

# The "Yellow Line" Concept

## From Gaza to South Lebanon: The Doctrine of Permanent Border Revision

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### ◆ KEY FINDINGS

Opposition leader Yair Lapid's March 6, 2026 call to establish a permanent "Yellow Line" inside Lebanon represents the first explicit political endorsement from outside the governing coalition for permanent territorial modification in South Lebanon. This is not an opposition stance aimed at embarrassing the government; it is confirmation that a cross-party Israeli consensus now exists on transforming the military presence in South Lebanon from a temporary measure into a new border reality.

Lapid is not alone. Benny Gantz, leader of National Unity (centrist opposition), released a security doctrine in November 2025 titled "1948 Mindset" that explicitly calls for "the establishment of buffer zones outside the border." Avigdor Liberman (Yisrael Beytenu) demanded the reoccupation of South Lebanon for 50 years. Netanyahu and Defense Minister Katz authorized the military on March 3 to advance and seize additional positions inside Lebanon. The consensus is clear: from the far right to the centrist opposition, the logic is identical.

The "Yellow Line" model is not a theoretical concept. It is an operational system, tested and functioning in Gaza since October 2025: Israel controls 53% of the Strip east of the line, and IDF Chief of Staff General Eyal Zamir declared in December 2025 that the line is "a new border" and "a forward defensive line." The yellow concrete blocks that demarcate the line are being moved gradually deeper into the Strip without announcement. This is the model being proposed for Lebanon.

The real danger is not in the political rhetoric but in the ground facts being created now: border villages completely destroyed (Kfar Kila: 52% of buildings destroyed, Aitaroun, Mhaibib, Odaisseh), five military positions and two buffer zones inside Lebanon since the ceasefire (November 2024), blanket evacuation orders south of the Litani (March 2026), and the redeployment of the Golani Brigade from Gaza to the northern border (March 11, 2026). The military reality precedes the political decision, not the other way around.

The Golan precedent confirms that "temporary" becomes "permanent" in Israeli practice: occupation in 1967, unilateral annexation in 1981, US recognition in 2019. After Assad's fall in December 2024, Israel immediately seized the UN-mandated buffer zone in southern Syria (400 km<sup>2</sup>), and Netanyahu announced the military would remain for "an unlimited amount of time." Three theaters (Gaza, Syria, Lebanon), one doctrine: temporary becomes permanent.

### ◆ INTELLIGENCE

#### 1. The Gaza Yellow Line: The Operational Model in Place

The Yellow Line in Gaza is not a planning concept but a functioning military system. It was implemented in October 2025 as part of President Trump's "Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict." Under this system:

- Israel controls 53% of Gaza's territory east of the line; Hamas controls 47% west of it.
- Nearly all Palestinians (over 2 million people) have been displaced west of the line.
- Palestinians are prohibited from crossing eastward; Israel declares the area east of the line a "free-fire zone" regardless of whether markers exist on the ground.
- The Israeli Defense Ministry began physically marking the line with yellow-painted concrete blocks similar to those used on the borders with Lebanon and Syria (October 2025).
- In December 2025, Israel began constructing earthen berms along the line.

**The most critical finding:** Satellite imagery analyzed by BBC Verify (January 2026) revealed that the concrete markers are being moved silently deeper into the Strip, sometimes by hundreds of meters. In the Tuffah neighborhood of Gaza City, markers shifted 295 meters westward between November 27 and December 25, 2025. Professor Andreas Krieg (King's College London) described this movement as "a tool for territorial engineering." Haaretz reported (December 2025) that the markers are being moved "surreptitiously and without warning."

**Chief of Staff's declaration:** On December 7, 2025, during a visit to reservist forces in northern Gaza, General Zamir stated: "The Yellow Line is a new border line, a forward defensive line for our communities, and a line of operational activity." This transforms what was supposed to be a temporary line (pending Hamas disarmament) into a border reality recognized by the military establishment.

For Lebanon, the model is clear: a "temporary" line drawn on the ground with concrete, moved gradually

inward, then declared "a new border" by the Chief of Staff. This is precisely what is being proposed for South Lebanon.

