

Strategic ASSESSMENT

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Strategic ASSESSMENT

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.

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Abstracts

Israel's Natural Gas Resources: Economic and Strategic Significance / Shmuel Even

Over the last decade there have been impressive developments in the three components of Israel's natural gas industry: discovery, transport, and consumption. Early 2009 marked an historic development with the discovery of the Tamar and Dalit gas reservoirs off the Haifa-Hadera coasts. These discoveries joined previous gas discoveries in the Mediterranean and ensure the continued development of the natural gas sector. A seismic survey from June 2010 indicated a possibility for much larger gas reservoirs, suggesting that Israel might have the potential to become a gas exporter. The article reviews the strategic economic, security, environmental, and perhaps political advantages to Israel of natural gas, one of Israel's few natural resources.

US-Israel Relations: Approaching a Turning Point? / Zaki Shalom

Since the beginning of Barack Obama's term as president, US-Israel relations have been characterized by almost continuous periods of tension of varying levels of intensity. The core of the dispute between the two countries focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Herein lies the Obama administration's aim – to what depth and extent it is still unclear – to bring about a change in the framework and rules of the game that have existed for years between the two countries. The essay examines President Obama's policy regarding an Israeli-Palestinian accord and the administration's attitude towards Israel, as manifested in disputes on freezing construction in Judea and Samaria in general, as well as in East Jerusalem

Israel and the US: That Bad? / Oded Eran

While tensions between the Israeli government and the US administration indeed exist, mostly on the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they must be examined in their historical and political perspectives before a conclusion is reached that President Obama has in fact broken away from previously held norms in the bilateral relations. In fact, the friction

between the governments that marked the first part of Obama's tenure is highly resonant of previous US-Israel tensions. The essay reviews these moments of conflict, and urges that they not be misread by any of the parties involved in the greater Middle East conflict.

A Military Attack on Iran? Considerations for Israeli Decision Making / Ron Tira

In the coming months, Israel's national leadership may need to decide whether or not to attack nuclear installations in Iran. This will be one of the most complex decisions since the establishment of Israel. The purpose of this essay is to structure the discussion that will necessarily be held by the leadership as it sits down to reach a decision, and to point out the central questions influencing the issue that must be examined, including: What strategic purpose does Israel hope to achieve? What is the greater risk for Israel: a nuclear Iran or an attack on it? Can an attack even stop Iran from becoming nuclear? If the post-attack trends are essential to achievement of the desired goal, how can Israel influence them? These questions and others are framed in the essay.

Turning Point 4: The National Civilian Front Exercise / Meir Elran

Turning Point 4, held in May 2010, was the fourth annual nationwide emergency exercise of its type. Described as the largest ever to have taken place to date, it involved over 150 organizations at all echelons, from government ministries, the IDF, rescue organizations, and local government authorities. The exercise represents the implementation of one of the important lessons derived from the Second Lebanon War, which in the case of the management of the civilian front was defined as a chain of misconduct and failure on the part of the different echelons. The article reviews the results of the exercise and looks at the issues that will likely be dealt with in the future.

Syria's Return to Lebanon: The Challenge of the Lebanese State and the Role of Hizbollah / Daniel Sobelman

Lebanese discourse today resonates in the context of assessments that the international conflict concerning Iran's nuclear program is liable to lead to a confrontation and undermine stability in the entire region. No

less important, however, this discourse occurs in the context of what is emerging as Syria's return to the Lebanese theater and the subjugation of Lebanon, including Hizbollah, to the Syrian agenda. Syria's success in restoring its status in Lebanon is likely to bring Hizbollah's moment of truth nearer, in which it will face a real dilemma. It may be forced to choose between its loyalty to the axis of resistance and its loyalty to Lebanon, and it may confront the need to reduce the risk of being drawn into a regional conflict, as well as perhaps an internal one.

Beyond the Nuclear and Terror Threats: The Conventional Military Balance in the Gulf / Yoel Guzansky

The Persian Gulf is currently in the midst of one of the largest arms races it has ever known. The chief motivation for it is Iran's progress on its nuclear program and the possibility that Arab Gulf states will be in the line of fire in any future conflict. These states' military forces have undergone substantive changes in recent years, mainly improvements in their defensive capabilities, and ostensibly they have acquired certain capabilities to attack Iran. Nevertheless, even massive procurement of weapon systems, no matter how advanced, is no match for Iran's military power and its ability to conduct modern warfare over any length of time. This article focuses on the changes taking place in the military balance in the Gulf and the conventional military threats to the Arab Gulf states.

Israel's Natural Gas Resources: Economic and Strategic Significance

Shmuel Even

Over the last decade there have been impressive developments in the three components of Israel's natural gas industry: discovery, transport, and consumption. Early 2009 marked an historic development with the discovery of the Tamar and Dalit gas reservoirs off the Haifa-Hadera coasts. These discoveries joined previous gas discoveries in the Mediterranean (off the coast of Ashkelon) and ensure the continued development of the natural gas sector. A seismic survey from June 2010 indicated a possibility for much larger gas reservoirs, suggesting that Israel might have the potential to become a gas exporter. Natural gas is one of Israel's few natural resources, and may provide it with strategic economic, security, and environmental advantages, and perhaps political as well.¹

Gas Consumption in Israel

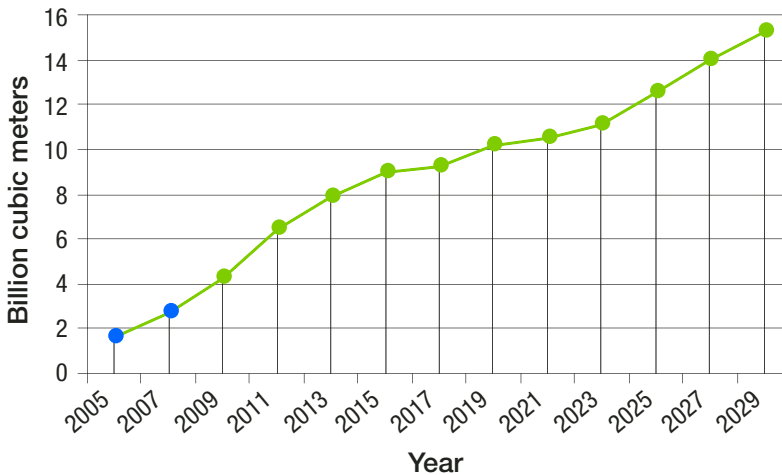
Natural gas consumption in Israel is increasing rapidly. According to the Ministry of National Infrastructures, in 2009 Israel consumed about 4.2 billion cubic meters (bcm), compared with 2.7 bcm in 2007 and 1.6 bcm in 2005. More than half of the natural gas is provided by the Tethys Sea consortium (Israeli gas), and the rest by the Egyptian EMG company. In the summer of 2009, natural gas was the source for 40 percent of Israel's electricity production – a rate similar to that in Britain. Dr. Amit Mor, CEO of Eco Energy, estimates that in the course of this decade, natural gas will comprise around 60 percent of the fuel used to generate electricity. This rate may be even higher unless an additional coal power station is

Dr. Shmuel Even, senior research associate at INSS

established in Ashkelon. In a related trend, there has been a decrease in the use of oil and oil products in Israel. In 2010, natural gas consumption will replace the need for 4.5 million tons of refined oil. By the end of the year, the Israel Electric Corporation (IEC) gas-operated units are expected to comprise around 55 percent of the company's total capacity.²

The Ministry of National Infrastructures forecasts a substantial increase in natural gas consumption in Israel (figure 1): for 2011 – 6.4 bcm (78 percent to generate electricity, and the rest to industry); in 2015 – 9 bcm; and in 2025 more than 11 bcm (two thirds for generating electricity and one third for industry and other purposes). A substantial expansion is also expected in the variety of gas consumers. Other than the needs of the IEC and heavy industry, natural gas can be used as fuel for cars, as an alternative for domestic gas, and as an inexpensive source of energy for desalination.

**Figure 1. Natural Gas Consumption in Israel
(recent past and forecast)**



Source: Ministry of National Infrastructures

Natural gas transportation in Israel is carried out by the national transport system, based in the sea off the coast of Ashkelon. The system connects between the natural gas suppliers and the gas consumers: IEC power plants; private electricity producers; and industrial plants such as Israel Chemicals, Dead Sea Works, Nesher Israeli Cement Enterprises,

the refinery in Ashdod, and the Hadera Paper group. The transport system's network pipes are already about 400 km. The southern part of the gas pipeline system reaches the Dead Sea Works plant and the power plant in Sodom, while the northern section reaches the power plant Hagit (south of Haifa). The underwater section of the system (about 90 km off the shore) supplies the large IEC power stations.

Natural Gas in Israel

Gas fields off the coast of Israel are the main source of natural gas for the local market. The proved gas reserves in these fields³ are estimated at over 200 bcm (47 times the total natural gas consumption in Israel in 2009), but their estimated potential is much larger. There are three main milestones in the development of the gas sector:

- a. *The discovery of gas fields off the coast of Ashkelon between 1999 and 2001.* These fields have provided Israel with natural gas since 2004. In 2009, these reservoirs provided 67 percent of IEC's gas needs. About 15 bcm have already been produced from these fields, and the remainder is estimated at about 20 bcm. Most of the remainder has already been allocated in existing contracts, and is intended to serve the gas sector until the full flow of gas from the new Tamar and Dalit gas fields is in place a few years from now.
- b. *Discovery in early 2009 of the Tamar and Dalit gas fields, which are intended to serve the market in the next decades.* Proved gas reserves in the Tamar gas field, located 90 km west of the Haifa coast, are estimated at about 184 bcm, with proved and estimated reserves together estimated at 247 bcm.⁴ Deep drilling has been carried out at the Tamar field; for example, Tamar 2 drilling went as deep as 1.7 km and its final depth (including beneath the sea floor) reached 5.1 km. Cost of the field's development is currently estimated at about \$2.8 billion.⁵ The gas flow should start within a few years, at which time the Tamar field will become a major source of gas supply for the economy. Gas reserves in the Dalit field, located 60 km west of the Hadera coast, are estimated at only 14 billion cubic meters, which decreases the value of developing the field. However, development of the Dalit field can be completed earlier than the Tamar field since drilling is less deep and closer to the coast.
- c. *Signs of additional new large gas fields that, if verified, will make Israel a gas exporter.* Such indications appeared in the June 3, 2010

announcement by the Noble Energy Company (partner to the gas discoveries) regarding the initial interpretation of a wide seismic survey conducted in the area. According to the announcement, Noble Energy believes there are favorable prospects for drilling natural gas reserves in the Leviathan structure (Amit and Rachel fields, located west of Tamar) and could reach up to 16 trillion cubic feet (453 bcm), double than in Tamar, as the geological chance of success at the structure is 50 percent. It was also reported that the total potential of gas reserves in the Leviathan and other structures examined in the latest survey is about 850 bcm (in the waters of Israel and Cyprus). However, an estimation of the geological probability of finding gas in other structures has not yet been carried out, and it is possible that it may be lower than in the Leviathan structure.⁶ In light of this data, Noble Energy intends to carry out exploratory drilling in the Leviathan structure towards the end of the year.⁷ Further reinforcement of the prospects of discovering gas is found in a report by the US Geological Survey institute, which indicates considerable potential of gas and even oil reserves within the layers of the ground underneath the Mediterranean in Israel's region.⁸

The Import of Natural Gas from Egypt

Egypt is the second source of gas for the Israeli economy. Egypt's proved gas reserves are estimated at around 1,655 bcm, about 0.9 percent of the total world reserves.⁹ In 2009 the Egyptian company EMG provided 37 percent of IEC's natural gas demand. Egyptian gas is supplied to Israel through an undersea pipeline that runs between el-Arish and the gas import facility in the Ashkelon waters. Natural gas supply is one of the most significant reflections of the economic ties between the countries.

The process of Israel's acquiring gas from Egypt was fairly protracted. In July 2005 an agreement was signed between IEC and EMG to supply about 25 bcm of gas for 15 years at an annual rate of 1.7 bcm. The agreement allows IEC a five-year extension for the same annual quantities under the same conditions. Gas flow began in mid 2008, but by mid June 2009 EMG did not fulfill its obligations. EMG argued that there is a general shortage of gas in Egypt due to delays in developing new production fields, gas demands that are exceeding forecasts, and malfunctions in the supply system. IEC was also asked to raise the price of gas stipulated

in the agreement due to a wide gap between the price appearing in the agreement and the price of gas in the global market. In August 2009 IEC's Board of Directors approved an updated agreement with EMG (according to the changes in the 2005 agreement made by Egypt with EMG). The updated agreement with IEC includes an increased price of natural gas and a system that allows a periodic price increase, reduces the amounts that IEC is obligated to purchase through the agreement, and establishes measures to ensure the reliability of gas supply. EMG has so far fulfilled its supply obligations.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in July 2009 EMG signed an agreement with a private electricity supplier, Dorad Group, to supply 0.75 bcm of natural gas per year for a period of seventeen years.¹¹

Additional Potential Sources of Gas in the Area

Natural gas off the coast of Gaza. In May 2000 Prime Minister Ehud Barak granted the Palestinians the option to search for oil and gas off the coast of the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Authority then granted permission to the British Gas company to carry out offshore drillings off the Gaza coast. In August 2000, natural gas reserves were discovered in the Gaza Marine gas field two kilometers below sea level, totaling more than forty bcm. After field development, the project's earnings were supposed to be distributed as follows: 60 percent to British Gas; 10 percent to the Palestinian Authority investment fund, and 30 percent to a privately owned Lebanese infrastructure company. Since Palestinians gas consumption is generally low, gas field development and gas production are conditioned in its sale to a third party – Israel or Egypt – but negotiations conducted by British Gas did not produce an agreement. To date the field has not been developed due to financial disagreements, concerns that some funds will end up in terrorist organizations hands, the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, and the priority given to the purchase of gas from Egypt rather than from the Palestinians. In February 2009, after a long period where IEC and British Gas were not in contact with one another, the parties met in London to resume negotiations regarding the sale of natural gas from Gaza Marine to IEC, but so far with no reported progress.¹² Under suitable political conditions, Palestinian gas could serve as an important source of energy

There are signs of additional new large gas fields that, if verified, will make Israel a gas exporter.

for power stations and water desalination stations that in the future will be constructed within Palestinian territory. Part of it may even find its way into the Israeli market or overseas through Israel (if and when Israel develops an infrastructure for export).

The option of importing gas from Russia or the republics in the Caspian Sea through Turkey. Turkey's geographical location, between countries rich in gas reserves and the European gas consumers, makes it an important junction on the regional gas infrastructure map. For example, the Russian gas pipeline, also referred to as the Blue Stream Pipeline, which brings natural gas into Europe, passes through its territory. In August 2009 Prime Minister Putin announced that Russia and Turkey will examine an option to lay a pipeline that will split off from the Blue Stream pipe and allow export to Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and Cyprus.¹³ The discovery of gas in Israel and the updated agreement with Egypt reduced Israel's current need for this option. Therefore, gas imports from Russia, which possesses about 25 percent of the world's proved gas reserves (table 1), or from the republics in the Caspian Sea area may become a long term alternative in case difficulties emerge with existing supply sources. In any case, on June 3, 2010, as a result of the tensions between Turkey and Israel, the Turkish minister of energy and infrastructure said that Turkey will not be developing any joint projects with Israel until normalization between the two countries is restored, and that Turkey has no intention of starting a feasibility study on transportation of water or natural gas to Israel.¹⁴

The option of importing liquid gas (LNG) from around the world. In order to reduce the dependence of the gas sector on gas suppliers, there are plans for construction of a liquefied natural gas facility with capacity for an annual supply of 4 bcm, which would allow liquid gas suppliers from around the world to bring natural gas into the Israeli market. Under normal conditions, liquid gas imports to Israel are not economically worthwhile. Thus, the main importance of this facility lies in providing a regular supply of gas in case of malfunction on the part of one of the suppliers. To date, six approved entrepreneurs have been approved to bid on constructing the facility.¹⁵

**Table 1. Distribution of the world's proved gas reserves
(estimates January 2010)**

Country	% of the world's proved gas reserves
Russia	25.4
Iran	15.8
Qatar	13.6
Turkmenistan	4.0
Saudi Arabia	4.0
United States	3.7
Abu Dhabi	3.0
Nigeria	2.8
Venezuela	2.7
Algeria	2.4
Iraq	1.7
Australia	1.7
China	1.6
Indonesia	1.6
Kazakhstan	1.3
Egypt	0.9
Libya	0.8
Other	13.1
World	100

Source: *Oil & Gas Journal*

Israel's Economic Benefits from Natural Gas

There are several advantages to establishing power plants that run on natural gas (table 2). Unlike coal plants, which must be built on the coast – usually a dense and high priced area – gas-powered plants require a relatively small area and can be built anywhere. They are generally much less expensive to build than coal-powered stations. The main drawback of using natural gas over oil and coal is the difficulty in storage and transport in containers. The most effective way to market it is by placing a gas pipeline infrastructure that must be maintained and secured.

It is possible to liquefy natural gas and transport it in tankers, but this involves relatively high costs.

Reducing market costs. Natural gas is the cheapest energy product in the Israeli market and its price is similar to the price of coal. The proximity of gas wells to the local market and the competition between Israeli and Egyptian gas suppliers allow Israeli gas consumers to purchase natural gas at low prices. IEC estimates the cumulative savings to the economy during 2004-2009 from use of natural gas at a total of about 23.5 billion NIS.¹⁶ Following the transition to the use of natural gas, the electricity authority approved a reduction in the prices of electricity starting February 15, 2010 of about 9.3 percent for domestic consumers and 16.3 percent for industrial consumers.

Direct income to the state treasury from use of Israeli gas. In 2009 the state collected nearly 150 million NIS royalties from the use of the Tethys Sea fields off the coast of Ashkelon. However, royalties (12.5 percent gross) are just a part of the state's revenues from gas. The Ministry of Finance estimates that the total value of taxes collected in Israel as a result of natural gas activities (including individual income taxes, corporate tax, and royalties) is about 40 percent of gas value, similar to the situation in Britain. By way of illustration, out of current proved gas reserves whose value is now estimated at \$40 billion, over the years the state is expected to receive about \$16 billion.¹⁷

In April 2010 the Ministry of Finance established a committee to examine the state gas royalties earned from discovered gas. The committee had the following mandates:

- a. To examine the fiscal system currently used in Israel in regard to oil and gas resources in comparison to countries with similar macroeconomic and democratic characteristics, while taking into account the special geopolitical and economic conditions in Israel.
- b. To offer an updated fiscal policy, with reference to the various stages of licensing and disclosure for resource areas found at the time of the committee's establishment.
- c. To examine the possible implications of current discoveries as well as future revelations for the Israeli economy.¹⁸

In other words, at issue is the increase of royalty rates that the state collects from natural gas producers. Investors in search for gas have reservations about the possibility of raising the royalty rate for licenses

and existing discoveries, with considerable sums already invested in seismic surveys and searches. The investors consider it to be “unfair play”¹⁹ and claim that the State of Israel should encourage investments in order to ensure the continued momentum in its oil and gas fields exploration.²⁰

The contribution to Israel's balance of payments. The use of Israeli gas will save hundreds of millions of dollars a year earmarked for fuel import. Israel is also expected to gain substantial revenues in foreign currency should it export gas. In other words, discovering gas not only reduces Israel's energy dependence but also its dependence on foreign currency. Even though currently Israel does not suffer from a balance of payments issue and in the short term foreign currency savings even contributes to the shekel's revaluation, which disturbs the economic leaders, the use of Israeli gas is still referred to as a long term strategic advantage that can help reduce the Israeli economy's dependence on overseas markets in difficult times.

