THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF MAP
FOR DEFENSIBLE ISRAELI BORDERS

Editorial

Immediately following the Six Day War, President Lyndon Johnson, on the assumption that Israel would have to yield up portions of the conquered territories, requested the opinion of the Pentagon regarding minimal defensible borders for Israel. Only the military viewpoint of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was to be presented, without any political considerations. By June 29, 1967, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, handed to Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, the Pentagon’s memorandum.

The document is six pages long and is accompanied by a map. What follows are its main points:

Paragraph 2 determines:

From a strictly military point of view, Israel would require the retention of some captured Arab 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 in-depth defense for important facilities and installations [military and civilian].

The document relates to five areas: The West Bank, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, Eilat and the Tiran Straits.

1. It posits that Israel must remain in Judea and Samaria but could yield the Jordan River Valley. This is in direct contradiction to the present Israeli view that we must remain in the Jordan Valley. It is unnecessary to note that from a military point of view, the Americans are correct. Whereas the Judean and Samarian Hills represent commanding territory, and are therefore required to defend the cities on the coast, the Jordan Valley is a killing field for any army spread out there.

2. The document states that “Israel must hold the commanding terrain east of the boundary of June 4, 1967 which overlooks the Galilee area.” The depth of the territory needed is 25 kilometers. That is to say, this represents a wider section of land than now controlled by Israel after the withdrawal from Kuneitra in 1974.

3. It is recommended that the Gaza Strip be retained in that the Strip is a salient into Israel which served as a source of the mounting of Arab terror raids. By keeping the Strip, Israel would “trade approximately 45 miles (72 kms.) of hostile border for eight (13 kms.)”.

4. It is suggested that Israel keep some 3500 square kilometers around Eilat “to provide Israel with sufficient depth to protect the port...which is vulnerable to interdiction from Egyptian territory (and is) Israel’s chief oil port and trade link with the West African countries”.

5. In order to protect its use “of the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba...Israel would feel compelled to occupy key terrain in order to control the entrance to the Straits.” The area near Sharm e-Sheikh which the Penta-
gon suggests be held by Israel for this purpose is approximately 3,000 sq. kms.

The memorandum was effectively concealed immediately after its presentation to the Defense Secretary and the matter was hushed up. It became apparent that the Pentagon's recommendations were in contradiction to the political directions of the administration. The document received a Group Four secret classification which permits its contents to be withheld for 12 years, that is, until June 1979. However, it was not released for public consumption at that time because by then, Israel had agreed to withdraw from the entire Sinai Peninsula. It was finally declassified on March 30, 1983, at a time when Israel was no longer in control of any Sinai territory.

Despite this, the document served as a basis for UN Resolution 242. The plan was presented to the President on November 15th prior to the Security Council discussion on Resolution 242 which was adopted on November 22, 1967. That decision is clearly referred to in Paragraph One (A) which deals with "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict", not from all territories or from the territories, and, in Paragraph One (B) it states that it is Israel's right "to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries". This precise terminology indicates that Israel is to remain in a portion of the areas that it possessed following the 1967 defensive campaign.

The three forthright supporters of this approach included Lord Caradon, the British UN representative, Arthur Goldberg, the US representative, and Eugene Rostow, the American Deputy Secretary of State for Political Affairs who formulated the text by virtue of his expertise in international law. Which territories are to be retained by Israel? This question is answered in detail by the Pentagon map.

Israel knew of the existence of the Pentagon map from the period when the IDF assisted the team of American experts just after the Six Day War when they made their field trips. Nevertheless, Menachem Begin chose not to make use of their recommendations at the time of Camp David. It would be unnecessary to describe President Jimmy Carter's embarrassment had the American plan been presented to him at the time.

If it is possible to forgive Begin, dazzled by peace, who claimed that "Sinai is not part of the Land of Israel", for the folly of his inaction, what of Benjamin Netanyahu? Not only does Netanyahu include the Pentagon's memorandum verbatim in his book, not only does he discuss Resolution 242 and quote testimonies of Caradon, Goldberg and Rostow, but he predicates his entire strategic concept on the issues of defensive borders on the Pentagon map. He views these borders as a requisite condition for the existence of the State of Israel. In reality, he is fulfilling, step after step, the Oslo program. That is, the return to the 1949 ceasefire lines.

It is appropriate to add and point out that the Pentagon plan referred to defensible borders in the reality of the 1960s. It took into consideration the effect of contemporary war materiel in parameters of firepower, distance and exactitude. In the thirty years since, the military strength of the Arab countries has multiplied tenfold and the lethality of the war materiel increased likewise. Furthermore, a widespread escalation in the dispersal of weapons of mass-destruction has occurred along with delivery capability via land-to-land missiles. The sole element that has remained unchanged is the territory.

Today, the threat on Israel from the 1949 ceasefire borders is unqualifiably greater than in 1967, the days when Abba Eban termed the Green Line boundary as "Auschwitz borders". It is within these lines that the Rabin-Peres-Netanyahu-Barak governments are planning to squeeze the Jewish state.