Strategic ASSESSMENT

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The purpose of *Strategic Assessment* is to stimulate and enrich the public debate on issues that are, or should be, on Israel's national security agenda.

Strategic Assessment is a quarterly publication comprising policy-oriented articles written by INSS researchers and guest contributors. The views presented here are those of the authors alone.

Abstracts

Nuclear Legislation for Israel / Avner Cohen

No single national security policy in Israel enjoys as much public support as its nuclear policy, commonly known as the policy of nuclear opacity. According to the policy, Israel acknowledges nothing factual about its nuclear status, activities, and capabilities, neither confirming nor denying anything. The article focuses on one subject for nuclear democratic reform: the desirability and feasibility of nuclear legislation. A law governing the Israel Atomic Energy Commission would highlight that the rule of law reaches even Israel's most sensitive national security area, and would clarify a reality that until now has never been defined in public terms.

Warfare – Morality – Public Relations: Proposals for Improvement / Roni Bart

Although new protective measures adopted by the IDF during Operation Cast Lead caused many casualties among the civilian Palestinian population, there was no genuine public debate on the issue of morality in warfare. Yet the issue must be examined. The IDF, precisely because it is unequaled in its moral considerations, must examine this sensitive subject and decide what can be improved. In addition, the government should define legal and public relations guidelines, to minimize the political and image-related damage that results with the IDF's chosen method of fighting in a built up area.

Israel's Strategy of Unilateral Withdrawal / Shmuel Even

The article explores whether unilateral withdrawal is a proper strategy for achieving Israel's national objectives when it is impossible to reach a suitable political settlement. It presents the rationales and the expectations defined by those who initiated the unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 and the Gaza Strip in 2005 against the results as these are apparent today. The author argues that in Israel's

current reality there is no rationale for the strategy of unilateral withdrawal. Rather, territories should be evacuated only on the basis of a stable agreement that is in line with Israel's long term objectives.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Situation Assessment for 2008-2009 / Eran Etzion

For the first time since its inception, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently undertook a ministry-wide political-strategic situation assessment. The purpose of the situation assessment was to identify the development of local, regional, and global trends, assess their significance, and formulate foreign policy recommendations. Several topics were identified as action items requiring unique, concentrated, and integrative ministry-wide efforts that will be promoted separately. The article presents some key insights from the situation assessment.

A Reversal in Israel-EU Relations? / Oded Eran

Early 2009 saw the end of a sustained period of positive growth in Israel's relations with the EU. Operation Cast Lead had some negative impact on EU-Israel relations. The heart of Europe's efforts to block an upgrade in bilateral relations, however, is the EU policy tightly linking the progress in its relations with Israel to progress in the political process between Israel and its neighbors, and the reluctance of Israel's new government to publicly declare support for the two-state solution.

Israel and Egypt: What Went Wrong? / Shlomo Gazit

When Israel signed a peace agreement with Egypt in 1979, many hoped that the agreement was the harbinger of a new era, a breakthrough that would bring about a fundamental change in Israel's relations with the Arab world. While this did not occur, the author contends that from the start there was never a chance for little more than cold peace or "non-war." Nevertheless, this does not erase the positive balance over the thirty years – the survival of the agreement during trying times, and the absence of real internal Egyptian pressure to end the peace and return to war.

The Mouse and the Lion: Syria – Between Passive and Active Resistance to Israel / Eyal Zisser

Over the years Syria has maintained a policy of non-action and passiveness towards Israel, explained as the necessity to stand firm and not be dragged by Israel into direct confrontation. The Syrian regime has adopted two new terms – passive resistance (*mumana'a*) and active resistance (*muqawama*), which reflect the familiar policy of a firm stance against the enemy and abstention from proactive and retaliatory action. They signal Syria's recognition of the balance of power with Israel, and its self-perception as the historic gatekeeper of the strong fortress of Arabism that stands firm against the storms that batter its gates without raising the white flag.

Shifting Tectonic Plates: Basic Assumptions on the Peace Process Revisited / Ron Tira

In the early 1990s, Israel adopted a new policy whose immediate and practical objective was to achieve normal relations with the Arab world. Two of the factors that helped Israel assume the risks of the peace process were the US's rising status as a hegemon in the Middle East, and the assessment that the military balance of power increasingly favored Israel. The article examines whether these assumptions are still valid, whether strategic turning points require that they be revisited, and what the implications are for Israeli policy.

Nuclear Legislation for Israel

Avner Cohen

Introduction

No single national security policy in Israel enjoys as much public support as its nuclear policy, commonly known as the policy of nuclear opacity. According to the policy, Israel acknowledges *nothing* factual about its nuclear status, activities, and capabilities, neither confirming nor denying anything. Silence is golden.

This conduct generates a democratic paradox for Israel: public knowledge and the right to know are a cornerstone of liberal democracy, but in Israel, in a most democratic fashion, the public surrenders its fundamental democratic right to information. This paradox presents a variety of challenges to Israeli democracy. Due to the fabric of nuclear opacity itself, however, those challenges have hardly been discussed in Israel. Moreover, this democratic paradox manifests a deep normative feature of Israel's nuclear exceptionality. No other nuclear democracy in today's world adheres to this pattern of nuclear opacity, that is, total non-acknowledgment of its nuclear status. Nuclear opacity as a long term nuclear policy is a unique Israeli novelty.

This article focuses on one important aspect of the paradox, namely, the absence of law that governs and regulates Israel's nuclear activities. More concretely, my interest here is to explore the desirability and feasibility of nuclear legislation. The article suggests that the time has come for Israel to place its nuclear activities under the rule of law by way of legislation. To the best of my knowledge, this issue has rarely – if ever – been discussed openly in Israel.[1]

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Nuclear Legislation: A Comparative Overview

Israel's primary nuclear organization, the Israel Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC), was founded by a secret executive order issued by Prime Minister David Ben Gurion in 1952 and subsequently reorganized into its present governance form in 1966, but is not anchored in any act of legislation. It is possibly Israel's most secretive organization, with huge areas of responsibility at home and abroad. However, notwithstanding the existence of some internal and external systems of governmental oversight as well as other governance provisions, no piece of legislation, which by definition is public, covers any of Israel's nuclear activities. Israel's nuclear activities are grounded in a virtually legal vacuum.

A quick comparison with the nuclear experience of other nations highlights the problematic and exceptional nature of Israel's public judicial policy in this area. In the United States, the cradle of the nuclear age, the civilian leaders of the Manhattan Project were committed from the very start to the notion that after the war the super secret military project should move to new civilian hands; and that this change of governance and custodianship must be done through an act of legislation. While it was apparent that the nature of nuclear affairs required an unprecedented kind of governmental secrecy, it was also understood that this secrecy – and the new organization that would guard it – must be enacted, governed, and regulated by law.

Throughout the spring of 1946, even before fateful political decisions were made about the future of the nuclear arms race (i.e., the Baruch Plan), Congress drafted, debated, and voted on the Atomic Energy Act of 1946 (known also as the McMahon Act). The act determined how the United States federal government should set up a new "government of the atom" that would manage, control, guard, and oversee the nuclear complex. Most significantly, it determined that the nuclear complex should be managed under a new civilian authority, not under the military. It also established the terms of Congressional oversight. The act was passed by Congress and signed by President Harry Truman on August 1, 1946 (less than a year after Hiroshima), and went into effect on January 1, 1947.

One year later the United States reorganized its entire national security establishment through another landmark piece of legislation,

known as the National Security Act of 1947. That bill inter alia established the Central Intelligence Agency. These two key pieces of legislation reinforced the concept that America's most secret national security organizations are under the rule of law.

As of 2009, more than sixty years after the United States initiated the first piece of nuclear legislation, nearly every democratic state has produced its own nuclear legislation. The website of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provides detailed analytical studies of nuclear legislations in some thirty liberal-democratic states (all are NPT signatories, including the three NPT declared weapons states: France, the UK, and the US).[2] The legislative differences among all these countries are significant, but underlying are some generic commonalities about how liberal democracies should manage their bargain with the atom: nuclear affairs should be handled in a transparent fashion; national nuclear activities must be governed and overseen by national laws; nuclear matters are important enough to require a national regulatory regime, and the law must govern such a regime.

On this matter Israel adopts a different posture. It stands in full contrast, even in defiance, to this contemporary democratic outlook. While the IAEC was reorganized afresh in 1966 – presumably through a set of highly classified government decisions – to this day Israel lacks a law that governs the management of its nuclear affairs, especially the IAEC. Nor is there any other public semi-legal document that regulates matters of responsibility, jurisdiction, and authority at the IAEC. The legal sphere is one example of how Israel's commitment to nuclear opacity has made its bargain with the atom an exception among democracies.

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The Israeli Tradition on National Security and the Law

The reasons for this Israeli exceptionality are many and complex; some antedate and go deeper than the issue of opacity as a national code of nuclear conduct. Their roots are grounded in an old Israeli tradition about how a state runs its secret national security organizations. For a long time the prevailing Israeli philosophy was that the secret national

security organizations should be exempt from the law. By their very nature and function these organizations reside outside the law.

Another way to express this Israeli outlook is as follows. In the most sensitive areas of national security, i.e., matters of intelligence and non-conventional weaponry, the government must act under absolute secrecy, at times even without acknowledgment. These affairs must be handled with as much legal discretion as possible, and therefore the government should be free to act in these areas without well defined legal constraints. They belong to the twilight zone of the law. This outlook typified Prime Minister Ben Gurion's basic thinking, and it explains the Israeli tradition that he founded and has been upheld by all his successors to this day: civilian organizations of national security fall under the direct ministerial responsibility of the prime minister.

The legality of these secret organizations is derived directly from the legality of the state itself, the power of the government to act. These secret organizations embody that power. This legitimacy is established constitutionally through a clause known as the government's "residual power clause," which is nowadays clause 32 in Israel's "Basic Law: The Government."[3] This clause endows the government with extreme legal power: it provides the government with the authority to act, on behalf of the state, in any way it finds fit, as long as that authority is not conferred by existing law on any other entity and does not challenge any Supreme Court ruling. The residual power clause is a legal loophole. Authority is granted by the Basic Law and though officially constitutional, it is not elaborated on in the law. It effectively grants legality to all governmental actions, as long as those actions are not in conflict with any other law. It is a magic legal device that precludes any legal vacuum as far as government action is concerned.[4] From the power of this authority and in the absence of specific legal limits, for example, the government is authorized to sign important international conventions.

The "residual power clause" creates a veil of constitutional legality for those state organizations and activities that the government would keep unacknowledged. It reflects a political philosophy that the state must maintain the freedom to run organizations that at times act domestically or overseas in the twilight zone of the law, or at times even break the law. The legitimacy of these secret organizations and

actions is derived from "reasons of state," namely, that exclusive realm of state activities where "common" morality and law are often viewed as inapplicable.

It was the legal cover of the residual power clause that allowed Israel's first defense minister, Prime Minister Ben Gurion, to set up Israel's national security secret organizations, most prominently the triad that is in charge of the nation's intelligence and nuclear affairs: Israel's domestic intelligence service, the General Security Services (GSS); the nation's foreign intelligence organization, the Mossad; and the state nuclear organization, the IAEC. The legality of all three civilian secret organizations was not derived from any specific law, as is the IDF, rather conferred on the government through the residual power clause. Only in the early years of the present decade did the Knesset pass the GSS law, which while as yet does not herald a conceptual breakthrough nonetheless provides important food for thought.

National Security Legislation: The GSS Law

This constitutional outlook dominated Israeli thinking and practice on matters of national security for a long time, but over the last few decades it has declined. The decline was stimulated by new societal and legal ideas about the rule of law in democracy as well as by actual severe misconduct within the secret organizations, which demonstrated the need for legislation to govern the nation's secret organizations. Most prominent among those events was the 1984 incident involving the GSS known as the "Bus 300 Affair," which subsequently led the GSS leadership to be involved in criminal acts of concealing evidence and cover-ups in an effort to protect itself and its internal code of secrecy and loyalty. At issue was a conflict between the secret organization's code of secrecy and the state's rule of law.

These scandals empowered the notion that in a democracy, secret state organizations must also be governed by the rule of law. The governance of those organizations should be regulated by law; it is wrong that those organizations reside in a legal twilight zone. It took almost two decades of hard legal labor for the GSS law to be drafted, deliberated, amended, and finally legislated. In 2002 the GSS law became the law of the land on matters of domestic state security.[5]

For all its importance, however, the law does not deal with the sensitive subject of GSS interrogations. Nonetheless, following this legislation, there was a wide expectation that it would be a precedent for Israel's other secret organizations. The next in line should have been the Mossad law.[6] Professor Ze'ev Segal of Tel Aviv University and *Haaretz*'s legal commentator raised the idea of a Mossad law in a number of editorials where he elaborated on some of the components required in such a law.[7]

But such a law is still not in sight. Following preliminary deliberations – at the Justice Ministry, the Mossad headquarters, the Knesset, and elsewhere – it became apparent that there was no political will to overcome the opposition of the old tradition to such a law. The opponents of the law argued that the Mossad must act sometimes illegally, and indeed, the very business of intelligence and espionage is inevitably based on deception and illegality. For the time being, the issue of a Mossad law is on hold, if at all on the agenda.

Unfortunately, public discussion about extending the rule of law has never reached Israel's third secret organization, the IAEC. The special status of Israel's nuclear organization within the Israeli bureaucracy and the public, an agency whose secrecy is even more sanctified than that of the Mossad, has made the notion of an IAEC law unthinkable. In a way, there is a paradox about drafting such a law: to draft such a law one needs to know a great deal about the organization and its mission, but such knowledge, under current opacity, is considered classified and hence unreachable. For this and other reasons, there has never been public discussion – if even interest – in drafting an IAEC law. The issue was apparently never raised for serious public debate in academia, the government, or the Knesset. Inside and outside of government, there is no constituency that could promote such a law in the media.

> The need for such legislation is twofold: symbolism (demonstrating that the rule of law reaches even the most secretive organization in the Israeli government) and practicality (better governance and oversight).

This is an unfortunate consequence of the culture of nuclear opacity. Despite all the talk in the Israeli press in recent years about the "rule of law," nobody from within the Israeli legal establishment

(including its academic component) has yet proposed such a law. This is the direct result of the double nature of opacity – a consensus-based governmental policy on the one hand, and a broad-based taboo-like societal prohibition against discussing nuclear matters on the other. The current nuclear threat from Iran is likely to reinforce the public's reluctance to engage seriously in the issue.

Israel's Need for Nuclear Legislation

Serious public discussion of legislation on nuclear issues should no longer be postponed. This legislation can be a kind of core legislation in its regulation of matters of authority and supervision of that authority, without necessarily going into undue detail. Following enactment of the GSS law, it is incumbent on Israel to start deliberating the merits of an IAEC law. It is time for Israel to end treating the legality of the nuclear issue as something that derives from the residual power of the government, which essentially stipulates nothing other than conferring sweeping authority on the executive authority. The nuclear issue is too important to be derived from the government's residual power; this is a sensitive domain of governmental action that requires a legal standing of its own through Knesset legislation. The need for such legislation is twofold: symbolism (demonstrating that the rule of law reaches even the most secretive organization in the Israeli government) and practicality (better governance and oversight).

It is not merely that Israel's nuclear organization and activities are currently not anchored in the law. Rather, by its very nature the nation's commitment to nuclear opacity enhances and magnifies the legal/constitutional vacuum involving the nuclear issue. This legal limbo, one of the defining features of Israel's unique bargain with the atom, highlights the non-democratic and non-normative nature of this bargain.

The GSS law of 2002 and the National Security Council Act of 2008 are examples of appropriate legislation on issues of national security in a democratic state. In contrast, Israel's commitment to nuclear opacity intensifies a situation that is legally flawed to begin with, which effectively makes the Israeli legal system incapable of adequately addressing the real implications of Israel's nuclear condition. Under opacity the Israeli legal system cannot acknowledge, let alone address,

the most important feature of the nation's nuclear reality. That feature can be stated in Israel only by reference to "foreign sources." If the basic reality is unacknowledged, it is impossible to address the legal consequences of that reality. Furthermore, one could argue that opacity deprives the country of the proper legal tools, i.e., specific laws, to address that reality. It forces us to ignore any and all of the complex legal challenges involved in the responsibility, accountability, and culpability over the nuclear complex and its products.

Consequently, opacity creates a legal reality in which the rule of law is effectively denied from governing one of the most important features of Israeli national security. A long set of legal concerns that are critical for the executive control of the nation's nuclear complex cannot be dealt with adequately because they cannot even be stated by the legal system to begin with. The point here is not merely that since the facts are classified, legal discussion should take place behind closed doors; rather, it is that opacity makes it difficult to form a legal discourse that is adequate for these unique issues. In fact, opacity creates legal uncertainty that might prove of critical importance in certain difficult situations.

Nuclear Law Guidelines

While any form of IAEC law would almost – by definition – surely have great symbolic value, the practical benefits of the law would depend on its substance: how explicit and detailed the law would be. More specifically, much would depend on how clearly the law would address the IAEC mandate.

At the least, however, such legislation must address the legal status of the IAEC as the government's nuclear agency: its overall mission, authority, subordination, oversight, and so on. Such a law should also define the statutory authority of the prime minister over nuclear affairs; the working relationship between the prime minister and the IAEC; the system of executive oversight that must be in place over the nation's nuclear policies and activities; supervision principles through the Knesset; issues of safety in the IAEC facilities; and more.[8] The most challenging aspect of drafting such a law would be to find formulations that would balance the requirements of the Israeli government's nuclear policy with the need for regulation.

At present, the notion of an IAEC law is an anathema to the Israeli nuclear establishment. Such a law is perceived as incompatible with the policy of opacity. After all, if opacity aims to obscure and conceal reality, a law would elucidate it. The supporters of the opacity policy, in Israel and elsewhere, have a two-pronged rationale. It is grounded in a fear that a change in Israel's nuclear code of conduct would be damaging both to Israel's vital national security interests and to the cause of international and regional stability and security. Simply put, the fear is that a law would elevate the salience of Israel's doomsday weapons.

These are major and legitimate concerns that should be taken seriously, and I do not dismiss their significance. One must agree that a first priority in easing the policy of opacity is something akin to the "do no harm" ideal commonly ascribed to the Hippocratic Oath. If a move towards democratic reform in the bargain stirs international apprehensions, which is doubtful, it may well be self-defeating.

But this concern should not lead to inaction and paralysis. True, initiating a process of nuclear legislation would be a departure from the old bargain and would likely have some impact on the policy itself, but it would not necessarily bring the formal end of the current policy of opacity. An IAEC law could be drafted in varieties of formulations, with various degrees of vagueness or explicitness.

Here are three considerations relevant to the concerns of the opponents. First, legislative deliberation, by its very nature, is a slow and highly deliberate process, as many individuals and agencies are involved. It took some fifteen years from the time the state commission of inquiry headed by the former Supreme Court justice Moshe Landau submitted its report on GSS interrogations (1987) until the law was passed and enacted in 2002.

Second, there is nothing inherent in such legislation that would require a formal end to opacity. As long as the State of Israel is not politically ready to move beyond the policy of opacity, no act of legislation could do so. One can easily conceive of all sorts of variants of such legislation, some that would substantially modify opacity while others could be more compatible with the current opacity philosophy. What is so democratically important about such legislation, however, is

that it would provide a legal standing for the nuclear reality. That alone would be an advantage over the present situation.

Third, legislation on such a sensitive matter with implications for Israel's nuclear policy would likely require consultation with outside parties, but if Israel decides to take the path of nuclear legislation it would be difficult to see how any foreign power could oppose the process for political reasons. An act of domestic legislation is normally not an occasion for foreign countries to intervene, and if there are reservations they would be made discretely.

Conclusion

The inherent tension that exists between the requirements of nuclear weapons and the norms of democratic governance emerges whenever democracy has to deal with nuclear weapons. The level of secrecy involved in nuclear weapons matters, especially in their early stages, blurs the ideals associated with democratic governance and the rule of law. There is nothing uniquely Israeli about it. But a policy of nuclear opacity, rooted in secrecy and non-acknowledgment, magnifies this essential tension much further. It not only impinges on the democratic right to know, but it creates a sort of legal vacuum that at times could even undermine the integrity of the governance process itself.

There are other factors in the Israeli nuclear situation that amplify the "theoretical" problem of opacity. First, the policy of opacity is incorporated into an organizational structure that has been designed from the start to obscure itself. Second, the democratic price of opacity is heightened by structural deficiencies of the Israeli governance system in general, and in the area of national security in particular. Third, all three organizations that constitute the infrastructure of opacity – the IAEC, MALMAB (the office of security at the Ministry of Defense), and the censor – are legally problematic because their power and authority are not firmly anchored in law.

Given Israel's constitutional makeup, compounded by its commitment to the policy of nuclear opacity, the tension between nuclear affairs and democratic governance has brought the conflict to its extreme. Opacity places the Israeli bargain at the very far end of the democracy spectrum. If we consider good democratic governance as a system in which norms of public accountability, the right to knowledge, and due process are all grounded in the rule of law and in

the transparency of government decisions, nuclear opacity is alien to these democratic ideals and clearly incompatible with the ideal of fair governance.

The proposed initiative will ease the existing tension. An IAEC law would not resolve the entire tension inherent in nuclear capability and democracy. Nor would such a law necessarily change the practice on the ground in a dramatic fashion. Still, deliberations can help advance the drafting process, and enacting an IAEC law would surely highlight that the nuclear domain in Israel is under the rule of law, and that the law reaches even Israel's most sensitive national security area.

Notes

My gratitude goes to Professor Ze'ev Segal of Tel Aviv University, with whom I discussed some of the constitutional issues that relate to the Israeli legal scene.

1   This article is based on part of my forthcoming study on nuclear opacity (to be published by Columbia University Press, 2010), which includes recommendations for domestic reforms that would liberalize Israel's bargain with the atom.

