Strategic ASSESSMENT

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ASSESSMENT

Volume 14 | No. 3 | **October 2011**

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

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

Abstracts

The September Process: The Bid for UN Recognition of a Palestinian State / Shlomo Brom and Oded Eran

On September 23, 2011, the Palestinian leadership based in Ramallah appealed to the United Nations to recognize a Palestinian state. The plausible scenario is that since the application will likely not be approved by the Security Council, the General Assembly will grant the Palestinians upgraded status as a non-member state, i.e., as an observer. The article examines the implications for Israel of a General Assembly upgrade of the status of the Palestinian Authority to a non-member state, and underscores that Israel has no choice but to respond in moderation and deal judiciously with the practical ramifications of the Palestinian move – all the while emphasizing that the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations is ultimately decided in negotiations rather than in a unilateral policy that bypasses negotiations.

The Value of Nuclear Ambiguity in the Face of a Nuclear Iran / Adam Raz

If and when Iran acquires a nuclear capability, should Israel revise and perhaps even terminate its policy of nuclear ambiguity and instead adopt a policy of explicit nuclear deterrence? The author argues that in a scenario in which Iran has nuclear capabilities, Israel must maintain its policy of ambiguity. The essay first deals with the issue of explicit nuclear deterrence, and then contends that the advantages of ambiguity will remain valid "the day after" Iran's nuclearization. Relying on the American nuclear umbrella is preferable to abrogating the policy of ambiguity, despite the concern stemming from the extent of America's commitment to Israel. The proof of ambiguity's success over the past fifty years lies in the history of the region, and even in the face of a nuclear Iran it does not seem that revoking the policy would benefit Israel.

Coping with Iran's Nuclear Capabilities / Ephraim Asculai

While international attention seems to be pointed elsewhere, Iran has proceeded relentlessly with its nuclear project. Since the world is divided on the ways of preventing Iran from becoming a full-fledged nuclear state, and since the current Unites States administration is reluctant to take any overt action other than sanctions, prevention of this situation hinges on the political decisions of the Iranian regime. Most likely in the short range, the Iranian regime will assume a posture of ambiguity, while slowly increasing the visibility of its potential for acquiring a military nuclear capability. This essay describes Iran's nuclear capabilities, and reviews the various Iranian options and their ramifications, the active and passive ways of dealing with these capabilities, and the implications of a nuclear Iran for Israel.

The Breakup of Israel's Strategic Puzzle / Ron Tira

The strategic environment in which Israel operates has recently been jolted, to the point that significant parts of the puzzle on which Israeli policy is based are in danger of collapse. One of the main conclusions to emerge from Israel's net assessment is that given the disappearance or the waning of a number of weighty actors in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia is possibly the last player that is both operating persistently to contain Iran and is also capable of serving as a counterweight to Turkey. The wave of Arab weakness has become Israel's problem, along with the reduced American effectiveness in the Middle East. Against this background, Saudi Arabia has – surprisingly – become the state closest to Israel in its reading of the regional map and in its strategic vector.

Saudi Activism in a Changing Middle East / Yoel Guzansky

Saudi Arabia has traditionally tended to avoid direct confrontation with strong enemies, preferring deep pockets and attempts at mediation in the Arab world in order to neutralize dangers. While Saudi Arabia has generally relied on American patronage for deterrence and defense, the turbulence in the Arab world has led Riyadh to a stronger sense that it is left on its own to cope with the threats it faces, as well as to the recognition that the challenges at home and abroad compel it to adopt different solutions than in the past. This has led it largely to abandon its former relative passivity, fling down the gauntlet to Iran, and even adopt a more

independent policy toward the United States. This article examines the motivation behind what appears to be an adjustment in Saudi policy, and the implications of this change.

Relying on a Splintered Reed? Intelligence about Allies and Partners / Udi Golan

This essay addresses the growing importance of intelligence about allies, and claims that intelligence organizations confront unique challenges and dilemmas (in terms of gathering, research, relations between the intelligence community and the political leadership, and more) when the object is an ally or partner (intra-alliance intelligence) rather than an enemy. Particularly in light of the upheaval in the Middle East, what has already occurred and what has yet to come, Israel's intelligence must be prepared not only to issue warnings and follow the state's enemies, but also to assess the changes likely to occur within allied nations, warn of the weakening of existing treaties, and note the possibility of creating new alliances and partnerships, while still examining the risks and limitations of such pacts.

American Intervention in Israeli Politics: Past Experience, Future Prospects / David A. Weinberg

Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to Washington in May 2011 provided renewed basis for speculation that President Barack Obama secretly hopes to unseat Netanyahu's right wing government. This essay examines the historical record in an effort to assess how viable US efforts to shape domestic politics inside Israel today might be. It seeks to build a general theory of partisan intervention by the United States into Israeli politics, focusing on the role and beliefs of the president to assess whether such intervention is likely to occur. The article also explains why certain features of partisan intervention make it distinct from other areas of the US-Israel relationship in which American domestic forces − including Congress, lobbyists, and organizational interests of the bureaucracy − tend to wield more influence.

The September Process:
The Bid for UN Recognition of a
Palestinian State

Shlomo Brom and Oded Eran

On September 23, 2011, the Palestinian leadership based in Ramallah appealed to the United Nations to recognize a Palestinian state. The application was made to the Security Council, since in order for Palestine to be accepted as a UN member state, a Security Council recommendation must first be received by the General Assembly, followed by a vote in the latter forum. Even if the recommendation gains the required nine-vote majority, it appears that US opposition will lead to an American veto in the Security Council. In either case – should the recommendation fail to gain a majority in the Security Council or if it meets with an American veto – the Palestinians intend to apply directly to the General Assembly. At that point, the likely scenario is that the General Assembly will grant the Palestinians upgraded status as a non-member state, i.e., as an observer.

In the meantime, there are continuing efforts on the part of the Quartet, comprising the US, the European Union, Russia, and the UN, to renew negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. The understanding is that renewed negotiations would enable either the halt of the UN process or its continuation, based on a mutual Palestinian-Israeli understanding as to its format. At the time of this writing, the Palestinians have expressed reservations over the formulation of the Quartet's September 23 proposal: renewed negotiations between the parties within four weeks

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and according to a timetable committing them to arrive at an agreement by the end of 2012. The accord would be based on President Obama's speech of May 19, 2011 and the relevant UN resolutions. Israel accepted the Quartet proposal; the Palestinians have conditioned their acceptance on an Israeli freeze on construction in the settlements and an explicit reference in the proposal that the border between the two states will be based on the 1967 lines. Therefore, chances are that the Palestinians will continue with their move at the UN.

The aim of this article is to examine the implications for Israel of a General Assembly upgrade of the status of the Palestinian Authority to a non-member state. Although the Palestinian leadership ultimately decided to apply first to the Security Council, the primary goal of this first stage is to isolate Israel and the US and not necessarily attain a Security Council resolution. In any event the next stage will be application to the General Assembly.

Palestinian Considerations

An analysis of what underlies the Palestinian decision can help clarify the potential significance of the UN move. Presumably those within the Palestinian leadership who advanced the move realize their decision lacks much practical significance. It will not change the political situation or the situation on the ground. Therefore one of the important questions is what the Palestinians expect from the move and its implications for the continued struggle with Israel.

To a large extent the decision to turn to the international arena reflects the Palestinians' sense that they have encountered a dead end. Direct political negotiations with Israel have reached an impasse, which in the Palestinians' view is not their fault. This is understandably a limited view, since the Fatah leadership too had little interest in continued direct negotiations with Israel given its lack of faith in the possibility of conducting effective negotiations over a permanent settlement with the current Netanyahu-led Israeli government. Added to this is Israel's rejection of a total construction freeze on settlements as well as the Palestinian leadership's disappointment with the performance of the

> If an accord between Israel and the Palestinians is achieved, it will be despite the resolutions of the UN General Assembly and not because of them.

American mediator. Internal considerations have come into play as well. Shifting the political struggle to the UN arena seemed to be a solution, even if temporary, that was comfortable and lacked a political price. Two years ago the Palestinian Authority announced a plan devised by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to build the infrastructure for a Palestinian state within two years. The UN discussion and resolution serves as a culmination of sorts of a project that in the view of the international community has progressed admirably, since the process has indeed produced a significant, positive change in the Palestinian Authority's performance in internal security and other areas.

Some say that a reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas (at this stage on paper only) and the adoption of a UN resolution are part of Abu Mazen's political finale. This view maintains that he will announce his retirement from political life with these two achievements recorded in the history books and thereby bequeath a favorable view of his political legacy.

The appeal to the international arena, therefore, has two main objectives, with the first oriented to the outside world. With all other paths blocked, the Palestinian leadership has turned to the only arena in which it can score any significant achievements. The goal is to enhance the status of the Palestinians vis-à-vis Israel and the US through the demonstration of international support for a Palestinian state, while spearheading a process that leads to renewed negotiations – from an improved position – over a permanent arrangement. At the same time, this step serves the Palestinian leadership in the internal arena. It cannot confess to the bankruptcy of its central agenda of the past two decades, namely, the realization of Palestinian national objectives through negotiations. Such an admission would play into the hands of Hamas, which represents the competing agenda of armed resistance. The application to the UN demonstrates to the Palestinian public that the current leadership has more political cards up its sleeve and has not been left without an agenda.

The Palestinian leadership did not reach a consensus as to the wisdom of applying for UN recognition, and there are those who opposed this measure, most prominently Abu Alaa. Opponents of the move fear that following the UN vote the move's limited benefit will be exposed, and it will simultaneously demand a high price from the Palestinians. First, it is

liable to generate exaggerated expectations for change. Second, it could create a situation that is more convenient for Israel, which can argue that the majority of Palestinians are not under occupation and that the conflict with Israel is just a territorial one over borders – with many such conflicts in the world. Third, the Palestinian side is liable to alienate the US and other important Western states opposed to the move.

There is also a debate among the Palestinians as to the next steps for translating the UN vote into a strategic process that paves the way to renewed negotiations from an improved position. Beyond using the vote to broaden international recognition of a Palestinian state, other ways of increasing the pressure on Israel are under consideration. These include exploiting recognition of their status as a state in efforts to join international organizations and conventions and integrating their efforts with peaceful national protests. In this regard too there is a debate within the Palestinian camp. Some see popular protests as a most effective means of pressure, based on the experience of the so-called Arab spring, while others fear a loss of control over the protests and their easy descent into violence.

Israeli and American Responses

Israel and the US have focused on intensive diplomatic activity aimed mainly at preventing a majority for a Security Council recommendation to accept Palestine as a UN member state. Additionally, there have been political elements from both countries threatening to punish the Palestinians for their moves at the UN. In Israel, some ministers and certain right wing elements have threatened that Israel would stop transferring customs revenues that Israel collects for the Palestinians; would consider the Oslo Accords null and void; or would annex settlement blocs to Israel. The US finds itself in conflict with the Palestinian leadership, which has placed the US in a highly uncomfortable political situation, particularly if it is forced to use its veto power in the Security Council. In the US too there are threats from Congress to cut off financial aid to the Palestinians totaling half a billion dollars per year, and a bill to this effect has already been drafted. So far all these efforts succeeded in slowing down the process of recognition in the UN.

Nevertheless, to a large extent these potential measures appear to be hollow threats. The Palestinian Authority is already in difficult financial

straits, because pledges of financial assistance from various sources have either not materialized or materialized only partially. Stopping the transfer of customs revenues and of American assistance would cause a severe crisis, which could lead to the collapse of the Palestinian Authority. It is not in the interest of either of the sides to see this happen, and therefore this scenario will likely be prevented. In addition, annulling the Oslo Accords would cause Israel no less damage than it would the Palestinians since those accords regulate the daily relationship between the parties. Furthermore the annexation of settlement blocs would be a demonstrative step only. Annexation might be received well in the Israeli public but it would be generally condemned in the international arena, which would not recognize the annexation.

Legal and Political Implications

Once the dust settles following the UN deliberations and vote over Palestinian statehood, what remains is an unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict: that will perhaps be the primary significant outcome of the political struggle prior to and during deliberations. Knowledge and experience from decades of political and armed struggle between the parties indicate that relevant UN resolutions bear only limited importance. Progress towards a solution to the conflict, or lack thereof, is not necessarily directly connected to resolutions passed by various international institutions. The political movements that were formed within the three territorial sectors of Palestinian society (the West Bank, Gaza, and the diaspora) did not originate from political resolutions passed at those institutions. Furthermore, the political process that took shape in the early 1990s was at best only loosely connected with those resolutions.

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When direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians are renewed, the significance of any UN resolution will be marginal. The three core issues – borders, Jerusalem, and refugees – will continue to dominate the debate, and the formulation of any UN resolution, certainly from the standpoint of Israel, will change nothing. The fact that Palestinian negotiators will be armed with a UN resolution (purely within the bounds of a recommendation) ostensibly recognizing

the June 4, 1967 border and East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital will not help them, first, because their claim to these points was already raised at the start of negotiations nearly twenty years ago; and second, because Israel refuses to accept any attempt to base an agreement on UN resolutions. If an accord between Israel and the Palestinians is achieved, it will be despite the resolutions of the UN General Assembly and not because of them.

