers find themselves in constant fear of sliding the slippery slope to war without being able to fully ascertain its necessity and/or the public's perception of this fact. This fear does not reflect their timidity or indecisiveness, but the reality that the identification itself has become complex and elusive. In contrast to a traditional war situation in which the strategic tipping point marking the transition to war is clearly identifiable, the war situations created by Hezbollah and Hamas made the identification of such tipping points very difficult and context-related.

Implications for the West Bank

Viewed against the backdrop of the changes in the nature of war discussed earlier, the successful implementation of Hezbollah's and Hamas's war doctrine in their armed confrontations with Israel over the past decade should conclusively dispel any remaining delusions regarding the IDF's ability to repeat its 1967 conquest of the West Bank after its surrender to the prospective Palestinian state. In the event of war on this front, the IDF will confront three major operational challenges:

- sustained fire strikes for many days on civilian and military targets in the Israeli hinterland in all ranges, from well-dug, fortified, camouflaged positions
- a multidimensional defense line – including underground tunnels – across the entire space, intended to exact a high cost from the attacking forces to the extent of raising doubts about the operation's necessity
- raids of Israeli border neighborhoods as a preemptive and/or opening strike, aimed at forcing the IDF to allocate significant forces to the protection of Israeli territory.

The deployment of firepower assets throughout the West Bank and the creation of a fortified defense system across this territory will provide the Palestinian state with built-in resilience that will enable it to continue fighting even in the event of heavy casualties and the loss of many defensive strongholds. This, in turn, will require the IDF to:

- neutralize the Palestinians' ability to attack the Israeli hinterland despite air degradation and conquest of much of the West Bank. (In Operation Protective Edge, Hamas continued to attack the Israeli home front even from areas captured by the IDF.)
- To defend settlements and cities close to the border from commando raids.
- To avoid the high costs of breaching the enemy's well-fortified defense system. Should the IDF be required to launch a ground offensive similar to that carried out in Lebanon in 2006, this will have to ensue from the coastal plain, which will make it highly difficult and complex to the point of unprofitability in terms of cost-effectiveness.
- To shorten as much as possible their control of the newly occupied territories so as to reduce both the human toll of prolonged occupation and its adverse international implications, which may well raise domestic doubts about the operation's success, if not its very necessity.

West Bank Jewish Communities as a Security Asset

Since the onset of the Jewish national revival in the late 19th century, frontier communities have played a central role in the national security concept in its broad sense. As the prominent military and political leader Yigal Allon put it:

> The defensive value of rural communities remains as important as ever: not only has the vital role of the frontier defense not diminished but it has rather increased due to the greater mobility of enemy armed forces on the one hand, and the necessity to allocate maximum Israeli forces to offensive missions on the other… The incorporation of civilian neighborhoods, especially frontier communities and vulnerable areas, into the defensive plan will provide the state with permanent frontline observation posts that can save the need for mobilized manpower... An alternative depth comprising a dense network of deeply spread and well-fortified rural communities, armed with the finest modern weapons and organized in a solid territorial defensive system can provide a strategic depth of sorts, as a substitute for the nonexistent geographic depth.[21]

Not only did this approach not disappear after the establishment of the state of Israel, but its validity grew still further: wherever no civilian neighborhoods existed, the security forces found it difficult to enforce the state's sovereignty. This applied not only to the West Bank, but also to the Galilee and the Negev, as well as to all flashpoints along Israel's borders. Consider, for example, the clashes along the Israeli-Syrian border before the June 1967 war. By way of exercising Israel's sovereignty in disputed border areas, farmers were asked to work the fields near the border to the last meter in the keen awareness that this might spark armed clashes that could at times get out of control. Was the use of civilians justified from a military point of view? Could it be justified in economic cost-benefit terms? Both IDF Chief-of-Staff Lt. Gen. Yitzhak Rabin, and head of the northern command, Maj. Gen. David Elazar, had no doubt about the justification of this struggle and the necessity of integrating the farmers.

Lt. Col. Israel Bar, who in the IDF's early years acted as *de facto* head of the planning division, succinctly explained the complementary role of spatial defense in Israeli security doctrine:

> There are those who believe that this part of our security system is a corollary of the conditions prevailing in the country before the establishment of the state, and hence should be seen as an anachronistic transitory phenomenon. But this view is fundamentally wrong. The underlying principles of spatial defense are the militia-like organization of the population so as to enable it to withstand attacks on its places of residence and work, as well as the creation of a synergy between economic productivity and military defense. These principles guided the security forces of many nations throughout history... Hence we find in the history of war, especially among small young nations fighting for their freedom, a system of spatial defense as a necessary supportive complement to the regular forces.[22]

Bar's approach is based on his deep familiarity with the lessons of WWII. Since then war has of course changed its form and logic, yet it is precisely the fight against terrorism and guerilla warfare amidst the civilian population that has made spatial defense all the more necessary. The increasing employment of irregular forces using easily concealed weapons (e.g., a rocket smuggled in the trunk of a private car, a cellular-operated IED on the side of the road) makes the widespread presence of civilian communities an active factor in creating the conditions necessary to cope effectively with such threats.

