**The National Security   
of the State of Israel**

***Approaches – Challenges – Relevance***

**Lieutenant Colonel (GS)  
Markus Schneider**

**German Army**

**Israel National Defense College**

**(INDC)**

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Content

[I. Introduction 3](#_Toc460603905)

[II. The National Security Concept 3](#_Toc460603906)

[A. Development since 1948 until today 3](#_Toc460603907)

[B. Analysis of the evolving National Security Concept 6](#_Toc460603908)

[III. The major challenges for decision makers 7](#_Toc460603909)

[IV. Germany and the Israeli National Security 8](#_Toc460603910)

[V. Conclusions 10](#_Toc460603911)

[VI. Bibliography 11](#_Toc460603912)

[A. Books 11](#_Toc460603913)

[B. Articles 11](#_Toc460603914)

[C. Internet 11](#_Toc460603915)

[D. Lecturers INDC Summer Camp 2016-2017 12](#_Toc460603916)

**List of figures**

Figure 1 Security Triangle 4

Figure 2 Adaptation of the Security Triangle 5

# Introduction

***„… (Israel) is probably the only state in the international system   
whose most basic right – its right to survive –   
has traditionally been disputed by its enemies.“ [[1]](#footnote-1)***

The Zionist vision, Israel as the home of all Jews, as depicted in the Declaration of Independence has for its fulfillment as one prerequisite that the state Israel has to survive and grow.[[2]](#footnote-2) These rights were from the beginning of the state’s existence endangered. Since 14 May 1948 Israel was either at war or under the permanent threat of a hostile attack, either by other states or non-state-actors; both with the aim to destroy Israel. Therefore it was from the beginning important to have a vision or strategy, respectively a National Security Concept, how this Zionistic vision could become true. However, since 1948 Israel and its strategic environment have changed. This had and has direct and indirect influences on the Israeli security architecture and the national security discussion, questioning to some extent the Security Concept.

This paper aims to describe and analyze this concept, its components and the changes. After a short comparison of the different stages of the National Security Concept follows an analysis of the major current challenges for today’s decision makers emerging from that. Additionally the German attitude to this concept will be analyzed before finally this all will be brought together in a conclusion.   
The nuclear issue is excluded due to space limitations.[[3]](#footnote-3)

# The National Security Concept

## Development since 1948 until today

The birth of the state Israel in 1948 was accompanied by heavy struggles, appearing since the development of this idea by Theodor Herzl. After the Declaration of Independence, Israel found itself straight in a war with all adjacent countries.[[4]](#footnote-4) Especially due to the permanent danger and the fragile inner structure Prime Minister Ben-Gurion ‘decided’ in a pragmatic way that this strategy should preferably not be written down however persist as a living concept for that time being. An agreement at the smallest common denominator should prevent a split-up of the population into a number of various fractions. An idea, which has not been joggled at over the years and led to an active concept, which was fortified by the development of basic laws, resolutions of the parliament, decision of the Israeli Supreme Court and directives of other entities[[5]](#footnote-5), like the IDF Strategy.

Starting point for this concept is the assumption of the worst case, i.e. a coordinated attack by all antagonists with the aim to destroy Israel. This supposition was heavily influenced by the former experiences and the geostrategic situation. The missing strategic depth for defense and the location of all economic and political centers in range of the enemies led to the conclusion that an attack has to be repelled as fast as possible and further battles have to be brought into the territory of the enemy[[6]](#footnote-6). Additionally, the results of the Independence War led to the fact that deterrence and the ability to respond adequately to an enemy attack by a high fighting competence have to be components of the national security. Those presumptions led to a security discussion which narrowed the approach to security almost only on military areas, because only military means could prevent the destruction of Israel at that time.

Therefore the Israeli National Security Concept was based on a Security Triangle[[7]](#footnote-7):



*Deterrence* is the ability to convince the possible adversary by a variety of different measures that the costs of a war against Israel would absolutely overweight any possible benefit the enemy thinks he could achieve.

*Early Warning* is a mechanism, based mostly on intelligence means, to discover a surprise attack by the enemy **at least** 48 hours in advance if deterrence had failed. This mechanism is one prerequisite to call the *reserve[[8]](#footnote-8)* and gives the possibility for *pre-emptive strikes[[9]](#footnote-9)* by fast air and tank assaults (in the meaning of a “Blitzkrieg”).   
*Battlefield decision* is the capability to force the enemy to a decision favorable for Israel; respectively to win the war as fast as possible, preferable on the territory of the enemy, and by that to reduce the influence of that war on the Israeli society and economy.