What will the "day after" look like politically? On the surface a resolution would be of little practical significance. At the same time, a changed official status of the Palestinian entity would allow it to join international organizations and conventions, granting it explicit legal standing in which its rights and obligations in multiple areas are clarified. Furthermore, the validity of the interim agreement between the PLO and Israel may be undermined because the Palestinian state would be formally able to expand its enforcement powers over areas under its control, beyond those currently held by the Palestinian Authority.

Full membership in agencies and organizations affiliated with the UN would enable the Palestinians to realize, even indirectly, certain elements of sovereignty. For example, membership in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) would be an attempt to express Palestinian sovereignty over its airspace. Similar would be the attempt to achieve membership in the International Marine Organization (IMO), the organization dealing with numerous aspects of marine traffic. One of the most difficult disputes in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians revolves around the division of electromagnetic frequencies. The Palestinians will likely attempt to enter the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) as full members in order to strengthen their claims in this regard. Today any Arab country can already present Palestinian claims in any international forum, but a full time Palestinian representative in those organizations would likely feel obligated to continually raise the Palestinian agenda at different international institutions. This would be a headache for Israeli representatives at those organizations who would be forced to cope with a relentless Palestinian political campaign. Such a Palestinian

> Israel will have to focus on the day after and consider whether in order to prevent potential crises, it makes sense to view the new situation as an opportunity for renewed negotiations.

move would create friction between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and between Israel and other members of those organizations.

An example of the repercussions of joining an international convention and institution is the Palestinians' possible joining of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Following such a move, actions taken in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip would fall into the legal jurisdiction of the ICJ, and it would be possible to file complaints against Israeli military and political figures over actions in those territories and demand personal accountability. An arrest warrant from the court would oblige member countries of the court's charter to arrest and hand over Israelis in question upon entering those countries. Similarly, an example of the implications of expanded Palestinian authority would be the arrest and trial of Israelis who enter Palestinian-controlled territory. Or, attempts might be made to broaden Palestinian authority in Areas B and C, and even in East Jerusalem.

The voting pattern of various countries and international organizations such as the EU would influence their subsequent conduct vis-à-vis Israel. For close to 120 countries, the manner of their voting is quite predictable and in effect already known. Questions remain, however, pertaining to the bloc of countries that includes most European states and other countries that vote in international organizations and on various issues similar to the European bloc, including Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Although in the General Assembly all votes carry identical weight, how the European bloc votes is nonetheless of special importance. The EU and Israel have for decades conducted a painful dialogue, replete with historical residue and mutual suspicion, but it comes amid the understanding that mutual interests dictate their political and economic cooperation. The desire of the EU to play a role in Middle East processes obliges it to maintain the appearance of neutrality. Therefore, although the European vote cannot decide the final outcome of the UN deliberation, the European voting pattern is highly important. Also, the fact that the Palestinians were unsuccessful in obtaining sweeping support for their demand from the leading world economic powers, i.e., the G-8, is of more than symbolic importance.

Further political complications could develop as a result of attempts by the Palestinian government, whether planned or spontaneous, to establish facts on the ground in East Jerusalem and the territories

subsequent to the UN decision. Such attempts would almost certainly meet with an Israeli response, which in turn would provoke Palestinian reactions and appeals to various UN institutions and result in exhausting, pointless deliberations.

Other political questions springing from the UN decision could relate to the validity of agreements between Israel and the Palestinians achieved since 1993 and the decision's impact on continued negotiations. It is in Israel's interest to underscore that a General Assembly decision has no binding authority and lacks the power to change the existing situation. The conclusion, therefore, is that Israel is not interested in the unilateral cancellation of existing agreements. One must assume that Israel would gain the support of countries that contribute to the Palestinian economy and wish to see the continued transfer of tax revenues collected by Israel for the Palestinians. Israel and the Palestinian Authority would do well to avoid harming existing agreements that regulate the system of relations between them, despite the fact that the temptation to do so exists.

Sooner or later negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians will be renewed and both sides will come to the table with their own interpretation of the UN decision. The Palestinians will likely attempt to convert it into a basis for negotiations, while Israel's stance can also be anticipated. Perhaps it is at this point that one of the damaging consequences of the UN deliberation and decision will be felt. It will require a significant diplomatic effort to circumvent the argumentation and arrive at "genuine" negotiations – where both sides seek a practical solution and are not satisfied merely with the claim to historical rights (authentic and fictitious) and assorted UN resolutions.

Security Implications

While a Palestinian effort to exercise sovereignty in places under Israeli control could bring about a direct clash between Israel and the Palestinian security forces, there are still no signs of such an intention. Apparently the Palestinian leadership has no wish to arrive at direct conflict of this sort with Israel. Their intention is limited to symbolic steps, such as the PA-launched demonstrations that began on September 20 under the supervision of Palestinian security forces and in controlled locations, i.e., city centers, so as to avoid their descent into violent clashes.

However, the assumption that all will remain under control is problematic. One cannot ignore the complex interplay of the influence of the Arab spring, frustrations arising from the frozen political process, and the current September process. The historic changes underway in Arab countries are exerting their influence on most Arab populations, and in this regard, on the Palestinian public as well. In all Arab societies, young people, who comprise a large percentage of the population, have understood their power to change reality. They are able to organize through online social networking and attain political achievements through non-violent protests. This potential power has not bypassed Palestinian society, and this new type of discourse and organization is gaining momentum among Palestinian young people. Moreover, they can already note an initial achievement, namely, the reconciliation accord between Fatah and Hamas (even if it has yet to be realized and is running into difficulties). It appears that frustrations over the deadlock in the political process are prodding the examination of other means of fulfilling the vision of a Palestinian state. Moreover, the failure of the violent intifada and the high price it exacted of the Palestinian population has turned non-violent protest into an attractive option. Recognition of a Palestinian state at the UN would create pressure to continue the momentum and take additional steps to advance the achievement of the goal. It would be very difficult for the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah to defy public pressure in such a situation.

In this type of a scenario, it is doubtful whether the Palestinian Authority would succeed in maintaining control over the mass protest; furthermore, the potential for violent friction would rise. Palestinian security forces would, for example, try to prevent direct contact between the demonstrators and Israeli forces and individuals through checkpoints and barriers to settlements. However, if a demonstration is sufficiently large and organized from the ground up rather than by the PA, the Palestinian security forces would find it hard to do so. Israeli security forces too would make a special effort to prevent the opening of fire through the use of non-lethal means. Yet when demonstrations are sufficiently large and their participants determined, situations could arise in which Israeli forces or civilians feel their lives are in danger and open fire. Loss of life among the Palestinians would generate the desire

for revenge, and from there the path is short to a serious cycle of violence that would be difficult to arrest.

Today, there are good relations and ongoing coordination between the security apparatuses of both sides. In the above-described scenarios, mutual relations and coordination become even more important and the political and security leadership on both sides would presumably seek to preserve these relations. But in a situation where the political process is completely frozen and the Palestinian leadership chooses the approach of confrontation with Israel and application to the international arena, the dynamic could change. There is a danger that those serving in the Palestinian security forces would not be sufficiently motivated to engage in what is perceived by the Palestinian street as cooperation with Israel and the serving of Israeli interests.

The Palestinian street has little appetite for being dragged into a situation of chaos and violence or a third intifada. Neither is there any real problem regarding the buildup of expectations for a drastic change of reality on the ground following the UN vote; nor is a severe reaction caused by disappointment from unfulfilled hopes anticipated. Today the Palestinian public is extremely pessimistic. The danger, then, is not the organized outbreak of a violent third intifada, but a situation in which both sides have begun a process over which they might easily lose control.

Economic Implications

The vulnerability of the Israeli economy to unilateral Palestinian moves is limited, and far less vulnerable than the Palestinian economy is to possible Israeli responses. Therefore it is reasonable to suppose that the Palestinian Authority/state will try to preserve the economic addendum to the interim agreement with Israel (the Paris Protocol). In the absence of an independent customs arrangement, the Palestinian government would find it hard to finance its actions without a mechanism for tax refunds, which are part of the arrangement.

A Palestinian attempt to limit imports from Israel into Palestinian controlled territory would be possible, even without breach of the Paris Protocol, through non-tariff barriers (NTB) such as quality standardization and domestic product campaigns. Since exports into the territories contribute less than one percent to the GDP of the Israeli business sector, economic damage would be scant; however firms for whom the territories

constitute a large market segment would be hurt. Conversely, Palestinian exports to Israel make up only about one percent of Israeli imports of goods. For particular goods, such as quarried materials, substitutes can be found in other construction materials and in imports from Jordan; on the other hand, the Palestinians have no satisfactory alternative markets to compensate for exports to Israel.

Other issues are of similar limited impact. Restricting the supply of Palestinian workers would be meaningless due to their present small numbers; and it is possible to replace them almost immediately by raising the ceiling on foreign workers. The issuing of Palestinian currency, itself a sign of sovereignty, would not affect the Israeli market. Nullifying the status of the Israeli shekel as legal tender in the Palestinian state would have a similar effect to that of imposing a 1.5 percent customs duty on Israel imports. A further effect on commerce could be uncertainty as to the exchange rate of the reserve currency/currencies against which the Palestinian currency would be issued.

Should violence on a large scale between the Palestinians and Israel develop, it would naturally have a far reaching economic impact on both sides. The second intifada caused a heavy blow to the Palestinian economy and the cessation of growth in the Israeli economy.

Conclusion

From the standpoint of Israel, which has accepted the two-state solution, the best way to deal with the Palestinian move might be to join in recognizing the Palestinian state, if the Palestinians and their supporters would not insist on the General Assembly resolution indicating "a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital." The current Israeli government could not support a resolution formulated in this way.

Not much should be expected from the Israeli Foreign Ministry's massive effort to persuade countries to abstain or vote against the resolution. In any case, chances are good that the Palestinian motion will reach the General Assembly. Even if a number of important European countries vote against the resolution together with the US and Israel, it would not prevent recognition of a Palestinian state and the practical consequences thereof. In the main, this is a symbolic achievement. The current process would stop only if negotiations between the two sides

are renewed. The Quartet's proposal could serve as a good basis for renewed negotiations as far as Israel is concerned, but it is doubtful that the Palestinians will accept it prior to the UN move or that the proposal would prevent continuation of the process.

Israeli ideas how to deter or punish the Palestinians for their statehood bid range from delaying the transfer of tax revenues to canceling the Oslo Accords and annexing Palestinian territory to Israel. It is better that the architects of such ideas recall Bismarck's saying "Anger is no substitute for policy." The damage caused to Israel by such acts would outweigh the benefits and only intensify the reaction by the international community against Israel. Israel has no choice but to respond in moderation and deal judiciously with the practical ramifications of the Palestinian move. This could include the need to confront judicially attempts to legally pursue Israeli military and political figures, or to deal with security and political challenges – all the while emphasizing the message that the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations is ultimately decided in negotiations rather than in a unilateral policy that bypasses negotiations.

Following certain declarations by political leaders, such as a speech by the Minister of Defense about the "political tsunami" that will follow the Palestinian bid to the UN, there was a feeling in the Israeli public that something dramatic was poised to occur immediately after the Palestinian appeal to the UN. When nothing happened, there was a general sigh of relief and a sense that nothing will happen. That reflects a misunderstanding. Processes in the UN take time, and this process is only at its beginning. Even the serious debate in the Security Council has not started yet. The implication is that there is still time to assess the situation and prepare for a possible crisis, as the reality to date is not the end of the story.

Israel will have to focus on the day after and consider whether in order to prevent potential crises, it makes sense to view the new situation as an opportunity for renewed negotiations. The Palestinians will be satisfied to receive international recognition for their state, but nothing will have changed on the ground. Therefore, as Abbas reiterates, now it makes sense to return to the negotiating table. In such a situation, it becomes increasingly possible that a formulation similar to the current Quartet's proposal could serve as a good basis for the sides to talk.

The Value of Nuclear Ambiguity in the Face of a Nuclear Iran

Adam Raz

Iran's nuclear progress raises anew an issue that has received little public attention in this context, namely, Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity. A question that decision makers will have to confront if and when Iran acquires a nuclear capability is: should Israel revise and perhaps even terminate its policy of nuclear ambiguity and instead adopt a policy of explicit nuclear deterrence?

The current debate focuses on "the day after" Iran's nuclearization. The following essay argues that in a scenario in which Iran has nuclear capabilities, Israel must maintain its policy of ambiguity. The essay first deals with the issue of explicit nuclear deterrence, and then discusses whether the advantages of ambiguity will remain valid "the day after." It discusses the possibility of regional stability between Israel and Iran solely in terms of the policy of nuclear ambiguity, and thus the possibility of nuclear stability by means of arms control, no first use, or other agreements is not discussed here explicitly, though it may be mentioned in various contexts.

