

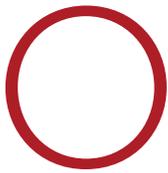
INDEFENSIBLE:



Misrepresenting the borders issue to undermine Israeli-Palestinian peace

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OPONENTS OF A REALISTIC ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN

peace agreement are attempting to foil President Obama's efforts to galvanize progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track. As a key part of their efforts, they contend that from the perspective of Israeli security, the 1967 lines dividing Israel from the West Bank are indefensible, and that any border based on these lines would be indefensible. They imply that anyone who would suggest that a future border should be based on the 1967 lines—starting with President Obama—must not care about Israel's security. In making these arguments, the opponents of a realistic peace agreement are cynically misrepresenting the issue of future Israeli-Palestinian borders and what President Obama said about them, in order to leverage legitimate concerns for Israel's security to justify hard-line, ideological positions and to score political points in the domestic Israeli and American arenas.

In doing so, it is they who are undermining Israel's security. And by denying Israel a viable peace agreement with the Palestinians, they are threatening Israel's viability as a Jewish state and a democracy.

MAKING 1967 LINES THE ISSUE

At the heart of this debate is the desire of some opponents of a negotiated peace agreement to erase more than two decades of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. The most important result of this progress has been the establishment of broad consensus among the parties and the international community that a peace agreement will indeed be based on two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security and with borders based on the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed upon land swaps. This was the clear position of the [Bush Administration](#)¹ (also [here](#)² and [here](#)³), and it has been [embraced](#)⁴ by previous Israeli governments. They are also trying to erase the fact that Israel long ago agreed with the U.S. and the entire world that the 1967 lines are the basis of negotiations, when it accepted United Nations Security Council Resolution [242](#)⁵ (of 1967), which requires Israel to withdraw from "territories occupied in the recent conflict."

Likewise, at the heart of this debate is the recognition that the ideological arguments that form the central rationale for Israel's West Bank settlement enterprise fail to resonate with most Israelis and among the vast majority of

American supporters of Israel. Consequently, supporters of the settlements have realized that a more politically palatable argument must be found to make the case for why Israel must keep all or most of the West Bank and continue expanding settlements.

Opponents of a realistic peace agreement have tried various arguments to reject any mention of the 1967 lines. They have argued that until Obama's May 19th speech, there was not even tacit agreement that the 1967 lines should be the basis of a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement—a case that the public record of the peace process categorically refutes. They argue, like Prime Minister Netanyahu did in his [speech](#)⁶ before the U.S. Congress in May 2011, that all the land of the West Bank has belonged to Israel and the Jewish people since biblical times and the 1967 lines are therefore meaningless. They have also argued that Israel has no legal or moral obligation to give an inch of land to the Palestinians, since Israel won the land in a war forced on it by the Arab world and no nation is ever required to give back land acquired in such a case.

These arguments have largely failed to convince most Israelis and their friends worldwide that Israel should not withdraw from the West Bank in order to make peace with the Palestinians. As a result, opponents of a realistic peace agreement now are trying to play what they apparently believe to be their strongest card: the argument that regardless of any other considerations, borders based on the 1967 lines will be indefensible and that therefore the 1967 lines, either as a future border or as the basis for a future border, must be rejected out of hand.

MISREPRESENTING THE 1967 LINES IN THE “DEFENSIBILITY” DEBATE

The debate over the “defensibility” of the 1967 lines starts with a bald-faced lie: that Obama—or the Palestinians, or the international community—is trying to force Israel to accept the 1967 lines as a permanent and official border between the West Bank and Israel.

President Obama could not have been clearer in his [May 19th speech](#)⁷: he did not talk about forcing Israel to return to the 1967 lines—he talked about a negotiated agreement and borders based on the 1967 lines with mutually

agreed-on swaps, and he talked at length about the imperative of addressing Israel's security concerns. The key words here—words that opponents of a realistic peace agreement want people to ignore—are “negotiated,” “based on,” “mutually agreed” and “security.”

“Negotiated”: Borders will not be imposed or forced on either party. There will be no peace agreement unless Israel agrees that it can live with it, including with respect to the defensibility of its borders.

“Based on”: Final borders will not be identical to the 1967 lines, but rather the 1967 lines will be the starting point for negotiations, as they have been for the past two decades of peace efforts.

“Mutually-Agreed”: Any changes to the 1967 borders will have to be agreed to by both sides. In other words, there will be no peace agreement unless Israel can successfully negotiate such changes in a way that satisfies its security concerns.

“Security”: Israel's security concerns are recognized by both sides, by the U.S., and by the rest of the international community as a key element that must be addressed, to Israel's satisfaction and as negotiated by Israel's own military and security experts, in any peace agreement.