Table 2. Electricity Production Costs at Different Power Plants

Burning material in power plant	Cost of electricity production (kWh) in NIS (in December 2009 prices)
Gas	0.129
Coal	0.15
Fuel Oil	0.38
Diesel	1.429

Source: IEC, periodic report for 2009

Investments in the energy sector. Consumption of Israeli gas in Israel has revolutionized the local search for gas and oil. The ability of investors to sell the gas at the nearest market has increased their motivation to continue to seek and drill for oil and gas in Israel. As a result, considerable investments are also being made in the transport infrastructure. So far, approximately \$1.3 billion have been invested in the natural gas sector, and the expected investment for the next five years is approximately \$3.7 billion.²¹

The environment. Natural gas burns relatively cleanly in comparison to other fuels, such as crude oil, diesel, and coal, and it emits fewer

pollutants and greenhouse gases. Improving air quality has a long term economic and social contribution to increased quality of life, decreased morbidity, and so on. Moreover, the effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions harmful to the atmosphere is currently a leading international priority. The use of gas improves Israel's international status as a state engaged in contributing to the environment.

Reducing Israel's Energy Dependence

More than most countries in the world, the State of Israel has a security interest to reduce its dependence on the import of basic resources such as water, essential food and raw materials, and – in particular – energy. Israel is still in a state of isolation in the Middle East, most of its energy sources are far away, its supply routes are narrow and limited, and in times of conflict foreign ships and tankers might not be able to reach the country's ports. Additionally, Israel may suffer a shortage of energy along with other countries in the world, following events such as a war in the Persian Gulf and instability that could impact on large oil producers. Following the Iranian revolution in 1979, for example, there was a rise in prices as well as difficulty in supplying oil globally.

The "oil weapon" was used by the Arabs in 1974. Although a similar ban is currently not likely, even then it came as a great surprise to the Western world and Israel. At the time it was estimated that Saudi Arabia would not work against the interests of the United States, but eventually it was drawn into Iraq's initiative. Although the current political conditions are totally different, world dependence on Arab and Iranian oil, controlling more than 60 percent of the world's proved reserves, could grow, and in a time span of decades the geopolitical map may change. Even today energy import is a matter of supreme importance in the foreign relations of oil importers. Previously a main issue was Western Europe's dependence on oil imports from the Middle East; it is now joined by East Asian countries like China and India, with rapidly growing markets dependent on oil from abroad. Although energy resources development will not reduce the political pressure caused by oil boycotts on consumers, it will certainly reduce Israel's energy needs. A significant change in the political power of oil producers will occur only when there will be alternatives based on renewable energy.

Israel is currently not dependent on oil for electricity production. Table 3 illustrates that most of the electricity in Israel is produced by coal and natural gas, and the amount of oil used for electricity generation is minimal. However, Israel depends on oil for transportation as well as for raw materials for industry. Further discoveries of natural gas in large quantities may reduce the need for refined oil for transportation by refueling cars with compressed natural gas or by a rise in electricity production, which will provide for electric cars on a large scale. Gas discoveries are also essential in reducing Israel's future dependence on gas imports.

Table 3. Electricity Production in IEC

	2008	2009
Coal	64.9%	64.7%
Natural Gas	26%	32.6%
Fuel Oil	3.1%	1.2%
Diesel	6%	1.5%
Total	100%	100%

Source: IEC, periodic report for 2009

Malfunction in gas supply and transport is one of the leading risks of the resource. It requires a sensitive system that must be secured. To reduce the risk, most power plants converted to gas are supposed to maintain the possibility of being refueled by liquid fuel (dual fuel capability). It is highly important to preserve the system even if it is not used for many years. The second component of the planned gas supply security system is a facility capable of overseas liquid gas absorption, which is expected to be available in the coming years. It would provide security to consumers who do not possess dual fuel systems. The third component is to use the depleting gas field off the coast of Ashkelon (Mary B) as a strategic and operational storage reservoir for natural gas to ensure supplies in case of failure, and allow flexibility in supply when demand peaks. The reservoir will function in this role after the economy will base itself on the gas flow from Tamar.²²

Developing the gas sector is part of a general strategic effort to reduce the dependence on oil. A related developing area is renewable energy sources. On January 29, 2009 the Israeli government set a target for the production of renewable power amounting to 10 percent of the energy

needed for the country's electricity in 2020 (interim target – 5 percent until 2014). On February 7 the government decided to establish a team of CEOs to formulate a national plan to reduce dependence on oil, headed by the head of the National Economic Council in the Prime Minister's Office, Professor Eugene Kandel. The team should submit its recommendations by August 2010. In this context, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said:

The government considers the research, development, and implementation of technologies that reduce the global use of oil-based transportation as a national mission that requires top level national priority...The world becomes aware of oil substitutes for transportation only when the price of oil goes up. When world oil prices go down, the awareness and investments in this field disappear. Therefore, Israel must consistently focus efforts on research and development of oil substitutes and do so consistently, while harnessing other countries that have an interest of freeing themselves from the grip of oil suppliers.

The team was instructed to examine priorities for research and academic and industrial development, and pool governmental resources towards a national effort for developing oil substitutes by cooperating with foreign governments, the private sector, and others.²³

One related issue is water. A reduction in water prices due to desalination can contribute to solving the water shortage in Israel. It reduces Israel's dependence on natural fresh water resources, and decreases the need for water transportation solutions, such as the project to import water from Turkey discussed in the past. The ability to desalinate water at affordable prices can help lessen political disagreements in the policies of this sensitive area.

Conclusion

Israel is in the midst of a new energy era, marked primarily by an increase in use of natural gas and the accelerated use of renewable energies as a replacement for oil. The use of gas allows savings in energy costs and contributes to the environment.

Of the existing and potential natural gas resources, the gas fields off the coast of Israel are particularly important. Israeli gas has a major role in the following areas: income for the country's treasury, foreign currency savings, increase in the number of investments in Israel, GDP growth,

stable energy supply, and minimizing Israel's dependence on overseas energy resources. As more gas fields are discovered, these advantages will grow in significance and if the latest predictions are realized, Israel will become a gas exporter.

In the regional context, the import of gas from Egypt has a significant political importance due to Egypt's centrality in the relations between the two countries lacking other economic and social normalization aspects. Importing gas from the Palestinian Authority is not currently on the agenda, but in the future it may contribute to the economic development of the Palestinian market, which is an Israeli interest. The use of natural gas increases the feasibility of desalination, therefore helping to reduce the potential of regional conflicts over water.

Notes

- 1 This article is intended for academic purposes only. The data appearing in it should not be relied upon for any investment or operative needs.
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- 6 Delek Drilling Ltd. partnership and Ratio Oil Exploration Ltd. partnership, note to the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange, June 3, 2010. The companies warn that the given information is a "look into the future" based on assumptions and estimates given to them. At this stage there is no certainty, and they may be updated.
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US-Israel Relations: Approaching a Turning Point?

Zaki Shalom

Introduction

Since the beginning of Barack Obama's term as president, US-Israel relations have been characterized by almost continuous periods of tension of varying levels of intensity. In itself, tension in the bilateral relations is not new and has accompanied US-Israel relations for decades. While there is mutual recognition of shared values and interests, at the same time there is a long series of issues on which the two countries disagree. Occasionally the administration chooses to blur the disputes and lower their profiles. Sometimes it chooses to highlight them. The Obama administration has generally chosen the second option, emphasizing the disputes and granting them high media prominence.

The core of the dispute between the two countries focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. What is most apparent in this regard is the Obama administration's aim – to what depth and extent it is still unclear – to bring about a change in the framework and rules of the game that have existed for years between the two countries. On other broad extensive features of US-Israel relations, e.g., strategic cooperation, economic assistance, and political support in international institutions, a close and tight relationship has, at least at this stage, been preserved.

The administration's policy towards Israel on the Palestinian issue stems primarily from its estimation that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the prime cause of instability in the region and America's eroding status there. It is a supreme national interest of the Obama administration to

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bring about stability in the region, largely due to its desire to remove US forces from Iraq and Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. It fears, and justifiably so, that should the region's lack of stability deteriorate to a situation of overall conflict and anarchy, dangers would abound for the international system in general and the US in particular.

President Obama apparently believes that an Israeli-Palestinian accord is within reach. He feels it is within his ability, thanks to his personality, great determination, and readiness to harness the power of the office of president for this objective, despite the failures of previous administrations to do so. In addition, the current US administration is convinced that achieving an Israeli-Palestinian accord would make it much easier for the US to realize an objective President Obama ascribed as supremely important to the US: reconciliation with the Arab world.

This essay examines President Obama's policy regarding an Israeli-Palestinian accord and the administration's attitude towards Israel, as manifested in disputes on freezing construction in Judea and Samaria in general, as well as in East Jerusalem.

The Demand for a Total Settlement Freeze

The first dispute with the Obama administration made headlines following President Obama's demand for a total freeze on settlements. As far as is known, this demand was presented to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu already in his first meeting with President Obama in May 2009, and was reaffirmed in President Obama's June 4 speech in Cairo. Statements were made openly and in an unequivocal manner, leaving no room for any other interpretations. President Obama declared: "The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop."¹

In subsequent messages relayed by the administration to Israel, it was stressed that understandings and agreements with previous administrations cannot be impediments to an accord in the spirit of President Obama's vision. This was expressed clearly by the president early in his term, when he stated explicitly that the attitude of previous administrations to Israel and its policy on the Palestinian issue was flawed. The implication was that the administration did not intend to

adhere to these understandings merely because they existed. Rather, it intended to turn over a new leaf regarding Israel and its positions on the Palestinian issue. This posture of suppressing or ignoring previous understandings does not suit basic norms of relations between states. It certainly appears incongruous with Israel's status as a close ally of the United States.²

Indeed, following President Obama's demand that Israel accept a total settlement freeze, his administration firmly refused to accept Israel's claim concerning understandings between Prime Ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert and President George Bush. These called for delimiting areas in which Israeli construction would be permitted on a defined scale. From the start, leaders in the administration tried to deny the existence of these understandings. However, after senior figures of the Bush administration, foremost among them Elliott Abrams, explained that understandings on the settlement issue did indeed exist, administration spokespeople rushed in. They clarified, some explicitly and some implicitly, that those understandings were irrelevant and that the president was determined that Senator Mitchell, special envoy for the region, formulate new understandings with Israel.³

This conduct by the administration has produced fissures in the special relationship formed over the years between Israel and the US. True, in the past there were also instances in which an administration renounced, directly or indirectly, commitments it undertook regarding Israel. However, in the sixteen years of the Clinton and Bush presidencies (1993–2009), it appeared that Israel and the US enjoyed a close, tight relationship. And what was regarded as acceptable in the past today seems an unacceptable deviation from conventional bilateral relations between them. This conduct of the Obama administration, particularly since it involves an opposing stance on a fundamental, broad issue and not a localized small matter, damages Israel's unique status. It alters the rules of the game that have formed over the years between the two countries.

Suppressing or ignoring previous understandings does not suit basic norms of relations between states, and appears incongruous with Israel's status as a close US ally.

In fact, the message the administration has sent Israel regarding the Israeli-Palestinian matter is of a power oriented policy devoid of sentiment, based on viewing the balance of power between the two sides

at a specific point in time. Such a policy seeks to deliver the message that the administration is determined to implement the blueprint of an accord with strong determination and decisiveness, and it is the presidential echelon that is directing the moves.

Sometimes the policy leads to a demonstration of excessive self-confidence or in any event to demands, especially from Israel, that are unrealistic. The demand for a total freeze on construction in Judea and Samaria, and later in East Jerusalem, is a clear example of this. In the weeks and months following the president's call for an immediate, total construction freeze in the settlements, it seems to have become clear to the administration that Israel's complex political, social, and economic reality made this demand unrealistic and in fact unattainable. President Obama was forced to relax his positions in an effort to minimize the damage caused to him and to Israel-US relations from the crisis that ensued. He sent Senator Mitchell to Israel to conduct a dialogue with Israel concerning the parameters of the freeze. The starting assumption was that a total freeze was not possible; now what had to be discussed was the scope of the freeze and the areas in which it would be realized. Ultimately, an understanding was achieved with the president's emissary – in part official and written, and in part, almost certainly, based on unwritten understandings – concerning areas in which construction is prohibited and others in which it is permitted on a defined scale. As far as is known, East Jerusalem was not included in the areas in which a construction freeze was agreed upon with Mitchell.⁴

Following the understandings that were achieved, it seemed that Israel and the US were in agreement over the basic parameters concerning renewed political negotiations with the Palestinians. In his State of the Union speech (January 27, 2010), the president avoided any mention of Israel and the issue of an accord with the Palestinians. There were those who interpreted his omission – considering the circumstances, the president's intensive involvement in an Israeli-Palestinian accommodation, and the high importance he ascribed to the issue in US national priorities – as an expression of satisfaction, even if relative, with the existing situation. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton went even further and confirmed Prime Minister Netanyahu's declaration: that there was never a demand to stop settlement construction as a condition to negotiations. She even complimented Prime Minister Netanyahu

for his willingness, more than that of any prime minister of Israel, to implement moves to freeze construction activity in the West Bank.⁵ The president seemed to acknowledge the limits of his ability to impose the initial sweeping demands on Israel when he said: “We overestimated our ability to promote peace between Israel and the Palestinians.”⁶

Construction in East Jerusalem

Within a short time it became clear to the Obama administration that the understandings achieved with the Netanyahu government fell well short of satisfying the Palestinian Authority, which was not prepared to renew negotiations with Israel based on those understandings. It appeared that the root of disagreement was mainly the issue of construction in East Jerusalem. Added to these actual issues were most probably feelings of frustration and rage in the higher echelons of the administration. This was due to rising criticism over the continued deadlock in the peace process as well as media reports in Israel that from the Netanyahu-Obama confrontation, the prime minister emerged with the upper hand.

It is also possible the American administration received leaks that right wing factions in the Netanyahu government saw the freeze agreement as a lever to undermine the understandings between the Sharon and Olmert governments and President Bush. These limited the right for continued construction to settlement blocs only. Based on this interpretation, the freeze agreements abolish the unique dimension of settlement blocs and in fact produce an identical ranking among communities in settlement blocs and isolated settlements. From the standpoint of a right wing government whose senior figures seek to preserve Israeli control over the entire West Bank, this development could be considered a significant, positive achievement.⁷

Within a short time the calm that ostensibly prevailed between Israel and the US evaporated. The issue of continued construction in Jerusalem, the most sensitive nerve center of Israeli-Palestinian relations, rose to the top of the agenda, leading to what some might call one of the most serious crises in Israel-US relations.

The dispute on the issue made headlines during the visit to Israel of Vice President Joe Biden (March 2010), following reports on the approval of permits for 1,600 new housing units in Ramat Shlomo in East Jerusalem. These types of disclosures are not an unusual phenomenon.

Many administration figures have been apprised of decisions on settlements shortly before or during their visits to Israel. In general, such announcements led to temporary rage, which would ebb during the visit. But this time the situation was different. The announcement led to unprecedented anger and astonishment in the vice president's delegation over the stinging insult suffered by the American guest during his visit to Israel. This visit, it was claimed, was meant to enlist the US vice president's sympathy for Israel to create a reconciliatory atmosphere in relations between the two countries and improve the relationship in light of the prevailing friction. It was meant to bring the sides closer towards declaring the opening of proximity talks. However the provocative steps of the Israeli government overturned those efforts.

Despite the anger, tensions seemed to subside during the visit, due to Netanyahu's willingness to apologize for the incident and pledge that his government would act to prevent the recurrence of such phenomena. Eli Yishai, minister of the interior and direct overseer of building committees, also quickly apologized for the insult to the vice president. However, as time went by it became evident that what transpired was not buried so easily. Within a short time, leaks emerged from administration circles in Washington that President Obama was fuming and did not intend to overlook this serious incident. Joe Biden, as White House circles reported, came to Israel in order to work towards renewing peace talks with the Palestinians; the announcement on construction came just as he was prepared to express full and unqualified US commitment to the security of Israel.⁸

This conduct of the Obama administration alters the rules of the game that have formed over the years between the US and Israel.

The impression among different circles in Israel was that the Obama administration decided to use the unexpected and humiliating incident in Jerusalem to embarrass Israel and extract a commitment that previously had not been demanded: to agree, during early stages of discussions towards the possible renewal of negotiations between the sides, to avoid continued

construction in extensive areas of East Jerusalem. Over the years, an unwritten agreement had formed between Israel and the US that Jerusalem is the most difficult issue to resolve and thus any discussion of arrangements concerning the city would be postponed for the final stages

of negotiations. This far reaching demand on the part of President Obama prompted a supposition among circles defining themselves as “close to the office of the Prime Minister,” to the effect that the administration’s sentiments of rage were not an expression of authentic anger. Instead they were a careful ambush meant to force the Netanyahu government into de facto recognition of the principle of dividing Jerusalem between Israel and the Palestinian Authority – even prior to the start of negotiations.⁹

The administration tried to reaffirm its demand for a construction freeze in East Jerusalem by asking Prime Minister Netanyahu to respond to a series of concrete questions as early as possible. This tactic of presenting questions was also employed in the past in dialogues with Israel. One recalls the questions referred by the Kennedy administration to Ben-Gurion concerning the reactor in Dimona (January 1961) and the questions of US Secretary of State James Baker to Prime Minister Shamir (1991–92). In part this technique is meant to convey the image of an hierarchal relationship between Israel and the administration, between the questioner and the one questioned. The administration’s questions were ultimately supposed to bring about acceptance of the demand to cease construction in different areas of East Jerusalem. Serving the questions in a subpoena-like fashion and the atmosphere of urgency regarding a response were meant to demonstrate to the Israeli government that at work was an order, not a request. Unlike in the past, the administration’s aim was to avoid entering a prolonged dialogue that would lead to an erosion of its demands.

Since then it appears that with the demand for a total freeze on settlements, Obama has understood, albeit gradually, that a sweeping demand to freeze construction in East Jerusalem is extremely hard to implement. Perhaps the demand is unrealistic and as such cannot be realized as it was formulated. In practice, it has become evident to the administration that the Israeli government possesses tools, even if limited in scope, to weather the stormy winds blowing in Israel’s direction from the administration. Thus the sense of urgency the administration sought in order to oblige the Israeli government to give answers under time pressure has eroded, as significantly, the Israeli government intentionally delayed its answer

It seems that the administration has essentially come to terms with the fact that the Netanyahu government will not accede to all of its demands.

to the US demands. At the same time, explicit and implicit threats of the administration's intent to present a peace plan of its own have ebbed, and the extensive criticism at home and abroad has waned somewhat.¹⁰

When the prime minister ultimately gave his answer, it became clear to the Obama administration that the Israeli government also possesses the option to respond negatively to the president's demands, despite its awareness of the great risk this entails. From the multitude of reports, it appears that Israel's negative answer was softened skillfully with fuzzy wording given to different interpretations, with a professed willingness for various gestures to the Palestinians and, apparently, a slowdown and curbing of construction in different neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. From the viewpoint of the current Israeli government, the price it was forced to pay in order to appease the administration temporarily was reasonable. The fact that decisions on the freeze did not spark serious protests in right wing circles inside and outside the government (and even among settlers in Judea and Samaria) shows that the price was almost certainly tolerable from their point of view. From a formal standpoint, a sort of precedent of no small importance was established in the shaping of future relations between Israel and the Obama administration: non-agreement to the president's unilateral demand to freeze construction in East Jerusalem.¹¹

Within the framework of the administration's pressure on the Israeli government to accept its demands regarding an Israeli-Palestinian accord, it crossed a line in its treatment of Israel.

