

DEFENSIBLE BORDERS FOR ISRAEL

AFTER THE **OCTOBER 7TH** INVASION

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2026

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ISBN 978-965-218-177-0

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Executive Summaries

Defensible Borders after October 7: Topographical Security along the Judea and Samaria Mountain Ridge, Buffer Zones and Demilitarization over Israel's Northern and Southern Borders

Dr. Dan Diker and Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser

The October 7 attack fundamentally reshaped Israel's security doctrine, demonstrating that defensible borders require more than topographical advantage in Judea and Samaria. Israel must establish a comprehensive security framework that combines strategic depth, buffer zones, and demilitarized areas along its southern, northern, and eastern frontiers to prevent future invasions by Iran-backed terrorist organizations. This includes maintaining security control in key areas of Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and the Jordan Valley until hostile capabilities are dismantled and effective verification mechanisms are in place. Defensible borders are presented not only as an existential requirement for Israel's security but also as a cornerstone of regional stability and a shared strategic interest with the United States and its regional partners.

Defensible Borders for Israel: From Historical Imperative to Post-October 7 Existential Necessity

Dr. Dan Diker

The October 7, 2023, Hamas attack exposed the failure of Israel's previous security doctrine and underscored the need to expand the concept of defensible borders beyond the preexisting focus on the Jordan Valley and the Judea and Samaria highlands. Israel's security now requires a comprehensive strategy combining strategic depth, topographical control, demilitarized zones, and buffer areas along its borders with Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria to prevent future cross-border attacks. Grounded in the legal framework of UN Security Council Resolution 242 and decades

of U.S. and Israeli strategic thinking, this approach argues that secure borders are a prerequisite for lasting peace. The essay concludes that internationally recognized defensible borders, coupled with verified demilitarization and Israeli security oversight, are essential to Israel's survival and to broader regional stability.

"Defensible Borders"—What It Means: Reflections After the War

Maj.-Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror

Enduring security relies on strength, vigilance, and unity. Geography alone cannot ensure safety; defense must combine military readiness, intelligence dominance, and social cohesion. A credible deterrent requires constant preparedness, rapid response, and the visible ability to act decisively. Diplomatic agreements can aid stability but cannot replace self-reliant defense. In an unpredictable region shaped by shifting alliances and new technologies, national resilience and proactive prevention are essential. True security comes from anticipating threats before they emerge and sustaining the moral and material strength needed to deter aggression and protect the nation's survival.

Israel's Right to Maintain and Supervise Security Zones and Demilitarized Areas as Part of its Right to Defensible Borders

Amb. Alan Baker

Israel's history of territorial withdrawals demonstrates that peace agreements require enforceable security arrangements, not merely diplomatic commitments. International monitoring forces in Sinai, southern Lebanon, and Gaza repeatedly failed to prevent hostile groups from violating demilitarization agreements and establishing military infrastructure, culminating in the October 7 attacks and Hizbullah's entrenchment along Israel's northern border. The article argues that these failures reinforce Israel's right under international law to maintain and supervise security zones, buffer areas, and demilitarized regions as part of its right to self-defense and defensible borders. Such measures are presented not as obstacles to peace, but as essential conditions for preventing renewed aggression and ensuring long-term regional stability.

A Defensible Border with the Gaza Strip After October 7

Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser

Israel's defense concept for Gaza failed on October 7 due to flawed intelligence, misplaced reliance on deterrence, underestimation of geographic and human

factors, and failure to prevent Hamas's buildup. To create a defensible border, Israel must shift from relying on deterrence and intelligence warnings to maintaining permanent readiness, operational control, and depth. Full control over access routes, a demilitarized buffer zone, and a constant IDF presence are essential. Settling Israelis in Gaza should be avoided. Only through continuous vigilance can Israel secure its southern border.

Redesigning the Security Space on the Israel-Lebanon Border

Oded Ailam

There is a strategic framework for transforming the volatile security situation along the Israel-Lebanon border. There is a historical evolution of the boundary from its 1921 demarcation to the current "Blue Line," and political weakness in Lebanon, UN ineffectiveness, and Iranian influence allowed Hizbullah to entrench itself as a dominant military force in southern Lebanon. Israel's recent military successes create an opportunity for a new, sustainable border arrangement emphasizing demilitarization, sovereignty restoration, and robust international oversight. This vision demands sustained U.S. leadership, international cooperation, and domestic political resolve, recognizing that true border security can only arise from a redefined strategic order on the ground.

Defensible Borders on the Syrian Front

Col. (ret.) Dr. Jacques Neriah

The regional balance of power has shifted dramatically following the fall of the Assad regime and the rise of a new Syrian leadership under Ahmad al-Sharaa. Syria's pivot away from Iran and its outreach to Israel have transformed a former enemy into a potential partner. This realignment has disrupted Iran's land corridor to Lebanon, weakened Hizbullah, and turned Syria into a strategic buffer separating Israel from Iranian influence.

Israel now benefits from greater strategic depth, an extended defensive frontier, and enhanced early-warning capabilities against threats from the east. Emerging cooperation between Israel and Syria—focused on deterring Iran, stabilizing the border region, and coordinating security measures—offers both nations new opportunities for peace and regional integration. If sustained, this partnership could mark a major step toward reshaping the Middle East's strategic landscape in Israel's favor.

Egypt's Place in Israel's National Security Concept

Col. (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman

The Israel–Egypt peace treaty remains a cornerstone of regional stability, but the aftermath of the 2023 Gaza war has highlighted both its strategic value and its limitations. While the treaty continues to support security cooperation and regional stability, Egypt's persistent hostility toward Israel, evolving regional alignments, and significant military buildup underscore the need for Israel to remain vigilant. Preserving the peace will require a balanced strategy that combines military preparedness with continued diplomacy, sustained U.S. engagement, and cooperation with regional partners.

Defensible Borders in the Context of the Eastern Frontier

Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser

The October 7 attacks revealed Israel's exposure to diverse threats—ground incursions, rockets, UAVs, and infiltrations—highlighting the need for defensible borders and strategic depth. Israel's security requires maintaining military control of the Jordan Valley, as emphasized by Prime Minister Rabin, to counter eastern threats and ensure surveillance and operational dominance. Peace and security cooperation with Jordan remains vital, though any instability there would demand reinforced Israeli forces. Within Judea and Samaria, Israel must sustain proactive counterterrorism operations due to the Palestinian Authority's failure to curb violence. Ultimately, Israel's defense strategy depends on retaining control of the Jordan Valley, preserving freedom of action across Judea and Samaria, and preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state that could serve as a base for terrorism.

An American Commander's Case for Israeli Strategic Depth After October 7

Gen. Charles F. "Chuck" Wald, USAF (ret.)

The October 7, 2023, Hamas attack demonstrated that defensible borders are an operational necessity rather than a political aspiration. Israel's security depends on three complementary pillars: strategic control of key terrain, the destruction of nearby enemy capabilities, and layered missile defense, with territorial depth serving as the indispensable foundation. Drawing on U.S. military experience, Gen. Charles F. Wald argues that buffer zones in Gaza, southern Lebanon, the Golan Heights, and other strategic areas are essential to preventing future invasions and cannot be replaced by technology alone. He further contends that Israel should strengthen a regional security architecture with the United States and Arab partners

while improving its strategic communications to explain the military and geographic realities underpinning its need for defensible borders.

Strategic Depth, Hybrid Warfare, and the Logic of Forward Defense After October 7

Brig.-Gen. Ernest C. "Ernie" Audino, U.S. Army (ret.)

Strategic depth, buffer zones, and demilitarized areas are essential to Israel's security and serve broader American strategic interests. The lessons of October 7 underscore that territorial control, combined with the ability to neutralize nearby threats, is indispensable for preventing future attacks by Iran and its proxies. A secure Israel strengthens regional stability, provides the United States with a capable frontline ally against global Islamist terrorism and Iranian expansion, and reinforces the strategic partnership that underpins both countries' security.

An Updated Security Doctrine

Maj.-Gen. (res.) Giora Eiland

The brutal terrorist attack carried out by Hamas on October 7 requires not only concrete lessons and adjustments in Israel's military force-building and border defense postures, but also an update to Israel's overall strategic concept, and to its ability to explain that concept to the international community. The purpose of this article is to outline the key principles Israel must adopt for itself, and learn to communicate effectively abroad.

From "The Iron Wall" to "Peace Through Strength"

Gabi Siboni and Erez Wiener

We look at the evolution of Israel's security doctrine from Ze'ev Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" concept to the contemporary "peace through strength" approach advanced by Prime Minister Netanyahu. Jabotinsky's central premise, that lasting peace requires unquestionable military strength, became the foundation of Israel's defense strategy, later formalized by Ben-Gurion into the principles of deterrence, early warning, and decisive victory. Over time, as Israel faced shifting threats, from conventional armies to asymmetric actors like Hamas and Hizbullah, the doctrine evolved toward containment and defense, notably under the Meridor Committee's 2000s reforms.

The October 7 attacks marked a turning point, exposing the weaknesses of containment and prompting a strategic shift back to decisive victory. Israel's current approach emphasizes dismantling enemy capabilities, sustained enforcement to

prevent rearmament, and greater self-reliance in defense production to ensure long-term security sustainability. Israel's future stability depends on combining military strength, economic and technological development, and strategic diplomacy, continuing Jabotinsky's vision of peace built on strength and deterrence.

The Changes Required in Israel's Security Concept Following the Failures of October 7

Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser

The October 7, 2023, Hamas attack and ensuing multi-front war exposed critical failures in Israel's security doctrine, particularly in early warning, deterrence, and defense. Israel's traditional four pillars—early warning, deterrence, decisive victory, and defense—proved inadequate against hybrid terror armies operating from urban and underground environments. To address these shortcomings, Israel must revise its security concept by adding a fifth pillar: prevention and suppression of enemy force build-up. This requires stronger intelligence coordination, expanded forces, and sustained cooperation with the United States to maintain freedom of action. Deterrence must account for ideologically driven adversaries, while defense strategies must ensure truly defensible borders. A decisive victory remains essential but must align with strategic and moral considerations. The updated doctrine should prepare Israel to operate across multiple arenas, strengthen resilience, and secure its long-term regional stability and survival.

Rethinking Israel's Security Concept After October 7

Gershon Hacohen

Israel's security doctrine, based on David Ben-Gurion's principles of warning, deterrence, and decision, was designed for swift victories followed by lasting peace. Today, that model is in crisis. Iran's "ring of fire" strategy, which unites Hamas, Hizbullah, and other proxies, seeks to trap Israel in prolonged, multi-front conflicts that weaken its military flexibility and national endurance. Modern asymmetric warfare, using missiles, underground networks, and attacks on civilians, has eroded Israel's early warning, deterrence, and ability to achieve clear victories. Over time, Israel's growing reliance on airpower and intelligence instead of ground readiness has created new vulnerabilities, exposed since October 7, 2023. To ensure its security, Israel must redefine its defense concept by balancing rapid offensive capability with lasting resilience, rebuilding territorial depth, and preparing for an extended period of strategic defense.

Israel's Vital Security Zones



INTRODUCTION

Defensible Borders after October 7: Topographical Security along the Judea and Samaria Mountain Ridge, Buffer Zones and Demilitarization over Israel's Northern and Southern Borders

Dr. Dan Diker and Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser

Since Israel's victory in the Six-Day War of 1967 opposite four Arab armies, Israel's doctrine of defensible borders has evolved. Driven by the vision and influence of former Foreign Minister Yigal Allon, Israel's defensible borders doctrine addressed its pre-war vulnerabilities to the East and its narrow coastal plain to the West, along the Mediterranean Sea. Israel's lightning victory in the Six-Day War resulted in both topographical advantage and strategic depth opposite Jordan to the East and Syria to the North, through the newly conquered Golan Heights. This newfound strategic advantage would protect Israel's main transportation arteries and its large coastal cities, from Ashdod in the South to Haifa in the North, where roughly 70% of Israel's population lives and about 80% of its industry is located.

Over the course of the last half-century, and particularly since Hamas's October 7, 2023, invasion, massacre, and abduction of hundreds of innocent civilians, Israel's security concept has undergone a fundamental shift. The horrors that Israel experienced on that fateful day were part of a larger Iranian regime strategy that sought to dissect the country in half, by the Iranian proxy Hamas in the South and by its Hizbullah proxy in the North. The lessons of October 7 underscored the essential importance of protecting all of Israel's borders by demilitarizing the territory beyond the border, creating broad buffer zones, enabling Israel's control, monitoring mechanisms, with strategic depth and maneuverability. This reflects the importance of expanding the defensible borders doctrine to effectively defend Israel from the East, the South, and the North.

In the South, establishing a buffer zone and demilitarized belt inside the Gaza Strip under Israeli control, including along the border between Gaza and Egypt, is essential to establish minimal strategic depth to prevent a repetition of Hamas's October 7 invasion. Before the attack, the lack of strategic depth between Israel's Gaza-envelope communities and the Gaza Strip rendered them virtually defenseless against a mass terror assault. Moreover, the porousness of the Gaza-Egyptian border, where tons of weapons, ammunition, and contraband were smuggled to Hamas, reflects similar strategic and existential vulnerabilities.

In the North, Israel has faced ongoing threats of Hizbullah terrorist infiltration through the Lebanon-Israel border, where the group has burrowed tunnels. On the Syrian-Israeli border, the collapse of Syria's Assad regime and the ascendance of competing jihadi groups pose an additional threat to Israel. Radical Islamist militias have threatened to invade Israel and Israeli military positions near the Golan Heights. These threats require Israel to establish buffer and demilitarized zones of approximately 15–20 kilometers beyond the border with Syria. IDF presence on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, including Mount Hermon towards Damascus, has created that buffer zone.

In Lebanon, too, Israel has established a buffer and demilitarized zone of a few kilometers. These areas must extend at least to the Litani River and, in certain places, beyond it to prevent hostile direct fire at Israeli communities and the threat of invasion. Israel learned painful lessons from its unilateral withdrawal in 2000, given the fragility of the country's truncated borders. Israel will always need to defend itself from ongoing threats from jihadi groups, whether Iran-backed Shiite Hizbullah or radical Sunni terrorists. Buffer zones will anchor, stabilize, and secure the fledgling anti-Hizbullah government, bolstering their efforts in demanding that Hizbullah and other terrorist actors disarm. Demilitarization and buffer zones provide a security advantage to Israel and other regional ethnic minorities, such as the Druze and Kurds in Syria.

Opposite Egypt, Israel should seek a full demilitarization of the Sinai approaches to Gaza, as set in the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty's military annex.

From an international perspective, defensible borders for Israel also constitute a vital condition for the U.S. administration's "America First" policy in the Middle East. Safeguarding these borders is a shared interest for Israel and the United States, which seeks to ensure regional stability, enabling economic prosperity in cooperation with leading states such as Saudi Arabia.

Additionally, defensible borders in Judea and Samaria, particularly securing and holding the Jordan Rift Valley and the Judea-Samaria hill ridge, constitute unconditional security requirements for any prospective Palestinian entity there. Israel must also make sure that the Palestinian Authority areas are not used to amass terror groups, especially in the refugee camps.

For any possible IDF redeployment to new security lines, Israel requires the reliable verification and well-monitored disarmament and the dismantlement of Iran's proxy Hizbullah and other Islamist terrorist groups in Lebanon and Syria, and of Hamas in Gaza. These unconditional security prerequisites would run in parallel with new border security arrangements in cooperation with neighboring state military forces that could ultimately replace Israeli security presence. Particularly after the atrocities of October 7, and ongoing Iranian regime pressure on the United States to drive Israel defense forces from its vital security positions in Southern Lebanon, establishing Israel's defensible borders in the South, North, and East constitutes an existential security requirement and a critical cornerstone of a potentially stabilized secure and prosperous Middle East region.

PART I: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Defensible Borders for Israel: From Historical Imperative to Post-October 7 Existential Necessity

Dr. Dan Diker

For nearly six decades, Israel's quest for defensible borders has been driven by its basic right as a sovereign state-member of the international community to defend itself, by strategic necessity, military and diplomatic achievements, all enshrined in internationally acknowledged and recognized instruments of law. However, Hamas's October 7, 2023, border invasion, massacre, and kidnapping operation, followed by the ensuing war and its international repercussions, shattered the defense assumptions that had governed Israel's national security concept. They brought about the need to fundamentally expand Israel's defensible borders doctrine. Israel's military achievements in the 1967 and 1973 wars with the concomitant international acknowledgment in United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), had provided territorial advantage, enabling Israel to control its borders and coastal plain from the east.

However, following Hamas's October 7 invasion and subsequent Hizbullah attacks that threatened Israel's very existence as a sovereign state, Israel requires a strategic framework that mandates demilitarized buffer zones across Israel's southern and northern peripheries.

The Diplomatic Foundation: UNSC Resolution 242

UN Security Council Resolution 242, unanimously adopted in November 1967, deliberately refrained from calling upon Israel to withdraw from all the territories it captured in the Six-Day War against four Arab armies. The resolution's carefully crafted language—withdrawal “from territories” rather than “from *the* territories”—reflected intensive diplomatic consultations among the Security Council's

Permanent Members. As British Ambassador Lord Caradon later acknowledged in a PBS television interview, “We did not say there should be a withdrawal to the ‘67 line.”¹ That was a position shared by U.S. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, who asserted that the cease-fire lines of 1949 were temporary armistice lines, not meant to be permanent borders, and would leave Israel with insecure boundaries if established.²

In fact, UNSC Resolution 242’s operative clause calling for “secure and recognized boundaries” reflected the Security Council’s recognition that Israel’s pre-1967 armistice lines, including the mere nine-mile width at the country’s narrow waist, were indefensible. Moreover, they were temporary military demarcation lines, not international borders. Former U.S. Undersecretary of State Eugene Rostow, a central figure in the passage of UNSC 242, argued that the resolution did not require Israeli withdrawal in advance of negotiated peace terms establishing “secure and recognized boundaries.”³ Security Council resolution 338, following the 1973 Yom Kippur war, affirmed the implementation of Resolution 242 and its call for secure and recognized boundaries in the context of a just and durable peace.

Successive U.S. administrations recognized the defensible borders framework. In June 1967, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) General Earle Wheeler concluded that “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 Judea and Samaria, the JCS recommended “a boundary along the commanding terrain overlooking the Jordan River.”⁴

This American commitment reached its most explicit formulation in President George W. Bush’s April 14, 2004, letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon: “The United States reiterates its steadfast commitment to Israel’s security, including secure and defensible borders.”⁵ Both the U.S. House and Senate adopted resolutions supporting the Bush letter with overwhelming bipartisan majorities, including then-Senators Hillary Clinton and Joseph Biden. These were formal commitments incorporated into every subsequent Israeli-Arab peace treaty and diplomatic framework.

The Rabin Legacy and Strategic Continuity

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s final Knesset address in October 1995 articulated the Israeli consensus on defensible borders. Speaking during Knesset deliberations over the Oslo Interim Accords and concluding the Israel-Jordan peace treaty, Rabin declared: “The borders of the State of Israel will be beyond the lines which existed before the Six-Day War. We will not return to the 4 June 1967 lines.”⁶

Rabin specified that “the security border of Israel will be located in the Jordan Valley, in the broadest meaning of that term,” emphasizing retention of “a united Jerusalem” and the major settlement blocs.⁷ His position reflected Israel’s fundamental vulnerabilities: gross asymmetries in standing forces compared to hostile neighbors, lack of strategic depth, and the concentration of 70 percent of

Israel's population and 80 percent of its industrial capacity in the coastal plain adjacent to the West Bank highlands.

As former UN Ambassador Dore Gold demonstrated in his comprehensive studies on defensible borders, this consensus extended across Israel's political spectrum and military leadership.⁸ From Foreign Minister Yigal Allon's 1976 *Foreign Affairs* article, "Israel: The Case for Defensible Borders,"⁹ through Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon's 2014 study "Israel's Critical Requirements for Defensible Borders,"¹⁰ senior Israeli officials consistently maintained that topography, geography, and territorial control remained indispensable despite technological advances.

Defensible Borders After October 7: Shattering the Security Concept

The October 7, 2023, Hamas invasion and assault in Southern Israel exposed the failure of Israel's prevailing security concept that deterrence and early warning alone, backed by technological superiority and limited military presence, could substitute for territorial depth and topographical advantage. The mass invasion by some 6,000 Hamas terrorists and their Gaza supporters resulted in the brutal murder and butchering of approximately 1,200 civilians and soldiers and the taking of 251 hostages, demonstrating that the 2005 Gaza disengagement model had neither deterred nor contained the enemy.

The conceptual failure was threefold. First, it assumed that a vision imbued with economic development and welfare would moderate Hamas's ideology. Second, it presumed that a limited Israeli military presence, combined with technological surveillance, could provide an adequate warning. Third, it underestimated adversaries' capabilities to prepare coordinated multi-front attacks. October 7 proved that territorial withdrawal without strategic depth and verifiable demilitarization is merely an invitation for further devastating cross-border attacks.

The Post October 7 Defensible Borders Doctrine: Buffer Zones and Demilitarization

Israeli strategic thinking has now crystallized around two complementary requirements: comprehensive demilitarization and territorial buffer zones. These principles now apply not only to Israel's control of the high ground in the hills of Judea and Samaria—where Rabin's vision of Israeli control over the entire Jordan Valley, 3,200 feet below, remains essential—but today no less important opposite hostile forces in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria.