## 2. The Israeli Political Landscape: Cross-Party Consensus

What makes the Yellow Line concept an exceptional threat is that it is not the position of a single political current but an emerging national consensus. This consensus spans the entire Israeli political spectrum:

### The governing coalition:

- Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Katz formally authorized the military on March 3, 2026 to "advance and take control of additional strategic positions in Lebanon to prevent attacks on Israeli border communities." Katz directly warned Lebanese President Joseph Aoun: "If the Lebanese government does not know how to control the territory and prevent Hezbollah from threatening northern communities and firing toward Israel, we will take the territory and do it ourselves." (March 12, 2026, via Reuters)

### The centrist opposition:

- Yair Lapid (Yesh Atid): In an interview with i24 News on March 6, 2026, stated literally that Israel "may ultimately have no choice" but to create "a sterile strip inside southern Lebanon — an area with no Lebanese villages in it, a completely clean strip between the last Lebanese and the first Israeli community." He added: "It may be unaesthetic, unpleasant to scrape away two or three Lebanese villages, but Lebanon brought this upon itself. No one told them they had to become a host state for a terrorist organization."
- Benny Gantz (National Unity): In November 2025, released a strategic document titled "1948 Mindset" calling for "a shift from a conflict management approach to an initiative-taking approach and prevention of threats," including "initiating a broad campaign to remove all the significant threats posed by the Iranian regime" and "the establishment of buffer zones outside the border."

### The hawkish opposition:

- Avigdor Liberman (Yisrael Beytenu): In January 2024, demanded the reoccupation of South Lebanon and the establishment of a buffer zone, indicating this could last "50 years." In January 2025, he visited the border town of Metula and renewed his demand.

**The broader framework:** The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune (January 2026) published a major analysis titled "Israel in 2026: A New Consensus on Security" confirming that three fundamental shifts occurred in Israeli security thinking after October 7: rejection of the "conflict management" principle, adoption of a preemption doctrine, and the demand for self-sufficiency in munitions. The article confirms that the upcoming elections (October 2026) will not revolve around security issues because the consensus already exists. This means any future Israeli government (whether right-wing or centrist) will adopt the buffer zone logic.

## 3. Lobby 1701: The Pressure Infrastructure from the Base

Lobby 1701 is an organization founded by Nisan Zeevi in December 2023 to represent approximately 80,000 Israelis evacuated from northern communities. It is named after UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006), which failed to disarm Hezbollah and push it north of the Litani.

**Evolution of demands:** The lobby began by demanding enforcement of Resolution 1701 (i.e., diplomatically removing Hezbollah from south of the Litani). It has since radicalized: in March 2026, it issued a statement explicitly calling for "the establishment of a Yellow Line in the north: a buffer zone reaching the Litani River — an empty area under exclusive IDF control that will truly ensure the security of northern communities." The statement explicitly distinguishes itself from the old "Security Zone" (1985-2000), describing the desired model as "a clear and determined model, similar to the Yellow Line in Gaza."

**Media infrastructure:** The statement was published and distributed by Amit Segal, the chief political analyst of Channel 12 (Israel's largest news channel) and a columnist for Yedioth Ahronoth. Segal is considered the most influential political journalist in Israel. His amplification of the lobby's statement gives it media weight far exceeding the organization's size.

This sequence (grassroots base → escalating demands → media amplification → political adoption) is a classic mechanism in Israeli politics for converting marginal demands into official policy.

## 4. Ground Reality: What Is Being Created Now

Regardless of political rhetoric, the ground facts in South Lebanon indicate that the Yellow Line is being built without a formal announcement:

### Military positions:

- After the ceasefire (November 2024) and the IDF's withdrawal from most of South Lebanon (February 2025), Israel retained five military positions and two buffer zones inside Lebanese territory near the Blue Line.
- The military stated it would remain "until Israel is certain that Hezbollah will not return to the area south of the Litani River."
- On March 3, 2026, Netanyahu and Katz authorized the military to advance and seize additional strategic positions.
- On March 4, Arabic-language military spokesperson Avichay Adraee issued the broadest evacuation order since the start of the conflict, covering all towns and villages south of the Litani (between 250 and 300 towns, including the major cities of Tyre and Nabatieh). This order effectively redraws the demographic

map of approximately 10% of Lebanon's territory.