USING “DEFENSIBILITY” TO HIDE AN IDEOLOGICAL AGENDA

The issue of the “defensibility” of the 1967 lines is also used to obscure the real ideological agenda of many peace opponents: a desire to keep much or all of the West Bank under Israel's control in order to continue and expand settlements while obscuring the cost to Israel.

Past negotiations—including those whose contents were recently leaked to the media—have shown that the Palestinians are ready to accept an agreement under which Israel annexes many settlements and most settlers. However, for adherents of the “1967 can't be the basis for negotiations” argument, this is not enough. Why? Because if 1967 is the basis of an agreement, and any changes must be dealt with through mutually accepted land swaps, then Israel will have to compensate for annexing these settlements with land from its side of the 1967 lines.

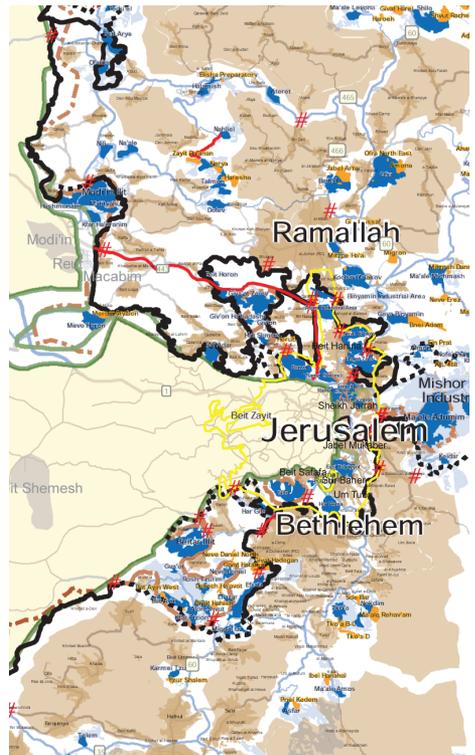
INDEFENSIBLE: MISREPRESENTING THE BORDERS ISSUE TO UNDERMINE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

This, in turn, imposes a natural “cap” on the amount of land and the number of settlements Israel can keep, since Israel has a limited amount of land inside its existing borders that it will be willing to swap. Thus, in the eyes of Israeli maximalists, who want to keep huge areas of the West Bank, the 1967 lines must be rejected as a starting point for negotiations—not because of security, but so that Israel will be able to keep whatever it wants without having to pay in kind, even if this comes at the price of peace.

PARSING “DEFENSIBILITY”

Despite being based on a lie, and despite obscuring a clear ideological agenda, the “indefensible borders” argument resonates deeply among those who care about Israel—both in Israel and in the United States. It resonates because Israelis and their supporters care deeply about Israel’s security, for very good reasons, given Israel’s history. Opponents of a realistic peace agreement are well aware of this and therefore engage in fear mongering to make their case. They typically refer to a range of threats, including: the threat of Arab armies invading Israel by land, through the Jordan Valley, across the West Bank; the threat of Arab armies attacking Israel from the skies, taking advantage of West Bank airspace; and the threat of terrorists (Palestinians and others) using the West Bank high ground as a launching pad for attacks on Israeli cities, infrastructure, military installations, and airport.

Concerns about these threats are legitimate. But manipulating these concerns by misrepresenting facts or ignoring overarching Israeli national security interests while



attempting to advance an ideological “Greater Israel” agenda are not. More importantly, fear mongering regarding the security implications of the future border between Israel and the Palestinian state conveniently glosses over some very important realities:

Territory does not equal security: Territorial depth—particularly when measured in single miles rather than in tens or hundreds of miles—is almost insignificant as a buffer in an age of intermediate- and long-range missiles. Israel’s adversaries already have missiles that can reach every corner in the country. Keeping the West Bank does not provide Israel additional meaningful strategic depth with respect to such a threat.

The threat posed to Israel by a land attack from the east is low: The threat to Israel of an invasion by foreign armies from the east, through the West Bank, is extremely low, as recognized by [Israeli strategic scholars](#)⁸. This is especially true since the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq and in light of Israel’s longstanding peace agreement with Jordan. Of course, Israel must and no doubt will do its utmost to prevent the creation of a so-called “Eastern Front,” and the best way of doing that, as [Israeli security experts](#)⁹ point out, is through diplomacy. Likewise, in the context of a peace agreement, Israel will continue to prepare itself for worst case scenarios, including a rise in extremist influence in Jordan and the West Bank. However, even if such changes were to occur, or if under some other circumstances foreign armies were to try to invade through the West Bank, the threat posed to Israel would still be low. The Jordan Valley is an excellent natural barrier, almost insurmountable for invading armies with tanks and mechanized infantry, regardless of whether or not the Israeli army is actually present in the West Bank. As Israeli military historian [Martin van Creveld observes](#)¹⁰, “The ascent from the Jordan Valley into the heights of Judea and Samaria is topographically one of the most difficult on earth,” and would be easily thwarted by Israel. He further notes that a permanent Israeli military presence in the Jordan Valley is not required to thwart such an invasion. In the improbable event that some country or combination of countries decide to send land forces to attack Israel from the east, despite the topographical challenges, Israeli military superiority would make any such attempt suicidal for the invading forces. Israel’s [early warning capabilities](#)¹¹, which comprise sophisticated