Israel's 2005 Gaza disengagement, a unilateral withdrawal from the Strip that expelled some 9,000 Israelis from their homes, resulted in a massive Hamas military buildup. Hamas systematically accumulated an arsenal exceeding 30,000 rockets,

mortars, and drones, built an underground tunnel network of some 500 kilometers, and trained forces capable of complex combined-arms operations. October 7 demonstrated that demilitarization must be absolute, verified, and maintained only through a permanent Israeli security presence.

Territorial buffer zones physically distance hostile forces from Israeli population centers and provide essential warning time, strategic depth, and freedom of maneuver. Following October 7, Israel established or expanded buffer zones across multiple fronts. In Gaza, the IDF established these zones extending up to three kilometers along the entire perimeter.

In southern Lebanon, despite UN Security Council Resolution 1701, following the 2006 Lebanon war, aimed ostensibly at establishing a Hizbullah-free zone south of the Litani River and supervised by UN forces, and in light of the abject failure of the UN to prevent the Hizbullah armed presence in southern Lebanon, Israeli forces now maintain positions several kilometers deep along critical high ground. Similarly, following the Assad regime's collapse in Syria, and after that regime had enabled increased terror activity from its territory against Israel, Israel secured the UN-mandated buffer zone on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights and established a wider, 15 to 20-kilometer demilitarized zone. This gives Israel a topographical advantage, overlooking Damascus and preventing hostile forces, including Iranian proxies, Hizbullah elements, or jihadi organizations, from positioning themselves in southern Syria.

Threats That Necessitate Expanded Defensible Borders

The expanded defensible borders doctrine responds to an intensifying threat matrix. In the North, Hizbullah still boasts a considerable arsenal of rockets and missiles, far exceeding Hamas's capabilities, and has demonstrated plans to infiltrate northern Israel. Iran still seeks to establish a continuous land corridor through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon, while Turkish influence and backing for Syrian militias threaten Israel's border.

The proliferation of precision-guided munitions, combat drones, and tunnel warfare has made control of key topographic positions even more critical. Ground-based early warning systems on the Judea and Samaria mountain ridge and the Golan Heights remain essential for detecting low-flying threats. Control of the Jordan Valley is now more vital in preventing weapons smuggling and hostile force infiltration as Iran attempts to infiltrate westward.

As former IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Gadi Eisenkot and Col. (res.) Gabi Siboni wrote in their 2019 strategic guidelines, the contemporary threat map "reinforces the importance of territory," and any peace arrangement must ensure "Israel will exercise by itself absolute control over its present strategic envelope, including the Jordan Valley."¹¹ October 7 vindicated this assessment and demonstrated that

the strategic envelope must explicitly include buffer zones across confrontation lines.

A Call for International Recognition

The post-October 7 security environment demands renewed U.S. and international legal recognition of Israel's requirement for expanded defense borders. The principle established in UNSC Resolution 242 and reaffirmed in President George W. Bush's 2004 letter to former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon—that Israel is entitled to secure and recognized boundaries different from the 1967 lines—must now extend to encompass buffer zones and demilitarization arrangements across Israel's southern and northern borders. Ambassador Alan Baker, a longtime legal advisor to Israel's foreign ministry, noted that Israel maintains the full legal right and requirement to guarantee its security by all means as long as the threat to its sovereignty remains active. This international legal principle remains all the more applicable, essential, and justified today regarding buffer and demilitarization security in Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza as long as threats persist.

The historical record speaks for itself. Every territorial withdrawal Israel has undertaken—Southern Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005—resulted in hostile forces filling the territorial vacuum, and embedding themselves along Israel's borders, leading to additional cross-border attacks. As October 7 tragically confirmed, Israel's insistence on defensible borders, supervised and monitored demilitarization, buffer zones, and the presence of Israeli forces to monitor and guarantee security cannot be seen to be an obstacle to peace. To the contrary, it is a prerequisite for any hope of regional stabilization and an essential requirement to ensure Israel's justified and proven right to ensure its security in accordance with its internationally acknowledged rights to defend itself and its people.

Conclusion

October 7 shattered a complacent security paradigm. The *assumption* that deterrence and early warning—two iron-clad principles of Israel's long-standing national security concept—could substitute for defensible borders rooted in strategic depth and the new principle of proactive military prevention collapsed in blood and fire. Yet, from this tragedy emerges a clarified strategic vision: defensible borders must now explicitly incorporate supervised demilitarized zones and monitored territorial buffers across all confrontation lines.

Israel's expanded defensible borders are a military, national security, and foreign affairs necessity. Israel must prevail upon the international community to recognize that its needs for secure borders are minimal requirements for a nation that has learned, at terrible human cost, that geography, topography, and territorial depth remain the foundations of security in the Middle East's volatile environment.

The October 7 invasion has transformed Israel's national and strategic consciousness, redefining its collective identity and security perception. That is why defensible borders securing all of Israel's fronts are existential requirements regardless of foreign political and economic pressure, global public opinion, or international NGO activism. As Israel faces Iran's continuing pursuit of nuclear weapons and regional supremacy while sponsoring jihadi terror proxies on a global scale, these vital security principles articulated by former Foreign Minister Yigal Allon and Prime Ministers Rabin, Levi Eshkol, and Benjamin Netanyahu remain essential to guarantee the continued existence of the nation-state of the Jewish people.

Notes

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“Defensible Borders”—What It Means: Reflections After the War

Maj.-Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror

► Executive Summary

Enduring security relies on strength, vigilance, and unity. Geography alone cannot ensure safety; defense must combine military readiness, intelligence dominance, and social cohesion. A credible deterrent requires constant preparedness, rapid response, and the visible ability to act decisively. Diplomatic agreements can aid stability but cannot replace self-reliant defense. In an unpredictable region shaped by shifting alliances and new technologies, national resilience and proactive prevention are essential. True security comes from anticipating threats before they emerge and sustaining the moral and material strength needed to deter aggression and protect the nation’s survival.

The phrase “defensible borders” has been used in Israel for many years to explain why Israel could not accept the 1967 lines as defensible, mainly with regard to the border with Jordan before the Six-Day War (that is, the Green Line between the West Bank and the State of Israel) and the pre-1967 border with Syria at the foot of the Syrian Golan Heights.

Before delving into detailed border options and what makes them defensible, it is worth recalling Israel’s basic strategic reality, a reality that is unlikely to change despite the many shifts that have occurred and will occur in the Middle East:

- Israel remains a small country (Iran is roughly 70 times larger in area) with a population bearing a demographic weight of about eight million Jews compared

with roughly 400 million people in the Arab League countries. Israel will remain the sole Jewish state at the United Nations facing 21 Arab states and 57 Muslim-majority states.

- The broad asymmetry facing Israel means it cannot “bring Berlin” to the Middle East; it cannot remake the region into liberal democracies or significantly reduce hatred of Israel, no matter how many wars Israel wins (and probably not even through diplomatic agreements alone). Conversely, if Israel ever loses a war, even once, that could spell the end of the Jewish national state. Therefore, after every war, however successful, Israel must begin preparing for the next one.

The Middle East will not change dramatically in the foreseeable future. It is unlikely that many new open, democratic societies will emerge there. Islam in its various forms will remain a dominant force. Regional competition for leadership, mainly from Iran and Turkey, will continue to hinge on military strength and the willingness to project force across the region. The Gulf states will use their economic power to expand influence, but they will be cautious about direct confrontations with aggressive neighbors and may seek accommodation with them, even at the cost of closer ties with states hostile to Israel, including Iran.

Therefore, Israel must understand that it is compelled to prepare for “the next war” and to rely on its own strength, even during extended periods of quiet. The sword must remain sharp and ready at all times, even when sheathed. Building Israel’s economic, social, and diplomatic strength is vital for its future and must proceed in tandem with building military strength, carefully balancing these efforts. It is essential to stabilize and strengthen Israeli society so it can withstand serious threats posed by states that reject the very existence of the Jewish national state.

Only on the basis of these two foundational understandings about Israel’s condition can one discuss various reference scenarios, knowing that Israel’s survival is not guaranteed by diplomatic agreements (which it should pursue but without accepting constraints that weaken it), but rather by objective strength and how that strength is perceived by enemies and rivals. No one truly knows how to build “conventional deterrence,” so Israel must rely on real, demonstrable power projected outward rather than on the psychological assumption called “deterrence.” Because one cannot precisely know the enemy’s deterrence status, national-security decisions must not rest on assuming deterrence exists or can be reliably altered. Deterrence can be an incidental result of correct actions and strong blows against the enemy, but whether it has been achieved, and how the enemy subjectively perceives its situation relative to Israel, is unknowable.

The concept of defense grounded in Israel’s borders is thus a vital component of its future ability to pursue those aims: to enable the society to strengthen, the economy to grow, and to demonstrate Israel’s capacity to protect itself. After the recent war, one must add and stress that border defense must make certain that no real existential danger threatens the state or its residents, both those close to the border

and those far from it. Therefore, border defense must take on renewed importance in the post-war security concept, which means clarifying the essential elements that constitute “defensible borders.”

Historically, the definition of defensible borders was largely geographic, that is, whether borders lie in terrain favorable or unfavorable for defense. For example, there were calls to move the Golan border eastward because the old Sykes-Picot-era line along the western slopes of the Golan, close to the Jordan Rift Valley and the Sea of Galilee’s shore, was topographically indefensible. The memory of the IDF’s topographic disadvantage before the Six-Day War, the difficulty of defending a low, dominated border along the Golan, embedded itself in Israeli consciousness and led to the enduring desire for a higher, easterly defensive line.

In the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), in addition to topographic disadvantage along much of the Green Line, Israel had virtually no operational depth between the West Bank and the Mediterranean. For example, the Tulkarm-Netanya sector of the country was extremely narrow, roughly 12 kilometers from the coast to the border fence, meaning a division-level offensive could reach the seacoast in under 24 hours. To create depth where none existed, Israel in practice (if not legally) moved the border away from its urban core. Yitzhak Rabin said in his last Knesset speech (October 1995) that the IDF would be deployed in any future agreement framework with the Palestinians “in the Jordan Valley in the broadest sense of the term” (my reading is that he meant up to the Allon Road, though he did not say so explicitly). He spoke not of sovereignty but of a practical reality that pushes the effective security border away from Israel’s heartland.

This logic appears in the Israel-Egypt peace treaty as well. The Sinai Peninsula separates Israel from the Suez and Egypt, and the treaty used limitations on Egyptian deployment and logistics to create an early-warning space and forward depth for Israel’s border, a buffer created by treaty limitations on Egypt’s forces across Sinai.

After the October 7 war, it is appropriate to reexamine the question of “defensible borders” to draw lessons from the conflict. Two general conclusions emerge that go beyond the Gaza envelope and should be adopted whenever Israel considers how to defend its borders.

First conclusion: How one prepares for defense and what forces are assigned matters, whether the border runs through terrain that is physically favorable or unfavorable. Defense is a military event with rules and principles like any other form of combat. Ignoring those principles greatly increases the chances of failure in a test, as happened in the communities around Gaza on the morning of October 7.

Second conclusion: Beyond correct force posture and adequate force along the borders, Israel should add substantial physical obstacles along the border to increase the cost of any attacking attempt. Those obstacles must be protected so they cannot be easily neutralized by a surprise attack. It is highly desirable that areas of

buffer or barriers be established before the obstacles to hinder access to them and to the border both in routine times and in emergencies.

On October 7, the IDF failed to meet the accepted requirements for defensive preparedness and lacked adequate obstacles or buffers, not only opposite the Gaza Strip but also regarding Hizbullah in Lebanon. Therefore, the failure was, in effect, predetermined by poor defensive preparations, regardless of the underground barrier (which was tested in a different way since Hamas did not attempt to cross the border in tunnels that morning).

Third conclusion: Along Israel's borders, most areas include civilian communities on or very near the border (or near IDF positions). The October 7 experience requires integrating those communities into the defense concept and defense management, as was common in the years after the state's founding. This concept was neglected over the years, as the October 7 morning made painfully clear, yet the communities still exist close to the border without adequate protection or proper integration into defense plans. Some communities were intentionally established near the border as part of the previous defensive doctrine; when that doctrine changed, necessary adjustments for the communities and their defense were not made.

Fourth conclusion: Israel must change its approach regarding the required combat power holding the defense lines. Because the October 7 attack occurred on a holiday, IDF forces were significantly reduced and "the IDF was in silence." That has no place in a force prepared to defend against an enemy openly intent on destroying the State of Israel. The IDF must set minimum manning levels in every sector and maintain them 365 days a year, without leniency. It must ensure that the components in the area match defense needs, for example, increasing firepower for combat support by enlarging artillery, adding armed drones, immediately deployable UAVs, and integrating reconnaissance directly with ground forces (not centralized in Tel Aviv). Firepower is central to defense capability; thus, units that generate firepower should be organic to or under the command of the regional division commander.

In general, one should not limit the definition of "defensible" to boundary placement alone. Defense is a professional challenge affected by factors beyond geography. Israel should change its approach in contact zones and treat them as combined spaces that include communities, outposts, fire assets, mobile military forces, and non-permanently inhabited agricultural lands. In light of the development of low-altitude warfare—drones, quadcopters, and personal aerial mobility seen on October 7—it will be appropriate to integrate local air-defense elements in these spaces that can operate independently without relying solely on the central air-defense elements run by the Air Force. Planning must include movement capabilities from these border areas into Israel and from Israel to these border areas to ensure tight coordination with the police, which remains responsible for the home front unless reallocated during wartime.

Regional divisions and corps should be built with a unified view of the military and

civilian space because integrating these capabilities under a single command will ensure better execution of the defense mission. Border location in geographic terms matters and Israel should strive for borders that are easier to defend, but location is not the whole story; one must address defense elements wherever the border lies.

Given these principles, what should Israel prepare for in the future and how will the war affect future threats?

Although it is too early to conclude the long-term impacts of Operation “Iron Swords,” there are important observations we can already make.

Future Options and Scenarios

The key question is how the Middle East will look after the war across various theaters.

Assuming the IDF completes its missions over the coming year and Israel succeeds in reaching agreements or practical arrangements on the ground, Israel will face a different Middle East in which the principal active, central, and direct adversary is Iran, and friction on Israel’s immediate borders will be reduced.

Because of developments in Lebanon and Gaza, Iran cannot rely on proxies on Israel’s borders to wage a large, multi-front war while remaining apparently uninvolved. Iran will have to depend more on Houthi capabilities and perhaps Shiite militias in Iraq. Iran itself was badly hit by Israeli strikes during the “12-day war” and operation “Roaring Lion”/ “Epic Fury” and its nuclear program has been set back, as has some of its missile production capacity. Nevertheless, Iran remains a country with enormous destructive potential, a learning state that will challenge Israel again in military and other domains such as cyber, terrorism, espionage, and internal subversion.

The reduced immediate threat from Gaza will permit the IDF to maintain a less intense combat posture vis-à-vis large areas in Gaza. At the same time, a wide deterrence or engagement zone may extend across a vast arena from western Iraq to the Mediterranean, encompassing Syria and Lebanon together. This represents a major and positive shift compared with the threat that faced Israel before October 7.

Future threats will center on two aspects:

- The residual capabilities remaining with Hamas, even if dismantled as an organization, and the residual strike capabilities that Hizbullah retains despite the severe blow it suffered, along with both organizations’ efforts to rearm and overcome IDF countermeasures.
- Concerns regarding various Sunni countries stemming from their internal

threats, meaning the possibility of drastic change in the regimes of states with which Israel currently has agreements or may have agreements in the future. Israel must learn to act to remove threats to those countries and within them, and to prepare both ideationally and operationally for regime changes that could affect Israel, a threat likely to grow over time.

Four countries merit focused intelligence and planning attention (in no particular order): Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Turkey. Israel must study them more deeply and prepare plans for scenarios in which regimes or their attitudes toward Israel change.

Jordan

Forces should focus mainly on preventing smuggling across the Jordanian border. As long as the current regime remains, a broader IDF deployment there would be a waste of resources, since Jordan is Israel's longest land border. Jordan would become an enemy or permissive to terrorism only if its regime changes.

Egypt

Egypt has the largest Arab army, and its capabilities should not be underestimated. Once fighting in Gaza eases, diplomatic efforts should focus on reducing the deployment of Egyptian forces and large logistical systems in Sinai. Israel must strictly enforce the military annex to the peace treaty. The Sinai Peninsula, the land separating Israel from the Suez and Egypt, must not permit Egypt to prepare the means for an attack on Israel. This is not necessarily about Cairo's intentions since there is likely no serious faction in Egypt today desiring war with Israel, partly because such a conflict could cause total economic collapse. Rather, this is about the military potential being built in Sinai. Israel should expand intelligence collection and research on Egypt and ensure that experienced professionals think operationally about potential Egyptian scenarios. At this stage, there is no need for major changes to the Israeli border posture vis-à-vis Egypt, but contingency plans must exist.

Syria

It is not yet clear what the new regime in Damascus will look like, whether jihadist elements within it will abandon an ideology hostile to Israel and attempt to reconstruct Syria as a state serving its population, or whether they will retain a hateful core and turn Syria into an active enemy. The danger increases if Syria becomes effectively a Turkish proxy as Turkey pursues neo-Ottoman aspirations. Turkish proxies or Turkish forces in Syria could deepen the risk of a direct and violent Israeli-Turkish confrontation.

A policy of caution and gravity is appropriate. Israel should maintain a broader IDF presence on the Golan while conducting real dialogue with the new regime in Damascus, which may still be fragmented and not fully in control of its territory. Israel should also consider its commitments to the Druze population, which remains an important separate matter. It is necessary to monitor Syrian developments closely; the situation there is highly fluid, and Israel may have to maintain a dual relationship with Syria—on one hand, pursuing talks about a better future, and on the other, preparing for friction including Israeli deployment and activity in parts of the Golan and preventing actions against Druze militants.

Lebanon

Lebanon is something of a success story following the war, but continued activity beyond the border is essential to consolidate and deepen the achievements. The replacement in Syria of an Alawite regime with one hostile to Iran and Hizbullah will make rearmament of Hizbullah more difficult. Hizbullah may have to devote resources to defending its own interests against a hostile Sunni neighbor. Together with the Lebanese government, there may be pressure to disarm the organization. In the new situation, Hizbullah's threat to Israel may decline or take a new form (drones) and its weakness may increase. This could provide Israel with an opportunity to further degrade Hizbullah's strength, either directly if circumstances allow or indirectly by exerting appropriate pressure on the Lebanese government.

Final Observations

One of the main lessons of the war concerns the root of Israel's ability to defend its borders in future defensive battles: it is crucial to prevent the formation of a large threat close to the borders even in periods of quiet. Israel must adopt an active worldview that regards preemptive operations aimed at preventing the construction of a significant threat as an essential tool of defense. The importance lies not only in the border's location and readiness along it but also in preventing the adversary's ability to create a border threat in the first place.

To realize these goals, it is vital to build intelligence systems tailored to these requirements. The enemy across the border must be understood as a military threat even when the actor is a terrorist organization. Intelligence collection and analysis must be structured accordingly. In these matters, the responsibility must lie fully with the military, which should hold exclusive authority for border defense, for managing defensive combat, and for overall preparedness.

Israel's Right to Maintain and Supervise Security Zones and Demilitarized Areas as Part of its Right to Defensible Borders

Amb. Alan Baker

Every territorial withdrawal Israel has undertaken, whether in the Sinai following the 1956 Suez crisis, and pursuant to the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty, in Syria in the 1974 Israel-Syria Disengagement Agreement, in Southern Lebanon in the late 1980s, and in the Gaza Strip in 2005—all have been accompanied by security and demilitarization arrangements, monitored and supervised in order to prevent hostile forces from filling the vacuum and embedding themselves along Israel's borders, resulting in territorial vulnerability and cross-border attacks.

Hence the creation of UNEF in the Sinai after the Suez Crisis in 1956 to supervise the cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of foreign forces, and UNEF II in 1973 to supervise the Israeli-Egyptian ceasefire after the Yom Kippur war, UNDOF in 1974 to maintain the ceasefire between Israel and Syria and supervise the disengagement of forces, and UNIFIL, established in 1978 and remodeled in 2006, to restore peace and security along the border between Israel and Lebanon.

These various security and demilitarization arrangements proved to be totally inadequate inasmuch as dependence on foreign forces and UN approval failed to prevent violations of the demilitarization requirements.

As October 7 tragically confirmed, both with regard to the Gaza Strip as well as Southern Lebanon, Israel's insistence on defensible borders, supervised and monitored demilitarization, and buffer zones, including the presence of Israeli forces to monitor and to guarantee security, is an indispensable component for ensuring the defensibility of Israel's borders.