The Debate over Nuclear Ambiguity

Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity dates back to the 1960s. While the nature of this policy, as well as how it came into being, is in dispute,[1] it was encapsulated by the pronouncement that Israel would "not be the first to introduce [nuclear weapons] into the region."[2] Later, Yigal Allon, one of the leading figures opposed to a policy of basing deterrence on nuclear potential declared that "Israel would also not be the second" to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East.[3] Allon's declaration may be

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parsed in two ways. One reading is Israel must be very close to acquiring open nuclear capabilities and therefore, should an Arab nation arm itself with such weapons, Israel will not be left behind. (Over the years, there were those who interpreted Allon's declaration to mean that Israel was keeping a "bomb in the basement," i.e., Israel had the technological knowledge to make a nuclear weapon but lacked the option of using it in the immediate term.) An alternative reading is that Israel would not allow any nation in the Middle East to arm itself with nuclear weapons. In other words, this was the source of the so-called Begin doctrine.[4]

These interpretations are not mutually exclusive, as "Allon viewed the nuclearization of the conflict as a disaster of the highest order and spoke of the idea that if a danger of a third national destruction existed [in addition to the destruction of the First Temple and exile to Babylonia in 586 BCE and the destruction of the Second Temple and exile in 70 CE], it existed only from this direction, from the introduction of nuclear weapons."[5]

Despite the intentional fog surrounding the political discussion of the issue, over the years opposing viewpoints have emerged in Israeli political circles about the advantages and drawbacks of the policy of nuclear ambiguity. For the most part, the debate has been conducted as an academic discussion in the media. Although ambiguity has been problematic for some Israeli political figures, the policy has nonetheless held and continues steadfast with no alterations. In fact, despite the public and political pressure (especially but not only from Arab political parties) to discuss the issue, over the past fifty years there has been a consensus of keeping the policy of ambiguity in place.[6]

The policy of ambiguity is a diplomatic fiction: a fiction because the decision makers of the world believe that Israel has nuclear capabilities; and diplomatic because it carries substantial weight on the international diplomatic field (in terms of international agreements, committees, peace talks, and so one). Nonetheless, the ambiguity is a significant element in Israel's deterrence, and Ze'ev Schiff rightly noted that the policy of ambiguity should be eligible for the Israel Security Prize.[7]

Nuclear Hawks

Analysts and researchers who oppose the policy of ambiguity have for many years recommended revoking it and instead adopting a policy

of explicit nuclear deterrence. Some propose Israel do this in order to strengthen its national security.[8] Others combine moral revulsion from nuclear weapons with democratic formalism (e.g., the project is not under open supervision; the manner in which decisions are made is not transparent). There is a certain paradox here, as most of those in the latter category, who are interested in Israel divesting itself of nuclear arms, are willing to have the region enter the nuclear era as a preliminary step. In other words, they claim that the Middle East must go through a period of explicit nuclear deterrence before it enters the era of disarmament.[9]

Nuclear hawks raise a number of considerations in favor of explicit nuclear deterrence:

a. Despite the policy of nuclear ambiguity, Israel is presumed to be a nuclear power. Since for all intents and purposes the region already sees Israel as a nuclear state, a strategy of explicit deterrence would not lead to any change in Israel's image in the Middle East.

b. Explicit nuclear deterrence would lead to a strengthening of Israeli internal morale and decrease anxiety about conventional attacks by Arab nations.

c. The policy of ambiguity has not prevented the introduction of nuclear weapons into the Middle East, as evidenced by the Iraqi, Libyan, Syrian, and Iranian nuclear projects.

d. Explicit deterrence would help reduce the defense budget currently funneled to strengthening and maintaining conventional forces.

e. Consequently, Israel's dependence on American weapons and funding would be reduced.

f. Explicit nuclear deterrence would make the processes connected to the nuclear issue (bureaucratic, economic, military, and others) more transparent and therefore more democratic.

Those who are adamantly in favor of explicit nuclear deterrence tend to accept the possibility of nuclear stability with regard to Iran, and even more, seem ready to come to terms with the Iranian nuclear project. Some prefer outright the creation of a nuclear balance over what they see as the uncertainty of the current situation. In addition to academicians who support this approach, Uzi Arad − while in a political capacity − said (in response to a question on a future theoretical situation) that "the situation of mutual armament [between Israel and Iran] is safer than a situation of mutual peace." According to Arad, "the defensive power we

have must become more sophisticated, be very powerful, and result in no one daring to realize any capability of harming us. Should they dare, we will exact from them full payment so that they too will not survive." Arad noted explicitly that a state of regional cold war is preferable to mutual peace between Israel and Iran, a state of affairs that can easily collapse.[10] Arad's preference for mutual armament (over unsure security of the region) ultimately means (after or maybe before the nuclearization of Iran) the elimination of Israel's nuclear ambiguity.

Academics and publicists lead the supporters of explicit nuclear deterrence, and most decision makers today avoid public discussion of the subject. Interestingly, however, in late 2001 there were media reports of a disagreement between Binyamin Netanyahu and then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Netanyahu reportedly claimed that "the veil of secrecy surrounding Israel's nuclear capabilities must be canceled, if it turns out that Iran is approaching nuclear capability."[11]

The question whether the international system (i.e., the United States) can contain and deter a nuclear Iran has been discussed extensively by analysts. Current research tends to support the possibility of stability between the US and a nuclear Iran.[12] The issue of regional deterrence balances has been debated less, usually bypassing the issue of Israel's policy of ambiguity. As an extension of their longstanding philosophy, nuclear hawks support a termination of the policy of ambiguity should Iran go nuclear.

In Israel, especially in the popular media, Reuven Pedatzur and Louis René Beres, the head of Project Daniel,[13] have long since claimed that the answer to Iran's nuclearization must be "to bring the bomb out of the basement"[14] (Beres), because "it is possible to live with [a nuclear] Iran"[15] (Pedatzur). Avner Cohen and Marvin Miller have said that the time has come "to take the Israeli nuclear bomb out of the basement," though their arguments focus less on the realm of strategy and more on concern for the state of Israel's democracy.[16]

Bruce Riedel, a former advisor to President Obama, has written and spoken about Israel's right to strengthen its nuclear deterrence by combining Israeli nuclear capabilities with America's. In practice, Riedel has suggested a joint American-Israeli nuclear umbrella. Riedel notes: "If we want truly to be serious about making a deal with Iran over the nuclear issue, Israel must come out of the closet. A policy that is based

on deceptions and double standards must, sooner or later, fail."[17] If five years ago it was possible to read about "a handful of experts who don't dare identify themselves" speaking of a nuclear Iran leading to regional stability, today this is a far more prevalent point of view.[18]

Nuclear Doves

Israel's nuclear policy rests on two foundations: intentional ambiguity, and Allon's declaration that "Israel would also not be the second" to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East. In other words, Israel is the gatekeeper to the introduction of nuclear weapons into the Middle East. It is neither a member of the nuclear club, nor will it allow any other nation to become a member. The 1981 attack on the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq and the 2007 bombing of the Syrian reactor (according to foreign sources) are direct derivatives of Israel's nuclear policy.[19] And even though as gatekeeper Israel has on a number of occasions failed to curb various nuclear initiatives in the region, in the end Israel has successfully prevented its regional neighbors (except for Libya, which subsequently rolled back its program) from possessing nuclear weapons. Almost half a century of the policy of ambiguity has proven its internal logic: the Middle East has not become nuclear, notwithstanding several attempts and significant international pressures to do so.

Given that to date there is no declared nuclear nation in the Middle East, nuclear doves have raised a number of claims in favor of maintaining the policy of ambiguity:

a. The policy of ambiguity gives Israel a unique status in the international arena, and as long as there is no clear evidence of nuclear capabilities (e.g., nuclear testing), Israel is not a nuclear state (a non-status that itself has many implications). Changing the policy would harm US and international efforts to limit the proliferation of nuclear arms and thereby damage the greater fabric of relations between Israel and the US.

b. As long as Israel maintains its policy of ambiguity, it can position itself as opposed to a Middle East arms race. The moment Israel concedes its nuclear ambiguity, it opens the door to a regional nuclear arms race and adds its seal of approval to such a race.

c. In a situation in which various Middle East nations are considering (or actively pursuing) arming themselves with nuclear weapons, the

policy of ambiguity strengthens Israel's ability to take both military and diplomatic action against them. A policy of explicit nuclear deterrence would weaken international legitimacy for Israeli military action against states that acquire nuclear capabilities.

d. The policy of nuclear ambiguity managed to weaken motivation for the nuclearization of the Middle East and allowed decision makers in the region to overcome internal public and political pressures and avoid traveling the military nuclear route. Thus, Israel's nuclear policy has bolstered those in the internal Arab debate opposing nuclear armament. Conversely, explicit nuclear deterrence would strengthen those supporting independent development of nuclear weapons.

e. Nuclear deterrence has in any case not prevented conventional wars in the past, nor has it stopped terrorism. Therefore, explicit deterrence is not an alternative to Israel's maintaining its conventional superiority. In the case of a limited attack, Israel will need its conventional capabilities. In addition, if there is another nation in the Middle East with nuclear capabilities, the policy of explicit nuclear deterrence is liable to weaken Israel's conventional capability as a result of concern about nuclear escalation. Not only is there no certainty that explicit deterrence in the reality of the Middle East would prevent the occurrence of a conventional war; in fact, nuclear deterrence in the Middle East is liable to lead to the opposite result of what proponents of nuclear openness believe: it is liable to perpetuate conflicts by neutralizing the possibility for arriving at a conventional decision.

f. Even in the case of explicit deterrence, Israel would need foreign aid and American support because it would still have to maintain conventional superiority. In fact, in a situation of explicit deterrence and regional nuclear balances, Israel is liable to face increased costs in its nuclear program. The proof of strong explicit nuclear deterrence lies in financial investments in the nuclear project and the related weaponry that strengthen nuclear deterrence over time, because the development and maintenance of nuclear technology and the development of means of nuclear deterrence are offset by the development of conventional weapons (or resource-intensive technological projects).

The Iranian-Israel Case: The Possibility of Nuclear Balance

The policy of nuclear ambiguity has proven itself over the last fifty years. Does it also meet the case of a nuclear Iran? Are the drawbacks of explicit nuclear deterrence on Israel's part cancelled out by a nuclear Iran?

There are a number of possible main scenarios regarding Iranian nuclearization. One, Iran adopts explicit nuclear deterrence: Iran will have a limited number of nuclear bombs within a few years as well as a warhead for launching nuclear weapons. Two, Iran maintains a policy of ambiguity with regard to every aspect of its nuclear project, similar to Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity. Three, Iran becomes a nuclear threshold state: Iran does not cross the nuclear threshold and reserves for itself the "option to break out." In other words, it has no nuclear weapon ready to use, but has all the equipment and technological know-how required to put one together.[20] Four, Iran manufactures a bomb for testing and discovers that it has not mastered the means for operating tactical nuclear weapons. Of course, each of these scenarios may be more complex or contain a number of possibilities.

Based on these potential Iranian scenarios, there are four main options from the perspective of Israel's nuclear policy. One, Israel maintains its policy of ambiguity: Israel continues to maintain a policy of ambiguity with regard to every aspect of its nuclear capabilities and policy. Two, Israel adopts a policy of full nuclear deterrence: Israel displays its nuclear capabilities and announces its nuclear defense doctrine. Three, Israel announces that is has nuclear capabilities and goes into no further detail. Four, Israel does not change its nuclear policy but pushes for regional agreements on arms control and general disarmament of the Middle East of weapons of mass destruction.

The notable drawback of the last option is the lack of faith that many in the Israeli political echelon have in international agreements, along with the undeclared policy that nuclear disarmament will only come after a number of years of general peace in the Middle East. Israel would claim, with a great deal of justification, that Iran has not honored its signature to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and therefore Israel cannot rely on international committees or regional agreements. Similarly, for arms control treaties to be honored, Iran would be obligated to reveal its nuclear capabilities (and other Middle East nations would have to reveal their non-conventional capabilities). It is hard to imagine a situation in which

Iran would be a credible partner to a process of arms control agreements after its flagrant violations of international treaties and after its many years of clashes with the West over the nuclear issue. The establishment of an arms control treaty requires a period of time in which Israel would be in a state of ongoing uncertainty, and it is easy to imagine that internal pressures by political (and public) elements would be leveled on decision makers to adopt explicit nuclear deterrence at such a time.[21]

The drawback of an announcement (the third option) lies in the fact that it goes a long way toward Israel declaring its nuclear capabilities. While there is no revelation of Israel's actual nuclear capabilities, it does represent a significant catalyst for the nuclearization of other nations in the Middle East. On the other hand, one could claim that the lack of clarity about Israel's capabilities and its doctrine of use of force would weaken the possibility of constructing regional arms control agreements and would therefore promote instability.