2   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Nuclear Legislation in OECD Countries," http://www.nea.fr/html/law/legislation/welcome.html.

3   "The Government is authorized to perform in the name of the State and subject to any law, all actions which are not legally incumbent on another authority." For the law in its present form see Israeli Knesset, Basic Law: The Government (2001), http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic14_eng.htm. It is now clause 32 but in the original version of the law from 1968 it was clause 28, and much of the literature refers to that number. See Israeli Knesset, "Basic Law: The Government – 1968 (Original Version), http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic1_eng.htm. For a brief discussion of how the Israeli constitutional system applies to the context of national security, including the residual power clause, see Yehuda Ben Meir, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), ch. 3.

4   Historically, it was a response to the predicament of a legal void that the newly born Israel found itself in May 1948: in a state of war, with no legal code, and with a government that had to act. Since then, the residual power clause has become a pillar in the Israeli constitutional system.

5   Gideon Alon, "The GSS Law Was Approved in the Knesset by Great Majority," *Haaretz*, February 12, 2002.

6   Gideon Alon, "The Mossad is Next in Line," *Haaretz*, December 20, 2001.

7   Ze'ev Segal, "Grounding the Mossad in Law," *Haaretz*, February 22, 1998; "The Mossad under Law," *Haaretz*, September 20, 2002.

8   The need for constitutional clarity in this area became apparent recently when Dan Meridor was appointed in March 2009 as the minister in charge of the three secret organizations under the responsibility of the prime minister: the GSS, the Mossad, and the Atomic Energy Commission. Only the GSS is by law under the prime minister; the two others are by tradition backed up by governmental decisions and classified executive orders. Reports suggest that the appointment of Minister Meridor will not alter the existing arrangement whereby the three organizations are administratively and functionally subject to the prime minister. The minister's authority stems from the authority of the prime minister but is not grounded in any legislation or protocol. As such, the status of the authority of Minister Meridor appears problematic from a legal point of view. See Mazal Mualem, "Dan Meridor and Benny Begin are Sharing a Secretary, but Lack a Clear Job," *Haaretz*, April 23, 2009.

Warfare – Morality – Public Relations: Proposals for Improvement

Roni Bart

During Operation Cast Lead a kind of rolling fire-induced smokescreen preceded the advancing units in order to protect them. As most of the fighting took place in built up and populated areas, this policy caused a large number of casualties among the civilian Palestinian population. This is largely a new policy. In previous campaigns the IDF drove the enemy civilians out of the area (southern Lebanon) or abstained from using massive firepower at the cost of casualties to its forces (Jenin in Operation Defensive Shield).

This new policy was almost universally supported by the Jewish public, and at the initiative of the minister of defense, the government of Israel even took an unprecedented decision to defend all IDF activity against potential judicial action. Those on the left who expressed reservations on moral and legal grounds were termed "bleeding hearts" who value the lives of Palestinian civilians over the lives of IDF soldiers. While stories from the seminar at the Oranim military academy were highlighted in the media, they did not resonate in political-military circles or prompt moral stocktaking, and a surprisingly rapid IDF investigation effectively closed the file. Whether or not there is truth in these tales is not the point. The majority of the fatalities were in any case not caused in incidents of this sort but as a result of the use of heavy firepower. Thus, the key issue is the policy determined by the high command, both with regard to the use of force and with regard to the message this sends to the rank and file soldiers.

There was no genuine public debate on this important issue of morality in warfare joining the rally to the battle cry. Seemingly, there

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is no middle ground between automatic support for all IDF actions and the labeling of its actions as war crimes. But that is not the case. The issue of moral consideration during warfare, first and foremost to preserve the sanctity of life, must be examined not only within the military. The IDF operates in the name of a Western-oriented Jewish society that has a duty to lay down for itself rules of combat morality. The IDF must examine this sensitive subject and decide what can be improved, primarily because of the inherent importance of the moral dimension. In addition, the government should define operational lines in the legal and public relations domains, in order to minimize the political and image-related damage that comes with the IDF's method of fighting in a built up area.

Two preliminary comments are in order before a number of proposals are presented. First, Israel's leaders and IDF commanders revel in the claim that "the IDF is the most moral army in the world." This assertion appears to be justified – or more precisely, perhaps, the IDF may be the most moral fighting army in the world. Compared with what has happened and occurs in the Third World, with the Soviet/Russian army, with the former colonial powers, and even with the US army from Vietnam to Afghanistan, the IDF comes out on top. The following criticism and suggestions should not be viewed as undermining this important assertion. On the other hand, this belief should not serve as a blanket response to any thoughts and questions on the matter. The IDF may be the most moral, yet there is still room for improvement in advance of similar future campaigns.

Second, some of what follows is based on information taken from the media, only part of which was officially corroborated by the IDF. In this area too, the IDF abstained from fully involving the public.[1] As such, some of the examples may not be factually accurate, and some of the proposals may be difficult or even impossible to apply. This does not detract from the validity of the basic ideas, or from the duty to think about other similar steps in the spirit of basic morality.

The Principle

During a hunt for terrorists in the Jordan Valley in 1969, a force commanded by Maj. Hanan Samson surrounded terrorists who took cover in a cave behind a woman nursing a baby. After the force held

its fire so as not to harm them, the terrorists fired and killed Samson. An entire generation of IDF soldiers grew up on this incident, which was presented as a model of morality in warfare. This was also the context for the statement by the minister of defense during Operation Defensive Shield, when he explained that the high number of fatalities at Jenin was a result of not using massive firepower that would have caused the deaths of many civilians.

At some point in time since then, possibly gradually and possibly only in advance of Operation Cast Lead, the approach changed. This is of course no black and white dichotomy. In the Gaza operation, the IDF invested major efforts in dropping leaflets and calling on civilians to evacuate. The idea of advance warning via tens of thousands of phone calls is, it seems, unprecedented in the annals of war. Also, the actual publicizing of the warnings, in general prior to the start of fighting and in particular before specific moves, denotes to a certain degree a foregoing of the element of surprise. Nevertheless, on a basic level what occurred in Operation Cast Lead represents an extreme change in the balance between two contradictory considerations. It is true that the reality in Gaza was very different from the cave incident forty years prior. Yet instead of a possibly supreme effort to avoid hurting civilians, even at the cost of interfering with the mission and the soldiers, the inculcation of a "no risk taking" approach raises questions about essence and process.

The basic question is, is the change justified? On the one hand, the answer is definitely yes. The sanctity of life is a universal principle and, as such, the lives of soldiers are no less important than those of civilians. Moreover, it is only natural that the country care for its own civilians and soldiers more than the lives of an enemy's civilians, all the more so civilians who are used as cover and support for the enemy's fighters. On the other hand, all the international conventions that address the laws of war are based on the following principles: it is permissible to intentionally kill soldiers, it is forbidden to intentionally kill civilians, and soldiers must take "every possible precaution" to avoid harming civilians.[2] This more than implies that they should take risks in order to do this. Furthermore, if it is so clear that the lives of soldiers are more valuable, why did the IDF behave differently in the past? Does the change in the nature of warfare justify extremity?

According to international law, this relates to a question of proportionality. Is it justified to shoot at an apartment from which there is enemy fire, even when it is clear there are civilians there? The answer is yes. Is it justified to shoot at an apartment because there is concern of possible enemy fire? That depends on the circumstances. Is it justified to bomb and destroy a building housing dozens of civilians? The answer must almost always be no. Perhaps especially since it is difficult for international law to lay down iron rules, certain standards must be set in place.

The impression gained from Operation Cast Lead is that there were no safeguards and considerations of these types. This impression is based on media coverage, soldiers' testimony, officers' accounts, and the across-the-board decisiveness of the official IDF spokespeople on the matter. The IDF did not carry out specific investigations in this area, and only published its position on two or three events that attracted media interest.[3] It is highly unlikely that through the entire campaign, not a single error of judgment was made in this complex area. In any case, the message conveyed to the public, and more important to the soldiers, is that everything is acceptable and that no risks should be taken. This norm should be adjusted based on moral, legal, and educational grounds. Not everything is acceptable. In certain cases, particularly when there may be a high number of civilian casualties, risks must be taken. Simply put, sometimes – as reflected in the battle heritage of Hanan Samson – one has to compromise on the way a mission is carried out and/or incur the risk of injury to soldiers to prevent harm coming to enemy civilians.

With regard to the process, the approach to the subject was likely not determined as a result of ethical discussion, rather as a byproduct of the campaign planning. Commanders and staff officers at the General Staff and the Southern Command devised operational plans that incorporated massive use of firepower as support and protection for the soldiers. The approach to the use of force was approved by the chief of staff and, one hopes, by the political leadership as well, and that was the end of the matter. The cost in civilian casualties should have been clear to them. It appears unlikely that any serious discussion took place on the ethical aspects. If it had, this would have been discovered by the media, at least following the campaign. If it is really important to the state and

the government of Israel that the Israeli military maintain moral values during warfare too, this is not the way. First, the discussion should start with the moral need and not with the operational requirements. Second, the discussion (if it took place) should be open and incorporate not just a handful of ministers and generals. Third, the new approach should have been explained to the public and conveyed to the soldiers. The story of Maj. Samson is less relevant to the IDF of today. In view of the difference in the nature of warfare between then and now, this is to be expected. Nonetheless, the topic is too important and sensitive to allow this change of approach to occur in a haphazard fashion.

Implementation

Even when the initial premise is the use of more aggressive firepower in order to protect IDF soldiers, a number of measures can be implemented in order to limit enemy civilian casualties.

- *Defining "refuge areas."* During the campaign, the IDF invested considerable resources in calling on the residents to evacuate. However, in contrast with campaigns in Lebanon when the residents fled to the north, Gaza is small, crowded, and closed off. The civilians did not know where to run, because they felt there was nowhere that was safe from the fighting. In the future, accessible refuge areas should be defined for civilians that will not be attacked by the IDF and will be coordinated with humanitarian bodies. Even if the enemy fighters exploit these areas for firing, such a move offers several advantages: it keeps civilians away from the more problematic frontline; it helps Israel in terms of its image; and it generates a problem for the enemy. If firing from the area becomes an acute problem, another area can be defined and the enemy's conduct can be exploited for public relations purposes. Furthermore, in order to avoid such a problem, Israel should consider defining a refuge area on the Israeli side of the Green Line.
- *Limits on the use of firepower.* The use of high trajectory fire (artillery and mortar) on areas with a civilian population in general, and particularly with a high concentration of civilians, should be avoided almost entirely. This kind of fire is less accurate than low trajectory fire, and thus endangers more civilians in the war zone. Furthermore, when using low trajectory firepower, preference

should be given as far as possible to fighter helicopters over tanks, because they are more accurate. An example of this can be seen in the counter fire used against a mortar unit that fired out of the school in Beit Lahia. Assuming the school housed students or people seeking refuge, no mortar fire should have been directed at the school, even at the cost of delaying the response to the enemy fire. It would have been better to have moved the IDF force that was under enemy fire and/or to screen it off than to have used high trajectory fire on a target with a large number of civilians. Another example is the shelling of the mosque that was used as a weapons repository. It is unclear why it was necessary to attack it without giving prior warning, particularly while prayers were in progress, and to cause dozens of fatalities. The IDF quite rightly takes pride in the clips it shows of the air force making a last minute decision not to carry out a targeted attack so as not to harm civilians. Such consideration should not only be taken into account during routine security operations but also during hostilities. The IDF would do well to examine each case of civilian casualties individually, in order to look at the unfortunate circumstances and how they can be avoided.

- *Providing medical assistance*. Only two weeks after the start of the campaign was a decision made to implement daily ceasefires in order to send in humanitarian supplies, and only at the end of the hostilities was a hospital established at the Erez checkpoint. Doctors who volunteered to help in Gaza came via tunnels beneath the border with Egypt. Regardless of the scale of propaganda exaggeration as to the degree of distress in Gaza, there is no doubt that the casualties there received less than optimal medical aid. It is difficult to gauge the number of civilians who died or remained permanently handicapped as a result. There is no operational reason not to act otherwise. Israel has to allow medical supplies, including personnel reinforcements, from the first day. A field hospital should be ready in the same timeframe, even if the Palestinians prefer not to make use of it.

- *Upgrading the humanitarian systems in the IDF*. During the campaign the IDF informed the public of the existence of a humanitarian system of sorts, with about 15 officers, whose role was to accompany

the forces and aid the civilian population. This system should be upgraded in four respects. One, its principal mission should be defined as limiting the number of enemy civilian casualties, and only subsequently as providing humanitarian aid. Two, the system should be expanded so that it has representatives in each combat unit, at least from battalion level and above. Three, it should be provided with the tools it needs to maintain direct contact with international humanitarian bodies working on the other side of the front during the fighting. This is a crucial measure for more efficient handling of cases, such as the firing on the UNRWA compound or the prolonged prevention of evacuation of the wounded from the Zeitun district. Four, it should be made responsible for humanitarian thinking and planning prior to the fighting, and should be given authority to intervene at the command level during the hostilities to ensure that commanders are aware of the aspect of saving the lives of civilians. There should be an officer in all staff groups whose exclusive job this is, and the world's "most moral army" would do well to establish this position.

Public Relations

The main practical aspect of warfare morality – the scope of civilian casualties – has direct significance for the political-public relations environment in which Israel operates. (This connection will presumably come into play more, now that the tolerant Bush administration has exited the stage). In order to limit the damage in this area, beyond technical improvements needed regarding public relations, it is recommended that a number of conceptual changes be introduced.

- *"Mobilizing" international law*. After Operation Cast Lead, Israel, and not for the first time, found itself on the defensive on the legal-public image level. As if to intentionally make the situation worse, the political and military leadership openly talked about a policy of "disproportionate response," which is prohibited by international law. In this area a 180 degree change of direction should be made. Israel's moves in Lebanon and Gaza comprise a disproportionate response only if the immediate damage that preceded the response is the criterion for proportionality. Although this approach is rooted in public opinion as the only understanding of the concept

of proportionality, this is not the case. There are two additional approaches among warfare legalists: "the cumulative" – a proportionate response to the collective number of strikes suffered in the past (suitable for countries that have turned a blind eye over a period of time); and "overall" – a proportional response to a threat, including with a view to its removal.[4] Israel should adopt this latter approach and explain that its response is entirely proportionate as it is designed to eliminate a threat of rocket terror to one million of the country's inhabitants. Instead of explaining that Israel acts against the terms or the spirit of the law and that there is no choice, it should be argued that the operations are entirely in keeping with the law.

- *A transition from response to proactiveness*. The decision to implement daily ceasefires to allow the provision of humanitarian aid was taken only a fortnight after the start of the campaign. This move, like arranging the evacuation of foreign civilians, was made after requests (not to say pressure) by international bodies. During the Second Lebanon War too, the IDF arranged "a humanitarian corridor" for evacuating foreigners only in the wake of international pressure. There is no reason why this should not be planned prior to the outbreak of hostilities and to implement this as soon as the fighting starts, without waiting for requests. This is the proper course to take, in humanitarian and public relations interests, and the operational constraint is almost always minimal.

- *Increasing transparency*. International bodies relate with justifiable skepticism to explanations by the IDF of damage that was inflicted on civilian targets because the IDF was fired on from them, and of the efforts invested in order to limit harm to civilians. It is worthwhile considering the idea of asking international observers to see this for themselves. The IDF's observation measures are in most cases capable of identifying the source of fire in real time. A sort of observers' war room can be established for military attaches and/or representatives of humanitarian bodies where they will be able to see firing in residential areas for themselves, even before the IDF responds. To a limited extent some presence can be allowed at military command facilities, or access to their communications systems, so that observers can hear the relevant decisions. At the

very least, immediate reports should be issued in any case when the IDF abstains from acting due to humanitarian constraints.

Regardless of this radical suggestion, the IDF should operate transparently with regard to problematic events. After any extraordinary event regret should be immediately expressed by a senior figure, a rapid internal inquiry should be undertaken that should be immediately followed by an external investigation, errors should be admitted, and if necessary, the culprits should stand trial. The results of the process should be submitted to the authorized international bodies. This is the right way to work in order to prevent claims and to avoid legal complaints.

- *Advance-preemptive public relations*. The Israeli public relations system only starts to work after the fighting starts. This contains two fundamental errors. First, the political-public relations official should be involved in the preparation of the operational plan, and should be present when the political leadership approves it. It is the official's role to identify moves that are problematic in public image terms, and make prior suitable arrangements. In certain cases the official should propose, initially to the military leadership and then to the political hierarchy, that certain steps should be avoided. In practice, he should act as the public relations equivalent of the legal advisor. Second, international public opinion should be primed long before the campaign, in terms of familiarization with the historical background, legal context, and Israeli humanitarian policy. Israel should bring to the international agenda the complete explanation of the issue of proportionality through Israeli legislation, an official proposal for adoption by the relevant international bodies, and recruited support in the professional community. Israel should, from the start, present to foreign governments and international bodies the humanitarian aspect in the IDF's operational method, and should propose its adoption by other countries. Israel should also initiate the establishment of a liaison facility between the IDF and local (Palestinian and Lebanese) and international bodies, so that coordination during hostilities proceeds correctly and helps to limit civilian casualties.

Conclusion

The IDF is the most moral army in the world. When this article was written it was not clear whether there was any damage inflicted intentionally on civilians during Operation Cast Lead. However, in view of a number of examples and in view of the blanket dismissals by military spokespersons on the subject, it is reasonable to assume that there were civilian casualties as a result of negligence, lack of discretion, and avoidance of risk taking. Efforts should be made to reduce this phenomenon. If too many enemy civilians are hurt during hostilities, this occurs for the sake of, and in the name of, Israeli society. Israeli society must therefore demand from the IDF a higher level of safeguards, without overly endangering IDF soldiers.

During the hostilities in Gaza there were no particular critical objectives, and the military did not operate according to a tight timetable. It seems that in some of the cases, discretion could have been exercised and a decision could have been made to forego, or take a more indirect approach, or proceed more slowly, in order to save human lives. The IDF has to accept this principle, to routinely educate its soldiers accordingly, to brief them before battle, and to develop a humanitarian system in order to properly implement this. Preserving human life during warfare in this manner offers inherent value. In the case in question, a supreme effort to do this also offers political and public relations value that supports achieving the objectives of the war. For these two reasons the IDF and the government of Israel should not suffice with sanctimonious repetition of "the most moral army in the world." The next round of fighting should be approached after the IDF has drawn conclusions and implemented improvements, and after Israel has done everything it can to explain to the world both the justification for its method of operation, and the safeguards it has adopted.

Notes

1   When this article went to press the IDF Spokesperson had not provided the author with answers to questions, data, or other information.
2   Clause 2-57 of the Additional Protocol of the 1949 Geneva Convention.
3   See footnote 1 above.
4   Anthony Arend and Robert Beck, *International Law and the Use of Force – Beyond the UN Charter Paradigm* (London, 1993), pp. 165-66.

Israel's Strategy of Unilateral Withdrawal

Shmuel Even

In the last three years Israel has been forced to wage two military campaigns in areas from which it withdrew unilaterally – southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip – in order to cope with threats that grew steadily following the withdrawals. Precisely the two arenas from which Israel withdrew to internationally accepted borders in order to avoid conflict were those that became Israel's most violent fronts. In addition, Israel reversed its intention to realize the "convergence" plan in the West Bank formulated by former prime minister Ehud Olmert as a continuation of the disengagement from the Gaza Strip.

This article explores whether unilateral withdrawal is a proper strategy for achieving Israel's national objectives under circumstances where it is impossible to reach a suitable political settlement in the foreseeable future. It presents the rationales and the expectations defined by those who initiated these moves against the results apparent today. For example, one may question – if not doubt – whether Ariel Sharon would have carried out the disengagement plan had he foreseen today's security reality. The convergence plan was taken off the table before its implementation since the rationales did not withstand the test of time even in the eyes of its creators. In fact, the strategic rationale of unilateral withdrawal grew less and less compelling with each of these events: if the withdrawal from southern Lebanon had a great deal of logic on its side, the disengagement from the Gaza Strip had only limited logic, while the convergence plan had very little logic at all in terms of providing a response to Israel's strategic needs.

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One of the lessons presented here is the need to undertake an advance examination of Israeli-initiated moves with a systemic long term view and to analyze the future expected conduct of all elements affecting the system. For example, in the disengagement Israel did not take into consideration that the withdrawal would generate fundamental changes in the complex Palestinian system so that the final outcome would significantly differ from what it anticipated. Israel also did not consider the full range of its limitations to impact on events in the territory it was evacuating. The backup mechanism for the withdrawal – a harsh military blow should the calm be broken after the withdrawal – turned out to require a concentration of high military firepower and maneuvers, and even then its success was by no means a given in light of the capabilities developed by the enemy.

The Withdrawal from Southern Lebanon

On May 24, 2000, Israel withdrew unilaterally from southern Lebanon to the international border, bringing to an end the IDF's occupation of the security zone that began with the 1982 Lebanon War. The considerations for the withdrawal included:

1. An inadequate military response to Hizbollah's fighting strategy and tactics, leading to relatively many IDF casualties, which in turn led to heavy pressure by the Israeli public. The security zone disintegrated and became a security and political burden.

2. Israel meant to retain the security zone until reaching a peace agreement with Syria and Lebanon,[1] but the failure to reach an agreement with them and the cost of maintaining a presence in Lebanon made Israel attempt to reshape the arena without an agreement. In the immediate term, Israel expected an end to the attacks on Israeli soldiers and the removal of Syria's bargaining chip, i.e., exerting pressure on Israel by means of Hizbollah.[2] In the longer term, Israel expected increased pressure on the Syrian forces to withdraw from Lebanon and a decrease in the legitimacy of maintaining Hizbollah's military power (dismantling the rationale of the opposition).