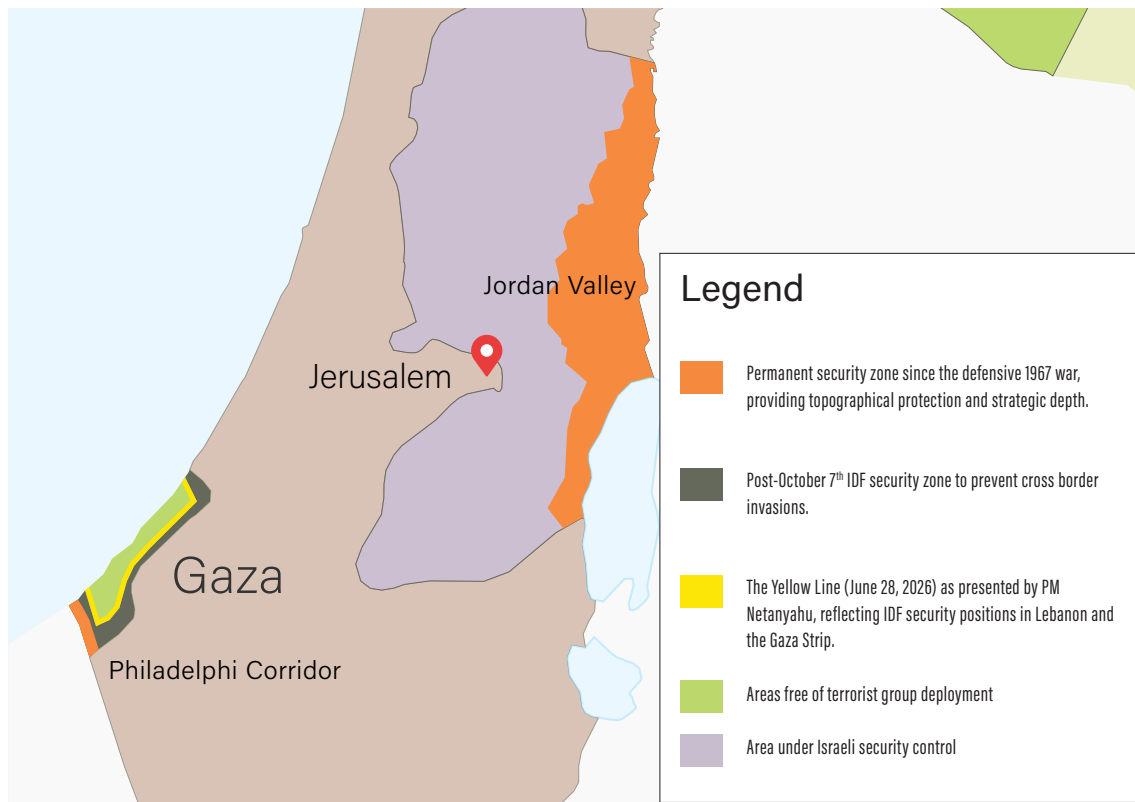
As long as a real and immediate danger continues to exist along Israel's borders, and as long as Israel's security continues to face ongoing threats from neighboring territory, Israel is fully justified in insisting on security zones and demilitarized areas under its monitoring and supervision.

Insistence by Israel on such ongoing presence and supervision cannot be seen in any manner whatsoever to be an obstacle to peace.

To the contrary, it is a prerequisite for any hope of regional stabilization and an essential requirement to ensure Israel's justified and proven right to ensure its security in accordance with its internationally acknowledged rights to defend itself and its people.

PART II: REGIONAL ARENAS

Israel's Eastern and Southern Border



A Defensible Border with the Gaza Strip After October 7

Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser

► Executive Summary

Israel's defense concept for Gaza failed on October 7 due to flawed intelligence, misplaced reliance on deterrence, underestimation of geographic and human factors, and failure to prevent Hamas's buildup. To establish a defensible border, Israel must shift from relying on deterrence and intelligence warnings to maintaining permanent readiness, operational control, and depth. Full control over access routes, a demilitarized buffer zone, and a constant IDF presence are essential. Settling Israelis in Gaza should be avoided. Only continuous vigilance can secure the southern border.

If one lesson is clear from Hamas's terrorist assault on October 7, 2023, it is that Israel's security concept regarding the Gaza Strip failed completely. Although the investigation into that day's events is still underway, several key failures have already emerged.

1. The Intelligence Failure

The first failure was conceptual.

- Intelligence assessments wrongly assumed that Hamas was deterred, incapable of a large-scale attack, and primarily focused on improving Gaza's living conditions.
- Analysts believed they could accurately gauge Hamas's intentions and capabilities.

This led to complacency and overconfidence, eroded professionalism, and resulted in an inadequate intelligence-collection plan. The defense establishment also assumed that the border fence system was sufficient to block infiltration attempts. That assumption was based on a small-scale threat scenario, not a broad, coordinated invasion targeting both civilians and military sites.

2. Overreliance on Deterrence

Too much confidence was placed in deterrence. The belief was that Hamas, due to Israel's overwhelming superiority in force, technology, and intelligence, would avoid offensive actions. It was also assumed that Hamas understood its tunnels were neutralized and its rockets were ineffective against Israeli defenses.

In reality, Hamas was willing to pay a heavy price to achieve its goals. The group's cost-benefit logic was misunderstood. Fanatical organizations are not deterred by conventional measures.

3. Underestimating the Geostrategic and Human Terrain

The defense posture underestimated the dangers posed by geography, population, ideology, and military conditions.

- The border's proximity to hostile population centers created vulnerability.
- Intelligence penetration was difficult.
- Defensive depth was almost nonexistent.
- Standing forces were limited.
- Civilians and bases were positioned too close to the border without proper protection.

These weaknesses existed opposite a population indoctrinated from childhood to hate Israel and glorify violence.

4. Failure to Prevent Hamas's Military Build-Up

Since the 2005 disengagement, Israel failed to prevent Hamas from building military strength. Beyond enforcing a blockade, little was done to stop the manufacture of weapons, smuggling, or training. The withdrawal caused a major loss of human intelligence, weakening Israel's counterterrorism capabilities. During quiet periods, Israel rarely targeted Hamas leaders.

5. Building a Defensible Border

To make the Gaza border defensible, Israel must fundamentally revise its security concept. Defense should be based on potential threats, not enemy intentions. Deterrence alone cannot guarantee security.

High-quality intelligence is vital, but defense cannot rely on advanced warning. Israel must maintain constant readiness, ensuring security through uninterrupted preparedness, much as Iron Dome does.

6. Operational and Strategic Requirements

Israel must prevent Gaza's rearmament by controlling all access routes, including the border with Egypt, tunnels, sea, and air approaches. An IDF presence along the Philadelphi Corridor is necessary until Egypt and technology can ensure complete arms interdiction.

Israel must also retain operational freedom across Gaza to prevent regrouping and rearmament. Firepower alone is insufficient; ground maneuvering must remain an option.

A forward demilitarized buffer zone inside Gaza could help detect infiltration. Agricultural land along the border should be fenced, and movement strictly controlled. In areas near the border, residents may need to relocate or face additional barriers.

Defense in depth requires strong border fortifications, rapid-response teams in nearby communities, and improved aerial and naval defense.

7. The Question of Renewed Settlement

Reestablishing Israeli settlements inside Gaza would currently do more harm than good. While settlements contribute to security in other regions, under the present circumstances, they would complicate defense and should be avoided.

Conclusion

Achieving a defensible Gaza border will require significant investment in manpower, technology, and intelligence. In a multi-front conflict, this burden is heavy but necessary.

Regardless of Hamas's status or Gaza's governance, only continuous readiness, operational control, and strategic depth can ensure a truly defensible border. This

is especially true as long as the Palestinians don't change their narrative of hatred towards Zionism and struggle against Israel until its demise.

Redesigning the Security Space on the Israel-Lebanon Border

Oded Ailam

► Executive Summary

There is a strategic framework for transforming the volatile security situation along the Israel-Lebanon border. There is a historical evolution of the boundary from its 1921 demarcation to the current “Blue Line,” and political weakness in Lebanon, UN ineffectiveness, and Iranian influence allowed Hizbullah to entrench itself as a dominant military force in southern Lebanon. Israel’s recent military successes create an opportunity for a new, sustainable border arrangement emphasizing demilitarization, sovereignty restoration, and robust international oversight. This vision demands sustained U.S. leadership, international cooperation, and domestic political resolve, recognizing that true border security can only arise from a redefined strategic order on the ground.

A Shifting Border Line

In early 1921, two lieutenant colonels, Britain’s Newcombe and France’s Paulet, set out to mark the border between Palestine and Lebanon, from the Mediterranean to Al-Hamma at the Yarmouk. Over three weeks, they drove the route and marked the border with 71 stone cairns; later these were replaced with concrete pillars and piles of concreted stones. The Newcombe–Paulet Commission’s report was accompanied by a written document and a map script.

From 1923 to 1948 the border line underwent many changes and refinements. During

World War II the British re-marked the border when their army conquered Syria (then controlled by Vichy France) and handed it over to General de Gaulle's Free French. The re-marking was done while British forces were in the country, using state-of-the-art surveying equipment for the time, and numerous errors from the 1921 demarcation were found. Border points were marked with concrete posts known as boundary pillars.

After Israel's War of Independence, the Israel-Lebanon Armistice Agreement of 23 March 1949 set the international boundary as the armistice line between Israel and Lebanon. As part of the armistice arrangements with Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, Mixed Armistice Commissions (MACs) were established, including with Lebanon.

The Israel-Lebanon MAC also worked on marking the armistice line by placing piles of concreted stones painted white, with two metal flags and the inscriptions "Israel" and "Lebanon" pointing in opposite directions. The MAC did not resolve all disputes before the Six-Day War began, at which point border talks effectively ceased.

Today, the line separating Israel from Lebanon is the line fixed when the IDF withdrew from the areas it entered in 1982. Upon Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon on 24 May 2000, it was agreed with the UN to delineate a redeployment line, slightly different from the international boundary, called the "line of withdrawal of IDF forces from Lebanon," also known as the Blue Line (based on the UN flag's color).

The UN marks the line on the ground with large barrels and concrete blocks painted blue. It is a provisional line that mostly, but not entirely, overlaps the Israel-Lebanon armistice line, with an understanding between Israel and the UN that the final line will be set in a joint Israel-Lebanon negotiation. Fourteen points of dispute remain.

The Border as a Volatile Strategic Front

Israel's northern border with Lebanon, especially since the events of 7 October 2023 and the ensuing northern campaign, has emerged as a volatile strategic front that requires fresh thinking. This proposal examines the inherent, persistent failures of past border arrangements, analyzing why they repeatedly failed to enforce Lebanese sovereignty and to prevent Hizbullah's consolidation as a strategic military actor. It argues that Israel's military successes in its various confrontations with Hizbullah, particularly in the current war, have created a unique lever that enables the Lebanese government, with international backing, to reassert sovereignty in the south. That, in turn, has far-reaching implications for Israel's claims to change the status quo. The paper proposes a new paradigm for stabilizing the border, based on a phased ("pulse") approach: creating an expanded security zone, completely demilitarizing southern Lebanon of Hizbullah forces, and deploying an effective multinational force led by the United States, while preserving Israeli aerial freedom of action in the initial stages until full stabilization. Finally, it discusses the international

and domestic challenges of implementing this option and the need for broad understandings and sustainable enforcement mechanisms.

Introduction: The October 7 Earthquake and the Need for a New Northern Security Paradigm

The events of 7 October 2023 and the war that followed not only exposed the severe vulnerability of Israel's southern borders; they also dramatically highlighted the escalating threats on the northern border with Lebanon. The intense fighting with Hizbullah—mass rocket fire, UAV launches, and ground maneuvers—forced large-scale evacuations of Israeli communities and proved that the existing security concept, grounded in UN Security Council Resolution 1701, collapsed completely. The Blue Line, intended to mark Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon and ensure the south's demilitarization, has de facto become an active frontline.

This reality compels a thorough re-examination of the strategic assumptions that have shaped Israel's Lebanon policy in recent decades. This paper analyzes the roots of the continuing failure to regulate the border, reviews the legal-international dimension of the dispute, and presents a comprehensive strategic alternative for redesigning the security space on the northern border. The alternative builds on lessons of the past, recognizes the complex geopolitical reality, and offers a phased, sustainable framework anchored in significant international commitment under leadership other than the UN, which has failed in its role.

Part A: Historical and Geopolitical Background—A Chronicle of Instability and Failed Sovereignty

Lebanon: An Artificial and Fragile State Turned "Hizbullah-Land"

By virtue of its multi-sectarian demography and fragile political system, Lebanon has suffered chronic instability since its founding. The Taif Agreement (1989), which ended the long civil war (1975–1990), was meant to lay a foundation for a functioning state but in practice left sectarian power centers and external interests that continued to undermine stability. Israel's withdrawal from the Security Zone in May 2000, though carried out in accordance with UN decisions, created a governance vacuum in southern Lebanon. Hizbullah, with Iranian and Syrian support, quickly and efficiently exploited this vacuum, transforming itself from a local guerrilla force into a semi-state military actor with strategic capabilities threatening Israel.

The establishment of a "Hizbullah state," especially in the south, complete with an independent military apparatus, social and economic networks, and a parallel political system, directly challenged Lebanese state sovereignty. Weak and divided Lebanese governments avoided direct confrontation with the organization, thereby

enabling it to systematically violate UNSCR 1701. That resolution, adopted at the end of the 2006 Second Lebanon War, called for disarming all armed groups in Lebanon, deploying the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) as the sole sovereign force south of the Litani, and preventing the entry of weapons to the area without government approval. In practice, Hizbullah was not disarmed; it dramatically upgraded its capabilities, building a stockpile of tens of thousands of rockets and missiles, including precision missiles, and creating a constant strategic threat to Israel's home front.

The Current Line (Blue Line): Anatomy of a Strategic Failure

The Blue Line, drawn by the UN in 2000, was never intended as a permanent international boundary but as a line of withdrawal. It stretches roughly 79 kilometers, from the Mount Dov/Hermon area in the east to Rosh Hanikra on the Mediterranean coast in the west. Complex mountainous topography, Lebanese-side commanding ridges, dense forests, deep wadis, severely hampers the IDF's observation and control and gives Hizbullah an inherent tactical advantage. Many Lebanese villages—Maroun al-Ras, Bint Jbeil, Aita al-Shaab, and others—sit dangerously close to the border, often overlooking Israeli communities. Hizbullah exploited this proximity to embed military infrastructure within civilian populations, cynically using civilians as human shields, and to mount attacks and indirect-fire salvos into Israel.

The strategic vulnerability of Israel's frontline communities—Metula, Kiryat Shmona, Shlomi, Manara, and many more—has been tragically demonstrated since October 2023. ATGM fire, short-range rockets, mortars, and UAVs became daily routine, causing heavy property damage, harming vital infrastructure, and paralyzing civilian life. The necessity to evacuate tens of thousands of residents for many months inflicts a severe blow to national resilience and Israeli sovereignty.

Part B: Diagnosing Past Border-Regulation Failures—Why the Existing Model Keeps Collapsing

Past attempts to stabilize the Israel-Lebanon border, especially arrangements rooted in international decisions, have failed systematically. This is not accidental but stems from a toxic mix of structural, political, and strategic factors:

- **Inherent weakness of the Lebanese state and inability/unwillingness to enforce sovereignty:** Lebanese governments have been weak, divided, and influenced by sectarian and external actors. They lack the military and political capacity to confront Hizbullah and enforce sovereignty across the country, particularly in the south. The LAF, despite some international support, remains secondary to Hizbullah's military power and at times must coordinate with it. Any

attempt to challenge Hizbullah risks renewed civil war—a threat all Lebanese political actors fear.

- **Failure of UNIFIL and the UN as a monitoring/enforcement mechanism:** UNIFIL, charged with supervising implementation of 1701, has proven toothless and ineffective. Its limited mandate, dependence on cooperation from the LAF and Hizbullah, and lack of real enforcement capability render it largely symbolic. UN reports have at times noted Hizbullah violations but did not produce meaningful corrective action. As an institution, the UN has repeatedly shown itself incapable of dealing with state-sponsored terrorist organizations operating from within civilian populations, failing to create effective enforcement mechanisms or impose meaningful sanctions on Lebanon for non-compliance.
- **Iranian intervention turning Lebanon into a forward front in a regional struggle:** Iran views Hizbullah as a central strategic arm of the “Resistance Axis” and regional-hegemony bid. It funds, arms, and directs the organization, turning Lebanon into a forward base against Israel. So long as Tehran’s interest in holding Lebanon hostage endures, any local arrangement will remain vulnerable to Iranian pressure and sabotage. The transformation of southern Lebanon into an Iranian outpost is the chief driver of chronic instability.
- **Cynical exploitation of international law and the civilian sphere by Hizbullah:** Hizbullah operates from within and behind civilians, exploiting protections in international humanitarian law. It places military infrastructure—arms depots, HQs, launch sites—inside residential areas, schools, and hospitals, complicating the IDF’s response and confronting Israel with moral-legal dilemmas. In parallel, Hizbullah runs an effective international propaganda apparatus portraying itself as a “legitimate resistance” and accusing Israel of “war crimes.”
- **Lack of genuine international commitment to change the situation:** Despite broad recognition of the Hizbullah danger, the international community, particularly Western powers, has not shown sufficient resolve to compel Lebanon to assert sovereignty or disarm Hizbullah. Economic interests, fear of regional escalation, and differing conceptions of the conflict have prevented the creation of a united, forceful front.

Part C: Implications of an Israeli Victory over Hizbullah for Lebanon’s Status and Israel’s Claims

Israel entered the current northern campaign with a clear position: the pre-October 7 reality cannot continue. This proposal assumes the campaign ended with significant Israeli military gains—Hizbullah forces pushed away from the border, substantial degradation of its military capabilities, a marked reduction in its dominance within Lebanon, and restored security for northern residents. Such an Israeli victory, even

short of Hizbullah's total dismantlement, creates a new strategic reality with far-reaching legal and political implications:

- **Lebanon's duty to restore sovereignty:** With the immediate military threat of Hizbullah in the south neutralized, Lebanon's chief excuse for failing to enforce sovereignty disappears. With Hizbullah significantly weakened, the Lebanese government, backed internationally, can and must deploy its army effectively along the border, enforce the law, and prevent any renewed entrenchment by armed non-state actors.
- **Strengthening Israel's claims for territorial and security changes:** Lebanon's persistent failure to meet its international obligations (notably 1701), coupled with Israel's repeated need to act militarily to remove threats emanating from Lebanese territory, bolsters Israel's argument for substantive changes in security arrangements. The principle of "territory in exchange for real security" becomes salient.
- **Implications under international law:** A situation in which a state consistently allows a terrorist organization to operate from its territory and attack a neighbor raises sharp questions of state responsibility. An Israeli victory that enables Lebanon to reassert sovereignty strengthens the case for holding Lebanon legally and politically accountable to prevent renewed aggression from its soil.

Part D: Paradigms and Options for a New Border Design—A Phased Proposal

History shows that durable border arrangements require more than paper agreements. They demand physical changes on the ground, robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, and broad international recognition. The Korean DMZ, the Lausanne Treaty (1923), and Camp David (1979) between Israel and Egypt offer key lessons:

- **Korean DMZ:** A 4-km-wide buffer, tightly supervised by international (mainly U.S. and South Korean) and North Korean forces, has prevented all-out war on the peninsula for over 70 years despite no formal peace treaty.
- **Lausanne Treaty:** Redefined modern Turkey's borders after World War I and the Ottoman collapse, creating a relatively stable territorial reality.
- **Camp David:** Returning Sinai to Egypt was made possible by complete demilitarization of the peninsula's offensive weaponry and deployment of an independent, more effective Multinational Force & Observers (MFO) rather than a UN force.

Drawing on these lessons, and recognizing the collapse of the current model, this

study proposes a phased (“pulse”) strategic alternative to redesign the Israel-Lebanon border security space:

Phase A: Create a New Security Reality and Ensure Initial Israeli Freedom of Action

- **Translate military gains into security gains:** Rigidly enforce Israel’s military outcome so that all Hizbullah forces and infrastructure are pushed a significant distance from the border, at least to the Awali River, and beyond in select areas. Destroy all of the organization’s underground infrastructure and strategic weapons stockpiles across Lebanon.
- **Maintain full Israeli aerial and intelligence freedom of action:** In the initial period, until a reliable alternative security mechanism stabilizes, Israel retains full aerial and intelligence freedom of action over all Lebanese airspace to prevent Hizbullah’s re-entrenchment, thwart arms smuggling, and respond immediately to emerging threats. This freedom will gradually decline as the multinational force and LAF demonstrate capability and effectiveness.

Phase B: Establish a Demilitarized, Supervised Security Zone Led by a U.S. Force

After Hizbullah is verifiably disarmed, define an expanded security zone: Establish a substantially wider security zone to the north of the Blue Line, extending from the international boundary north at least to the Litani River and beyond in topographically critical areas. This zone will be fully demilitarized of any military or armed presence other than the IDF in the first stage and later LAF and a dedicated multinational force.

1. **Blended recommendation—new defensive border concept:** Base the Israel-Lebanon boundary on a demilitarized buffer inside Lebanon under a U.S.-led force combined with a multi-layered defensive belt inside Israel.

Core principles:

- **Effective control:** Combine international actors with Israel’s smart technological control.
- **Prevent terrorist re-entrenchment:** A meaningful buffer that blocks renewals by Hizbullah or other extremists.
- **Operational flexibility:** Advanced defensive arrays inside Israel for rapid response.

