

# Preface: ISRAEL'S CONTINUING REQUIREMENTS FOR DEFENSIBLE BORDERS IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING MIDDLE EAST

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Israel is entering an extremely dangerous period in the years ahead. What little strategic certainty Israel enjoyed in the past can no longer be taken for granted. Instead, a rapidly changing Middle East is emerging in which neighboring Arab regimes have either been overthrown, or their grip on power has been badly shaken by mass uprisings. The loss of predictability about threats emanating from surrounding states is being caused by other reasons as well. To Israel's east, for example, the ultimate direction of Iraq remains unclear; it would be an error to rule out Iraq coming under the hegemony of Iran and thereby adopting the kind of adversarial posture against Israel that previous Iraqi regimes assumed in decades past.

Yet precisely as these developments are underway, Israel is also confronting a new diplomatic assault that could well strip it of the territorial defenses in the West Bank that have provided for its security for over forty years. This applies particularly to its formidable eastern barrier in the Jordan Valley, which, if lost, would leave Israel eight or nine miles wide and in a very precarious position against a broad spectrum of military challenges that are likely to emerge to its east in the years ahead. These new demands of Israel, which would be problematic in any event, are being proposed at the worst possible time; that is, precisely when large parts of the Middle East appear to be engulfed in flames.

This diplomatic assault is being waged on several fronts, most notably at the United Nations General Assembly, where the Palestinians are seeking support for establishing a state on the 1967 lines. But also, several European Union states, including Britain, France, and Germany, have proposed that the Middle East Quartet (consisting of the U.S., Russia, the EU and the UN Secretariat) adopt a similar position. This was confirmed by British Foreign Secretary William Hague in March 2011 during an address at Chatham House in London, where he reiterated these terms.<sup>1</sup> In Washington, there have been both public and private efforts to press President Barack Obama to join the Europeans and issue his own blueprint for Israel's future borders, based on the same territorial parameters.<sup>2</sup>

Obama stunned many Israelis on May 19, 2011, when he declared in an address at the State Department that "the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders are established for both states." Three days later he clarified that Israelis and Palestinians would need to negotiate a border "that is different from the one that existed on June 4, 1967." Nevertheless, his explicit reference to the 1967 lines appeared to diverge from past U.S. positions on this issue.

Indeed, traditional U.S. policy recognized that Israel is not expected to withdraw from all the

Anti-government protesters celebrate in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, Feb. 10, 2011.



territories it captured in the 1967 Six-Day War. This was enshrined in the language of UN Security Council Resolution 242, which was the basis of successive peace treaties between Israel and the Arab states. This principle, in fact, had already been underscored by the main author of Resolution 242, the British ambassador to the UN in 1967, Lord Caradon, who admitted on PBS: "We didn't say there should be a withdrawal to the '67 line....We all knew – the boundaries of '67 were not drawn as permanent frontiers."<sup>3</sup> This key element of Resolution 242 also appeared in repeated letters of assurance to Israel by U.S. secretaries of state from Henry Kissinger to Warren Christopher. In 1988, Secretary of State George Shultz reiterated: "Israel will never negotiate from or return to the lines of partition or to the 1967 borders."<sup>4</sup>

The April 14, 2004, presidential letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon also spoke explicitly about Israel's right to "defensible borders" and to Israel's need to defend itself by itself. This point implicitly acknowledged Israel's doctrine of self-reliance, by which the Israel Defense Forces were to guarantee Israel's survival, and not international troops or even NATO. Two months later, the 2004 letter was confirmed by massive bipartisan majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Significantly, the letter also ruled out the notion that Israel would be expected to withdraw in the West Bank to the 1967 lines, which were only armistice lines and not internationally recognized borders.

Speaking on May 24, 2011, before a joint session of the U.S. Congress, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated that Israel could not withdraw to the 1967 line: "Israel will not return to the indefensible lines of 1967." He laid out Israeli security needs beyond those lines, stressing the importance of the Jordan Valley, in particular: "It is vital that Israel maintain a long-term military presence along the Jordan River." He also included "places of critical strategic and national importance" in his list of Israeli requirements for a secure peace. Immediately following his address, Netanyahu was interviewed on Fox News by Sean Hannity and further amplified his position, explaining that Israel was only nine miles wide in 1967. He added that there was "agreement between Israel and the U.S. that Israel must have defensible borders. Because in our part of the world, there's a simple truth, a peace you cannot defend is a peace that will not hold." Undoubtedly, the revolts that were transpiring across the Middle East contributed

to the Israeli view that defensible borders were still very relevant for guaranteeing Israel's future.