In the era of the new warfare, this integrative approach has become the logic of the moment. Due to legitimacy constraints and political considerations, civilians in conflict zones have increasingly spearheaded the struggle to promote a national interest. Hence the Palestinian striving to expand the Gaza Strip's fishing zone; hence Beijing's expansion in the China Sea through thousands of civilian fishing boats; and hence the Russian intervention in Georgia and Ukraine, which relied heavily on the local population.

Conversely, it has been argued that not only do the Jewish West Bank communities not add to Israel's national security but they seriously constrain the IDF's operational capabilities by requiring it to deploy across the entire area rather than reduce its forces and shorten its lines of engagement.

This outlook is not only completely unfounded but the inverse of the truth. It is not only the IDF that protects the West Bank Jewish communities. They themselves enable the IDF to operate throughout the area with minimal forces, with the communities' residents providing the critical mass buttressing these operations.

Without the large-scale civilian Jewish presence in the West Bank, the IDF would have found it difficult to stay in the area and effectively fulfill its role. The strategic success of Operation Defensive Shield in the spring of 2002 was only made possible by the sustained efforts of the Jewish communities deep in the area, such as Har Bracha on Mount Gerizim, which served the IDF as protected exit points for repeated counterterrorism operations throughout the West Bank. Without constantly mobilized large-scale reserve forces the IDF does not have the necessary critical mass and breathing space to both sustain uninterrupted counterterrorist activities and maintain a network of bases across the West Bank. Through their permanent presence throughout the area, the Jewish communities fill these vital operational lacunae.

Consider, for instance, the winter 1997 helicopter disaster during the fighting in the security zone in south Lebanon. While the collision was apparently caused by careless flying, the necessity to airlift troops to the depth of the security zone was a direct corollary of the IDF's failure to secure the roads to the area, which in turn stemmed from its chronic manpower shortage. By contrast, over the past two decades the IDF has been able to operate effectively in the West Bank with a relatively small order of battle, due to the presence in the area of hundreds of thousands of Israelis who fill the critical mass function through their daily presence and activities. Even today, the IDF keeps no more than 10,000 soldiers in the West Bank, compared, for instance, to the 100,000 French soldiers and police personnel used to secure the Euro 2016 football games. From this vantage point, not only do the Jewish West Bank communities not constitute a security burden, but through effective organization that maximizes their relative advantage as locals, they provide important support to the defense establishment.

In the overall fabric of security efforts, settlement also plays a central role in creating an agricultural presence that expands the physical presence

required to control the area. From its early days, the Zionist movement identified the farmer and his plow as a necessary and unique tool in the struggle for the exercise of sovereignty, and this reality is no less valid today. This is illustrated by the activity of farmers in the Gaza vicinity, in the Jordan Valley, and even in the open spaces around West Bank localities.

Within Israel itself, the presence of the Israeli farmer plays a daily role in the ceaseless struggle to prevent a hostile and aggressive invasion of state lands. In contested and/or border areas, agricultural activity has a formative function in enforcing sovereignty and determining the border regime. In addition, by virtue of farmers' intimate presence in the area, they serve as a power multiplier for the institutional security services in defending the area and fighting terrorism.

This was the traditional Zionist security concept from the early days of the Jewish national revival in the Land of Israel, and it continues to be necessary and effective today. As David Ben-Gurion summed up the victory in the 1948 War of Independence: "We triumphed via three paths: the path of faith, the path of pioneering creation, the path of suffering."[23] These values continue to be essential, with the West Bank Jewish communities being their current manifestation.

The Jordan Valley: Israel's Eastern Line of Defense

Since the conclusion of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty in 1994, and all the more so after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's army in the Iraq war in 2003, it has been widely argued that because there was no longer a threat of an anti-Israel eastern front, the Jordan Valley has lost its significance as Israel's eastern line of defense.[24] In the words of Maj. Gen. (res.) Amram Mitzna: "In the age of long-range missiles there is no importance for strategic depth. Agreements will provide us with greater security than strategic depth."[25]

Notwithstanding the dubious credibility of signed agreements with the PLO/PA (given their wholesale violation of the Oslo Accords), let alone with Hamas, which considers any agreement with Israel (or with any other "infidel" entity for that matter) a transient arrangement destined to be violated at the first available opportunity; and given the new regional threats that have arisen over the past decade, which could revive the eastern front under certain circumstances, the peremptory pronunciation of the "end of territory" as a vital security component is far too premature – especially in the Israeli-Palestinian context.