This Security Triangle was developed for the fight against states. Non-state-actors although being already present in and around Israel, were not the main threat for the existence of Israel. Consequently, there was no need to align the national security concept to them.

In the period 1979 until around 2000 the environment of Israel changed, especially because of the peace treaty with Egypt, the revolution in Iran and the end of the Cold War. Additionally, non-state-actors like the Palestine Liberation Organization and Hezbollah gained the ability to threaten Israel, using mostly asymmetric warfare methods. Moreover, the danger of non-conventional warfare came to the awareness of the politicians and the population (e.g. Iraq-Iran war 1980-88; attack of sect Aum Shinrikyo in Tokyo 1995). Furthermore Israel gained de jure resp. de facto more and more legal recognition by a lot of states in the region.

However, esp. the War of Attrition 1968-1970 and the Yom-Kippur-War 1973 showed that the still valid National Security Concept with the Security Triangle reached its limits. Components like *Deterrence* had only limited effect on non-state-actors. Also, the ability for a quick and decisive attack on opposing forces deep into the enemy's country could not be effective against an enemy without own territory [[10]](#footnote-10). As well the gains of territories esp. after the 6-Days-War and the First Lebanon-War led to the occupation of territory with a predominant Israel-opposing population, with the obligations to deploy more forces inside Israel’s borders.

In retrospective nevertheless it seems that due to the negative results (maybe even a trauma) of the Yom-Kippur-War the national security community was not willing or rather able to start a discussion about a change in the Concept.[[11]](#footnote-11)

At the beginning of the 2000s, Israel had to cope with an increase in terrorist attacks. Additionally lessons from Intifada I and II pushed the discussion that the Concept had to be improved; the Security Triangle was not able to cope with those effects.[[12]](#footnote-12)



The result was an adaption of the Triangle to a “rectangle” by adding the pillar *Defense*. [[13]](#footnote-13) *Defense* in this sense is the ability to withstand an attack by both military and civilian means. This included the build-up of the civilian resilience with mostly passive measures[[14]](#footnote-14) as well as military tools, like the IRON DOME.

Until today this concept has only been tested in operations against non-state-actors, not in a comprehensive war.

## Analysis of the evolving National Security Concept

Looking back, the National Security Concept since 1948 was a successful endeavor to tackle with the immediate threat against Israel imposed by its surrounding states. The emphasis at that time on military means for ensuring the Zionistic Vision was inevitable. However the Security Triangle could not prevent the wars after 1948. Therefore, with the change of the security environment, especially with the immediate threat by non-state-actors, an adaption was unavoidable.

With the inclusion of *Defense* as a fourth component of the Concept also the approach to the National Security changed to a broader one. Still military means build the main effort for Israeli security but (passive) civil measures play a vital role in the new methodology. This more civilian-military approach to security lays the base for the development of other components, like economic steps. This reflects the grown Israeli national self-image too. However, the rectangle seems not to be the last adaptation. Wars, such as the Second Lebanon War, and the constant threat, for example by Hamas, can be hardly prevented by this[[15]](#footnote-15). The current warfare of states and non-state-actors leads to the necessity of a new discussion about the Security Concept. Esp. the *Deterrence* pillar shows a declining relevance due to its disappearing ability to prevent asymmetric threats[[16]](#footnote-16) willing to use non-conventional measures. Additionally the discussion still has to be broadened[[17]](#footnote-17) and led away from stressing mainly the military. So among others, means of hybrid warfare should be covered.

# The major challenges for decision makers

The national security is driven by the acting of decision makers, thus the government but also leaders of the opposition have the main responsibility for ensuring peace and stability. Their ability to cope with the National Security Concept as a tool box to prevent or limit war and hostilities decides about the well-being of the nation. However, their decisions are heavily influenced by a vast of effects.