The second option, whereby Israel adopts full nuclear deterrence, contains all the drawbacks described above with regard to explicit nuclear deterrence. The only advantage to explicit deterrence, from the perspective of a strategic advantage in the nuclear era, is the possibility of creating a nuclear balance between Israel and Iran. However, there is good reason to question whether such a balance is possible. The word "balance" implies a scale: equal forces or equilibrium. This is problematic in the attempt to describe the situation that would be created between Israel and Iran. The question that needs to be asked, from the point of view of the policy of ambiguity, is not whether it is possible to arrive at a balance vis-à-vis Iran (and thereby prevent a nuclear war). Rather, what would be the nature and meaning of such a balance? Even if we assume that it is possible to arrive at a balance of regional nuclear deterrence that would reduce the risk of a nuclear war, it is important to ask what the effect of such a balance would be on the Middle East. In other words: would it be stable beyond the nuclear realm?

To the general risks of explicit nuclear deterrence enumerated in the theoretical analysis above, certain drawbacks and possible results of a policy of explicit nuclear deterrence specifically with regard to Iran should also be mentioned. First, a nuclear balance between Israel and Iran, unlike the nuclear balance during the Cold War, is an imbalanced, asymmetrical equilibrium. Because of the geographical proportions,

which favor Iran, and the disproportional nuclear capabilities which presumably favor Israel (as Iran would have a limited arsenal of nuclear weapons), Israel would always remain in a constant state of anxiety about an Iranian nuclear first strike. Thus, the security dilemma Israel would face would lead to a "launch on warning" situation, i.e., a nation worried that it could not withstand a first strike (because of civilian reasons and/or its nuclear response capabilities) is maneuvered into acting first if it is greatly worried about being attacked. Similarly, because Israel cannot allow itself to absorb a nuclear weapons attack (primarily because of civilian considerations), it lacks, strategically, the ability to trade geographical space for time, in other words, to sustain a nuclear strike and respond with a nuclear second strike.

Second, Israeli nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis Iran would weaken Israel's conventional advantage and is liable to neutralize conventional decision capabilities because of the concern that widespread military activity might lead to nuclear escalation (by Iran or a third party, such as Hizbollah). Because nuclear weapons are ineffective against terrorist organizations and sub-state organizations, explicit nuclear deterrence is liable to create a situation of low intensity border confrontations that would force controlled wars of attrition on the region to preserve the status quo. In fact, explicit nuclear deterrence is liable to sever the various levels of Israeli deterrence from one another.

Third, the Iranian nuclear program is not meant just to deter Israel, but it also functions as a tool for imposing Iranian hegemony and stagnation on the Middle East. The director-general of al-Arabiyya, Abd al-Rahman al-Rashid, wrote:

> We are not afraid of an Iranian nuclear bomb as a weapon. No military use will be made of this weapon; rather, it will serve as a means to change the rules of the game. We are afraid of Iran's policy, which uses all means in order to impose its existence [as a regional power], and the nuclear bomb is only a means to that end…We are not afraid of a nuclear bomb in Iranian hands. We are afraid of the rationale of the present regime in Tehran that has wasted its country's money on Hizbollah, Hamas, the extremist movements in Bahrain, Iraq, Yemen, and the Muslim Brotherhood, and has supported every extremist in the region. The ambition of Ahmadinejad is for expansion, hegemony, and clear control of the area; to achieve this, Iran needs a nucle-

ar umbrella that would defend it against the deterrence of [any other] power. The Gulf states, having built cities and tremendous industries on the banks of the Gulf will become – once Iran has nuclear weapons – hostage to the caprices of Ahmadinejad and his extremist government.[22]

Explicit nuclear deterrence on Israel's part would enhance the threat Rashid describes. Led by Egypt, the Arab nations are calling for disarming the Middle East of weapons of mass destruction, not for Israel to alter its policy of nuclear ambiguity and joining the nuclear club. The future of the Middle East as a whole depends on the difference. The claim that were Israel to heed the Egyptian call for disarmament by canceling its strategy of ambiguity it would appease both the US and Egypt and strengthen its own place in the international arena is without any foundation whatsoever. Not only are those nations not calling for Israel to withdraw its strategy of ambiguity, but ceding this strategy would serve the opponents of disarming the Middle East. Explicit deterrence in the face of a nuclear Iran would not be directed against Iran alone but also against other players in the region.

Finally, Iran would acquire major argumentative ammunition should Israel withdraw its policy of ambiguity. Iran will have legitimate claims about the international community applying a double standard and would have greater legitimacy in demanding that the economic sanctions in place against it be lifted.

A Nuclear Iran without Explicit Nuclear Deterrence

The present discussion contends that abrogating the ambiguity policy would almost certainly create a "balance" lacking true equilibrium.[23] Louis René Beres has described this well in talking about the benefits of adopting explicit nuclear deterrence: such a step would perhaps be insufficient in saving Israel from a possible nuclear war with Iran, but would without a doubt be preferable to clinging to a policy that is no longer practical – that of ongoing uncertainty. However, beyond the claims made by Beres, it is not at all clear what kind of stability would be created by explicit Israeli nuclear deterrence. The dynamics of using nuclear weapons in the region would be fundamentally different from the dynamics of deterrence patterns between the US and the USSR, India and China, and India and Pakistan. In the absence of size of significant scale in the region (the size ratio between Iran or Egypt and Israel, for

example) and absent relevant sources and technology in this limited region, the dynamics that would be created by the nuclearization of the Middle East would lead to and strengthen the motivation to attempt preliminary decision. Such a decision, with its risks and outcomes, could be fatal.

In the nightmare scenario of a nuclear Iran, relying on the American nuclear umbrella is preferable to abrogating the policy of ambiguity, despite the concern stemming from the extent of America's commitment to Israel. Even in the face of a nuclear Iran, national security and Israeli deterrence would thus not be damaged; given the policy of ambiguity, hypotheses about Israel's real might would remain as before.

The proof of ambiguity's success over the past fifty years lies in the history of the region: it has weakened the motivation of Arab nations to arm themselves with nuclear weapons, and the nuclear aspect has been marginal throughout Israel's conflicts with its neighbors. Even in the face of a nuclear Iran it does not seem that revoking the policy would benefit Israel in any way.

One additional point concerns Israel's current political and economic situation. What is the meaning of deterrence without the willingness to realize the potential? The deterrent effect of nuclear potential proves itself only if there is willingness and capability to realize it. Such willingness is not specific but is proven over time, and therein lies its perpetual danger. From Israel's perspective, explicit nuclear deterrence – should it be realized – requires that the state arm itself unceasingly and create the reality of a regional cold war. The history of the Cold War demonstrated that two superpowers armed themselves with tremendous numbers of nuclear bombs, way beyond anything that was required as operational firepower, simply in order to maintain a nuclear balance between them so that neither side would be at a disadvantage.[24] One may assume that with or without regional treaties, explicit nuclear deterrence would boost Israel's motivation to arm itself with nuclear weapons far beyond what is strictly necessary in order to maintain its nuclear superiority (relative to its geographical inferiority). However, a nuclear balance between the various players would not prevent the continuation of the nuclear race, but would ensure that the nations of the region develop and arm themselves with nuclear weapons at the expense of their national economies in order to maintain nuclear deterrence.

Notes

1 For a detailed discussion, see Yair Evron, *Israel's Nuclear Dilemma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

2 Some of the relevant literature on the topic is mentioned in the essay and the endnotes. While some analysts view the policy of ambiguity as a significant success, others have challenged this view. Eyal Zisser has claimed that ambiguity was the result of "improvisation with no prior planning or thought"; see "Goodbye to Opacity," *Walla.co.il*, April 12, 2010. Reuven Pedatzur argues that the strategy of nuclear opacity is "a ludicrous fiction." See "An End to Nuclear Opacity," *Haaretz*, May 7, 2010, and "Israel must Change its Nuclear Policy," *Haaretz*, October, 10, 2011.

3 On Allon's policy, see Yair Evron, "Yigal Allon and the Nuclear Issue," pp. 295-304, in *Preparing for the Future: The Values of Yigal Allon*, ed. Muki Tzur, Yigal Wagner, and Adam Raz (Genossar: Yigal Allon House Press, 2009).

4 Dana Preisler, "Israel's Policy of Nuclear Deterrence," MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2004.

5 Quoted in Yigal Wagner, "Politics and Ideology in the Debate over the Greater Land of Israel," in *The State of Israel and the Land of Israel*, ed. Adam Doron (Beit Berl Press, 1988), p. 175.

6 Over a number of years Moshe Dayan openly favored explicit nuclear deterrence and was publicly associated with the issue. Contemporary proponents include figures such as Yossi Sarid and Zehava Galon. The latter noted with particular vehemence that "everyone knows that Israel possesses nuclear weapons and that it ought to be stated openly and that we should put an end to the policy of opacity." Galon made this statement in a radio interview just before Ehud Olmert left for Germany for talks on armaments and security, *News 1* website, December 12, 2006.

7 Uzi Arad, ed., "The Balance of National Morale and Security," 2001 Herzliya Conference (Yediot Ahronot Press, 2001), p. 246.

8 See Shai Feldman, *Israeli Nuclear Deterrence*: *A Strategy for the 1980s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Shlomo Aronson, *Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East*, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Academon Press, 1994). Over the years, Feldman has changed his position about nuclear deterrence. See, e.g., "Maintaining Ambiguity," *Haaretz*, September 20, 1998.

9 A prominent proponent of this school of thought is Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). See also Meir Pa'il and Menahem Barabash, "The Nuclear Terror," *Haaretz*, January 1, 1998, and Avner Cohen and Marvin Miller, "Bringing Israel's Bomb Out of the Basement," *Foreign Affairs*, Sept./Oct. 2010.

10 "Power of Deterrence," *Haaretz*, July 10, 2009.

11 "Nuclear Duel between Netanyahu and Sharon," *Yediot Ahronot*, September 7, 2001.

12 Geoffrey Kemp of the Nixon Center has claimed, "The United States will have to learn to live with a nuclear Iran and shape a policy of deterrence that will be effective enough against the potential risks associated with an Iranian bomb." Kemp claims that the United States should learn to work with a nuclear Iran for the sake of the security of all the players connected to the Iranian issue. See Geoffrey Kemp, *U.S. and Iran, The Nuclear Dilemmas: Next Steps* (Washington: Nixon Center, April 2004). Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh are also of the opinion that the US can contain a nuclear Iran. See Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh, "Taking on Tehran," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2005. In an essay with James Lindsey, "After Iran Gets the Bomb," Takeyh claimed that a nuclear Iran could actually contribute to the region's stability, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2010. George Perkovich of the Carnegie Institute claims that should Iran acquire nuclear capabilities, the West will have to take one of the following two courses of action: either demand that Iran roll back its nuclear project to the stage at which it can be considered not to be a nuclear nation, or "adopt the new Iranian status and seek a modus vivendi through deterrence, containment and diplomacy." See Henry D. Sokolski and Patrick Clawson, *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), chapter 8. Sokolski and Clawson also claim that a nuclear Iran is far from being an insoluble problem for the West and that even the "worst-case scenario" can be resolved.

13 Project Daniel, established in the early years of the previous decade, was an independent research group comprising a group of security and strategy experts who studied different aspects of Israel's security. The project focused on the threat to Israel from non-conventional weapons and Israel's preparedness in face of these threats. The project's first report was submitted to Prime Minister Sharon in 2003 and publicized one year later. Regarding Israel's nuclear deterrence, Project Chair Louis René Beres wrote in an article summarizing the project that Israel ought to take the bomb out from the basement immediately, since otherwise Israel would be unable to take advantage of the recommended doctrine of preemption. See "Five-Year Retrospective on Project Daniel," *Nativ* 21 (2008): 90-99. In other words, if Iran acquires nuclear capability, Israel ought to revoke its ambiguity policy.

14 "Reconsidering Israel's Nuclear Ambiguity," *Haaretz*, March 6, 2009. Another essay by Beres, together with John Chain, continues the same line of thought: "Deterrent and Defense against a Nuclear Iran," *Haaretz*, June 24, 2001.

15 "It's Possible to Live with Iran," *Haaretz*, February 18, 2009.

16 Cohen and Miller, "Bringing Israel's Bomb Out of the Basement."

17 Bruce Riedel, "If Israel Attacks," *The National Interest*, Sept.-Oct. 2010.

18 "Kissinger is Worried," *Haaretz*, July 1, 2005.

19 Apart from destroying the nuclear reactor in East Syria, the bombing – which did not lead to any public comment by the Syrian leadership – was also intended to "signal" Iran, i.e., signal to the Iranian leadership that Israel

will not tolerate its nuclearization and will respond with military force if necessary.

20 Minister of Strategic Affairs Moshe Yaalon referred to the issue in his speech "Iran as a Nuclear Threshold Nation: Global, Regional and Israeli Implications," Herzliya Conference, February 2010. See www.herzliyaconference.org/_Uploads/3123bugi1.doc.

