Concept
Security Borders
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Definition

The concept of Security Borders refers to the case for establishing Israel's international borders according to Israel's security needs. These requirements mandate holding territory beyond Israel's internationally recognized border for strategic depth between a hostile force and Israeli population centers.[1]

Background

The concept Security Borders emerges from concern that the geographic proximity of Israel's population centers to any hostile force sitting along the pre-1967 boundaries leaves Israel vulnerable. Thus, Israel may require borders which mandate holding on to territory beyond internationally recognized boundaries in order to possess strategic depth.

The Israeli need for defensible borders has been expressed by its leaders and allies for decades:

- Foreign Minister Yigal Allon expressed the need for defensible borders "which could enable the small standing army units of Israel's defensive force to hold back the invading Arab armies until most of the country's reserve citizen army could be mobilized."[2]

- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said: "We will not return to the lines of June 4, 1967 – the security border for defending the State of Israel will be in the Jordan Valley, in the widest sense of that concept."[3]

- Ariel Sharon stated that "Topography and strategic depth will remain vital for Israel's defense. Israel should strive to obtain defensible borders."[4]

- In his letter on Sharon's Disengagement Plan, US President George W. Bush affirmed America's "strong commitment to Israel's security including secure and defensible borders."[5]

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[1] See, for example, Yaakov Amidror, "Israel's Requirement for Defensible Borders". Available from http://www.defensibleborders.org/amidror.htm.

[2] According to Allon, Israel would need a minimum of 700 square miles out of the 2,100 square miles that make up the West Bank. See "Israel: The Case for Defensible Borders," **Foreign Affairs** (10/76). Available from http://www-stage.foreignaffairs.org/19761001faessay10203/yigal-allon/israel-the-case-for-defensible-borders.html.

[3] Rabin spoke about "Ratification of the Israel-Palestinian Interim Agreement" in his final appearance in the Knesset (10/5/95). Available from http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1995/10/PM%20Rabin%20in%20Knesset-%20Ratification%20of%20Interim%20Agree.

[4] Sharon spoke as Foreign Minister at the Herzliya Conference in 2000. See also Sharon's op-ed as Prime Minister: "The Way Forward in the Middle East", **New York Times** (6/9/02). Available from http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=40887.

[5] "Letter From President Bush to Prime Minister Sharon," (4/14/04). Available from http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/04/20040414-3.html.

Case Studies of Israel's Security Borders

The two cases where there is a debate regarding the creation of Security Borders are Israel's borders with Syria and the Palestinians in the West Bank since they provide strategic depth but are not recognized as legitimate permanent borders:

1. **Syria** – There is a debate in Israel regarding whether or not the price of returning the Golan to Syria in order to sign a permanent peace agreement is worthwhile. The text of the "Israeli-Syrian General Armistice Agreement" (1949) signed between Israel and Syria makes clear that they were not creating permanent or de jure borders.[6] Thus, Israel's occupation and annexation of the Golan following the Yom Kippur War (10/73) is perceived as illegitimate in the eyes of the international community.[7] However, there is a perception among many Israelis that the current line will better satisfy Israel's security needs due to the strategic depth it provides.[8]

2. **West Bank**[9] – There is also a debate in Israel regarding the outline of its future border in the West Bank. The security barrier does not run along the Green Line (i.e., 1967 border) but was defined as a security border. According to the Ministry of Defense, the sole purpose of the security barrier is to provide security.[10]

End.

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[6] See http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/arm04.htm.

[7] The "Separation of Forces Agreement between Israel and Syria" (5/31/74) is mutually agreed upon and United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) was deployed as a buffer force by the UN after the adoption of UNSCR 350. See http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/pal04.htm. However, the negotiations on Israel and Syria's permanent border were based more closely to the 1949 armistice line or the Sykes-Picot colonial boundary, which are perceived as more legitimate boundaries.

[8] Prime Minister Ehud Olmert indicated that he felt the price of returning the Golan Heights to Syria and therefore giving up Israel's strategic depth was not worth obtaining a peace agreement with Syria. See Aluf Benn, **Ha'aretz** (22/10/06) http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/776081.html.

[9] Israel's occupation of the West Bank is also perceived as illegitimate in the eyes of the international community, including the annexation of East Jerusalem, the construction of settlements and the construction of the security barrier. See, for example, the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the construction of the security barrier, available from http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/idocket/imwp/imwporder/imwp_iapplication_20031208.PDF.

[10] As stated in the Israeli Government decision (23/07/01). See http://www.securityfence.mod.gov.il/Pages/ENG/purpose.htm.