3. An expectation that Israel's international standing would improve. Likewise, by withdrawing to the internationally accepted border,

Israel expected international legitimacy for its reactions to hostile activities from Lebanon.

The unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon did in fact boost Israel's image in the international arena but severely harmed Israel's image in the region. It was accompanied by an extensive Hizbollah media campaign in which Nasrallah claimed Israel was weaker than a cobweb.[3] In the Arab world, the withdrawal was seen as an unprecedented achievement for Hizbollah, which through intransigence and perseverance brought about – for the first time in history – an Israeli withdrawal without preconditions or an international dictate. The withdrawal apparently blurred Arab awareness that it is impossible to overpower Israel using military force, which in turn strengthened radical Islam's championing the destruction of Israel. Hizbollah's achievement was one of the factors that incited the Palestinians before the al-Aqsa Intifada.

Following the withdrawal, the friction between Israel and Hizbollah declined significantly, but Hizbollah regularly sought new points of contention that would justify perpetuation of the armed struggle, including: the kidnapping of Israelis in order to release Lebanese prisoners in Israel, the demand for the return of Shab'a Farms, and the claim to Lebanese sovereignty over seven destroyed Shiite villages in the Galilee.[4] As an inseparable part of the said unilateral strategy, Israel was supposed to retaliate forcefully against any provocation and blatant violation of the security status quo. However, Israel's reactions were comparatively mild and Hizbollah dictated the rules of the game – that is, until the kidnapping of Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser in July 2006, which resulted in the Second Lebanon War. Israel's reaction to the kidnapping was so extreme in terms of the damage suffered by Lebanon that Nasrallah admitted that his organization would not have kidnapped the soldiers had he anticipated Israel's reaction. This admission indicates that good deterrence on the part of Israel might have prevented a war. The blow Israel dealt Hizbollah did in fact change the rules of the game but did not alter the strategic threat posed from the northern front, and may have even accelerated the process of Hizbollah's rearmament.

> Though the withdrawal from southern Lebanon had some significant disadvantages, it also had many more convincing rationales than those underlying the Gaza withdrawal.

Developments in Lebanon after the withdrawal did not occur as Israel had anticipated. Hizbollah's status was strengthened, as was Iran's influence on Lebanon. The withdrawal did in fact have a negative impact on Syrian legitimacy to remain in Lebanon and eventually sparked a process that – as Israel had hoped – forced the Syrian military to withdraw from Lebanon in April 2005, but this step backfired. As a result of the new order created in Lebanon, it is doubtful whether Syria today can bring the same incentives to the negotiations table with Israel as in the past. Although before Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon it was clear that a political move with regard to Syria would also include Lebanon, today there is no such guarantee in light of Hizbollah's power and Iran's involvement in Lebanon. While the strategic value of an agreement with Syria is significant in and of itself, without a solution in the Lebanese arena it is far less valuable since threats against Israel from this arena are no less severe than those coming from the Syrian army.

Yet despite the many drawbacks, the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon still seems to have been a justified move in light of Israel's political and military situation. Nonetheless, it could probably have been executed differently, with less damage to Israel's image.

The Disengagement from the Gaza Strip

In September 2005, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip and evacuated the settlements there.[5] Similar to the withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip also stemmed from a desire to shape the political-security reality with a unilateral move after many years without a political solution. The idea of a unilateral withdrawal began to take shape in Israel earlier in the decade, after the Palestinians rejected the generous offers made by the Barak government for a permanent settlement and started the intifada. As a result, the Israeli side concluded that there was "no partner" on the Palestinian side. The idea of the unilateral withdrawal (which subsequently became known as the disengagement) was adopted by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The disengagement plan was first presented by Sharon at the Herzliya Conference on December 18, 2003. Sharon said that he preferred to follow the Roadmap, but that he would not wait for the Palestinians to make the effort to solve the conflict and within

two months would initiate a unilateral move that would include an evacuation of settlements:

> The Disengagement Plan will include the redeployment of IDF forces along new security lines and a change in the deployment of settlements, which will reduce as much as possible the number of Israelis located in the heart of the Palestinian population. We will draw provisional security lines and the IDF will be deployed along them. Security will be provided by IDF deployment, the security fence and other physical obstacles. The Disengagement Plan will reduce friction between us and the Palestinians….The relocation of settlements will be made, first and foremost, in order to draw the most efficient security line possible, thereby creating this disengagement between Israel and the Palestinians. This security line will not constitute the permanent border of the State of Israel, however, as long as implementation of the Roadmap is not resumed, the IDF will be deployed along that line….At the same time, in the framework of the Disengagement Plan, Israel will strengthen its control over those same areas in the Land of Israel which will constitute an inseparable part of the State of Israel in any future agreement.[6]

At the time, Ze'ev Schiff speculated that Prime Minister Sharon's initial thinking about the disengagement began with the idea of evacuating three Gaza Strip settlements – Netzarim, Kfar Darom, and Morag – but that the plan then evolved.[7] Schiff added that, "We do not know what primary factor motivated Prime Minister Sharon to transform his strategic-security views and suggest the disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria. There are undoubtedly several reasons for the switch, but it seems he concluded that despite Israel's successes in its war against terrorism it was unable to suppress it completely. He also understood that the occupation was greatly harming Israel's international standing and was damaging the underpinnings of the society and the economy."[8]

> The unilateral withdrawals strengthened the radical axis in the Arab world that urged the destruction of Israel.

Another important consideration in favor of unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip was the acknowledgment that this area had little

chance of being included within the State of Israel in the permanent settlement, and therefore it would be best for Israel to spare the security and demographic burden of holding onto this strip of land. This consideration was supported by the following facts:

1. Demographic weakness: the Jewish population of the Gaza Strip was only 0.6 percent in relation to the Palestinian population. The location of the Israeli settlements between two large Arab population centers did not allow for a great deal of flexibility for possible future annexation to Israel.
2. The historic connection of the State of Israel to the Gaza Strip was less significant than the connection to the West Bank, and at the time there was a fairly widespread consensus in Israeli society on withdrawal from the Gaza area.
3. Israel has a relatively large capability of bringing military tools to bear on the Gaza Strip from the outside because of its small size and delineated area.
4. The Gaza Strip exacted a high casualty toll. From 1967 until the withdrawal, 230 Israelis were killed there.[9]

A successful marketing campaign accompanied the promotion of the plan and the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The concept of "disengagement" took the place of the (defeatist) concept of unilateral withdrawal. It broadcast a message that Israel intended to take the initiative and disengage from the situation in the Gaza Strip, from the problems associated with it, and from the moral responsibility for events there. It served the shapers of public opinion and the leaders of the intra-Israeli arena well as they achieved a broad consensus in Israeli society for the disengagement.

The political echelon created high expectations from the disengagement. In a speech at the Israel Management Conference on September 29, 2005, Prime Minister Sharon said:

> The title of your conference is "Decisions Can Change the Course of History." As one who witnessed the decision making during several significant events in our short history, I would like to tell you that it is true. … In the political field, I initiated the Disengagement Plan – a plan to secure Israel's most essential interests. The implementation of the Disengagement Plan, in addition to our determined struggle against terror, yielded fruit in all fields. Israel's

international standing improved immensely since the implementation of the plan. We brought about a significant reduction in the level of terror, and increased the personal security of the citizens of Israel. The international markets view the Disengagement Plan as a step which will lead to security and economic stability, which creates movement of capital to the Israeli economy and a sharp increase in foreign investment.[10]

The disengagement coordinator in the Prime Minister's Office, Brig. Gen. (ret.) Eival Giladi, clarified:

We decided to put an end to the fact that the Palestinian leadership was the one dictating our future to us.…After ten years of dialogue along the lines of Oslo and over three years of struggle with many casualties, we decided on the disengagement…It would be accurate to say that had we continued without the unilateral withdrawal, the negotiations would have been hopeless, and even after many years we wouldn't have achieved any results.[11]

When the disengagement was first made public, the Palestinians welcomed the withdrawal and saw it as a success of the intifada. At the same time, they treated the plan with suspicion and expressed concern about the end of the process of withdrawals and the possibility that the Gaza Strip would turn into one massive prison. A poll taken in March 2004 by the Palestinian Center for Political and Statistical Research among 1,320 Palestinians in 120 different locations in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank showed that 42 percent of respondents felt that the withdrawal would reduce the chances for peace, 23 percent felt that the plan would increase the chances for peace, and the rest answered that they did not know.[12]

The disengagement plan infused the Palestinian drive with new energy. Similar to Hizbollah's claims after the withdrawal from Lebanon (the issues of Shab'a Farms in the Golan and the ruins of the Shiite villages in the Galilee), the Palestinians too found new bones of contention with Israel concerning the Gaza Strip. Before the implementation of the disengagement, Mahmoud Abbas asserted that even after the completion of the withdrawal, Israel would continue to occupy land belonging to Palestinians to the north and east of the Gaza Strip. He was referring to areas included in the Gaza Strip as part of

the ceasefire line set in 1949 in the Rhodes agreements between Israel and Egypt but that had passed into Israeli hands a year later as part of a land-swap agreement.[13]

The disengagement and the events that followed did not meet Israel's prior expectations. Hamas' victory in the parliamentary elections and its takeover of the Gaza Strip created a new reality that complicated the reality of the Palestinian system. In the wake of the disengagement, the Gaza Strip is controlled by a hostile entity supported by Iran. Now, after the disengagement, Palestinians are under different rule in four separate geographical locations: citizens of Israel, residents of the "independent" Gaza Strip under Hamas rule, Palestinians under Israeli and Palestinian Authority control in the West Bank, and Palestinians in the diaspora claiming the right of return to Israel.

As a substitute for the friction within the Gaza Strip, the Palestinians accelerated the confrontation with Israel using high trajectory fire. This capability was strengthened thanks to a steep rise in arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip, primarily as a result of the withdrawal from the Philadelphi axis. The new reality was a major snag in the political negotiations that posited territorial unity between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Though the withdrawal from southern Lebanon had some significant disadvantages, it also had many more convincing rationales than those underlying the Gaza withdrawal. A comparison between the two may shed light on the weaknesses of the disengagement:

1. In the withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Israel returned to the international border, and with that the conflict between the two countries was meant to come to a close, at least in the eyes of the international community, while in the disengagement from Gaza Israel withdrew to the border in only one of the disputed sectors.

2. The withdrawal from southern Lebanon greatly decreased Hizbollah's legitimacy in attacking Israel, while the disengagement did not affect Palestinian legitimacy in its struggle against Israel.

3. In the withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Israel left the territory it had occupied in the hands of a sovereign nation that upholds ceasefire agreements with Israel (despite the obvious weaknesses of Lebanon's central government), while in the disengagement, Israel left the territory to the whims of the powers there, though without

any possibility of existing as an independent entity detached from Israel (especially in light of Gaza's economic dependence on Israel) and without a security arrangement.

4. In the withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Israel did not concede any bargaining chips it might have needed in future negotiations, while the disengagement included an erosion of Israel's position and problematic precedents for future negotiations with the Palestinians. Israel withdrew from Gaza fully, without preconditions and without recompense for a strip of land it had previously put up for negotiations with the Palestinians. Israel also evacuated and destroyed Jewish settlements (hitherto unprecedented in the Palestinian arena) and withdrew without any of the demilitarization agreements it would have obtained had there been an agreement with the Palestinians.

5. The withdrawal from Lebanon matched the interests of the pragmatic Arab nations, while the disengagement was seen as a hostile move: skirting the political process, casting the Gaza Strip and its problems at Egypt's doorstep, and setting the precedent for a similar move in the West Bank with difficult consequences for Jordan.

6. The withdrawal from Lebanon was carried out under heavy internal Israeli pressure in light of the failure of the military struggle against Hizbollah in the security zone, while the disengagement was initiated at the political level precisely after impressive Israeli successes in breaking the Palestinian terrorist assault in Operation Defensive Shield in the West Bank and the preventive operations that followed. The psychological achievements of these successes were all but wiped out by the disengagement.

The Convergence Plan

The quick and smooth implementation of the disengagement plan aroused expectations in Israel and among foreign elements that Israel would continue with similar moves. During a full day seminar of the Reut Research Institute at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya on September 27, 2005, the prime minister's strategic advisor, Eyal Arad, responded to the question that was the focus of the conference: Was the disengagement a one-time move or did it represent a strategy?

Arad said: "If over time we see that the stalemate continues despite the fact that the political reality is convenient for Israel, it is possible that we would consider turning the disengagement into an Israeli strategy. Israel will determine its borders independently." Following up on this, Prime Minister Sharon's office clarified that "the position of the prime minister has been and remains that after the completion of the disengagement, Israel will work towards promoting the political process solely on the basis of the Roadmap. Any additional territorial change will be discussed and decided upon only in the context of negotiations over a permanent settlement. If and until we reach that point, there are and will be no additional unilateral territorial moves." It was explained that there was no diplomatic or political rationale for embarking on a new initiative that would include withdrawal from territories at the time, and that the disengagement was meant to secure the existing situation in the West Bank until the Palestinians changed.[15]

The consensus on the Israeli street in favor of disengagement from the Gaza Strip was nonexistent regarding the West Bank. A survey by the Peace Index taken on September 1, 2005 at the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at Tel Aviv University[16] showed that 71.5 percent of the Jewish population in Israel felt that the disengagement from the Gaza Strip was the first step in an extensive plan for evacuating settlements in the West Bank as part of a permanent settlement with the PA; 15.8 percent did not believe there would be further evacuations, while 12.7 percent did not know. In response to a question about their position regarding extensive evacuations of settlements in the West

> Apparently the right way to evacuate territories is only on the basis of a stable agreement that is in line with Israel's long term objectives.

Bank, 34.3 percent answered that they would support an evacuation only in the context of a peace agreement, 13.5 percent answered they would support it even in the context of a unilateral withdrawal, and 41.8 percent answered they would not support extensive evacuations from the West Bank under any circumstance; the rest said they did not know.[17]

After Prime Minister Sharon was incapacitated and no longer in office, Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert presented the convergence plan, an idea of his own design. According to the plan, Israel was supposed to withdraw unilaterally from some sixty settlements. Upon

completion of the plan, Israel was supposed to realign its borders based on the 1967 lines, retaining control of only 7 percent of the West Bank.[18] The convergence plan lay at the heart of the political platform of the Kadima party, which won the 2006 elections. During the first part of the Second Lebanon War in 2006, Olmert declared that the war would give momentum to the convergence plan, but later he announced the plan's suspension. The notion of a unilateral separation from the Palestinians without an agreement was so strong among the population that it created a new field in Israeli politics. Although nothing was left of the original idea of unilateral separation by the 2009 elections, the notion nonetheless changed Israel's political map.

The main rationales of the convergence plan were largely similar to the previous withdrawals: an attempt to shape unilaterally a new security-political reality after the failure to achieve political agreements; an attempt to determine unilaterally the permanent borders of the State of Israel; an attempt to reduce the friction between Israel and the Palestinians, and thus reduce the loss of life and the costs of security; and an improvement in Israel's international standing.

A comparison between the disengagement and convergence plans shows that even the limited rationales of the former did not exist in the case of the latter. First, the strategic importance of the West Bank is much greater than that of the Gaza Strip because of its location in the center of Israel, the size of the area, and its key areas (such as the ascent from the coastal region towards the central mountain ranges and the Jordan Valley). The military threat liable to develop from the West Bank and the subsequent difficulty in operating the IDF (after a withdrawal) are much greater in comparison with the situation in the Gaza Strip because of the size of the West Bank, the area's proximity to the center, and the topography. Second, Jewish settlement in the West Bank is much larger than that in the Gaza Strip, and history forges a strong connection between areas in the West Bank (among others, for example, Bethlehem and Hebron) and Israel. Evacuating these areas might invite much more severe internal confrontation than what took place regarding the Gaza Strip. Third, the area of the West Bank is vastly more important to Israel as a bargaining chip in negotiations over a permanent settlement – importance that increased following the withdrawal from Gaza. Finally, the convergence plan did not denote

withdrawal to an internationally acknowledged border and not even the complete withdrawal of Israel's security forces, but primarily an evacuation of settlements, similar to the evacuation of the four northern Samaria settlements in the disengagement plan (the status of this area differs from the status of the Gaza Strip, which Israel completely evacuated). Therefore, the convergence plan would not have resolved the conflict with the Palestinians and would not have supplied Israel with great political gains on the international arena in comparison with the heavy internal cost this move would have entailed.

Assessment

There was a considerable gap between the expectations that the political echelon and the Israeli population had pinned on the strategy of unilateral withdrawal and the results in practice, as outlined in table 1.

Table 1. Unilateral Withdrawal: Expectation vs. Reality

	Expectation	Outcome
1.	Israel's international standing would improve as a result of the withdrawals from southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.	The withdrawals contributed to Israel's international standing. Israel enjoyed broad international legitimacy even at the beginning of the military campaigns in Lebanon and Gaza, but later there was an erosion of this legitimacy on the basis of the claim of "lack of proportionality."
2.	The withdrawals would create a new political reality that would promote the peace process.	The withdrawals did create a new reality, one that strengthened the opponents of peace in the region.
3.	The withdrawals would erase the friction between Israel and its enemies in the area.	As a substitute for a drop in friction in the area, there was a rise in the enemies' capability and high trajectory fire. In addition, Israel was forced to return to the region and operate with a show of great force.

4.	The withdrawal would deny legitimacy to act against Israel from the evacuated areas.	The withdrawal from southern Lebanon did in fact reduce legitimacy to act against Israel, but Hizbollah found new means of engagement. The withdrawal from the Gaza Strip did not reduce Palestinian legitimacy to operate against Israel.
5.	The withdrawals would reduce the need and the legitimacy for maintaining military forces in the areas evacuated, since there would no longer be any Israeli targets and Hizbollah and Hamas would be occupied by political and governmental demands.	After the withdrawals, Hizbollah and Hamas' military forces grew stronger, in particular their high trajectory ballistic missiles, both in terms of quantity and in their range of attack. Despite Hizbollah's political challenges and Hamas' governmental difficulties, both groups chose to invest in military fortification.
6.	The IDF's capabilities, Israel's warnings, and Israeli legitimacy to operate from the international border would deter the enemy from acting against Israel on these fronts.	The enemies on the two fronts were not deterred.
7.	Israel would respond rapidly with great military force should it fail to deter (should strategic threats in the areas withdrawn from be created or should power moves be made against it).	Israel did not make good on its threat until the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead.
8.	Even were threats to emerge from areas Israel evacuated, the IDF has the standoff fire capabilities to handle security problems without the need for ground maneuvers.	The IDF's standoff fire capabilities did not achieve sufficient successes. The ground maneuver emerged as essential, but using it involved some difficult dilemmas.
9.	The residents of the Gaza Strip settlements would be assimilated into new settlements to be established in southern Israel and into older settlements.	The process of rehabilitating the Gaza Strip evacuees has been fraught with difficulties and, as indicated by the state comptroller's report, many remain without a suitable arrangement to this day.
10.	The withdrawals would reduce casualties among the civilians on the enemy side.	In both campaign, Israel was forced to harm many civilians as a result of the enemy's manner of engagement.

In the end, the strategy of unilateral withdrawal caused Israel significant damage in several areas. In both sectors from which Israel withdrew, the security-strategic threats grew stronger. The Gaza Strip, which before the disengagement had been a secondary confrontation arena with the Palestinians, turned into the major front and a considerable strategic problem affecting Israel's relations with its surroundings, as demonstrated during Operation Cast Lead. Furthermore, the withdrawals hurt Israel's image as an entity that cannot be vanquished by the use of military force. The unilateral withdrawals strengthened the radical axis in the Arab world that urged the destruction of Israel. It would seem that the disengagement hurt Israel's image more than the withdrawal from southern Lebanon, as Israel created a precedent for destroying settlements it had established without getting anything in return from the Arab side, at a time when the Oslo accords did not even demand the evacuation of the settlements.

The strategy of unilateral withdrawal and its implementation strengthened the image of the Shiite and Palestinian struggle and its values: patience, self-sacrifice, endurance, resistance, and devotion to the land. The unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip demonstrated to the radical Islamic camp that it could achieve extraordinary successes even without negotiations, which was quite disturbing to the pragmatic camp in the Arab world. The unilateral withdrawals did not create better political conditions or improve political options, but rather harmed Israel's ability to promote political settlements. The disengagement contributed to the internationalization of the conflict, i.e., it strengthened the involvement of foreign nations and international organizations in the conflict. It may be possible to find advantages in this (especially in the humanitarian field), but there are also distinct disadvantages to their involvement, such as the growing need to consider their positions and sensitivities to events in the territories. The unilateral withdrawal left Israel's security interests in the hands of others, such as supervision of arms smuggling and security arrangements in the Gaza Strip, matters that Israel would have insisted on in any negotiation. In the internal Israeli arena, the unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip took a tremendous social toll, as well as incurring a very high economic price.

The strategy of unilateral withdrawal likely did not meet expectations because of some erroneous basic assumptions, estimates, and concepts that lay at the heart of the approach:

1. Israel did not understand that the step would cause a deep systemic change in the political and security reality of the region evacuated and in the entire strategic surroundings, e.g., the rise of Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the strengthening of the Iranian camp and Hizbollah in Lebanon, and ultimately the strengthening of the radical axis.

2. The assumption that withdrawal would pull the rug out from under the feet of the aggressor was mistaken. In practice, the enemy found new points of friction after the withdrawals.

3. The use of concepts such as "disengagement" and "convergence" (as substitutes for unilateral withdrawal) in the Israeli public discourse created a mirage, as if Israel could take its fate into its own hands unilaterally and ignore what was happening on the other side.

4. The assumption that it was proper to withdraw unilaterally from land Israel did not expect would be included in its areas in a permanent settlement ran counter to the rules of negotiation, whereby Israel should have held on even to assets needed by the other side. The convergence, for example, would not have left enough assets in the hands of Israel to conduct negotiations for a permanent settlement.