21 For Israeli public opinion on a number of questions relating to a nuclear Iran, see Yehuda Ben Meir and Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, *Vox Populi: Trends in Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2004-2009*, Memorandum No. 106 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2010).

22 MEMRI, February 24, 2010. Published by *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 21, 2010.

23 For a discussion with diametrically opposed conclusions from those of the present essay, see *The Iranian Bomb and Israel's Policy* (Netanya Academic College, The Center for Strategic Dialogue, 2005), especially pp. 18-22. In an epilogue Reuven Pedatzur refers to the debate among several experts and explains the necessity for a change in Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity. According to Pedatzur, the policy of ambiguity leaves too many "gray areas" that endanger the security of the State of Israel. In addition, Israel and Iran can adopt the model of inter-bloc balance: "Such deterrence must include unambiguous clarifications about the red lines that, if crossed, would place the Iranians in danger of an Israeli nuclear reprisal. Thus it would, for example, be made clear that identifying any missile launched by Iran in a westerly direction would, from Israel's perspective, mean that an Iranian missile had been launched at Israel. In such a case, Israel would not wait to see where the missile was going to strike or whether or not it was equipped with a nuclear warhead, and no attempt to intercept it would be made. Rather, automatically, an Israeli response would be triggered, which would include the nuclear attack on central targets in Iran, such as Tehran, Tabriz, Qom, Esfahan, and similar targets. Such a clarification would present Iran with the need to decide whether attacking and killing several thousand Israeli civilians would be worth the price of destroying the modern Iranian state, taking it back to the Middle Ages, and killing millions of Iranian civilians. It is doubtful whether there exists an Iranian national interest that could justify a price that high, including the possibility of killing the citizens of 'the little Satan.'"

24 Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, explained that massive nuclear arming – some described it as "unbridled" – was actually one of the moderating elements of the Cold War, because the certainty of total destruction made a nuclear war impossible. See Robert McNamara, *The Essence of Security* (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), pp. 51-68.

Coping with Iran's Nuclear Capabilities

Ephraim Asculai

While the world's attention, at least judging by media coverage, is pointed elsewhere, Iran has proceeded relentlessly with its nuclear project. Iran's reasons for wanting to acquire nuclear weapons have been discussed extensively elsewhere,[1] but certainly producing nuclear weapons has become more of a political decision than anything else. This essay describes in general terms Iran's nuclear capabilities, and reviews the various Iranian options and their ramifications, the active and passive ways of dealing with these capabilities, and the implications of a nuclear Iran for Israel.

Iran's Nuclear Capabilities

Iran has the capability to enrich uranium to any degree it wishes. By mid August 2011 it had enriched more than 4.5 metric tons of uranium to 3.5 percent of uranium 235; of this, 320 kilograms were further enriched to produce some 70 kilograms of about 20 percent enrichment.[2] For the production of 25 kilograms of 90 percent enriched uranium metal, a quantity required for a first core, an amount of approximately 1.3 metric tons of 3.5 percent enriched uranium is needed.[3] If the starting point is 20 percent enriched uranium, the required amount of this material is 0.19 tons. The step from 20 percent to 90 percent enrichment is technically very short. Taking all the available information into account, it appears that Iran currently has the potential to produce some four cores for nuclear explosive devices. This estimate does not take into account the possibility of the production of fissile materials in any concealed or undeclared facilities, or materials obtained from external sources.

Two more steps are needed to turn the fissile material cores into nuclear weapons: manufacturing the explosive mechanism, and packaging this

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mechanism into a military warhead, either aircraft or missile borne. Although the evidence is scant there are strong indications, including in the IAEA reports, that Iran has been working on the explosive mechanism and on the delivery systems. In any case, these two latter steps take much less time to complete in comparison with the first and much more complicated enrichment stage.

It thus seems that all that is needed for Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons is a political decision to utilize the existing stocks of 3.5 and 20 percent enriched uranium and enrich them to the desired level, around 90 percent. Although estimates vary as to how long it would take Iran to achieve this aim should it decide to do so, the common wisdom is that it would take several months to produce the first weapon and a shorter period to produce each subsequent one.[4] There is little doubt that all the while Iran would continue to enrich uranium, and probably at an increased rate. This "breakout" scenario would likely be detected eventually by the IAEA inspectors if they were still actively verifying the Iranian nuclear installations. However, because of the inherent difficulties in verifying the inspectorate findings, the lag time between the actual activities and their reporting could be quite long.

Therefore, given what is known as of mid 2011, Iran can have 1-2 operational nuclear weapons within a year or so from the moment its leadership decides to make them. Unless Iran makes any move to change its nuclear status, this could remain the assessment for years to come. Coupled with its tested delivery systems, these weapons could reach all West Asian countries, southern Russia, and southeastern Europe.

The Iranian Options
While by all indications Iran is attaining all necessary technical capabilities for the production of nuclear weapons, presuming what Iran's next steps will be is folly. There is a range of options open to Iran; some have been discussed in the past and some seem particularly valid at the present time.[5]

a. Iran could continue on its current course: accumulating quantities of 3.5 and 20 percent enriched uranium, while remaining under IAEA inspections. However, Iranian officials have started obliquely to adopt a policy of ambiguity,[6] and theoretically this could continue for a long time. The benefit of this course of action is that Iran will

accumulate a growing inventory of source material while not overtly breaching the boundaries of permitted activities.

b. Iran may have a parallel concealed uranium enrichment program, or may have managed to divert materials under inspection and produce fissile materials.

c. Iran's leaders may decide to openly pursue its nuclear capabilities and announce that should the conditions be right (e.g., an actual threat to their state), Iran could produce a nuclear weapon in order to enhance its security. It could also either threaten or actually withdraw from the NPT.[7] Although such a withdrawal does not put an end to IAEA inspections, it could certainly complicate matters for the inspectors and extend the period until the world receives adequate warning in case Iran wanted to break out.

d. Either in the next step or in an unrelated one, Iran could carry out an underground nuclear test. Iran would thereby declare its nuclear capabilities to the world, while still not carrying out an overt act of aggression against a foreign state. It would then be in violation of several treaties and obligations, notably the NPT and the CTBT, to which it is a signatory.

e. If the Middle East situation of mid 2011 persists and Bashar Asad retains his presidency, Syria and Iran could be tempted to strengthen their relationship and extend it to military nuclear cooperation, perhaps going as far as stationing Iranian nuclear forces on Syrian territory.

f. Another possibility is Iran's transfer of a nuclear explosive device to Iranian-supported terrorist organization such as Hizbollah or Hamas. Although far less likely, this possibility is not completely out of the question, and blackmail by these organizations (even if the threat does not specifically emanate from Iran) could create havoc in the Middle East.

Would Iran use its nuclear weapons against another state? The common wisdom is that nuclear weapons serve mainly as deterrents. Many researchers postulate that the Iranian regime is rational and would act accordingly. However, Iranian reasoning and decision making processes demand much more extensive study, and the assumption that Iranian rationality would follow traditional Western assumptions may be unfounded.[8]

Preventing a Worse Situation

The first stage, preventing Iran from gaining its nuclear potential, has passed. Iran has reached that objective. Even if Iran were to halt any further development of its nuclear capabilities, the possibility of rollback is not realistic.[9] Therefore, tackling the situation means preventing a deteriorating situation and preparing for eventualities, both politically and militarily, should Iran decide to use its potential for political gains or even decide to produce nuclear weapons. Regime change in Iran might bring about the desired result, but this cannot be assured.

How can the situation be prevented from deteriorating? Creating technical difficulties for the nuclear project has its tactical benefits, but with increasing Iranian achievements these decrease as time goes on. Thus any such difficulties must increase in proportion to the achievements in order to have any discernible effects.

On an overt level, the UN Security Council (SC) imposed several rounds of sanctions on Iran, with most economic and some designed to prevent Iran from increasing its technical capabilities. By their nature, economic sanctions have effects over the long term. Their success is not assured and there is no guarantee they will have any tangible effect on Iran's nuclear program.[10] Moreover, although some important countries went beyond SC sanctions, others, notably Russia and China, did much less and thereby helped Iran.[11] It is also quite certain that although the sanctions are having an economic effect on Iran, the international pressure exerted on Iran did not significantly affect the way the nuclear project has proceeded, especially not on the visible part of this project – the production of fissile materials. Whether the international pressure had any effect on the weaponization part of the program and halted it in 2003 is irrelevant, since there is no doubt that Iran is proceeding with this part of the program independently of the others.

In a covert mode, where details are scant, the more prominent method is the thwarting of Iranian procurement efforts. The extent of successes is not known, and Iran probably succeeds in getting most if not all the equipment and materials it needs, albeit with delays, at very high prices, and in reduced purchase quantities. Another method, extensively reported in the media, is sabotage, in this case the Stuxnet cyber attack on the gas centrifuge uranium enrichment operations. Apparently this did succeed in slowing down the operation by limiting the increase in

enrichment potential, but did not stop the operation for any significant length of time.

Overall, however, most see regime change in Iran as the most promising way to proceed in stopping the Iranian nuclear project, or at least making it more palatable. Although there is the South African precedent of dismantling a nuclear weapons arsenal, it is uncertain whether any new regime in Iran would accept this, in particular since some of the regime's opposition strongly supports the nuclear project.[12] Once a country acquires a military nuclear capability, it most likely wants to keep it. The hope in this case would be to witness a change in Iran's foreign policy to a non-belligerent posture, which would reduce the threat to Iran's neighbors in particular and to the world in general. Here the relevant precedent is Japan. Yet while at present the regime is encountering significant internal unrest, the hope for a radical regime change in Iran is currently little more than wishful thinking. The Iranian regime still enjoys strong backing, reinforced by military and para-military forces. Although the Iranian people are affected by the sanctions, these measures are not aimed directly at them and hence do not force widespread anti-government protests. There is no overt support for a regime change by outside governments, and thus prospects for imminent regime change are minimal.

The one remaining option for stopping or at least delaying the Iranian nuclear project is the use of physical force. This has proved successful in the cases of Iraq and Syria (and Libya, in a way), but would be much more difficult in the case of Iran. In the first two cases, single targets were involved. In the case of Iran, several targets would need to be destroyed, and it is not certain that all targets are known to the potential attackers. Some of these targets are placed deep underground and are well protected. Thus it would seem that only a superpower such as the US or an alliance of states such as NATO would be able to achieve a strategic result in military attacks. At present, the consensus opposes military strikes against Iran's nuclear installations, including its military potential.

The remaining option, then, is to learn to live with the Iranian threat.

Dealing with a Nuclear Iran: Deterrence

If prevention fails or does not cause a substantial delay to Iran's nuclear ambitions, the world will have to cope with the new situation in ways

that would hopefully deter Iran from furthering its plans and moving towards a full-fledged nuclear capability or achieving a regional military superiority dependent on military nuclear power.

One indication of things to come occurred when a senior member of the Saudi establishment indicated that Saudi Arabia would develop its own nuclear weapons to counter the Iranian threat, should it materialize.[13] This is not an empty threat. It is generally assumed that Saudi Arabia assisted Pakistan financially in the construction of its military nuclear capability, with returns perhaps in the form of a nuclear umbrella or even a shared nuclear arsenal. Other regional states that might consider establishing their own nuclear weapons project in response to the Iranian threat include Egypt, Turkey, and perhaps Iraq.

Another way to counter an Iranian threat is to deter it through strong defenses that would destroy missiles with non-conventional warheads before they reach their destinations. If a high degree of success is assured, Iran stands to lose much more than it can gain by launching an attack. A failed attack would put Iran in a very vulnerable position and make it ripe for retaliation and preemptive attacks from its neighbors, mainly in but also outside the Gulf region.

> The future is here. Despite the many estimates regarding the time frame, a nuclear Iran is still a matter of Iranian decision making processes more than anything else.

An indirect yet potentially effective way of deterring Iran is to reduce its capability of operating from foreign bases or operating through proxies. The three main potential proxies are Syria, Hizbollah, and Hamas. Weakening these alliances is almost imperative if Iran's potential for striking Israel is to be significantly reduced. Indeed, as long as Syria's Asad remains in power and Syria serves as the bridge between Iran and Lebanon, this front remains potentially dangerous. Although this may appear to be a regional/local issue, it has the potential to ignite a more general conflict. The world would do well to defuse this potential.

The Import for Israel

Certain basic assumptions underpin planning for a nuclear Iran. One, the future is here. Despite the many estimates of the Iranian time frame, it is still a matter of Iranian decision making processes more than anything else. Thus, one cannot further delay the preparations for this eventuality

in the hope that something will delay, suspend, or even completely arrest Iran's nuclear project. Two, all Iranian options are possible. Therefore, profound thought and well-considered preparations are in order, and Israel's past experience suggests that contingency plans, at least for the obvious scenarios, are not necessarily prepared adequately in advance. The complex situation at hand demands much thought and preparation, at least in defining the more general responses to the Iranian developments.

