

Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense

The following document from the US Joint Chiefs of Staff was obtained by the Middle East Research & Information Project, publisher of MERIP Reports, through the Freedom of Information Act. Although the document was officially declassified in 1979, MERIP only became aware of its existence from a Wall Street Journal article (March 9, 1983) entitled "What the Joint Chiefs Saw as Defensible Borders," by Richard Brody, a consultant with Pan Heuristics. Near East Report (April 15, 1983), a publication of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, noted that the document supports Israel's policy of not withdrawing from the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights, occupied in 1967.

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1. Reference is made to your memorandum, dated 19 June 1967, subject as above, which requested the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, without regard to political factors, on the minimum territory, in addition to that held on 4 June 1967, Israel might be justified in retaining in order to permit a more effective defense against possible conventional Arab attack and terrorist raids.

2. From a strictly military point of view,

Israel would require the retention of some captured territory in order to provide militarily defensible borders. Determination of territory to be retained should be based on accepted tactical principles such as control of commanding terrain, use of natural obstacles, elimination of enemy-held salients, and provision of defense in-depth for important facilities and installations. More detailed discussions of the key border areas mentioned in the reference are contained in the Appendix hereto. In summary, the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding these areas are as

follows:

a. *The Jordanian West Bank.* Control of the prominent high ground running north-south through the middle of West Jordan generally east of the main north-south highway along the axis Jenin-Nablus-Bira-Jerusalem and then south-east to a junction with the Dead Sea at the Wadi el De'aja would provide Israel with a militarily defensible border. The envisioned defensive line would run just east of Jerusalem; however, provision could be made for internationalization of the city without significant detriment to Israel's defensive posture.

b. *Syrian Territory Contiguous to Israel.* Israel is particularly sensitive to the prevalence of terrorist raids and border incidents in this area. The presently occupied territory, the high ground running generally north-south on a line with Qnaitra about 15 miles inside the Syrian border, would give Israel control of the terrain which Syria has used effectively in harassing the border area.

c. *The Jerusalem-Latrun Area.* See subparagraph 2a, above.

d. *The Gaza Strip.* By occupying the Gaza Strip, Israel would trade approximately 45 miles of hostile border for eight. Configured as it is, the strip serves as a salient for introduction of Arab subversion and terrorism, and its retention would be to Israel's military advantage.

e. *The Negev-Sinai Border.* Except for retention of the demilitarized zone around Al Awja and some territory for the protection of the port of Eilat, discussed below, continued occupation of the Sinai would present Israel with problems outweighing any military gains.

f. *The Negev-Jordan-Aqaba-Strait of Tiran Area.* Israel's objectives here would be innocent passage through the Gulf of

Aqaba and protection of its port of Eilat. Israel could occupy Sharm ash-Shaykh with considerable inconvenience but could rely on some form of internationalization to secure free access to the gulf. Failing this, Israel would require key terrain in the Sinai to protect its use of the Strait of Tiran. Eilat, situated at the apex of Israel's narrow southern tip, is vulnerable to direct ground action from Egyptian territory. Israel would lessen the threat by retention of a portion of the Sinai Peninsula south and east of the Wadi el Gerafi then east to an intersection with the Gulf of Aqaba at approximately 29°20' north latitude.

3. It is emphasized that the above conclusions, in accordance with your terms of reference, are based solely on military considerations from the Israeli point of view.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

Signed

Earle G. Wheeler

Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Appendix

Discussion of Key Israeli Border Areas

1. *The Jordanian West Bank*

a. *Threat.* The Jordan-Israeli border is 330 miles in length extending from the Gulf of Aqaba northward to the Dead Sea, thence following the armistice demarcation lines and the Jordan River northward to the Yarmuk River, thence along the Yarmuk River to the Syrian frontier. This border area has traditionally been lightly held by military forces and defenses consisted mainly of small, widely separated outposts and patrols and, therefore, afforded an area where launching of saboteurs and terrorists into Israel was relatively easy. During the period January 1965 to February 1967, a total of 53 inci-

dents of sabotage and mining activity took place along this border. These activities resulted in three killed, 35 wounded, and damage to houses, roads, bridges, railroads, and water and electric power installations in Israel. Instances of exchange of small arms fire occurred quite frequently. The majority of these events took place from the Mount Hebron and Aravah areas where the Jordanian authorities did not take sufficient measures to protect against line crosses and saboteurs. The high ground running north-south through the middle of West Jordan overlooks Israel's narrow midsection and offers a route for a thrust to the sea which would split the country in two parts.

b. *Requirement.* A boundary along the commanding terrain overlooking the Jordan River from the west could provide a shorter defense line. However, as a minimum, Israel would need a defense line generally along the axis Bardala-Tubas-Nablus-Bira-Jerusalem and then to the northern part of the Dead Sea. This line would widen the narrow portion of Israel and provide additional terrain for the defense of Tel Aviv. It would provide additional buffer for the air base at Beersheba. In addition, this line would give a portion of the foothills to Israel and avoid interdiction by artillery in the Israeli villages in the lowlands. This line would also provide a shorter defense line than the border of 4 June 1967 and would reduce the Jordanian salient into Israel. It also provides adequate lines of communications for lateral movement.