## The New Strategic Uncertainty Across the Middle East

For decades Israeli policy planning has been predicated upon certain constants. The calculus of the risks Israel could assume if it decided upon certain territorial concessions was based on a keen awareness of the policies being pursued by surrounding states. Since 1979, Egypt has been formally at peace with Israel. Though it has refused to progress towards a full normalization of relations, it has adhered to the military clauses of its peace treaty which kept the Sinai Peninsula for the most part demilitarized. While Syria joined the radical bloc in the Middle East led by Iran, and waged a proxy war with Israel through its support for terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas, it has not launched offensive operations against Israel on the Golan Heights since 1973. Jordan has formally been at peace with Israel since 1994 and has been able to block efforts by terrorist groups and hostile neighbors to incorporate it into the front line for future attacks against Israel.

Today these constants can no longer be taken for granted as rebellions against central governments have been spreading from Yemen to Syria, as well as from Egypt to Bahrain. This wave of change will hopefully lead in the long term to accountable and democratic governments that will not be prone to military adventurism. But in the short and medium term, the results of these uprisings could be highly destabilizing and bring to power far more radical forces that could seek renewed conflict.

Israel is not the only state concerned about how these developments will turn out. In fact, on March 22, 2011, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates admitted in an interview in the *Washington Post*: "I think we should be alert to the fact that outcomes are not predetermined and that it's not necessarily the case that everything has a happy ending....We are in dark territory and nobody knows what the outcome will be."<sup>5</sup>

What all this means is that just as Israel faces complete strategic uncertainty with regard to the future of the Middle East, it is being asked to acquiesce to unprecedented concessions

that could put its very future at risk. A number of immediate questions arise. First, how can Israel be expected to sign agreements that are predicated on it withdrawing from strategic territories like the Jordan Valley when it cannot be certain if the governments it negotiated with will even be there in the future? Look what happened in Egypt after the fall of President Hosni Mubarak, where senior political figures have said they will have to re-examine the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli Treaty of Peace. No one can provide a guarantee to Israel that future peace agreements, based on Israeli territorial withdrawals, will not be overturned. Moreover, it is not at all clear that the regimes ruling today in Syria, Jordan, or Saudi Arabia will not be overthrown.

In the West Bank, the regime of Mahmoud Abbas has remained in power largely due to the deployment of the Israel Defense Forces throughout the area and their counter-terrorist operations against Hamas and its allies. On May 4, 2011, Abbas reached a new reconciliation agreement with Hamas, but that has not removed the threat of an overall Hamas takeover in the West Bank, like the 2007 Hamas coup that followed a period of Fatah-Hamas cooperation. Were Israel to pull out of the West Bank, under present circumstances, it could not depend on Abbas remaining, regardless of what is happening to Arab regimes today across the region. In short, the degree of strategic uncertainty for Israel, given current political trends around it, has increased sharply.

## The Rising Profile of the Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood

What makes this concern even more compelling is the fact that the strongest political forces today that are now vying for power in the Arab world, and are seeking to replace the current regimes there, are tied to the Muslim Brotherhood network. This is already evident in Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood had an extremely low profile when President Mubarak was toppled, but since that time its role in Egyptian politics has grown substantially.<sup>6</sup> Even before the current wave of uprisings, Turkey became, after 2006, a new center of Muslim Brotherhood activity, hosting its global network in high-profile conferences in Istanbul.<sup>7</sup>

The Muslim Brotherhood stands out as one of the main political forces behind the wave of protests that took place in Jordan, as well.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Jordanian Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit charged that the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood was taking orders from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria.<sup>9</sup> Historically, the Muslim Brotherhood provided the ideological underpinnings for the leading figures in global terrorism from Khalid Sheikh Muhammad to Osama bin Laden. In the last few years, with the rise of leaders like Muhammad Badie in Egypt and Hammam Sayid in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood has come under a more extremist leadership, which still embraces hard-line doctrines against the West and a commitment to *jihadism*.<sup>10</sup> Both the Egyptian and Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood branches, like Hamas, attacked the U.S. for eliminating Bin Laden.<sup>11</sup>

Even if the Muslim Brotherhood does not take power at this initial stage, it will undoubtedly become part of future political coalitions that will move many neighboring countries into a much more hostile stance against Israel and even one supportive of militant action against the Jewish state. The hostility of the Muslim Brotherhood to Israel should not be underestimated. It is frequently forgotten that Hamas, which regularly launches rocket attacks deliberately aimed at Israeli population centers, is, according to its own charter, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Muhammad Badie in late 2010 issued a weekly message in which he plainly stated that the way forward on the Palestinian issue is not through negotiations, but rather returning to *jihad* and martyrdom (*istishhad*).<sup>12</sup> It should come then as no surprise that the Muslim Brotherhood's second-in-command announced in February 2011 that the movement will seek to cancel the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.<sup>13</sup>

At a minimum, Muslim Brotherhood regimes can be expected to provide sanctuary to terrorist groups engaging in active conflict with Israel. The first Muslim Brotherhood regime, under Sudanese leader Hassan Turabi, hosted both Hamas and al-Qaeda in the early 1990s.

