

Concept

Wall of Legitimacy

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Definition

The concept Wall of Legitimacy refers to the Israeli national security perspective whose purpose is to stabilize the border regime without agreement with a hostile neighboring entity of which Israel may control a part of its territory.

This national security perspective is implemented by means of two elements:

- 1) unilateral Israeli withdrawal to internationally Recognized Borders, and
- 2) military deterrence.

The Wall of Legitimacy model has been implemented twice: Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon (05/00) and the Disengagement from Gaza (08/05).

Background

The Wall of Legitimacy is based on the assumption that the combination of deterrence and withdrawal to internationally recognized borders will:

- 1) grant Israel with legitimacy in the eyes of the international community, who would concede that Israel is not an occupying force and is not responsible for the vacated territory (See End of Responsibility, End of Occupation, and Recognized Border); and
- 2) reduce the legitimacy of internal resistance movements to continue to harm Israel, using occupation of territory as a pretext for attacks.

This national security policy developed under Barak's government in the 1990's as the IDF was deployed in the buffer zone of South Lebanon.

Implementation of the Model in Lebanon

In 2000, after an 18-year presence in Lebanon, Israel withdrew unilaterally from South Lebanon to behind the internationally recognized border (the "Blue Line") based on UN Resolution 425.¹ This resolution constituted the implementation of the Wall of Legitimacy.²

¹ Security Council Resolution 425 (03/78) was accepted after Israel launched Operation Litani. The resolution called for the complete withdrawal of the IDF and for restoration of the Lebanese government's sovereignty over the entire Lebanese territory, reaching to the internationally recognized border. As a result of this resolution, the UNIFIL force was created. See <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/368/70/IMG/NR036870.pdf?OpenElement>.

² Two months before Israel's withdrawal (03/22/00), Prime Minister Barak declared that in the absence of an agreement with Syria, Israel will announce that it has withdrawn from South Lebanon according to Security Council Resolution 425. Barak further declared that the IDF will be deployed on the international border between Israel and Lebanon. The Prime Minister rejected IDF's proposal to retain a buffer zone on the Lebanese territory, which would have maintained the previous national security policy of a "security strip" (A. Benn, **Haaretz**, 03/23/00).

After having satisfied the international community's requirements concerning the border, Israel declared that it will retain its right to react to every attack in a full-fledged manner.³

Nonetheless, even after Israel's withdrawal in 2000, the Hizbullah continued to attack Israel, targeting IDF bases on the border, kidnapping soldiers and opening gunfire on military posts and Israeli communities.⁴

In July 2006, following an attack on an IDF patrol and the kidnapping of two reservist soldiers by the Hizbullah, Israel launched its operation "Summer Rains."

Implementation of the Model in the Gaza Strip

The Wall of Legitimacy was also the basis of the Disengagement Plan (08/05), whereby Israel withdrew unilaterally from the Gaza Strip to an internationally recognized border ("the Green Line").⁵

The Israeli government decided that after its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, Israel's Responsibility over the local population will be terminated and thus Israel will no longer be considered as an occupier.⁶

Nevertheless, after accomplishing the withdrawal, Israel did not request actors in the international community to officially acknowledge its End of Responsibility over the Gaza Strip, as it did following its withdrawal from Lebanon.⁷ As the international community and the UN may consider the Gaza Strip and the West Bank as a Single Territorial Unit, they may not acknowledge Israel's End of Occupation in the Gaza Strip while Israel is still occupying the West Bank.⁸

Following the border crossing agreement (11/05), Israel withdrew its forces from the external boundary of the Gaza Strip at the Philadelphi Route, between Egypt and Gaza. From Israel's perspective, this agreement was designed to end its de-facto responsibility (as opposed to official responsibility) for Gaza. The agreement passed the [Responsibility](#) of managing, monitoring and

³ As Israel withdrew (05/24/00), Prime Minister Barak stated that Israel will set a "very high bar for its reactions in Lebanon as nobody can possibly have an opportunity, reason or excuse to harm us after we have withdrawn from Lebanon." (D. Sobelman, **Haaretz**, 22/05/01). Once Israel had completed its withdrawal from the security strip in Lebanon, the Security Council approved the process (06/18/00) and confirmed that Israel had fulfilled its responsibility, which was imposed on Israel by the Resolution 425, regardless of Lebanon's objections regarding the [Shebaa Farms](#) and other subjects (See the Security Council's proclamation, available from <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20000618.sc6878.doc.html>) The UN Secretary General repeated this decision in an official letter to the Lebanese Prime Minister, stating that Lebanon has to accept the UN's decision until Syria and Lebanon find an agreement on the Shebaa Farms region (Stern, **Haaretz**, 10/06/06).

⁴ According to Hizbullah, these attacks were carried out in order to free the Shebaa Farms, free the Lebanese prisoners and cease the Israeli aerial incursions into Lebanon.

⁵ See Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's speech at the Fourth Herzliya Conference (2003) <http://www.herzliyaconference.org/Articles/Article.asp?ArticleID=1096&CategoryID=170>

⁶ See the Disengagement Plan – (18.02.2005) "Upon completion of this process, there shall no longer be any permanent presence of Israeli security forces or Israeli civilians in the areas of Gaza Strip territory which have been evacuated." (§2.i.2)

⁷ Following the completion of the Disengagement, a Palestinian assumption rose, holding that Israel has not evacuated some parts of the Northern Gaza Strip. See Reut's Point Of View: [The Debate Over Erez: A Palestinian Setup?](#)

⁸ In practice, the end of Israel's presence in the Gaza Strip does not suffice for the International Community to concede the [End of the Occupation](#) and the [End of Responsibility](#).

policing on to three bodies: the [Palestinian Authority](#), Egypt and European Union monitors. Up to now, the Rafah agreement has only partly been implemented.⁹

Israel did not obtain the official acknowledgement for End of Occupation in the Gaza Strip.¹⁰ After the Disengagement from Gaza, violence still continues along the border, including rocket-fire on Israeli communities.¹¹

End.

⁹ See the Reut Concept [Agreement on Movement and Access \("Rafah Agreement"\)](#)

¹⁰ Cf. Moshe Yaalon's, IDF Chief of Staff, Interview preceding the execution of the Disengagement: "(...) Israel has taken upon itself all the compromises of the disengagement, without even getting the international recognition for ending its occupation in Gaza. Despite all what we have done, we are still considered responsible for the destiny of the Palestinian people in Gaza." (Ari Shavit, **Haaretz**, 6/7/06).

¹¹ The failure of deterrence in the Gaza Strip has also been expressed by the former head of the *General Security Services* Avi Dichter: "(...) the fact that we have committed ourselves to react harshly to every rocket that will be fired after the disengagement and that we have not done so, has broken our deterrence. This bears a bad influence on our status in the region and encourages even Iran. As a matter of fact, one can say that we have accepted the shooting of rockets as rain. We have integrated the firing of rockets on Sderot into the rules of the game. Our restraint was a significant mistake. If it is allowed to open gunfire from Gaza to Sderot, then it is also allowed to open gunfire from Lebanon to the Galil. We are facing a serious problem of a loss of deterrence, for which we will pay a heavy price in the future." (Ari Shavit, **Haaretz**, 6/7/06).