2. *Syrian Territory Contiguous to Israel*

a. *Threat.* The border between Syria and Israel extends approximately 43 miles. It extends from a point on the Lebanese-Syrian border east to the vicinity of Baniyas, south to Lake Tiberias, then south along the eastern shore of the lake to the Syrian-Jordanian border. Dur-

ing the period January 1965 to February 1967, a total of 28 sabotage and terrorist acts occurred along this border. In addition, there were numerous shellings of villages from the high ground overlooking the area southeast of Lake Tiberias. Casualties were seven killed and 18 wounded. Control of the dominant terrain affords Syria a military route of approach into northern Israel; however, the greatest threat in this sector is from terrorism and sabotage.

b. *Requirement.* Israel must hold the commanding terrain east of the boundary of 4 June 1967 which overlooks the Galilee area. To provide a defense in-depth, Israel would need a strip about 15 miles wide extending from the border of Lebanon to the border of Jordan. This line would provide protection for the Israeli villages on the east bank of Lake Tiberias but would make defending forces east of the lake vulnerable to a severing thrust from Jordan to the southern tip of the lake. The Israelis would probably decide to accept this risk. As a side effect, this line would give the Israelis control of approximately 25 miles of the Trans-Arabian Pipeline.

3. *The Jerusalem-Latrun Area*

a. *Threat.* These areas have been the scene of intermittent trouble over the years as both Jordanians and Israelis have been illegally cultivating lands in the areas between the lines. Only one serious incident occurred in this area during the period January 1965 to February 1967.

b. *Requirement.* To defend the Jerusalem area would require that the boundary of Israel be positioned to the east of the city to provide for the organization of an adequate defensive position. On the other hand, if Jerusalem were to be internationalized under the United Nations, a boundary established west of the city could be defended in accordance with the

concept in paragraph 1, above.

4. *The Gaza Strip*

a. *Threat.* During the period 1949-1956, prior to the Suez war, numerous infiltrations and terrorist raids were mounted by Egypt from the Gaza Strip. However, with the establishment of the United Nations Emergency Force in 1957, based in the Gaza Strip and along the Sinai border, the situation has been quiet. Only three events of sabotage occurred in this area during the period January 1965 to February 1967. The Strip, under Egyptian control, provides a salient into Israel a little less than 30 miles long and from four to eight miles wide. It has served as a training area for the Palestine Liberation Army and, despite the few incidents arising in this area of late, it is significant to note that one of the first actions by the Israelis in the recent conflict was to seal off the area from the Sinai.

b. *Requirement.* Occupation of the Strip by Israel would reduce the hostile border by a factor of five and eliminate a source for raids and training of the Palestine Liberation Army.

5. *The Negev-Sinai Border*

a. *Threat.* This area has not presented any border problems since establishment of the United Nations Emergency Force in 1957. The demilitarized zone around Al Awja, containing the main north-south, east-west road junction in eastern Sinai and the major water source in the area, is

the principal feature providing military advantage.

b. *Requirement.* Except for an adjustment of a portion of the boundary tied to the defense of Eilat, discussed below, and retention of the demilitarized zone around Al Awja, no need is seen for Israeli retention of occupied territory in the Sinai.

6. *The Negev-Jordan-Aqaba-Strait of Tiran Area*

a. *Threat.* There were only five incidents of sabotage in this area during the period January 1965 to February 1967. Israel's chief concern in this area is free access through the Strait of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba and protection of Eilat, Israel's chief oil port and trade link with the West African countries. Eilat, being at the apex of Israel's southern tip, is vulnerable to interdiction from Egyptian territory.

b. *Requirement.* To provide Israel with sufficient depth to protect the port, the boundary should be established approximately 20 miles to the west along the Wadi el-Gerafi, south to its headwaters, then east to a point on the Gulf of Aqaba at approximately 39°20' north latitude. In the event an international guarantee for free passage of the Strait of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba is not provided, Israel would feel compelled to occupy key terrain in order to control the entrance to the Strait.

7. See map on following page.

