

Alternative Perceptions of Security and Vulnerability amongst the Israeli Population

David Newman,
Dept of Politics & Government,
Ben Gurion University,
Beer Sheva, Israel.

Abstract

For most Israelis, the *raison d'être* of the State is the notion of Jewish sovereignty and independence in which the people are able, through the agencies of government and army, to determine their own safety and security after centuries of minority status and persecution elsewhere. Within the short time space of twenty years, Israel underwent a transition from being a State founded in the wake of the holocaust experience, to a regional military power, occupying territories (the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights) which it acquired through armed conflict. This has given rise to two very different discourses concerning notions of security, strength and weakness within the contemporary Israeli experience. One such discourse sees Israel as a small, weak, country surrounded by enemies and a hostile world, a country which has to demonstrate its might as a constant form of deterrent. The other sees Israel as a military power, a country which has to display magnanimity and voluntarily cede territories as a means of achieving peace and becoming an equal player in the global scene. The first of these discourses perceives the giving up of territory as a sign of weakness, while the second discourse sees the retention of territory as constituting weakness and long term insecurity. The internal Israeli political discourse is a constant battle between these two contrasting perspectives of what constitutes security and/or vulnerability in the contemporary world. This paper will examine these two discourses, with a specific focus on the agencies of security, such as military power, territorial breadth, demographic majorities, and regional integration.