5. The assumption that the disengagement was able to offset the Palestinian demographic threat and help preserve Israel as a democratic Jewish state was unfounded. The demographic threat was presented to the Israeli population as one of the central and urgent justifications for the disengagement.

6. Israeli deterrence was not effective. After the withdrawals there was no real backing to the declarations regarding harsh and immediate Israeli responses to hostile enemy acts and the development of threats against it from the areas it evacuated. The enemy continued to strengthen its forces and engage in provocations, so that in the end Israel had no choice but to fulfill its deterrent threat with the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead while paying a significant price.

Conclusion

It would seem that from one withdrawal to the next the Israeli rationale for the strategy of unilateral withdrawal grew slimmer and slimmer: if it was possible to discern significant logic in the withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip had limited rationale, while the convergence plan had very little. Acknowledgment of the less than stellar results is embedded in President Shimon Peres' statement: "Had the disengagement [from the Gaza Strip] been a success, we would have repeated it in the West Bank."[19]

As an inseparable part of unilateral withdrawal, Israel was supposed to have reacted immediately and with great force to any provocation and gross violation of the security status quo, but that did not happen. Its reactions were relatively mild – until the war in Lebanon in July 2006 and Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip in December 2008. In both cases, the blow dealt by Israel had a significant impact on the enemy but did not change the trend of the enemy's growing strength or the strategic threat posed from these fronts.

As for the foreseeable future, there is no rationale for the strategy of unilateral withdrawal. At most, Israel may examine the use of this tool on the basis of tactical considerations. Apparently the right way to evacuate territories is only on the basis of a stable agreement that is in line with Israel's long term objectives.

Notes

1   Israel's presence in Lebanon was a strategy (the security zone) and there-fore differed from the temporary presence of the IDF on enemy territory in other operations.

2   When it controlled Lebanon, Syria allowed Hizbollah activity against Israel on the assumption that it provided a means of exerting pressure on Israel to arrive at a political agreement with it and with Lebanon (which was inextricably linked to Syria) on terms convenient to Damascus.

3   In an interview published on April 15, 2000 in the Egyptian *al-Ahram* just before the withdrawal, Hizbollah leader Nasrallah said that "Israel has no foundation that would allow it the possibility to exist more than a decade." In the victory speech made on May 24, 2000, in Bint Jbail, after Israel's withdrawal, he said: "Israel may have nuclear weapons and heavy weaponry, but, as God lives, it is weaker than a cobweb....There was a time when we feared the Israeli threat, its airplanes, tanks, and missile boats that encroached on our sovereignty of the skies, the land, and the air, but that time has passed and is no more." Nasrallah called on Palestinians

to follow his fighters' example: "In order to liberate your land, you don't needs tanks or airplanes. Learn from the holy martyrs; you can impose your demands on the Zionist aggressor" (Sheffi Gabbai, *Maariv*, May 26, 2000).

4   These villages are on the Israeli side of the international border. According to a 1920 agreement between France and Britain, they were Lebanese, but according to the 1923 border marking, recognized by the UN, they are in Israeli territory.

5   The settlements evacuated were Neve Dekalim, Netzer Hazani, Pe'at Sadeh, Katif, Rafiah Yam, Shirat Hayam, Shalev, Tel Katifa, Bedolah, Bnei Atzmon, Gadid, Gan Or, Ganei Tal, Kfar Yam, Kerem Atzmona, Morag, Netzarim, Elei Sinai, Dugit, Kfar Darom, and Nissanit. Four settlements in northern Samaria were also evacuated: Ganim, Kadim, Homesh, and Sa-Nur.

6   http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leade rs/2003/Address+by+PM+Ariel+Sharon+at+the+Fourth+Herzliya.htm.

7   *Haaretz*, August 19, 2005.

8   *Haaretz*, September 4, 2005.

9   *Haaretz*, August 23, 2005.

10 http://www.sela.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Archive/Speeches/2005/09/ speechB290905.htm.

11 At the State of the Nation Conference on September 28, 2005, at Tel Aviv University in memory of Maj. Gen. (ret.) Aharon Yariv, *Maariv*, September 28, 2005.

12 Itamar Inbari, *Maariv*, March 29, 2004.

13 As part of the land swap, Israel received the area in the northern Gaza Strip where today the Erez crossing and the cooperative agricultural settle-ment of Netiv Ha'asara are located, while in exchange it gave up a larger part in the eastern Gaza Strip. The amended border was in force until 1967, and was accepted by the Palestinians in the Oslo accords, Aluf Benn, *Haaretz*, September 6, 2005.

15 *Haaretz*, September 29, 2005.

16 Efraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, *Haaretz*, September 7, 2005.

17 A comparison with a similar question posed six months earlier (in April 2005) showed that the number of supporters for unilateral disengagement dropped by half (from 26.2 percent to 13.5 percent), while there was a rise among supporters of an evacuation only in the context of an agreement (from 27.5 percent to 34.3 percent) and among opponents of evacuation under any circumstance (from 37.1 percent to 41.8 percent).

18 *Maariv*, April 11, 2006.

19 Walla, October 28, 2008.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Situation Assessment for 2008-2009

Eran Etzion

Background

For the first time since its inception, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently undertook a ministry-wide political-strategic situation assessment. The purpose of the situation assessment was to identify the development of local, regional, and global trends, assess their significance, and formulate foreign policy recommendations.

To this end, the methodology was defined, 17 cross-divisional teams were established, and a three-day conference – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Conference for Policy and Strategy – convened. Once the process of integrating the work of the various groups and extracting the main findings of the situation assessment came to a close, the process of formulating the Ministry's meta-objectives and secondary goals began. The objectives, a direct outgrowth of the situation assessment, became the basis for formulating the work plans for the Ministry's divisions and delegations abroad. Finally, several critical topics were identified as action items requiring unique, concentrated, and integrative ministry-wide efforts that will be promoted separately under the close supervision of a steering committee headed by the Ministry's director-general. The complete document, including the situation assessment, the objectives, and the action items, was distributed to the political-security leadership and presented to the new government.

In undertaking its first situation assessment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs studied the experience of Israel's security institutions, the IDF Planning Division, the GSS, and the National Security Council, as

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well as that of the British Foreign Office. The methodology used at the security institutions emphasizes – and rightly so – the identification of the primary security threats and the security-military responses to these threats. As part of its job to formulate foreign policy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in addition to identifying the relevant threats in the political arena, is supposed to identify political opportunities and potential for promoting bilateral, multilateral, economic, and cultural relations, and on this basis define public diplomacy efforts and foreign aid efforts (Mashav – Israel Center for International Cooperation).

The political planning branch at the Foreign Ministry leading the project drafted an outline for an integrated product that served as the framework for the teams' work. It included building the situation assessment, identifying primary strategic trends, identifying relevant interests, assessing Israeli policy, analyzing alternatives, and drafting recommendations for action. When a first draft of its report was completed, each team met with a control group – a feedback team – comprising senior level experts in security and strategy. The team personnel, highly experienced in the political-security field, contributed significantly to focusing the product and honing its insights and recommendations.

Two months of teamwork were followed by the three-day Ministry of Foreign Affairs Conference on Policy and Strategy, where situation assessments from leading figures in the international arena were presented, including the French minister of foreign and European affairs, the former German foreign minister, the Palestinian Authority's foreign minister, the director-general of Singapore's Foreign Ministry, the head of France's political planning body, and others. In addition, over the next two days, leading officials in the Ministry, headed by Director-General Aaron Abramovich, met with Ministry personnel and the 15 senior ambassadors invited to the conference.

What follows are some central insights from the situation assessment, within the limits of the article's scope and security information requirements.

The International Arena

Regarding the international arena, the Ministry's natural field of operations, the conference dealt with central changes reflected in

diplomatic, political-security, and academic forums on the international scene, primarily since 9/11 and the start of the military campaigns against terrorism in Afghanistan and later in Iraq.

We distinguished four types of change on the international scene, all of which directly affect Israeli policy. The first is a change in the balance between the US superpower and the rising powers – China, Russia, the European Union, and possibly India as well. This issue is the subject of numerous essays and discussions in political-security establishments around the world and in academia. Although there is no consensus, not even within the Israeli establishment, it is possible to point to a clear and significant increase in the power of the "new forces," particularly China, India, and Russia. The developing inter-power system has been called multi-polar; to some it is non-polar; and others continue to claim that the decisive power of the United States ensures an unbridgeable gap between it and its rivals, precisely as has been the case since the collapse of the former Soviet Union.

Russia sees itself as the successor of the Soviet Union superpower, and despite the serious internal challenges it confronts, is working to strengthen its status vis-à-vis American dominance. The crisis over the stationing of anti-missile defense in Poland and the Czech Republic, Russia's role in the war in Georgia and the aftermath of the war; and the fallout from the Bush administration place Moscow in a relatively comfortable position versus the Obama administration. For its part, the administration requires an overall strategy towards Russia, deciding where on the conflict-compromise axis to lay its emphasis. Israeli policy toward Russia needs a continuation of the strategic dialogue, with the hope that Russia will take into consideration Israeli interests, particularly regarding arms sales to Iran and Syria.

From Israel's perspective, it is of course critically important to identify trends on shifting balances of power as precisely and early as possible, and formulate Israeli foreign policy in a way that captures not only the current situation but also strives for optimal long term strategic positioning. Even though the United States will continue to be Israel's leading strategic ally in the foreseeable future, there is major importance in expanding relations with the rising countries. Finding the appropriate balance in Israel's foreign policy on the inter-power

arena is one of the central challenges of the country's foreign policy in the years to come.

The second change on the international arena touches on the very concept of power. Until fairly recently, it was customary to assess the power of states and international elements primarily in terms of military power, or "hard power." In recent years, in part as a result of lessons learned on the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq, and as a result of the dramatic rise of China and India, it has become more and more clear that assessing power requires the inclusion and weighing of additional parameters, collectively known as "soft power,"[1] i.e., economic, technological, diplomatic, and even cultural power, whose relative weight in the total power of a nation is steadily increasing. Recently, an all-inclusive term has come into vogue – smart power[2] – which refers to the optimal combination of hard and soft power.

Traditional Israeli thinking has always emphasized hard power, and has tended to underestimate the soft power composite. This is so both in terms of intelligence assessments, whose very nature leads them to favor a military-security perspective, and in terms of processes involved in formulating Israel's actual policies, which are still largely led by the security establishment. Predictably, Israel's budgetary allocations are fully in line with this worldview. One need only mention Israel's foreign aid, a central resource in the context of soft power, budgeted at a rate that is no more than 0.068 percent of the GNP (as of 2007), in comparison with OECD nations whose average foreign aid budget is 0.46 percent of the GNP (in 2006-7). Assuming that Israel, which has begun the application process to join the OECD, will want to match the average, Israel's foreign aid budget will have to grow sevenfold (!). The Israeli cultural export budget, currently at NIS 18 million, is another discouraging example.

As part of the situation assessment, we noted that global adjustment to activities in soft power areas represents a significant opportunity for Israel. The relative advantages in hi-tech, agriculture, and R&D in renewable energy and clean-tech and the growing interest in Israeli culture of various kinds, as expressed in many international competitions, are strategic assets for Israel's foreign policy. Inter-ministry activity in conjunction with the private sector and the relevant NGOs is needed to realize the great potential of Israel's soft power. This

year, as part of its recommended action items, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has made it its goal to reexamine Israel's foreign aid strategy, a central tool for realizing soft power. In addition, political planning will attempt to construct updated indices for assessing national power and its components, in order to create improved tools for situation assessments. The need to identify and assess the significance of the global economic crisis from Israel's foreign policy perspective is a catalyst for these efforts.

The third change in the international arena touches on the types of actors currently on the stage. If in the past the international system was virtually formed by state players only, it is clear that in recent years there has been a significant increase in the role played by non-state players. These are divided into sub-national entities, such as terrorist organizations, and – in stark contrast – NGOs and other non-state players such as commercial corporations, and meta-national players such as international and regional organizations. Israel's foreign policy must formulate new approaches and methods of action appropriate to the changing arena. While this is particularly true with regard to terrorist organizations acting as semi-states such as Hamas and Hizbollah, it is also true vis-à-vis NGOs and regional and international organizations. The development of Israel's relationship with NATO is a positive example in this context, as are its effort to upgrade relations with the EU.

Hamas and Hizbollah exemplify the sub-state threat. Notwithstanding the differences between them and between their host territories, they operate on the basis of similar guidelines (many of them shaped by Iran). Particularly noticeable are: the consistent attempt to blur the possibility that they might be the responsible political party; military deployment within the civilian population; and the drive to wear down the Israeli home front using high trajectory fire. These guidelines neutralize the Israeli capability for quick decision, which is part of the Israeli security concept, and enable a significant military and civilian defeat emerging as a strategic victory, especially given the gaps between the sides. The sub-state threat has become far more significant in light of its being part of a wide campaign against state actors, specifically, Iran and Syria. Through their proxies these states benefit from prolonged indirect deterrence of Israel and reduced

threats against them as states, as well as the possibility to threaten through expanding the campaign and waging, if necessary, a campaign on two fronts (northern and southern) and as such challenge Israel even further.

The fourth change refers to the international agenda. Recent years have added cross-border global security issues, in particular the proliferation of non-conventional weapons and the struggle against terrorism, to the classic national security issues such as territorial disputes. In addition, the international agenda abounds with a series of relatively new crises and challenges, among them climate, food, water, development of the African continent, and the waves of immigration from developing countries to the West. These issues, called "new agendas," have the potential to expand Israel's foreign policy agenda. If we direct Israeli foreign aid as well as part of our diplomatic-economic resources to these issues, we will gain significantly both in essence (the export of Israeli values) and in image, as a member of the family of developed and enlightened nations. Today Israel is not identified with significant activity in these spheres, both because of the scant resources allocated and because the security agenda dominates Israel's foreign policy and public diplomacy. In this field too Israeli foreign policy must strive for an appropriate balance between the old and new agendas.

Thus the essence of the situation assessment regarding the changes on the international arena can be summarized by the word "expansion" in terms of the number of power players, the types of new non-state players, the components of relevant power, and the new issues infusing the global agenda. This expansion requires the development of new diplomatic responses across the spectrum: in bilateral, multilateral, public, and economic diplomacy, and in foreign aid.

The Regional Arena

In terms of the near Middle East, we examined the political-strategic threats, the political opportunities, and the political process as part of the situation assessment. As expected, Iran stood out as the primary threat. The strategy of regional hegemony pursued by Iran is the primary strategic influence in this region. The Iranian threat with its four components – the nuclear project, the support for terrorism, the

attempts to undermine pragmatic Arab regimes, and the ideological-theological threat – remains at the core of Israel's foreign policy agenda.

In recent years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been waging an extensive diplomatic campaign to undermine the Iranian nuclear program politically. This campaign seeks to increase awareness of the severity and immediacy of the threat, its long term significance, and the need for extensive sanctions against Iran in order to allow an effective diplomatic endeavor. This campaign will continue through 2009 with even greater force than before.

Iran's support for terrorist organizations on different fronts (Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Iraq, and elsewhere) is a second source of threat requiring – alongside the security response – a political response. Since the start of the campaign in Iraq, the awareness of the US, Britain, and the international community with regard to this aspect of the Iranian threat has increased, but many other states do not attribute enough weight to this Iranian activity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is working to put the issue on the international agenda while making use of UN Security Council Resolution 1747, which forbids the export of Iranian weapons.

Iran's subversive activities against pragmatic Arab nations are another component of its drive for regional hegemony that indirectly damages Israeli interests. The fact that Iran now represents a common threat to Israel and the pragmatic Arab nations contains important potential for political cooperation. The clear support of the pragmatic Arab nations for the Israeli-Palestinian political process is an example, as are the exchanges of verbal blows between Iran and Egypt and Saudi Arabia in light of Operation Cast Lead; Iran's open support for Hamas; and its attempt to split the Arab camp and the Arab League.

The ideological-theological dimension of the Iranian threat is the least understood and perhaps the most complex in terms of a potential response. The total delegitimization of Israel's existence, which lies at the heart of Iran's policy, is based on deep ideological foundations and attracts growing popular support not only among Shiites but also among Sunnis. Alongside the United States ("the great Satan"), Israel ("the little Satan") is the primary focus for incitement and subversion in a variety of ways. In fact, Iran makes effective use of a type of negative soft power, which is also translated into hard power, such as the terrorist

attacks by Iranian satellite organizations inspired by the same radical ideology. In the face of a complex and abstract threat such as this, Israel must develop an appropriate response and it too must come from the realm of soft power.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is mandated to identify and seize political opportunities. As part of the situation assessment and beyond the Iranian challenge, a number of important opportunities were identified, including the formulation of a pragmatic Arab camp with at least some overlapping of common interests with Israel; the success of American stabilization attempts in Iraq; and the existing window of opportunity for a peace agreement with Syria and an agreement with the pragmatic Palestinian camp.

Israel's strategic objective for 2008-9 in the Palestinian arena was to reach a stable political agreement with the Palestinian Authority and overturn or at least weaken Hamas' control of the Gaza Strip. In light of the split between the West Bank and Gaza, most efforts were directed separately to the respective areas. Israeli policy in the West Bank was two-pronged: first was the Annapolis process, which did not achieve a permanent agreement yet succeeded in sustaining political momentum on the Palestinian issue and earning international support, including among the pragmatic Arab states. Second, efforts continued with the help of the international community to advance state institution building in the West Bank and improve the daily life of the Palestinian population – while insisting on the Palestinian fulfillment of their security obligations and preventing the consolidation of Hamas influence in the West Bank.

The primary objectives for Gaza were preventing terrorism and rocket fire, and preserving the international system's adherence to the Quartet's three conditions for acknowledging Hamas' legitimacy. Israel's ceasefire with Hamas was not renewed in December 2008, and the expansion of violations by Hamas led to Operation Cast Lead. The assessment was that the results of the fighting should be leveraged to strengthen Israeli deterrence, establish a stable security situation without any agreement with Hamas, and intensify efforts to prevent Hamas' rearmament. It was recommended that the Egyptian and international role in preventing smuggling be strengthened, and that the international effort be bolstered to prevent a humanitarian crisis

in Gaza. Pressure on the civilian population should be reduced with the cooperation of the PA and in a way that will not translate into a strengthening of Hamas.

The common interests between Israel and Egypt and some of the Arab states (usually called pragmatic even though this label does not necessarily fit all of them) is not a new phenomenon. The support of these nations for the political process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and Syria was already expressed at the Madrid conference and later in the Oslo and Annapolis frameworks. However, the new element in the equation is the sharpened sense of the Iranian threat among the pragmatic nations. This sense, in recent years expressed behind closed doors, has become more vocal, in part by means of unprecedented public declarations by Arab leaders. Without a doubt this state of affairs represents an important political opportunity for Israel, even though it is clear that the familiar obstacles to Arab-Israeli cooperation have not disappeared.

In the past, the Iraqi arena represented a source of significant threats against Israel. Since the beginning of the American campaign in 2003 it has became a Shiite-Sunni arena of struggle and a strategic test for President Bush's war on terrorism. In recent years, many eulogized the chances for success of this campaign. Today, it is clear that the United States succeeded in learning operative lessons and creating a real opportunity for long term stability in this complex arena. The achievements of the war create an opportunity for a positive change even beyond the borders of Iraq, and for creating new alliances and pooling the interests of the United States, Iraq on the day after the US withdrawal, other Middle Eastern states, and possibly even Israel.

A significant opportunity exists also with regard to Iraq's northwestern neighbor, Syria. The regime of Bashar al-Asad, which has successfully maneuvered between the radical and pragmatic camps, has for some time been signaling its desire to forge a closer relationship with the United States and to negotiate for peace with Israel. The outgoing Israeli government identified this opportunity and opened relations-building talks with Syria through Turkish mediation. The expected change in American policy towards Syria, which is connected to the process of exiting Iraq and is in keeping with the engagement approach, may create an opportunity for a change in policy towards

Syria that would allow realization of peace negotiations with Israel. As for Israel's own interests in such negotiations, it is clear that unlike prior rounds of negotiations it will not be possible to settle for a bilateral discussion, but it will be necessary to undertake a thorough and decisive investigation of Syria's strategy in the comprehensive regional context, and in particular the future of its relations with Iran, Hizbollah, Hamas, and various Palestinian terrorist organizations.

It was my privilege to participate in the Israeli-Syrian negotiations at Wye Plantation in 1996. Even then, the head of the Syrian delegation, Walid al-Mu'alim, today Syria's foreign minister, said that in the long term, the clear choice for Syria was either a treaty with Iran or one with the United States. It would seem that in the current geo-political context, Syria will have to make a clear choice.

Turkey is an additional regional actor that has bolstered its status in recent years. It continues to be an important strategic partner for Israel, despite its political and public escalation vis-à-vis Israel following Operation Cast Lead. This escalation ebbed over time, and relations were gradually restored to their previous balance. Turkey is a leading regional power and has a key role on the regional arenas of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the nuclear and terrorism challenges. Turkey also has a main role on the Iranian issue, although its own interests dictate a cautious and "neutral" posture towards Tehran. In the short and medium term Turkey will continue to be a desired export market and security cooperation partner for Israel, and in the long term the "infrastructures corridor" may be a platform to upgrade relations. The potential to advance common interests in the Israel-Turkey-US triangle may grow under the Obama administration. The civilian aspect to the relations must be strengthened, and the political dialogue widened and expanded to other areas, including possible opportunities for Turkish assistance to the Palestinian economy in the West Bank.

