How the Changing Nature of Threats to Israel
Affects Vital Security Arrangements

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- How do we resolve the dilemma of a peace agreement that includes handing over the Golan Heights to the Syrians, while facing the fact that Israel cannot be defended without the Golan Heights? The way around this was supposed to be the inclusion in any peace agreement of specific security arrangements. Yet this approach was based on a number of assumptions, all of them misguided.

- Events over the past ten years have also revealed a marked change in the types of threats to be expected from a Palestinian state or from the existing Palestinian entity. This involves a switch to three types of weaponry that all fundamentally contradict the guidelines discussed for security arrangements.

- *Rockets and missiles* positioned throughout the West Bank would easily cover the entire State of Israel. *Advanced anti-aircraft missiles* would be capable of shooting down not only large passenger aircraft flying into Ben-Gurion International Airport, but also helicopters and even fighter planes. *Anti-tank missiles* that are highly effective up to a range of 5 km. can easily cover not only strategic positions such as Israel's north-south Highway 6, but well beyond.

- The common denominator among all of these is the ease of smuggling and clandestine manufacture, as is taking place today in Gaza. No monitoring system that may be established will be able to prevent this. Only effective control of the Jordan Valley along the Israeli-Jordanian border can prevent the smuggling of these types of weapons.

- In addition, if Israel were to withdraw to the 1949 armistice lines, then the area to the east of the Israel-Palestine border would be home not only to the Palestinian Authority, but to other potential enemies too, including Hizbullah and Syria. This

means that in determining security arrangements in the West Bank, the approach must be broader, beyond Israel's needs vis-à-vis only the Palestinians.

In 1999-2000 Israel held fairly detailed and advanced negotiations with the Syrians and the Palestinians simultaneously. It was clear that Israel would have to give up land in both cases – the Golan Heights in order to reach an agreement with Syria, and a large area, perhaps even most, of the West Bank in favor of the Palestinians, while security arrangements were supposed to compensate Israel for the loss of territory. This approach was partially correct for the time on both tracks, but it was also very short-sighted.

Negotiations with Syria and Security Arrangements

When Israel, at that time, debated the question of how to defend itself following a peace agreement with Syria, the prime minister and defense minister at the time determined (rightly so, in my opinion) that without the Golan Heights the country would be unable to defend itself. But how do we resolve the dilemma of a peace agreement that includes handing over the Golan Heights to the Syrians, while facing the fact that Israel cannot be defended without the Golan Heights? The way around this was supposed to be the inclusion in any peace agreement of specific security arrangements that would distance Syrian army divisions much further to the east, while Israeli divisions would be stationed on the banks of the Jordan River, close to the Golan Heights.

According to this solution, if the fateful day were to arrive when Israel realized the Syrians were preparing for war and their divisions began to approach the Golan Heights, then the Israeli force, already located closer to the Golan, would quickly reoccupy that area, so that any encounter with the Syrians would take place more or less on the lines that Israel occupies today. This approach was based on five assumptions, all of them misguided; but in fact, it would have been enough for only one of the premises to be wrong for the entire concept – of Israel defending itself after giving up the Golan Heights – to collapse.[1]

During the Olmert government, Israel again entered into negotiations with Syria, albeit indirectly with the Turks as intermediaries, on a permanent arrangement between Israel and Syria. Surprisingly, despite the fact that no professional security inquiry was made into the implications of pulling out of the Golan Heights, Israel was willing to announce during those indirect negotiations with Syria that it would be able to withdraw from the Golan Heights. I state unequivocally that since the year 2000 and to date, no discussion or simulation, even on the most basic level, has been held to examine Israel's ability to defend itself *without* the Golan Heights. Only after such a simulation will the political echelon be able to claim that it can take that risk, but performing such a simulation is an essential precondition.

Preparedness for New Types of Threat

In negotiations with the Palestinians ten years ago, Israel perceived two types of threats:

1. *The military threat* – primarily from possible developments in Jordan, Iraq (when Saddam Hussein still ruled), and other threats on the eastern front.
2. *Terror* – originating from West Bank and Gaza Palestinians. This referred to Palestinian terrorists attempting to cross through the security fence and carry out suicide attacks within Israel. The response to such threats took the form of an obstacle – a fence or wall – and intelligence.

But events over the past ten years have revealed a marked change in the types of threats to be expected from a Palestinian state, if such a state comes into being, or from the existing Palestinian entity. This involves a switch to three types of weaponry that create problems that are very difficult to handle:

1. *Rockets and missiles* of different varieties, positioned throughout the West Bank, would be easily able to cover the entire area of the State of Israel.
2. *Advanced anti-aircraft missiles* would be capable of shooting down not only large passenger aircraft flying into Ben-Gurion International Airport, but also helicopters and even fighter planes.
3. *Anti-tank missiles* that are highly effective up to a range of 5 km. can easily cover not only strategic positions such as Israel's north-south Highway 6, but well beyond, including other sites that are crucial to Israel's defense.

The common denominator among all three types of weaponry is that they all fundamentally contradict the guidelines discussed for security arrangements in any agreement with the Palestinians.

The Necessity of Controlling the Territory

Ten years ago it was said that the answer to coping with the Palestinian threat to Israel was a *demilitarized* Palestinian state. But what does this mean? If such a state is stripped of tanks, artillery, and aircraft, it is probable that a detailed agreement to that effect will be signed and a monitoring system will be instituted to oversee its enforcement.

However, the real threat comes not from tanks but from rockets, anti-aircraft missiles, and anti-tank missiles. The common denominator among all of these is the ease of smuggling and clandestine manufacture, as is taking place today in Gaza. No monitoring system that may be established will be able to prevent this.