It now seems that the administration has essentially come to terms with the fact that it will not receive full agreement to all of its demands from the Netanyahu government. Its responses following Israel's answer were measured and guarded. Actually, clear signs have been evident in recent weeks of the administration's readiness to appease Israel and its government. At the same time, there is a new self-scrutiny in the administration on the question of its policy for advancing an Israeli-Palestinian accord in general and the question of

its relations with Israel in particular. Based on numerous reports, the president recently said to a delegation of Democratic senators that there had indeed been missteps in the administration's handling of disputes with Israel: "I walked through a minefield and lost a few fingers."¹²

To summarize the current state of affairs, although the prime minister emerged beaten and bruised from his recent skirmish with the president and secretary of state, from his standpoint he scored very important points in his continued handling of the peace process vis-à-vis the Palestinians and vis-à-vis the United States. He weathered the most serious crisis he has faced since the beginning of his term after making it clear to the administration that Jerusalem is one of his government's red lines. Meantime, his domestic political standing remains firm, and has perhaps even grown.¹³

Where is the Obama Administration Headed?

If the prime minister supposes – which is presumably not the case – that he has reached a secure, calm position, he will likely soon be proven false. The administration's demands concerning cessation of construction in East Jerusalem and countless statements by senior officials in the Obama administration, including the president himself, are expressions of a well defined outlook, somewhat different from in the past. The outlook concerns the administration's perception of the required degree of resolve in advancing an Israeli-Palestinian accord, Israel's standing in the international system, and its relations with the American administration.

This change is not reflected in positions the Obama administration presents on the issue of an Israeli-Palestinian accord: these positions are very close to those presented by almost all American administrations since the Six Day War, including presidents considered sympathetic to Israel such as President Clinton. In general terms, the agreement will likely comprise the following basic components:

- a. Israel will withdraw to the June 4, 1967 border with Jordan.
- b. Several border adjustments will be made to allow heavily populated Jewish settlements beyond the Green Line to remain under Israeli sovereignty, apparently in the spirit of the April 14, 2004 letter of President George W. Bush to Ariel Sharon.
- c. These border adjustments will oblige Israel to transfer land in Israeli territory to the Palestinians.
- d. Jerusalem will be divided between Israel and the new Palestinian state and special arrangements will be made regarding control over holy places.

- e. No formal recognition will be conferred on the Palestinian demand to the right of return for refugees. However, the administration is likely to demand that Israel agree to accept a limited number of refugees, such that the Palestinian right of return is to some extent recognized without fundamentally endangering Israel's Jewish character.¹⁴

The administration can claim – and with a great deal of justification – that this outline clearly represents the national interests of the State of Israel. Similar plans were offered to the Palestinians by two Israeli prime ministers: Ehud Barak, at the Camp David conference, and Ehud Olmert towards the end of his term as prime minister. The Obama administration can claim that practically speaking, it is helping Israel realize its most vital interests. Already in his Cairo speech, Obama exhorted that the sole solution lies in the aspirations of both sides being realized through two states in which Palestinians and Israelis live side by side in peace and security. The solution is “in the interest of Israel, the interest of Palestine, the interest of America, and the interest of the world.” It is quite possible the administration assumes that its pressures on Israel help the prime minister set in motion the accommodation process he would want, if not given to severe political pressure at home.¹⁵

President Obama's actions and statements on an Israeli-Palestinian accord raise justified concerns over a new, far reaching trend in the winds blowing from the White House: the creation of a new framework of game rules, different from in the past, between Israel and the US. If these concerns indeed materialize, their primary expressions would be a sterilized version of the unique Israel-US relationship and a fading of the empathy and special relations between the two countries. The new relationship, if indeed set in place, would be based on explicit rules of give and take and cost versus benefit in the narrowest sense of the word, with an emphasis on presenting Israel as an American liability rather than an asset.¹⁶

This turning point in US policy towards Israel will materialize if the Obama administration concludes that an Israeli-Palestinian accord is a top priority from a US standpoint, and if the Israeli government's conduct seems to intentionally stymie the realization of such an accord. Should this indeed become the administration's sense, it could lead to an overall change in relations with Israel, including within contexts unaffected thus

far, i.e., the security level, strategic cooperation, economic ties, and the administration's support for Israel in international organizations.¹⁷

From the standpoint of the current Israeli government, this dangerous trend is intensifying due to President Obama's firm decision to throw all his weight behind plans to bring about this change. Obama made this fervent commitment unequivocally clear in his Cairo speech: "I intend to personally pursue this purpose [resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict] with all the patience that the task requires."¹⁸ In the reality created since Obama entered office, the lack of substantial progress towards an accord necessarily signifies a serious blow to the prestige of a president wishing to run for a second term. The president is clearly in desperate need of political success in the international arena in order to strengthen his political standing.

Within the framework of the administration's pressure on the Israeli government to accept its demands regarding an Israeli-Palestinian accord, it crossed a line in its treatment of Israel. Very senior officials in the American administration created a clear association between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the one hand, and the ability of the US to confront threats from radical Islam on the other. The strongest statement was attributed to General David Petraeus, commander of the US Central Command. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 16, 2010, the general enumerated root causes of instability or obstacles to security in the areas under his command. Among other factors, he mentioned the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the lack of an accord between the two sides.

The enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the AOR [area of responsibility]. Israeli-Palestinian tensions often flare into violence and large scale armed confrontations. The conflict foments anti-American sentiments due to a perception of US favoritism for Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of US partnerships with governments and peoples in the AOR and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile al-Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support.¹⁹

In media reports it was stressed that the significance of this declaration was its positioning of Israel as a factor endangering the lives of American soldiers fighting in the Middle East. Although in a conversation with IDF Chief of Staff Ashkenazi General Petraeus took pains to explain that he did not make such a statement, the message attributed to him had already permeated American public opinion. For its part, the administration did not display any efforts to refute those remarks.²⁰ Similar statements followed, though more nebulous, from the secretary of defense and the president. President Obama was quoted in several reports as declaring that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict “is costing us significantly in terms of both blood and treasure.”²¹

The bottom line of these statements – whether or not worded explicitly as such – is the positioning of Israel by the most senior figures in the administration in a regrettable and defensive situation within American public opinion. This occurs notwithstanding that administration figures almost certainly understand that claims of this sort have no solid basis, since:

- a. Israel is involved in the US military’s combat against Islamic terror groups through a broad variety of courses of action.
- b. The war of Islamic terror groups against the US is the expression of a war against all of Western culture in which the “Great Satan,” the US, is its chief representative. Israel plays a marginal role as the “Little Satan.”
- c. Even if an Israeli-Palestinian accord is signed that leads to peace and mutual acceptance between Israel and the Palestinians, it will be unacceptable to the radical terror groups the US is currently combating.²²

Thus it seems highly inappropriate for such senior figures in the administration to suggest such claims if the aim is to preserve a relationship of allies between Israel and the US.

Conclusion

The bottom line of this essay suggests that there is a possible inclination on the part of the Obama administration to bring about a dramatic change in Israel’s unique status in the US. At this stage, this trend is expressed solely regarding the issue of an Israeli-Palestinian accord. Other issues in Israel-US relations – economic assistance, security cooperation, strategic

dialogue, support for Israel at international institutions, longstanding US commitment to Israel's nuclear policy, and others – at this time remain fairly intact, though some have been targeted and sustained painful hits.²³

Numerous and diverse considerations will guide the Obama administration on the question of future US-Israel relations. Different opinions are no doubt circulating in the administration on the question of its continued treatment of an Israeli-Palestinian accord in general and its attitude to Israel in particular. Public admissions by the president and his close advisors on mistakes that accompanied the administration's moves in the region thus far clearly indicate that the determination and self-confidence that accompanied those moves has somewhat ebbed. Critical factors that will influence the administration's process of policymaking include the reactions of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority; strategic developments in the Middle East, mainly in the Iranian matter; weighty political constraints at home; and other burning problems around the world, be they political, military, or economic. These will likely oblige the president to adjust the list of priorities that he has embraced thus far.²⁴

Notes

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- 14 Ran Dagoni, "One Fell Swoop? Leak from Washington on a comprehensive peace plan," *Globes*, April 7, 2010.
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Israel and the US: That Bad?

Oded Eran

The first part of President Obama's term sparked a major public outcry both in the US and Israel that reached unprecedented dimensions of populism, sensationalism, and irresponsibility. Many commentators either lacked or ignored the relevant historical perspectives, and in several cases relied on gut feelings rather than on factual evidence.

Tensions between the Israeli and US administrations indeed exist, mostly on the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but they must be examined in their historical and political perspectives before a conclusion is reached that President Obama has in fact broken away from previously held norms in the bilateral relations. The issue is so central, sensitive, and crucial to Israel's long term strategic assessment that it cannot and should not be dealt with in a populist manner.

Since 1967 the major bone of contention between Israel and the US has been the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There was hardly a moment when the two countries agreed on the three core issues in this conflict: borders, Jerusalem, and, to some extent, refugees. The US position on the principal core issue – borders between Israel and its neighbors – was pronounced as early as December 1969, when then-US Secretary of State William Rogers said, "Any change in the pre-existing lines should not reflect the weight of conquest and should be confined to insubstantial alterations."¹

On December 22, 1969 the Israeli cabinet not only rejected the Rogers Plan, as it became known, but also adopted a response that David Korn, a senior American diplomat at the time, regarded as a rebuke. The Israeli statement said, "If these proposals were to be carried out, Israel's security and peace would be in very grave danger. Israel will not be sacrificed by any

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power policy, and will reject any attempt to impose a forced solution upon it." And, "The proposals submitted by the US cannot but be construed by the aggressive Arab rulers as an attempt to appease them at Israel's expense."² Israel, in other words, indirectly accused the US administration of endangering Israel's security and appeasing the Arabs. Significantly, this language was used by a Labor Party-led Israeli government.

The 1969 Rogers formula has remained the cornerstone of US policy on this issue, notwithstanding subsequent shifts in nuance and context. Even the April 14, 2004 letter by President George W. Bush to Prime Minister Sharon, for example, should not be construed as a change in policy. President Bush wrote, "In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full return to the armistice lines of 1949." But then the President added, "It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities."³ He thus subjected changes in the 1967 lines to Palestinian consent.

More specifically, it is sufficient to say that the Palestinians calculate the built-up settlement areas as less than 2 percent of the West Bank, while the very far reaching proposal of former prime minister Olmert suggested that Israel retain 6.5 percent, albeit with an almost 1:1 land swap.⁴ The Clinton parameters of December 2000 range between 4-6

percent, certainly less than the 8.5 percent that is on the western side of the security fence according to its current demarcation. In other words, US ideas on borders have long been at odds – at least somewhat – with Israeli approaches.

The building of Jewish suburbs beyond the pre-1967 lines, both in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, has caused severe tensions between Israeli governments and US administrations. All US presidents opposed this construction, and President George H. W. Bush went further when in September 1991 he persuaded the US Congress

to delay granting US guarantees to loans Israel raised in the US for fear that some of the funds would be used for settlement building. Following the Labor Party victory in the June 1992 election, the US president and

Relating the conduct of President Obama vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the general pattern in US-Israel relations does not mean the administration did not commit errors of judgment and policy.

the Congress approved the loan guarantees. The US has over the years reduced more than \$1.5 billion from the loan guarantees, equal to the sum Israel has been estimated by the US to have spent on building settlements.

As an expression of displeasure with Israel and in a move to push Israel to accept certain US proposals and ideas on how to advance the Arab-Israeli peace process, at least two former US administrations have threatened Israel with the suspension of US arms shipments to Israel. Note that President Obama's administration has resorted to none of the measures or language used by some of the previous US administrations. Furthermore, the US has recently added \$205 million to the already substantial aid package for the Israeli Iron Dome project against short range rockets.

The Israeli, American, and international press predict that the US will come out with its own blueprint for the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even if the White House indeed issues such a formula without consulting and informing Israel in advance, it will not constitute a deviation from a familiar pattern of communication between the two governments. The norm has been the two surprising one another rather than conducting prior consultations and maintaining coordination.

The US surprised Israel with the 1969 Rogers Plan, with the October 1, 1977 agreement with the Soviet Union on the guidelines for the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the September 1, 1982 Reagan Plan, with the December 15, 1988 opening of a dialogue with the PLO, and with the December 26, 2000 Clinton proposal. It is quite possible that if and when President Obama decides to issue his own plan on how to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, most Israelis – perhaps with too short lived memories – will not juxtapose it with the list above.

Furthermore, most Israelis will likely forget that Israel's record in not informing the US of major political initiatives is not much shorter. Partly as a result of the US-Soviet Union agreement of October 1, 1977, Israel and Egypt began secret talks that eventually led to President Sadat's visit to Israel and then to the 1979 Treaty of Peace. The US was not privy to the secret talks.

In December 1992 Israel launched secret talks with the PLO, which led to the September 13, 1993 Oslo Accord. The US, which was informed post factum, was left to host the signing ceremony on the White House lawn. Most of the negotiations between Israel and Jordan were also held

away from American eyes and ears. From this point of view, one can say that proximity talks between Israel and the Palestinians are a novelty. Ever since the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel this method was used only between Syria and Israel with Turkey as the go-between.

However, relating the conduct of President Obama vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the general pattern in US-Israel relations does not mean the administration did not commit errors of judgment and policy. This can equally be said about the current Israeli government. Both the US and the Israeli governments failed in their assessment of the other. Israel overestimated the pressures that dealing with the global crisis would put on the administration, believing it would lower the Middle East on the president's agenda. It did not fully assess the connection Washington has drawn between dealing with Iran, pulling out from Iraq, and fighting in Af-Pak and the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Prime Minister Netanyahu has therefore failed to present to President Obama a viable action plan that could create a better climate in the bilateral relations. For example, indicating willingness in the first meeting in the White House to make a public statement in support of a two-state solution might well have reduced much of the tensions that later ensued between the two administrations. Instead, Israel is now seen as being coerced by the US into taking certain measures, including making a belated and reluctant statement recognizing the two-state solution.

Unless one attributes to the current US administration a deliberate policy of removing the term "special" when describing the relationship, the approach to Israel was not free of errors of judgment. While it is arguable whether President Obama's Cairo speech is an appeasement of the Arabs and Muslims, it was certainly an affront to the Jews and Israel to put the Holocaust on par with the suffering of the Palestinians. By now it is recognized, including in the US Congress, that President Obama erred in sidestepping Jerusalem while paying visits to several Muslim/Arab capitals.

A second error, at least in terms of rhetoric, appeared in a statement by General David Petraeus to the US Senate Armed Services Committee on March 16, 2010:

Insufficient progress towards a comprehensive Middle East peace: the enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the AOR [area of responsibility].

Israeli-Palestinian tensions often flare into violence and large scale armed confrontations. The conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of US favoritism for Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of US partnerships with governments and peoples in the AOR and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile, al-Qa-eda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support. The conflict also gives Iran influence in the Arab world through its clients, Lebanese Hizballah and Hamas.⁵

Israeli journalists in Washington hurriedly reported that General Petraeus accused Israel of standing in the US's way of attaining its interests in the region. One needs very fine linguistic tools to interpret the statement differently.

On the other side of the equation, much has been written about the Israeli decision during Vice President Biden's visit in March 2010 to issue a building permit for 1,600 new housing units in a Jerusalem suburb beyond the 1967 line. Describing Israel's handling of this incident as clumsy is an understatement.

Both Israel and the US have employed the traditional "assets" in the battle of words. Well known American columnists have conveyed the sense of mistrust felt in the White House towards Prime Minister Netanyahu, while on April 15, 2010 the President of the World Jewish Congress published a full page letter to President Obama questioning, "Is it assumed worsening relations with Israel can improve relations with Muslims?" He continued, "Appeasement does not work."⁶

The two governments have for now embarked on an effort to lower the flames, as both deem these exchanges running counter to their immediate interests. But the lull is most likely temporary. Both the moratorium on building in the settlements and the four-month period approved by the Arab League for the proximity talks run their course in September. That may create the first bumper. Further down the road, the relations between the two countries could be rocked by a total collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian

Israel did not fully assess the connection Washington has drawn between dealing with Iran, pulling out from Iraq, and fighting in Af-Pak and the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

talks, be they direct or indirect, and/or the failure of the international efforts to stop the Iranian nuclear project.

The failure of the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians may, under Palestinian-Arab pressure, drive the US and its partners in the Quartet into issuing a blueprint for establishing a Palestinian state. This would most probably occur without prior consultations with Israel, causing the widening of the rift between Washington and Jerusalem. Failure of the US to veto a resolution at the UN Security Council approving the Palestinian state and its territorial attributes might cause a serious crisis in the US-Israel relations.

The statement by General Petraeus clearly links the issues of the peace process between Israel and its neighbors with the US success of dealing with Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Even an indirect attempt to pin a US failure on these latter fronts on a failed peace process could further exacerbate the relations with Israel.

One important consideration has been absent from the debate. US officialdom, including President Obama, Vice President Biden, and Secretary of State Clinton, all continue to emphasize the US commitment to Israel's security. During his visit to Israel, Vice President Biden stated,

I am here to remind you, though I hope you will never forget, that America stands with you shoulder-to-shoulder in facing these threats. President Obama and I represent an unbroken chain of American leaders who have understood this critical, strategic relationship. As the President said recently, "I will never waver from ensuring Israel's security and helping them secure themselves in what is a very hostile region." President Obama has not only stated those words, he has translated that vow into action in his first years in ways both known to the public and not known to you, as Prime Minister Netanyahu eloquently acknowledged the other day when he and I were meeting and had a short press conference that followed. Beyond providing Israel nearly \$3 billion in military aid each and every year, we have reinvigorated defense consultations and redoubled our efforts to ensure that Israel's...forces will always maintain a qualitative edge.⁷

Nonetheless, attention should be paid to the possible damage that has been dealt the overall Israeli posture of deterrence as a result of perceptions among many in the Middle East that statements such as

the one by Vice President Biden do not reflect the true state of relations between Israel and the US. The perceptions, valid or false, can become significant elements in a decision making process among the various Middle East players, a risk that has to be seriously considered by key US and Israeli politicians when they make public statements pertaining to bilateral relations.

Unrelated to the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the two governments may find themselves at odds on a different nuclear issue, the one relating to the Israeli file. After failing some 50 years ago to find a way of monitoring the Israeli facilities, US administration opted to shelve the issue rather than allowing it to become a constant irritant. President Obama's ideological approach to the subject of non-proliferation has set off an alarm in Israel. In various official statements the president, secretary of state, and others have expressed the US determination to work for a world free of nuclear weapons. Secretary of State Clinton said in the opening statement of the NPT Review Conference on May 3, 2010, "We want to reaffirm our commitment to the objective of a Middle East free of these weapons of mass destruction, and we are prepared to support practical measures that will move us toward achieving that objective."⁸

The US had almost no option but to vote for the final document of the NPT Review Conference, which called for Israel to accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards. It also called for a conference in 2012 on the establishment of a zone free of WMD, based on terms of reference from the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East. While the call for Israel to adhere to the NPT is not new, the idea of a regional conference is.