In contrast to the trend of expansion characterizing the international arena, it seems that in the Middle East it is possible to point to a trend of contraction and convergence around a central focus – Iran. This, however, does not suggest a reduction of the threats to Israel, since the nuclear threat and the Iran-centered radical axis, in its symmetric and asymmetric components, have widened the overall security threat in Israel's strategic environment. An additional important characteristic

of the regional arena in the coming year is the fact that it is an election year. Following the elections in the United States and Israel, there are upcoming elections in Lebanon and Iran (in June), and later in Afghanistan (August), Iraq (December), and finally – if held as planned – in the PA (January 2010).

Guidelines for a Current Israeli Strategy

The threats, led by Iran in its various guises, were identified, as were the opportunities, chiefly the formation of a pragmatic Arab camp to counteract this principal threat. Next, an Israeli political strategy is required that will encompass an optimal response to the threats and an intelligent use of the opportunities, while weighing the available resources (conventional resources such as budgets and manpower, as well as resources harder to quantify such as attentive leadership on the international arena, the ability to create legitimacy and enlist regional and international support for Israeli moves, and so on).

The situation assessment shaped our view that Israel's political strategy must stand on two pillars: deterrence and resolution.

The concept of deterrence is charged and complex, all the more so in the context of terrorist organizations and sub-state actors. This is one of the greatest challenges faced by the shapers of policy not only in Israel but also in the United States and among all states fighting terrorism. Despite the built-in difficulty of creating and maintaining deterrence in such cases, there is no practical alternative that can replace this. With regard to Iran, Syria, and the sub-state actors such as Hizbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and others, a policy based on strong ongoing deterrence is required. Deterring Iran from realizing its strategy of regional hegemony in all its forms, particularly its military nuclear program, is the primary challenge for the "likeminded" nations headed by the United States, including Israel.

Alongside deterrence, a strategy of resolution is also required, aimed at creating a fundamental and long term change in the policy of the enemy side. Such a strategy requires the construction of a political setting that would be acceptable to Israel, the United States, additional relevant powers, and also at least some of the pragmatic Arab states. Existing political frameworks (e.g., the Madrid understandings, the Oslo accords, the Roadmap, President Bush's letters, negotiations conducted

under the Annapolis framework, and elements of the Arab initiative) provide a possible base for shaping an updated Israeli resolution strategy, both with regard to states such as Syria and Lebanon, and with regard to the pragmatists in the Palestinian arena.

The geographically and politically divided Palestinian arena serves as kind of microcosm embodying both threats and opportunities, and will continue to require a dual strategy combining deterrence with regard to Hamas and the terrorist organizations and an ongoing search for a resolution with PLO pragmatists headed by Abu Mazen. The immediate results of Operation Cast Lead and the weakening of Hamas on the one hand, and the first successes of the process of constructing Palestinian security forces and institutions in the West Bank on the other, create an infrastructure for shaping an updated strategy.

Balancing deterrence and resolution, determining their respective demands, prioritizing interests and challenges on the various arenas, achieving maximum coordination with the Obama administration and other powers, and taking maximum advantage of the opportunities with respect to the pragmatic Arab nations – all of these are fundamental conditions for shaping Israel's regional and international strategy.

The situation assessment by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs maps the threats and the opportunities, and proposes the appropriate guidelines for an updated Israeli foreign policy. As the new Israeli government settles in, it will embark on its own annual situation assessment for the year 2009-10 while learning lessons in terms of methodology and contents. From the experience of the British Foreign Office, we learned that the value of situation assessments grows from one year to the next as the Ministry and the political system gain experience and assimilate proper methodologies and analytical approaches.

Notes

1. Soft power is a term coined by Joseph Nye in 1990 in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. It refers to the ability to attain certain goals through cooption and attraction rather than through force or by payment.
2. The term "smart power," coined by Joseph Nye in 2006, is defined as the ability to combine hard power with soft power as a leading strategy. Recently, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted the administration's intention to use smart power to deal with American foreign policy challenges.

A Reversal in Israel-EU Relations?

Oded Eran

Background

Early 2009 saw the end of a four-year period of positive growth in Israel's relations with the EU. In recent months a bitter exchange of declarations has occupied the front pages of Israeli newspapers regarding Europe's blocking efforts to upgrade the bilateral relations. At the heart of the argument is the EU policy tightly linking the progress in its relations with Israel to progress in the political process between Israel and its neighbors, and the reluctance of Israel's new government to publicly declare support for the two-state solution.

Beginning in late 2004 the two sides overcame the tense and chilly atmosphere that developed in the wake of the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations of 1999-2001 and the start of the second intifada in 2000. The positive turn was marked by the bilateral agreement (Action Plan) reached by the two sides in late 2004 in the context of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The Action Plan aimed at upgrading relations beyond the 1995 Association Agreement. This was a major step towards fulfillment of the 1994 Essen conclusions that "the European Council considers that Israel, on account of its high level of economic development, should enjoy special status in its relations with the EU on the basis of reciprocity and common interest."

The next four years – 2005-2008 – saw not only the thawing of relations, but the development of a political dialogue, the expansion of economic relations, and Israel's joining new European programs such as Galileo. The following factors can explain the profound change of direction:

1. In August 2005 Israel implemented its unilateral decision to withdraw completely from the Gaza Strip and dismantle the

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Jewish settlements there. The EU, like the rest of the international community, hailed this Israeli decision.

2. The complete withdrawal from the Egypt-Gaza Strip border required the monitoring of the Rafah Crossing. Israel agreed to the deployment of a European unit – the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM).

3. Israel agreed to the EU providing assistance to the Palestinian Authority security forces. This has been carried out by EUPOL COPPS, which was established in late 2005.

4. At the end of the Second Lebanon War in August 2006, Israel asked for the strengthening of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the deployment of European naval and land forces. The three cases, EUBAM, EU COPPS, and UNIFIL, though not representing a new Israeli strategy towards Europe, can be described as a softer attitude towards Europe's involvement in the Middle East political process.

5. While initially rejecting the Quartet (which in addition to the EU includes the United States, Russia, and the United Nations) as a political interlocutor, Israel has come to accept the Quartet's role, especially in the economic development of the West Bank and Gaza.

6. In May 2004, ten new members joined the EU, eight of which are East European countries that, once released from the Soviet Union's grip, expressed a friendly attitude towards Israel and moderated the stance held by the fifteen mostly West European members.

7. In January 2006 Hamas won a victory in the Palestinian general elections, prompting both the EU and the Quartet to formulate conditions for accepting Hamas. These included Hamas' renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations.[1] Thus the EU allayed Israel's fears that the EU would use the election results to open an unconditional dialogue with Hamas.

8. At the November 2007 Annapolis summit, Israel and the Palestinians agreed to enter negotiations towards "a peace treaty, resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues."

9. The terror activities in Madrid (March 11, 2004) and London (July 7, 2005), and the Danish cartoon affair (September 30, 2005) aggravated the relations between Europe and several Muslim

countries, increasing, at least temporarily, the understanding of the situation in which Israel finds itself.

10. Israel supported the dialogue with Iran that the EU initiated through three of its members, France, Germany, and Great Britain, to bring an end to Iran's military nuclear efforts.

Europe's Reaction to Operation Cast Lead

Europe's reactions to Operation Cast Lead developed with time and should be read as initially dealing only with Israel's military operation, but gradually becoming heavily influenced by two major developments. The first, still connected to the operation, was the growing doubt and criticism in Israel itself; the second was the election campaign in Israel, the February 10 election results, and the formation of the new Israeli government.

Phase I – Israel's aerial attacks on Gaza –December 27, 2008

On November 4, 2008, six Hamas members were killed when Israel attacked a tunnel that it alleged was to be used to cross into Israel. Hamas considered it a "major breach of the truce" and on December 20 declared that it would not extend the ceasefire. On December 27, following several days of dozens of rockets fired daily on Israeli population centers, Israel launched aerial attacks on Gaza, and during the night of January 3-4, 2009, Israeli ground forces entered Gaza.

Europe's immediate reaction was balanced and cautious. Bernard Kouchner, France's foreign minister (France held the EU presidency until December 31, 2008) affirmed "that only a renewal of the truce broken by rocket fire from Gaza on Israeli territory can guarantee the minimum conditions acceptable to the people of Gaza."[2] The foreign minister of the Czech Republic, the incoming holder of the EU presidency, also issued a statement on the same day: "I consider it unacceptable that the villages, in which civilians live, have been shelled. Therefore, Israel has an inalienable right to defend itself against such attacks. The shelling from the Hamas´s side makes it impossible to consider this organization as a partner for negotiations and to lead any political dialogue with it." The Czech foreign minister also said that there is a need to think together with Israel how to change the living conditions in Gaza.[3] On December 28, 2008 German chancellor Angela

Merkel said it was Israel's legitimate right to protect its people, and that Hamas was responsible for the situation.

This mild and certainly uncritical attitude to Operation Cast Lead in its early phase can be explained in several ways. First, the aerial attack could be seen by Europe as Israel not reentering into Gaza. Second, Europe could not disregard the cumulative impact of the rocket attacks on Israeli populated areas. Some European foreign ministers were actually in Sderot, the town most shelled by Palestinians, when rockets struck it. Third, Europe can accept an Israeli attack on the Hamas political and military infrastructure because it views this movement as a challenge to the Palestinian Authority under Abu Mazen and Salam Fayyad. Fourth, Operation Cast Lead began in the "slowest" week in Europe, between Christmas and New Year's.

Phase II – From January 3, 2009 to the end of the operation, January 18, 2009

The short period of a low keyed European reaction came to an end once the Israeli ground forces went into action (January 3, 2009). Europe returned from the New Year's holiday, the anti-Israel lobby mobilized itself, and news about innocent Palestinian casualties began to multiply. From Athens to Madrid thousands took to the streets to demonstrate with banners equating Israel to Nazi Germany, labeling Israel's action genocide, and calling for an immediate end to the operation. In some demonstrations (Athens, for example) the police had to use force and tear gas.

The Czech presidency warned that "even the undisputable rights of the state to defend itself does not allow actions which largely affect civilians," saying later it was "profoundly disturbed" by the loss of civilian life at the school in Jabalya.[4] This statement also reflected a growing concern with the humanitarian crisis that developed as the flow of food and medical supplies was interrupted. On January 7, 2009, the presidency issued a call to Israel to open a humanitarian corridor.[5]

Britain's secretary for foreign affairs David Miliband spoke on January 7 on both the "smuggling of illegal weapons into Gaza that are then fired into Israel" and allowing humanitarian aid, but already at that stage Miliband was referring to a disproportionate Israeli reaction,

a view he attributed to his 26 colleagues as well.[6] A similar statement was made by Sweden's foreign minister Carl Bildt the following day.

At this point there were still vast differences between Europe's official reactions and those of the demonstrators and media. The most striking evidence of this was the visit of six European leaders to Jerusalem on January 18, 2009. They included President Sarkozy and the prime ministers of Germany, Britain, Italy, Spain, and the Czech Republic. None was critical of Israel and none mentioned any violation by the IDF or the issue of disproportionate firepower. Some mentioned stopping the flow of illegal arms into Gaza and some raised the need to allow humanitarian assistance to enter Gaza.[7]

Phase III – Since the end of the military campaign in Gaza
Two major developments prompted the deterioration in Europe's official attitude. On the one hand, reports were published about the use of controversial equipment and ammunition, allegations of excessive use of force, abuses by Israeli soldiers against innocent Palestinian civilians, and the sense of growing self-criticism in Israel. On the other hand, as the election campaign heated up in Israel, Israeli political leaders who ultimately formed the new government on March 31, 2009 distanced themselves from the vision of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The fact that criticism of the behavior of the IDF on the use of certain kinds of equipment and ammunition gave credence to some allegations and accusations, and Israel's slow reaction and willingness to investigate them, exacerbated the situation to the extent that in some countries, notably England, there could be indictments issued against Israeli soldiers and politicians. Certain Israeli high ranking officers are refraining from entering European Union member states for fear of being indicted. Indeed, on January 26, at its first meeting after the end of the Gaza campaign, the General Affairs and External Relations Council of Ministers concluded: "The European Union…will follow investigations into the alleged violations of international humanitarian law."[8] It is quite possible that the statement reflects the weakening of the resolve of some EU member states to oppose petitions for trials of some Israeli soldiers for their alleged violations during the fighting in Gaza.

Yet the strong message to Israel that what was really important to the EU was the idea of the two-state solution was made by the prime minister of Spain, José Luis Zapatero, already at the end of the military confrontation on January 18 during his (first) visit to Israel with his colleagues. "Spain and the European Union," he said, "are strong advocates of peace, a just peace process that will guarantee the safety of Israel and enable the birth of a Palestinian state."[9] Similarly, the EU foreign ministers concluded their January 2009 meeting saying that "the European Union is convinced that an end to the current crisis must be followed by renewed and urgent efforts by the Israeli and Palestinian parties as well as the international community to establish an independent, democratic, continuous and viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza."[10]

The results of the February 10, 2009 elections in Israel and the swearing-in of the new Israeli government on March 31, 2009 could not be seen by the European Union as steps towards the implementation of the two-state solution.

The Impact on EU-Israel Relations

EU-Israel relations seem to be heading to their pre-2004 positions. The prime casualty is the upgrading of relations. The two sides were working on the 2nd generation ENP Action Plan. The Association Council, which formally governs the relations, gave the signal to start work towards upgrading. Though Israel expressed satisfaction at the time, the document that summed up the June 16, 2008 meeting includes the key sentence, "The process of developing closer EU-Israel partnership needs to be, and to be seen, in the context of the broad range of our common interests and objectives, which notably include the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the implementation of the two-state solution."[11]

The Council of the EU Foreign Ministers, which met on December 8, 2008, approved the June 2008 document and according to the French Presidency, "the Ministers approved the principle of reinforcing relations between the EU and Israel, particularly regarding political dialogue, and insisted that this deepening of relations encourage the Israeli authorities to do more to improve living conditions on the ground (the immediate freezing of settlement activities, opening of points of

passage into Gaza, reducing the traffic restrictions that are strangling the economy and hampering the everyday lives of Palestinians), and contribute to advancing the peace process."[12]

The intention to upgrade relations was weakened even before the operation in Gaza, as the European Parliament decided not to decide whether to accept the proposition. It is doubtful whether the EU Parliament will overcome the hurdle of Operation Cast Lead and the new Israeli government's position when and if a new discussion and vote reach Parliament's floor. The absence of the reference in the new Israeli government's platform to the two-state solution almost seals the fate of such a vote and it is unlikely to be taken again in the foreseeable future. Israel's ambition to be more deeply integrated into EU programs and projects, and eventually certain institutions, will have to be shelved for now. In the EU view, upgrading the bilateral relations was always conditional on progress in the process of reaching a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and it remains the EU approach. The next EU presidencies of Sweden, Spain, and Belgium are unlikely to push forward the upgrading of relations with Israel.

The recent report by the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council[13] will further diminish the prospects of an early upgrade. This report, part of the Commission's working paper on the progress made in 2008 in the European Neighborhood Policy, heavily criticizes Israel for unsatisfactory dealings with the promotion and development of the Arab minority in Israel itself, little progress in Israel's cooperation with the EU on a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, growth of settlements, no progress in access and movement of Palestinians, hindering EU assistance to Gaza, and so on.

This conditionality will not be mitigated even under an exceptionally friendly EU presidency of the Czech Republic. The current political leadership in the Czech Republic entertained the idea of holding an EU-Israel summit during its presidency as a symbol of upgrading the relations. Summits are held between the EU and it major parties such as the US, Russia, and India. Holding one with Israel would certainly be more than just a symbolic gesture. Like the second generation of the Action Plan, the EU-Israel summit idea will be shelved indefinitely.[14]

It will be interesting to see how the new Israeli government relates to the EU and to the expected setbacks described above. Both the new

Israeli prime minister and the new foreign minister have very little experience as far as Europe is concerned. Given that most of the EU institutional leaders – the majority of the Commission, the President, and the EU Parliament and the High Representative – will change during 2009, some cooling off period would have followed Operation Cast Lead anyway, even if the Israeli government remained committed to the two-state solution. Under these circumstances the new leaders of Israeli foreign policy may resort to seeking support from potential allies among the member states such as the president of France and the prime minister of Italy.

A potential bone of contention could develop around Europe's attitude to Hamas. The EU has hitherto adhered to the Quartet's policy of not conducting a political dialogue with Hamas, making it conditional upon the organization's acceptance of Israel and the previously signed agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, and a renunciation of violence. In the wake of Operation Cast Lead and the attempts to create a Palestinian national unity government, some European foreign ministers (notably the French and Spanish) have softened the conditionality, using the Arab initiative of 2002 as the test for Hamas. Since no Israeli government has ever accepted this initiative, the dilution of the conditions set for Hamas and the new, much lower threshold could add tension to EU-Israel relations. If the EU decides not to push for a change in the Quartet's conditionality, this should be attributed to Egypt's objections sooner than to those voiced by Israel.

Europe's eagerness to enhance trans-Atlantic relations following the election of President Obama may affect Europe's attitude to Israel and its new government. However, this is not necessarily a one-way street, and the EU may also influence the US approach, especially on issues such as the settlements, the restrictions on the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank, and violations of human rights. In their first formal meeting in Prague on April 5, 2009, the EU heads of state and government and the US president announced that "the EU and the US both support…a forward movement in the Peace Process through the Quartet towards a two-state solution."[15] The President then made a similar commitment at the Turkish Parliament in Ankara, sending a clear message to everyone, especially to the new government in Israel.

Calls for academic and economic boycotts against Israelis and Israeli products were limited and unsuccessful before Operation Cast Lead. At this point, they have not gathered momentum, but newly heightened tensions, terror activities, and tougher Israeli reactions may result in more successful boycotts in certain countries, especially in those with significant Muslim communities.[16]

The already lame and almost defunct EuroMed cooperation will suffer further from a potential deterioration in EU-Israel relations. The first Netanyahu government, which began in 1996, triggered an Arab retreat from the Barcelona Process, at that time in its very early stages, having been born just a few months earlier. The Barcelona Process has effectively not recuperated since then and the situation became even more complicated with the addition of the French initiative of the Mediterranean Union of July 13, 2008.[17] The growing gap between Israel under the new government and the Arab Mediterranean states will cause further paralysis in the activities of this new framework. One other potential result may be the strengthening of EU relations with sub-regions, bypassing Israel. Such a policy is being developed towards North Africa, not necessarily because of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but tensions between Israel and its immediate neighbors may encourage South Mediterranean EU members, such as Spain or France, to push ahead ties with North African states, regardless of whether similar progress is achieved with Israel.

Conclusion

Operation Cast Lead in itself would have had limited impact on EU-Israel relations, in spite of some wear and tear resulting from the allegations on the use of certain weapons, human rights abuses, and a perception of Israel's use of disproportionate force. A serious Israeli investigation into these allegations would have done much to reduce the damage. An active political campaign that would have brought, for example, senior Israeli politicians to European capitals and European media might have helped diminish the criticism leveled against Israel. But Israel plunged into the election campaign soon after Operation Cast Lead and the election results will overshadow relations in the near future.

Notes

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1   Quartet statements can be found on the US State Department website. See also Council of the European Union 5565/06 (presse 22) of January 31, 2006.
2   www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/article, December 28, 2008.
3   http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/en/issues_and_press/events_and_issues/press_releases/index.html, December 28, 2008. Later the Czech presidency "balanced" the statement, saying the right of self-defense does not allow actions affecting civilians.
4   www.eu2009.cz/eu/news.
5   http://www.eu2009.cz/en/news-and-documents/cfsp-statements/eu-presidency-statement-on-the-current-situation-in-gaza-4960/.
6   Sky News, January 7, 2009.
7   www.regeringen.se/sb/d/7956/a/118274.
8   5 to1/09 (Phase 18).
9   http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2009/Statements_PM_Olmert_European_leaders_18-Jan-2009.htm.
10 http://www.consilium.eu.int/uedocs/NewsWord/en/gena/105561.doc.
11 Document of the General Secretariat of the Council, Brussels, June 16, 2009, article 6 in the statement of the European Union.
12 www.eu2008.fr Results of the General Affairs and External Relations Council. The French Presidency's statement omitted the reference that appeared in the official conclusions of this meeting. The omission can be attributed, as explained to this author by one connected to the EU commission, to the request by Israel's then-minister of foreign affairs, who thought it could damage her electoral prospects.
13 The report was published on April 23 – Com (2009) 188/3 and SEC (2009) 516/2.
14 Karel Schwarzenberg, the Czech foreign minister told the Czech newspaper *Lidové Noviny* on 31 March, 2009 that he was afraid that the summit would not take place.
15 Council of the European Union, April 5, 2009 8482/09 (Presse 84).
16 For an extensive discussion of the potential boycott effectiveness see *The Marker,* February 6, 2009.
17 The 1995 Barcelona Process was the EU initiative to strengthen its relations with the southern flank of the Mediterranean. President Sarkozy launched his initiative during the French presidential campaign. It was reluctantly adopted by the EU.

Israel and Egypt: What Went Wrong?

Shlomo Gazit

Israel recently marked the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of its peace agreement with Egypt. Three decades are a significant period of time that invites retrospection and assessment. Back in March 1979 there were those who hoped that the agreement was the harbinger of a new era in the region, a breakthrough that would bring about a fundamental change in Israel's relations with the Arab world. This did not happen, and so the question is – what went wrong? Why were expectations not met?

Allow me to go straight to the conclusion – nothing went wrong. From the start there was never a chance, and the reason lies in the positions and approaches of the two sides. The Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement did not take off, and the responsibility rests on the shoulders of both parties. Despite the impressive label "peace agreement" between the two countries, in practice Israel arrived at a situation of non-war. It was Egypt that could have adopted a different approach and a different policy towards Israel, a policy of warm and real peace, a policy of coexistence. The Israeli people wanted and hoped for peace between the two peoples and hoped to see an end to the age of hostility, but Israel was unable to impose this on the Egyptians. President Sadat's initiative did not stem from an aspiration for peace with Israel. His visit to Jerusalem resulted from his desire to change Egypt's national strategy and move away from a military effort towards rehabilitation of the Egyptian economy and society, but he could not do so without restoring the Sinai to the Egyptian homeland.