For instance, in a convoy of tens or even hundreds of trucks carrying crates of agricultural produce, there is nothing to prevent missiles from being concealed. Nor would there be any problem in storing such weapons in houses and cellars in built-up neighborhoods of Tulkarm, Kalkilya, or Nablus in the West Bank, nor any way of knowing of their existence until they are used against Israel. The threat that these weapons pose to Israel is much more significant than that of tanks or airplanes. On the contrary, there are various excellent means of combating tanks and artillery, but no effective way of combating smuggling or the local production of missiles. That being so, the term "demilitarized state" is an almost

meaningless concept, if not accompanied by a monitoring system. It is well known that even in the best possible scenario, the existing systems are able to monitor only standard military weapons. The only way to monitor the prevention of smuggling of such types of weapons into the West Bank, or prevent their manufacture within it, is *control*.

Agreement with the Palestinians – The Regional Connection

Accordingly, only effective control of the Jordan Valley along the Israeli-Jordanian border can prevent the smuggling of these types of weapons. There are currently 14 km. of the Gaza-Egypt border which are not under Israeli control and there is no real monitoring against infiltration or smuggling of weapons into Gaza. If Israel effectively relinquishes control of Palestinian towns in the West Bank, this will incur the risk of a threat to which no real solution exists.

In the year 2000 we were told that the way to deal with terror was through intelligence, cooperation, and an effective fence. But today terror has taken on a different form, one that raises territorial significance beyond what was expected in the past, not only in connection with the Jordan Valley, but especially in the narrow sense of the outline of a new border along or to the east of the Green Line.

If Israel were to withdraw to the 1949 armistice lines, then the area to the east of the Israel-Palestine border would be home not only to the Palestinian Authority, but to other potential enemies too, since an agreement with the Palestinians provides no guarantee of an agreement with Hizbullah or peace with Syria. The question of whether Israel is able to defend itself is relevant not only in relation to the Palestinians, but should also be examined in the not unreasonable scenario of a war with Syria, Hizbullah, and the Palestinians.

Under such circumstances, hostile activity from the West Bank could neutralize Israel's ability to mobilize its forces to reach the Golan Heights, or prevent attacks on its Arrow anti-ballistic missile batteries or other systems that are vital in a war against more sophisticated enemies. Such activity could neutralize Israeli capacity to mobilize not only its ground forces, but also some of its airborne activity and helicopters designated to evacuate the wounded, if the Palestinians were able to control the entire coastal plain with advanced anti-aircraft missiles. This means that in determining security arrangements in the West Bank, the approach must be broader, beyond Israel's needs vis-à-vis only the Palestinians.

Control on the Ground – Tactical Aspects

There are a number of tactical aspects that must be considered since they could have a major impact on actual defensive ability:

1. The *line of visibility* is a highly significant advantage in the enemy's firing ability. Flat-trajectory weapons are simpler, more efficient, and available in larger quantities. For that reason it is vital to prevent the enemy from having control of the line of visibility by moving the border several kilometers further to the east, not only in distance but

also topographically. In this way, for example, the Palestinians will not be able to control Israel's Highway 6 and other sites with flat-trajectory weapons.

2. In order to deploy Israel's anti-missile defense systems effectively, a minimum range is needed. Even an advanced technological system will be inadequate against a missile fired from a distance of one or two kilometers. These systems need a range of several kilometers in order to detect the firing and deal with it. Hence, Israel must maintain a tactical distance that will permit this.

3. Even with very large Israeli land, air, or other forces, a minimum distance is needed in order to deploy them. Such a minimum requisite distance does not exist in Israel's narrow, 9-mile-wide "waistline" along the 1949 cease-fire lines.

These fundamental questions are important in the absence of an extra security "margin" and illustrate the elementary requirements involved in likely scenarios.

Changes in U.S. Policy Regarding Israel's Right to Independent Self-Defense

Until recently there was a very distinct dividing line between U.S. policy and European or other policy. President Bush reflected an attitude that was accepted by the Americans for at least the past twenty years: Israel has to be strong enough in order to "defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats."[2] Indeed, the starting point of talks with the Americans on security arrangements was that Israel would defend itself, by itself.

The European attitude is different. Even those Europeans who consider it important to maintain not only Israel's existence but its security as well are not at all convinced that Israel alone is able to provide security. They suggest different solutions, such as demilitarization, an international force, or international guarantees. Yet history is riddled with depressing, negative examples of the implementation of such solutions.

Today, a significant change is underway in the American approach, which is cause for concern. The change is not expressed outright, but is noticeable in the gradual erosion of the American position, whether in the degree of support for some specific Israeli action or in other ways. There is a clear and growing impatience with the deployment of any force on Israel's part with the aim of defending itself, as we saw in the American position on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the flotilla to Gaza.

The United States is coming into line with the European approach and Israel is losing the main source of support that could help it arrive at workable security arrangements. Israel could be dragged into a solution involving an international force, international guarantees, and promises that, when it comes to the crunch, could let the country down.

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Notes

1. Maj.-Gen. (res.) Giora Eiland, *Defensible Borders on the Golan Heights* (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2009), http://www.jcpa.org/text/DefensibleBorders-GolanHeights.pdf. The five problematic assumptions discussed in this study are:

    1) "When the war erupts, it will begin with a situation in which both sides are located where they are obligated to be."

    2) "The warning will be issued in real time."

    3) "A correct interpretation will be made with regard to any Syrian violation."

    4) "The Israeli government will react speedily and vigorously to any serious violation."

    5) "The IDF will fulfill its plan by outracing the Syrian force and arriving at its positions on the 'ridge line'."

2. "Letter from U.S. President George W. Bush to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon," April 14, 2004, http://www.defensibleborders.org/apx2.htm

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