The White House issued a formal statement by National Security Advisor Jim Jones in which he stated that the proposed 2012 conference will draw its mandate from the countries in the region, that to ensure that it takes into account the interests of all regional states, the US has decided to co-sponsor the conference, and that along with other co-sponsors, it will insist that the conference operates only by consensus among the regional countries and that this consensus will be required

Attention should be paid to the possible damage that has been dealt the overall Israeli posture of deterrence as a result of perceptions among many in the Middle East that US strong statements of support for Israel do not reflect the true state of bilateral relations.

for agreements, possible further discussions, and follow-up actions. To clinch all these stipulations, General Jones stated that, “The United States will not permit a conference or actions that could jeopardize Israel’s national security. We will not accept any approach that singles out Israel or sets unrealistic expectations.”⁹ The US deplored the fact that Israel was singled out in the final document and that Iran was not mentioned.

These assurances notwithstanding, the US vote is viewed in Israel with some alarm. The US not only failed to delete the specific references to Israel, but has painted itself as the one to block the 2012 conference from becoming an anti-Israel event and from adopting anti-Israeli resolutions, increasing Israel’s dependence on the US’s goodwill in this respect. Beyond the nuclear aspect, it will be interesting to watch what linkages will emerge between the US handling of this particular issue, the effort to block the Iranian nuclear project, and the overall peace process.

The second half of President Obama’s tenure will be marked by significant developments in the broader Middle East. They will include the thinning of the US presence in Iraq, the crucial stage in blocking Iran’s road to military nuclear capabilities, further stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan, and attempts to advance the peace process between Israel and its neighbors. The linkage between these issues – as well as the linkage to other important questions related, for example, to leadership changes in the region – is certainly a question on which the two governments differ. The differences of opinions are legitimate, but the governments should be careful to conduct the debate in a way which does not weaken them both.

Notes

- 1 Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: www.mfa.gov.il.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Discussion by Dr. Saeb Erekat at INSS, May 16, 2010.
- 5 Armed-Services.senate/gov. (Hearings).
- 6 World Jewish Congress website.
- 7 White House website.
- 8 US Department of State website, May 3, 2010.
- 9 The White House, Office, Statement by the National Security Advisor, General James L. Jones, on the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, May 28, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statement-national-security-advisor-general-james-l-jones-non-proliferation-treaty->.

A Military Attack on Iran? Considerations for Israeli Decision Making

Ron Tira

In the coming months, Israel's national leadership may need to decide whether or not to attack nuclear installations in Iran. This will be one of the most complex decisions since the establishment of Israel. The purpose of this article is to structure the discussion that will necessarily be held by the leadership as it sits down to reach a decision. The article is not designed to reach a particular conclusion, rather to point out the central questions that must be examined and start to sketch the considerations influencing the issues. Among the question are:

- a. **The actors:** Who are the relevant actors and what are their interests? What strategic purpose does Israel hope to achieve?
- b. **The alternatives:** What are the ramifications for Israel of a nuclear Iran and what are the ramifications of attacking Iran? What is the greater risk: a nuclear Iran or an attack on it?
- c. **The time frame:** Should the two alternatives be examined from the short or long terms? What are the purely temporary ramifications ("the dust will settle") and what subsequent trends will only intensify in years to come?
- d. **The achievable objectives:** Can an attack even stop Iran from becoming nuclear? Would an attack stop the nuclear process directly, or are the non-military follow-on trends generated by the attack the only way to stop it?
- e. **Subsequent trends:** If the post-attack follow-on trends are essential to achievement of the desired objective, how can Israel influence them?

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Which tools are likely to accelerate desirable follow-on trends and deflect dangerous ones?

- f. **The necessity:** If only international follow-on trends are capable of attaining the strategic objective, is an attack even necessary in order to set these trends in motion? Is it possible to set them in motion even without an attack?
- g. **Measures of success:** How does one measure the success of an attack on Iran? Is the parameter operational (the military mission), physical (destruction of the nuclear installations), or something completely different? When will it be possible to measure the success of the attack?
- h. **The American variable:** Can the United States be expected to give a green light to an attack? What is the meaning of attacking without a green light? Are there alternatives to American support in terms of steering post-attack trends?

Full answers to such complex questions lie beyond the scope of this discussion, and thus this essay intends only to jumpstart and frame the debate, while focusing on critical aspects for consideration that have not yet received the requisite attention in the public discourse. The questions will not necessarily be examined in the above order, nor will internal Israeli political considerations be examined. And while some of the topics discussed herein lie right at the heart of the realm of uncertainty, even in that realm decisions must ultimately be made.

The main value of an attack does not lie in the direct physical damage to the nuclear program, rather in the subsequent political trends necessary to realize the strategic goal.

For the purpose of the discussion that follows, certain working assumptions – which may legitimately be challenged – will be made. One such assumption is that Israel’s strategic purpose is to prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons – for a lengthy period of time. A second working assumption is that an attack would occur with a red light from the United States. The article will subsequently examine the calculations in the case of a yellow or a green light from the United States.

Can an Israeli Attack Stop the Nuclear Program?

The preliminary question that must be addressed is whether attacking Iranian nuclear installations can deliver the strategic goal, or whether

Iran would rebuild its capabilities and complete its nuclear weapon building after a limited delay. In order to examine this question (and not be waylaid by operational and intelligence issues), let us assume that Israel is capable of rendering extensive physical damage to Iranian nuclear infrastructures, but also that given enough time and will, Iran would have the capability of rebuilding the program and completing it. According to these assumptions, an attack would deny Iran nuclear weapons – for an extended period that goes beyond the mere time needed by Iran for physical reconstruction of its nuclear infrastructures – only given one of several possibilities.

The first possibility is that an attack would impair not only Iran’s capabilities but also its will to go nuclear (as happened in part by the attack in Iraq in 1981 and the attack attributed to Israel in Syria in 2007). However, as discussed below, gaining a nuclear capability is a supreme Iranian priority and Iran has proven that it is willing to assume significant risks to make it happen. Iran is firmly committed to the nuclear program and it has harnessed many of its national resources to advance it. It is therefore difficult to presume that a one-off strike would quell the desire for nuclear weapons. A second possibility is repetitive Israeli strikes whenever the Iranian nuclear program reaches a critical stage. This is a policy requiring a great deal of national staying power and tremendous international political strength, and thus its viability is doubtful. Israel is good at sprints but would find a marathon difficult to run, especially if the action is taken in defiance of the international community.

The third possibility is that an attack would generate non-military follow-on processes, and that these economic, internal, or international political trends would induce Iran to abandon the program. For example, an attack might undermine the stability of the regime or it might target Iranian economic infrastructures; the consequent economic blow could in turn set the desired processes within Iran in motion. However, the chances of success of this possibility are at best unclear, because the attempt to set off internal processes within other nations has a proven track record

Unlike the scenario of attacking Iran, in which the costs that Israel would pay – at least some – would be short term, the follow-on trends generated by a nuclear Iran are liable to become more serious with time.

of failure (the First Lebanon War, the Sinai Campaign, the Agudot HaKfarim peasants' association in the West Bank, Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba, and others). Therefore, the attempt to generate internal processes in Iran is too unpredictable and unreliable to serve as the basis for a plan.

An Israeli attack might yield an international post-attack process that would in turn generate the desired goal. It may be that the international community would take effective economic and military steps against Iran, force it to concede its nuclear program, and impose an effective denuclearization verification regimen. This alternative may be attainable, but the decision makers would have to be convinced of two points: one, that an attack would indeed yield such subsequent international processes, and two, that an attack is crucial for generating the desired international process. In other words, it is in fact impossible to set this process in motion in a rapid and timely manner without an attack (the latter point will be discussed at length below).

Attacking Iranian nuclear installations would demonstrate to the international community and the United States that Israel is credible and determined in its claim that it cannot accept a nuclear Iran, and that Israel is willing to assume serious risks and pay a heavy price in order to prevent Iran's nuclearization. Should Israel demonstrate that it indeed views a nuclear Iran as an existential threat, that this is not simply a hollow slogan, and that it is committed to preventing the nuclearization of Iran even at the cost of a massive avalanche of criticism, the international community will have to take this into account. Because of the prevailing understandable doubts regarding Israel's credibility and determination on the matter, the

Anyone who fears the response of a non-nuclear Iran has much more to fear from a nuclear Iran.

attack would be a new factor that would have to be considered and might perhaps yield the desired international process. It is also possible that in order to demonstrate determination, decisiveness, and tenacity, it would be necessary for Israel to engage in more than just a handful of pinpoint attacks and undertake an ongoing campaign, despite international pressures to cease.

Thus the main value of an attack does not lie in the direct physical damage to the nuclear program, rather in the political follow-on trends necessary to realize the strategic goal. The leadership must focus on this point and assess whether or not it is capable of sketching a credible,

serious scenario of how an attack would yield the desired political post-attack process. Directing international processes is necessarily a complex and difficult endeavor, and has never proven to be one of Israel's relative strengths. Worse still, given an American red light, the attack might be seen as illegitimate, and therefore the leadership would also have to be convinced that it could repel dangerous follow-on processes, such as the demand for a comprehensive, Middle East-wide nuclear disarmament.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia as Keys to Influencing Follow-on Processes

Creating desirable post-attack processes is not impossible and to an extent resembles the Egyptian attack on Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. There too, the attack was not designed to attain Egypt's strategic goal directly. Rather, its purpose was to create the conditions for the United States to push Israel into withdrawing from the Sinai, following Egypt's demonstration to the United States that Israel's continued presence in Sinai presented significant risks for the US, and the demonstration to the international community that the situation created in 1967 had left Egypt with no choice but to go to war. The Egyptian attack merely served as a catalyst and created the context for setting an international process in motion. If so, the question is whether the relevant staffs and headquarters in Israel know how to set in motion and steer international processes in this manner and how precisely to affect the political post-attack trends.

Unlike in 1973, when it comes to Iran's nuclear program Egypt and Israel find themselves on the same strategic side, along with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates. This is one of Israel's most important strategic assets today. Clearly, Egypt and Saudi Arabia would find it convenient to have Israel act against Iran and have Israel pay the price while they play the role of spectators, ostensibly opposed to an attack. However, if the United States were to withhold the green light, Israel's political weakness might keep it from attacking. The United States and Iran might continue playing for time, and such time would allow Iran to go nuclear. Clearly this is not in the best interests of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and Israel would have to know how to take advantage of this situation. The question is how to enlist Egypt and Saudi Arabia in an effort to steer the post-attack processes.

Driving Iran's Strategy Out of the Balance

Another way in which attacking Iran could yield the desired result would be to drive Iran to deviate from its (thus far successful) strategy of acquiring nuclear weapons. The reasoning calls for broadening the discussion: Iran seeks to strengthen its status as a regional hegemon and as a state with a leadership signature of global proportions. It also seeks to weaken its traditional enemies (the Arabs, the Sunnis, Russia, and the West), exhaust their armed forces in secondary theaters, dismantle potential anti-Iran coalitions, and surround itself with a strategic security zone of weak or failing states as well as non-state satellites or proxies capable of reining in states (Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and so forth). Iran's grand strategy is that of a strong-weak state (somewhat similar to the case of China): it sees itself as a strong player and sets itself ambitious goals, but it is also aware of its underlying weaknesses and therefore avoids direct confrontations, prefers to exhaust its enemies by using proxies and acting indirectly, and is motivated by fear. For Iran, the survival of the regime is not enough; it sees itself as a reputable member of the international community. In this context, the nuclear program is of supreme value for establishing itself as a strong, leading state, for having a defensive card to play against a Sunni Arab front (Iran has already been attacked with chemical weapons) or against the superpowers (the scenario of Iraq in 2003 or of Kosovo in 1999), and for possessing an umbrella that will allow it in certain cases to move from an indirect to a direct military approach.

Iran's strategy for realizing its nuclear objectives is based on several components, first, attaining the semblance of deterrence that exceeds its real military capabilities. Iran has an outdated military with limited direct operational capabilities and middling missile and naval capabilities, while its indirect capabilities are not much greater than those already demonstrated by its proxies in Iraq and Lebanon. Still, Iran projects an almost apocalyptic image of deterrence, as reflected in a statement made by the Russian president to the effect that attacking Iran would generate an all-out world war involving nuclear weapons¹ or the concern expressed regarding disruptions to the global oil supply for an extended period. Second, at present Iran prefers to broaden its nuclear infrastructures and its nuclear program's redundancy over charging straight to weapons construction. Thus it both projects the message that the wide redundancy makes attacking it pointless and avoids the risk of

becoming a state under siege. Third, Iran conducts a threshold policy that renders the world accustomed to its positions, while red lines are eroded and Iran gains time. It adopts a defiant position, reexamines it, withdraws from it, returns to it in response to some Western move, and so forth. Thus, Iran's position is – intentionally – unclear; meantime, the international community gradually acquiesces to some of Iran's more far reaching stances. At the same time, Iran preserves its capacity for tactical retreats at critical junctures, and more time passes.

However, an attack might in fact be able to upset Iran's strategy to realize its nuclear ambitions. First, it would probably undermine its shield of deterrence and expose the limitations of Iran's response. As detailed below, Iran's response would likely be harsh, but temporary and most definitely non-apocalyptic. Iran has weaknesses, such as its refined oil needs, and therefore is vulnerable to opposing and restraining leverage; hence its staying power in high to medium intensity direct confrontations is very limited.

Second, an attack would confront Iran with two problematic alternatives. On the one hand, if it continues with its present strategy of expanding infrastructures without pushing forward to weapons construction – but with reduced capabilities as a result of the attack – it will be made clear to all that it is still possible to roll back the nuclear program. An attack would undermine Iran's attempt to send the message that because of the redundancy it is useless to attack its installations and because of its determination it cannot be stopped, and this would encourage international pressures. On the other hand, should Iran seek to change its strategy and accelerate its weapons construction with residual capabilities that would survive an attack, it would be forced to concede its threshold policy and commit to a clear position, and that would accelerate international activity against it. The attack may perhaps not annihilate the Iranian nuclear infrastructure, but the Israeli leadership may conclude that it would upset the balance of Iran's successful strategy.

What is Worse – Attacking or not Attacking?

For the sake of structuring the discussion, let us assume that the Israeli leadership must make a choice between only two simplistic options: an Israeli attack within the next few months or a nuclear Iran at the end of this period. Reality is obviously more complex and there is a spectrum

of intermediate states and possibilities, but presenting the question in this way brings the dilemma into sharper relief. Let us also assume that the attack would indeed prevent a nuclear Iran for an extended period (because we would not attack unless we determined that was the situation), and, as noted, the United States has issued a red light regarding an attack. Another assumption is that we calculate the alternatives from the perspective of 2016 – some five years after the attack and after the immediate shockwaves of the attack (military, political, and economic) have passed. The idea is to analyze which ramifications are temporary, where the “dust will settle,” and which follow-on trends would actually worsen with the passage of time. 2016 is a useful year for examining the results because that year the present American administration would change (unless a new administration takes office already in 2012), and Israel would have a chance for a fresh start with the White House.

The analysis below shows that the Israeli leadership does not have the luxury of choosing between a good and a bad alternative, but must choose the lesser of two evils. Moreover, it may perhaps be possible to sketch out the first developments that would occur after an attack on Iran or after it has become nuclear, but it is difficult to characterize the long term strategic trends that would be set in motion by each alternative. The leadership must choose which Pandora’s box to open while the contents and volumes of the two boxes are difficult to estimate.

The scope of this essay limits an in-depth analysis of the results of each alternative, but some defining outlines are possible. An Israeli attack against Iran would yield results on several levels. First, we could expect an Iranian military response against Israel, either directly or by means of Hizbollah and others (even including another war in Lebanon). A direct Iranian response would be possible both against Israel itself and against its interests around the world (from embassies to seaways and airways). The military response may be characterized by a high intensity response for a short period or by the attempt to exhaust Israel with a prolonged effort of variable intensity. Second, Iran may also respond militarily against others, such as the Gulf states and the United States forces in the Middle East, or use terrorism around the globe. The expansion of Iran’s response beyond Israel alone towards third parties is not self-evident, especially with Israel operating under red light conditions. There are reasons for Iran to attempt to set the political follow-on vector in its favor

precisely by limiting its response to Israel alone and there are opposing calculations for expanding the circle of targets for response. Third, should Iran choose a wide response, it is likely also to include oil resources and airways and seaways, which would take a heavy economic toll from the world and Israel. Fourth, under red light conditions, Israel might incur extreme punitive measures from the United States and the West (from stopping arms and military spare parts to economic and diplomatic sanctions, at least on the scale of what occurred after the attack on the Iraqi reactor in 1981). The more Iran responds towards third parties, so the probability grows that the United States would intervene directly in the fighting, but at the same time this might intensify America's punitive measures against Israel. This would create a dilemma for the Iranian leadership.

Of these results, what would remain in 2016? One may assume that high to medium intensity warfare will have died down, even if not all the scores would have been settled, and that terrorism will not disappear. Since Iran itself would go bankrupt and its economy grind to a halt should shipping lanes be closed for an extended time, this is an improbable scenario. The West's punitive measures against Israel will also likely have died down, especially if there is a change in the US administration. However, this does not mean that the long term risks to Israel are negligible: Israel might unwillingly find itself part of a post-attack externally-imposed regional arrangement and might have to face follow-on trends such as pan-Middle Eastern nuclear disarmament attempts or attempts to otherwise limit Israel's strategic capabilities as part of a new regional equation. Israel might also be seen by American public opinion as having entangled the United States in a war, and this would erode its public support there. Before Israel decides to attack Iran it must consider the short term punitive measures that may well be levied against it, and it must also plan how to repel post-attack processes that might generate long term strategic damage to Israel's strength and capabilities.

What is the meaning of a nuclear Iran, and can Israel live with such a scenario? The ultimate threat, of course, is the use of nuclear weapons, and one should examine how to cope with such a threat outside the framework of this article. However, even without the use of nuclear weapons, the regional and global reality might undergo severe strategic shockwaves.² Technology and materials are liable to trickle into third

party hands, including non-state entities. A regional nuclear arms race could develop and include regimes of questionable stability. The expansion of the nuclear club to include multiple actors, including non-state or unstable state actors, creates the risk that it would be impossible to maintain mutual deterrence such as existed between the United States and the Soviet Union. The basic game theory assumptions of the nuclear rule of mutually assured destruction (MAD) would simply not be met.

Iran is liable to gain hegemony and set the tone for the Near East. Empowered militarily and politically and virtually immune to direct military threats, Iran would become a dominant entity sending its tentacles forth from Iraq, through Bahrain, the Straits of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb, Yemen, the Horn of Africa, Sudan, Gaza, and Lebanon, to Afghanistan and Central Asia. A nuclear Iran would be more daring in sub-nuclear confrontations and would be likely to offer its nuclear umbrella to its allies, such as Syria and Hizbollah. An empowered and decisive Iran would be liable to subvert moderate Arab and central Asian regimes, undermine existing Arab peace agreements with Israel, and foil future peace processes. A nuclear Iran that emerges in face of unequivocal American and Israeli opposition would undercut the strategic credibility of both nations, weaken their deterrence and power projection, hasten the waning of American influence in the region, and undermine the regional order we have known since 1991.

What about 2016? Unlike the scenario of attacking Iran, in which the costs that Israel would pay – at least some – would be short term, and their dust – at least in part – settled, the follow-on trends generated by a nuclear Iran are liable to become more serious with the passage of time. A nuclear Iran becomes untouchable: other players would hesitate to oppose it and would gradually grow closer to it, the projection of its national power would grow, and it would amass more and more influence. Regional stability would be eroded and chances for peace in 2016 would be much lower should Iran attain nuclear capabilities. Moreover, it is not clear that the threat of an Iranian response to an attack is a cogent argument, because anyone who fears the response of a non-nuclear Iran has much more to fear from a nuclear Iran.

Is there an Effective Alternative to an Attack?