Israel is not exempt from responsibility either. Over the last thirty years decisions and steps were taken in Jerusalem that contributed to

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the unfriendly relations between the two countries. These were steps that were not supportive of coexistence, although it is highly unlikely that the result would ultimately have been different even if Israel had desisted from such moves, as long as Israel has not settled the conflict with Syria, Lebanon, and – particularly – the Palestinians. And even then, as much as this can be estimated, the maximum Israel could have achieved was normalization and coexistence relations, without any chance of "a warm peace." Recognition of the right of a Zionist entity to exist in the heart of an Arab-Muslim Middle East might be possible only after several generations of cold peace and normalization.

Military Intelligence's Assessment on the Eve of the Agreement

I served as head of Military Intelligence during President Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem, and it was my responsibility to present our intelligence assessment to the government. When we learned of the intended visit there were differences of opinion between the Intelligence Corps and Prime Minister Menahem Begin and members of his Cabinet. We differed on four points:

- We estimated that Egypt would not accept an agreement that did not include full Israeli withdrawal to the international border set by the British Mandate.
- We said that Egypt would not accept any continued Israeli presence (military or civilian) in the Sinai after the implementation of the agreement between the sides.
- We assessed that the Egyptians would demand that the bilateral peace agreement be part of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace agreement, and that the Israeli commitment would include Israel's withdrawal along all borders with the neighboring Arab states, including in the Palestinian arena.
- Finally, we felt that there was no chance of developing warm relations between the two countries and the two peoples as long as all the other problems of the Arab-Israeli conflict were not solved.

The first two points related to aspects of the bilateral agreement, and the latter two dealt with the larger matrix of future relations between the two countries. Unfortunately, we in the Intelligence Corps were proven right.

The Egyptian Position

Egypt did not change its attitude towards Israel following Sadat's visit or after signing the peace agreement. Egypt refused to recognize Israel's existence as a sovereign country in the region. Egypt – like the other Arab states – considers Israel a foreign element in religious, social, cultural, and political terms. This attitude also embodies suspicion of Israel as a spearhead of Western imperialism that seeks to control the Middle East and the Third World. Furthermore, one cannot ignore two generations of wars with Israel, of humiliating defeats inflicted by tiny Israel, and the inability of the Arab Goliath to crush the Israeli David.

Egypt's reservations from and aversion to drawing closer to Israel were reflected on all levels:

- President Mubarak, who has headed the political establishment, has abstained from visiting Israel (aside from attending Yitzhak Rabin's funeral) since assuming the presidency in 1981. The entire Egyptian leadership (and not just the political leadership) has adopted the same policy of shunning Israel. The most striking and unfortunate boycott is that of the Egyptian academic establishment.
- Since the signing of the peace agreement, Egypt has recalled its ambassador to Israel twice. Over the years Egypt has mostly been represented in Israel by a "proxy." On the other hand, Israel's ambassador in Cairo lives in almost complete isolation in political, social, and physical terms.
- The economic ties between the two countries are maintained at the lowest possible level. Not only, for example, do we not see Egyptians visiting Israel; there is almost no "third party" tourism, i.e., foreign citizens who combine a visit to both countries as part of a natural package.
- The Egyptian media is hostile to Israel. You will not hear one positive word, and not just on political issues. To the contrary – we find endless fabricated tales designed to present Israel and Israelis in dark and ugly colors.

Relations between the two countries have known their ups and downs over the last thirty years. These developments were influenced by and reflected changes that occurred in the region and in Egypt itself, and naturally were influenced by Israeli clashes in Lebanon and in the Palestinian arena. Nevertheless, even during the calmest

periods there was no warming of relations and there was little beyond various symbolic gestures that harbored no intention to fundamentally change the relations temperament. Still, the actual peace agreement has remained stable, and we have almost never heard calls to rescind it, even when crises occurred in the arena.

Three groups in the Egyptian public reject Israel's very existence. The first is the Islamic group, which considers *shari'a* the focus of Egyptian life. From its perspective, the religious dimension outweighs the pragmatic political Egyptian element. The second group embraces Nasserite political ideology, and aims to unite all Arabs of the region and free them of Western imperialism and any imprint of Western lifestyle. The third group embraces Egyptian nationalism and wants to see Egypt lead the region's nations. For them, Egypt has paid a heavy price for its separate peace with Israel. For over a decade Egypt was completely ostracized by the Arab world and lost a range of positions at the core of Arab politics. One should not wonder, therefore, that all three groups believe that Egypt's relations with Israel constitute an obstacle to its regional aspirations.

In 1982 Cairo recalled its Israeli ambassador in response to the war in Lebanon. A new ambassador was appointed eleven years later, following the signing of the Oslo Accords. That ambassador was also recalled with the eruption of the al-Aqsa intifada in 2000. In addition, there are almost no joint economic projects between the countries. The few that do exist operate in almost "underground" conditions. Israel is not invited to participate in international conferences and conventions, and even at the Egyptian book fair there is no room for books from Israel. Israel's main bone of contention, however, relates to the Egyptian media, which is largely controlled by the government in Cairo. Israel is portrayed in the media in a distorted manner, and television dramas are particularly severe in this regard. And on other matters, an Israeli citizen was arrested and imprisoned in Egypt for eight years after being falsely accused of spying, and Egypt chose to turn a blind eye and do nothing about the smuggling of arms into the Gaza Strip. Israel believes that if it wanted, Cairo could certainly have prevented the smuggling.

> Egypt – like the other Arab states – considers Israel a foreign element in religious, social, cultural, and political terms.

Nevertheless the government in Cairo, which abstains from provoking extreme Muslim groups that endanger the regime, understands that it is beneficial to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. This explains Egypt's involvement in the Arab peace initiative (an antithesis to the Khartoum resolution of 1967) and its efforts to resolve the situation in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli Role

Israel has also contributed to the situation. Four "transgressions" are worthy of note. First, Israel did not live up to Egypt's expectations of treating the bilateral agreement as an initial stage and as a lever for achieving additional agreements, which in the spirit of the Camp David framework was designed to reach agreements with Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians as well. Second, Israel's military might, and particularly Israel's nuclear arms, constitute an intolerable threat from Egypt's point of view. Third, Israel took a number of unilateral steps that embarrassed Egypt and unsettled Cairo's standing in the Arab world. Finally, Israel took a number of steps that hurt Egypt's honor.

The Camp David memorandum of understanding from 1978 included two parts. The first addressed the elements of the bilateral peace agreement, while the second outlined a framework for a solution to the conflict with all the other Arab parties. The most important point of the second part referred to the establishment of full Palestinian autonomy on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, whereby – after five years – an agreed solution to the Palestinian problem was to be reached.

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Mr. Begin's government of the early 1980s did not intend to enter serious peace talks with Syria or the Palestinians. The government's position proposed something else – "peace" for "peace." Moreover, the prime minister passed a resolution in the Knesset annexing the Golan Heights to Israel, and the message thereby conveyed to the other side was clear. With regard to the Palestinians, while Israel did hold talks with Egypt and the United States about granting "full autonomy,"

what it offered the Palestinians was "autonomy for the people," which did not incorporate "territorial autonomy for the Palestinians." Then-Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan resigned from the Begin government when he realized that Begin had no intention of reaching an agreement on the Palestinian issue. Shortly thereafter Minister of Defense Ezer Weizmann resigned over the same issue. This brought the second part of the Camp David agreement to a close.

Israel's overall dominant military power and its nuclear capacity, which threatens Egypt's existence, is Israel's second "transgression." Not only does that impinge on Egypt's honor, but threats by senior Israeli ministers, talks about destroying the Aswan Dam, and the implications of Israel's nuclear weapons for the nuclear arms race in the region create a difficult problem for Cairo.

Israel's third "transgression" comprised the unilateral steps that even if unintended as such were considered an insulting slap in the face for Egypt. Israel's first move immediately following the signing of the agreements was to accelerate the construction of settlements on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. The government believed that Israel would not be able to hold on to these territories unless it established populated settlements. When the Likud party rose to power in the political turnaround of 1977 there were approximately 5,000 Jewish residents of the territories; thirty years later the number has grown by more than 50 times, to around 280,000. That was a negative message to Egypt, which expected to see the opposite process take place, a process that would lead to full Palestinian autonomy and an end to the conflict in the spirit of the Camp David accords.

The cold war of the thirty years since the agreement was signed should not come as a surprise to anyone. There was no peace process here that went awry.

Another Israeli step was the Lebanon War. Just two months after the completion of the Israeli withdrawal of Sinai, while the Egyptians hoped to see progress with the peace process in other arenas, Israel launched a war, took control of an Arab capital city, and drove out the PLO leadership and the Syrian army. From an Egyptian point of view and against the backdrop of its predicament in the Arab arena, it appeared as if Israel signed the peace agreement in order to earn freedom of action on its northern border.

Israel's fourth "transgression" was its insensitivity towards Egypt's honor. The prime minister demonstrated a lack of sensitivity during the peace talks when he called the Egyptian foreign minister and delegation leader "young man." The members of the Egyptian delegation were quite offended and President Sadat ordered the immediate recall of the delegation from Jerusalem and a freeze of the talks. Eighteen months later, in May 1981, Menahem Begin met Sadat at Sharm el-Sheikh. It was a week before the attack on the Iraqi nuclear plant. Arab public opinion suspected that the meeting was designed to coordinate the attack with Cairo, and that Sadat gave it his blessing. Ten years later, referring to the Madrid peace conference, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir mentioned talks with the Syrians and Palestinians and admitted he had no intention of reaching an agreement, and that he was prepared to continue with unsuccessful talks for the next ten years.

After the Oslo Accords, at a time of hope and expectation for the peace process, Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres talked repeatedly about "a new Middle East" and economic cooperation that would serve the interests of both sides. For their part, the Arabs saw this as evidence of an Israeli plot to take control of the Arab world through economic means. Soon after that, the economic conference took place in Rabat and was flooded with hundreds of Israeli businessmen. This provided further "proof" of Israel's "intent" to take control.

Conclusion

The cold war of the thirty years since the agreement was signed should not come as a surprise to anyone. There was no peace process here that went awry. What has happened in the interim was predictable and resulted from the basic standpoints of both sides, the gap between both sides' perception of peace, and their conduct from the negotiations stage and in the ensuing years. What occurred was expected. Nevertheless, this does not erase the positive balance over the thirty years – the stability of the peace, its survival during difficult and trying times, and the absence of real internal Egyptian pressure to end the peace and return to war.

The Mouse and the Lion:
Syria – Between Passive and Active Resistance to Israel

Eyal Zisser

Introduction: A Mouse on the Golan and a Lion in Lebanon

The entry of Syrian forces into Lebanon in the middle of the 1970s aroused fierce opposition towards Syria among many Lebanese. They objected to the destruction in their country caused by the Syrian forces, and in particular worried that Damascus intended to do away with Lebanon's existence as an independent entity and annex it to Syria. The more outspoken among them even dared to speak out against Syrian president Hafez al-Asad, using the strident phrase: "*fa'r fi al-Julan waAsad fi Lubnan*" – "a mouse on the Golan and a lion in Lebanon" – suggesting that Asad uses his power to trample Lebanon brutally (as befitting his name, Asad meaning "lion"), but at the same time displays hesitancy and even cowardice towards Israel on the Golan Heights, and balks at action to restore the Golan to Syrian control, as if he were a frightened mouse (*fa'r*).[1]

This modus operandi – or possibly non-action – by Syria towards Israel continued in the following years and still prevails today. Indeed, notwithstanding the hostile and threatening statements that Syria frequently makes towards Israel, the Syrians surprisingly – but consistently – maintain complete calm along the Golan Heights, their border with Israel, and desist from any moves, including responses to Israeli action against them, that may upset the calm on the border.

This pattern of inaction is rooted in a solid worldview that has governed the Syrian regime since its inception. It is also reflected semantically in phrases used habitually by Syrian spokespeople in

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recent years and in recent Syrian discourse. These include the terms *mumana'a*, which means passive resistance and is used to describe Syrian's behavior towards Israel, and *muqawama*, a term that means active resistance and is used to describe the operational approach adopted by Hamas and Hizbollah. The latter conduct an active struggle against Israel, made possible by the policy of passive resistance adopted by Damascus. In an address at the Arab summit in Damascus on March 26, 2008, Syrian foreign minister Walid al-Mu'alim called Damascus "the capital of Arabism and passive resistance" (*'asimat al-'uruba wal- mumana'a*),[2] and at the time of the summit Radio Damascus said that Syria is working to establish an axis, or even a front, of passive resistance (*mihwar al-mumana'a*,[3] and elsewhere the terms *jabhat* or *fustat al-muqawama* were used) dominated by Syria and incorporating Iran and Hizbollah.[4]

Syrian spokespeople use these terms to explain (or even give legitimacy to) Syria's recurring conduct towards Israel based on restraint and desistance from any move or action against its southerly neighbor liable to lead to a major escalation in which Syria has absolutely no interest. As some Syrians explain, Damascus may be a radical base, a pillar of "the axis of evil," as former president George Bush put it, but that encapsulates its overall role and considers its strategic reality, and one should not expect this radicalism (passive resistance) to galvanize it to take actual action against Israel, or even to respond or instigate a reprisal to Israel's actions.

It appears that the tendency of the regime towards passivity and its preference for inaction over militant and hasty conduct are part of the Syrian DNA.

September 6, 2007: Syria's Familiar Desistance from Response

In the wake of the 2006 Second Lebanon War, tension between Israel and Syria escalated to the point of concern that a confrontation between the two countries might erupt. Although the war took place between Israel and Hizbollah, Syrian president Bashar al-Asad was quick to take credit for what was considered by many in the Arab world as the organization's victory in the war. In a series of addresses made by Bashar towards the end of the war he even implied to Jerusalem threateningly that he would consider adopting Hizbollah's

approach if Israel continued to occupy the Golan Heights and refused to conduct talks over returning the land to Syria. These threats lent further credence to the claim made by Damascus that following the war in Lebanon, the rules of the game between Jerusalem and Damascus had changed, and that Israel no longer enjoys a strategic advantage over Syria or complete operational freedom in the Syrian arena.[5]

However, the tension between Israel and Syria dissipated quickly, and with it the view among many in Israel that war was imminent. On September 6, 2007, Israeli jets attacked and destroyed a nuclear facility under construction in the region of Dayr al-Zur in northern Syria. Syria quickly released an announcement about the attack, although it said the target was an empty military structure under construction and definitely not a nuclear plant. For its part, Israel never officially responded to the Syrian announcement, although in April 2008 the White House confirmed that the attack had taken place and that the target was a nuclear facility that Syria sought to build in the north of the country with the aid of North Korea.[6]

Following the attack attention centered on Damascus in the tense expectation that Bashar al-Asad would respond to the Israeli move that, at the end of the day, had far reaching strategic significance for all aspects of Israeli-Syrian relations, and in particular with regard to the balance of power between them. It dashed Syria's hopes of attaining nuclear weapons while inflicting a blatant blow to Syria's sovereignty and humiliating the regime and particularly the Syrian military, which was helpless and idle following the Israeli attack. However, Bashar surprisingly refused to respond or launch any reprisals against Israel following the attack on the nuclear plant.

Likewise after September 2007 Syria's president was once again forced to confront the dilemma whether to act against Israel, in response to a number of moves that were aimed against Syria that he attributed to Israel. On February 12, 2008 Hizbollah military commander 'Imad Mughniyyah was assassinated in the heart of Damascus, and on the night of August 1, 2008, Muhammad Sulayman, one of Bashar al-Asad's closest confidantes, was killed by sniper fire at his vacation home near the town of Tartus on the Syrian coast. Sulayman was responsible for strategic links between Syria and Iran and Hizbollah and also for the Syrian nuclear project. In these two instances as well Bashar desisted

from responding or blaming Israel, and left the work to the Hizbollah leadership (in the case of Mughniyyah's assassination) and to the Arab and foreign media (in the case of Sulayman's assassination).[7]

However it seems there was little new in all this. In April and July 2001, Israeli jets attacked Syrian military positions in Lebanon in response to Hizbollah attacks on Israeli strongholds along the Israeli-Lebanese border. A number of Syrian soldiers were killed and several were wounded in the attacks. In August 2003 and then in June 2006, Israeli jets flew over the Syrian president's palace near his hometown of Qardaha in northern Syria. In August 2003 the intention was to impress on the Syrian president the need to restrain Hizbollah activity along the border between Israel and Lebanon, and in June 2006 the move followed an attack by Hamas on the Gazan border with Israel, in which two IDF soldiers were killed and the soldier Gilad Shalit was captured. On October 7, 2003, Israeli jets attacked an abandoned training base of the Popular Front-General Command (PFLP-GC) of Ahmad Jabril in 'Ayn Sahab, about six kilometers northeast of Damascus in the heart of Syrian sovereign territory. That was the first time since the 1973 Yom Kippur War that Israeli jets attacked a target in the heart of Syria. The attack came in response to a suicide attack by the Damascus-based Islamic Jihad organization at the Maxim restaurant in Haifa, which killed twenty-two Israelis. No Syrian response followed any of these events, and this so-called non-response indicated Damascus' acceptance that Israel enjoys complete freedom of action over its skies and in its territory.[8]

The lack of any reaction by Damascus to the aforementioned events appeared surprising, as this pattern of passiveness defied Syria's fiery rhetoric, similar to what was voiced following the Second Lebanon War, and to the aggressive and even hasty and temperamental behavior that Israel has tended to attribute to Syria, such as the conduct that led to the outbreak of the 1967 Six Day War. Many in Israel also sought to compare reality in Syria to Israel, where any security event in the country – even the most insignificant – could cause a public and media storm, not to mention hysteria, that could force any government to respond, often in an ill-considered manner and against the leaders' better judgment.

Syrian Realism and Restraint

Closer examination of the past reveals that Syria's passiveness, or even a policy of non-response to Israel, not only is not surprising but is in fact deep seated in the nature of the Syrian regime and its leaders, and also in their sober recognition of Syria's strategic reality, not to say strategic weakness, which ultimately dictates the actions by its leaders.

In this context, certain observations should be made. First, the lack of any response by Syria each time Israel chooses to act against it ultimately testifies to Syria's measured and realistic vision of the balance of power between the two countries. Therefore it appears that despite heated statements in the Syrian media and sometimes of the Syrian leadership as well, there is a sober recognition in Damascus – both among the Syrian leadership and the general public – of Israel's clear military advantage over Syria and the lack of anything to achieve through military engagement. In this respect the lessons of the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War are still strong in Syria's collective memory, whereby everything possible should be done to keep Syria outside the circle of confrontation with Israel. The Second Lebanon War, when Israel caused widespread damage in Lebanon, presumably reinforced Syrian recognition of Israel's clear military advantage over one of its neighbors.

Second, it appears that the tendency of the regime towards passivity and its preference for inaction over militant and hasty conduct are part of the Syrian DNA. After the disengagement agreement between Israel and Syria was signed in 1974, Syrian president Hafez al-Asad generally avoided any direct military move against Israel, including responses to Israeli activity, even to moves that Damascus considered provocative. This passiveness and pattern of non-action by Asad Sr, incidentally, was not specific to Israel but also to most of his other areas of activity, particularly on the domestic front – i.e., social and economic matters – and it seems this has been inherited, at least in some respects, by his son Bashar. At the same time, Hafez el-Asad, and in his wake his son, pursued an indirect approach based predominantly on the use against

> The recognition that Israel enjoys total military superiority over Syria is complemented by the awareness that Syria can respond indirectly and no less painfully through Lebanese and Palestinian terror organizations.

Israel of Palestinian and Lebanese terror organizations for the purposes of taking revenge, or of promoting Syrian interests that he was hard-pressed to advance with direct Syrian measures, political or military. This indirect approach was therefore designed to compensate for the preference to not confront Israel, while generating and maintaining a balance of fear whereby the Lebanese and Palestinian arenas, through Lebanese and Palestinian actors and not necessarily Syrian actors, become the theater of activity for Syria.[9]

Many commentators in Israel tend to project modes of behavior onto Syria from the experience of other Arab countries. Yet in contrast with the general impression gained in Israel on more than one occasion and certainly in complete contrast with Israel, in the events mentioned here no pressure was felt in Syria from public opinion or from the various different power players there, in particular the armed forces and the ruling party, to respond militarily to Israel.

In many respects Syria is still lags behind by many years, compared with the reality of life in Israel and Western countries and even with other Arab countries. The pace of life in Syria is slow, and the Syrian establishment – the media, and certainly the decision making establishment – is complex and cumbersome, and progress occurs slowly. The Syria media is controlled completely by the regime and as such the media is official and dull, and also primitive and undeveloped.

> Syria perceives itself in the role of historic gatekeeper of the strong fortress of Arabism that stands firm against the storms that batter its gates, and survives these storms without raising the white flag.

For example, there are almost no active websites in Syria in social or economic fields, nor in the area of news reports, and access by the Syrian population to Arab and foreign websites is limited. It is no wonder, therefore, that Syria does not have the dynamic and pressuring media and the same hurried pace of events as in Israel that sometimes leaves the Israeli political leadership with no choice, if it values its political survival, other than to respond quickly and resolutely to events, and on occasion even without due consideration and restraint. It also appears that the Arab public in general and the Syrian public in particular, notwithstanding the myth of the political strength of the Arab street that invariably tends towards incitement and power intoxication, do

not carry with them the same historical baggage as the Israeli public that frequently evokes reactions of hysteria and panic that in turn impact on the decision making process of the Israeli government.