- On March 11, Chief of Staff Zamir ordered the redeployment of the Golani Brigade (a specialized offensive ground unit) from Gaza to the northern border. Analysts assessed this as an indicator of preparation for a large-scale ground operation.

#### **Systematic destruction of border villages:**

- According to Amnesty International analysis (August 2025): In Kfar Kila alone, more than 1,300 structures (52% of all buildings) and 133 acres of orchards were heavily damaged or destroyed between September 2024 and January 2025.
- A Reuters report (October 2024) documented the destruction of entire border villages: Kfarkela, Aitaroun, Odaïseh, Mhaïbib, Ramyeh, with footage showing simultaneous explosions of multiple structures, indicating they had been laden with explosives.
- An NBC News investigation (November 2024) found "widespread destruction" in IDF-occupied areas.
- An NPR report (November 2025) confirmed that demolitions continued even during the ceasefire period.

This pattern is identical to what occurred in Gaza: buildings are destroyed first, the area is then declared "empty" and treated as a buffer zone, then the Yellow Line is placed. Destruction is not a byproduct of military operations but a precondition for establishing the buffer zone.

### **5. The Golan Precedent: How "Temporary" Becomes Permanent**

The occupied Golan Heights provides the analytical framework for understanding the Yellow Line trajectory:

- **1967:** Israel seizes the Golan in the Six-Day War (described as a "temporary security measure").
- **1974:** Disengagement agreement with Syria, establishment of a UN-supervised buffer zone (UNDOF).
- **1981:** The Knesset passes the Golan Heights Law, applying Israeli law to the occupied territory (unilateral annexation). The Security Council issues Resolution 497 declaring the Israeli decision "null and void."
- **2019:** The Trump administration recognizes Israeli sovereignty over the Golan, converting "temporary" occupation into a recognized geopolitical reality.

**The December 2024 precedent (Syria):** Immediately after the fall of the Assad regime, the Israeli military seized the demilitarized buffer zone in southwestern Syria (approximately 400 km<sup>2</sup>), established under the 1974 disengagement agreement and monitored by UNDOF. Netanyahu announced that the military would remain "until another arrangement is in place that ensures Israel's security," without specifying a timeframe. The Carnegie Endowment described this as "Israel has occupied new parts of Syria, including the UN-mandated buffer zone where it intends to stay for an unlimited amount of time."

**The pattern is clear:** In every theater, it begins with a "temporary security measure" conditional on the other party's behavior (Hezbollah disarmament, Syrian stability, Hamas disarmament). Since these conditions are never fully met, the "temporary" converts to permanent by fait accompli. International recognition (or international indifference) follows later.

### **6. The Security Zone (1985-2000): Lessons and Differences**

Israel is fully aware of the historical failure of the "Security Zone" in South Lebanon (1985-2000):

- 256 Israeli soldiers were killed in attrition operations.
- More than 450 South Lebanon Army (SLA) fighters were killed.
- The "Four Mothers" movement succeeded in turning public opinion against the occupation.
- Prime Minister Ehud Barak ordered the unilateral withdrawal in May 2000.

**But the new version is structurally different.** Lobby 1701 explicitly distinguishes itself from the "old Security Zone," describing the desired model as "not another demilitarized zone in the style of the old Security Zone, but a clear and determined model, similar to the Yellow Line in Gaza." The fundamental difference: the old Security Zone was populated by Lebanese civilians and protected by a local militia (SLA); the new model is based on completely "emptying" the area of its population and converting it into scorched earth under exclusive Israeli control, without the need for a local proxy.

The second difference: political consensus. In the 1990s, Israeli public opinion was deeply divided over the Security Zone. Today, after the trauma of October 7, there is no prominent opponent of the buffer zone principle. The debates revolve around scope and depth, not the principle itself.