The Israeli leadership could consider non-military alternatives that meet two criteria: the first, that they may be expected to show results within a few months. Taking the most severe intelligence assessments into account and in order to leave enough time for a military alternative should the non-military option fail, Israeli leaders cannot give a non-military option more than a few trial months to prove itself. The second criterion is that the non-military option must be concrete, characterized by self-evident cause and effect relations, and be reliable enough to form the basis for a plan. (For example, actions designed to undermine the regime in Tehran do not meet the second criterion and therefore neither the first.)

Thus, if we are looking for leverage that is physical and immediate, it seems that the primary leverage meeting the criteria is an embargo on refined oil. Such an embargo would have to be shared by the entire international community or be accompanied by a naval blockade, because there is no point to a Western embargo if other nations continue supplying Iran with refined oil. (Some claim that cutting Iran's banks out of the global banking system would generate a similar effect, but for the sake of the simplicity of the discussion the focus here is on refined oil.)

For an oil embargo to work, it must begin immediately and be enforced on the whole global refinery industry. The Israeli leadership would have to decide if that is a credible, reasonable scenario. The signs are not encouraging. Unlike Israel, to whom the Iranian threat is immediate and existential, for most of the international community a nuclear Iran, while undesirable, is something it can live with and contain.³ Whether their perspectives differ, their interests diverge, or because of psychological repression, the immediate costs and risks that most of the international community is willing to incur in this context are limited. There is a difference between Israel's calculations regarding the cost and risk that merit undertaking the removal of the threat and the calculations of the United States, not to mention Russia or China.

Ironically, Iran and most of the world (except for Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia) have a shared interest in playing for time: the Americans in

Ironically, what is likely to accelerate the diplomatic process is concrete preparation by Israel for a military action. The one who wants peace must prepare for war, and the one who prepares for war may be rewarded with peace.

order to avoid the need for difficult decisions and the Iranians in order to advance the nuclear program. However, time is a honey trap: the diplomatic process is lengthy, one round of talks follows another, the superpowers seek a common denominator (which is too low, and certainly not an immediate comprehensive embargo on refined oil), Iran slowly formulates its tortuous answers, and months pass. The Israeli leadership must withstand the temptation of these time consuming moves that bear the appearance of progress, because time allows Iran to pass more and more milestones.

Also ironically, what are likely to accelerate the diplomatic process are concrete preparations by Israel for a military action. The one who wants peace must prepare for war, and the one who prepares for war may be rewarded with peace. Is determining a D-day for an Israeli attack the move that would inadvertently generate the refined oil embargo?

The United States Position

An American approval of an attack, whether explicit or implied, would make an Israeli decision to attack much easier. First, it would make it easier to steer the political post-attack process towards an imposed end of the Iranian nuclear program and a long term denuclearization enforcement regimen. Second, it would reduce the price Israel would have to pay. Iran would in any case respond militarily against Israel, whether directly or indirectly. And should the Straits of Hormuz be closed, Israel would share the economic burden with the rest of the world, but the legitimacy afforded by the United States would spare Israel both punitive measures from the West and attempts to involve it in a new imposed regional order or limit its strategic power.

The Israeli leadership must make every effort to coordinate its steps with the United States, but because of the ticking clock it must also assess the amount of time to be allotted and the prospects for success. Israel and the United States share basic interests and their worldviews are usually similar. In certain scenarios, it is convenient for the United States that Israel attack, whether with tacit American agreement or with its symbolic opposition.

Nevertheless, other than the fact that the United States is already embroiled in two regional wars and its appetite for moves liable to entangle it in a third is practically nonexistent, and in addition to the

fact that the current president's worldview differs from that of most of his predecessors, two considerations are liable to cast a shadow on green or yellow light scenarios: first, the timetable for making a decision. Washington's approach to the hourglass is more liberal than Israel's and the administration has in practice allowed years to pass. Indeed, Iran has already missed several American deadlines with the Americans' silent acquiescence. It is hard to imagine an Israeli-American agreement even on the issue of when to decide on a green or yellow light. Without agreement on when a decision on a green light must be made, one may assume that the green light will not be given.

Second, there is a limited range of situations in which it would potentially make sense for the United States to be a partner to the cost of an attack without enjoying the benefits of carrying out the attack itself. The United States has more capabilities than Israel to act not only against the nuclear program but also against Iran's regular response capabilities (such as the Iranian navy), to effect widespread damage to the Iranian regime, and to continue a routine of attacks over time. Therefore, an expanded American campaign would be more effective than pinpoint Israeli attacks. Given an American sense that it does not have to act and bear the consequences, it is hard to see how it would approve a less effective attack yet assume the risk of sharing the costs and dangers of an attack.

Nonetheless, two other calculations actually figure in the opposite direction. First, the United States' calculations the day after the attack may be different from those of the day before the attack (especially if the attack is viewed as successful). In the eye of the storm, nations tend to resort to their fundamental interests and stick with their natural allies. The storm shifts the perspective from shades of gray back to a world of black and white. Thus, despite the sometimes tense relations between Roosevelt and Churchill because of Great Britain's attempt to involve the United States in the war in 1939-1941, from the moment the Americans joined the war the basic strategic interest overcame the discomfort generated by Great Britain's sometimes devious conduct. Here, the fundamental interest of the United States is to strengthen Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, to protect Jordan, Lebanon, and the Gulf states, and to remove Iran's hands from the global oil valve, i.e., Hormuz. America's basic interest is to prevent defiant, terror-sponsoring states that challenge

it from becoming nuclear. The rest is merely the difficulties of day-to-day life, the exhaustion of the American defense establishment by the attrition in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the constraints of public diplomacy. (And even if the United States takes punitive measures against Israel, this does not necessarily preclude it from taking advantage of an attack in order to dismantle the Iranian nuclear project.)

Second, Israel must persuade the American defense establishment that attacking and weakening Iran enables America's exit strategy from Iraq and perhaps even from Afghanistan. An American withdrawal from Iraq under present circumstances would be irresponsible and liable to result in a strategic disaster. The day after, Iran would become the most influential foreign power in Iraq. This would also represent a direct threat to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the Gulf states, and Jordan. South Vietnam fell a short time after the United States withdrew from the area, but Iraq and the Straits of Hormuz falling into Iranian hands is simply unacceptable. On the other hand, attacking Iran and imposing a nuclear enforcement regimen would undermine Iran's strategic strength, its image as a winner, its ability to project national strength, and the momentum in which it continues to gather regional influence. This would help rebuild the United States' ability to project power and exert its influence over the region. This would generate conditions critical to a more responsible withdrawal from Iraq. An effective move against Iran, the state leading radical Islam and global terrorism, is also likely to advance a withdrawal from Afghanistan. A blow against the great lion would create the context and conditions for exiting the confrontation with the little fox.

An Attack as a Catalyst for International Processes

The responsibility of the Israeli prime minister and the minister of defense for a military action is not merely ministerial; it is substantive. Only they are capable of shaping and conducting a multidisciplinary strategy and achieving the critical synergy between military, clandestine, diplomatic, political, and economic efforts. Should the Israeli leaders decide to attack Iran, this would be much more than an operational move aimed at Iranian targets: it would be a political move addressed to the international community. When the landing gear of the returning airplanes touch down on the runways, perhaps one mission will have ended, but the main campaign will have only just begun. The importance of the attack

lies not in its physical operational result, rather in demonstrating to the international community that this is an acute, burning, unavoidable problem, demanding direct, effective, and immediate action. The Israeli leadership would have to focus on the question of how to leverage the attack such that it would set in motion international follow-on processes that would stop a nuclear Iran and tap all possible assets, including Egyptian and Saudi Arabian interests. On the other hand, the leadership is also charged with the responsibility of minimizing Israel's long range strategic damage and repelling dangerous post-attack trends, such as attempts to force Israel to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. These are the goods that the IDF alone cannot deliver; it is up to the political echelon to do so.

Preventing Iran from becoming nuclear is the most important issue on Israel's agenda. This means that all other policy issues must be subordinated to that goal or at the very least be synchronized with it. The political echelon is obligated to shape now, before an attack, the political reality that would serve it optimally after the attack. So, for example, it must ask itself what is the best situation regarding talks with the Palestinians when Israel attacks Iran and what its relations with the White House should be like at that time (incidentally, the answer is not trivial and necessitates sophisticated thinking, as it can well be counterintuitive). At the same time, it is necessary to examine Israel's response to different events, for example, the Turkish flotilla to the Gaza Strip, with the yardstick of shaping a political reality that is most effective for the day after an attack on Iran.

The paradox is that the more the relations of the Israeli political echelon with the White House deteriorate, so the motivation of the Israeli political echelon to attack Iran might increase: first, because sans strategic support from the United States, Israel has less to lose; second, because undermining the internal Israeli status of the prime minister is liable to create a situation in which he has less to lose; third, it changes the agenda and avoids negotiations with the Palestinians in a setting in which it seems as if all the pressure is directed against Israel; and fourth, because if the impression is created that American support for Israel is weakening, the Arabs will be less deterred by Israel and the probability for war anyway increases.

If the quotation attributed to Prime Minister Netanyahu, “The year is 1938 and Iran is Germany,”⁴ is correct, the answer to the question of whether to attack – at least Netanyahu’s answer – is obvious. Clearly, had Israel existed in 1938 and had it had the capability of attacking Berlin, it would have been right to attack, even at the cost of a severe confrontation with Roosevelt, Chamberlain, and Daladier. However, a decision to attack is complex and the leadership must first be convinced it has mapped out the entire matrix of relevant considerations, has weighed the claims for and against, and has arrived at serious, well-founded answers to the questions raised in this essay.

Notes

- 1 Reuters Agency, April 13, 2010.
- 2 For more, see Ron Tira, “Shifting Tectonic Plates: Basic Assumptions on the Peace Process Revisited,” *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 12, no. 1 (June 2009): 91-107, [http://www.inss.org.il/upload/\(FILE\)1244445236.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/upload/(FILE)1244445236.pdf).
- 3 See, for example, George Freeman, “Thinking about the Unthinkable: A US-Iranian Deal,” *Stratford Global Intelligence*, March 1, 2010.
- 4 Aluf Benn, “Churchill and His Pupil,” *Haaretz*, October 7, 2009.

Turning Point 4: The National Civilian Front Exercise Ramifications for the Nation's Preparedness

Meir Elran

Background

On May 23-27, 2010, Israel held its annual nationwide emergency exercise, whose purpose was to “improve preparedness and response to an emergency in Israel, at the national and system-wide levels, based on joint operation in a war scenario.”¹ The exercise was described as the largest ever to have taken place to date and involved over 150 organizations at all echelons: government ministries, the Home Front Command, the Israel Police, Magen David Adom (MDA), firefighting and rescue services, local government, infrastructure authorities, and others. In addition to drills at the command centers, there were on-site activities. A special administrative organ was set up to coordinate the activity of the “third sector” in the exercise. Thirty-five local governments were directly involved in the exercise for two days, and government ministries were required to assist them in supplying critical services for civilians in an emergency. An important component was the call for the involvement of the entire population in one of the segments of the exercise: the public was asked to follow emergency procedures and take shelter after a siren was sounded throughout the country.

Turning Point 4 was the fourth nationwide exercise of its type. It represents the implementation of one of the important lessons derived from the Second Lebanon War (2006), which in the case of the management of the civilian front was defined as a chain of misconduct and failure on the part of the different echelons, “from the prime minister to the Home Front Command, who failed miserably in their decision

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making, in their situation assessments, and in the execution of caring for the civilian population and guaranteeing their normal routine.”² In many ways, the Second Lebanon war marked a turning point in the way Israeli government institutions relate to preparing and managing the civilian front. A National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA, Hebrew acronym RAHEL) was established (April 2007) to coordinate and integrate emergency response among the various agencies. The Home Front Command was strengthened, and to a great extent it changed its operational concept to include more comprehensive management of the civilian public during an emergency. In addition, it was decided to hold a series of varied exercises throughout the year to test different scenarios of mass disasters and military confrontations and the systemic responses to them.

The Contribution of the Exercise to Public Preparedness

Drilling the systems and the public, with an emphasis on joint functioning and connectivity, is of unquestionable value in preparing a nation for military confrontations, especially when the public and the civilian front are the clear, preferred targets. Israel is currently a model for emulation for many other countries that are diligently studying Israel’s practices of preparedness and drilling.³ In the Israeli context, the system exercises are particularly important in two categories.

The first is in the systemic sense, as a means to improve coordination and cooperation between the multiple response agencies at the state government and local levels. Coordination between large bureaucratic entities is always complex, as has been demonstrated time and again in Israel and elsewhere, especially in cases of mass casualty disasters (e.g., Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2004). This is especially true in Israel, given its unique, continuous security challenge and the lack of a single, authorized, responsible body to manage the systems involved and to coordinate their activities.⁴ Ostensibly, once it was decided to establish NEMA, this organ became charged with the coordination at the government level.⁵ Yet in practice, three years after its establishment, NEMA is still small in size and weak in terms of the authority needed to handle such a weighty task successfully. Its ability to impose an organizational culture, policy, and means to ensure coordination and integration in an emergency situation is fairly limited. Most of the agencies

view the IDF's Home Front Command as the strongest operational organization, because of the relative abundance of its resources, its professional expertise in the relevant fields (e.g., search and rescue), and its status and prestige as a military unit. The Home Front Command thus assumes the leading role in practice, coordinating the work in the field, even if it is not the exclusive authority on the scene. The issue of authority and responsibility is clouded and ill defined, both at the national and at the local level, and leaves much room for gratuitous conflicts and struggles for prestige. This undesirable situation will not change until legislation establishes which organ should be in charge and lead the management of the civilian front at the national and local levels. Until then, there is no alternative to frequent drilling of the different systems in order to create at least a basic measure of familiarity with the threat and the response doctrine and practices, as well as the procedures and regulations. The necessity of the exercise was proven yet again, especially at the local level, which is claimed to be – at least in official declarations – the cornerstone of the response system of the civilian front.

The second category is the engagement of the general public. The accepted notion in disaster management is that citizens who are prepared and involved in an active community, capable of defending itself and providing its needs with adequate local solutions, represent the bulk of the nation's social resiliency and the ultimate response to the challenge.⁶ This is true even when the institutional response agents are limited in capability and availability. Conversely, a passive public is far more vulnerable, and quickly becomes a heavy burden on the community, damaging social resiliency.⁷ A comprehensive study recently undertaken by the American Homeland Security Institute (a research institute funded by the US Department of Homeland Security), dealing with a detailed comparison between Israel and the United States in public engagement in coping with terrorism,⁸ devoted an entire chapter to the question of public involvement in preparedness and emergency exercises. The important assertion of this chapter, praising Israel's efforts (compared with the American ones), determines that

To mitigate the effects of terrorism, the public needs to be prepared to respond and recover from the possible consequences of a terrorism-related catastrophe. It is in this context that the grassroots participation in emergency readiness and preparedness training/drills plays a significant

role in allowing the public to familiarize itself with procedures and skills of emergency response and recovery.⁹

In context of its recommendations, the document states,

To develop a culture of resiliency...more will need to be done to advance the notion that preparedness is a joint responsibility for the government and the public, requiring both entities to take an active role. However, these roles should not be independent of each other; their coordination is essential for true national preparedness.¹⁰

In light of these assertions there seems to be a special significance to the Home Front Command's focus on activating the public in the annual exercises to the extent possible. Despite the indifference of a large part of the public (in 2009, some 40 percent participated in the limited portion of the exercise by responding to the siren calling for the public to take shelter), the very fact that the exercise receives extensive publicity and that some population sectors – especially schools – are closely involved, creates a degree of exposure and encourages public engagement and the assimilation of information, albeit partial and indirect. This is a substantive contribution to the enhancement of the public's readiness to face future emergency scenarios. In the future, it will be imperative – not only in the exercises – to underline this crucial issue of activating the public, including the use of community volunteers such as high school and college students, the business community, and others.

Issues for Future Consideration

Although the main thrust of the exercise focused – correctly – on familiar scenarios of rocket and missile attacks on populated centers and strategic civilian infrastructure installations, it was reported that the exercise also involved some sensitive questions that may in the future play a more prominent role in the public's consciousness and in the preparedness for a war on the civilian front. Among them:

Mass Evacuation. A scenario involving extensive evacuation, which has been part of the Israeli scene since the 1991 Gulf War, is not a simple challenge for the government, which faces a difficult dilemma already in the preparation stage and certainly at a time of confrontation. On the one hand, civilian evacuation (not to say flight) is liable to reflect massive demoralization, fear, and system disintegration. As such, it may express

national weakness or be perceived as such by the enemy, striving to generate precisely these results when directing its terrorist activities. On the other hand, past experience has proven that what is needed is a measured, rational approach to the phenomenon, which reflects a natural impulse stemming from legitimate anxiety that is difficult to prevent or minimize. On the horns of this dilemma, the Israeli government chose not to adopt a sweeping decision on evacuation in 2006 and hardly intervened in the mass movement southwards.¹¹

Over the years, as the missile threat against Israel has grown – nearly all of Israel is now within range of high trajectory enemy fire – the need to formulate a systemic approach to this issue is called for as part of the public preparedness. Indeed, in the current exercise, it was reported¹² that the Home Front Command is formulating a detailed program for mass evacuation of civilians from areas under attack and that preliminary aspects of the program are ready to be reviewed by the Command. It was also reported that according to the head of the Home Front Command,¹³ the state must take responsibility for its citizens even in a mass evacuation and through prior, organized planning to assist local authorities in absorbing the evacuees. As part of the last exercise it was reported that the Home Front Command examined the option of Jewish evacuees from Petah Tikva taking shelter in the Arab town of Taibe.

Response to cyber terrorism. In a speech given at the Institute for National Security Studies, the head of IDF Military Intelligence alluded extensively to this field, asserting that cyberspace allows small nations and individuals to gain potential power that in the past was reserved only for the great superpowers: “Here we see the potential for force operation that...is capable of inflicting damage on military forces and on states’ economic lifelines, without limitations of time or range...The powers have recognized that there is a new world to be reckoned with.”¹⁴ Exposure of such acknowledgment of this threat may still be sparse, but the issue itself and the inherent threats against the civilian front are familiar and

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have been discussed extensively throughout the world for years.¹⁵ As part of civilian front readiness it is necessary to relate to future cyber threats, particularly against national infrastructures that rely on information and communication systems. The current exercise reportedly addressed the issue of defense against cyber threats, and appropriately so. It will be necessary to discuss this critical issue more thoroughly in the future, despite its high degree of sensitivity, during and between the home front exercises.

Relating to non-conventional threats. Like the previous exercises, the current exercise included a segment devoted to the response to chemical attacks. Previous exercises reportedly dealt with responses to biological and atomic threats as well. This testifies to the prevalent assessment in the defense establishment that the weaponry in Syrian hands is also liable to fall into Hizbollah and Hamas hands, thereby requiring adequate preparation. At the same time, the Home Front Command saw fit to take advantage of the drill to highlight the gap regarding the decision to equip all citizens in Israel with personal protection kits: today, the budget allocated to this goal is sufficient to distribute personal protection kits to not more than two thirds of the population. This issue requires attention, not only because of the actual shortage of kits, but also because it is liable to reflect neglect on the part of the state's decision makers in an area defined by the Home Front Command experts as one that necessitates appropriate resources to meet the defined needs. Civil defense in the face of non-conventional arsenals and other weapons of mass destruction requires additional thinking and perhaps even widespread education and systemic drilling in order to enhance public awareness and readiness, particularly as the challenge in these cases is not only the physical response in and of itself, but also the possible outbreak of large scale panic among the public and the need to contain and manage it rapidly and effectively.