- **International cooperation:** A multinational force that confers legitimacy and enforces on the ground.

Program components:

- **Demilitarized buffer (10–15 km) inside Lebanon**

Control structure:

- **U.S.-led multinational force:** Oversees demilitarization and ensures the Lebanese government bars any renewal of terrorist activity.
- **Potential Arab partners:**
 - **Jordan:** Training Lebanese forces to hold and maintain the area.
 - **Egypt:** Managing logistics facilities and engineering oversight.
 - **UAE:** Funding and controlled support for civilian projects.

Key features:

- **No restoration of commanding ridgelines:** Designate principal villages/areas as “no-rebuild on commanding ridges” to prevent return of terror groups.
- **Technological monitoring:** Smart cameras, patrol UAVs, early-warning systems.
- **Ground obstacles:** Build ground obstacles on selected terrain to prevent ground incursions into Israel akin to the Gaza October 7 model.
- **Building permits:** Any civilian project requires joint approval by the Lebanese government under multinational supervision.
- **Central monitoring hub:** Located near Naqoura, with direct access to multinational forces.

Multinational coordination and crisis management:

- **Border Multinational Coordination Center:** Located near Rosh Hanikra; includes representatives from the U.S., Lebanon, and Israel. Responsible for incident management with the LAF.

- **Intelligence coordination:** A shared intelligence framework—Israeli advanced ISR fused with ground collection by the multinational force.
- **Civil support:** Emergency civil centers near Metula and Rosh Hanikra to support populations during escalations. **Controlled humanitarian resettlement aid** for evacuated Lebanese villagers if needed.

Advantages:

- **Security and international prestige:** U.S. and Arab participation boosts legitimacy.
- **Active defense:** Israeli technology coupled with on-ground multinational presence.
- **Prevents terror re-entrenchment:** Demilitarization and building limits block renewal.
- **Improves Lebanese stability:** Supports Beirut's control and provides civil assistance.

Risks:

- **Lebanese destabilization:** Need rapid-response mechanisms for political shifts.
 - **Problematic cooperation:** Ensure long-term commitment by the multinational force.
 - **Border breaches:** Bolster advance intelligence arrays inside Israel.
 - **The Shiite population:** May return to the area, still supports Hizbullah ideology, and may be used to help resumption of terror infrastructure.
2. **Create a strong, effective multinational force (not a UN body):** Replace UNIFIL with a new multinational force led by the U.S. and joined by states with an interest in regional stability (e.g., France, Britain, Germany, Gulf states). Give it a clear, robust mandate with enforcement powers, authority to use force, and unrestricted access across southern Lebanon. Its core missions:
- Prevent any return of Hizbullah or other armed actors to the demilitarized zone.
 - Oversee dismantlement of remaining military infrastructure.

- Assist the LAF in establishing sovereignty in the area.
 - Prevent arms smuggling into the zone.
 - Establish an efficient dispute-resolution and coordination mechanism with Israel and Lebanon.
3. **LAF deployment:** The LAF deploys throughout the demilitarized zone as the sole Lebanese sovereign actor permitted to operate there, supported by the multinational force with equipment, training, and logistics.

Phase C: Long-Term Stabilization, Economic Development, and Gradual Easing (Condition-Based)

- **Prove sustained stability and security:** Only after a significant period (e.g., 5–10 years) of complete quiet, full demilitarization, and no hostile activity from southern Lebanon should certain easings be considered. This period is needed to build trust and prove Lebanon's commitment.
- **Economic incentives and development of southern Lebanon:** In parallel with security stabilization, the international community, led by the U.S. and the EU, offers a significant economic aid package to develop southern Lebanon. Development provides a socioeconomic alternative for locals and reduces dependence on Hizbullah.
- **Specific arrangements on disputed points:** Through the coordination mechanism, address specific points of dispute along the border (e.g., Shebaa Farms/Mount Dov, Ghajar) based on international law and both sides' security needs.
- **Reassess Israeli aerial freedom of action:** As stability consolidates and the LAF and multinational force prove capable of preventing threats, Israel's aerial freedom over Lebanon can be gradually curtailed, while retaining responsive capability in case of grave violations.

International and Domestic Challenges to Implementing the Proposed Option

Implementing such an ambitious strategic vision entails complex challenges internationally and domestically:

1. **Internal Lebanese resistance:** Hizbullah and its political allies will vehemently oppose any move that harms their status and military power, potentially sabotaging implementation via political pressure, internal violence, or renewed

fighting. Even a well-intentioned Lebanese government will struggle to garner broad backing for a plan that could be seen as capitulation to external dictates or an infringement of sovereignty (though the current situation is a far graver infringement).

2. **Regional resistance, chiefly from Iran:** Disarming Hizbullah is a severe strategic blow to Iranian interests. Tehran will use all its influence to thwart such a move and continue backing Hizbullah and other destabilizing actors.
3. **Building broad international consensus and support:** Creating a U.S.-led multinational force with a strong mandate and enforcement power requires agreement from key UN Security Council powers (U.S., U.K., France, and possibly Russia and China, which are more likely to demur). States must be persuaded to contribute troops and resources, and disagreements over mandate scope and use of force must be overcome.
4. **Ensuring long-term U.S. commitment:** U.S. leadership is essential but demands sustained political, military, and economic commitment, never guaranteed and dependent on U.S. domestic politics and perceived interests.
5. **Logistical and budgetary hurdles:** Standing up and operating a large, well-equipped multinational force and major economic-development programs in southern Lebanon require significant international funding and efficient management mechanisms.
6. **Defining effective enforcement and sanction mechanisms:** Pre-define responses to violations—by Hizbullah or by the Lebanese government (if non-compliant). International sanctions and an option for military response (by the multinational force or Israel) must be clear and agreed in advance.

Summary and Conclusions: Toward a New Era of Security in the North—From Vision to Reality

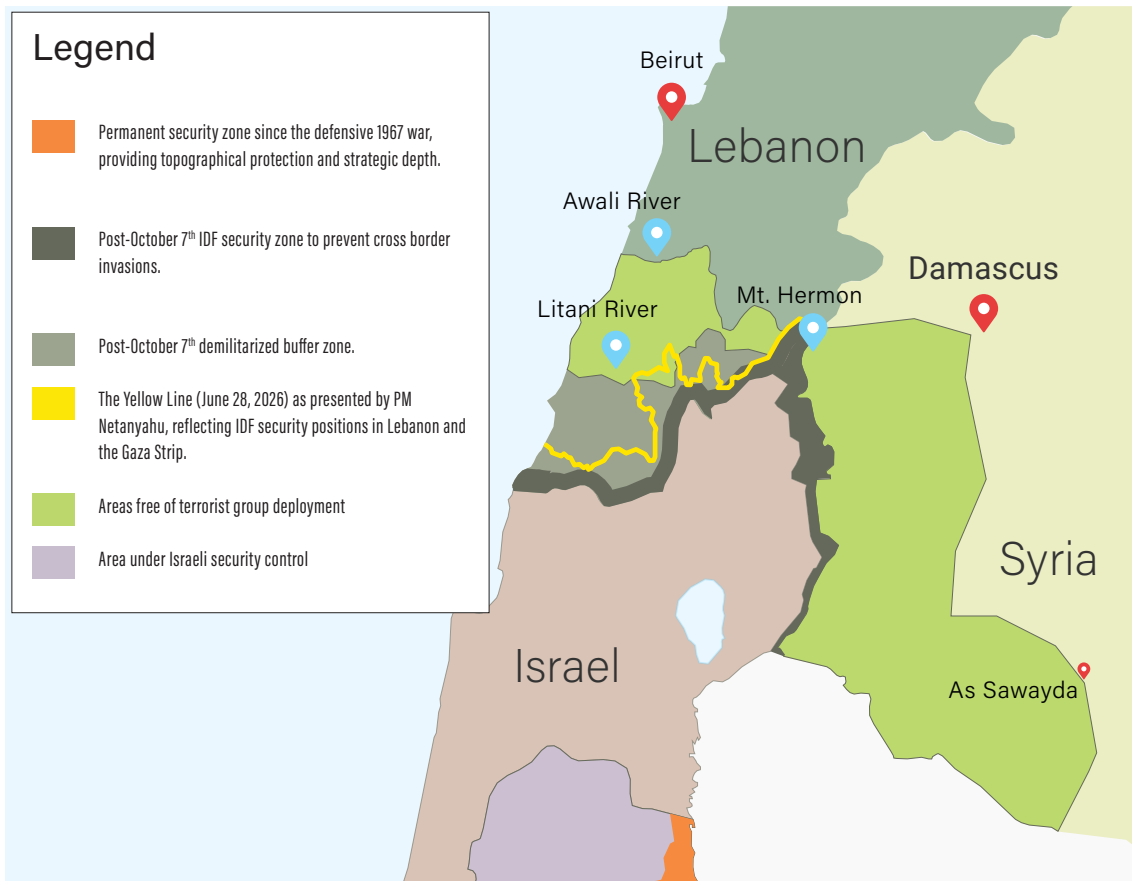
The strategic reality on the Israel-Lebanon border, revealed in full severity since October 7, demands a fundamental paradigm shift. Persisting with failed models such as UNSCR 1701 and UNIFIL in its current form is an invitation to the next disaster. This proposal addresses the roots of failure—Lebanon's inherent weakness, the UN's ineffectiveness, and Iran/Hizbullah's central role in destabilization.

The premise that an Israeli victory in the current campaign can create an opportunity for change obligates Israel to craft a clear, long-term strategic vision. The proposed alternative, a phased framework featuring a broad demilitarized security zone, supervised by an effective U.S.-led multinational force, while preserving initial Israeli freedom of action, offers a path to address these complex challenges. It combines military strength, resolute diplomacy, and international commitment,

recognizing the need for sustainable solutions grounded in real changes on the ground.

Implementing this vision will be difficult, as detailed above. It requires determined leadership in Israel, U.S. willingness to assume a leading role, and cooperation from key international actors. Above all, it requires understanding that there are no quick fixes: durable security on the northern border will come only through sustained, multi-dimensional effort and the demonstration of strategic resolve. The repeated failures of the past must serve as a warning, and as a source of insight for building a safer future for Israel's northern residents and the state as a whole. The shift from temporary stabilization to sustainable security demands readiness for bold moves and a deep conceptual change.

Israel's Northern Border



Defensible Borders on the Syrian Front

Col. (ret.) Dr. Jacques Neriah

► Executive Summary

The regional balance of power has shifted dramatically following the fall of the Assad regime and the rise of a new Syrian leadership under Ahmad al-Sharaa. Syria's pivot away from Iran and its outreach to Israel have transformed a former enemy into a potential partner. This realignment has disrupted Iran's land corridor to Lebanon, weakened Hizbullah, and turned Syria into a strategic buffer separating Israel from Iranian influence.

Israel now benefits from greater strategic depth, an extended defensive frontier, and enhanced early-warning capabilities against threats from the east. Emerging cooperation between Israel and Syria—focused on deterring Iran, stabilizing the border region, and coordinating security measures—offers both nations new opportunities for peace and regional integration. If sustained, this partnership could mark a major step toward reshaping the Middle East's strategic landscape in Israel's favor.

The sudden collapse of the Ba'ath regime in Syria, which had been identified with the Alawite Assad dynasty for nearly six decades, has shattered Israel's long-standing security concept regarding defensible borders with Syria.

Following the Six-Day War and the October 1973 War, the Israeli-Syrian security framework was based on strict adherence to the 1974 disengagement agreement, monitored by UN observation forces (UNDOF and UNTSO). This agreement, which imposed clear limitations on Syrian force deployments facing Israel, was

scrupulously observed even during times when Israeli forces clashed with Syrian troops in Lebanon or conducted airstrikes deep within Syrian territory.

True to its strategic doctrine of preventing any existential nuclear threat, Israel destroyed the Syrian nuclear reactor built with North Korean assistance in 2007, signaling that it would not tolerate any attempt to endanger its survival or allow any hostile entity to acquire nuclear capabilities threatening the Jewish state.

The Syrian civil war created an entirely new strategic environment. Iran and its proxies intervened to rescue the Assad regime, establishing a continuous military presence in areas adjacent to the Israeli-held Golan Heights. Over the past fourteen years, Israel has worked tirelessly to prevent Iran and its allies from entrenching themselves along the Israeli border. Iranian monitoring stations and Hizbullah observation posts, reinforced by pro-Iranian militias from Afghanistan and Pakistan, took up positions facing Israel. This transformed the local threat into a regional and even global axis of confrontation designed to encircle and ultimately destroy Israel.

In essence, Iran succeeded in constructing a “ring of fire” stretching from Lebanon through Syria and Iraq to Yemen, creating a de facto front line with Israel 1,300 to 1,500 kilometers from Iran’s own borders.

In response, Israel adopted a strategy known by its Hebrew acronym MABAM (“the campaign between wars”), aimed at preventing Iranian and proxy entrenchment in Syria and halting the transfer of strategic weapons from Iran to Hizbullah in Lebanon. Israel carried out hundreds of airstrikes on targets in Syria, achieving only partial success, intercepting perhaps ten percent of weapons shipments, but with Russian mediation, managed to prevent large-scale Iranian deployments near the Golan frontier.

On December 8, 2024, Bashar al-Assad’s regime collapsed like a house of cards, replaced by a Sunni jihadist militia that accomplished the unthinkable: the ouster of the entrenched Alawite oligarchy.

Fearing a surprise assault similar to the October 7 attack on its southern front and believing the new Syrian leader to be a reincarnation of ISIS, Israel launched intensive air raids to neutralize remaining Syrian army threats, then advanced ground forces into the buffer zone and deep into the southern Golan plateau, seizing positions on the Syrian side of Mount Hermon overlooking Damascus. To prevent future surprise attacks, Israel began constructing a massive trench as an insurmountable barrier ahead of its new defensive line.

Soon, however, a surprising new tone emerged from Syria’s new ruler, Ahmad al-Sharaa, known as Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, a former ISIS and al-Nusra member and founder of Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham. Initially viewed with deep suspicion as a disguised jihadist seeking to deceive observers, Al-Sharaa gradually gained legitimacy through consistent peace overtures. His message was clear: Israel should have no doubts

about Syria's peaceful intentions. Syria, he declared, would not serve as a launchpad for attacks on Israel. Instead, Syria and Israel shared a common enemy, Iran, which was conducting subversive operations to topple his regime.

Al-Sharaa's gestures multiplied. In a striking symbolic act, he presented Israel with the complete archive of Eli Cohen, the legendary Israeli spy executed in Damascus in 1965. He accepted proximity talks with Israel, held in Azerbaijan, the United Arab Emirates, and even within the Golan buffer zone. U.S. President Donald Trump later revealed that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had encouraged him to lift sanctions on Syria and appointed Tzachi Hanegbi, Israel's National Security Adviser, as liaison with the Syrian leadership.

Under Al-Sharaa's leadership, Syria began its rehabilitation among nations, leading to a strategic convergence of interests between Israel and Syria, each driven by its own motivations:

- **Syria:** Israel represented a potential ally capable of deterring Iran and Hizbullah.
- **Israel (and Saudi Arabia):** Syria's alignment offered a potential diplomatic bridge to Washington.
- **Both sides:** Israel's relationships with the Druze and Kurdish communities, long seen as levers of influence, required careful management to avoid destabilizing Syria.
- **Israel:** Ensuring that areas east and south of the Golan would remain free of Iranian militias became a top priority, with Syrian cooperation vital to securing this objective.

Rumors soon surfaced about a potential peace treaty between Syria and Israel, possibly following a meeting between Netanyahu and Al-Sharaa during the UN General Assembly next September. More cautious voices spoke instead of a non-belligerence pact, which could include provisions such as:

- **From the Syrian side:** Israeli withdrawal from territories seized after December 8, cessation of uncoordinated air incursions over Syria, and Israeli recognition of the Shebaa Farms as Syrian (contrary to Hizbullah's claim that they belong to Lebanon).
- **From the Israeli side:** Expansion of the buffer zone to include not only the original strip but the entire area south of Damascus to the 1967 border, creating a "sterile zone" guaranteeing full Israeli military and aerial freedom of action and eliminating future threats.

Whether or not such a treaty materializes, one fact is undeniable: Iran's ambition to establish a direct border with Israel from 1,500 kilometers away has failed. The siege

Iran sought to impose around Israel has been broken. In fact, the strategic tables have turned. Syria has become a buffer state between Israel and Iran, severing Tehran's land corridor to its Lebanese proxy, Hizbullah.

Consequently, Israel's effective frontier has shifted eastward to the Syrian-Iraqi border, dramatically transforming the regional strategic balance in Israel's favor.

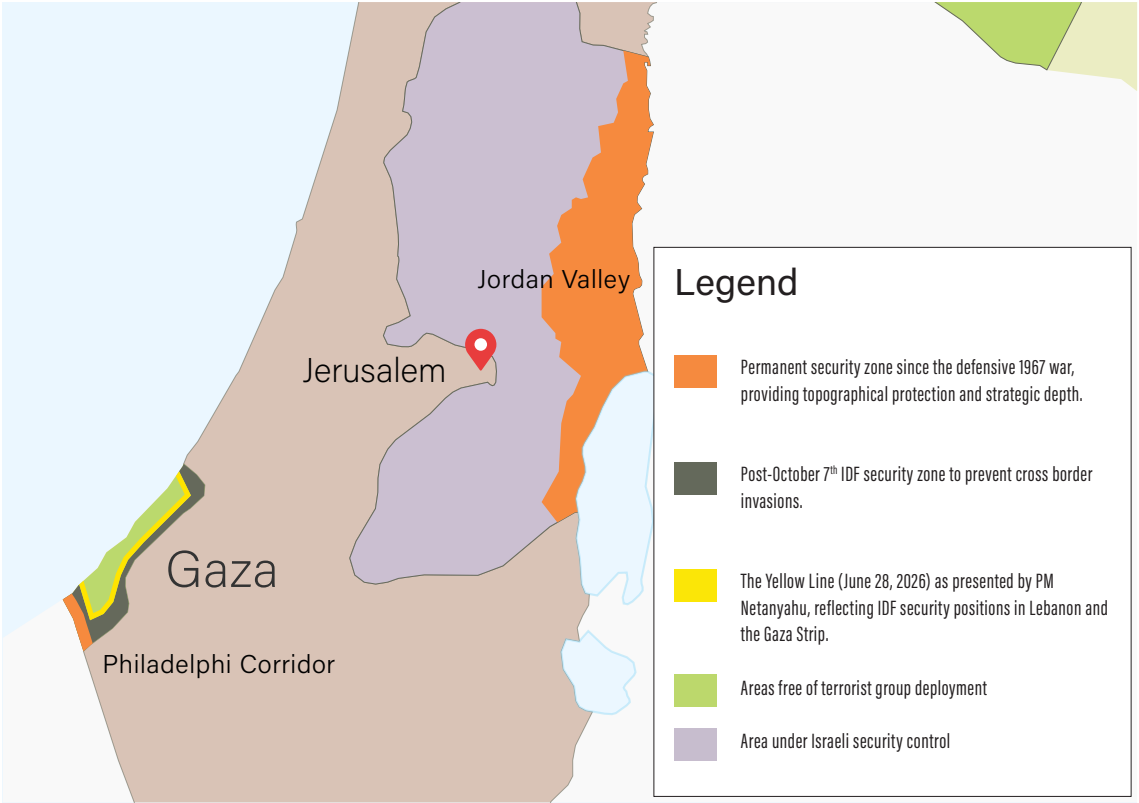
In this new order, Israel enjoys significantly enhanced early-warning capabilities against threats from Iran and Iraq. Cooperation with Syria could enable the installation of joint early-warning systems, bolstering both nations' defenses against Iranian subversion. Security collaboration would allow coordinated counterterrorism operations and facilitate the Israeli Air Force's use of Syrian airspace as a corridor to penetrate Iranian defenses.

Syria's position as a buffer zone also strengthens Israel's monitoring of its border with Jordan, which is especially important given Iran's ambition to ignite unrest along the 300-kilometer Israeli-Jordanian frontier by infiltrating through Syria and Iraq.

Moreover, Syria's strategic realignment has severely disrupted Iran's logistical lifeline to Hizbullah. The Lebanese organization now finds itself unable to replenish its arsenal or access the funds once supplied by Tehran, its former patron and lifeline.

In short, the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime has opened new avenues that greatly enhance Israel's ability to defend itself against Iranian threats. Cooperation with Syria has become not merely desirable but imperative. Both nations stand to gain immeasurably from the vast opportunities presented by the emergence of a new Syrian regime.

Israel's Eastern and Southern Border



Egypt's Place in Israel's National Security Concept

Col. (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman

► Executive Summary

The Israel–Egypt peace treaty, a nearly five-decade pillar of regional stability, has endured upheaval following the 2023 Gaza war. It allows Israel to redirect its security and diplomatic focus and enables limited cooperation with Egypt on counterterrorism and regional energy.

However, the peace remains largely “cold.” Deep Egyptian hostility toward Israel persists, and Cairo’s diplomatic actions—especially on the Palestinian issue—often run counter to Israeli interests. Meanwhile, Egypt’s massive military expansion is increasingly sourced from China and other powers, and its warming ties with Turkey also raise concerns about its long-term strategic orientation.