### **7. International Response and the Lebanese Position**

#### **Internationally:**

- **UNIFIL:** Considered the Israeli military activities "not only a violation of Resolution 1701, but also a violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity." But it lacks enforcement authority.
- **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (March 6, 2026):** Blanket evacuation orders "raise serious concerns under international law."
- **Security Council (March 2026):** May issue a non-binding presidential statement urging parties to recommit to the cessation of hostilities.

**The United States:** The US position is the decisive factor. The United States provided bilateral guarantees to Israel within the ceasefire framework (November 2024) recognizing "Israel's right to respond to Hezbollah threats." This broad guarantee, amid the current US-Israeli military partnership (the war on Iran), provides de facto cover for expanding operations in South Lebanon without effective American opposition.

#### **Lebanon:**

- The Lebanese Army announced on January 8, 2026 the completion of Phase 1 of the disarmament plan south of the Litani. However, it noted that "continued Israeli attacks and the occupation of several sites in Lebanese territory negatively affect the completion of required tasks."
- Prime Minister Nawaf Salam described Hezbollah's rocket launches (March 1) as an "irresponsible" act endangering Lebanon's security.
- The government ordered the military to "immediately take all necessary measures to prevent any military operation or any rocket or drone fire from Lebanese territory."
- Hezbollah officials stated that the group has no intention to disarm north of the Litani until Israeli strikes and occupied positions are addressed first.

This structural contradiction (the party refuses → Israel stays → the party justifies its position by the occupation → Israel justifies its stay by the party's weapons) is precisely the environment in which "temporary" converts to "permanent" without a single formal decision.

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## ◆ ASSESSMENT

**The Yellow Line concept is not a policy proposal but a doctrine under implementation.** What is happening in South Lebanon now follows the same pattern that preceded the establishment of the Yellow Line in Gaza: systematic destruction of civilian infrastructure, forced depopulation, establishment of fortified military positions, then declaring the area "empty" and "under Israeli control." The political rhetoric (Lapid, Gantz, Lobby 1701) does not create a new reality but rather legitimizes a reality being built on the ground.

**The window for intervention is narrowing.** Every day that passes without effective Lebanese and international action entrenches the ground facts. In Gaza, it took less than 14 months (October 2024 to December 2025) to convert a "temporary withdrawal line" into what the Chief of Staff describes as "a new border." In the Golan, it took 14 years (1967-1981) to reach annexation. The pace accelerates with each successive experience.

**The Israeli consensus eliminates the electoral variable.** Even if Netanyahu falls in the October 2026 elections and is replaced by Lapid or Gantz, the buffer zone policy will continue. Gantz demands "buffer zones outside the border" as part of his security doctrine. Lapid demands "scraping away" Lebanese villages. There is no serious Israeli prime ministerial candidate who opposes the principle.

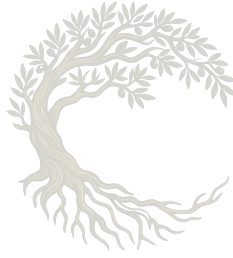
**The expected trajectory (the Golan model):** (1) "Temporary" military presence conditional on Hezbollah's behavior (current status) → (2) Fortification and construction of permanent infrastructure (underway) → (3) Knesset legislation applying Israeli law to the zone (next probable step) → (4) US recognition (under Trump, probable). The time interval between each step shrinks with each successful precedent.

**The structural weakness in the Lebanese position is what enables this trajectory.** Hezbollah refuses to disarm north of the Litani, giving Israel the perpetual justification to remain. The Lebanese Army cannot confront Hezbollah directly due to the absence of internal political consensus. Israel sets conditions it knows will never be fully met, then uses their non-fulfillment to justify remaining indefinitely. This vicious cycle (the party refuses → Israel stays → the party justifies by the occupation → Israel justifies by the weapons) is precisely the environment in which "temporary" converts to "permanent" without a single formal decision.

**What should alarm Lebanese officials is not the statements but the bulldozers.** Lapid can be dismissed as electoral rhetoric. But 1,300 destroyed buildings in Kfar Kila alone, five fortified military positions, and the Golani Brigade on the northern border cannot be dismissed. These are not negotiating positions but material facts redrawing the geography.

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