Demilitarizing the West Bank

An axiomatic assumption among proponents of an independent Palestinian state is that this entity will be fully demilitarized – that is, devoid of major weapons systems capable of endangering Israel's security. This principle was ostensibly accepted by the PLO, which committed itself in the Oslo Accords to the tenet of "one sovereign, one authority, one law, and one weapon." By way of implementing this principle, the Palestinian Authority (and by extension the future Palestinian state) was to rely on a "strong police force" – not a regular army – that would take "all measures necessary in order to prevent acts of terrorism, crime and hostilities." No less important, the PA was to ensure that no other armed groups would be established or operate in the territories under its jurisdiction apart from the official police force, and that no organization or individual "shall manufacture, sell, acquire, possess, import or otherwise introduce into [these territories] any firearms, ammunition, weapons, explosives, gunpowder or any related equipment."[26]

In fact, not only were none of these contractual obligations implemented, but the PLO transformed the West Bank and the Gaza Strip into unreconstructed terror entities that murdered and maimed tens of thousands of Israelis and rained thousands of rockets and missiles on Israel's towns and villages. And while West Bank terrorism has been largely curtailed after years of sustained counterterrorist operations (though not before hurting Israel on a hitherto unprecedented scale), Gaza has become an ineradicable terror entity – in flagrant violation of its demilitarized vision.

Since, as noted above, the transformation of a future Palestinian state in the West Bank (and Gaza) into a similar terrorist entity would pose an existential threat to Israel, the demilitarization of this state must be a necessary precondition for its establishment. And by way of preventing demilitarization from remaining a dead letter in signed agreements, as was the case with the Oslo Accords, Israel must retain indefinite security control of the Jordan Valley. For even if this control will not hermetically seal off the West Bank from weapons smuggling, its absence ensures the transformation of the Palestinian state into a terrorist entity.

The necessity of Israel's control becomes all the more crucial by the changes in weapons and military technology that have taken place in recent decades and their global proliferation, combined with the increasing sophistication of domestic weapons production, which has substantially reduced the ability to monitor the smuggling of these weapons. Detecting the crossing of the Jordan River by an armored division is infinitely easier than monitoring the smuggling of rockets, anti-tank missiles, or standard explosives in a civilian food truck crossing the Jordan bridges.

Thus, for example, Egyptian control of the Sinai Peninsula did not prevent the massive smuggling of weapons and military equipment into Gaza after Israel's disengagement from the Strip and the ending of its control of the Egyptian-Gaza border (the Philadelphia axis). And while part of this failure can be attributed to President Mubarak's half-hearted measures against weapons smuggling,[27] the influx of weapons into Gaza (as well as to jihadist terror groups operating in Sinai) has not ceased despite President Sisi's strenuous efforts over the past few years.

Nor does the technological revolution in intelligence gathering and warfare provide an adequate solution to the demilitarization problem.

The execution of this revolution in the IDF, which began in the 1990s in an attempt to synergize intelligence gathering and precision fire capabilities, led to a consensus among the army's top echelons that intelligence and air superiority, together with sophisticated command and control systems, substantially reduce the importance of ground forces and their continuous retention of terrain. Instead, the air force, with its advanced counterattack capabilities, was expected to provide the response to emerging threats even hundreds of kilometers away. Yet here too, the reality of intelligence and air superiority vis-à-vis regular armed forces is not comparable to that directed against locating subversive, concealment-guided efforts at both the strategic and tactical levels. Confronting this threat, which becomes increasingly central in intensity and scope, necessitates a physical presence on the ground that can effectively monitor smuggling efforts.

The mirage of international supervisory forces

In order to enhance the willingness of both sides to reach an agreement, it has been proposed *inter alia* to replace Israel's military control of the Jordan Valley with an international force that would ensure Israel's security interests in the region while minimizing any infringement on the sovereignty of the prospective Palestinian state.

In 1994, shortly after the signing of the Oslo Accords, Professor Efraim Karsh of King's College London and Dr. Yezid Sayigh of Cambridge University, who also headed the PLO delegation to the Multilateral Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security within the Oslo process, proposed the establishment of a regional security system based on peace agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors (Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians), supervised by international forces, that would be deployed along the borders, including the Jordan Valley.[28] While the idea never came to fruition, it has been rekindled over the years, such as in *New York Times* correspondent Tom Friedman's proposal (2001) that NATO or similar forces be deployed in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to safeguard the prospective Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.[29] Much more importantly, as part of its effort to revive the Israeli-Palestinian "peace process," the Obama administration instructed Marine General John Allen, who had previously commanded the International Security

Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, to prepare a comprehensive security package that would allay Israel's fears of complete military withdrawal from the West Bank.