For Israel, Egypt’s growing capabilities do not yet signal aggression. Still, they require inclusion in future defense planning. Israel must balance deterrence and preparedness with diplomacy and reassurance. This approach avoids fueling mutual suspicions. Sustaining peace will require preserving U.S. involvement, leveraging regional partners like the UAE, and maintaining open political channels with Cairo. These steps are vital amid shifting regional dynamics.

The peace treaty between Israel and Egypt is a pillar of Israel’s security concept and remains in force nearly two generations after its signing. It enables Israel, which was Egypt’s principal adversary during its first 30 years, to redirect its security and national resources elsewhere. Over the past decade, Israel has provided security

assistance to Egypt in its campaign against ISIS in Sinai. Israel has also partnered with Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus to establish a regional energy framework in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus far, the peace treaty has withstood even the severe test posed by the war, as reflected in Egyptian public opinion. Egyptian leadership continues to state, despite hostile voices at home and in Israel, that peace is Egypt's strategic choice.

That said, it is a “cold” peace, with almost no people-to-people contact. Economic anchors are limited to energy supply and Egyptian exports to the U.S. under the QIZ framework. Meanwhile, worrying signs are accumulating regarding the future of the relationship. Diplomatically, Egypt is leading problematic initiatives on the Palestinian issue, and its Foreign Ministry still seeks ways to censure Israel over its alleged capabilities, shifting the arena from the IAEA board to the UN General Assembly. Popular hostility in Egypt, especially among elites, is deep and has intensified under the shadow of the suffering in Gaza.

The Egyptian military now consists of 13 divisions and 3 internal security divisions. Its air and naval forces are powerful, with over 400 fighter aircraft. These forces are trained and equipped with a focus on what they call “the small state in the northeast.” Military deployment and infrastructure in Sinai are steadily increasing, sometimes with Israel's consent, even when these changes do not always fit the treaty's military annex. For now, these changes do not seem to have an offensive purpose. American assistance remains important for Egypt and shapes its military thinking. Still, Egypt is increasingly turning to other suppliers, especially China, for weapons. Another concern is Egypt's improving relationship with Turkey. In the past, Turkish leader Erdoğan's support for the Muslim Brotherhood isolated Egypt and led to shared worries with Israel and Greece about Turkey's intentions. Recently, Egypt's economic troubles and tensions with Ethiopia have drawn it closer to Turkey, reducing trust with its former regional partners.

Because Israel is facing tough battles on other fronts, these developments create new strategic challenges. Even if warnings about Egypt seem premature, Israel must prepare for possible changes. Egypt is focused on its own problems, such as the Ethiopian dam, instability in Libya, and the threat of economic collapse. Still, Israel cannot ignore Egypt's growing military strength when planning its own defense forces. Israel needs to maintain its qualitative advantage, with a significant, multi-branch military that relies in part on American support. This will help ensure long-term deterrence and readiness in the face of unexpected shifts in Egypt's policies. At the same time, Israel should be proactive in how it builds its military, so as not to increase Egyptian suspicions or trigger a military buildup in response. For these reasons, open political communication with Egypt and cooperation with American and regional partners remain essential.

The Peace Treaty's Resilience Was Tested...

More than twenty months after October 7, 2023, the peace treaty with Egypt has held up well. It has survived the most severe test ever, far harsher than earlier episodes like the 1981 strike in Iraq, the 1982 Lebanon War, the 1987 intifada, the “escalation and lull” from fall 2000, and four rounds of fighting with Hamas in Gaza (2008–09, 2012, 2014, 2021). The suffering and destruction in Gaza during the current war have left a powerful imprint on Egyptian public consciousness. They have further fueled deep hostility among professional and academic elites in Egypt. IDF operations in the Philadelphi Corridor and Rafah area posed a real risk of direct friction with Egypt, and there were incidents with casualties. The potential for escalation was significant, yet it has not materialized so far.

Also, Egypt put itself, both as a partner and a rival to Qatar (which does not get along with Sisi's government because of support for the Muslim Brotherhood), as a main go-between in talks to free hostages. Egypt also wants to play an important role in planning for what happens next, as the natural way for people and goods to enter for future rebuilding. In earlier problems with Hamas, Israel pushed for Egypt—not Turkey or Qatar—to handle the final steps. Then, now, and in the future, this work means Egypt must keep open lines with Israel.

Since the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood from power in Cairo on July 3, 2013, ties between Israel and Egypt have developed in three key areas. These changes go beyond patterns from the Mubarak era.

1. Israel helped a lot in the U.S. to stop efforts to punish and cut aid to Egypt after its elected president was removed.
2. A terrorist organization entrenched itself in northern Sinai and pledged allegiance to ISIS, becoming the “Sinai Province” of the Islamic State. Intelligence and even operational cooperation with Israel then emerged to aid the Egyptian army. This cooperation has never been officially acknowledged. Press reports, including a detailed *New York Times* article in 2019, indicated that the IAF, with Egyptian approval and at Egypt's request, struck terror targets in Sinai.
3. The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) was established in 2019 and is hosted by Egypt. Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority participate, with European actors and the U.S. as observers. The forum reflects a shared interest in developing gas and possibly oil resources in the region. Trilateral summits—Egypt–Greece–Cyprus and Israel–Greece–Cyprus—have been held, creating a framework for strategic cooperation, though not merging into a quadrilateral.

Shared interests in the Eastern Mediterranean arise partly from concern about Turkey's ambitions under Erdoğan. Israel sided with Egypt and Greece in their dispute with Turkey over exclusive economic zone boundaries. Turkey claims

a corridor linking its waters to those of Libya. The UAE took a similar stance and was among the main actors who supported the anti-MB movement in 2013. Egypt's reaction to the 2020 Abraham Accords was positive, a big change from earlier hostility to normalization. Egypt's dependence on the UAE also helps the peace treaty's resilience.

Even if Egyptian public discourse remains extremely hostile toward Israel, the regime has a strong interest in avoiding a flare-up, if only because more urgent matters dominate the agenda: the dispute with Ethiopia over filling the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile; devastating civil wars in Sudan and Libya; and, above all, feeding roughly 110 million people.

...But Worrying Signs Are Accumulating: The Military Dimension

Despite all of the above, especially the last point, namely the disastrous implications for a perpetually near-bankrupt state of reverting to a costly, ruinous conflict of the kind Anwar Sadat inherited from Nasser, there are aspects of Egyptian behavior, in force build-up and deployment as well as in diplomacy, that raise concerns about the future of the peace treaty and Egypt's long-term intentions toward Israel. In Israel's research and public discourse, there are voices that amplify these aspects to the point of "warning" that deterioration to crisis (or even a surprise attack) is imminent; even if that is, at this stage, an unfounded fear, it would be unwise to ignore the gathering clouds.

The most troubling sign concerns both the scale of Egypt's force build-up and the growing diversification of its sources for advanced weapons. In July 2025, the U.S. administration announced its intention to sell Egypt advanced air-defense systems on a wide scale—about \$4.67 billion. a significant portion of Egypt's military, especially the ground forces (Abrams tanks and APCs) and air force (F-16s and Apache helicopters), continues to rely on U.S. follow-on support within the longstanding \$1.3 billion annual aid package. The Egyptian military today has 13 divisions (4 armored, the rest mechanized), plus three internal-security divisions and special-forces formations; over 3,800 tanks, more than a quarter American M1A Abrams; and an air force with over 400 fighter aircraft, more than half F-16s.

In recent years, however, Egypt has increasingly diversified its arms sources, especially for the navy and air force. The Egyptian navy is the largest in the Middle East. The purchase of four German submarines already caused a stir in Israel. The navy has also acquired four German, two Italian, one French, and six American frigates. In addition to a French helicopter carrier, Egypt is acquiring two from Russia, which seeks to preserve its influence and partnership with Egypt in regional policy, particularly in Libya.

Even more dramatic are implications of air-force procurement: alongside 54 French

Rafales (24 bought in 2015, 30 more in 2021), 46 Russian MiG-29s, and a rolling deal for 50 South Korean FA-50 light fighters, China's importance as an arms supplier (and as an investor and economic backer within the Belt and Road framework, in which Egypt is a strategic anchor) is becoming more prominent. In February 2025, the first advanced J-10CE fighter jets began arriving in Egypt, part of a 40-aircraft deal agreed in summer 2024. Egypt is also purchasing Xi'an Y-20 transport aircraft, with Chinese assistance, building 60 JL-8 trainers, and acquiring advanced Chinese UAVs and HQ-9 air-defense systems (in parallel with U.S. procurement), raising questions about technology exposure.

Moreover, an unprecedented joint air exercise with China in April–May 2025, titled, with pointed bravado toward “young” and “uncultured” America, “Eagles of Civilization 2025,” is a worrying signal regarding Egypt's strategic orientation. A loosening of the American grip on the future of Egyptian military power could affect how Egypt's military leadership views the importance of the peace treaty and the “Camp David package.”

Naturally, Egypt's force build-up, despite the treaty, is benchmarked against Israel as the reference threat. Sudan and Libya pose governance challenges due to internal conditions, but neither justifies acquisitions on this scale; even a clash with Ethiopia is little more than an impractical notion. Still, it is important to distinguish between military-strategic rationales and the political weight of the military establishment, which has effectively ruled Egypt for over seventy years, ousted the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, and for whom military might is both essence and symbol of state hegemony. In this respect, the “Israeli threat” is more pretext than cause—but that does not allay concern that capabilities might one day be translated into intent.

In this context, Egypt's military presence and infrastructure in Sinai are also significant. Because of the fight against ISIS, Israel in 2015 gave its consent (explicit, renewed from time to time as “agreed activities”) to roughly doubling the permitted Egyptian military presence in Sinai beyond the treaty annex (to over 40,000 from 22,000). Since October 2023, amid concerns about spillover of the fighting and/or population transfer into Sinai, forces have been further reinforced, with battalion-level formations deployed near the border.

However, these are not divisional or corps-level formations with all that entails, and the Egyptian military is neither organized nor designed to fight the IDF's power in a classic force-on-force framework. For years, it has been aware of its weaknesses in a “meeting engagement” in Sinai, given Israel's technological superiority, which was newly demonstrated again. Looking ahead, the more troubling element is the scale of investment in dual-use infrastructure—airfields, logistics bases, and transport routes—that could mobilize large forces on order, under air cover, and with a mobile air-defense umbrella.

...And in the Diplomatic Dimension

Concern about Egypt's intentions, and the meaning of its military build-up and posture, stems first and foremost from the fact that this is a cold peace whose economic anchors are quite limited (gas supply to Egypt and QIZ exports to the U.S.), and that it lacks any real layer of people-to-people relations that might restrain deterioration.

Added to this is Egypt's diplomatic stance, which, despite the peace treaty, continues to preserve elements of hostility. As a leading actor in the Arab League, it continues to adhere to core demands on the Palestinian issue—statehood within the 1967 lines with Jerusalem as capital—and to promote them internationally.

Regarding Israel's alleged special capabilities: already in early 1995, when the Oslo process was still in full swing, Egypt brought the multilateral negotiations with Israel to a halt, demanding that Israel accede to the NPT; after several failed efforts in the IAEA plenary in the last decade, Egypt shifted the campaign to the UN arena.

Other questions about the future of relations concern broader aspects of Egyptian regional policy. Despite the ties mentioned above with the Gulf states, chiefly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Egypt has in practice avoided taking a clear stance toward Iran (with which it has maintained foreign-minister-level dialogue in recent years); moreover, it has not assisted in military efforts against Houthi actions in the Red Sea, even though it suffered most economically from reduced traffic in the Suez Canal. Signs of a weakening affiliation with the “camp of stability” in the Middle East, which includes Israel, can therefore be seen.

This weakening is also reflected in the change in Egypt's relations with Turkey, ideologically aligned with a different camp because of its support, along with Qatar's, for the Muslim Brotherhood. Relations that were highly strained until a few years ago and, in 2019–20, were on the verge of direct confrontation due to the struggle in Libya between the Tripoli government (defended by Turkish forces) and Khalifa Haftar's forces in eastern Libya, backed by Egypt, have now warmed. As part of his efforts to cement Turkey's leading regional role and improve ties with the Gulf states, Erdoğan is seeking to draw Egypt closer and create avenues for cooperation, including military ones. Here, too, a key pillar of shared interest between Sisi's regime and Israel is eroding.

Should Egypt Be Seen as a Threat? The Dilemma Facing Israel's Security Planners

The sequence of arrangements that removed Egypt from the circle of war, “step by step,” in Kissinger's phrase, began immediately after the Yom Kippur War and was completed with the 1979 peace treaty and the 1982 withdrawal from Sinai. For roughly five decades, the transformation in relations with Egypt enabled Israel to

redirect its military power and national resources to other missions and purposes, including a significant reduction of defense spending as a share of GDP.

Reassessing how Egypt's strength is factored into Israel's security equation, therefore, has far-reaching implications. Egypt is not included in the IDF's "reference threat," though in the past, during the annual U.S. talks on the aid framework, Israel occasionally raised the need to take Egypt into account when defining Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME), which the U.S. is committed to maintaining. a shift in this basic stance would entail far-reaching changes in force structure, posture, and the defense budget.

Faced with this challenge—and the risks and costs inherent in the two alternatives (on the one hand, maintaining the status quo, devoting only limited resources to the Egyptian front; on the other, a sharp pivot placing Egypt at the center of the IDF's reference threat)—a middle course seems necessary. In it, elements of Israel's traditional security concept, and additions since the 1950s, are harnessed to address the risk (not yet a realized threat) posed by Egypt's military build-up and shifting diplomatic climate:

1. **Deterrence:** The IDF's capability, especially its long arm, has been demonstrated recently, and carries a deterrent message to Egypt. It is important, primarily through quiet channels, to impress upon Egypt's military leadership what it already knows: the IDF's superiority in combined-arms maneuver and meeting engagements in Sinai, and the IAF's ability, if necessary, to neutralize the Egyptian navy's numerical edge. At the same time, avoid empty threats that only heighten tension and hostility, such as striking the Aswan Dam, which would entail mass casualties and destruction, and is not Israel's intent.
2. **Warning (Intelligence):** The worrying, though not yet warning-level, signs should translate into elevating Egypt's priority in the intelligence community's collection requirements, with particular attention to OSINT: open-source monitoring of policy in Sinai, the complex relationship with northern Sinai's tribal elements, infrastructure construction, the Egyptian military's public profile, and sentiments among the Egyptian leadership.
3. **Decision (Decisive Capability):** In the broad restructuring of IDF force build-up and procurement required by wartime lessons, the risk of deterioration with Egypt should be factored into force design, above all, renewed strengthening of maneuver capabilities. Incorporating the Egyptian factor can help refocus attention on military thinking components Israel has neglected and that have eroded.
4. **Defense:** The Egypt-Israel border's terrain is not easy to defend against an attacking force (as distinct from the fence's effectiveness against infiltrators and migrants). October's lessons point to the need to thicken defensive arrays

along potential avenues of approach and to maintain substantial reserves for rapid counter-attack.

5. **Technological Superiority:** Alongside familiar U.S. systems, Egypt is acquiring advanced capabilities from China and others; this calls for Israeli intelligence and industrial efforts to generate counters.
6. **Strategic Partnership:** So long as the U.S. remains Egypt's principal (though not exclusive) security patron, and the massive air-defense/air package appears designed to preserve that status, Israel should both convey restraining diplomatic messages and secure mitigations for potential impacts on QME.

Alongside these adjustments, diplomatic reassurance is required, informed by the “security dilemma”: Egyptians might interpret Israeli steps as threatening, accelerate their build-up, and further deteriorate the situation. Hence, the need to identify and emphasize shared interests that still exist, and to clarify that Israel has no intention of harming Egypt (or forcing Gaza residents into Sinai) so long as the basics of the peace treaty are respected. The American channel, administration, and Congress alike (and in the past, Egyptians also valued ties with Jewish organizations in the U.S.) can also serve to deliver messages, both to reassure and to signal that certain Egyptian activities, especially infrastructure development in Sinai, are concerning not only to Israel.

Additionally, Egypt's orientation—toward Israel, toward China globally, and toward Turkey regionally—should concern other actors, including the UAE, whose ties to the U.S. are deep and whose view of Erdoğan remains wary. As a principal investor in the Egyptian economy, including the vast \$35-billion Ras al-Khaimah tourism development on the Mediterranean, the UAE holds levers over Egypt that Israel can also benefit from, given the dire regional implications were Israel-Egypt relations to veer onto a dangerous path.

Defensible Borders in the Context of the Eastern Frontier

Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser

► Executive Summary

The October 7 attacks revealed Israel's exposure to diverse threats—ground incursions, rockets, UAVs, and infiltrations—highlighting the need for defensible borders and strategic depth. Israel's security requires maintaining military control of the Jordan Valley, as emphasized by Prime Minister Rabin, to counter eastern threats and ensure surveillance and operational dominance. Peace and security cooperation with Jordan remain vital, though any instability there would demand reinforced Israeli forces. Within Judea and Samaria, Israel must sustain proactive counterterrorism operations due to the Palestinian Authority's failure to curb violence. Ultimately, Israel's defense strategy depends on retaining control of the Jordan Valley, preserving freedom of action across Judea and Samaria, and preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state that could serve as a base for terrorism.

The October 7, 2023 Hamas attack starkly illustrated the range of threats Israel must contend with, including a ground incursion with light vehicles, infiltration by air and sea, rockets, missiles, drones, and other UAVs. All these threats, and others (targeted attacks by various means, anti-aircraft weapons, and conventional military threats), must be accounted for when analyzing Israel's defensive needs against threats from the east. This analysis addresses several components, each with unique characteristics: Israel as it has functioned since 1967, namely, with the Jordan River and the Arava as its eastern security border vis-à-vis the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; Israeli settlement in Judea and Samaria; Jerusalem and its surrounding area;

and Israel within the Green Line in general, with emphasis on the communities adjacent to that line on both sides. It is true that the ability to cope with some of the threats, primarily rockets, missiles, and UAVs, is less dependent on the precise route of the border and on the nature of military and civilian presence along it. Nevertheless, even in those areas, and certainly regarding classic and newer ground threats, control of terrain and topography are of great significance.

Defensible borders, understood as Israel is a single geographic unit encompassing the Land of Israel from the Jordan to the Mediterranean, require an Israeli military presence in the Jordan Valley, as stated by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in his Knesset speech of October 5, 1995: "Israel's security border will be located in the Jordan Valley in the broadest sense of that term." The meaning is that effective defense against eastern threats requires military control of the eastern slopes of the Judea and Samaria highlands, which in any case are sparsely populated. This conclusion is almost self-evident given the nature of the threats and the area's topography, which both necessitate and enable observation and fire control over the entire sector, as well as control of the routes ascending from the Jordan Valley to the mountain ridge, especially around Jerusalem. Such control is essential for optimally thwarting all the threats mentioned above.

How this translates into force structure and deployment on the ground is the product of ongoing assessments. At present, since the Jordanian army acts with reasonable success to thwart hostile activity against Israel from its territory and maintains close security cooperation with Israel, it is possible to suffice with mobile forces backed by observation and intelligence. If, however, the character of Jordan's security activity was to change significantly in the future, a reinforcement of forces would likely be necessary. In any case, there is currently no need to apply to Jordan Israel's new security concept of preemptively suppressing every threat that appears along the borders, because the Kingdom is effectively handling those threats itself. This underlines the immense strategic importance of peace with Jordan, Israel's longest border, home to millions of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons and their descendants, and a country contending with Iranian and Islamist subversion alongside persistent protests and opposition to the peace treaty, which have intensified since October 7, 2023.

Military deployment along the Jordanian border is also a vital component in addressing the unique threats within the other frameworks. Thus, the posture in the Valley is essential to preventing the smuggling of weapons through Jordan to terrorist elements in Judea and Samaria, and to thwarting sporadic attempts by terrorists in Jordan to carry out pinpoint attacks against Israeli targets throughout Judea and Samaria. In general, preventing attacks across Judea and Samaria and from there into Israel within the Green Line and into Jerusalem requires significant force deployment across the entire sector, with emphasis on transportation routes, as well as high-quality intelligence that takes into account the decentralized nature of the terrorist threat.

Given the Palestinian Authority's unwillingness and inability to fight terrorism, in practice it even encourages it through its curricula and by paying salaries to terrorists and their families, Israel must also apply in Judea and Samaria the proactive policy of preventing the development of terrorist threats near its borders. This policy already found practical expression during 2025 with the IDF's seizure of problematic neighborhoods in refugee camps in Samaria and the expulsion of terrorist operatives from them, but achieving the goals over time requires sustained resolve. This operational concept is essential in light of the possibility that, after the Abu Mazen era, changes on the ground will intensify security challenges, including potential governmental chaos in Palestinian Authority areas or a Hamas takeover there. Israel must prepare for these scenarios.

Activities to prevent terrorist threats from areas adjacent to the Green Line are required because of the acute sensitivity of attacks inside or near Israel within the Green Line, and especially in the capital, Jerusalem. Terrorist organizations of various kinds, more or less organized, are constantly striving, with full vigor, to carry out attacks in different formats, and thwarting them requires preventing the entry by any means of terrorists into the sovereign territory of the State of Israel. For this purpose, among other things, it must be ensured that the security barrier and the adjacent buffer zone function properly and are under continuous supervision.