reconnaissance technologies, including satellites, are such that under no circumstances could Israel be surprised by a land invasion, and it is clear that in the context of peace talks, Israel will consider it a priority to negotiate security arrangements that satisfy Israel's need for early warning stations in key points in the West Bank—something to which Palestinian leaders have in the past indicated they would agree. Finally, Israel has the strongest and best-equipped air force in the region, enabling aerial attacks on any ground forces advancing toward Israel.

The danger to Israel from an air attack is low: Israel has not been attacked by enemy aircraft in decades. In the age of ballistic missiles, the likelihood of such an attack remains low. However, to the extent that air attacks remain a legitimate concern, in negotiations Israel can and surely will make it a priority to secure the right to enter Palestinian airspace in the case of any such threat—something to which Palestinians have indicated in the past that they would also agree. Furthermore, in past informal negotiations, like [the Geneva Initiative](#)¹², Palestinian representatives associated with the PLO agreed to Israeli Air Force use of the West Bank airspace not only during military emergencies but also on a routine basis, for the purpose of military training.

Leaving the IDF in the West Bank would not be a guarantee against terrorism: The infiltration of terrorists and the smuggling of weapons into the West Bank, as well as the use of projectiles against Israeli targets are valid concerns, as is the concern that terrorists will use smuggled or locally-made projectiles against Israel. But an Israeli military presence on the ground in the West Bank is not a guarantee against either. Even when Israel was in full control of the Gaza Strip, rockets and mortar rounds were routinely launched at Israel from the northern part of the Gaza Strip. Fire from the Gaza Strip stopped when the Palestinian authorities in Gaza decided to stop it. Likewise in the West Bank, a motivated Palestinian government will be the most effective means of stopping terrorism. Added to this, in the context of peace negotiations there is no doubt that Israel will insist on security arrangements that address specific Israel concerns, including protecting Ben Gurion airport and preventing infiltration of both people and weapons through the Palestinian-Jordanian border into the future Palestinian state.

The threat of terrorism from the West Bank will be reduced by a peace agreement: Terrorism emanating from the West Bank and Gaza, and sometimes supported by outside forces, is already a top Israeli concern. To address this concern, Israel today is forced to rely mainly on defensive measures, like the Iron Dome anti-rocket system. Israel will no doubt maintain such measures even under a peace agreement, as Israel will have to plan for potential worst-case contingencies (just as Israeli security and

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military planning has always taken into account the possibility of changes in Egypt or Jordan). However, under a peace agreement, Israel would likely also benefit from intensified security cooperation

with Palestinian security authorities. The Palestinian Authority has already shown its capability to fight terrorism in the West Bank and to cooperate with Israel's security authorities, even while the West Bank is still under occupation, and security cooperation negotiated by Israel as part of a peace agreement would most likely include anti-smuggling measures, early warning systems and intelligence sharing. Likewise, subject to negotiations and the agreement of both sides, there is a possibility of the deployment of an international force inside the future Palestine, as has been the case, successfully, in the context of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty (the Multinational Force & Observers in the Sinai). Such a force could, for example, monitor the Jordan-Palestine border to prevent infiltration of terrorists and the smuggling of weapons, and be present at points in the West Bank from which Israel perceives itself to be especially vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Moreover, under a peace agreement the existing Israeli-Jordanian security cooperation would likely be strengthened and serve as an additional component in counter-terrorism efforts.

A peace agreement will strengthen Israel's military deterrence. A peace agreement would strengthen Israel's ability to deter terrorist attacks. Israel's ability to inflict pain militarily, whether against Hizballah or Hamas, is unquestioned. However today, absent a peace agreement, Israel's right to

do so is often challenged. Under a peace agreement in which Israel's borders with the Palestinians are universally recognized and it is universally accepted that the occupation has ended, Israel's right to use force to defend its borders from outside attack will no longer be subject to any serious challenge and Israel's military deterrence will be exponentially stronger.

A peace agreement will significantly reduce hostility toward Israel in the region. Israel will always need to plan for worst-case scenarios and be ready to defend itself in the case of attack, and clearly, there will be extremists and recidivists who will reject a peace agreement. However, a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that ends the occupation and officially marks an end of claims—recognized as such by the Palestinian leadership and the world at large—will significantly reduce hostility toward Israel among Palestinians and in the Arab world. It will also improve Israel's standing in the world at large, where hostility to Israelis is a growing problem, mitigating the chances of future hostilities and increasing support for Israel in the event such hostilities may arise.