Prepared over months of intensive consultations within the administration, the plan was never completed. Yet substantial parts of it were presented to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (who criticized it), to Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon (who dismissed it out of hand), and to the IDF leadership, where some top commanders (including Chief-of-Staff Benny Gantz and head of the planning department, Maj. Gen. Nimrod Sheffer) viewed it favorably. While the plan has never been officially announced, even after the failure of the Obama administration's peace efforts in 2013-14, its key elements have become public knowledge. Accepting the Palestinian demand for total withdrawal of IDF forces from the West Bank as part of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement (in contrast to Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967, which spoke of Israel's withdrawal from "territories," not "the territories," occupied in the 1967 war),[30] the plan proposed a complex security package that substituted the deployment of US forces in the Jordan Valley for Israel's longstanding demand for defensible borders in line with Resolution 242's clear stipulation.[31]

But to what extent can foreign military forces operating in a wholly alien environment (in both operational and socio-cultural terms) provide an adequate substitute for the IDF, which has been operating in this terrain for decades, in enforcing the West Bank's demilitarization? Judging by the experience of international forces in the Middle East over the past half-century, the answer is far from satisfactory. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), deployed along the Israeli-Lebanese border since 1978, for example, has miserably failed to prevent the transformation of the area under its jurisdiction into an unreconstructed terrorist entity – first by the PLO (until 1982), then by successive Shiite terrorist organizations. As starkly demonstrated by the recent exposure of Hezbollah's attack tunnels penetrating Israel's territory, UNIFIL has utterly failed to enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1701 of August 11, 2006, at the end of the Second Lebanon War, which stipulated the disbanding of all armed militias in Lebanon and prohibited arms supplies to any group without government authorization, as well as the presence of armed forces south of the Litani River.[32]

It is true that the multinational force in Sinai supervising the demilitarization of the peninsula in accordance with the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty of March 1979 has been doing so successfully. But it is no less true that this success has been due to Egypt's disinterest in violating the agreement and Israel's permission of the occasional reinforcement of Egyptian forces in Sinai (e.g., for fighting Islamist terrorism). Nor is there any similarity between supervising the crossing of the Suez Canal by regular forces and monitoring the smuggling of weapons under the guise of the civilian fabric of life. Indeed, the multinational force has abysmally failed either to stem the flow of weapons into the Gaza Strip or to prevent the entrenchment of jihadist terror organizations within the Sinai Bedouin tribes. The West's experience in Afghanistan and Iraq over the past decades inspires no more confidence in the ability of external powers to cope effectively with sustained, subversive terrorist and jihadist insurgencies.

These operational constraints notwithstanding, the idea of international supervision suffers from an inherent political-constitutional flaw: namely, its total dependence on the consent of the host government, which can demand the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces from its territory, as happened with the May 1967 removal of UN forces from Egypt at President Nasser's demand and expulsion of Soviet aerial and air defense forces from Egypt five years later by Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat. To this must be added the numerous instances where international supervisory and/or intervention forces were withdrawn from countries they were supposed to protect as a result of unilateral decisions by the sending governments: from the evacuation of the American-French-British-Italian force from Lebanon following Hezbollah's bombing of its Beirut headquarters (in October 1983), to President Obama's hasty withdrawal of US forces from Iraq (2011) with the attendant rise of ISIS and its takeover of large swaths of Iraq and Syria, to President Trump's December 2018 decision to withdraw US forces from Syria. Even Israel withdrew hastily from its security zone in southern Lebanon (May 2000), abandoning its local allies to their bitter fate, though this area borders its sovereign territory (and has served for decades as a springboard for terrorist attacks on its civilian population) rather than being a remote area, thousands of kilometers away.

Above all, by vesting essential components of its national security in foreign hands, Israel effectively surrenders its daily routine – first and foremost on the coastal plain, the state's heartland – to the goodwill and commitment of foreign elements. This, in turn, raises a fundamental question about the essence of the Zionist ethos. Is Israel meant to provide a safe haven for persecuted Jews – even if this is increasingly achieved by foreign forces – or to realize the Jewish People's natural right to national self-determination in its ancestral homeland, including the responsibility for safeguarding its sovereignty and security?

The presence of foreign military forces in the West Bank will severely restrict Israel's ability to defend itself from external aggression – the most basic right of any sovereign state. Already Israel incurs the patently false canard of using "disproportionate force" (uniquely reserved for it) whenever it seeks to defend itself from indiscriminate Palestinian terrorism, including the appointment of international commissions of inquiry to examine imaginary "war crimes." Such censure will substantially worsen should Israel be forced to destroy terrorist infrastructures in the future Palestinian state or thwart terrorist activities emanating from its territory – not least since the states participating in the international force will be loath to admit the existence of such infrastructure, thus implying the complete failure and/or non-necessity of that force. The Palestinians, for their part, will most likely continue their skillful incorporation of terrorist infrastructures within civilian populations that has long allowed them to attack Israel with virtual impunity.

Preventing war and stopping a regular attack?

If the failure of international supervisory forces to ensure the demilitarization of a future Palestinian state is a foregone conclusion, their ability to carry out their second mission – peacekeeping – is far more limited. The practical implication of this mission is war either with neighboring Arab states (notably Jordan under non-Hashemite rule) wishing to move their forces to the West Bank, or with the prospective Palestinian state, should it seek armed confrontation with Israel. In the latter case, the international forces will find themselves the target of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations of the sort they have experienced in Afghanistan and post-Saddam Iraq, with direct, constant

friction with the civilian population leading inevitably to high casualties on both sides – something the sending governments are unlikely to tolerate.