Finally, Israel should not rely on international responses to a de facto nuclear Iran. The world has reacted to but not countered Iran's developing nuclear project. The world should have forecast the developments and prepared for them. The response time has been so prolonged that it has become almost irrelevant, leaving the world in a defensive mode and with little to show in the way of results. Given the past international reaction to Iranian developments, it is difficult to view any political activities (e.g., "engagement") as anything but helpful to Iran. The US economic crisis and the weakness of the administration in its response to other Middle East developments is evidence of this. Past regional experience has proven that guarantees are temporary at best and are easily abandoned with changes in governments. The concept of extended deterrence is inviting, but there is no assurance that it would withstand the test in real time.

A nuclear Iran will bring about a major change in Middle East regional politics and alliances. It is possible that Israel will take part in forming new political and military alliances. Regional developments in the nuclear field will also have to be considered. Israel's policy of ambiguity will also probably come under discussion as a part of the overall Middle East nuclear scenario.

A completely different aspect of coping with a nuclear Iran is civil defense − preparation of the population for the possibility of an Iranian attack. Although the common wisdom is that Iran would never attack Israel directly, with or without nuclear weapons, no Israeli government can afford to assume this. There are two main aspects of preparations: the technical aspects and the psychological preparation of the population for the possibility of having to respond to a nuclear weapons emergency situation. Although of a much lesser scale, the public has been made aware of the possibility of having to respond to a military attack on a nuclear reactor.[14] In addition, Israel is preparing to deal with two potentially

large scale emergency situations: a major earthquake and an attack with chemical warfare agents. In preparing for these, the authorities are planning, training, and drilling the public as to the proper response and behavior for these events. Thus, the ground is being prepared for dealing with emergency situations, including a possible nuclear attack.

The public must be made aware that a nuclear attack is not an existential threat. No doubt the effects of a nuclear attack are very serious and the number of casualties could be high, but the radius of damage would still be limited, and the nation would certainly survive such an attack.[15] Preparing the population for such a possibility would also become part of Israel's deterrence, since good preparations minimize the effects, and effects are the ultimate purpose of such an attack.

Conclusion

Since the world is divided on the ways of preventing Iran from becoming a full-fledged nuclear state, and since the current Unites States administration is reluctant to take any overt action other than sanctions, prevention of this situation hinges on the political decisions of the Iranian regime.[16] Most likely in the short range, the Iranian regime will assume a posture of ambiguity, while slowly increasing the visibility of its potential for acquiring a military nuclear capability. Without Iran taking overt military action against other states, it is difficult to foresee that the US or any other state or group of states will take military action against Iran. Thus, it is imperative that Israel's government prepare for the new developing situation.

Today's reality indicates that regime change is the only way to materially change the situation in Iran, with persuasion of the new regime to become a rational member of the international community much in the way that Japan, for example, is accepted. Although a legitimate wish, it is too much to hope for a complete dismantlement of the military nuclear project, following the pattern of South Africa in the 1990s. Israel must assume that this will not happen, and must prepare

> Today's reality indicates that regime change is the only way to materially change the situation in Iran, with persuasion of the new regime to become a rational member of the international community. It is too much to hope for a complete dismantlement of the military nuclear project.

itself to cope with all possible scenarios emanating from the eventuality of a nuclear-capable Iran. The better it is prepared, the better it will be able to cope with the situation.

Notes

1   The reasons most often given for Iran wanting a military nuclear capability are Iran's threat perception; its regional hegemonic ambitions; and regime survival.

2   See IAEA report GOV/2011/54, 2 September, 2011. All amounts relating to the enrichment processes are given as uranium hexafluoride (UF6). When referring to cores of explosive devices, the amounts are given in kilograms of uranium metal.

3   This quantity is probably needed only for the production of the first core of a nuclear explosive device. For the production of any subsequent core less than 25 kilograms is necessary. See, e.g., Thomas B. Cochrane and Christopher E. Paine, "The Amount of Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium Needed for Pure Fission Nuclear Weapons," Washington, DC, Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc. 1995. All calculations in the present article were made with the "uranium enrichment calculator," http://www.wise-uranium.org/nfcue.html.

4   For an up-to-date detailed discussion of this period see David Albright, Paul Brannan, and Christina Walrond, "Critique of a Recent Breakout Estimates at the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP)," ISIS, September 20, 2011, http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/critique-of-gregory-joness-breakout-estimates-at-the-natanz-fuel-enrichment/8.

5   Ephraim Kam, *A Nuclear Iran: What Does it Mean, and What Can be Done?* Memorandum No. 88 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2007).

6   There is no unequivocal definition for nuclear ambiguity. Intended here is that there are two or more possibilities of action, with the choice between them and the intentions on how to proceed shrouded in secrecy.

7   This is permissible under Article X of the NPT.

8   Defining Western rationality is itself a challenge, given the history of the past 100 years. Many rationality-based assumptions in decision making processes did not withstand the test of reality.

9   The "swap" deal that crops up from time to time, whereby Iran would trade some of its enriched uranium for nuclear fuel for its small Tehran research reactor, would cause only a minor setback in its timetable and not accomplish the aims of the removal of the Iranian threat. See, e.g., "Iran Ready to Halt 20% Nuclear Enrichment: Ahmadinejad," October 4, 2011, http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Iran_ready_to_halt_20_percent_nuclear_enrichment_Ahmadinejad_999.html.

10 Ephraim Asculai, "Can the Iran Sanctions Succeed?" in "*Iran's Ambitions for Regional Hegemony*," S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue, November 2010, pp. 53-68.

11 In early September 2011 it was reported that under pressure from the US, China withheld investments in Iran's oil industry, much needed given Iran's aging equipment and underdeveloped oil fields. Still, Iran is China's largest trading partner, and the supply of Iranian oil to China has not suffered because of the sanctions. See "China Curbs Oil Investments in Iran to Avoid US Sanctions" at http://www.cnbc.com/id/44368708/China_Curbs_Oil_Investments_in_Iran_to_Avoid_US_Sanctions.

12 Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a leader of the opposition in Iran, is one of the strongest proponents of the nuclear project in Iran and used his term as president to advance it.

13 See the report that quoted Prince Turki al-Faisal, a former Saudi intelligence chief and ambassador to Washington and Britain, and other officials that indicated that Saudi Arabia would develop its own nuclear weapons if the situation demands it, in "Saudi Will Seek Nuclear Arms if Iran Gets Them – Report," http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/06/29/uk-saudi-iran-nuclear-idUKTRE75S83X20110629.

14 Yaakov Katz, "IDF to Simulate Missile Attack on Dimona Nuclear Reactor," *Jerusalem Post*, May 9. 2011, http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=236779.

15 See also "why a nuclear Iran is not an existential threat" where the author postulates that Israel's missile defense guarantees a second strike capability, in Jonathan Paris, "Prospects for Iran," London, Legatum Institute, January 2011.

16 It is not even certain that all states, and this includes Russia and China, are emphatically opposed to a nuclear Iran, since this could serve hegemonic interests in the Middle East and their interest in the global energy marketplace.

The Breakup of Israel's Strategic Puzzle

Ron Tira

The strategic environment in which Israel operates has recently been jolted, to the point that significant parts of the puzzle on which Israeli policy is based are in danger of collapse. One of the main conclusions to emerge from Israel's net assessment is that given the disappearance or the waning of a number of weighty actors in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia is possibly the last player that is both operating persistently to contain Iran and is also capable of serving as a counterweight to Turkey. The wave of Arab weakness has – surprisingly – become Israel's problem and increases the friction between Israel and the regional powers that lie beyond the Sykes-Picot zone, which are attempting to deepen their influence in the Levant. Against this background, Saudi Arabia has – also surprisingly – become the state closest to Israel in its reading of the regional map and in its strategic vector.

On the other side of the hill, Iran is reading the same map. Saudi Arabia is after all waging a struggle to halt Iran that extends from Yemen, through Iraq and Egypt, all the way to Lebanon. A defining moment that changed the nature of this struggle was Saudi Arabia's unusual direct intervention in Bahrain. In its relative effectiveness and its gradually emerging assertiveness, the House of Saud is turning itself into Iran's main target. Consequently, at the next stage Iran may focus on challenging the Saudi royal house, whose survival is of the utmost importance. If the House of Saud falls, the remaining Arab opposition to Iran may disintegrate as well.

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The unsettled strategic environment is also liable to create new difficulties in the attempt to reach an Israeli-Palestinian agreement. Indeed, most of the actors who in the past helped provide a supportive strategic environment for political settlements have disappeared or been weakened, or alternatively, their relations with the United States have cooled.

Breaking Up the Strategic Puzzle

A number of critical stabilizers in Israel's strategic puzzle have been undermined or are now in uncertain states of flux.

The end of the balance of power between Iran and Iraq: The years-long struggle between Iran and Iraq preoccupied these two states and limited the possibility that an effective front to Israel's east could emerge. The dismantling of the Sunni-Baathist regime and the American withdrawal from Iraq are creating the conditions for undermining this balance of power and for turning Iran into the dominant player in Iraq.[1] Iran is liable to reach Jordan's doorstep and create Shiite contiguity through Iraq and Syria to southern Lebanon. By both indirect and direct means, Iran is developing a strategic reach[2] to the Mediterranean.

Instability in Egypt: Egypt's formal removal from the cycle of warfare in the 1970s anchored Israel's strategic puzzle in stability, but the creation of a strategic partnership was a no less important development. Only in recent years did the partnership gradually come into existence, as evident during the wars in 2006 and 2008 and the struggle to contain Iran. It is still too early to assess where Egypt is headed, what the standing of the Islamist movements there will be, whether Saudi money will prevent an erosion of Egyptian policy, and whether Egypt will remain an active regional player or will withdraw into itself. But an uncertainty emerges on two levels: one, more distant, is the future of the formal peace treaty framework, and the second, more immediate, is the strategic partnership.

As a result of Mubarak's ouster, third parties have gained the ability to challenge Israeli-Egyptian relations. For example, in order to protect its relations with Egypt, Israel is compelled to restrain itself vis-à-vis Hamas. However, this increases Hamas' freedom of action, and Hamas in part also has a vote on the path to escalation on Israel's southern front. It is thus capable of fanning the flames to a point at which Israel, while recognizing the political trap, will find it difficult to avoid a military

operation in Gaza. This time such an operation might cause diplomatic friction between Jerusalem and Cairo; the evolution of such friction is difficult to predict.

A changing Turkey: Turkey was a partner in creating a balance of power vis-à-vis Syria, and to a certain extent, Iran and Iraq as well. But Turkey has changed its policy. Turkey has no significant strategic rivalry with Israel, but it now wishes to claim rivalry with Israel to advance its interests with third parties. This new policy has produced outcomes such as the flotilla to Gaza, the Turkish-Brazilian initiative on Iran's nuclearization, and the freezing of relations between the governments. Likewise, the Israeli-Cypriot agreement to develop gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean has the potential to spark friction. Given the new Turkish policy, the expansion of Turkey's strategic footprint in the region and among potential clients is liable to limit Israel's freedom of action. Indeed, Turkey now commands increased weight among Israel's set of strategic and even operational considerations. At the same time, and as discussed more below, Turkey's geopolitical position is too complex to label it simply as an adversary.

The undermined Alawite regime: The IDF enjoys an excellent ability to threaten the Alawite regime in Damascus, and this has allowed Israel to restrain Syria and enjoy nearly four relatively quiet decades along the shared border. Furthermore, in the years preceding Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon, Israel used the threat to Syria and to the Syrian political order in the Land of the Cedars as leverage. It did not pay for Syria to incur significant risks for Hizbollah, and as long as it controlled Lebanon, Syria made sure that Hizbollah was relatively restrained. Thus the effectiveness of the threat to the Alawite regime made it possible to enjoy relative stability in Israel's entire "Northern System of Fronts" (Israeli jargon describing Syria, Lebanon, and the non-governmental and foreign forces operating on or through Lebanese soil).

The withdrawal of the Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005 decreased Damsacus' influence in Beirut, which in turn decreased the effectiveness of Israel's indirect restraint vis-à-vis Hizbollah. To a large extent Lebanon drifted from being a Syrian satellite to being an Iranian satellite. Perhaps in part for this reason the Second Lebanon War was more prolonged and less effective than previous similar situations, such as Operation Accountability and Operation Grapes of Wrath. It is possible that Israel

did not internalize the significance of the Syrian withdrawal, and hence the difficulties in 2006 in applying the lines of operation that had been relatively successful in 1993 and 1996.

The current rebellion in Syria raises doubts as to the future of the Alawite regime. The familiar situation promised stability, with the Alawite regime vulnerable and Israel having good military access to it. On the other hand, if the regime falls, the immediate result will be uncertainty and the undermining of some of the leverage for restraining Syria. It appears that for Israel, having a coherent state opponent that can be pressured at well-known vulnerability nodes is preferable to the danger of Syria's Iraqization, i.e., breakup into a state on the verge of failure. Even a new Syrian government that is a satellite of Turkey would not necessarily be beneficial for Israel, since this would likely exacerbate the Israeli-Turkish friction and change its nature, while strengthening Syria. Therefore, the Alawites are liable to be an exceptional case in which Israel's interest in undermining Iran's affiliates differs from the Sunni interest.