The October 7 terrorist attack demonstrated the dangers inherent in allowing terrorists to control territory adjacent to the border and treat it as a quasi-independent state, the potential severity of attacks under such a scenario is particularly high. The attack was directed simultaneously at numerous targets within the Green Line, and throughout the war repeated efforts were made to strike Ben-Gurion Airport. Against this backdrop, the importance is clear of preserving freedom of action throughout all of Judea and Samaria, including in Palestinian Authority areas; of preventing the emergence of terrorist threats there; and, of course, of the security imperative to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, which would serve as a hothouse for the development of such threats.

In conclusion, against threats from the east, Israel's security border must be in the Jordan Valley in the broadest sense. Its chief advantage is in countering ground threats, but it is also vital for pushing back ballistic and aerial threats and improving Israel's ability to cope with them. At the same time, the overall defensive posture must ensure operational freedom of action throughout Judea and Samaria and the proactive prevention of developing security threats there, especially terrorist threats, both against Israeli communities in that area and against Israel within the Green Line, particularly Jerusalem. To guarantee this objective, the establishment of a Palestinian state, which would pose a grave security danger, must not be allowed.

**PART III:
DEFENSIBLE BORDERS AS
AN AMERICAN SECURITY
INTEREST**

An American Commander's Case for Israeli Strategic Depth After October 7

Gen. Charles F. "Chuck" Wald, USAF (ret.)

Hamas's massacre in Israel's southern communities on October 7, 2023, settled an old strategic argument. Israel, about the size of Maryland, is bordered almost entirely by adversaries intent on its destruction. Defending Israel requires strategic depth. The country lacked buffers in Gaza, southern Lebanon, and on the Syrian Golan front. The result was the worst single day for Jews since the Holocaust. Hizbullah also attacked from the north, and with better coordination from Tehran and Hamas, the disaster could have been far worse. The case for defensible borders is no longer theoretical. It is the operational lesson of an ongoing war.

Most Americans have little sense of these distances. Israel covers about 8,800 square miles, smaller than New Jersey. Its population and industry cluster on a coastal strip that, before 1967, was just nine miles wide at its narrowest. Hizbullah's estimated 150,000 to 200,000 rockets and missiles are in Lebanon, north of Israel, comparable to Northern Virginia relative to the U.S. The Iranian regime built this arsenal, armed Hamas, and has spent 40 years declaring its intent to eliminate Israel. Iran operates about 1,000 miles away—the equivalent, for Americans, of a hostile power in Havana able to strike Chicago.

Strategic depth, in this environment, is not a luxury. It is achieved simultaneously on three lines, and Israel must pursue all three. The first is physical control of key terrain that prevents an adversary from massing on the border. The second is the elimination of the near-end threat, the enemy capability that can reach out and strike. The third is layered defense: Iron Dome, David's Sling, Iron Beam, and Arrow, integrated with U.S. and allied systems. None of the three is sufficient on its own. The first, the territorial line, is the most controversial and resource-intensive. It is also the most decisive, and it is the one that was missing on October 7.

The IDF holds vital territory about 30 kilometers north of the Israeli border in southern Lebanon, up to the Litani River. The recent discovery of more Hizbullah tunnels three to four kilometers from the border shows the scale of invasion infrastructure being built as the international community urged restraint. Israel must not withdraw from the area until the threat is clearly and consistently neutralized. The same logic applies on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, where Israeli forces now provide depth and buffer zones absent on October 7. The new Damascus leadership may be an improvement, but no responsible military assessment would advise Israeli withdrawal for that reason. The lessons of withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005 were paid for in Israeli lives. They do not need to be paid again.

A familiar argument says precision rockets, cruise missiles, and one-way attack drones make terrain obsolete. But this claim does not survive operational reality. Rockets and drones are lethal, but not war-winning. Hizbullah, Hamas, and the Iranian regime do not aim to harass Israel—they seek its elimination. That requires a ground invasion like Hamas executed in the south on October 7. Buffer zones, demilitarized areas, and topographical control prevent such invasions. Layered air defense can blunt missile barrages, but cannot stop infantry from entering through tunnels.

The recent record of American military operations reinforces the same conclusion. The Taliban were defeated in roughly five weeks after October 2001. Saddam's regular forces collapsed in three. The American error in both theaters was not in the conduct of the initial campaign. It was on the assumption that follow-on political reconstruction could remake those societies in a Western democratic image. It could not. The applicable lesson for Israel is operational, not political: defeat the adversary's capability to threaten and to invade, do not attempt to remake his worldview, and return to dismantle the capability whenever it begins to reconstitute. This is the logic the IDF has applied to Lebanon, to Gaza, and most consequentially to the Iranian regime itself.

Israel's Operation Rising Lion in June 2025 showed what that logic achieves at scale. In under two weeks, Israel crippled Iran's nuclear and ballistic-missile programs, dismantled its air defenses, decapitated command and control, and eliminated key scientific and military leaders. Israeli pilots first cleared a path for U.S. B-2 bombers at the Pentagon's request. The operation should have lasted another two or three weeks: every remaining missile, air-defense radar, IRGC headquarters, and command-and-control node should have been struck. The campaign should resume as soon as signs of reconstitution appear. The IRGC is now degraded, isolated, and bleeding cash. Its proxies are starved, its population exhausted, and the regime's grip weakened. Patience and continued pressure will finish what Rising Lion began.

Within this picture, the regional architecture matters as much as the territorial one. The Abraham Accords were the political and economic opening. The next required step is what Prime Minister Netanyahu, in his August 2024 address to a joint

session of Congress, termed an Abraham Security Alliance. The word "security" distinguishes the next phase from the last. It commits the resources of partner states and the credibility of partner governments to a shared regional defense—a formal, integrated air and missile defense capability that binds Israel, the United States, and willing Gulf partners into a single architecture, with a serious ground component. The strategic conditions for such an arrangement have not been better at any point in the past quarter-century. When the air chiefs of the GCC states first met one another, during this author's service as commander of U.S. Air Forces in the Middle East, the foundation for that architecture did not yet exist. It does now.

One element of the strategic picture remains underdeveloped: Israel's case is not being presented effectively to the American and Western publics. Polls and direct experience show that most Americans cannot locate the Litani River on a map, envision a 30-kilometer buffer zone in a country the size of Maryland, or grasp the significance of 150,000 rockets aimed at it.

Meanwhile, adversaries with less military capability still conduct more disciplined, sustained information operations than the West's strongest democracies. Although the IDF is the region's most operationally proficient military by a wide margin—and arguably the world's most precise urban warfare force—military excellence does not speak for itself. This underscores the need for a sustained, joint U.S.-Israeli strategic communications effort focused on clear, factual presentations of geography, threat, and capability. Without legitimacy abroad, even the most advanced military tools cannot be used to full effect.

This is the work the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs undertakes in its Defensible Borders Initiative. The project does what governments rarely do well. It makes clear to Western audiences why Israel cannot be defended from within the pre-1967 lines. It shows why buffer zones in southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan are self-protection, not aggression. It explains why a security architecture anchored by Israel and the United States serves direct U.S. strategic interests.

Israel has a right to exist. Its citizens have a right to live in safety within defensible borders. October 7 showed what happens when geography is left undefended and threats are allowed to grow. Defensible borders are not a maximalist demand or a negotiating position. They are the minimum required for a small state's survival in a hostile neighborhood, and the precondition for any lasting peace.

Strategic Depth, Hybrid Warfare, and the Logic of Forward Defense After October 7

Brig.-Gen. Ernest C. "Ernie" Audino, U.S. Army (ret.)

Strategic depth is not a slogan. It is a function of time and distance that enhances a nation's geographic defensibility, and it does so in two concrete ways. It provides adequate reaction time between sensing a threat and acting on it. And it provides sufficient land area to deploy and array friendly forces before committing them to combat. Every serious military planner understands this. Few American politicians do.

October 7, 2023, forced the question back into the open. Without the high ground of Judea, Samaria, and the Golan Heights, Israel is incredibly narrow—too narrow to permit the swift internal deployment of overwhelming combat power against any compelling external threat. This is not a recent insight or an Israeli talking point. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff reached exactly this conclusion in their own analysis in the late 1960s, when modern Israel was barely two decades old. Their judgment has only been reinforced by the technological developments of the intervening half-century. The terrestrial range of the weapons commonly employed today is far greater than it was 20 years ago, let alone 60. Once-adequate strategic depth is no longer adequate.

The Litani Lesson

Consider the area south of the Litani River since the IDF's unilateral withdrawal in 2000. The river's furthest point from the Israeli border is less than 30 kilometers. That is not a vast theater. It is a thin strip of land. Yet in the 23 years between withdrawal and the October 7 war, that strip became saturated with Hizbullah missiles, artillery, mortars, anti-tank guided missiles, rockets, and drones. The terrain, combined with

modern technology, enabled deeper, more accurate strikes into Israel proper than had been possible previously. Every weapon was emplaced for one purpose: to kill Israeli civilians.

Three conclusions follow, and they are not difficult. First, it is unacceptable that non-combatants should be targeted by these weapons. Second, it is unacceptable that the Lebanese government has been unable to disarm Hizbullah. Third, it is a fantasy to think Hizbullah will disarm itself. Given these realities, re-securing this area as a buffer is therefore imperative—not optional, not negotiable, and not subject to revision by a foreign chancellery whose own borders are not exposed to a single Hizbullah rocket. Similarly, the same logic applies on the Syrian side of the Golan, where the lessons of 2000 in Lebanon and 2005 in Gaza were paid for in Israeli lives and should not have to be paid again.

Why Washington Misses This

American opposition to Israel's IDF presence in Lebanon and Syria is, at root, ideological, not experiential. Most U.S. politicians lack military experience and do not understand battlefield realities. They are politicians, not colonels. They first weigh every issue in terms of political coin, whether it will gain or cost a vote, and they are uniquely vulnerable to their preferred sources of information on warfighting, because they lack the relevant experience to critically assess what they are told. Lacking relevant experience, they're vulnerable to their preferred sources, shaped by decades of orchestrated false narratives about the Israeli-Palestinian arena, Iran, and the broader Middle East. The result is that passions masquerade as reason—and they do not or cannot acknowledge it. Advocates of defensible borders face less an analytical challenge than an engagement challenge: figuring out how to reach politicians on the terrain of American interests, where their passions already lie.

Appeal to Self-Interest, Not Mercy

With this in mind, the most effective way to convey to U.S. lawmakers the necessity of military buffer zones and demilitarization on Israel's exterior borders is not to appeal to American mercy. Instead, it appeals to American self-interest. President Trump's "America First" framing may be labeled arrogant by his political rivals, but it is eminently rational. The essence of rational behavior is acting in one's own interest. As unseemly as that may sound in polite company, it is how the world goes round, and it is how alliances are sustained when the rhetoric of shared values runs thin.

A related factor complicates the conversation: isolationist sentiment now occupies much of the Republican coalition and, in the Beltway, inhibits discussion of allies' security needs. Even isolationists rarely admit they'd want as many strong friends as possible in a fight—not senior citizens, but buddies with the power and will to

knock someone out. That is Israel. As General George Marshall said: You don't want to fight unless you must, but if you do, you don't want to fight alone or for long.

From an American viewpoint, Israel is on the front lines against global Islamist terror, providing a buffer. Israel's need to counter threats daily has fostered valuable experience, technology, and intelligence networks. Their lessons benefit U.S. security as well.

The Same Enemy in Our Own Backyard

A similar dynamic plays out in the United States' own backyard, making the case for defensible borders relevant beyond Israel. The United States faces the same enemy, albeit from a greater distance, conducting distributed operations on non-contiguous terrain in our own hemisphere. Venezuela is the clearest illustration. Until the recent capture of Nicolas Maduro, Iran's presence there was pervasive and deliberate. Since at least 2010, Tehran has maintained a growing complement of Quds Force and Hizbullah assets on Venezuelan soil. In 2022, Tehran and Caracas began coordinating with Moscow and Beijing to establish an Iranian naval base on the Venezuelan coast. In 2023, the commander of the Iranian Navy publicly announced the regime's intention to deploy and maintain assets at the Panama Canal. For several years, Iran supplied Venezuela with drone components and assembly lines, eventually opening a dedicated factory producing three variants of the Shahed loitering attack drone—the same family of drones supplied to Venezuelan forces and to other Latin American militant groups. Shortly before Maduro fell, the two regimes had agreed to deepen nuclear cooperation.

The threat in the Western Hemisphere is not isolated. The tri-border area where Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina meet has become a narco-terror hub, and it should surprise no one that Quds Force and Hizbullah operatives are on the ground there to exploit those networks in service of Iranian interests. The same Quds personnel missioned to train, equip, and cadre terror forces in the Middle East are the same personnel missioned to do the same in Latin America, and, almost certainly, inside the United States itself. The enemy employs hybrid capabilities by design, operating in the gray zone between war and peace, between combat and crime. That ambiguity confuses lawmakers and warfighters alike and inhibits effective response. Because Tehran calculates each hybrid action to remain just below the threshold that might trigger a decisive American reply, the temptation in Washington is to deny that this is a new character of war at all.

President Trump is finally doing something about this. Re-invigorating the Monroe Doctrine and toppling Maduro were the first steps. Cuba is likely next. The second- and third-order effects for global adversaries, Iran above all, who have been quietly setting up shop near our southern border while American eyes were closed, will be considerable. Stay tuned.

Tehran Is the Center of Gravity

What happens in Tehran does not stay in Tehran. Modern, global Islamist terrorism was born there in 1979. Islamist terrorism existed before the Islamic Revolution, but the example set by Khomeini's seizure of power, combined with the regime's explicit doctrine of exporting jihad, inspired and underwrote campaigns of terror worldwide. Tehran is now the global patron and center of gravity for these movements. Their dependency on that patron is also their vulnerability.

Eliminating the center of gravity makes its operations—including those in Latin America—untenable. Israel's proximity, will, and capability make it indispensable for any effort to destroy that center. Whenever Americans choose to target Iran's regime, Israeli participation will be essential. The reverse is also true: a secure Israel within defensible borders is the platform from which this work continues.

The Floor of a Serious Strategy

Defensible borders, buffer zones, and demilitarization on Israel's northern and southern frontiers are not maximalist demands. They are the minimum required for a small state to survive in a hostile neighborhood, and the precondition for any lasting peace. The military center of gravity in any democracy is almost always the support of its domestic population. If Americans want a willing and capable ally in Israel—and it is increasingly clear that many of our European allies are no longer willing or capable—if we want a partner who can go shoulder-to-shoulder with us and deliver a punch, we need to understand that sufficient strategic depth is necessary to secure the Israeli population. That is not charity. It is American interest, plainly stated.

PART IV:
ISRAEL'S UPDATED SECURITY
CONCEPT AFTER OCTOBER 7

An Updated Security Doctrine

Maj.-Gen. (res.) Giora Eiland

► Executive Summary

The brutal terrorist attack carried out by Hamas on October 7 requires not only concrete lessons and adjustments in Israel's military force-building and border defense postures, but also an update to Israel's overall strategic concept, and to its ability to explain that concept to the international community. The purpose of this article is to outline the key principles Israel must adopt for itself, and learn to communicate effectively abroad.

Updating Israel's Existing Security Doctrine

Israel's existing security doctrine, as formulated by the Meridor Committee and approved by Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz in 2006, consists of four pillars: early warning, deterrence, defense, and decisive victory. It is fair to say that on October 7 Israel failed in the first three pillars; as for the fourth, decisive victory, the verdict is still unknown. Clearly, Israel must ensure that such a failure never recurs, but that alone is insufficient. There is now a clear need for an additional, first-in-sequence pillar: "prevention of enemy build-up."

For decades, Israel was willing to act militarily to prevent the build-up of an enemy only when the threat involved nuclear weapons. This was the rationale behind Israel's strikes on Iraq's nuclear program (1981) and Syria's reactor (2007). Israel refrained, however, from military action to stop conventional rearmament by its adversaries, a reasonable policy as long as those adversaries were states such as Syria or Egypt. The traditional four pillars of Israel's security doctrine were sufficient

both to maintain long periods of calm and to guarantee eventual victory when wars occurred. In the cases of Egypt and Jordan, this doctrine even proved robust enough to help produce peace treaties with Israel.

But adopting the same “containment approach” toward sub-state enemies such as Hamas in Gaza and Hizbullah in Lebanon proved to be a grave mistake. In both arenas, monstrous adversaries arose. Moreover, the stronger they became militarily, the greater their willingness to go to war against Israel. Traditional deterrence factors that work against states, such as the need for international legitimacy, are far less effective against these new types of enemies.

The years 2005–2006 mark Israel’s abandonment of the principle of preventing enemy military build-up. Until the 2005 disengagement, Hamas in Gaza possessed mostly light weapons, mortars, and short-range rockets. After the Second Lebanon War, Hizbullah was severely weakened. Had Israel then applied the principle of force-build-up prevention, it would be in a far stronger position today.

The only arena in which Israel de facto implemented this principle was in Syria, not against the Syrian army itself, but against Iranian arms transfers to Hizbullah and the establishment of Iranian-backed Shiite militias modeled after Hizbullah. This campaign, the “Campaign Between the Wars” (MABAM), proved partially effective.

The implementation of the “prevention of build-up” principle could and should be applied, after the conclusion of Operation Iron Swords, to both Gaza and Hizbullah.

The Importance of Territorial Depth

Throughout history, terrain has remained the most crucial factor in any military assessment. Hizbullah poses a significant threat to Israel not only because of its strength but primarily because of its proximity, enabling it to fire anti-tank missiles directly into Israeli towns. Hypothetically, if Hizbullah possessed the same capabilities but were located 1,000 kilometers away, it would constitute a far lesser threat, even though distant adversaries such as Iran or the Houthis in Yemen still pose serious challenges.

Classical defensive doctrine dictates organizing territory into three zones:

- Security zone (forward area)
- Holding zone (main defensive belt)
- Civilian rear

When attacked, the enemy may penetrate certain parts of the security zone, an area designed to “absorb” incursions. The main defensive battle takes place in the holding

zone, which, if it holds, prevents any invasion of the civilian rear, the most sensitive area.

When the IDF withdrew from Lebanon (2000) and from Gaza (2005), it effectively gave up its ability to deploy according to this accepted model. All three layers—the security zone, the holding zone, and the civilian rear—collapsed geographically into a narrow strip, in places less than a kilometer deep. The assumption that Israel could adequately defend itself without territorial depth, relying instead on intelligence, barriers, and technology, collapsed on October 7.

Israel therefore needs, along both the Gaza and Lebanon borders, and equally in the seam zone adjacent to the West Bank, to create minimum defensive depth, which must include at least some kind of security zone.

Two possible configurations exist:

- The more limited version is the establishment of a security perimeter—a strip beyond the border where no enemy military presence, overt or disguised, is allowed. This is a constrained solution, but it has the advantage of avoiding permanent Israeli presence inside enemy territory.
- The broader version involves establishing a security zone inside enemy territory. Such a zone both pushes the enemy back and provides early warning in case of invasion. In Lebanon's case, it offers a further, critical advantage, control of commanding terrain, preventing the enemy from using those high points to fire small arms or anti-tank missiles into Israel.

State Responsibility and Strategic Clarity

An equally vital strategic recalibration concerns how Israel defines its enemy. This definition shapes both Israel's declared policy and its military responses to attacks from neighboring states and entities.

In recent conflicts, the Second Lebanon War and the current Gaza war, Israel adopted the narrative that the enemy is the sub-state terrorist organization that attacked it (Hizbullah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza). Accordingly, Israel fought those organizations and their military infrastructures while trying to avoid, as much as possible, damage to the civilian areas in which they operate, including infrastructure, logistics, and the “noncombatant” population.

This narrative aligns with international preferences, particularly those of the United States, which will likely continue pressuring Israel to maintain it. Yet, this narrative is fundamentally flawed and disconnected from reality. History shows that the gravest strategic errors often stem from adopting a false narrative.

Hizbullah, while a terrorist organization, is also a major political party with substantial representation in the Lebanese parliament. It is the principal, legitimate representative of Lebanon's Shiite population. Moreover, Lebanon's so-called "moderate" factions rely on Hizbullah's superior military power, granting it broad authority over national security. Hizbullah effectively decides whether the border with Israel remains calm or ignites. Consequently, it makes no sense to separate Hizbullah from the State of Lebanon in the context of its conflict with Israel. Israel is therefore justified in holding Lebanon as a whole responsible for security along its northern frontier.

Similarly, the link between Gaza and Hamas is absolute. Since the 2005 disengagement and Hamas's electoral victory, Gaza has become a fully-fledged state-like entity with its own foreign policy, well-armed military, and centralized governance. Hamas arose as an authentic, legitimate movement elected from within the Gazan population. After winning power, it seized all state institutions—military, civil, educational, medical, and administrative—creating complete unity between the State of Gaza, its population, and the Hamas ideology, enjoying the population's broad support. Thus, it is more accurate to view the current war as a conflict between the State of Israel and the quasi-State of Gaza, with all that this implies.