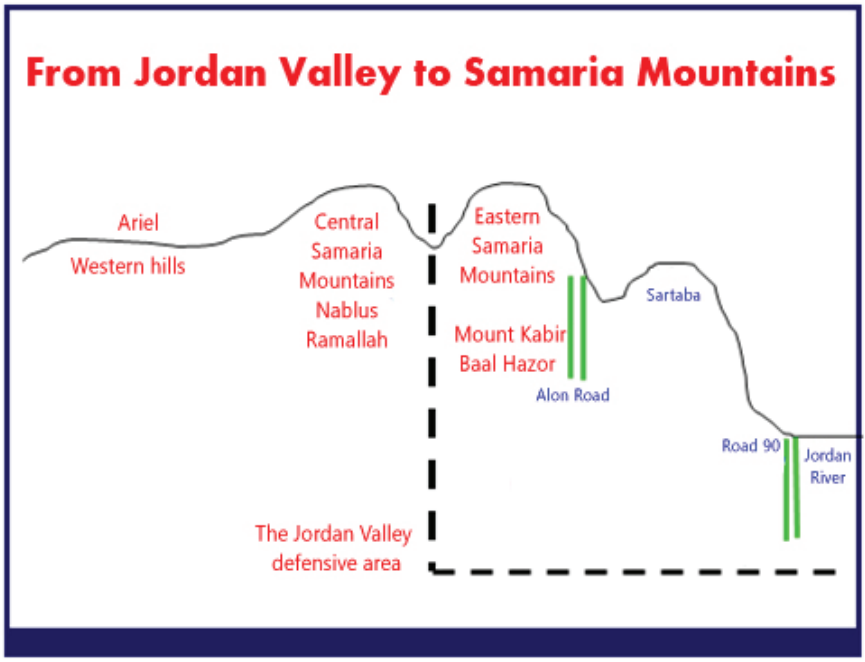
The self-evident conclusion therefore is that retaining control of the Jordan Valley is vital for Israeli security, as both a buffer zone against invasion by foreign forces and as a prerequisite for the demilitarization of the future Palestinian state and the transformation of its territory into an unreconstructed terrorist entity. Though the possibility right now of an invasion by an Iraqi military force is very slim, we must remember the possibility of a Quds force guided by Qasem Soleimani. Specifically, and as envisaged by the Allon Plan of the late 1960s, this means continued Israeli control of:

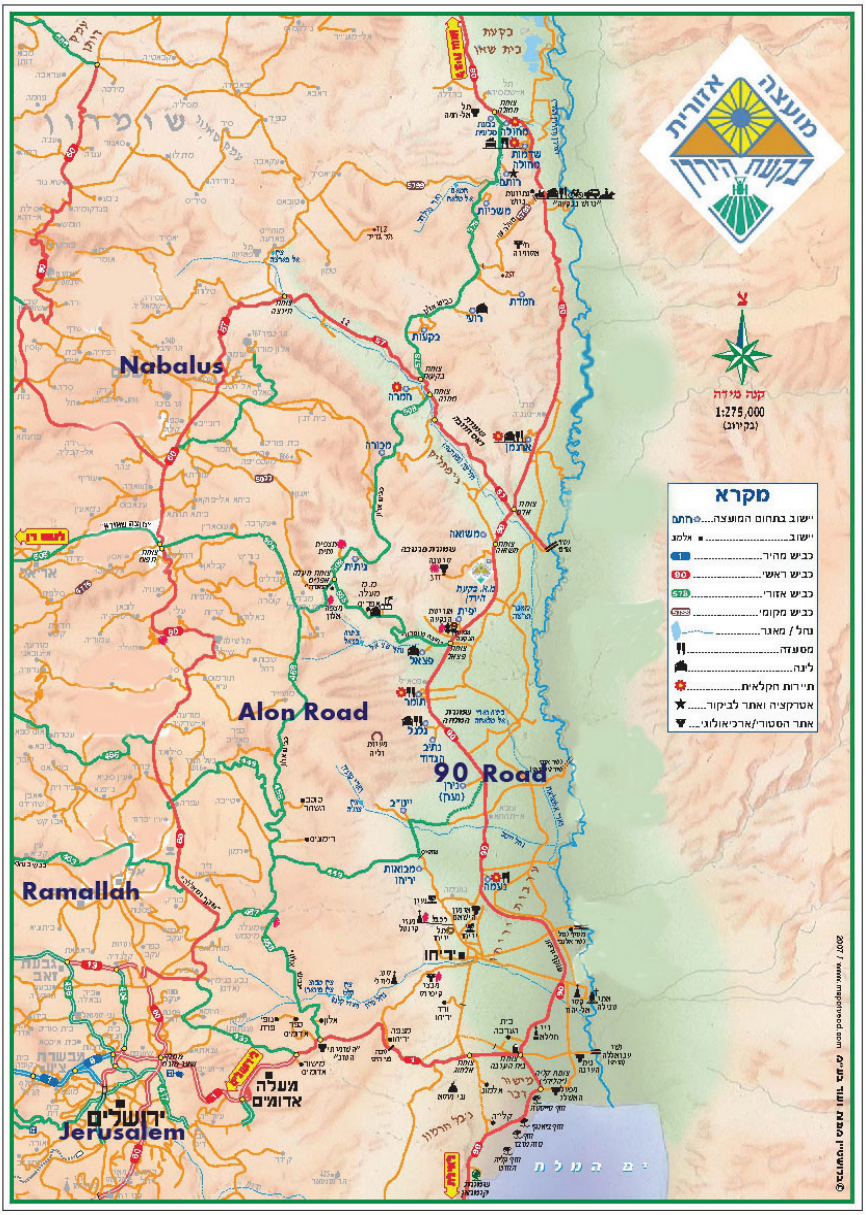
- the ridges west of the Jordan Valley, beyond the narrow strip that runs between the Jordan River along Route 90 and the beginning of mountainous terrain. A military force that does not hold the cliffs and mountaintops that control the valley west of Route 90 will find itself exposed to significant risks; and