The decline of American effectiveness: The United States is the main stabilizing element in the Middle East, but its status as the Archimedean point of regional geopolitics has been undermined. First, the United States is less effective in containing its adversaries; Iranian activity in Iraq against the United States, in proximity to US forces there, and its advance on the nuclear program illustrate this. Moreover, for all practical purposes the current White House has removed from the spectrum of possibilities the potential use of force in new theaters, which also lessens US restraint over its adversaries.[3]

The root problem is that it is not clear what strategic map the Obama administration is using to navigate.

Second, America's allies are now forced to reexamine whether toeing the American line still assures reasonable protection of their interests. By turning its back on Mubarak, the United States aroused concern among the pro-American Arab regimes. In tandem, the lack of American effectiveness toward Iran in Bahrain forced the Sunni monarchies to fill the strategic vacuum and take action themselves in ways that they had almost never been required to in the past.

Israel too should be troubled by the Obama administration's turning its back on the April 14, 2004 letter from President Bush, which was

approved almost unanimously by Congress, and the implications for the strategic credibility of the United States. Yet the problem runs deeper than the Obama administration's diplomacy or the "raw" diplomacy of the Netanyahu government. With Nixon too relations were not warm, nor did Netanyahu have fans in the Clinton White House. The liberal Clinton administration had a different worldview from that of the conservative Reagan administration, for example, but still, most US administrations in recent decades (a) used a similar strategic map for geopolitical navigation, and (b) were relatively effective in realizing their policy, whatever it was.

The root problem is that it is not clear what map the Obama administration is using to navigate. It is not clear if it still interprets reality through the geopolitical paradigm of a front of allies that should be strengthened and an axis of adversaries that should be contained. For example, it is widely believed in Washington that there is such a thing as an Arab spring, which puts those who embrace this view at odds with most of their partners in the region. In reality, it is difficult to find this spring, and it is difficult to point to even a single Arab state in which liberal democratic forces have taken hold.[4] Even in Cairo, the game is between the army and its proxy party on the one hand, and the Islamic movements on the other. In addition, it does not appear that the Obama administration is taking the slide by Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon toward Iran seriously enough. From its perspective, these trends are perhaps undesirable and justify nominal opposition but apparently do not justify drastic action or the taking of particular risks. The administration is also failing to act as decisively as required by the fact that the pro-American camp is disintegrating, such that it has only two significant and certain partners remaining in the Middle East: Israel and Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, the Obama administration finds it a challenge to realize its policy objectives, whatever its policy may be. From Afghanistan and Pakistan, through Iraq, and to Syria, America's will is not becoming a reality. Both rivals and partners (from Iran to Turkey to Saudi Arabia) have learned that they can ignore American will without facing any particular consequences. The United States, therefore, is also being excluded from key processes such as the formation of the new Lebanese government, the Turkish army's removal from politics and the change in its leadership, and the Palestinian reconciliation agreement. The decline

in the strategic effectiveness of the United States is causing a decline in its diplomatic effectiveness.

From an Israeli point of view, the exact content of US policy is less material. Israel knows how to live with both the cold shoulder of George H. W. Bush and the warm embrace of George W. Bush. What is critical for Israel's strategic puzzle is that the United States (a) considers itself as a player in the regional power game, and (b) is effective in realizing its chosen policy.

Toward the Final Battle: The Struggle for the Survival of the House of Saud

It may be that rather than talking about pro- and anti-American camps, it is more accurate today to talk about the camp of stability and the camp of change. Israel and Saudi Arabia are seeking to minimize the shockwaves to the status quo, as are less influential countries like Jordan and the Gulf monarchies. Iran aspires to upset the status quo. From this point of view at least Turkey is in the opposing camp, since it too aspires to reorganize the balance of power. As to the Obama administration's approach to the fabric of forces in the Middle East – time will tell.

But at least as far as the House of Saud is concerned, the picture is already becoming clear: Saudi Arabia remains almost alone. From the perspective of the Saudi royal house, the strategic deal with the United States, oil-for-security, is losing its validity.[5] There are two reasons for this. First, in the Saudi view, the United States has changed its policy and has left the House of Saud to deal on its own with its internal and external challenges.[6] This has generated a long list of differences between Saudi Arabia and the United States, starting with the American demand for democratic reforms in the Sunni monarchies, through the American dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the handling of the crisis in Bahrain, to the US withdrawal from Iraq in the manner of "après moi le déluge," which brings Iran directly to Saudi Arabia's doorstep.

Second, given what the Saudis consider to be lesser effectiveness of the United States, the Saudis have begun to think in terms of a post-American era.[7] No doubt, in spite of the Saudi investment in drawing closer to China, India, and Pakistan, there is no alternative superpower that is more sympathetic and more effective. But Saudi Arabia understands that the need for self-reliance has increased, and that it must attempt to fill by

itself at least some of the vacuum that the United States is leaving behind. This insight has already produced arms deals with a cumulative value of $70 billion, and it might lead to a Saudi assessment that the country must possess nuclear weapons.

As far as the Saudis are concerned, they have already lost their significant partners in the Sunni-Arab front. Mubarak was ousted and the future of Egypt is not clear, and after the American withdrawal from Iraq, Iran will become the dominant player there. This grave new situation has forced Saudi Arabia to change its strategy. A player that in the past preferred to operate behind closed doors and avoid risks has been pushed into overt and direct military intervention in Bahrain. In the same new spirit of boldness (and perhaps recklessness), Saudi Arabia has begun to undermine Iran's ally in Damascus, the Alawite regime.

The House of Saud has remained the chief – and perhaps the last – tenacious fighter in containing Iran. From the billions of dollars invested in Egypt, through the harnessed oil weapon and the struggles within OPEC, through the struggle over the channels to Pakistan and India, to the attempt to expand the Gulf Cooperation Council and turn it into a type of Sunni NATO, the House of Saud is attempting to draw the line where Iran is to be stopped. It is thus turning itself into Iran's prime target. In each of these arenas both sides are being put to the test, with the war taking place in the Arabian Peninsula as well. The Iran-inspired agitation is taking place not only in Yemen and Bahrain, but also among Shiites in eastern Saudi Arabia, and it has been reported that the Revolutionary Guards have begun to train the Mahdi Army for operations against the royal houses on the peninsula.[8] Forecasting further escalating moves by Iran against the House of Saud is more than just an educated guess.

The undermining of the Saudi royal house, in a direct operation or through indirect means, may bring Iran within reach of the final collapse of the known regional order. In addition, there is a risk of strategic reversals stemming from a new generation taking over the House of Saud, or from

> In light of the cultural gaps it is difficult to speak about an open Israeli-Saudi partnership. Nonetheless, the two countries are moving along parallel strategic vectors, and therefore it is appropriate to consider expanding the dialogue between them.

a Saudi assessment that the struggle with Iran is too dangerous and the chances of success too low, and that therefore Saudi Arabia must seek a modus vivendi based on recognition of Tehran's seniority.

Consequently, the House of Saud is critically important to Israel. In light of the cultural gaps it is difficult to speak about an open Israeli-Saudi partnership. Nonetheless, the two countries are reading a similar strategic map and are moving along parallel strategic vectors, and therefore, it is appropriate to consider expanding the dialogue between them.

The Palestinians: Undermined Strategic Environment for an Agreement

The changes and the turmoil described above have created additional cracks in the strategic foundation that is supposed to serve Israel in its efforts to reach a settlement with the Palestinians. Even prior to the recent changes, the Palestinians have suffered from lack of coherence, partly because there are centrifugal forces operating among them such as the Palestinian Authority government, the Hamas government, and strong extra-governmental forces. It is difficult to create equilibrium with an entity that suffers from fragmentation and a multiplicity of vectors. But these problems are exacerbated by the deterioration of the strategic and political environment that is supposed to enable a lasting agreement. The Palestinians, certainly in light of domestic opposition, will find it difficult to sign an agreement without receiving significant inter-Arab backing. But the inter-Arab backing was provided in the past mainly by Mubarak, and Mubarak was the chief player working to weaken and contain Hamas within the Palestinian system. Mubarak's ouster and the increased political power of the Islamists in Egypt, who are closely connected to Hamas, have caused disruptions in the environment that is supposed to enable a future settlement.

The Roadmap, for example, received the blessing of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Bahrain. However, in light of the new trends in Egypt and the tensions between the United States and the Sunni monarchies, it is not clear whether the White House can mobilize a new supporting front. Since the United States has lost strategic credibility to a degree in the eyes of both sides, its ability to supply the strategic context required for an agreement, which it enjoyed in the past, can no longer be taken for granted.

A related question is whether Israel can assume that the United States will act effectively against actors that will attempt to challenge the reality created by an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. The conduct of the United States, from Iraq through Syria to Libya, suggests that Washington today is averse to risks or the payment of significant strategic prices. Nor is it just the memory of 1967 and 1970 that should dampen Israeli enthusiasm for international security guarantees; there is also the fresh experience whereby the international community failed to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and completely failed in the security arrangements on the Gaza-Egyptian border in 2005 following the Israeli disengagement from Gaza.

These concerns are intensifying in light of Iran's larger strategic footprint on the shores of the Mediterranean, including infiltration of the Palestinian system through Gaza. Iran's effectiveness and boldness are increasing, and it does not hesitate to challenge the existing American order, American clients, or the United States itself. The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, and any new agreements reached in the near future, are thus exposed to two forces that are liable to undermine them: Iran and pressure on the regimes from the Arab spring.

A clinical analysis reveals that there must be two overarching aspirations in any agreement with the Palestinians, no matter what its content. The first is that the agreement will be implemented in reality and not be a dead letter. The second, complementary goal is that the situation following implementation of the agreement be stable and be able to withstand attempts to challenge it over time. However, the empirical foundation for assessing that these aspirations are achievable is growing weaker.

Opportunities

The more Iran intervenes in additional theaters or deepens its involvement in existing theaters, the closer it gets to overstretching. Iran's GDP is lower than that of Argentina or South Africa, and Iran's extensive intervention in the region is taxing its economy. The Iranian method of operation, based on non-state proxies and local sympathizers, is highly cost-effective, but the adoption of a wise strategy by its adversaries could well draw Iran into overstretching.

Another opportunity lies in the renewal of the historic competition between the Persians and the Ottomans, which may become a main thrust of regional geopolitical dynamics. Given this potential, it is surprising that the Turkish vector sometimes aids more than frustrates Iranian ambitions, such as in the nuclear realm. In fact, Turkish and Iranian interests are likely to collide in central Asia, Iraq, and Syria. In recent years, Turkey has sought to draw closer to the Alawite regime, but the riots in Syria have endangered this regime and give rise to the possibility that Sunni forces will come to power. The Ottomans (Sunnis themselves) ruled Syria for hundreds of years through the local Sunni-Arab elite. Therefore, competition for control of Syria may develop between Iran and the Alawites on the one hand, and Turkey and Sunni-Syrian forces on the other.

Another possible theater of competition is Lebanon. First, Turkey is attempting to acquire influence in the Land of the Cedars. Second, while Syria has not defined its strategic situation as competition with Iran and Hizbollah for hegemony in Lebanon, the latter have taken advantage of the withdrawal of Syrian forces to replace Syria as the dominant player in Lebanon. If the Arab spring in Syria comes to an end, perhaps the Israeli diplomatic and military strategy should aim at Syria's return to Lebanon with Saudi backing (a second Taif Agreement). This would achieve three objectives: first, return to a situation that would allow events in Lebanon to be restrained through leverage over Syria; second, the generation of tensions on the Iran-Syria-Hizbollah axis; and third, preservation of a geopolitical zone of separation between Turkey and Israel. From an Israeli point of view, it is preferable that Syria and Lebanon have a Saudi orientation, not a Turkish or Iranian one. Israel's interest is a balance of power, not Arab, Iranian, or Turkish dominance, and Saudi Arabia has remained the last Arab player that is still capable of balancing Iran and Turkey.

The traditional Israeli view was that geopolitical conditions created a convergence of interests between Israel and Turkey, which began with containing pan-Arab regimes, developed into containing pro-Soviet Arab regimes, and of late has transformed to containing Iran. But it is not clear whether in his current calculations Erdoğan envisions an Islamic front against Israel, a front with Israel and Saudi Arabia against Iran, or a front

with Iran and Syria against the Kurds – or that he does not seek to commit himself to any front.