THE BOTTOM LINE: PEACE IS ISRAEL'S BEST DEFENSE

Israel cannot have and will not be able to have conventional, territorial "strategic depth." As Israel's founding father David Ben Gurion once said: "There are geo-political facts that cannot be ignored. Our land is small and there is no difference whether it lies on both sides of the Jordan River or only west of it. Even if we had the ideal borders, ours would have remained a small country in comparison to the vast [Arab] expanse... this is an ironclad historical fact."

While additional territory would at best only marginally impact Israel's tactical security posture, an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement would represent a national security paradigm shift. As one [Israeli security expert](#)¹³ noted, "A regional peace deal, including normalization, as promised by the Arab peace initiative, would confer more security than a few thousand dunams in the Jordan Valley." Peace will make Israeli borders more, not less, defensible. Overall, peace will make Israel more, not less, secure. And peace is not possible unless Israel negotiates an agreement based on the 1967 lines. A peace agreement based on these lines can leave Israel not only with defensible borders, as negotiated by Israel, but it can transform

the regional environment and pave the way for comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace. Clearly, making peace with the Palestinians will involve risks—risks that can be diminished, though not entirely eliminated—in the negotiations leading to a peace agreement, and by Israeli strategic decisions and security arrangements in the wake of an agreement.

On the other hand, not making peace poses far greater risks to Israel than negotiating a realistic and durable peace agreement with the Palestinians—risk that cannot be diminished, no matter the strength of Israel’s army or the intensity of its diplomacy. These include the perpetuation of Israel’s armed conflict with enemies who are growing increasingly skilled in their war making capability and have increasing access to technologically sophisticated weapons; ever-increasing international isolation and pressure, as the world grows impatient with Israel’s occupation of the Palestinians, the increasing mobilization of the Palestinian diaspora, increasing distancing of American Jewish youth from Israel, and the threat of mass Palestinian non-violent activism on Israel’s borders. Failure to make peace increases the likelihood that popular antagonism toward Israel would fuel future attacks against it.

The reality is that today, potential attacks by Arab armies or terrorists are not the greatest threat facing Israel. The greatest threat facing Israel is the continuing occupation, which directly undermines Israel’s viability as a Jewish state and a democracy, and the perpetuation of which is fueling attacks on Israel’s very right to exist. And the reality, too, is this: the only thing that can guarantee Israel’s security and its survival as a Jewish state and a democracy is to achieve a realistic peace agreement with the Palestinians.

“Such borders are not indefensible—they are Israel’s best defense.”

In the context of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, the lines that will separate Israel from Palestine will be negotiated borders with a Palestinian state that has every interest in maintaining peace and everything to lose by initiating hostilities against Israel. They will be borders that are part of a system of robust, agreed-on, internationally endorsed and internationally guaranteed security arrangements. They will

be borders that are internationally recognized, allowing Israel to maintain, and even enhance, its overwhelming military superiority and deterrence.

Such borders are not indefensible—they are Israel's best defense.

What is indefensible is an occupation that has been going on for forty four years. What is indefensible is continuing this occupation in perpetuity. Indefensible is constructing settlements on land that must soon become the future Palestinian state. Indefensible is dismissing a peace plan endorsed by the Arab League, which promises full normalization with all twenty two Arab states. Indefensible is denying Israelis the peace that they yearn for and deserve, and continuing to deny them a respectable place among the family of nations.

LINKS

- ¹ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/ Bush071607.html>
- ² <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/ BushSharon0404.html>
- ³ <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Reference+Documents/ Exchange+of+letters+Sharon-Bush+ 14-Apr-2004.htm>
- ⁴ <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/olmert-israel-must-return-to-1967-borders-1.257032>
- ⁵ <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace%20Process/Guide%20to%20the%20Peace%20Process/UN%20 Security% 20Council%20Resolution%20242>
- ⁶ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/israeli-prime-minister-binyamin-netanyahu-address-to-congres/ 2011/05/24/AFWY5bAH_story.html
- ⁷ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks- president-barack-obama-prepared- delivery-moment-opportunity>
- ⁸ <http://spirit.tau.ac.il/government/downloads/Avner.pdf>
- ⁹ <http://www.peace-security.org.il/articles.asp?id=1578>
- ¹⁰ <http://www.forward.com/articles/133961/>
- ¹¹ <http://spirit.tau.ac.il/government/downloads/Avner.pdf>
- ¹² <http://www.geneva-accord.org/images/PDF/security.pdf>
- ¹³ <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-real-meaning-of-defensible-borders-1.368464>



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