Second, the present wave of anti-regime rebellions is loosening control of the central governments over large parts of several Arab states. This has created a vacuum in many areas, which is being filled by regional terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda and its affiliates, who seek to establish new sanctuaries beyond the reach of pro-Western Arab military establishments.

This process is already evident in Yemen. But it has become accentuated in Egypt, as well, especially in the Sinai Peninsula, where the Bedouin have drawn closer to Hamas and even al-Qaeda affiliates. They have engaged in a number of acts of sabotage against the Egyptian gas pipeline that supplies both Israel and Jordan. During the Iraq War, al-Qaeda of Iraq sought to set up forward positions in the Jordanian city of Irbid. The Jordanian security forces overcame this challenge, but can Israel always be certain that this will be the case?

Third, the undermining of the internal stability of Sunni Arab states is occurring as Iran seeks to consolidate its regional hegemony in the entire Middle East. While Iranian interests may be affected by the continuing rebellions in the Arab world, especially in Syria and Hizbullah-controlled Lebanon, Tehran stands to be a major beneficiary of the current instability in critical countries like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.

For Israel, the biggest question is the future orientation of Iraq, where the Iranians have been supporting a number of key Shiite parties.<sup>14</sup> Those Iraqi politicians who are prepared to oppose Iranian encroachments have only done so with strong U.S. backing.<sup>15</sup> But after the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, what is to prevent Iraq from falling into Iranian hands? For the last numbers of years, Lebanese Hizbullah has also been active in Iraq, training Shiite militias, along with Iranian Revolutionary Guards. As Iran's regional power grows, will Iraq still be oriented towards the U.S. or will it evolve into an Iranian satellite and re-engage in the Arab-Israeli conflict? Iraq is not far away from Israel; it is roughly 210 miles from the Iraqi border to the Jordan River.

It has not gone without notice that Saudi Arabia has reinforced its northern border with Iraq, considering that it too cannot be certain what Baghdad's future orientation will be. Israel, as well, cannot rule out Iraq, under Iranian influence, re-engaging in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1948, 1967, and 1973, Iraq took part in the war effort along Israel's eastern front by consistently dispatching one-third of its ground forces; in 1991 Baghdad launched missiles again Israeli cities. Regardless of the form it takes, if the rejuvenation of Israel's eastern front is even a remote possibility, how can Israel be expected to fully withdraw to the 1967 lines and abandon its right to defensible borders?

## **Undermining a Negotiated Peace**

To conclude, the pressures Israel faces at this time to agree to a full withdrawal from the West Bank and to acquiesce to the loss of defensible borders pose unacceptable risks for the Jewish state. It also stands in contradiction to the international commitments that were given to Israel in the past. These recognized that Israel did not have to agree to a full withdrawal from this territory.

Additionally, the 1993 Oslo Agreements envisioned a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Borders were to be decided by the parties themselves and not be imposed by international coalitions or by unilateral acts. In fact, those commitments to a negotiated solution of the conflict appeared explicitly in the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement. Notably, that agreement bears the signatures of President Bill Clinton and officials from the European Union and Russia, who acted as formal witnesses.

What is clear today is that the Palestinian leadership under Mahmoud Abbas has no interest in a negotiated solution to its conflict with Israel. It prefers to see the international community impose territorial terms that are to its advantage without having to formally declare an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and without having to recognize the rights of the Jewish people to a nation-state of their own. The idea that the Quartet would dictate to Israel the 1967 lines and set the stage for an imposed solution serves this Palestinian interest, but not the interest of achieving real peace. European support for such initiatives would contravene the very peace agreements they signed in the past as witnesses. It would set the stage for further Palestinian unilateralist initiatives at the UN in September 2011 and deal a virtually fatal blow to any negotiations.