- the controlling ridge west of the Allon Road that runs north to south along the eastern ridges of the Samaria hills. Located in the Accords' Area C, this territory is largely empty of Palestinian population yet includes a number of significant Jewish communities, including Elon Moreh, Itamar, Kochav Hashahar, and Amona.

Advocates of Israel's withdrawal from the Jordan Valley do not deny this prognosis, though they subordinate it to other considerations. Prime Minister Barak, who at the Camp David summit (July 2000) agreed to relinquish control of the Jordan Valley to the prospective Palestinian state, must have remembered the precepts of the defensive plan that had led him, as IDF Chief-of-Staff, to define Israel's eastern defense zone as extending from the Jordan River waterfront to the central Samaria ridges of Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival. In the words of Brig. Gen. (res.) Shlomo Brom, former director of the IDF's Strategic Planning Division: "The marginal security benefit derived from control of the Jordan Valley is no match to the strategic reality that will be created by signing a fair permanent agreement with the Palestinians and the attendant international supervisory and cooperation arrangements."[33]

As shown by this study, not only has the Palestinian leadership demonstrated during the 25-years-long Oslo process, especially after Barak's Camp David concessions, its total lack of interest in a peace agreement with Israel (and its rejection, for that matter, of the very idea of Jewish statehood), but changes in the nature of war, the West Bank's topographical control of the coastal plain, and the inherent inability of international forces to provide the necessary security for Israel necessitate the preservation of the Jordan Valley as Israel's eastern line of defense.





Map via the Jordan Valley Regional Council.



A map of the Allon Plan presenting what Itzchak Rabin called “the Jordan Valley in its broadest interpretation”. – map via Wikipedia

Conclusion

The withdrawal of IDF forces from the West Bank and the establishment of a Palestinian state in these territories (aligned to the Gaza Strip) will constitute an existential threat to Israel. The absence of an Israeli military presence in the West Bank, especially along the Jordan River, will enable the creation of a terrorist entity a la the Gaza model a stone's throw from the Israeli hinterland. This withdrawal will box Israel into indefensible borders, especially in light of the major changes in the nature of war in recent decades that have made the astounding achievements of 1967 impossible to replicate (not to mention the stark international response to the takeover of a sovereign state). The deployment of international forces in the West Bank will not ensure the demilitarization of the prospective Palestinian state, let alone prevent the entry of Arab forces into its territory (with or without its consent) and/or its transformation into a springboard for terrorist attacks against Israel.

As noted above, ever since the IDF withdrawal from the West Bank's Palestinian-populated areas in January 1996, more than 90% of their residents have lived under PLO/PA rule in Areas A and B (the Gaza population had lived under PLO/PA rule since May 1994, and under Hamas rule since 2007). As a result, Israel maintains control of some 60% of the West Bank's territory, or Area C, which is mostly empty of Palestinian population but includes all of the West Bank's Jewish communities and IDF camps, as well as main highways, vital topographic areas, and open spaces descending eastwards to the Jordan Valley. The retention of this territory constitutes the absolute minimum required for the preservation of defensible borders and meets two conditions necessary for Israel's security: the Jordan Valley buffer zone, without which it will be impossible to prevent the rapid arming of Palestinian terrorist groups throughout West Bank; and control of intersecting transport arteries which, together with control of strategic topographical sites, enables rapid deployment of IDF forces deep inside Palestinian areas. It is the surrender of such conditions in Gaza that has transformed the Strip into an ineradicable terrorist entity.