Beyond narrative correction, it is vital to recognize that a democratic state acting under international law cannot win an asymmetric war against a sub-state organization operating from within another state's territory, supported by that state's population but bearing no national or international responsibility. A state cannot prevail in a war where the enemy attacks its civilian rear while the state is expected to avoid harming the quality of life of the enemy's population.

In wars between states, the range of legitimate and effective tools is far broader, including economic, diplomatic, and civilian pressure, than in conflicts against terror organizations. For example, Hizbullah does not fear another military clash with the IDF aimed at eliminating its missile launchers, but it, and the world, does fear the destruction of Lebanese infrastructure including in Beirut.

The conclusion, therefore, is that Israel must make it clear now, to the international community, that any hostile action against Israel originating from a territory not under Israeli control, including Gaza or any other state, will be treated as an act of aggression by that state itself, which will bear full responsibility.

Security Implications for Judea and Samaria

For 31 years, the "two-state solution" has been at the center of debate over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Naturally, Israel has raised security concerns and demands, which its counterparts, the Palestinians and the United States, typically answer by promising that any Palestinian state would be largely demilitarized and far weaker than Israel, implying there would be nothing to fear.

Unfortunately, there is much to fear, and three points are especially critical:

1. **Regional Environment:** Israel and any future Palestinian state would not exist in a peaceful, pastoral setting. Theoretically, if the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean could be relocated to Western Europe or Canada, the security challenges would be manageable. In reality, Israel is surrounded, within a few thousand kilometers in every direction, by actual or potential enemies. If Israel were to withdraw to the 1967 lines (with minor adjustments), the distance from Tulkarm to Netanya would be 15 kilometers, but from Tulkarm eastward for 5,000 kilometers lies a continuum of hostile or potentially hostile states and forces.
2. **Lack of Strategic Depth:** As emphasized, there can be no adequate compensation for a severe shortage of territory, particularly territorial depth. If Israel were ever to agree to a Palestinian state roughly within the 1967 framework, the enemy could fire Kornet anti-tank missiles, with an effective range of 10 kilometers, at every major road, critical site, and urban center in Israel's heartland. Unlike past demilitarization agreements, when the main threats were tanks and artillery, difficult to smuggle and conceal, it would be virtually impossible to prevent smuggling of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles into a Palestinian state. Given the short distances and topography, such weapons could easily paralyze Israel, and no agreement or international guarantee could prevent it. Moreover, if the IDF withdrew from most or all of Judea and Samaria, thousands of armed Palestinians in Tulkarm or Qalqilya could, on a Saturday morning, breach the fence, cross Route 6, and massacre civilians in Kfar Saba and other nearby towns.
3. **The Jordan Valley Factor:** One might assume the Palestinian state could be isolated if the IDF retained control of the Jordan Valley along the Jordan River. Effective control, however, would require at least 10 kilometers of depth on average, since without minimal depth and control of the first ridgeline west of the Valley, Israeli presence would be a liability rather than an asset. This means roughly 800 square kilometers—about 12% of the West Bank—would need to remain under Israeli sovereignty, not counting a western security belt adjacent to Israel proper. It is doubtful any Arab or Palestinian party would accept this, since such a configuration would render their state a landlocked enclave surrounded by Israel on all sides. Moreover, maintaining control of the Jordan Valley would require Israel to keep at least one corridor from west to east, such as the Jerusalem-Ma'ale Adumim-northern Dead Sea axis, connecting Israel to the Valley. Thus, the Palestinian state would not only shrink in size and become an enclave, but it would also be geographically split into at least two separate parts.

Conclusion

The events of October 7 prove that agreements, or even deterrence alone, are insufficient when dealing with non-state enemies. a Palestinian entity created under

a “two-state solution” might formally be a state, but it is naïve, and dangerous, to assume that Hamas or other jihadist groups would not seize control, just as they did in Gaza. When that happens, no agreement would be respected.

From “The Iron Wall” to “Peace Through Strength”

Gabi Siboni and Erez Wiener

► Executive Summary

We look at the evolution of Israel’s security doctrine from Ze’ev Jabotinsky’s “Iron Wall” concept to the contemporary “peace through strength” approach advanced by Prime Minister Netanyahu. Jabotinsky’s central premise, that lasting peace requires unquestionable military strength, became the foundation of Israel’s defense strategy, later formalized by Ben-Gurion into the principles of deterrence, early warning, and *decisive* victory. Over time, as Israel faced shifting threats, from conventional armies to asymmetric actors like Hamas and Hizbullah, the doctrine evolved toward containment and defense, notably under the Meridor Committee’s 2000s reforms.

The October 7 attacks marked a turning point, exposing the weaknesses of containment and prompting a strategic shift back to decisive victory. Israel’s current approach emphasizes dismantling enemy capabilities, sustained enforcement to prevent rearmament, and greater self-reliance in defense production to ensure long-term security sustainability. Israel’s future stability depends on combining military strength, economic and technological development, and strategic diplomacy, continuing Jabotinsky’s vision of peace built on strength and deterrence.

Background

Israel’s security concept grew out of Ze’ev Jabotinsky’s “Iron Wall” logic: the need for an “iron wall,” a strong Jewish military force that would prove to the Arab

inhabitants of the land that any attempt to uproot Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel was doomed to fail. Only then, Jabotinsky argued, would pragmatic elements gain strength and political agreements and durable compromises become possible. A hundred years on, it is striking how closely this resembles the principle of “peace through strength” that Israel and the United States now seek to advance in the region.

The Iron Wall concept was adapted by David Ben-Gurion and served as the basis for Israel’s security doctrine in its early decades, later distilled into the principles of early warning, deterrence, and decisive victory. For much of Israel’s history, however, substantive debate over a security concept, as the starting point for military thinking and doctrinal development, was sorely lacking. Despite the major changes after the Six-Day War, when Israel’s borders expanded and strategic depth was gained, the security concept, built in part on the absence of strategic depth, was not revised.

This remained the case in the early 1980s with the peace treaty with Egypt and growing focus on the Palestinian issue. Other major events later affected national security as well: the Lebanon War, the First Intifada in 1987, the Oslo Accords in 1993, and another peace treaty with a key Arab state, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in 1994. Beyond the Palestinian issue and peace arrangements, another significant shift greatly affected Israel: the growing threat to Israel’s home front from missiles and rockets. This intensified with rocket fire from Lebanon and became palpable to every Israeli during the 1991 Gulf War. Yet, despite these changes, which were certainly impactful on the security concept, no orderly process was undertaken at the time to review and update it.

A significant attempt to update the security concept was undertaken by the Meridor Committee in the early 2000s. The “Committee for a Re-examination of Israel’s National Security Concept” operated from 2003 to 2006 and, for the first time, proposed substantive changes to Ben-Gurion’s concept, foremost among them the addition of a fourth pillar: defense. Another central change in the committee’s conclusions was the shift from a decisive victory concept, one of Ben-Gurion’s three pillars, to a containment concept. Although the committee’s conclusions were not formally ratified as binding policy, its recommendations, especially the emphasis on defense as a foundational element, percolated deeply into Israel’s security establishment and influenced its actions.

This approach accompanied Israel through the 2000s, including the first phase of the Second Intifada, at least until Operation Defensive Shield in March 2002. It was highlighted by the withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 and even more so by the 2005 Gaza disengagement, including the pullout from the Philadelphi Corridor, the main route for smuggling weapons and explosives into the Strip.

In August 2018, Prime Minister Netanyahu presented a security concept he had formulated.¹ The document emphasized the Iranian threat as existential, underscored the need to build economic and technological strength as foundations

for military and diplomatic power, and elaborated on the “campaign between wars” (Mabam) doctrine—continuous strikes on enemy capabilities to curb their build-up and delay readiness for war, aiming to prevent wars or at least lengthen the intervals between them. This was a clear example of the Meridor containment approach taking precedence over Ben-Gurion’s decisive victory.²

The Need to Update the Security Concept

The events of October 7 brought the containment concept to an end. Prime Minister Netanyahu understood this from the first days and, already on October 8, while terrorists from Gaza were still inside Israel, spoke of changing the face of the Middle East. Indeed, in the months since that terrible day, Israel has operated in line with Jabotinsky’s Iron Wall doctrine: mobilizing national resources to defeat the threat, leveraging the Air Force’s relative advantage and moving to ground maneuver on enemy territory, seeking cooperation with the United States where possible, particularly after U.S. President Donald Trump took office, and strengthening home-front resilience for wartime conditions.³

Israel struck Hamas, dealt major blows to Hizbullah, contributed indirectly to the fall of the Assad regime, destroyed most of the Syrian army’s capabilities, and ultimately hit Iran’s nuclear and ballistic-missile programs hard. Following these achievements, especially the impressive strike in Iran, voices are now being heard about regional peace agreements akin to the Abraham Accords. States seek alliances with Israel, the rising regional power and America’s leading partner under President Trump.

This is an opportunity to revive Jabotinsky’s Iron Wall. As he argued, only a strong Jewish military force that deters the Arabs and proves that removing the national home is impossible will open the way to durable agreements and compromises. Led by Netanyahu, who at times cites the Iron Wall as a formative text, Israel now stands at a historic juncture that allows it to maximize the military gains of the past two years and translate them into diplomatic achievements and improved security reality.

A Return to Decisive Victory

To shape the security environment, and thereby Israel’s diplomatic clout, for years to come, Israel must first and foremost return to a decisive-victory concept, focused on dismantling enemy capabilities rather than periodic deterrent operations. This has become essential in the “War of Revival” war, given threats from Hamas in Gaza, Hizbullah in Lebanon, Iranian infrastructures in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, and Iran’s ballistic-missile and nuclear programs.

The broad ground operation in Gaza—seizing territory, destroying tunnels and above-ground infrastructure, and eliminating senior Hamas figures—reflected

the need for a decisive defeat to destroy the organization's military capabilities and prevent similar future attacks. The decisive-victory approach is needed to ensure that groups like Hamas cannot rebuild their strength.

In Lebanon, the fight against Hizbullah showed that offensive action can destroy extensive capabilities and target its leaders. Years of focused airstrikes in Syria as part of the Mabam doctrine, interdicting Iranian arms shipments to Hizbullah, such as SAMs and precision munitions, demonstrated that preemption alone is insufficient. Defeating Hizbullah required neutralizing its infrastructure, striking its fighters and senior operatives (e.g., the pagers and radios operation), destroying weapons depots and headquarters, and targeting the organization's leadership (including Nasrallah), all to deprive it of offensive capacity and force long recovery cycles. These blows also weakened Hizbullah's standing within Lebanon, which, now backed by the U.S., seeks to dismantle its military capabilities.

The securing of a security zone in southern Syria and around Mount Hermon, and the destruction of most of the Syrian army's capabilities within days of Assad's fall, likewise reflected a shift to the decisive approach. Finally, striking Iran's nuclear facilities and long-range missile array places Israel's security doctrine in a new era.

This return to decisive victory also stems from Israeli public pressure for strategic change after the failure of containment exposed on October 7, and from the understanding that confronting the Iranian-led radical axis requires firm action. A decisive-victory concept, paired with diplomacy ("peace through strength"), is essential for Israel's security against states and organizations alike, and this is the path Israel is now taking.

The Need for Enforcement

The required shift in the security concept also concerns sustaining decisive outcomes through enforcement. Having dealt a heavy blow to Hizbullah and hit Iran's nuclear and missile programs, Israel must maintain its gains by preventing rearmament and renewed threat-building. Hence, the ongoing series of strikes in Lebanon, even after a ceasefire, Israel acts on intelligence to block Hizbullah's attempts to recover.

We see similar IDF activity in Syria, aimed at stripping residual Syrian army capabilities, hitting terrorist actors attempting to threaten Israel, and thwarting Iranian entrenchment. An example of enforcement was the July 2025 IDF action in Syria to block regime forces from moving south of Damascus and to assist the Druze in as-Suwayda on Jabal al-Druze, preventing harm to them.

After the painful blow Iran suffered in "Operation Rising Lion," Israel will likely soon face the need to prevent the ayatollahs' regime from rebuilding its nuclear program and missile project.

Enforcement aims not only to preempt attacks on Israel but also to block adversary strategic force-building, using a variety of tools alongside military ones: economic, legal, and diplomatic.⁴ As shaped after the war in Lebanon, enforcement requires close cooperation with the United States to ensure international legitimacy and secure backing for wide-ranging enforcement operations—as is already the case in Lebanon and Syria. It also requires continuous intelligence hold across multiple arenas and preservation of Israel's operational freedom of action throughout the Middle East.

This is the most significant change relative to Ben-Gurion's concept. Whereas Ben-Gurion favored rapid decision, given limited territorial and manpower depth, today, after a swift decision, an enforcement phase is needed to preserve the military gains.

Security Sustainability

Shortages of munitions and spare parts that hindered the IDF during the war (especially under the Biden administration) showed how dependent Israel is on others to execute its security policy. They underscore the need to develop indigenous procurement, development, production, and acquisition capacity so that Israel can carry out almost any military plan it deems necessary in line with its security interests, while recognizing that absolute autonomy is unattainable.

Israel should strive for security sustainability (defense self-sufficiency, especially in weapons and munitions): diversify procurement and produce domestically as much critical ordnance and as many platforms as possible. To overcome dependence on the U.S., Israel should examine alternative sources for ammunition, weapons, and advanced systems, in addition to or in place of U.S. procurements, and in line with the additional needs of an expanded force structure. Procurement of critical systems should be distributed among several countries wherever possible. Israel should also build partnerships with other states with similar interests to bolster security sustainability.⁵

Accordingly, to ensure security sustainability, Israel should work to reduce its dependence on the United States as much as possible, including gradually curtailing and ultimately ending U.S. military aid, while investing in and expanding Israel's defense industrial base. Israel must also re-examine and redefine its reference threat scenarios and required stockpile days to maintain adequate inventories for protracted war and emergencies.⁶

Conclusion

The evolution of Israel's security concept reflects changes in the strategic reality in which it operates. Ben-Gurion's era focused on rapid decision against regular armies; today, Israel faces more complex threats, including terror and cyber. Jabotinsky's

Iron Wall still influences Israeli policy, but has undergone significant adaptations. Notably, the peace treaty with Egypt, and to a lesser degree with Jordan, actually reflected Iron Wall logic toward them: even if they did not embrace the legitimacy of a Jewish state, they came to understand that removing it was not feasible in the foreseeable future and that dedicating most national resources to that goal was irrational. Israel's achievements over the past year seem to signal to Egypt that it is wise to adhere to peace as a strategic choice.

The “Iron Wall” includes not only a military capable of striking the enemy, but also advanced defense systems, technology, intelligence, diplomacy, and social cohesion. To Jabotinsky's original idea must be added the economic and technological capacity to develop advanced weapons and intelligence, and to maintain a powerful, modern defensive force.

The shift from decisive victory to defense and containment reflected, in part, the assessment that fully defeating non-state actors is difficult. The “quiet will be met with quiet” policy dominant in Gaza before 2023 showed its limits, especially on October 7, since it allowed Hamas to rebuild between rounds and plan a major blow against Israel. The “War of Revival” marked a partial return to decisive victory, while highlighting the need to update Israel's security concept and adapt it to present realities.

The move from action against intentions to action against capability-building reflects recognition that preventing enemy armament is more effective than waiting for intentions to mature into offensive capacity. Strikes in Syria and Gaza aimed at terror infrastructure have shown this approach can reduce threats over time; implementing it requires precise intelligence and advanced technologies.

Israel's security concept has thus evolved from an offensive doctrine centered on decision at the end of each round to a framework that integrates defense, containment, and prevention. The Iron Wall remains the conceptual foundation, but must be adapted to Israel's current challenges. The “War of Revival” shows that despite technological and military advances, full decision over non-state actors remains a major challenge. Going forward, Israel's security concept will require continued investment in technology, a stable economy, intelligence, and diplomacy, while upholding the foundational principles of warning, deterrence, and defense—alongside alliances and agreements near and far. This is the “peace through strength” cited by Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Trump: a peace that will secure Israel's resilience and prosperity and strengthen its regional and international standing.

Notes

1. Ariel Kahana, “Netanyahu Presented: ‘Security Concept 2030,’” *Israel Hayom*, 15.8.2025.

2. For further reading, see Efraim Inbar and Menachem Bekerach, "Containment—A Troubling Component in Israel's Security Behavior," *JISS*, April 2024.
3. For further reading, see Yossi Kuperwasser, *Policy Paper: Demilitarization of Gaza*, (Israeli Victory Project, June 2023).
4. Eviatar Matania, *A New Security Concept for Israel*, (Misgav Institute, 2024).
5. For example: Israel need not purchase engineering equipment such as the D9 only from the American company **Caterpillar**. There are other manufacturers worldwide no less capable—**Komatsu** (Japan), **Liebherr** (Germany), **Hyundai** (South Korea), **Hitachi** (Japan), and more. Although this entails establishing an entire logistical maintenance and operations system and not merely procuring equipment, it is essential to examine these matters with a long-term view so that we are not subject to an American embargo in the midst of the "War of Revival" war.
6. Kobi Michael and Gabi Siboni, *Israel 2.0*, (Misgav Institute, 2025).

The Changes Required in Israel's Security Concept Following the Failures of October 7

Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser

► Executive Summary

The October 7, 2023, Hamas attack and ensuing multi-front war exposed critical failures in Israel's security doctrine, particularly in early warning, deterrence, and defense. Israel's traditional four pillars—early warning, deterrence, decisive victory, and defense—proved inadequate against hybrid terror armies operating from urban and underground environments. To address these shortcomings, Israel must revise its security concept by adding a fifth pillar: prevention and suppression of enemy force build-up. This requires stronger intelligence coordination, expanded forces, and sustained cooperation with the United States to maintain freedom of action. Deterrence must account for ideologically driven adversaries, while defense strategies must ensure truly defensible borders. A decisive victory remains essential but must align with strategic and moral considerations. The updated doctrine should prepare Israel to operate across multiple arenas, strengthen resilience, and secure its long-term regional stability and survival.

Hamas's murderous terrorist attack on October 7, 2023, and the prolonged war Israel has since waged across eight arenas, shook Israel's security concept and require a review of its existing principles and the formulation of a new concept. Above all, they demonstrated how Israel's security and very existence are challenged by many of its neighbors, and how essential it is that the security concept take this fact into account, along with efforts to build a regional architecture that strengthens actors

willing to maintain peaceful relations with Israel and to reduce, as far as possible, the intensity of hatred and hostility (de-radicalization).

Until October 7, the security concept rested on an analysis of Israel's relative military, human, technological, demographic, geographic, diplomatic, and economic advantages and disadvantages in relation to its environment. It was built on four pillars: early warning, deterrence, decisive victory, and defense. A series of principles was designed to ensure those pillars were realized. These included a people's army based on compulsory service and a large reserve force; air and intelligence dominance and superiority; preservation and expansion of the qualitative edge; a commitment to defend ourselves by ourselves while maintaining strategic and operational cooperation with the United States grounded in shared values and interests; shifting the fighting to enemy territory; developing indigenous technological solutions such as missile defense; continuous learning; preventing enemy nuclearization; responding to any harm to Israeli interests; preventing force build-up through the campaign between wars (MABAM); home-front resilience; adherence to the laws of armed conflict and IDF values; and preserving international legitimacy.

On October 7, Israel failed in warning, deterrence, and defense. Despite impressive battlefield achievements, it did not succeed in defeating Hamas in Gaza, due to both the strategic complexity and the enemy's changing characteristics. In practice, rather than fighting regular armies in open battlefields, Israel was compelled to fight terror armies operating from densely populated areas and from the subterranean domain. All this was seemingly known in advance and should have required appropriate preparations and a prior reassessment of the security concept. To some extent, such a reassessment did occur and had implications for force building and employment, but these were not fully internalized across the board, particularly within the intelligence, planning, and operations bodies dealing with the Gaza Strip.

The conceptions that led up to the war, partly derived from the security concept, assumed that the defense establishment could provide timely warning on Gaza, that Israel deterred Hamas there, and that Israel could defend against any Hamas offensive and, if necessary, defeat it. They also included the assumption that because Hamas is a chronic threat with which one can live—"mowing the grass" whenever its jihadist nature sparked escalation—there was no need to act decisively to prevent its military build-up. In practice, all these assumptions proved baseless. Worse still, the clash with Hamas ignited many additional arenas at varying intensities, forcing Israel to cooperate with the United States to defend itself and take care of the Iranian threats with relative success.

Accordingly, Israel must update its security concept, including both the four pillars and the accompanying principles. First and foremost, Israel appears to need to add a new pillar: prevention and suppression of force build-up. Israel cannot allow the development of threats to its security near its borders or in the second and third rings (a nuclear program and missiles in Iran; missiles and UAVs in Yemen and

Iraq). Implementing this pillar requires cooperation and strategic understanding with the United States to guarantee freedom of action and the practical use of air and intelligence superiority.

The campaign between wars (MABAM), through which Israel sought to limit Hizbullah's build-up and, to a lesser extent, Hamas's, proved insufficient. Far more resolute measures are needed to realize this new pillar. The conditions for ending the current conflict must create an operational space that allows this pillar to be applied in all arenas. In practice, it means maintaining buffer zones controlled by the IDF in Gaza (including along the border with Egypt, to prevent arms smuggling), in Lebanon, in Syria, and in certain areas of Judea and Samaria (especially in the refugee camps).