Conclusion

The organizers of the exercise appear satisfied with the drill and the lessons learned from it. Indeed, holding a series of sequential exercises, including the annual national drills, is an important development and should be continued, though not necessarily with the identical patterns familiar from previous years. Future exercises should perhaps be

expanded to include other scenarios, such as earthquakes or hazardous materials spills, which require particular attention in preparedness and handling.

The importance of training the systems to promote cooperation and coordination and the significance of inclusion and engagement of the public in these scenarios demand serious attention. Inter-system coordination is critical; without it, the system as a whole will not function as it should. Yet even an optimal level of coordination is not sufficient to provide the needed response to the multiple sites of impact that can be expected in a major, multi-front conflict. In such circumstances there is no alternative to rely on the public at large, on its capacity to provide aid, and most of all, to depend on its social resilience. The latter would best be expressed by the rapid return to routine, perhaps even to an improved situation, which allows effective attention to the damage to life and property, even at a time when state resources are in short supply.

This is the critical issue that demands attention, planning, preparation, and training beyond what has been done to date. It would be wrong to place the burden of the civilian front squarely on the shoulders of institutional first responders, whether of the central government – which, in essence, is the situation today – or those operated by the local government. It is important to move away from the top-down model and to adopt a more balanced approach, empowering a bottom-up concept. In practice, this means continuing to improve the capacities of the institutional organizations and their synchronization, while at the same time developing two other channels. The first has already earned some attention, but needs to be expanded, namely, strengthening the capabilities of the local governments to manage the disaster in its zone, while building on the skills of the local system itself and its command and control of forces that will be allocated to them in time of emergency. The second is empowering the public and its capabilities, encouraging volunteer networks, and developing local informal leadership to improve the public's capability to provide for itself and its victims as required. There is a tremendous potential in the public at large, and only a fraction of it is tapped. Moreover, engaging the public at large will help not only to mitigate damage and minimize casualties, but will also nurture its social resiliency.

This issue, like others connected to the basic notion of engaging the civilian front in the face of the multi-faceted terrorist threat, requires an ongoing, sometime Sisyphean, effort every day of the year. Exercises like Turning Point 4 will undoubtedly continue to strengthen the abilities of the various agencies involved and will in all likelihood also improve coordination between them. However, this is not enough to shape and stabilize the system, to formulate its approaches, or to change basic patterns currently characterizing the scene. For this to happen it is necessary to engage in an open public debate and reach difficult decisions on key issues that have not yet been taken. The most important of these are: the role of the civilian public in Israel's overall security concept; the place of civil defense in relation to the components of military deterrence and attack; responsibility and authority to manage the civilian front in routine times and in emergencies; the role of the IDF and the Home Front Command in relation to the civilian institutions, and especially local government; the role of civilians, volunteers, and the civil society in systemic responses to emergencies; and a doctrine of utilizing the nation's resiliency, including its "hard" components (the economy, infrastructures) as well as its "soft" ones (society, culture, politics, and leadership). Until a comprehensive systemic doctrine is formulated and agreed on with regard to these fundamental issues, emergency drills will not achieve significantly more than technical and methodological improvements – important though these may be – of the existing system.

Notes

- 1 The National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA), <http://www.rahel.mod.gov.il/SiteCollectionDocuments/goal.ppt#482,1>. According to the Home Front Command the purpose of the exercise is "to improve the preparedness of the organizations *and the public* to cope with emergencies" (emphasis added). See <http://www.oref.org.il/1000-he/FAQ.aspx>. <http://www.oref.org.il/404.aspx>.
- 2 Summary of the state comptroller's report: "The Preparedness of the Civilian Front and Its Functioning in the Second Lebanon War – Summary / Main Findings," July 2007.
- 3 Seventy visitors from thirty countries, more than in previous years, came to observe the drill, IDF Spokesperson, May 25, 2010.
- 4 Deputy Minister of Defense Matan Vilnai, head of the National Emergency Management Authority, in an interview with Amos Harel, *Haaretz*, May 26, 2010: "Over 400 command centers are involved in this drill. It's as if the whole world is involved. We have to determine inter-relations between all of

- these, and to coordinate all the respective organizational cultures. You cannot imagine how hard it is to create a joint blueprint for responsibility and authority, with every organization convinced that it can do the job best, and can do it by itself.”
- 5 Government Decision 23B of December 19, 2007, limits the authority of NEMA in emergencies to that of a command center advising the minister of defense.
 - 6 Fran H. Norris, Susan P. Stevens, Betty Pfefferbaum, Karen F. Wyche, Rose L. Pfefferbaum, “Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41 (2008): 127-50; Michael T. Kindt, *Building Population Resilience to Terror Attacks: Unlearned Lessons from Military and Civilian Experience*, The Counterproliferation Papers, Future Warfare Series No. 36, USAF Counterproliferation Center, Air University, Alabama.
 - 7 See, for example, M. Lahad, A. Ben Neshet, “From Improvising in Trauma to Developing a Doctrine: How Communities Cope with Terrorism – Preparation, Intervention and Rehabilitation,” in A. Sommer and A. Bleich (eds.), *Early Interventions After Disasters and Terrorism: The Israeli Experience* (Tel Aviv: Ramot Publishers, 2005). Also see Amanda Ripley, *The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes – and Why* (NY: Crown Publishers, 2006); and Wendy A. Schafer, John M. Carroll, Steven R. Haynes, and Stephen Abrams, “Emergency Management Planning as Collaborative Community Work,” *Journal of Homeland Emergency Management* 5, no. 1 (2008).
 - 8 “Public Role and Engagement in Counterterrorism Efforts: Implications of Israeli Practices for the U.S. / Final Report,” Homeland Security Institute, April 2009.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, p. 79.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
 - 11 Gilead Shenhar, David Gidron, Kobi Peleg, “Mass Population Displacement under an Unclear Evacuation Policy during the Israel-Lebanon War 2006,” *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* 5, no. 1 (2008).
 - 12 Amos Harel, “IDF Formulated Mass Evacuation Program for Civilians in Missile Attack,” *Haaretz*, May 20, 2010.
 - 13 Home Front Command Headquarters, Population Department, “Civilian Defense Doctrine of Local Government,” May 2007, pp. 72-73.
 - 14 “Security Challenges of the 21st Century,” December 2009, <http://www.inss.org.il/events.php?cat=257&incat=&read=3572>.
 - 15 See, for example, Frank J. Cilluffo and J. Paul Nicholas, “CyberStrategy 2.0,” *Journal of International Security Affairs*, April 2006; and Michael Chertoff, *Homeland Security: Assessing the First Five Years* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 95-103.

Syria's Return to Lebanon: The Challenge of the Lebanese State and the Role of Hizbollah

Daniel Sobelman

On July 7, 2006, the Beirut newspaper *al-Mustaqbal*, owned by Saad al-Din al-Hariri, published an article that in retrospect seems almost prophetic. Less than three weeks prior, Gilad Shalit was kidnapped on the border of the Gaza Strip, and Israel, writer Nasir al-Asaad warned, was in a state of frenzy and sending threatening messages to Damascus and Hizbollah, warning them against provocations. "What was passed over on previous occasions will not be passed over now," al-Asaad cautioned, and added, "It would not be overstating the case to say that Lebanon is directly exposed to danger." In previous years, the United States had restrained Israel, but this time, there would be no such restraint. He explained: "Needless to say, opening a front in Southern Lebanon, regardless of the reason, will expose Lebanon to the Israeli frenzy, and will also be of no use to the Palestinians themselves." Al-Asaad summed up by saying that it was in Lebanon's interest

to refrain from supplying military and warlike "contributions" that this time could make Lebanon pay a very heavy price...The coming days, and perhaps the next few hours, present Lebanon and the Lebanese with a great challenge. The challenge here is how to make defense of [Lebanon's] national interest against the dangerous consequences the top priority, above any other priority.¹

Five days later, Hizbollah kidnapped two IDF soldiers on the northern border, an action that set off the Second Lebanon War.

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In recent months, commentators in the same newspaper, whose owner has since become prime minister of Lebanon, have warned against Lebanon being dragged into a regional confrontation between Israel, Syria, and Iran. In a long series of anxious articles that apparently reflect the prime minister's opinion, the newspaper's commentators are now warning that the Iranian Revolutionary Guards are acting to divert attention from events in Iran by mobilizing its allies in the Middle East.² Al-Asaad and other journalists are again speaking out and urging Hizbollah to refrain from supplying Israel with "excuses," lest the events of July 2006 repeat themselves.³ The fear of war in Lebanon has been palpable for several months. Already in early January, a journalist closely associated with Hizbollah wrote that "the possibility of an Israeli war against Lebanon in the next three months" was discussed at virtually every gathering in Lebanon.⁴

The Lebanese discourse resonates in the context of assessments that the international conflict concerning Iran's nuclear program is liable to lead to a confrontation and undermine stability in the entire region. No less important, however, this discourse, like virtually any other discussion in Lebanon, occurs in the context of what is emerging as Syria's return to the Lebanese theater and the subjugation of Lebanon, including Hizbollah, to the Syrian agenda.

The Restoration of Syrian Influence in Lebanon

It appears that five years after Syria was forced to terminate its three-decades-long military presence in Lebanon, it is successfully reasserting

Five years after Syria was forced to terminate its three-decades-long military presence in Lebanon, it is successfully reasserting domination over its western neighbor.

domination over its western neighbor. Damascus had in the past based its control of Lebanon on a massive military presence and its pervasive involvement in management of the theater. In recent years, it has been extending its control gradually through a combination of political alliances, assassination of opponents, and regional diplomacy.

The restoration of Syria's influence in Lebanon, although less ubiquitous than before, is a result of its successful extrication from the isolation that followed the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri in February 2005.

The change of administration in Washington and the softening of the American policy towards the Syrian regime were also interpreted as a weakening of the international support for the opposition in Lebanon, the March 14 Alliance. In addition, significant political changes have taken place in Lebanon itself, and the opposition began to recognize the strategic influence of Damascus on Lebanon's stability.

The withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon in the spring of 2005 and the Second Lebanon War in the summer of 2006 created a deep political rift in Lebanon. A series of influential actors, including Saudi Arabia, France, the US, and Iran, hurried to fill the vacuum left by Syria by increasing their influence in the country. Internally, the fault line left the country torn between two main rival camps divided on the question of Lebanon's commitment to Syria and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The rift aggravated the conflict not only with respect to Lebanon's identity, but also concerning a highly sensitive and volatile question: the continued existence of Hizbollah's military apparatus, independent from the state's institutions.

By successfully balancing one another, the two camps caused such severe internal paralysis and tension that public discourse in Lebanon began to focus on what all the players regarded as a concrete risk of a renewed civil war. The tension peaked on May 7, 2008, when in response to the government's attempt to dismantle part of Hizbollah's operational telephone network, the organization took over West Beirut and wreaked havoc on its political opponents' main media outlets, effectively shutting them down. This act, Hizbollah's biggest domestic display of force since the Lebanese Civil War ended in 1989, delivered an unmistakable message that any attempt to undermine the organization would necessarily upset the country's stability.⁵

In December 2009, about five months after the parliamentary elections, a national unity government was established headed by Saad al-Din al-Hariri (the son of the assassinated ex-prime minister). The rapprochement between Syria and Saudi Arabia, which facilitated the October 2009 Syrian-Saudi Arabian summit, paved the way for the establishment of the unity government in Lebanon. This, along with the interest of all parties in calming the situation in Lebanon, probably augurs well for a period of relative political quiet and renewed stability, at

least in the near future. Yet even if the political and ethnic fault lines have been blurred, they still lurk unmistakably beneath the surface.

An “Independent,” but not anti-Syrian, Lebanon

In recent months, both sides in Lebanon have expressed satisfaction at the course taken by Lebanon. The leaders of the March 14 camp claim that the struggle they waged over the past five years has achieved independence for Lebanon. Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, until recently the most outspoken opponent of Syria and Hizbollah, summed it up by saying,

We will one day proudly write the history of the March 14 camp, which led to independence. At the same time, however, we have a strong neighbor named Syria, with which we have historic relations. We can't ignore it; we have to respect it... We have achieved a great deal in the framework of March 14, but we should not demand the impossible.⁶

The recognition of Syria's key role led al-Hariri to make a two-day visit to Damascus in late December, during which he held meetings described as “historic” with Syrian president Bashar al-Asad. This summit was no trivial matter; in the wake of his father's assassination, al-Hariri held the Syrian president responsible for the murder. Before his visit, al-Hariri declared that Syria and Lebanon should launch relations “as between equals.” Later, he declared that a new leaf with Syria had been turned over on the basis of mutual respect and joint interests.⁷

A qualitative change has occurred in Damascus-Beirut relations from what prevailed until a few years ago, when the slogan of “a unity of fate and paths” was heard on an almost daily basis, and the head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon managed Lebanese affairs in detail. Nevertheless, to say that Lebanon has become an independent country is an overstatement. While Syria and Lebanon exchanged ambassadors last year and they are expected to begin demarcating an official border between them for the first time, with regard to the Middle East conflict in general and Syrian interests in particular, although Lebanon has come a long way in reinforcing its sovereignty, it is far from independent. Information leaked to the Lebanese press on Syria's behalf indicates that Damascus has demanded absolute allegiance to the Syrian agenda from its new loyalists.⁸

According to the information leaked in Lebanon following the talks between Asad and al-Hariri, the Syrian president presented his former enemy with two fundamental principles on which he was unwilling to compromise: Hizbollah, and what was defined as the strategic relations between the two countries. In this context, Asad reaffirmed to his counterpart the basic principle that has guided Syria for many years: by no means will it accept a situation where its security and stability are exposed to any danger originating in Lebanon. As a direct consequence of this, Asad stated that Beirut must coordinate its foreign policy with Damascus. According to reports in Lebanon, even when the arrangements for the Lebanese prime minister's visit were made, Asad made "hostility to Israel" and "maintaining the resistance in Lebanon and coordination with Syria" the basic conditions for making a fresh start.

As of the spring of 2010, it appeared that al-Hariri had fully acquiesced to Bashar al-Asad's terms, meaning that the renewed political struggle that began five years ago over Lebanon's political orientation in the Middle East was coming full circle. The political consensus in Lebanon states that Israel, not Syria, is the enemy and the principal threat to Lebanon, and Lebanon remains part of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This state of affairs matches Hizbollah's view, which holds that "Lebanon's location on the borders of occupied Palestine and in a region subject to the effects of the conflict with the Israeli enemy obligates the country to bear national and pan-Arab responsibility." The Shiite organization believes that Lebanon's geopolitical position "commits it to the just Arab issues, headed by the Palestinian cause and the conflict with the Israeli enemy."⁹

In recent months Hizbollah has won public internal ideological and political support from some of its important opponents. On the eve of the formation of the unity government, al-Hariri commented on the dispute over the continued existence of Hizbollah as an armed organization, saying, "There was a period in which we disagreed about the resistance, but we have turned over a new leaf, and this ammunition will in no way be directed internally against Lebanon." He added, "If Israel decides tomorrow to commit aggression against Lebanon, will we say then that our resistance is illegal, or will we

The political consensus in Lebanon states that Israel, not Syria, is the enemy and the principal threat to Lebanon, and Lebanon remains part of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

endorse the resistance, with all of us acting together as Lebanese – the state, the army, the people, and the resistance?”¹⁰ On another occasion, al-Hariri cautioned Israel that it should not assume that in the event of a renewed conflict, Lebanon would once again become divided.¹¹

Similarly, Jumblatt described Hizbollah’s weapons as “the main guarantee for dealing with any possible Israeli aggression against Lebanon.”¹² As part of his renewed rapprochement with Syria, facilitated by the Hizbollah secretary general, who acted as main intermediary, it was reported that Jumblatt had expressed to Nasrallah his deep commitment to the “resistance” option and the strategic path to which Lebanon was committed in the event of a confrontation with Israel.¹³

The Defense Strategy Challenge

In the near future, regional developments, mainly those involving Iran, will likely affect events in the internal Lebanese theater, perhaps to an unprecedented degree. For months, Lebanon has been living in the shadow of its anxiety about a regional conflict involving Iran – a conflict that is liable to spread to Lebanon. Furthermore, the consolidation of Syrian hegemony in Lebanon is augmenting the risk that Hizbollah and all of Lebanon with it will become involved in a regional conflict in one way or another, especially if it includes Syria.

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In early February Syrian foreign minister Walid al-Muallem, in uncharacteristic fashion, said that any Israeli attack on Syria “would mean an all-out war...It would be all-out, whether it takes place in Southern Lebanon or Syria.” He added that war would cause damage to Israel’s cities.¹⁴ The heightened tension between Israel and Syria, which stemmed from Israel’s threat to attack a target in Syrian territory,¹⁵ was apparently prompted by the supply of Scud and other advanced missiles to Hizbollah. As a direct consequence of this tension, a tripartite summit was convened in Damascus, attended by the leaders of Syria, Iran, and Hizbollah. This was an unprecedented event, whose purpose was to demonstrate a united front in the face of regional

challenges, including concern about an Israeli military strike against Iran, but mostly against Syria and Hizbollah. The tripartite summit also led to the formal upgrading of the status of Hizbollah's secretary general to that of a regional player and leader.¹⁶ In a certain sense, Syria has taken care that the political vacuum in Lebanon created by its withdrawal in 2005 would be filled mainly by Hizbollah.

On the day following the summit, a senior Hizbollah official was quoted as saying that in the "work meeting" between Bashar al-Asad, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Hassan Nasrallah, "it was stressed that any attack on Lebanon would amount to an attack on Syria, and any attack on Syria would be considered an attack on Lebanon."¹⁷ Although later the organization denied that a joint defense pact had been signed, the intention nonetheless was that in the event of a confrontation between Israel and Syria, Hizbollah would be liable to initiate military action against Israel. For his part, Asad refused to divulge whether Syria would come to Hizbollah's aid if Israel attacked Lebanon. "We won't show our cards," he said.¹⁸ The Syrian president's remarks reflected his sense that Syria's strategic environment has become more comfortable.

On the other hand, for months, al-Hariri, Lebanese president Michel Suleiman, and the Lebanese army have all exerted their influence to prevent Lebanon from being dragged into a military conflict, mainly by urging not to give Israel "excuses" to attack Lebanon. As part of these efforts, and against the Syrian-Iranian policy, the Lebanese president recently attempted to define clearly the status and military function of Hizbollah, while publicly announcing that defending Lebanon was the army's job. This measure reflects a profound disagreement that will probably not be resolved in the near future. In certain circumstances, it is also likely to force Hizbollah to choose between its priorities of "the resistance axis" and the Lebanese state.