Finally, it must be added that the people of Israel have undergone a traumatic decade and a half. For the most part, they passionately embraced the promise of the 1993 Oslo Agreements and yet, instead of peace, they saw their cities attacked repeatedly by waves of suicide bombers that left over 1,000 Israelis dead. Israelis took further risks and supported unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005, only to find that there was a five-fold increase in rocket fire against Israeli population centers in the year that followed. Longer-range rockets poured into Hamas-controlled Gaza, as Iran exploited the vacuum

**created by Israel's withdrawal. The people of Israel have an inalienable right to security and to certainty that the mistakes of recent years will not be repeated. The full withdrawal from the Gaza Strip must not be attempted again in the West Bank, especially given what is happening today across the Middle East region. For those reasons, Israel must not be asked to concede its right to defensible borders.**

## Notes

1. Herb Keinon, "Hague Comes Out Against Interim Agreement," *Jerusalem Post*, March 30, 2011.
2. See, for example, Bernard Avishai, "Next, an Israeli-Palestinian Peace Plan," *New York Times*, March 30, 2011. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/30/opinion/30iht-edavishai30.html?\\_r=1&ref=global-home&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/30/opinion/30iht-edavishai30.html?_r=1&ref=global-home&pagewanted=print).
3. British ambassador to the UN in 1967 Lord Caradon: "We didn't say there should be a withdrawal to the '67 line; we did not put the 'the' in, we did not say all the territories, deliberately. We all knew – that the boundaries of '67 were not drawn as permanent frontiers, they were a cease-fire line of a couple of decades earlier....We did not say that the '67 boundaries must be forever; it would be insanity." *MacNeil-Lehrer Report*, March 30, 1978.
4. Richard Holbrooke, "The Principles of Peacemaking," *Israel's Right to Secure Boundaries: Four Decades Since UN Security Council Resolution 242*" (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2009), p. 45.
5. David Ignatius, "Gates Underlines the Dangers in the Middle East," *Washington Post*, March 22, 2011.
6. Michael Slackman, "Islamist Group Is Rising Force in a New Egypt," *New York Times*, March 24, 2011.
7. "Islam and the Arab Revolutions," *The Economist*, April 2-8, 2011. See also, "Energized Muslim Brotherhood in Libya Eyes a Prize," CNN, March 25, 2011.
8. Ranya Kadri and Isabel Kershner, "Protestors Rally into Night in Jordan," *New York Times*, April 1, 2011.
9. Taylor Luck, "Gov't, Islamists in 'Dangerous Game,'" *Jordan Times*, April 1, 2011.
10. For a discussion about the more extremist trends in the Muslim Brotherhood, see Shadi Hamid, "A Radical Turn for the Muslim Brotherhood?" Brookings Institution, June 26, 2010; and Jonathan D. Halevi, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood: In Their Own Words," February 6, 2011, *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Hammam Sayid was known before his election as head of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood to have made statements in support of Osama bin Laden; see *al-Hawadeth*, September 24, 2001.  
Regarding the harder line of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood under its new leader, see Nour Malas, "Brotherhood Raises Syrian Profile," *Wall Street Journal*, May 17, 2011.
11. Jonathan D. Halevy, "Who Else Is Condemning the U.S. for Killing Bin Laden?" Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs blog, May 5, 2011.
12. Muhammad al-Badi' – Weekly Message, December 23, 2010 (from the Muslim Brotherhood website in Arabic).  
The entire Umma [the Islamic people], and not just the Palestinian Authority, is being asked to return to true fundamental principles, that must guide the [handling of the] Palestinian problem, so that it won't be forgotten. Therefore, relating to negotiations, to recognition [of Israel], to reconciliation [with Israel], or establishing a Palestinian state in the '67 borders as an axiom, is a big mistake, for the Land of Palestine is Arab and Islamic land, on which their holy sites [of the Muslims] are located. The Jihad for the return of this land is an obligatory commandment incumbent on the entire Arab and Islamic nation....Palestine will not be liberated by hopes and prayers, but rather by Jihad and sacrifice, and we call all Brothers in Palestine to return to national unity, on the basis of resistance, for that is the only way to recover Palestine. Jihad is victory or martyrdom for Allah.  
(For the complete text in Arabic, see <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=76669&SecID=213>).
13. Rashad al-Bayumi, the Muslim Brotherhood's second-in-command, announced in an interview with Japanese TV (and cited by *al-Hayat*, March 2, 2011) that the group would join a transitional government in order to cancel the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, as it "offends the Arabs' dignity and destroys the interests of Egypt and other Arab states."
14. Michael Gordon, "Meddling Neighbors Undercut Iraq Stability," *New York Times*, December 5, 2010. Gordon refers to a WikiLeaks U.S. cable from November 13, 2009, according to which Iran was spending up to \$200 million annually on political groups in Iraq.
15. Frederick Kagan and Kimberly Kagan, "Stand with Iraq," *Weekly Standard*, April 18, 2011.