Among others:

* Change in the security environment: Since 1948 new actors, notably supranational non-state-actors, in parts sponsored by other states, gained influence[[18]](#footnote-18).
* Use of force: The will to reach political aims by other means, e.g. war, differs in the various Israeli political directions[[19]](#footnote-19), like the will to take risks. This all influences the weight of the different pillars of the security concept[[20]](#footnote-20).
* Fall of states: This has led in the most cases, totalitarian regimes or not, to a high instability in the region.
* Technology: Israel as a start-up-nation is depending on technological developments. The ability to cope with the speed of progress and utilization of latest technology in the fight against the enemy, e.g. for *early warning systems*, gives Israel a big advantage. On the other hand improvements in general lead to a decreasing need of old goods in the region, including weapons and ammunition. This might result in a surplus, which could, together with the collapse of states, lead to the danger of unhindered proliferation of modern weapons technology [[21]](#footnote-21).
* Globalization: Israel is highly dependent on its *reserve* system. The decision to call the reserve has a huge impact on the economy in Israel and - because of its dependency as a globalized nation - its trade partners. However, not all investors have the will to invest in a country whose work force is often at reserve duty or even at war[[22]](#footnote-22).
* Military Service: There are voices which question the *reserve* or conscription duty in favor of a high technological sophisticated, professional army. Additional the tendency in a globalized world to become hedonistic might lower the attractiveness of the IDF.
* Budget: Especially the build-up of a *deterrence* posture and the ability for a decisive *battlefield decision* costs money. The balance between a limited national budget and competing ministerial interests is challenging.[[23]](#footnote-23)
* Strategic Communication: Allegiance of the population[[24]](#footnote-24) and resilience are a prerequisite for restrictions during preparation and conduct of military operation[[25]](#footnote-25). This can be quite difficult, especially in a globalized media landscape, where “one picture” might force a government to withdraw.
* Strategic planning: The development of a vision for the state for the next 20 years, underpinned by a comprehensive strategic plan, is often hampered by the coercion to win the next election and to orient own politics at mainstreamed opinions.
* Partners: Ben-Gurion was always keen to have an influential partner at Israel’s side[[26]](#footnote-26), mainly for security and economic reasons. Even though Israel’s situation and certainly its self-confidence is not comparable with the situation in 1948, today’s decision makers still have a close look to a big nation, i.e. USA.
* Demography: “*Demography is democracy*”[[27]](#footnote-27). Birth rates of different groups in the population have a longsome influence on the political direction of a state via political streams and elections.

In particular, the reluctance to strategic action seems to support the unspoken decision of Ben Gurion to avoid a written strategy; though, to bring more transparency in the political behavior, it might be worth to discuss this. It is maybe the wider national political community to start that discussion.

# Germany and the Israeli National Security

***„… I want to explicitly stress … Germany's special historical responsibility   
for Israel's security. This … is part of my country's raison d'être.   
For me as German Chancellor, therefore,   
Israel's security will never be open to negotiation.”***[[28]](#footnote-28)

The German-Israeli relationship is a story with a variety of facets. The Holocaust as part of German history was certainly a mournful starting point for the latest history and relations. German’s brutal atrocities during the Shoa still cause reparations of about three hundred Million EURO every year[[29]](#footnote-29). However, with the start of diplomatic relations on 12 May 1965, the base was laid for an evolution from ‘uniqueness over normality to part of the German reason of state’[[30]](#footnote-30). Since 1965 several exchanges in political, economic, cultural, scientific and social areas have taken place. Moreover, Germany is behind the USA and China the 3rd largest trade partner for Israel[[31]](#footnote-31).

Thus the German support for Israel is visible, but especially the direct support with military goods shows the real backing. „*Normally, Germany wouldn't export weapons to a country involved in conflicts such as the one between Israel and Gaza. But the German-Israeli partnership is a special case*.”[[32]](#footnote-32) Germany’s support for Israel’s aim of self-sufficiency[[33]](#footnote-33) esp. in the field of weapons is without any example. Moreover the abundance of bilateral military exchanges, training and exercises show that the positioning of Chancellor Merkel in 2008 is still valid. This direct support is accompanied by the active German endeavor for peaceful solutions for the crises in the region. Although a direct German military involvement is neither foreseeable nor asked by Israel, German economic sanctions against IRN or the support in the UN back the Israeli policies. Vice versa Israel as well supports Germany, like the lease of Israeli UAV Heron / Machatz-1 for the German engagement in Afghanistan, German soldiers taking part in Israeli trainings in the Negev or in the fight against terror.

Nevertheless a good relationship is no charter for uncritical support[[34]](#footnote-34). Germany’s role in the world and esp. in NATO and EU is changing, and by that the interdependencies have become challenging. Germany is asked to play a more active, constructive role in the international political community. Hence a clear positioning to open questions, like a 2-state-solution or the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, has to be obtained; even if this is not always comfortable for the German-Israeli relationship. On the contrary, a relationship, based on trust and friendship, has to cope with that[[35]](#footnote-35). So, Germany will always have a special, supportive position to Israel security and the strategy behind. For continuity in this relation, however, both states have to work for[[36]](#footnote-36).