Uprooting the West Bank's Jewish communities will also make it difficult for the IDF to operate in the depth of the Palestinian state, especially if

it is forced to fight simultaneously on a number of fronts (simultaneous fighting in Gaza, which will be an integral part of the future Palestinian state, is a foregone conclusion). Without the critical mass of the West Bank's Jewish population, the IDF will likely find itself in an acute operational predicament that will result in total withdrawal a la the May 2000 evacuation of southern Lebanon.

It is likely that this was Yitzhak Rabin's perception of a desirable security situation in West Bank. This was vividly demonstrated not only by his last Knesset address a month before his assassination, which defined the Jordan Valley area, "in the broadest sense of the word," as Israel's security border, and insisted on Israel's retention of a united Jerusalem "comprising Maale Adumim and Givat Zeev;"[34] but also from his delineation of Area C on the map of Israel's spatial interests in the West Bank while giving personal attention to each and every detail. In practical terms, this spatial perception envisaged the development of metropolitan Jerusalem, especially in an eastward direction towards the Dead Sea; development of the southern Hebron Hills and the Jordan Valley; and the paving of transportation arteries from the coastal plain to the Jordan Valley.



Map of Areas A, B, and C showing the spaces within Area C (in white) that are under Israeli control. – map via Wikipedia

Moreover, Rabin exploited progress in the implementation of the Oslo Accords for a systemic effort to reshape the area in accordance with Israel's security interests. Within this framework, he led an ambitious infrastructure effort to build a network of bypass roads in Area C that provided the IDF with the necessary conditions for operational mobility in the area and enabled it to withdraw from Palestinian population centers in Areas A and B while preserving Israeli security interests. Without this intricate road network, the IDF would have found it exceedingly difficult to carry out the large-scale movement of troops and equipment across the West Bank that were necessary for the success of Operation Defensive Shield (April 2002).

Interestingly enough, Shimon Peres held much more hawkish views than Rabin prior to his transformation into an "indefatigable peacemaker" during the Oslo years. As he wrote in a late-1970s programmatic book:

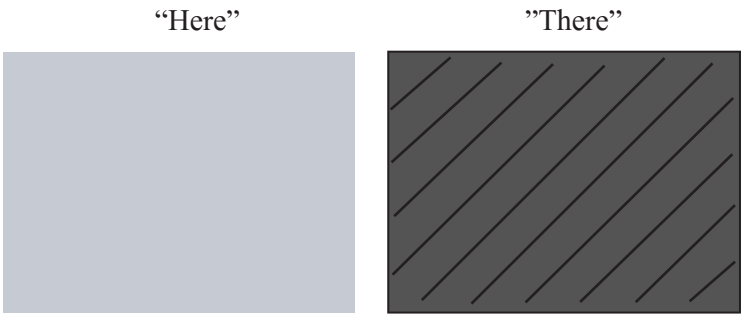
> Should a separate Palestinian state be established, it will be armed from head to toe. It will have bases for the most extremist terrorist forces, which will be equipped with anti-aircraft and anti-tank shoulder missiles that will endanger not only innocent bystanders but every aircraft and helicopter in Israeli airspace and every vehicle travelling along the main arteries of the coastal plain. It is doubtful whether territorial space can provide absolute deterrence, but the absence of minimal territorial space puts the state in a positon of complete lack of deterrence. This in itself creates a compulsive temptation to attack Israel from all sides. The West Bank's demilitarization seems a dubious remedy: the main problem is not agreeing on demilitarization but its actual implementation. The Arabs have violated no fewer agreements than those they observed.[35]

As noted above, this study confines itself to the military-strategic implications of establishing a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders (with minor border modifications) on the basis of complete Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, rather than the possible or even desirable political steps for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hence it will avoid the question of whether the Palestinians are likely

to accept Israel's vital security needs (and to what extent their rejection of those needs indicates their [dis]interest in peace). At the same time, one cannot ignore the detrimental security-strategic implications of the binary worldview of the Israeli "peace camp" – "They are there and we are here." According to this outlook, most starkly demonstrated by the 2005 unilateral disengagement from Gaza, the border constitutes an absolute barrier between Israel and the Palestinian entity in a manner that necessitates the uprooting of Jewish communities and the "cleansing" of the area of any Jewish presence. In practice, the Gaza disengagement imposed severe restrictions, both physical and mental, on the ability of the Shin Bet and the IDF to operate on the other side of the border to prevent the Strip's transformation into a terrorist entity, leading to three large-scale confrontations with Israel in half a decade (in 2008/9, 2012, and 2014).