It is no longer possible to base emergency and wartime readiness on the assumption of timely warning. The place of warning and of intelligence in general must be redefined within the security concept. Intelligence plays a crucial role in each component of the concept, but the expectation that it will provide timely warning has proven unrealistic. This means the new pillar, preventing and suppressing force build-up, is essential to reduce the likelihood of surprise attacks. It also means that Israel needs a significantly larger army than the IDF on October 7 to deploy adequate forces across all plausible theaters, according to updated reference scenarios.

Deterrence must also be updated. Until October 7, the working assumption was that an enemy familiar with the IDF's power would be deterred and prefer to avoid confrontation. The Hamas attack and ensuing war demonstrated that the willingness to sacrifice among radical Islamist actors, along with their assessment of Israel's internal weaknesses, can motivate them to attack despite the IDF's strength. Their calculations also included the costs of not acting, for example, in light of Israel-Saudi normalization.

Moreover, deterrence has proven to be a multidimensional and relative concept. An enemy may be deterred from a full-scale war with Israel, yet be less deterred by a controlled escalation focused mainly on exchanges of fire, especially if refraining would damage its standing and prestige among its target audiences. This describes Hizbullah's conduct at least until July 2024 during the period of controlled escalation. Assessing an enemy's level of deterrence is another elusive task for intelligence, one in which it also failed, and the security concept should not rely too heavily on success in this task. For this reason as well, the IDF's order of battle must be expanded.

Defense also failed on October 7. It relied excessively on the barrier system, which collapsed in an instant, while the division had no preparation for such a case. Area defense and the defense of communities and permanent bases functioned only partially. As for air defense, performance against missiles was relatively good, but gaps were revealed in countering attacking UAVs.

The conclusion is that Israel must ensure defensible borders in all sectors, with

the territorial implications that entail, and it must improve the overall defense concept and all its components. Some defensive lessons are already being implemented, including greater use of relatively older reservists for area defense. The need for defensible borders is also a clear American interest, not only because of the U.S. commitment to Israel's security but also because, in their absence, extremists are more incentivized to attack Israel. Without defensible borders, Israel becomes more sensitive to potential threats, and as a result, the likelihood of regional instability that endangers Washington's allies increases.

A decisive victory remains the most significant pillar. Israel's defense establishment demonstrated its strength in this regard during the recent war, both against immediate enemies and distant ones. At the same time, the limits of power were exposed. The IDF did not bring down Hamas, not necessarily because of military incapacity, but apparently because of a considered decision that the strategic, military, moral, and economic costs would outweigh the benefits. Yet this assessment also stemmed from a lack of resolve to create a complete change in Gaza's reality after October 7, particularly the removal of Hamas from its position of control. The required change, therefore, concerns both the scale and composition of forces, especially strengthening the ground army, as well as the command ethos.

Updating the security concept requires renewed understanding that Israel faces a significant and ongoing threat from its regional enemies and cannot afford complacency at any time. The concept must also reflect the need to operate across multiple arenas, including international legitimacy.

This brief volume presents reflections by several veterans of Israel's security-concept design on the implications of the "Iron Swords" war for that concept. Some of the military implications have already been examined by the Nagel Committee, which called for a substantial increase in the defense budget and identified key directions needed in force building. However, the scope and direction of change remain open to debate, partly professional, partly political, and, in the end, it will be the democratic decisions of the public that are implemented.

Rethinking Israel's Security Concept After October 7

Gershon Hachohen

► Executive Summary

Israel's security doctrine, based on David Ben-Gurion's principles of warning, deterrence, and decision, was designed for swift victories followed by lasting peace. Today, that model is in crisis. Iran's "ring of fire" strategy, which unites Hamas, Hizbullah, and other proxies, seeks to trap Israel in prolonged, multi-front conflicts that weaken its military flexibility and national endurance. Modern asymmetric warfare, using missiles, underground networks, and attacks on civilians, has eroded Israel's early warning, deterrence, and ability to achieve clear victories. Over time, Israel's growing reliance on airpower and intelligence instead of ground readiness has created new vulnerabilities, exposed since October 7, 2023. To ensure its security, Israel must redefine its defense concept by balancing rapid offensive capability with lasting resilience, rebuilding territorial depth, and preparing for an extended period of strategic defense.

Since the war erupted on the morning of October 7, 2023, Israel's security concept, and its core assumptions, has entered a strategic maze.

The Iranian plan crafted by Qassem Soleimani to encircle Israel with a "ring of fire" and a coordinated envelope of jihadist forces on all its borders, anticipating an internal front of Israeli Arab unrest, was woven already in the previous decade. In August 2022, following Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's Quds Day guidance to act for Israel's destruction, IRGC commander Hossein Salami declared: "The Palestinians are now ready for ground combat. This is Israel's main weak point. Missiles are excellent for deterrence... but they do not liberate land. a ground force must be

deployed to liberate the land step by step... Hizbullah and Palestinian fighters will move on the ground as a single military formation.”¹

Since Soleimani’s blueprint to encircle Israel with a ring of fire was set, it has evolved. Core elements have already been implemented in the current war. Even after Iran’s direct participation with missiles and UAVs on the night of April 14, 2024, the plan as a whole has only been partially activated. Hizbullah joined late and in a relatively limited manner, yet still succeeded in placing Israel in a strategic bind, with tens of thousands displaced from their homes and large IDF formations tied down in the north. Those forces, anchored in the north, would surely have aided in defeating Hamas in the south. Split between fronts, the war drags on with no quick end in sight. That fact, in itself, reflects the essence of the new security threat inherent in the region-wide system Iran has built for war against Israel.

The significance of this Iranian system of threat becomes clear when one compares Iran’s war logic for Israel’s destruction with the security concept laid down by David Ben-Gurion in the state’s early years.

The new form of war, as expressed by Hamas and Hizbullah under Iranian direction, and as voiced by Hizbullah’s deputy secretary-general in aspiring to force Israel into an endless war, challenges Ben-Gurion’s security concept on two levels:

1. It denies Ben-Gurion’s expectation of quick decision in war; and
2. It undermines his expectation that, after defeating the enemy, Israel would enjoy a prolonged quiet enabling a focus on growth and nation-building.

Ben-Gurion’s Starting Point: Enduring Tensions

Ben-Gurion was acutely aware of Israel’s quantitative asymmetry versus its enemies. He repeatedly stressed that even a decisive Israeli victory would not prevent the next round of war; at best, it would grant Israel a few years of respite to consolidate.

Israel’s security concept was forged amid the immediate challenges facing the nascent state. These were laid out to the Mapai Council on January 12, 1949, even before the War of Independence ended, in five goals: (1) immigration and ingathering of exiles; (2) “rapid settlement of the land’s empty areas,” especially territories captured in wartime momentum; (3) “a foreign policy of peace” for international recognition and support; (4) rapid economic development in agriculture and industry; and (5) upgrading the IDF in all aspects of quality.²

“The State of Israel,” Ben-Gurion explained, “is a state like all other states, and at the same time unlike any other state...”³ Israel must be, simultaneously, a “normal” state seeking prosperity and stability, and an “abnormal” state bearing unique national tasks—foremost, the supreme test of national defense. Recognizing these

unresolvable tensions, Ben-Gurion framed governance as a daily navigation effort, balancing competing imperatives across the apparatus of state.

Leadership, at every level, from national strategy to public administration, was thus conceived as a daily calibration amid constant tension, employing a “both-and” approach that synchronizes seemingly contradictory aims. A traditional inspiration for this mindset appears in the Hebrew calendar, which uniquely combines lunar and solar logics: Passover always falls at full moon (15th) by the lunar count, while, unlike the Islamic calendar, it always remains in spring by the solar year, thanks to the intercalated leap month. In acknowledging that two aspirations cannot be unified into a single computation, the Hebrew calendar fuses lunar time with a solar synchronizing factor. That leap-month principle, inserted periodically by institutional authority, illustrates Ben-Gurion’s conceptual basis for navigating unresolved tensions. It also underlies the classic Mapai “compromise”: tensions are never fully resolved; they are balanced and synchronized by leadership.

Upon this conceptual base Ben-Gurion set Israel’s security concept, derived from diagnosing existential and security tensions. From the outset he had to synchronize, systematically, between the duty of constant war-readiness, recognizing neighbors might launch a surprise attack, and Israel’s inability to maintain a permanently fully mobilized army at requisite readiness. The newborn state had unprecedented nation-building tasks, ingathering exiles and constructing institutions, while also obligated to defend its existence. The balancing point settled on a small standing army backed in emergencies by a broad reserve mobilization. Given this reliance on rapid transition from peacetime nation-building to wartime footing, strategic warning became indispensable. Thus emerged the triad: warning, deterrence, decision. Ben-Gurion never articulated the triad explicitly in his writings, but later Israeli security thought, e.g., Maj. Gen. Israel Tal, *National Security: Few Against Many*, and David Freilich, *Israel’s Security Concept*, formalized it. In 2006, the Meridor report added a fourth pillar: defense.

The Conceptual Triad as a Compass

A compass is essential for navigation, but it does not set the destination. So too with Israel’s security lexicon: national leadership must choose direction and daily balance among unresolved tensions.

Warning (Hatra’ah): Early warning bridges the gap between peacetime posture and emergency requirements, enabling rapid reserve mobilization. Intelligence interpretation, to avoid mobilizing on every weak signal, has always been part of the craft.

Deterrence (Harta’ah): Deterrence sustains the balance between Israel’s normal aspiration for development and the moment demanding full national mobilization. It was never expected to eliminate the danger of war, only to postpone it and lengthen

the interwar periods of growth. Over time, public discourse loaded deterrence with excessive expectations; “loss of deterrence” became a cliché, as if it were a quantifiable metric. Yet, in practice, whether in the 1973 surprise or October 7, deterrence, as commonly invoked, has proven misleading.

Decision (Hachra’ah): Once war breaks out, the IDF must win a clear, rapid decision to end the war quickly, restore normalcy, and re-establish deterrence. The IDF’s offensive strike force was built to shift the war swiftly to enemy territory and defeat its army there, keeping most wartime damage on enemy soil and sparing Israel’s civilians. It is precisely these foundations that the new Iranian war concept aims to shake: denying Israel’s ability to maintain warning, deterrence, and decision.

The Evolution of Hizbullah– Hamas Warfighting

In May 2000, after the IDF left Lebanon, Hizbullah fundamentally revised its war posture, effectively adopting Syria’s new war doctrine developed in the late 1990s by COS Gen. Ali Aslan (influenced by his role commanding Syria’s expeditionary force with the U.S.-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf War). With Iranian guidance, Hizbullah optimized Lebanon’s mountainous terrain, village networks, and winding routes through built-up and wooded areas. Israel encountered the first full expression of this doctrine in the Second Lebanon War (2006).

Inspired by Hizbullah’s 2006 fighting, Hamas in Gaza fully adopted the Syrian-Hizbullah war idea. Since then, the two organizations have engaged in mutual learning, drawing lessons from IDF operations in Gaza over the past decade.

Over the years, a new war logic has been built on three systemic pillars:

1. **Fire Arrays:** Systematic preparation to deliver sustained, massed fires across all ranges for days on end, from concealed and dug-in positions prepared in advance, aimed at Israel’s civilian and military rear and strategic assets.
2. **Defense Arrays:** A multi-layered, multi-domain defense, including extensive subterranean networks, across the entire battlespace. Anticipating Israel’s desire to move the war into enemy territory, they invite IDF ground incursions into hardened defenses above and below ground, designed to inflict attrition and sow operational confusion over the purpose and payoff of maneuver.
3. **Commando Blows:** Penetrating raid forces as a preliminary or parallel shock across the entire front, compelling the IDF to commit elite units to homeland defense and delaying Israel’s transition to offensive maneuver (Hizbullah’s Radwan in the north; Hamas’s Nukhba in Gaza). This is precisely what Hamas executed on October 7 against border communities all along the line.

With these three elements, Hizbullah and Hamas have shaken the basic assumptions

of Israel's security concept. Their dispersed, redundant fires and defenses allow continued campaigning even after losing terrain and assets, deliberately generating Israeli strategic bewilderment.

Three Core Difficulties for the IDF

The evanescence of warning. When conventional armies (e.g., Egypt before 1967; Syria on the Golan before and after 1973) prepared for war, they left a trail of indicators. By contrast, Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza—embedding permanent, concealed fire arrays and defenses inside populated areas, maintained at continuous readiness by local cadres—have greatly reduced classic warning signatures. Their posture allows a rapid shift from routine to emergency, compressing Israel's warning time.

The erosion of deterrence. The adversary retains sufficient capacity to continue rocket and missile barrages into Israel's rear even after significant IDF air strikes and territorial gains. As seen, fire continued even from areas already "cleared." In Lebanon, even if the IDF were to seize south Lebanon, Hizbullah's northern arrays could still hit Tel Aviv. Under such conditions, Israel's offensive gains may not deliver a favorable opening position for cease-fire talks, complicating the re-establishment of deterrence. In Gaza too, full territorial control does not guarantee removal of the threat when the enemy fights from within the civilian population. Above all, Israel now faces a regional, axis-based war system directed by Iran and backed by the Russia-China-North Korea nexus; adversary fighters are animated by religious motivation (mujahideen), further narrowing Israel's deterrence leverage.

The blurring of decision. Given Hizbullah's depth across all of Lebanon and into Syria, seizing the south would not suffice for decision; with UAVs and cruise missiles, sustained fires could continue from thousands of kilometers away. IDF ground forces attacking the enemy's fortified cores confront dense defenses that exact casualties and slow the advance. Prolonged clearing fights, while rockets still strike Israeli population centers, undercut Israel's ability to achieve a clear, rapid decision. Meanwhile, elite units diverted to defense against Radwan/Nukhba near the border delay Israel's shift to offense, and displacement near the frontlines grows.

Confusion in Identifying the State of War

A conceptual transformation has merged the basic operational modes, defense and offense, into a hybrid often called "defense-offense." Both sides can launch deep, large-scale fire attacks without any ground border crossing. In such a setting—e.g., Lebanon from Oct 8, 2023 to Oct 2024—it is often unclear who is attacking and who is defending. The question becomes: When does a war become a "war" (versus a "day of battle" or a "round" of fire)? As soon as fires intensify beyond routine, or a serious border incident occurs (e.g., an IDF unit ambushed, soldiers abducted),

the operational-strategic state becomes hard to define. Deciding, and persuading, whether to escalate into a broad campaign or all-out war is inherently difficult. This is not mere Israeli hesitation; it is a changed reality where the “boiling point” of war is context-dependent and elusive.

Between Strike Power and Staying Power

Even if this war ends with significant Israeli military achievements, it is hard to assume it will halt the Soleimani program’s trajectory. At first glance, it may resemble the old “worst case” scenario familiar in Israel’s early years. But key novelties exist.

Arab armies in the 1950s also sought Israel’s destruction. What has changed is the idea of operations and the strategic sophistication. The 20th-century threat drew on WWII methods of organizing and employing armies; Ben-Gurion’s concept, culminating in 1967, was tailored to defeat those methods. The Iranian war idea, however, is built on 21st-century warfare, refined by lessons from Ukraine: long-range ballistic and medium-range missiles, massed remotely piloted aircraft (swarms), precision rockets, and easy-to-operate cruise missiles—all while concentrating combat in built-up areas among civilians, with deliberate focus on Israel’s civilian rear and critical infrastructure. In aggregate, these developments challenge Israel’s traditional security concept and expose its vulnerabilities.

At Ben-Gurion’s core stood the unresolved tension between normalcy and unceasing struggle. Administratively, that tension meant balancing national-social tasks—immigration absorption, economic and infrastructure development, education—against the need to build a large, well-equipped army. Israel’s classic security concept favored strike power over staying power. As Maj. Gen. Israel Tal analyzed,⁴ “strike power” is the set of forces actually committed to win quickly and decisively; “staying power” encompasses the state’s broader capacity to endure—material resources, production, logistics, and civilian morale—especially in protracted war. Aware of Israel’s limits in staying power, Ben-Gurion aimed for short wars. The present war, like Ukraine, demonstrates the growing centrality of staying power. Even Russia has faced limits in societal will and logistics, relying on outside munitions (e.g., 1.5 million artillery shells from North Korea).

Iran’s war plan aims precisely to deny Israel quick decision, forcing Israel into the domains of its relative weakness: staying power.

Three Decades of IDF Conceptual Shift

Over the last 30 years, the IDF underwent a deep operational-concept shift. Beginning after the First Lebanon War, and especially under CoS Ehud Barak (inspired by the U.S. AirLand Battle and the 1991 Gulf War), the IDF developed “Asufa”—a concept of systemic, intelligence-driven precision fires from the air

and the ground to achieve rapid, high-volume destruction. NATO's 1999 Kosovo campaign reinforced the belief that future wars could be decided by stand-off airpower. In the 2004 "Avnei Esh-9" IDF exercise under CoS Moshe Ya'alon, ground forces remained largely static in border defense while the main offensive effort was assigned to the Air Force; a doctrinal paper soon followed.

Air-intelligence strike capabilities improved dramatically, and the IDF entered 2006 with this concept in place. Air strikes achieved notable successes against Hizbullah's medium/long-range rockets (based on plans years in the making), but the war also exposed limits in suppressing Hizbullah's short-range rocket fire on Israel's rear. Ground maneuvers encountered dense defensive systems in villages, along mountain routes, and in heavy underbrush.

Operation Protective Edge (2014), 51 days, again revealed disappointment with over-reliance on systemic fire.

Throughout these years, Israel's defense establishment shifted concepts without fully internalizing the implications. The IDF, historically focused on offensive maneuver into enemy territory, moved toward an effects-by-fire approach, gradually neglecting maneuver forces, especially reserves. Israel's adversaries recognized this doctrinal pivot and its potential to unbalance the IDF. As Bashar al-Assad said in 2009:

Israel is becoming militarily stronger as time passes... it has greater capacity for destruction but less ability to achieve military objectives, and therefore less ability to achieve political objectives. It moves from failure to failure... Today, Israel no longer fights on others' land; that's a strategic principle. Today, its campaign is "inside." The map has changed. Israel does not know how to deal with this map.⁵

In Syria, the IDF successfully leveraged precise, intelligence-driven airpower in the Campaign Between Wars (MABAM) against Iranian entrenchment and weapon transfers. But the satisfaction with intelligence and air superiority coincided with reduced training for ground formations, especially reserves, and the erosion of local defense arrangements in border communities (shrinking rapid-response squads).

CoS Aviv Kochavi correctly identified the new threat posed by Hizbullah's Radwan commandos, poised to attack border communities and positions, and stressed preparedness for defense, including tiered alerts ("Tzariah" first, "Mivtsar" second). Similar attention was paid to Hamas's Nukhba in the south. Yet this defense posture depended on warning and on committed elite standing forces to defend first, delaying the IDF's transition to the offensive. The classic Ben-Gurion expectation of rapid maneuver into enemy territory thus lost practical validity.

Confidence in intelligence superiority, nurtured by MABAM, masked the growing warning problem against rapid Hamas/Hizbullah attacks. Operation Guardian of the Walls (May 2021) began with Hamas rockets at Jerusalem, on about one hour's warning, insufficient in strategic terms. Embedded within populations, organized on

a local cadre basis, the enemy can shift very quickly to attack, deliberately blurring indicators and eroding Israel's strategic warning capacity.

Viewed thus, the surprise of October 7 reflects a long, gradual process that has, in recent years, undermined the foundations of Israel's security concept.

Conclusion

Given Iran's enveloping threat architecture around Israel's borders and in depth, pursuing a perpetual war posture, Israel must rethink both how to achieve a decision and how to build significant staying power for a long war. Ben-Gurion would likely argue that precisely here, Israel needs a new national security concept.

Charting the directions of a new concept first requires recognizing the roots of the conceptual crisis, a recognition that the defense establishment has yet to fully embrace. Outlining such a concept demands a seminar of inquiry and learning of the kind Ben-Gurion conducted in summer 1947 before the War of Independence.

As a guide, with warning, deterrence, and decision all constrained, Israel needs a new warfighting concept in both defense and offense. Above all, the shrunken warning window compels a renewed foundation for continuous defense along all borders and within the home front. Strengthening defense necessitates re-addressing territorial depth. Already after the War of Independence, it was accepted that Israel could not be defended from the narrow coastal plain along Kfar Saba/Route 6. In light of modern war capabilities, the required depth is greater still, mandating an Israeli hold in the Jordan Valley as the eastern security border and in vital areas of Judea and Samaria.

In today's regional threat system, Israel's security concept must acknowledge the growing multi-front regional existential threat, requiring the reconstruction of a national mindset for living under a continuous regime of strategic defense.

Notes

1. MEMRI, 19 August 2022; interview on Khamenei's official website.
2. See *Vision and Path*, vol. I, pp. 11–15.
3. Zionist Congress XXIII, Aug. 1951; *Vision and Path*, vol. III, Mapai 1953, pp. 200–201.
4. *National Security: Few Against Many*, ch. 2.
5. *Al-Asafir*, 25 March 2009.

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