# Conclusions

***“The weak will not survive”***[[37]](#footnote-37)

The current National Security Concept is maybe until today the best concept to prevent or limit war and hostilities against Israel. The permanent danger of a final defeat[[38]](#footnote-38) increased by the unfavorable geo-strategic situation leads to a unique Israeli ambition for security. Although the large-scaled tank attacks like in the 1960s / 1970s are not foreseeable at the moment, the ability to be prepared fighting those and the more dangerous asymmetric threats, forces Israel to keep their security forces at a high level[[39]](#footnote-39). Especially the hazards by small-scaled pin-prick terror attacks (Hezbollah, Hamas or ISIS) accompanied by strategic communication, coerces Israel into a permanent ‘war’ with the aim ‘winning by not losing’.

However, together with current tendencies like the changes in Turkey or other streams, those factors should push Israel to put its Security Concept on the test bench.[[40]](#footnote-40) The adaptation from a triangle to a rectangle might not be the last step. In particular in the relation to the Palestinian the factors ‘diplomacy’ and ‘relaxation’, maybe again by one-sided confessions, could get a broader space; however, on the base of a workable deterrence posture. The pure concentration on preventing or limiting threat escalations without the will to start peace talks will not lead to a lasting peace.[[41]](#footnote-41) NATO realized this in the mid 1960’s, driven by the Harmel - Report[[42]](#footnote-42). This way would certainly be strongly supported by Israel’s partners; here Germany could play a larger role.

In doing so the Strategic Communication has to be covered. Military abilities have more and more non-military borders and have to be compensated by other means.[[43]](#footnote-43) For this the development of broader international corporations[[44]](#footnote-44) should be strengthened, transferring for instance from other fields (such as economics) into the security area with the aim to reinforce the current components. Consequently, the government might have to adapt its structural and organizational measures, e.g. to develop a written, regularly checked[[45]](#footnote-45) strategy and avoid politics based on day-to-day-decisions in favor of a strategic comprehensive approach.

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## Lecturers INDC Summer Camp 2016-2017

As general information served:

* “*Israel’s Government System*”, lecture by Prof. Avi Ben Zvi on the 11 July 2016.
* “*Israeli Security Doctrine*”, lecture by Dr. Dima Adamsky on 12 July 2016.
* “*Israel’s Military History*”, lecture by Dr. Ido Hecht during the Summer Course.
* ”*Geopolitics*” and “*Demography*”, lectures by Prof. Arnon Soffer on 10 August 2016.

1. Rodmann, 2005, page 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dekel and Einav, 2015, page 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For that discussion see e.g. Ben-Dor, 1998, pages 117ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tal, 2000, page 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Tal, 2000, page 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Rodman, 2005, page 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ben-Dor, 1998, page 114ff; Dekel and Einav, 2015, page 1; Shabtai, 2010, Page 8+10. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Besides the early warning mechanism, Israel worked later on for other measures to gain time for   
    mobilizing the reserve. See i.a. Efraim, 2008, page 9ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ben-Dor, 1998, p. 122; Efraim, 2008, page 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ben-Dor, 1998, page 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Shabtai, 2010, page 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Shabtai, 2010, page 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Dekel and Einav, 2015, page 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Shabtai, 2010, page 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Dekel and Einav, 2015, page 2f. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. IDF, 2015, page 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Dekel and Einav, 2015, page 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The growing importance of dealing with sub-state enemies is well illustrated in the IDF strategy   
     (e.g. page 36, force build-up). See also Tira, 2016, page 153, to this fact. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Efraim, 2008, page 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Tira, 2016, page 147f. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. IDF, 2015, page 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Senor and Singer, 2009, page 115f + 155ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Tal, 2000, page 13; IDF, 2015, page 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Tal, 2000, page 15f. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Shabtai, 2010, page 14; Efraim, 2008, page 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Rodman, 2005, page 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Dr. Ido Hecht during his lecture at August 24th, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Merkel, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. LPB, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Stein and Lewy, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. LPB, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. DW, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Rodman, 2005, page 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Lammert, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Lammert, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Stein and Lewy, 2015, page 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Prime Minister Netanjahu during his graduation address to the 43rd class at the INDC, July 13th 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Tal, 2000, page 41f. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Tira, 2016, page 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Nye, 1990, page 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Dekel and Einav, 2015, page 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. NATO, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Nye, 1990, page 156f. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Shabtai, 2010, page 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Shabtai, 2010, page 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)