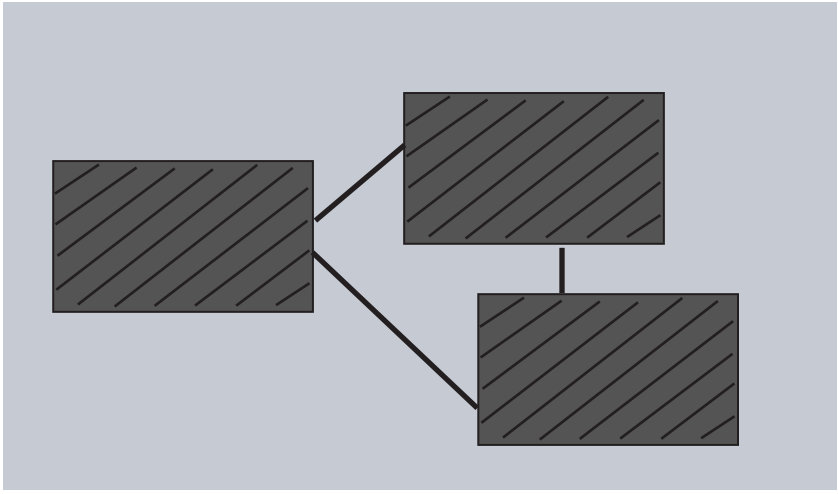
In a hybrid space, by contrast, where two separate ethnic and/or national entities live side by side in a multidimensional coexistence (transportation, water, electricity, business, industry, etc.), the daily friction, including in the security sphere, enables the sparing use of force in a manner that can prevent large-scale, high-intensity conflagrations.

Binary spatial order



In a binary spatial order, the border stands as a definite barrier between entities in a way that demands that the settlers be uprooted and the area cleansed of all Jewish presence. From a security point of view, organizing a space in this way places many limitations on the activity of Shin Bet and on the routine deployment of IDF forces, which would be constrained both physically and mentally from acting on the other side of the border.

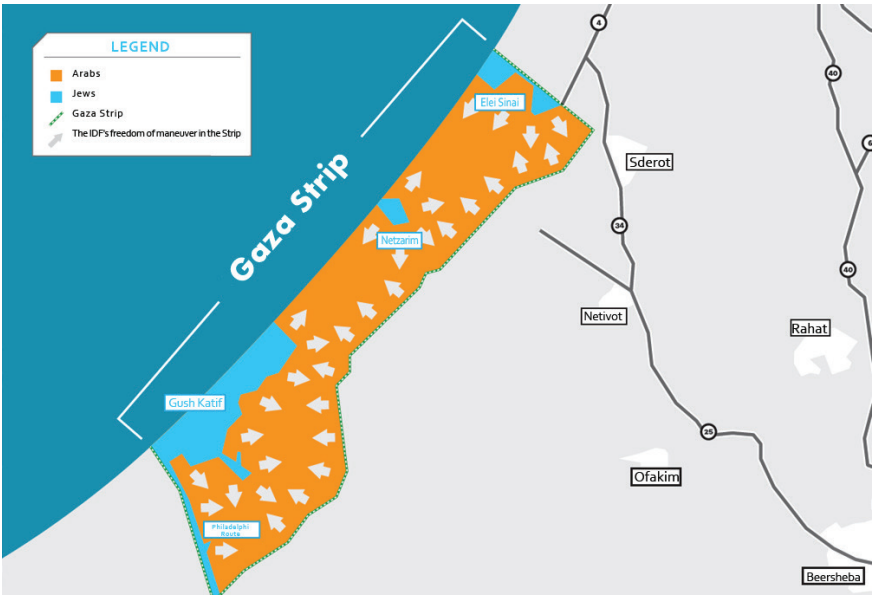
Hybrid spatial order



In a hybrid spatial order, the two entities exist each one in its own location by shared use of routes and infrastructure assets that serve both of them. From a security perspective, it gives greater flexibility and better outcomes.

The Potential Movement of the IDF in the Gaza Strip (Test Case)

Before disengagement



After disengagement



Because the hybrid space provides a more diverse and relevant response to Israel's security problems than its binary counterpart, and because the IDF's continued presence in Area C with its Jewish communities constitutes the absolute territorial minimum for defending Israel, it is possible to highlight a number of actions that will help consolidate Israel's hold over the area:

- Boosting Jerusalem's metropolitan status by developing transportation and municipal infrastructures from Gush Etzion to Mishor Adumim, Michmash, Ofra and Givat Ze'ev.
- Exploiting the open land corridor from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea to construct tens of thousands of housing units.
- Creating an uninterrupted settled area along the Jordan Valley.
- Consolidating the communities of the southern Hebron Hills as a northern enveloping neighborhood of the Beersheba metropolis.
- Constructing a north-south cross-country highway ala Route 6 from the Judean Desert, via Maale Adumim, all the way to Beit Shean and Afula (the road currently known as Route 80).
- Developing the communal potential on Route 5 in a sequence of localities from Elkana to Ariel to Tapuah to Maale Ephraim.
- Consolidating the West Binyamin communities as a security line for the coastal plain.

These recommendations are not meant to suggest a specific solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, let alone to undermine the Palestinian Authority. It is clear, however, that their implementation and – all the more so – their acceptance of their underlying rationale will affect the broad contours of a future peace agreement by ensuring Israel's continued security-strategic control of Area C, thus preventing the future Palestinian state from becoming an existential threat.

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