In previous years, the Lebanese military was considered no more than a gendarmerie. Now, however, an effort on the part of senior Lebanese officials and the military itself to establish and bolster its status, a measure supported economically by the US,¹⁹ is now evident. A Lebanese military source was prominently quoted in *al-Safir* as predicting that war with Israel was not expected, and that the army was operating to maintain security in Southern Lebanon and along the border with Israel: "We, and especially the resistance, will not provide Israel with an

excuse for aggression. This does not mean that we are not being careful, or that we as an army, a people, and the resistance are not in a state of readiness."²⁰ Lebanese military chief General Jean Qahwagi declared, "Lebanon's power – the main guarantee in dealing with regional upsets – rests primarily on the strength of the army, the backbone of the state, which has the confidence of all Lebanese."²¹

In what was perceived as a countermeasure by Suleiman, the Lebanese president announced on the day following the tripartite summit that the national dialogue meetings would resume. He made this announcement without any consultation with Damascus, which was surprised, and not pleased, by the measure.²² On eve of the renewal of the dialogue on March 9, he revealed that in previous discussions, it was agreed that "the resistance would kick in once occupation takes place, in the event that the army proves unable to carry out its duties, in the event that it collapses under enemy pressure, or if it asks the resistance for assistance."²³ Like President Suleiman, Prime Minister al-Hariri also supports a defensive strategy, in which the army plays a key role.²⁴

In other words, the support that Hizbollah receives from the state's leaders is not a blank check. Furthermore, the public support that the Shiite organization receives does not mean that it will henceforth have a public mandate to expose the country to a renewed risk of war with Israel, as occurred on July 12, 2006. In early May, following the reports that Scud missiles were supplied to Hizbollah, al-Hariri was quick to deny the remarks that were previously attributed, in which he was cited as supporting the organization's right to arm itself with such weapons.²⁵

Nevertheless, it is difficult at this stage to visualize the process started by Suleiman developing into a defensive strategy that would make Hizbollah subordinate to the Lebanese government. While Hizbollah and Syria have no interest in the collapse of the Lebanese system, from their perspective an excessively independent and strong Lebanese regime would be liable to pose a challenge to their interests and to Hizbollah's room to maneuver. There is no doubt that Hizbollah is now entering the national dialogue with a reinforced status. Following the convening of the national dialogue forum – in its first sessions the representatives refrained from so much as maintaining eye contact with each other²⁶ – Syria's allies in Lebanon launched a campaign against President Suleiman. The situation was summed up in a headline in the pro-Syrian

daily *al-Akhbar*: “His Excellency the President: His Mouth is in Syria, His Heart is in Washington and Riyadh.”²⁷

The political and ethnic rift, which widened greatly following the Second Lebanon War, was quite detrimental to Hizbollah, which needs public support and comfortable surroundings in order to enable it to achieve its strategic goal: preservation of the “resistance.” In Hizbollah’s viewpoint, blurring the public rift is an important achievement. Ibrahim al-Amin, who is extremely close to the organization, wrote, “At the end of four years, Hizbollah again faces the test of a total war by Israel, and perhaps also by the other devils in the world. It knows in advance, however, that an alliance of Lebanese – a group that includes far more than half of the population – stands at its side.”²⁸ Nawaf al-Musawi, a Hizbollah member of parliament, said that the “resistance” had invested efforts in the general public sphere in order to benefit from a friendly and “united home front.”²⁹

Even if the internal rift in Lebanon remains unhealed, there is no doubt that the Lebanese environment is currently more comfortable for Hizbollah than in recent years. Five years after Hizbollah was obliged to deal with the consequences of the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, and four years after the blow it suffered in the Second Lebanon War, Naim Qasim, the organization’s deputy secretary general, declared recently that the center of power in Lebanon, the Middle East, and the international theater had shifted, and that “the situation cannot be compared to the one that prevailed in 2005.” The United States, Nasrallah’s deputy explained, was busy with Iraq and Afghanistan, and at the current stage, Hizbollah felt more satisfied with its situation than ever before.³⁰ Muhammad Raad, a senior Hizbollah official, stated that Security Council Resolution 1559, which obligated Lebanon to disarm the “militias” on its territory, i.e., the military wing of Hizbollah, “had become a dead letter.”³¹

In a certain sense, Syria has taken care that the political vacuum in Lebanon created by its withdrawal in 2005 would be filled mainly by Hizbollah.

While in previous years Hizbollah cited tactical issues (e.g., the Lebanese prisoners and Shab’a farms) in order to justify its continued existence as a military organization, it now appears that it no longer feels any need to do so. More than ever before, Hizbollah’s status is that of a

regional player. Nasrallah himself recently declared that his organization had become part of “not only the Lebanese defense equation, but also the regional and global equation.”³² From this standpoint, it appears that Hizbollah has succeeded in achieving a critical mass within Lebanon and in rendering its military power a *fait accompli*, with the power of shaping the image of Lebanon to a large extent, at least for the coming years.

Hizbollah’s recognition of its basic need for the broadest public support possible is likely to have a restraining effect on its actions. If Hizbollah does decide to intervene in a military conflict in the region – without having being challenged directly by Israel – it may attempt to draw Israel into attacking first, thereby justifying its entry into the campaign.

Conclusion

At the moment it appears that Hizbollah is preparing militarily and politically for a renewed confrontation – mostly in a regional context – even though another war with Israel is not a scenario that the organization desires. As of now, the restraining effect of Israeli deterrence has been effective since August 2006, even if a conflict between the two sides continues in more clandestine channels. Since the ceasefire took effect, Nasrallah has been careful to declare in almost every speech that his organization does not wish for war. Equally important, Hizbollah currently believes that a war with Israel is not expected in the coming months, and perhaps not in the coming years.³³

Since the Second Lebanon War, Hizbollah has worked gradually and prudently to restore its deterrence against Israel, mainly – it says – to prevent another war. On several occasions after making statements about the organization’s military power and issuing threats against Israel, Nasrallah explained that his threats were designed to deter Israel and to prevent war.³⁴ His deputy stated in March that the defense of Lebanon and the establishment of a balance of deterrence against Israel were now the leading priority.³⁵ Nasrallah’s recent remarks indicate that he believes that his organization has succeeded in this task. From his perspective, his organization’s success in arming itself with relatively advanced missiles and developing capabilities that it did not previously possess, without Israel acting to foil such action, has presented Israel with a *fait accompli*. One question is whether Hizbollah will exploit what

it regards as success in achieving a balance of deterrence in order to test Israel again by demonstrating greater daring against it in the military sphere, or whether the mutual balance of deterrence will restrain and curb the two sides, thereby ensuring continued stability. The assessment by the parties that a Third Lebanon War would be more far reaching and destructive than the previous rounds of violence could also dictate restraint to Israel and Hizbollah.

However, as Syria strengthens its hegemony in Lebanon, the commitment by Hizbollah – which has openly become part of Syria's system of deterrence – to actively support Syria and perhaps also Iran in any future conflict is also likely to increase. Thus other Lebanese leaders, and possibly the army, are liable to find themselves facing their moment of truth. Hizbollah is aware of this. Nasrallah has stated more than once that if another war with Israel breaks out, the face of the region would change. It currently appears that the organization is also establishing its deterrence within Lebanon: sources around the organization recently voiced implied threats that any attempt to exploit a regional conflict to attack Hizbollah (such as it claimed took place in 2006) would lead to a change in the political system that has been in force in Lebanon since 1943,³⁶ and to what was described as “a political May 7”³⁷ – a hint at a military takeover of Beirut by the organization.

The extent of Hizbollah's involvement in any future regional conflict remains unclear. On the one hand, issues and forces larger than Hizbollah itself – namely its patrons Syria and Iran – are expected to affect its future and behavior. Nasrallah's deputy recently hinted at this when he warned, “Israel and the US cannot bomb Iran and expect things to continue as usual...any attack on Iran can ignite the entire region, and the attacker, whether it is Israel or the US, will pay a heavy price.”³⁸

On the other hand, Hizbollah itself cannot know at this stage what role it will play in a regional conflict, and to what extent it will place itself at the disposal of Syria and Iran if they are attacked. Qasim admitted that there were several possible scenarios, and that all he could say was, “We will determine our position according to the character of the Israeli aggression, according to what we regard as appropriate...I do not know to what extent the various parties will intervene in order to halt the aggression, and what coordination will take place between them.”³⁹ Despite Hizbollah's relations with Iran and Syria, it cannot be concluded

that the organization would automatically involve itself in any conflict, especially if it believes that the result would be an unrestrained response by Israel against Lebanon. If it believes that it can remain untouched or escape with a minimum of damage, the probability that it will act will be greater.

In any event, Syria's success in restoring its status and domination in Lebanon are likely to bring Hizbollah's moment of truth nearer, in which it will face a real dilemma. It may be forced to choose between its loyalty to the axis of resistance and its loyalty to Lebanon, and it may confront the need to reduce the risk of being drawn into a regional conflict, as well as perhaps an internal one.

Notes

- 1 *Al-Mustaqbal*, July 7, 2006.
- 2 For example, *al-Mustaqbal*, January 30, 2010.
- 3 *Al-Mustaqbal*, January 18, 2010.
- 4 *Al-Akhbar*, January 9, 2010.
- 5 On these events, see Eyal Zisser, *Lebanon: Blood in the Cedars: From the Civil War to the Second Lebanon War* (Bnei Brak: Kibbutz HaMeuhad, 2009), pp. 346-48.
- 6 *AFP*, January 17, 2010. In a March 13 interview with al-Jazeera, Jumblatt completed the process by apologizing on the air for his condemnation of the Syrian president, and even forgave Syria for the 1977 murder of his father, Kamal Jumblatt. Two weeks later, the Syrian president greeted him in Damascus.
- 7 *Al-Safir*, February 9, 2010.
- 8 For example, see *al-Akhbar*, March 13, 2010, and *al-Safir*, March 18, 2010.
- 9 See "The 2009 Political Document of Hizbollah," published on November 30, 2010. For the full document in Arabic, see <http://www.moqawama.org/essaydetailsf.php?eid=16245&fid=47>.
- 10 *Al-Safir*, November 27, 2009.
- 11 *Al-Safir*, January 28, 2010.
- 12 *Al-Safir*, January 23, 2010.
- 13 *Al-Akhbar*, March 18, 2010.
- 14 *A-sharq al-Awsat*, February 4, 2010.
- 15 *Al-Akhbar*, March 20, 2010. On 28 May, the *London Times* reported that Hizbollah had access to secret arms depots inside Syria, which the Lebanese party was operating freely. The following day, Israel's Channel 2 Television cited Prime Minister Netanyahu as confirming the report.
- 16 A story published in *al-Akhbar* on March 18, 2010 described Nasrallah as "Syria's secretary general in Lebanon," and stated, "Nasrallah is Syria's key in Lebanon, and Lebanon's key in Syria."

- 17 *Al-Akhbar*, March 1, 2010.
- 18 *Al-Safir*, May 18, 2010.
- 19 A senior official in the US embassy in Lebanon noted that since 2006, the US had provided over \$500 million in aid to the Lebanese army. See *A-sharq al-Awsat*, May 7, 2010.
- 20 *Al-Safir*, January 16, 2010.
- 21 *Al-Hayat*, February 21, 2010.
- 22 *Al-Akhbar*, March 11, 2010.
- 23 *A-sharq al-Awsat*, March 8, 2010.
- 24 *Al-Hayat*, December 29, 2009.
- 25 *Al-Mustaqbal*, May 12, 2010.
- 26 *Al-Hayat*, March 10, 2010.
- 27 *Al-Akhbar*, March 12, 2010.
- 28 *Al-Akhbar*, February 8, 2010.
- 29 *Al-Hayat*, January 17, 2010.
- 30 *A-sharq al-Awsat*, April 17, 2010.
- 31 *Al-Liwaa*, December 25, 2009.
- 32 *Al-Hayat*, May 22, 2010.
- 33 *Al-Hayat*, December 28, 2009.
- 34 For example, on February 16, 2010, Nasrallah threatened that if Israel attacks the southern suburbs of Beirut, Hizbollah would bomb Tel Aviv, and if Israel attacks Lebanon's international airport, his organization would hit Ben Gurion Airport. In a speech on March 2, he explained that sometimes "you must say certain things in order to prevent war." Nasrallah spoke along the same lines on August 14, 2007, when he said that his declaration that Hizbollah now possessed a "big surprise" was designed to deter Israel, not to promote war. In a speech on May 1, Nasrallah claimed that Israeli rhetoric had changed following his February 16 speech, which proved his assertion that he had succeeded in creating a balance of deterrence against Israel.
- 35 *Al Intiqad*, March 19, 2010.
- 36 *Al-Akhbar*, March 20, 2010.
- 37 *Al-Akhbar*, March 30, 2010.
- 38 *Reuters*, March 18, 2010.
- 39 *A-sharq al-Awsat*, April 17, 2010.

Beyond the Nuclear and Terror Threats: The Conventional Military Balance in the Gulf

Yoel Guzansky

The Persian Gulf is currently in the midst of one of the largest arms races it has ever known. The chief motivation for it is Iran's progress on its nuclear program and the possibility that Arab Gulf states will be in the line of fire in any future conflict. These states' military forces have undergone substantive changes in recent years, mainly improvements in their defensive capabilities, and "on paper" they have acquired certain capabilities to attack Iran.¹ Nevertheless, even massive procurement of weapon systems, no matter how advanced, is no match for Iran's military power and its ability to conduct modern warfare over any length of time. The basic conditions behind this reality include the Gulf states' inferior geo-strategic situations, their domestic constraints, their dependence on foreign manpower, and their difficulty in creating effective security cooperation among themselves.

The Persian Gulf arena has decisive importance for regional and world security, as is patently clear from the events that have befallen it since the Islamic Revolution: several energy crises, three regional wars, outside military intervention, subversion and terror, and several low intensity conflicts, all of which create a state of ongoing crisis. Currently, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman seek to prepare for any possible development regarding the Iranian nuclear program, including use of force against Iranian nuclear facilities or Iran's acquisition of nuclear capability, and the ensuing ramifications of these scenarios. Looking beyond the sub-conventional threats (subversion and terror) and the non-conventional threats (weapons of mass destruction),

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this article focuses on the changes taking place in the military balance in the Gulf and the conventional military threats to the Arab Gulf states, and the connection between the various threats.

Threat Reference: Iran

From Iran's point of view, the Gulf is a main attraction as an area for potential influence, but it is also a major source of threat. Despite the Arab Gulf states' basic weakness, Iran sees them as a not insignificant security risk, mainly because of their ties with the United States and the concrete fear that the US will use bases on their territory to attack Iran's nuclear facilities. Senior Iranian officials in the military and government frequently declare that in such an event, Iran will respond by striking the Gulf states and American interests in those states.² These repeated threats are intended first and foremost to deter the Gulf states from cooperating with the United States, but it may be that they also reflect Iranian operational plans in the Gulf.³ Iran has several military aims therein: to prevent or at least limit the ability of various players to use the Gulf to attack it; to defend the Iranian coast with its refineries and navigation lines; to attempt to undermine American influence and increase the price of any American intervention in the Gulf; to improve Iran's ability to respond if attacked, especially regarding freedom of navigation and oil exports from the Gulf; and to project its strength while sowing fear among its smaller neighbors in order to influence their policies.

A prevalent view in the Gulf is that the United States must be close enough to protect the Gulf states, but far enough so that it does not create problems.

Some time ago the Revolutionary Guards, which in 2007 received overall responsibility for the Gulf, adopted the principles of asymmetric warfare against "soft targets," mainly infrastructure facilities on the Arab Gulf coast, including oil rigs, transport terminals, refineries, ports, and desalination facilities. The tactics of asymmetry are mainly intended to offset the Gulf states' preference for advanced weapon systems. In addition, Iran's difficulty in obtaining weapons and spare parts because of the sanctions it has faced in one form or

another since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 has led the Iranian military industry to attempt to acquire the capability to manufacture a variety of offensive weapons. As of today, the main Iranian military threat to the

Gulf states is connected to Iran's clear superiority in surface-to-surface missiles and other asymmetric capabilities, especially maritime ones, which the Gulf states view as tangible and immediate threats, specifically:

a. **The missile threat.** Today Iran possesses the largest surface-to-surface missile arsenal in the Middle East, estimated at 1,000 missiles with ranges of 150-2,000 km.⁴ Because its air force is weak, Iran is enlarging its ballistic arsenal, gradually but systematically. At the same time, it is increasing the ranges of its missiles and improving their accuracy and destructive force, and it is working to shorten their "exposure time" (by increasing reliance on solid fuel engines, which shortens preparation and launching time). The result is that in the next confrontation, urban centers and strategic facilities in Gulf states will be exposed to more missiles for a longer period of time.⁵ In a rare statement, former Iranian defense minister Ali Shamkhani described Iran's response to the Gulf states: "Iran will launch a missile blitz at the Gulf states...with the missiles aimed not only at American bases in the region, but also at strategic targets like refineries and power stations...The objective will be to stun the American missile defense system using dozens if not hundreds of missiles that will be launched simultaneously at certain targets."⁶

b. **The naval threat.** For a variety of reasons (mainly the weakness of the regular Iranian navy and America's naval superiority in the Gulf), Iran has given preference to the purchase and building of a large number of small, fast naval vessels (some unmanned) and to the conversion of civilian ships to military purposes. Some of the vessels are armed with anti-ship missiles, some have been fitted with naval mines, and others are full of explosives.⁷ The result is that Iran's naval fleet in the Gulf has taken on the characteristics of a guerrilla force in every sense: mini-submarines for landing commandos and fast ships used for "hit and run" missions using "swarming" tactics, that is, a large number of fast, small boats that attack at the same time. This tactic is intended to "stun" the adversary's defensive systems. In addition, Iran has

Iran's nuclear buildup and the threat to the Gulf states from Iran's asymmetric capabilities in the Gulf and its surface-to-surface missile arsenal are the main catalysts for these states' efforts to increase their military strength.

shore-to-sea missiles on barges, on islands in the Gulf, and along the Iranian coast, as well as a not-insignificant ability to use sea mines, whose main purpose is to interfere with maritime traffic in the Gulf.

The Military Balance in the Gulf⁸

Category	Iran	Saudi Arabia	Other Gulf States
Territory (km)	1,647,000	2,150,000	325,000
Population	70,000,000	25,000,000	12,000,000
Investment in defense	2.5%	10%	6.8% (average)
Military personnel	870,000 (including Revolutionary Guards; in addition, there are some 600,000 Basij forces)	220,000 (not including the establishment of a force of 35,000 soldiers dedicated to protect the oil infrastructure)	140,000 (there are also 24,000 reserve soldiers in Kuwait)
Fighter planes	237	252	258
Transport planes	101	57	113
Helicopters	340	226	304
Coast-to-sea or sea-to-sea missiles	Some 400 (HY-2/C801/802/701)	Otomat/Teseo (unknown number)	MM-40 (unknown number, UAE)
Surface-to-surface missiles	Some 1,000 missiles with ranges from 150-2,000 kilometers	(CSS-2) 30-50	Scud-B (unknown number, UAE)
Frigates and corvettes	90	27	51
Submarines	3 (in addition to 5 midget submarines)	None	None

Source: Middle East Military Forces database, Institute for National Security Studies, 2010

The Gulf states' vulnerability has prompted them to adopt a cautious, measured policy, which includes maintaining as good relations as possible with all sides, including the countries that most threaten them. Thus in recent years, security ties between Iran and Oman have been strengthened, practical security cooperation agreements have been signed between Iran and Qatar, including training and exchange of information, and joint exercises have been held with Kuwait. There have even been reports of limited cooperation with Bahrain – despite the prolonged hostility between the countries – on “soft” security issues like border security and smuggling prevention.⁹

The United States

Gulf security is closely tied to the Arab Gulf states' dependence on outside protection and to the need by foreign actors to have access to the Gulf's economy. As such, the Gulf military balance is integrally linked to the presence of the American forces. Since the Gulf states became independent they have been defense buyers, not suppliers. Their lack of strategic depth, built-in military weakness, and hostile neighbors – in the past Iraq, and now Iran – have caused them to depend more and more on an American military presence for protection. American intervention in the Gulf includes ongoing arms sales; ongoing advance stationing of practice and training equipment; placement of central bases (including the headquarters of the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain and the regional headquarters of the American Central Command in Qatar); and even direct military intervention (during the Iran-Iraq War).