The Syrian public does not, therefore, display tense expectation of a military response by Syria to anything perceived by Damascus to be provocation or aggression by Israel. This indicates acceptance and internalization of the rules of the game between Israel and Syria and recognition that Israel enjoys total military superiority over Syria, even if complemented by the awareness that Syria can respond indirectly and no less painfully through Lebanese and Palestinian terror organizations – what is generally the case. Indeed, such a response has in the past proven to be no less efficient than a direct military response while absolving Syria of entanglement in a direct confrontation with Israel.

The position of the Arab public in general and the Syrian public in particular on a response to Israel also reflects recognition of the historic role filled by Syria in the Arab-Israeli conflict. This recognition is rooted in the self-image of the Syrian regime and in the expectations that it itself generates in all matters relating to how it deals with Israel. It perceives itself in the role of historic gatekeeper of the strong fortress of Arabism that stands firm against the storms that batter its gates, and survives these storms without raising the white flag. The emphasis, therefore, is on standing firm against Israel and refusing to bow one's head and accepting its dictates and terms, and not responding violently, which would lead to an illogical, ill considered, and uncalculated provocation toward confrontation.

Indeed, therein lies one of the main differences between Syria and Hizbollah, and certainly in all matters relating to their image in the Arab public. Hizbollah, in complete contrast to Syria, consistently takes pains to nurture and preserve at all costs its image as an organization that refuses to turn the other cheek to Israel. It demonstrates zero patience towards Israel and towards what is considered provocation by Israel. This was deemed an important factor in establishing and maintaining the deterrent equation between Hizbollah and Israel. As a result, over the years Hizbollah always responded rapidly to any Israeli action, even if in relation to an unintentional attack on Lebanese shepherds who crossed the Israeli-Lebanese border by mistake, or flocks of sheep that wandered from Lebanon into Israel.

Syria is a different case. This is a country that does not respond hastily, and its strength does not necessarily translate into proud insistence on an immediate settling of accounts with Israel. Syria thus wants to present itself as one whose power lies in determination and steadfast adherence to opinions rather than impulsive military responses, despite any attacks it suffers and the pressure to react. Its greatness, in its own eyes and in the eyes of Arab public opinion, lies in its ability to maintain its standing as a foundation of radical anti-Israelism and anti-Westernism in the Middle East that does not follow the American lead and is in no hurry to normalize its relations with Israel. This is the core of Syria's strength and an asset that keeps the historic conflict between Israel and the Arabs from moving to an arena where Syria enjoys no advantage over Israel. On the contrary, these are arenas in which it suffers from inferiority and shortcomings. This Syrian policy is, therefore, based on survival at all costs, and does not necessarily advance Syria in any way – politically, socially, or even economically. This policy has left Syria in political isolation, in constant military tension, and in an underdeveloped economic state, whereby the heavy price was paid by the inhabitants – but this subject lies beyond the scope of this article.

This pattern of action by Syria was long evident during the regime of Hafez al-Asad in the 1970s and 1980s towards the challenges Syria faced at the time, especially the peace initiative of Anwar Sadat in November 1977, which led to the singing of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in March 1979. This was followed by Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights in December 1981 and the First Lebanon War in 1982 (Operation Peace for the Galilee), in which Israel challenged Damascus' regional status and especially Syria's standing in Lebanon. Yet Hafez al-Asad refrained from any direct confrontation with Israel, even when in 1982 he found himself forced by Israel into a confrontation in Lebanon. This Syrian mode of behavior was expressed in the official term used by the Syrians in those years to define their policy and behavior towards Israel: *al-sumud wal-tasadi* – endurance and extrication in the face of challenge. This term incorporated two components designed to express the two stages of Syria's conduct towards Israel. The first stage, relevant to the reality of Syria in the 1980s, is the stage of endurance (*sumud*), a stage characterized by a battle of restraint that incorporates

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a great degree of passiveness in the face of the Israeli-Zionist challenge (indeed, like the Palestinians who are also surviving on their homeland – *samidun*). The second stage is extrication from the challenge (*tasadi*), which involves a great degree of action and even initiative, even when the initiative is designed to disrupt the moves and initiatives of the other side and not necessarily spearhead a proactive Syrian move. Interestingly, the term *tasadi* is used by Syria to denote interception, for example interception of enemy jets.[10]

Mumana'a and Muqawama

Today the popular terms used in Syria to express Syria's way of dealing with Israel are *mumana'a* and *muqawama*, expressing passive resistance alongside aid and support for anyone who nonetheless follows a course of active resistance to Israel. In other words, these terms express Syria's strategic decision not to become embroiled in a confrontation with Israel and to make do with passive resistance while leaving active resistance to others, mainly Hizbollah and Palestinian terror organizations.

These terms were used, for example, in an address given by Syrian president Bashar al-Asad to the military leadership of the ruling Baath party in Syria on April 20, 2008: "The more it became apparent that we are determined to maintain our fierce position and our adherence to our Arabism, [the more] the actions [taken by the enemy against us] became increasingly cruel. But we maintain that active and passive resistance (*muqawama* and *mumana'a*) are part of our strategic decision to which we intend to adhere."[11]

In Arabic there is a clear differentiation between these two terms, as follows: *qawam* means "resisted," "stood up and stood up to," and "struggled against." On the other hand, *mana'a* means "struggled against or contended with," "opposed," "competed for… against," "divested or prevented…from," "defended." This leads to a translation and understanding of the term *muqawama* as "active resistance" as opposed to *mumana'a*, which means passive resistance or even non-violent resistance.

The Syrian ambassador to the UK, Sami al-Khaymi, explained the meaning of these terms in an interview to the Lebanese television channel ANB: "Arab countries are concerned over Israel, but not Syria, which has adopted the principle of a passive resistance country (*dawlat*

mumana'a). The meaning of *mumana'a* for Syria is not confrontation, due to Israel's military might, and mainly due to the military might of the United States, which is capable of conquering and swallowing up a large number of European countries – but resistance to ideas that the US proposes and advances."[12]

These ideas were also raised clearly in an interview given by a member of the Syrian People's Assembly, Muhammad Habbash, in an interview to Lebanese satellite television channel al-Manar belonging to Hizbollah, just prior to the outbreak of the Second Lebanon War but against a backdrop of increasing tension in Israeli-Syrian relations. Habbash explained in the interview:

> The Syrian public is incensed. There are those who wonder about the position of the armed forces [the Syrian armed forces, which desist from attacking Israel on the Golan Heights front]. The Syrian people will not continue to stand idly by. Although it treats its leaders' decisions with respect [the official position that believes in abstaining from any action against Israel] it is likely to be pushed not only towards passive resistance (*mumana'a*) but also towards active resistance (*muqawama*), like Hizbollah, and even towards being proactive [as in the decision to embark on the Yom Kippur War], if it is convinced there will be benefit to be gained from that. Nevertheless, it is clear to all that the decision on confrontation is a military matter entrusted to the military commanders and the country's leaders.[13]

Indeed, Syrian discourse takes pains to stress that Syria has chosen to be a wall that will deflect and destroy US and Israeli pressure on the Arabs to succumb. Herein lies Syria's historic role, and not specifically in active resistance to its enemies. Similar ideas were expressed by Hasan al-Ahmad Hasan in the government organ *al-Thawra* on December 7, 2007:

> The pact of resistance (*muqawama*) stretches from Iran to Syria, and joins with the resistance of Iraq, the Palestinians, and even of Lebanon. This pact grew and strengthened due to the failure of US policy that was designed to neutralize the strength of the region's countries. The United States failed despite its military might, which allowed it to conquer a sovereign country [Iraq] against

international legitimacy….Syria is the security valve and
the cornerstone of the building of resistance, which is built
on it. Without Syria the entire building of resistance will
collapse. Syria is responsible for the effort to stand firm
and to honorably protect the interests of the nation; it is
responsible for the flow of blood in the veins of the nation,
for the effort to prevent the progress and implementation
of aggressive plans that will damage the region and the
Arabs.[14]

In an article in the Syrian regime's organ *Tishrin* on November 15,
2006, 'Ali al-Sawan noted that passive resistance (*mumana'a*) is a policy
adopted and embraced by Syria over the years since the Arab uprising
of 1916 (during the Ottoman Empire) and up to the outbreak of the 2003
Iraq War. Following the war in Iraq US secretary of state Colin Powell
threatened Syrian president Bashar al-Asad and reminded him that the
United States military was deployed along the Syrian border, while
Bashar al-Asad refused to give in and succumb to American dictates.
There were many, for example "the new liberals" (a denigrating term for
the liberal intellectual camp in Syria), and many in Lebanon (implying
the anti-Syrian March 14 camp), who sought to exert pressure on Syria
and even claimed that the time for concessions had come and that the
principle of passive resistance should be expunged from Arab discourse.
However, Syria clung to its approach and remained committed to the
legitimacy of resistance, and thanks to this approach the Americans
became mired in Iraq.[15] Finally, 'Izz al-Din Darwish, editor of *Tishrin*,
wrote in the August 23, 2007 issue:

Syria is in the enemy's sights, not due to a defect in its
policies or positions but because the United States and Is-
rael are looking to damage it, in order to dissuade it from
its decision to adhere to the option of passive resistance
(*mumana'a*) and because they do not want it to disseminate
its positions that oppose the plans of Israel for an Ameri-
can Middle East and talks of summits and meetings that
bear the name of "peace" in vain, but that are designed to
advance normalization alone.

In the editorial published by 'Izz al-Din Darwish in *Tishrin* to mark the
Syrian Day of Independence, the Evacuation Day, on April 17, 2008,
he added: "Evacuation Day reinforces Syria in its stance against the
occupation, the aggression, and violence, in its decision to adopt a

policy of passive resistance (*mumana'a*) and of adherence to Arab rights, and its decision to defy American and Israeli pressure and threats."

Syrian opposition parties, like the enemies of the Syrian regime in the Arab world, have not hesitated to castigate what they perceive to be Syrian hypocrisy and two-facedeness, the fact that while Syria glorifies itself as hawkish in the struggle against Israel, in practice it is doing nothing against the Zionist enemy. In their eyes Syria's policy, passive resistance (*mumana'a*) means passiveness, not to say idleness and cowardice in the face of the enemy. In an article published in *al-Hayat* on October 24, 2006, member of the Syrian opposition Yasin al-Haj Salah explained:

> Passive resistance means turning our back on the enemy, and although it concerns adhering to our position as far as possible, this is based on avoiding confrontation (*muwaja-ha*) with the enemy and accepting its dictates. This, then, is an interim situation between action that may develop into limitless confrontation (*majabha maftuha*) and ceding to the enemy. In passive resistance our back is turned towards the enemy, but we stand firm and do not go anywhere, while in contrast with what the Damascus propagandists are trying to tell us, passive resistance is not a single mo-ment or one stage in the dynamics of confrontation (*muwa-jaha*) – a moment during which we wait for the appropri-ate opportunity to proceed to a stage where we take the initiative. On the contrary, in practice passive resistance (*mumana'a*) is one moment along a path of endless retreat in which the Syrian regime – which adopts a policy of pas-sive resistance – is surrounded by the enemy and does not make an effort to take the initiative. This involves being two faced, as the supporters of passive resistance (*ahl al-mumana'a*) [members of the Syrian regime] turn their back on the enemy and prefer to confront the society in which they live [Syrian society]. It is as if they are saying: the war is taking place here at home [against our own people] while there [against Israel] we are conducting passive re-sistance.

Clearer and more strident words were written by Rami al-Rayis, who is responsible for information in the party of the anti-Syrian Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, the progressive Lebanese social party, in an article he published in the *al-Anba'* newspaper, which he edits: "Passive

resistance (*mumana'a*) is a term invented by the Syrian regime in order to justify its failures and the fact that it avoids demonstrating active resistance and the fact that it has failed in its efforts to liberate the land that has been occupied since 1967. Passive resistance is, therefore, a more accurate version of normalization based on Israel's terms."[16]

Indeed, in the Arab press, some of which is hostile towards Syria, a simpler differentiation is often made between Syria, which is an entity with the mentality of a state (*aqliyat al-dawla*) committed to preservation of its political interests and in any event seeks to avoid involvement in a confrontation with Israel at all costs, and others, such as Hizbollah, which is not a country and is not bound by the constraints and interests of a state. This reality changed in all aspects relating to Hizbollah after the Second Lebanon War, which linked the organization and Lebanon's interests and made the organization a hostage committed to these interests, to the preservation of interests, and to the party that is obliged to consider these interests as it maps out its measures against Israel.

Conclusion

Over the years Syria has maintained a policy of non-action and passiveness towards Israel. The Syrians explain this policy by the necessity to stand firm and not be dragged by Israel into direct confrontation, which also possibly involves defeat, as happened in June 1967. In this spirit in recent years the Syrian regime has adopted two new terms – passive resistance (*mumana'a*) and active resistance (*muqawama*), which describe Syria's policy in light of the constraints upon it. Although these are new terms they reflect the familiar policy that supported making do with a firm stance against the enemy and abstaining from proactive and retaliatory action. This reflects Syria's recognition of the balance of power that exists between it and Israel, and the Syrian leadership's known aversion to becoming embroiled in a confrontation. Finally, it is recognition of the firm stance that realizes Syria's historic role against the enemies of the Arabs, and constitutes its relative advantage over Israel.

The use of these terms in Syrian discourse increased following the Second Lebanon War, which accentuated the difference between Hizbollah, which was actually engaging Israel in battle, and Syria, which talks in lofty terms about the need to fight Israel but in practice

avoids any such battle. These terms, based on the approach of the Syrian regime, were designed to differentiate between Syria and its allies, but also to temper expectations with regard to Syria's conduct and try to endow this policy with public legitimacy.

This is official Syrian terminology that expresses a deep and fundamental perception among the Syrian leadership, the Syrian public, and possibly also the Arab public as a whole, whose bottom line is the absence of any pressure or expectation from Syria to act and respond like Israel. The expectation of Syria is that it will adhere to its fundamental positions, stand firm, and not succumb to pressures. In addition, it is expected to provide indirect aid to Hizbollah and Hamas, which can still allow themselves to fight against Israel.

Notes

1   See Reuven Avi-Ran, *Syrian Involvement in Lebanon (1975-1985)*, (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 1986), p. 240.

2   SANA (Syrian Arab News Agency), March 26, 2008.

3   Radio Damascus, March 28, 2008.

4   Al-Jazeera, March 19 and 23, 2008, January 17, 2009.

5   See also in Eyal Zisser, "The Battle for Lebanon: Lebanon and Syria in the Wake of the War," in *The Second Lebanon War: Strategic Perspectives*, eds. Shlomo Brom and Meir Elran (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2007), pp. 135-49.

6   See Eyal Zisser, "An Israeli Watershed: Strike on Syria," *Middle East Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (2008): 57-62.

7   *Yediot Ahronot*, January 2, 2009; *Haaretz,* February 4, 2009. See also Eyal Zisser, "It's a Long Road to Peace with Syria: From the Second Lebanon War to Peace Overtures with Ankara," *Strategic Assessment* 11, no. 2 (2008): 107-22.

8   Eyal Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006,) pp. 159-65.

9   Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy: Syria in Transition* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 67-74, 146-48.

10   Moshe Maoz, *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1988), pp. 185-98.

11   SANA, April 20, 2008.

12   Lebanese TV station ANB, July 23, 2006.

13   Al-Manar TV station, July 6, 2006.

14   *Al-Thawra* (Damascus), December 7, 2007.

15   *Tishrin* (Damascus), November 15, 2006.

16   *Al-Anba'* (Beirut), October 23, 2007.

Shifting Tectonic Plates:
Basic Assumptions on the Peace Process Revisited

Ron Tira

In the early 1990s, Israel adopted a new policy whose immediate and practical objective was to achieve normal relations with the Arab world. This turning point was prompted by a host of factors, and the nation's leaders weighed various considerations. This article focuses on two of these factors: first, the US's rising status as a hegemon in the Middle East, and second, the assessment that the military balance of power increasingly favored Israel. These two factors became basic assumptions in the calculations that helped Israel assume the risks of the peace process. The article examines whether these assumptions are still valid, whether strategic turning points require that they be revisited, and what the implications are for Israeli policy.

Assumption 1: The US is the Dominant Element in the Middle East

In 1991, a new regional order took shape.[1] The United States led a coalition to war against Iraq, which resulted in Iraq's defeat and demonstrated the US's political and military effectiveness in the region. After the war, the United States left significant forces deployed in the Gulf. Concomitantly, the Soviet Union collapsed. The new Russia sought ties to the US and international financial institutions, and this too had implications for the Middle East: first, the rejectionist states lost their political patron, and second, Russia withdrew most of its military advisors and assets from the region. In the decades prior to its collapse, the USSR rebuilt the Arab militaries after every war, but its reluctance

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to continue doing so without receiving payment in full complicated any Arab resolve to go to war. The 1991 Gulf War also helped two American principal clients, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, strengthen their status as leaders of the Arab world. The rejectionist states, headed by Iraq, Syria, and Libya, grew increasingly isolated and gradually went bankrupt.

In the 1990s, the United States continued to demonstrate its regional power: it sponsored the UN inspectors, enforced no-fly zones in Iraq, and undertook various operations such as Desert Fox. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, American influence was stepped up yet again: the United States conquered Afghanistan and Iraq, and established a permanent political and military hold there. In late 2003, Iran and Syria were marked as the next targets, and the threat to them was imminent: the United States surrounded Iran from Afghanistan, Central Asia, Iraq, and the Gulf, and Syria too sensed the Americans encroaching. The United States' proven military effectiveness coupled with its willingness to exert force deterred Libya, which even in the absence of a direct threat "volunteered" to abandon its nuclear program.

The next test of hegemony took place in Lebanon. In 2005, in a move commonly attributed to Syria, former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri was assassinated. Departing from the past, the American-French response was sufficiently weighted and backed by an implied though reliable military threat. As a result, the Syrian military withdrew from Lebanon after almost twenty years of occupation. It seemed that the pro-Western March 14 coalition was marking a strategic turning point in Lebanon.

The cumulative effect of these events and trends was that the United States became a regional hegemon in the Middle East on the political and military levels. At the height of the process, American units were operating in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Saudi

"In the global balance, the United States, particularly after the crisis in the Gulf, remained the only superpower…an entity seeking to form 'a new world order'…. The realization that now there remained no other practical alternative to a political move to solve the conflict with Israel became more and more widespread…. This is the essence of the new state of affairs."

Brig. Gen. Uri Saguy, 1991

Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Kyrghystan, and Azerbaijan, and the US navy was operating in the Arabian Sea and in the Mediterranean. The United States maintained the capability for massive and immediate military intervention throughout the Middle East, and the reliability of the American threat was at its peak. It was clear that the United States had both the ability and the willingness to prevent significant harm to its allies' interests as well as to its own.

Assumption 2: A Military Window of Opportunity

In 1988, the Iran-Iraq War ended and Israel's threat reference became "the Eastern front" – a coalition of a number of militaries headed by the Syrian military and Iraqi expeditionary forces. Israel assumed that in the event of war, the Arabs would attempt to confront the IDF symmetrically and capture territory by force. Thus the said war scenario was an attack by Syrian divisions that would traverse dozens of kilometers (from their bases deep in Syrian territory) and Iraqi forces that would cross hundreds of kilometers of exposed desert. Numerically the threat was great, but its nature played to the heart of IDF effectiveness.

In the early 1990s, the IDF started arming itself with new generations of sensors and precision armaments. These gave it the capability of operating deep in enemy territory and provided an effective response to the scenario of Syrian and Iraqi convoys moving along desert roads. A Syrian-Iraqi attack also required overcoming natural and constructed obstacles, but the sensors and precision firepower could allow striking the engineering equipment while advancing towards the obstacles, thereby frustrating the attack, and then precision fire could destroy the mass of armored vehicles.

These developments spawned a new defense doctrine: it was possible to halt an attack with precision firepower, without the need for mobile ground forces, maneuvers into enemy territory, and extensive deployment in one's home territory. Precision firepower requires relatively small forces, so it was therefore possible to maintain it primarily on the basis of the regular military while reducing the number of reservists. Israel's longstanding principles of warfare, such as thrusting the battlefield onto enemy territory and relying on the reserves, began to appear obsolete.

After the 1991 war, the Iraqi threat was removed and the probability of Syria mobilizing a war coalition decreased. As early as the 1980s, Syria was interested in achieving a strategic balance with Israel, but recognized that such a balance was not within its reach. In the mid 1990s an impoverished Syria estimated that it did not have a viable military option and hence it was pointless to invest in military buildup. The result was the neglect of the Syrian military and its deteriorating capability. On the other side stood the IDF, which at the end of the 1980s was at the height of its strength in terms of size, means, training, morale, and sense of capability.

The PLO, which supported Iraq in 1991, was severed from its sources of financing in the Gulf and was politically weakened. From its exile in Tunis, it did not even have significant terrorist capabilities. Palestinian and Shiite organizations in Lebanon did maintain guerilla and rocket capabilities, but these were limited. The first intifada was also declining, and in the early 1990s the non-state threat represented no more than a "serious nuisance."[2]

Former head of Military Intelligence Brig. Gen. (ret.) Uri Saguy wrote, "All Arab leaders…are convinced that Israel's military might can, now and in the foreseeable future, defeat any regional coalition formed against it."[3] Overall, Israel's characteristic situation assessment of the 1990s did not identify significant threats, what suggested a window of opportunity for taking risks.[4]

American Hegemony and Israeli Military Superiority: The Safety Net for the Political Process

In 1992, Israeli policy underwent a thorough shift: the desire for comprehensive peace was no longer just an abstraction, rather a concrete policy for immediate implementation. The sources for this shift can be found in a wide array of factors, some domestic, some US-related, and some stemming from processes within the Arab world. It is also possible to find signs of a shift in the 1987 London agreement and in the 1991 Madrid Conference.[5]

However, the willingness to incur the risks of a peace process rested on two basic assumptions.[6] First, the United States had become the dominant power in the Middle East and its political and military standing created the strategic context in which it was easier for Israel

to assume these risks. The implicit assumption was that the US would be able to block any threat to critical American interests and those of its allies. Second, the regional balance of power favored Israel, and this tendency would grow as the technological gap widened further. Thus, even should Israel make an error in the process and some risk were to materialize, Israel would be able to exert enough force to remove the threat and largely restore the situation to its previous state. The assumption was that military superiority allowed Israel to advance even on ground that was not entirely solid, because the cost it would pay for mistakes and the realization of threats would not be beyond the tolerable.