Strategic logic is not the only American consideration in the region. The United States also leads the sale of weapons to the Middle East in general, and the Gulf in particular: between 2001 and 2004, it was responsible for 56.1 percent of these deals, and from 2005-2008, for 8.9 percent (followed by Britain with 18.7 percent and Russia with 15.4 percent).¹⁰ These close ties have improved the American defense industry's economic situation and developed the links between the US and Gulf states defense establishments. On the other hand, from a purely military perspective, these ties have also had negative influences, making it difficult for the Gulf states to build a collective military framework (the Gulf Cooperation Council) and causing them to be dependent on foreign forces for the supply, maintenance, and operation of weapon systems.

Gulf rulers are sensitive to every advance placement of military equipment and American soldiers in their territory, especially in the early stages of fighting. This issue has been the subject of critical public opinion, and in several cases in the past, these forces were the targets of terrorist attacks. Therefore, the Gulf states prefer that they be stationed “beyond the horizon,” preferably in the Arabian Sea in the area of the Gulf of Oman. In other words, the United States must be close enough to protect the Gulf states, but far enough so that it does not create problems. The Obama administration, like its predecessors, has pleaded with the Arab Gulf states to strengthen their militaries by purchasing advanced American weapons in order to better confront the threat from Iran.¹¹ In the view of the United States, the strengthening of America’s allies in the region, especially through provision of access to missile protection systems, will help in implementing a deterrence and containment policy against Iran.

New Emphases in Buildup

Of all developing countries, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates spend the largest amounts on weapons purchases: the Saudi defense budget grew from \$24.9 billion in 2001 to \$41.2 billion in 2009, a 65 percent increase, while the defense budget of the UAE jumped 700 percent, from \$1.9 billion to \$15.4 billion. In the same period, Kuwait’s and Bahrain’s defense budgets also skyrocketed by 35 percent and 80 percent, respectively.¹² The assessment is that Saudi Arabia will spend some \$50 billion on advanced weapons in the next two years, while the UAE will spend nearly \$35 billion. They are followed by Oman and Kuwait, with an expected expenditure of up to \$10 billion.¹³

The Arab Gulf states lack the ability to act independently as a counterweight to Iran.

In the past, the main fear of the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, was a land invasion by Iraqi forces. This prompted the purchase of armor and artillery platforms, as well as helicopters and anti-tank weapons, in order to stop any advance of armored columns. Since the

1991 Gulf War the Arab Gulf states have worked to improve existing systems rather than invest in new technologies, primarily because the war proved that even if they invest in advanced weapon systems, their

security is dependent on the willingness of foreign forces, especially American forces, to protect them.

In the not too distant past the threat faced by the Gulf states has changed, and until recently, their capabilities did not match the threat from Iran. The trends in Gulf states weapons purchases in recent years, however, reflect a preference for advanced weapon systems that better match the enemy's threats and modus operandi, and these have been complemented by increased training and instruction and improved maintenance of the weapons purchased. The massive weapons purchases of recent years, especially missile protection systems, fighter planes, and advanced naval vessels, are intended first and foremost to strengthen the Gulf states' ability to defend their weak point: essential assets, especially oil production, refining, and transport infrastructures, but also desalination facilities (the only source of water in these countries) and military infrastructures.

Iran's nuclear buildup and the threat to the Gulf states from Iran's asymmetric capabilities in the Gulf and its surface-to-surface missile arsenal are the main catalysts for these states' efforts to increase their military strength. (These attempts have not diminished in the wake of the economic crisis and the decline in the price of oil). Several of these states are interested and others are already in the midst of purchasing missile deterrent and defense systems, including Patriot (PAC-3) batteries, while joining the American defensive disposition in the region that includes Aegis ships. In addition, in an unprecedented move, the US Congress last year approved the purchase of advanced missile defense systems (THAAD) by the UAE, which has even expressed interest in purchase of advanced American F-35 fighter planes. Moreover, the buildup is not limited to defensive means. Thus, for example, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have purchased advanced munitions for their fighter planes (including JDAM GPS-guided bombs), while Kuwait and the UAE have ordered fast patrol boats. The scope and type of the purchases, which are clearly driven by the Iranian buildup, are potentially strengthening their ability to maintain aerial and naval superiority in their territories.¹⁴

The strengthening of the Gulf states' military capabilities serves Israel's interests, especially if they adopt a more aggressive stance toward Iran.

In addition to trying to deter aggression by equipping themselves militarily, these acquisitions are also intended to ensure a continued American presence in the Gulf, to show that they are taking action, and to consolidate their rule and strengthen the personal prestige of their rulers (which is also part of the competition between these states, i.e., “mine is bigger and more advanced than yours”). Although the likelihood that these states will change their defensive orientation is small, there are certain trends, some of them new, in their current approach to national security, against the background of what is seen as a growing threat from Iran.

1. More cooperation.

- a. *Joint military force*: In late 2009, the Gulf states declared their intention to reestablish a rapid intervention force on the ruins of the “Peninsula Shield,” the joint military force that was de-facto disbanded in 2006. This step, they say, was intended to create a rapid and flexible intervention force with headquarters in Riyadh, with the troops remaining in their home countries until called during an emergency. Despite its previous weakness (at the height of its power, the force had about 5,000 soldiers, and only rarely was it completely staffed), it can be credited with some relative successes, including the establishment of a joint headquarters with a permanent command, joint exercises, and three deployments on Kuwaiti territory: during the Iran-Iraq War; in 1994; and with the US military’s entry into Iraq in 2003. Like its predecessor, the new force is planned to be mainly a ground force, with no aerial or naval branches, and is also planned to be under Saudi command.
- b. *Command and control*: A surveillance and reconnaissance system has been set up to allow the Gulf states to jointly oversee their airspace while providing the ability to better coordinate defensive actions. The system is linked to aerial defense systems in the Gulf states to create a unified aerial picture. It works in both Arabic and English (the language used by air forces in the Gulf states), and was officially inaugurated in 2001 with an investment of more than \$160 million. However, it is not known whether the states have used it, or how.¹⁵

- c. *Defense agreement*: In December 2000, the heads of the Gulf states agreed to move toward greater security cooperation. A mutual defense pact was signed, and if ratified, it will obligate the members to consider an attack on a member state an attack on all member states. This agreement is something of a deviation from the approach of states that until now were quite cautious about closer security cooperation. Though no formal declaration has ever been made and no document on this issue published, the participants agreed on steps toward establishing a defense pact.¹⁶ The agreement, which has been described as essential for breathing new life into the informal agreements between the states, apparently does not specify conditions and circumstances in which the states will be obligated to provide mutual aid in the event of an attack on one of them. More than a decade after the signing of the original agreement and without a timetable for ratification, the Gulf Cooperation Council is still discussing possibilities for implementing the agreement.¹⁷
2. **Independent production capabilities**. Several states are seeking to establish independent production capabilities on their territory while cooperating with Western companies and tailoring the solutions to their needs. Thus while receiving advanced technologies, the Gulf states have benefited from the creation of new branches of industry and new workplaces. The United Arab Emirates, which is producing military vehicles on its territory and various advanced naval vessels (Project Baynunah), is noteworthy in this regard, as is Saudi Arabia, which is setting up on its territory a Typhoon plane production line that it bought from Britain.
3. **Diversifying sources of support**. In recent years, there has been an attempt to diversify the sources of outside security support linked with hosting of bases, weapons purchases, and participation in multinational task forces.
 - a. *Hosting of bases*: The inauguration of the “peace base” of the French fleet in Abu Dhabi in the UAE is undoubtedly an unusual event. This base is the first opened by France outside its territory in the past fifty years, and the first built in a country that was not a French colony in the past. Despite the UAE’s long history of cooperation with the United States and Great Britain, this is the

- first (official) foreign base located in the UAE since independence, and according to publications it includes ground, aerial, and naval elements. The opening of the French base was intended to send a deterrent message to Iran: if it attacks the UAE, this will also be an attack on France.¹⁸
- b. *Procurement sources*: This phenomenon is largely unique to the Gulf states. Diversifying sources of weapons procurement requires duplication of training, maintenance, and inventory systems, and makes it difficult to move components and parts between different weapon systems. In addition, different manufacturers use different methods of operation and training. Nevertheless, the Gulf states are investing larger sums to equip themselves with parallel systems. Thus, for example, the UAE's air force is equipped with both American-made and French-made fighter planes, and the Saudi air force operates both American and British fighter jets. Reports on Saudi attempts "to persuade" Russia not to supply Russian-made advanced air defense weapons (S-300) to Iran by purchasing a newer generation of anti-aircraft missiles (S-400) are part of this trend.¹⁹
- c. *Multinational forces*: In recent years, several task forces and multinational forces have been established in the Gulf. By participating in security initiatives such as these, the Gulf states seek to diversify the sources of their security support. The strengthening of the partnership with NATO in the framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and the active participation in Combined Task Force 152, the American-led multinational naval task force stationed in Bahrain, are prominent examples of this trend. As for non-Western states, despite growing interest in access to the Gulf's resources on the part of China and India, they cannot or are not interested at this point in defending shipping lanes or essential facilities in the Gulf. However, in the future in the wake of exponential growth and the need for access to energy resources to sustain it, increasing military strength, and the establishment of blue-water navy capabilities in these countries, they may expand their military presence in the Gulf.

The Gulf states fear that the planned withdrawal of American soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan will naturally reduce the American military

presence in the Gulf, which is behind their efforts to bring new actors into the arena in order to maximize security. It is possible that the goal of these steps is also to signal to the United States that the Gulf states have alternatives to the Americans. By hosting foreign bases, as with weapons procurement issues, the Gulf states decrease the fear of excessive dependence on one country, which could threaten them or put pressure on them merely by “turning off the tap.”

Limitations of the Buildup

Procurement of individual weapon systems cannot equal real military force and the ability to wage a modern war against Iran, mainly because of several factors:

- a. **Built-in weakness.** The Gulf states suffer from a lack of strategic depth and a small population, as compared with Iran’s 70 million people. Iran controls the entire eastern coast of the Gulf, and the total population of the Gulf states is about half that of Iran. This built-in weakness translates into vulnerability since the Gulf states have some 44 percent of the world’s oil reserves and 24 percent of the world’s natural gas reserves, and because they are a target for outside intervention and need outside support to protect them.
- b. **Differing conceptions of the threat:** Every state in the Gulf Cooperation Council has a different view of the threats it faces. Each state makes its own calculations, and each is bilaterally connected through different agreements with outside forces for protection. Different security agendas, suspicion and lack of trust, an Iranian attempt to drive a wedge between the states, and the fear of Saudi domination, as well as the comfort provided by the American “defense umbrella,” have contributed to their reluctance to participate in a joint defense initiative.
- c. **Internal constraints:** The percentage of those serving in the armed forces in the Gulf states is even lower than in other Arab states because none of the Gulf states, other than Kuwait, has compulsory service. The issue is sensitive, because it contradicts the “contract” between the citizens and the rulers of these countries, which grants state benefits in exchange for the non-participation of the citizens in the political process. Conscription is likely to cause tremendous pressure from the citizenry for greater participation in the political

process and thereby undermine the stability of the regimes. Thus, for example, Saudi Arabia's population is more than 25 million, but it has no more than 220,000 soldiers in all of its security forces. There is also an ethnic element: Shiites are not eager to join the security forces, and when they do, they suffer discrimination in advancing through the military ranks.

- d. **Dependence on foreigners:** Since all of the Gulf states suffer from small populations, they employ many foreign citizens in all realms of life, including defense. Weapons deals generally include maintenance contracts whose value is sometimes greater than the value of the systems themselves. Foreign workers employed by the weapons manufacturers provide training in ongoing maintenance on all levels, from spare parts to fourth-echelon repair, i.e., repairs and improvements in weapons systems. Furthermore, the Gulf states are attempting to compensate for their inability to draft the population (military service is seen as not prestigious and not well paying) by stationing foreign citizens, many of them from Asia, as a substitute for local military men. The result is that the Gulf states need to rely on mercenaries, which means that their armies are expensive in peacetime and not necessarily loyal in wartime.

Conclusion

Despite the scope and quality of the procurement, or perhaps because of it, the Gulf armed forces have remained small and limited in their ability to operate and maintain many advanced weapon systems. The result is that the Arab Gulf states lack the ability to act independently as a counterweight to Iran. It is difficult to see how accelerated purchase of advanced weapons systems would contribute to the security of these states if it has not done so in the past. Furthermore, Iran's continued buildup of unconventional weapons will require even greater projection of American strength in the Persian Gulf than what exists today. If Iran does not show willingness to change its position on its nuclear program, there will be no substitute for increasing American strength in or near the Gulf in a way that will allow the United States to respond to or initiate effective actions against Iran.

With Iran's approaching 'break out capability' the Arab Gulf states will have no choice but to increase their cooperation with the United

States, and possibly even de facto come under the American defense umbrella. If this is the case, the buildup process in the Gulf can be integrated in a policy of deterrence and containment of Iran, but will also help to confront Iran if it chooses to respond to an attack on its territory, or if it initiates an offensive move in response to the tightening of economic sanctions. In such an event, the weapon systems will serve to protect American forces and allies in the Gulf. In the view of the Gulf states, purchase of advanced American-made systems is one way to ensure the American commitment to continue maintaining a military presence in the Gulf in the future as well.

What does this mean for Israel? In Israel there is a tendency to take a grave view of the sales of advanced weaponry to Arab countries, and in fact, the possibility that these weapons will be turned against Israel one day – through the fall of a regime or their transfer to hostile states or terrorist organizations – cannot be entirely ruled out. At the same time, this sort of argument may have practical benefit when Israel requests newer technologies from the United States with the claim that the IDF's qualitative advantage is being eroded.²⁰ Yet in any event, the strengthening of the Gulf states' military capabilities serves Israel's interests, especially if they adopt a more aggressive stance toward Iran. In addition, the deployment of missile defense systems in the Gulf is liable to improve early warning capabilities for any Iranian attack against Israel.

The possibility that the weapons reaching the Gulf states would ever be turned against Israel is very small, and their advantages currently exceed the potential price. Emphasizing America's commitment to the security of its allies in the Gulf through the supply of advanced American weaponry and its integration in missile defense programs in the Gulf suits Israel's interests: it increases the pressure on Iran, strengthens the self-confidence of the rulers, and is liable to make it easier for them to take a tougher stance against Iran.

The dilemma in the Gulf is not a simple one. On the one hand, the Gulf states do not want to see a radical nuclear state beside them that will dictate the Gulf's political, economic, and military agenda. On the other hand, they fear a scenario in which, in the absence of an attractive diplomatic option, Iran's nuclear facilities will be attacked and in response Iran will choose to strike their territory. In order to prevent

a direct conflict with Iran, the Gulf states have declared on various occasions that they will not allow their territory to be used for an attack on Iran. However, it is possible that there will be no escaping this if the United States chooses to use military force against Iran. If the monarchs are convinced there are indications that Iran intends to “break out” to nuclear military capability and that a military action is the only way to prevent this – and if there is an explicit request from the United States – it is reasonable to assume that they will allow it to use their territory for this purpose. It is possible that ultimately they will prefer to absorb a limited blow from Iran, painful though it might be, and not to live for many years with the negative consequences of Iran’s possession of this type of weapon.

From the outset, the military procurement in the Gulf was not intended to balance Iran’s strength; the Gulf states understand that even if they invest tremendous resources in equipping themselves militarily, their national security will to a large extent be dependent on foreign powers. The goal of the military buildup is to demonstrate their activism domestically and abroad and be integrated in America’s operative plans in the Gulf, and it is one way to deflect the fire from their territory. But it can also strengthen their deterrent capability, and if it fails, it can delay and interfere with any Iranian attack on the Gulf states until the Western forces arrive. One of the main implications of the conventional military buildup is the limitation on Iran’s freedom of action in the Gulf, and even the (potential) establishment of a certain ability to attack its territory. The Gulf states already possess better weapon systems than those in the Iranian army’s possession, even if it is unlikely that they will exploit their potential advantage in order to confront Iran directly. Because of a long list of basic conditions, these trends in the Gulf states’ security concept, some of them new, cannot in practice be translated into military superiority in the Gulf and into the ability to serve as a counterweight to Iran’s strength. They too are likely to remain, at least in the foreseeable future, “on paper.”

Notes

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- 1 At a January 2010 conference on policy toward Iran at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in conjunction with the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), the possibility was raised that the Gulf states' advantage in advanced weapon systems would provide them with a better capability of confronting Iran. See <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/pubPDFs/StrategicReport03.pdf>.
- 2 Larijani: "Don't Allow Iran Attack from Gulf," *Kuwait Times*, January 28, 2010.
- 3 As a rule, historical experience shows that there is a large gap between Iran's belligerent declarations and its policy, which is more pragmatic. However, Iran has not hesitated to strike the Persian Gulf states in the past, for example, during the Iran-Iraq War, because of the assistance they provided to Iraq.
- 4 Defense Intelligence Agency, *Unclassified Report to Congress on the Military Power of Iran*, April 2010, http://media.washingtontimes.com/media/docs/2010/Apr/20/Iran_Military_Report.pdf.
- 5 International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Iran's Ballistic Missile Capabilities: A Net Assessment*, May 2010.
- 6 *Haaretz*, June 11, 2007.
- 7 Iran sees itself as a regional power, and its forces act in accordance with that view. It is also striving to improve its ability to project its power beyond the Persian Gulf, and for this purpose the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) has increased its activity in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea in the past two years. In February 2010, Iran inaugurated the first Iranian-made battleship, and it is also the only country in the Gulf in possession of submarines (Kilo class) and midget submarines (Yono class and Nahang class).
- 8 Because of Iraq's significant relative weakness at this time, data on its military is not included in the calculation of the current military balance.
- 9 Thus, for example, Qatar also participated in the naval maneuvers held by the Revolutionary Guards in the Gulf in April 2010. The head of Qatar's military delegation, Abd al-Rahim Ibrahim al-Janahi, who attended the maneuvers as an observer, said that Qatar would like to benefit from Iranian military expertise and to undertake joint maneuvers with Iran. MEMRI, April 26, 2010.
- 10 Congressional Research Service, *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations*, September 2009.
- 11 "U.S. Speeding up Missile Defenses in Persian Gulf," *New York Times*, January 31, 2010. See also "U.S. Urges GCC to Buy Weapons to Face Iran," *Middle East Newslite*, September 9, 2009. In this context, there has been a series of visits by senior American officials to the Gulf states. Over the course of one

- month, from mid-February to mid-March 2010, Secretary of State Clinton, Defense Secretary Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mullen, and Commander of the US Central Command Petraeus all visited the Gulf states.
- 12 International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2010*. See also David Kenner, "Get Yer Anti-Ballistic Missile Here," *Foreign Policy*, March 15, 2010.
 - 13 "Gulf States Set to Spend More on Armaments," *Financial Times*, May 3, 2010.
 - 14 Michael Knights, "Changing Conventional Military Balance in the Gulf," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Watch* 1577, September 14, 2009.
 - 15 *Jane's C4I Systems*, July 20, 2009.
 - 16 *Congressional Research Service Report to Congress*, The Library of Congress, February 2001.
 - 17 *Kuwait News Agency*, November 1, 2009.
 - 18 The International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Gulf States Step Up Defences," *Strategic Comments* 15, no. 9 (November 2009).
 - 19 *Financial Times*, September 29, 2009, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/38e8ec8e-ad21-11de-9caf-00144feabdc0.html?nclick_check=1.
 - 20 Yiftah Shapir, "The United States and the Buildup of Military Force in the Persian Gulf," *INSS Insight* No. 161, February 14, 2010.



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