Revisiting Assumption 1: Has America's Hegemony Waned?

With the transition to the nation-building stage in Afghanistan and Iraq, American military and political effectiveness decreased. The fatigue and lack of popularity of both wars among the American public, particularly Iraq, eroded the domestic political power of President Bush, and obstacles emerged to long term commitments on the Iraqi issue and to the use of force in additional theaters.

While the United States did strengthen its forces in Iraq temporarily (the surge) and saw an improvement in the security situation, in November 2008 it signed the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Iraq, which determined the withdrawal from Iraqi territory: from the cities to the bases in the open areas by the summer of 2009, and totally by the end of 2011. SOFA places more emphasis on dates than on the fulfillment of qualitative criteria, and the ticking clock might make it difficult for the United States to meet its goals. In February 2009, President Obama declared his intention to withdraw most of the fighting force as early as August 2010.

By contrast, Iran is pursuing an effective program of acquiring influence in Iraq.[7] Conditions are convenient, as 60 percent of Iraqis are Shiite and their numbers were reflected in the parliamentary election results: the Islamic-Shiite party, the United Iraqi Alliance, won 128 of the 275 seats. Party leaders include clerics who in the past were exiled to Iran – some identified with the Badr Brigade, an Iraqi-Shiite militia that fought alongside Iran in the Iraq-Iran War, many of whose men were integrated into the official Iraqi security services. Thus Iran's

influence in Iraq is growing, in part because of the appointment of allies to key positions in the regime, thanks to kickbacks to senior personnel and investments of billions of dollars in the Iraqi economy.[8]

Armed Shiite militias operating in Iraq such as Jaysh al-Mehdi benefit from the assistance of the Quds forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Hizbollah. In April 2008, General David Petraeus testified that Iran was training armed forces similar to Hizbollah that would have the capability of operating against Iraq's central government. Similarly, a report by the American Defense Department of September 2008 assessed that the most significant threat to the stability of Iraq was emanating from these organizations, which are largely responsible for the weakening of the US in Mesopotamia.

After the American withdrawal from Iraq, Iran's influence is likely to assume one of two forms. If Iraq manages to maintain a strong central government, Iran may exert political and economic influence over the government together with an ability to threaten its stability (similar to Hizbollah's threat to the Lebanese government). Should Iraq's central government weaken and the ethnic communities manage their affairs independently of one another, Tehran may strengthen its influence over the Shiite south. To be sure, Iraq's Shiite Arabs and the Iranians are not identical; Iraqi Shiites themselves are not a uniform community. However, Iran might acquire religious, economic, security, and political influence in Shiite areas in Iraq. In either case, Iran may become the foreign element whose influence on Iraq is the most pronounced.

Another American-Iranian test of strength occurred in Lebanon. In May 2008, the Lebanese government decided to dismantle the communications network linked to Iran and Syria established by Hizbollah, and take some additional steps against the organization.

"No aspect of the Iraq quagmire can be resolved without Iranian involvement. Washington has a better chance of modifying Iran's influence in Iraq – and Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon – than of immediately halting it."
Samantha Power, *Time*, **2008**

Hizbollah reacted with force and determination, and the crisis – a military coup in practice – ended not only with the abrogation of these decisions by the Lebanese government, but also with assurances on a change in the balance of power within the state:

Hizbollah gained veto power over government decisions, ensured that Shiite representation in the parliament would increase, and guaranteed a strengthened Hizbollah foothold in the Lebanese military. However, what is most disturbing is what is missing from the story: effective American influence. The United States and France (and even Egypt and Saudi Arabia) were powerless to influence these developments. Certainly their influence was overshadowed by that of Syria and Iran, which once again witnessed that their determination to act against a hesitant West paid off.

An additional American mistake is apparent in the Palestinian context. In 2006, American pressure brought Israel to agree to Hamas' participation in the Palestinian Authority elections. To the surprise of the United States and Israel, Hamas won the elections and ultimately took control of Gaza. Hamas is a Sunni organization with a Palestinian agenda and is not an Iranian proxy. Nonetheless, Iran finances and arms the group, supplies it with political support, and is in fact the power with the most influence over Hamas. Indeed, President Husni Mubarak of Egypt claimed that after the Hamas takeover of Gaza, Egypt had a de factor border with Iran.[9] Iran also threatens other Egyptian interests; e.g., it cooperates militarily with Sudan, Egypt's southern neighbor.

The Egyptian-Iranian fault line was revealed in full during Operation Cast Lead, when for the second time in two and a half years Israel and the Sunni states found themselves on the same strategic side of military action against the Iranian crescent. What is no less surprising is that the Iranian attempt to undermine Egypt – America's closest Arab ally – was not met with an effective American response.

However, the most telling lack of American effectiveness with regard to Iran is over the nuclear issue. This is shaped by three factors: the difficulty in building a wide coalition supporting sanctions (even though the Arab world, Russia, and China share the concern about a nuclear Iran); the lack of a credible American threat of immediate military actions, even without a supportive coalition; and Iranian resolve versus Western hesitancy. The Iranian leadership

> Israel's decreased ability to remove the new threats quickly and the heavy toll involved in terms of attrition and diplomatic entanglements has made the notion that Israel can take risks difficult to sustain.

regards nuclearization as a strategic interest of the highest order, and Iran is willing to pay a steep price to achieve it. Iran does not view the West, reluctant to pay the price of a confrontation, as a factor capable of derailing it from its course. Indeed, recent expressions in the West have implied the necessity of learning to live with a nuclear Iran, which is reflected in reports about American intentions to offer its allies a "nuclear umbrella." Without an immediate change in policy, Iran is likely to attain nuclear capabilities, or at least attain reliable nuclear opacity in the near future.

The significance of a nuclear Iran is far-reaching. It is unclear whether it is possible to maintain a lasting deterrence balance along the lines of the MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) of the Cold War. There is concern over knowledge and materiel that might leak into the hands of non-state entities and the start of a multilateral nuclear arms race. Furthermore, there is concern that the Iranian regime or the regime of other nations that might consequently acquire nuclear capabilities will collapse, and that the nuclear capabilities will fall into unanticipated hands.

However, the most practical implication of a nuclear Iran is a change in the rules of the regional and global game, in particular shifting the boundaries of Iran's influence and its freedom of action, if it harms American interests or those of its allies. For example, if a nuclear Iran takes control of territories it claims in the Straits of Hormuz, the United States will find it difficult to shape a response. Credible nuclear opacity is enough to complicate the Untied States acting against Iran the way it acted against Iraq in the 1990s or against Serbia.

Iran may hint as to the existence of a nuclear umbrella to its allies. The credibility of such an umbrella is not high, but doubt is enough in order to impinge on freedom of action against Syria, Hizbollah, Hamas, or future pro-Iranian satellites. Iran's self-confidence will grow and it may provoke the United States or Israel, push limits, and in a series of escalating tests challenge their willingness to go to the nuclear threshold. Likewise, the Arabs and Turkey may seek to forge a closer relationship with Iran, which would afford it greater political influence. When American and Iranian interests clash, third party states may side specifically with an Iran that joins nuclear capability with determination

to use force and an ability to threaten the moderate regimes (and the radical ones too, should they change) with a host of different threats.

Iran threatens other critical interests of the United States as well, with its involvement in Afghanistan, a military presence in a number of states in the Horn of Africa, support for Shiite rebels in Yemen, a greedy eye on Bahrain (with its Shiite majority), and even a foothold in Venezuela and other Latin American countries as well as along the drug smuggling routes through Mexico to the United States. The United States is not responding effectively to these moves either.

Granted, Iran is a regional power, but with a GDP comparable to that of the state of Maryland it is clearly not a peer competitor to the only superpower in the world. Furthermore, despite the cooperation between Iran and China and Russia, including on issues of nuclear programs, weapons, and Central Asia, they do not fall into the same strategic camp. However, the loci of friction between a nuclearizing Iran and its proxies on the one hand, and the United States and its allies on the other, are clearly apparent, and it is incumbent on us to connect the dots and draw a coherent, dynamic and developing picture. Indeed, we are witnessing the Iranians eroding America's regional dominance. A Shiite crescent with territorial continuity has started to form from Tehran through Karbala and Damascus and ending in Bint Jbail. Iran's influence is liable to reach Gaza, the northeastern and southwestern shores of the Arabian Peninsula, Bab al-Mandeb, and Central Asia. One of the fundamentals of the Iranian strategy is building the capability to threaten Arab regimes via satellites operating within the various Arab countries, while preserving the ability to deny its own involvement.

President Obama's policy towards Iran is not fully clear. The administration has declared the need for dialogue alongside the need to stop Iran from going nuclear, but the declarations have yet to be translated into practical policies. The first period of the Obama presidency points to attempts to conduct foreign policy based on dialogue. Attempts at dialogue provide Iran with precious time, and Iran is skilled at exploiting time while advancing its own nuclear interests. In Washington, there are also voices calling for waiting until after the Iranian elections, which is problematic for two reasons: first, it supplies Iran with additional months to advance its program, and second, the idea indicates a measure of confusion between the representational

figure of the president and the real decision makers behind the scenes of the Iranian establishment. Therefore, it remains highly uncertain whether White House policy will be effective in stopping Iran.

Revisiting Assumption 2: Can Political Errors Still be Corrected Militarily?

The peace process represents a legitimate and to a great extent essential strategic move, but the complement to the risks of the peace process should have been the strengthening of the IDF. Israel's military power was what created the context and motivation of leaders like President Sadat to abandon the path of war in the first place, and therefore Israel's weakened military power might undermine the strategic basis of peace.

However, Israel's leadership believed that the peace process represented a substitute for military power (what used to be called "peace is security"), and did not understand that military power was the foundation of peace. Israel sought to cash in on the peace dividend several decades too early. The defense budget was slashed, and according to certain parameters the IDF lost up to one-third of its size. The IDF also experienced an erosion of values: the commanders came of age on the basis of the slogan, "There is no military solution," whereas the military – any military anywhere – must think primarily in terms of military solutions. The military commanders are supposed to be "noble horses" (in Moshe Dayan's expression), always galloping into battle, with the politicians in charge of restraining them. The message that pronounced an end to the age of war caused the sharpness, aggressiveness, and sense of urgency that had characterized the IDF until the early 1990s to yield to a kind of gray mediocrity and lethargy. The inevitable result emerged in the Second Lebanon War.

The Second Lebanon War had implications beyond its immediate circumstances. It aroused a sense of competence among Israel's neighbors, and that brought war back into the range of viable options. Syria, for example, once again began to invest enormous amounts of money into its military and train it intensively after some fifteen years of neglect. The Second Lebanon War demonstrated that the non-state threat was more than just a case of a "serious nuisance," and had become a strategic threat of the first order. If in the past there were two types of major threats, the symmetrical military threat and terrorist

activity, today there are more varied types of threats. Terrorism in the West Bank, Hamas in Gaza, Hizbollah – a non-state entity with state capabilities, Syria – a state adopting a guerilla paradigm, and distant Iran all require a more varied approach to constructing forces and forging new operational approaches. However, the IDF is not large enough, and the current force structure is not adequate for the full spectrum of new threats and the combination of multiple threats at any one time. So, for example, the air force and navy are structured primarily for missions in nearby arenas. An air force supposed to wage an extended, massive, and distant campaign requires the capabilities akin to those of the US Strategic Air Command that operated until 1992. The navy too needs to beef up its capabilities to undertake a massive and extended attack against dozens of targets deep in enemy territory 5,000 km away from its own ports.

However, the most significant lesson of 2006 is the change in the Arab war concept. Particularly noteworthy was the transition from a military strategy of the direct approach (i.e., an attempt to capture territory and defeat the IDF in battle, an approach that characterized the thinking of the regular Arab armed forces in previous decades) to a strategy of indirect approach, which attempts to exhaust and weaken Israel by means of extended wars and periods of instability between them. The symmetrical and direct military encounter has been replaced by the asymmetrical response, which seeks to offset the IDF's tactical and technological advantages and render them less relevant. The source of the asymmetry is the non-state enemy, but its success has led states such as Syria to likewise adopt components of military asymmetry. Indeed, we are witnessing the creation of hybrid threats: the non-state enemy acquiring state-like strategic military capabilities in terms of quality and quantity, and thus the confrontation has climbed from the level of low intensity terrorist attacks to one of high intensity strategic firepower. By contrast, the state enemy is trying to adopt and adjust to non-state military attributes.

The new war paradigm is implemented via three principles. First, the main form of battle on the part of Syria, Hizbollah, and Hamas is the attack on the Israeli civilian rear with disappearing and highly redundant rocket and missile forces that are hard to trace and destroy completely. Second, the enemy tries to avoid symmetrical engagements

continued growth of the threats. By contrast, in Operation Defensive Shield (2002), and particularly in the ongoing activity that continued after the operation, Israel restored the situation in the West Bank to its previous state (militarily, though not politically), and it was clear that regaining operational and intelligence control over the territory allowed for the removal of the threat.

For its part Operation Cast Lead had some positive implications: the restoring of Israeli self-confidence and its ability to project strength. Moreover, the campaign was an important step in confronting the new war paradigm of the Arabs. What allows this paradigm to exist is the fact that the enemies placed on Israel the burden of responsibility for the security of their own civilians, a responsibility Israel accepted – and therefore acted with significant restraint. Yet assuming responsibility for its own civilians and also for enemy civilians, thereby absolving the enemy of that responsibility, created an impossible situation for Israel. In Operation Cast Lead, Israel operated more freely than in the past – though within the rules of international law – against enemy combatants wherever they were to be found, even among civilians. Some call this the "Dahiya doctrine," a reference to the attack on the Dahiya quarter of Beirut in the Second Lebanon War, which contributed to deterring Hizbollah and to undermining the enemy's paradigm.

However, in weighing the range of new threats – from the distant Iran, through a disappearing and decentralized enemy armed with rockets generating a strategic effect, to terrorism in all its forms, to conventional armed forces, some of which are equipped with Western weapons – it seems that the IDF's capability of removing threats quickly is inferior to what it was in the early 1990s. It is doubtful whether it is still possible to claim that military superiority allows Israel to correct every strategic error at a tolerable price, or whether we can always turn back the military wheel.

Revisiting Security Arrangements

Over the years Israel formulated an approach to security arrangements appended to political agreements, and their core is the prevention of surprises. Therefore, Israel strives to disengage the forces by defining demilitarized and sparsely militarized zones, inviting multi-national supervision, and using other mechanisms intended to give early

warning about the enemy preparations for waging war. This approach was perhaps appropriate for the challenges of the past, but its relevance to the present is questionable.

The war paradigm of some of Israel's enemies has changed from a direct approach of conquering territory to attrition by means of rocket fire from the depth of enemy territory towards the Israeli home front coupled with a low signature but fire-saturated ground defense. In this new reality, placing distance between the armed forces does nothing to protect Israel from a surprise attack, rather creates even more convenient terms for realizing the enemy's war outline. Separating the forces provides the enemy's firepower sources with an additional layer of protection, and makes it more difficult to take control of the launching areas or undertake a strategic maneuver deep into enemy territory. Demilitarization and thinning out of troops are also less effective in the context of guerilla and anti-tank means, which have become a core component of ground battles. Ironically, what Israel needs today in order to maintain strategic balance and ensure peace is not the separation of forces but actually convenient corridors of approach to neighboring territories. One must not dismiss the idea of early warning, but as the probability of invasion decreases it is necessary for the sake of operational convenience rather than for existential reasons such as in 1973. Moreover, when Israel's enemies favored a symmetrical war paradigm, complex preparations were required for starting a war, such as moving thousands of tanks and logistics from home bases to the front lines. However, in the current paradigm, it is possible to begin firing rockets even after only minimal preparations.

Another lesson linked to security arrangements has emerged from the unilateral withdrawals. Both in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon, chaotic non-state spaces emerged, and therefore it is difficult to arrive at satisfactory security arrangements there. This must serve as a red light before any additional unilateral withdrawal. These lessons correlate with the lessons the Americans have learned in Iraq and Afghanistan (as well as Pakistan): not every population in every area tends to organize itself on the basis of state rationale, even when given the opportunity to do so. Sometimes, the natural state of organization is based on religious, ethnic, tribal, or family rationale, while the avoidance of the state system naturally creates unstable situations. Furthermore,

the seventeen years that have passed have provided critical perspective with regard to relying on foreign forces for security arrangements. For example, the very partial success of UNIFIL in enforcing UN Security Council Resolution 1701, of the Europeans and Egyptians in preventing arms smuggling through the Philadelphi axis, and of the Palestinian Authority in preventing terrorism is not an encouraging model for the future.

The Implications for Israeli Policy

The tectonic plates of strategic reality are in constant motion. Ironically, Israel's natural partners in blocking Tehran are Cairo and Riyadh, and at times it seems as if Jerusalem's point of view is closer to theirs than to Washington's.[10] Meanwhile, Iran is eroding America's hegemony in the Middle East and establishing proxies undermining the status quo. If Iran attains nuclear capability, the movement of the tectonic plates is liable to prompt a strategic earthquake.

The question now at Israel's doorstep is the effect of these changes on its policies. It is possible to point to two alternative approaches: one contends that Israel must hurry and arrive at a peace settlement before Iran goes nuclear. According to this approach, Israel must strive to shape the regional political reality; whereby normalizing relations with the Palestinians and the Syrians should strengthen the moderate camp and disrupt Iranian plans. Military power and territory are but two pieces of the puzzle and, under certain circumstances, the strategic value of a political arrangement could be higher than the military factor.

A second approach holds that stable and lasting peace agreements require an enabling strategic environment as a precondition. Based on this approach, if there are already strategic balances in place it is then possible to arrive at a formal settlement, but if the strategic environment is unstable then the formal settlement on its own will be hard put to stabilize it; the settlement may not survive the blows of strategic instability.

According to this second approach, shifts of the tectonic plates – i.e., the proliferation of Iranian state and non-state satellites in the region, and the possibility of Iran's attaining nuclear weapons – are not the result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and therefore an Arab-Israeli settlement will be hard pressed to prevent them. The causes and

motivations for these processes are clearly much deeper and wider than the Arab-Israeli conflict. In addition, one of Iran's major programs is the creation of satellites within Arab states and development of capabilities threatening the regimes from within. Therefore, the second approach holds that without stopping Iran, even a settlement of one kind or another with Syria or the Palestinians will struggle to stop these trends over time, and the settlements (and regimes) will find it difficult to withstand the tests of time.

Yet whether we choose the first or the second approach, it seems that peace is another layer built on the foundation of military superiority, and a political settlement is not a substitute for military power. Military power is specifically meant to serve a situation in which the political arrangement collapses, and therefore it is a methodological and logical error to claim that the political settlement guarantees itself. The other side of the "peace is security" coin is that we have no military response should peace collapse, and we must take that into consideration as well. On the contrary, loss of territory requires compensation in the form of a large and immediately available force; the new firepower capabilities of Israel's neighbors – liable to disrupt the process of mobilizing the reserves and to harm the military rear – require the strengthening of the regular force and expanding military dispersion and redundancy. In certain senses, Israel's security deficit – i.e., the gap between the threats and the ability to remove them quickly at a tolerable cost – is one of the worst we have ever experienced. Therefore, Israel must significantly enlarge its defense budget and develop a host of new capabilities and approaches.

The changed reality must also teach us not to base a long term strategy on a certain confluence of circumstances existing at the time of an assessment (including the circumstances described in this article) that may not last into the future. Stability cannot be learned from a slice of any one given situation, but is rather an ongoing, dynamic process. It is necessary to maintain the strategic balance continuously over time and under changing circumstances.

Notes

1   President George H. W. Bush to Congress, September 11, 1990: "A new world order can emerge."
2   Uri Saguy, *Lights in the Mist* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1998), p. 174.

3   Ibid., p. 293.

4   See, for example, Ibid., pp. 191, 208, 280, 292-95.

5   In his situation assessment for 1991, then-Intelligence head Brig. Gen. Uri Saguy wrote, "There was no one challenging the idea that in the global balance, the United States, particularly after the crisis in the Gulf, remained the only superpower, with all other nations knocking at its doors, an entity seeking to form 'a new world order'… In the Middle East, the defeat of Iraq, in the past the central pillar of the total Arab military body, was a crushing blow to the Arab philosophy that had supported a solution by force… and thereby opened the possibility of some Eastern front…As a result, the realization that now there remained no other practical alternative to a political move to solve the conflict with Israel became more and more widespread, taking root even in Syria. It seems to me that this is the essence of the new state of affairs." Ibid., pp. 153-54.

6   See, for example, Ibid., pp. 144, 147-48, 153-54, 191-92.

7   For sources and extensive reading, see for example Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and "Other Means,"* Combating Terrorism Center, West Point, October 13, 2008.

8   "No aspect of the Iraq quagmire can be resolved without Iranian involvement. Washington has a better chance of modifying Iran's influence in Iraq--and Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon--than of immediately halting it," Samantha Power, *Time*, January 17, 2008.

9   Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *Haaretz*, June 29, 2008.

10 This is reflected, for example, in the Baker-Hamilton Report and its echoes of the thinking of the early 1990s, whereby the regional friction fault line is the Arab-Israeli one, which mostly emanates from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the promotion of US interests in the region requires payments in Israeli currency. Yet today, the fault line is with Iran. Seventeen years of the peace process have made moderate Arabs weary of the Palestinians, and the regional interest in containing Iran is mutual and its promotion requires no payment in Israeli currency.