Furthermore, current Turkish policy appears crude and rudimentary, evident in its fickleness toward Syria; its inability to decide between cooperation with Iran (even militarily, against the Kurds) and its aversion to the spread of Iranian influence; its threat to break off relations with the European Union if Cyprus is given the EU's rotating presidency – even as it agreed to position on its soil NATO radar for the detection of Iranian missiles; and its threat to use military force against Cyprus and Israel. Nor is it clear to what extent Turkey is motivated by strategic, ideological, or economic considerations, such as the economic interest in gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean, whose significance for Turkey was perhaps not understood by Israel. This Turkish ambivalence is liable to continue to resonate in the coming years.

The bad news is that the Turkish vector is not clear and perhaps not cohesive; the good news is that much is still possible. Israel, therefore, must seek common ground with Turkey and find processes in which it can involve Turkey. At the same time, it must seek the partnerships necessary to balance Turkey's power.

Military Implications

The breakup of Israel's strategic puzzle has two seemingly opposing military meanings: on the one hand, the disappearance or the waning of critical stabilizers increases the chance of a military conflagration. On the other hand, the desire to protect the existing peace treaties and avoid unnecessary entanglements with uncertain repercussions limits Israel's military freedom of action. Under the current conditions, there is a developing asymmetry between the modest political-strategic gains that are possible in military campaigns, such as in Gaza, and their potential for substantive regional mischief. Therefore, there is a need to accelerate military buildup and develop appropriate capabilities suited to the new challenges, but there must also be increased restraint in the use of force.

Force buildup: Whether what is already known today is sufficient to provide Israel with a strategic warning of a possible future reversal in Egyptian policy or the future emergence of an eastern front composed of state actors remains to be assessed. At issue are years-long processes of force buildup, which center on long range scenario forecasts and

simulations. The IDF must not be surprised by the possibility of the return of the state actor adversary. There is also a need to refresh the logistics and capabilities that allow the IDF to take advantage of possibilities for operating on interior lines. In the first decades of the IDF, war fighting on interior lines was one of its main relative advantages, but in recent decades that need was perceived to have diminished.

In addition, Iran is developing a strategic reach to Israel, and in fact has already developed an indirect ability to wage an extensive campaign against it.[9] Therefore, Israel must determine its countering strategic concept and what kind of force buildup will prevent a deficit in long range power projection capabilities. Israel's contemporary strategic tensions relate to non-bordering regional powers as much as to bordering states, and since the non-bordering regional powers are sometimes stronger than the bordering states, there is a need for both quantitative buildup and improved long range naval and air power projection.

Use of force: Relations with Egypt (and Jordan) are an Israeli asset of the utmost importance. Therefore, the regional processes require the IDF to plan future campaigns against third parties with different considerations than in the past. It is no longer possible to presume that Egypt will necessarily back Israel, as Mubarak did in 2006 and 2008. The working assumption should be that the future Egyptian government, no matter what its exact character, will find it difficult to remain aloof in the event of a prolonged IDF operation. Israel must thus prepare for a situation in which campaigns against third parties (if they are unavoidable) will be limited and not continue beyond the several days in which the Egyptian government can justify self-restraint. Collateral damage needs to be minimized even more than in the past and the alternative of defense should also be considered, in accordance with the circumstances. Such constraints are liable to develop from Turkey's growing footprint as well.

> There may be differing opinions as to whether Israel should attack Iran, but it is very difficult to contend that Israel does not need to attack because the Americans will deliver the goods in their own way. A more valid working assumption is that the White House simply will not deliver.

Finally, there is a growing fear that the United States aegis no longer assures sufficient protection of national security, as it did in the past. Therefore, the need for self-reliance is becoming

clearer, including on the Iranian nuclear issue. There may be differing opinions as to whether Israel should attack Iran,[10] but it is very difficult to maintain the position that Israel does not need to attack because the Americans will deliver the goods in their own way. A more valid working assumption is that the White House simply will not deliver.

Israeli Policy: A Challenge in Three Parallel Spheres

One of Israel's complex challenges is the need to operate simultaneously in three parallel spheres, each operating according to different (and to some extent contradictory) laws of mechanics and based on different (presumed) facts. At one end is the sphere of the cold strategic reality. This is the rough sphere in which the spoken language is not infrequently that of the power struggle, and Israel tends to feel that it must have the upper hand in this sphere at all times. At the other end is the sphere of international public opinion. This is a universe of perceptions and images that are sometimes far from the tough reality on the ground, but they have taken hold in the media and among international organizations. These perceptions and images are to a large extent a source of international legitimacy, or lack thereof. The legitimacy also affects the boundaries of Israel's freedom of action and its staying power and ability to maintain its course in the strategic reality sphere. Between the two extremes is the inter-governmental sphere. Governments exhibit at least partial familiarity with the facts and mechanics of the strategic sphere, but their policies are to a large extent driven by public opinion.

The gap between the laws of mechanics and the perception of the facts in the three spheres is growing wider. In the universe of world public opinion, Israel is called on to set its affairs in order, mainly the Palestinian issue, without delay. There is minimal patience and willingness to listen to various arguments. The inter-governmental sphere is spread between the belief that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the root cause of instability in the Middle East on the one hand, and apathy behind closed doors – yet with public opinion taken into consideration when speaking to the media – on the other. But the situation in the strategic universe is much more complex.

The reality described in this article reveals a new map of instability, uncertainty, and threats that Israeli policy cannot ignore. In tandem, Israel must aspire to preserve channels of cooperation with Egypt,

Jordan, and Turkey; develop channels of cooperation with Saudi Arabia; and take advantage of opportunities to mitigate the regional shockwaves.

Notes

1   See also Ron Tira, "The United States in the Middle East: An Exercise in Self-Defeat," *Strategic Assessment* 14, no. 1 (2011): 41-54.

2   According to the US doctrine, "the distance across which the Nation can project decisive military power is its strategic reach." U.S. Army Field Manual FM 3-0, C1, February 22, 2011.

3   Libya is the exception that proves the rule, and from the outset the military involvement there was designed in a way that was intended chiefly to reduce risks and costs, and not to ensure that objectives were achieved. See Ron Tira, "The Uncommitted Commitment: U.S. Military Involvement in Libya," *Infinity Journal*, April 27, 2011.

4   Other than perhaps Tunisia, but there too the situation is very different from what is reported in the news.

5   Nawaf Obaid, "Amid the Arab Spring, a U.S.-Saudi Split," *Washington Post*, May 16, 2011.

6   Paul Richter and Neela Banerjee, "U.S.-Saudi Rivalry Intensifies," *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 2011.

7   Ray Takeyh, "A Post-American Day Dawns in the Middle East," *New York Times*, June 8, 2011.

8   "Iran 'Grooms Mehdi Army for Gulf Ops,'" *UPI*, June 9, 2011.

9   Ron Tira, "Israel's Strategy (or Lack of) towards Iran's Forward Rocket Deployments in Lebanon and Gaza," *Infinity Journal* 1 (Winter 2010).

10 See also Ron Tira, "A Military Attack on Iran? Considerations for Israeli Decision Making," *Strategic Assessment* 13, no. 1 (2010): 45-60 and Ron Tira, "Can Iran Be Deterred?" *Policy Review* No. 169 (October 1, 2011.)

Saudi Activism in a Changing Middle East

Yoel Guzansky

Saudi Arabia has traditionally tended to avoid direct confrontation with strong enemies. Instead, it uses its deep pockets to increase its influence and focuses on attempts at mediation in the Arab world in order to neutralize dangers.[1] In spite of its political and religious standing and its being the largest exporter of oil in the world, with one-quarter of the proven oil reserves on its territory, it sees surrounding states such as Iran, Iraq, and Yemen as a threat, although for differing reasons. This sense of vulnerability, along with Saudi Arabia's relative military weakness – its borders are long and easily penetrated, and its military, though equipped with advanced weaponry, is small and untrained – has until now prompted it to rely on American patronage for deterrence and defense. However, the turbulence in the Arab world has led Saudi Arabia to a stronger sense that it is left on its own to cope with the threats it faces, as well as to the recognition that the challenges at home and abroad compel it to adopt different solutions than in the past. This has led it largely to abandon its former relative passivity, to fling down the gauntlet to Iran, and even to adopt a more independent policy toward the United States. This article will examine the motivation behind what appears to be an adjustment in Saudi policy, and the implications of this change.

Buying Domestic Quiet

Until now Saudi Arabia has coped with threats of unrest by iron-fisted suppression of the protests (especially in Shiite areas) and by injecting large sums of money (some $120 billion) into buying domestic quiet. It appears that the royal house has learned the lessons of events in North

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Africa. It has made extensive use of social networking sites to connect with the citizenry and both propose solutions to domestic problems and warn against harm to the royal house. For example, in spite of the efforts by various opposition figures both inside and outside the kingdom to promote a "day of rage" in March 2011, early preparations by security forces and warnings not to demonstrate contributed to calm the situation. At the same time, a series of edicts was published that were intended, inter alia, to assist in housing solutions, encourage employment of young people, and expand the social safety net. King Abdullah also issued a royal decree intended to fight the rise in prices of basic foods, and he approved six decisions concerning wage increases for public service workers in security, health, and agriculture. Several days before the local elections on September 29 – which occurred only for the second time in the history of the kingdom – the King announced that women would be given the right to vote and run for a seat in the local municipalities. However, the fact that he avoided implementing the dramatic step at this point calls into question his actual willingness to realize it – it seems more a gesture than a tangible measure.

In spite of the increasing calls to fight corruption, separate powers, and make a gradual transition to a constitutional monarchy, most of the reforms were economic in nature. Nonetheless, they have helped take the sting out of the protests. Once again oil wealth has proven to be an effective tool for calming social and political tensions, at least as long as oil prices remain at their current level. Yet not only is the regime reaching deep into its pockets; it has also shown its determination to use force against any manifestation of popular protest, and in particular, to take vigorous action against the protests – thus far limited – of Shiites in the Hasah and Qatif region. Charges that the protesters were Iranian agents strengthened the legitimacy of the regime's suppression by force and deterred others from taking to the street. Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal threatened that the authorities would "cut off every finger" that worked against the regime, and the Council of Senior Ulama, the most important religious body in the kingdom, issued a religious edict stating that the protests are a deviation from the path of Islam. Likewise, rules governing the print media and the internet, which were already draconian, have been tightened, and it was reported that the royal house was working on a new "anti-terror" law that would place further restrictions on the

population.[2] Inter alia, the new regulations permit extended detention without trial and increase use of the death penalty for anyone who casts aspersions on the royal house and its policy. These steps, ostensibly part of a war on terror, aim to curtail the rights of the kingdom's subjects, which are already circumscribed. There is an intention to expand the definition of "act of terror" to any action that "harms the reputation of the state" or "endangers national unity."[3] Additional measures include increased security around strategic facilities; mass preventive arrests; and tightened supervision of Shiite clerics and control of the entry of foreign citizens, especially Arabs, to the kingdom, to preclude the import of revolutionary ideas.

Monarchies Unite!

Since coping with domestic protests, Saudi Arabia has been free to attempt to restore the regional status quo, and if it could, to compete for leadership of the Sunni world. Perhaps its most dramatic step is connected to the initiative to enlarge the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) by including Jordan (and perhaps Morocco) in a new bloc of monarchies in order to prevent them from bowing to the demands of protesters and implementing significant reforms. The Saudi elite, which fears that governmental reforms in the Arab world will serve as a role model for opposition forces in Saudi Arabia, is seeking to immunize the monarchies from possible risks to their stability and to strengthen their legitimacy, both domestically and abroad. In this framework, it is pushing to include Jordan in the GCC in spite of the reservations of some of its members, who fear that their standing in the organization will be harmed and who still remember King Hussein's support for Saddam, and despite the longstanding hostility between the Saudis and the Hashemites.[4]

Inviting Jordan, likewise a pro-Western Sunni monarchy that opposes Iran, into the private club of oil producers (at this stage, it is not clear what its status will be) will give the loose thirty-year old GCC political and security depth; contribute to increasing investments in Jordan; and facilitate the supply of cheap oil from the Gulf states. This is a fundamental issue for Jordan – whose economy is even smaller than Oman's – as 80 percent of its electricity production is dependent on the supply of Egyptian gas. In parallel, Saudi Arabia transferred $1.5 billion to Jordan as part of a five-year plan intended to assist it in coping with

its budget deficit, which has grown significantly as a result of the rise in energy prices.[5] There is also a not-insignificant security dimension to the initiative. From the Saudi perspective, Jordan's joining the GCC will improve the Saudi ability to cope with a possible deterioration in the security situation. Jordan's special units and intelligence services have a good reputation, and they have been training and assisting security forces in the Gulf for several years (it was even reported that Jordanian troops joined the forces that entered Bahrain in March 2011).[6]

In parallel with the negotiations to include Jordan in the GCC, Riyadh is providing Gulf states that were hit with protests with large grants ($20 billion for Bahrain and Oman, most of it Saudi money). These moves have already produced results, and the GCC appears more united than ever. Even Qatar, which in recent years has had a policy that was independent of Gulf positions (in order to avoid conflict with Iran, to balance Riyadh's power, and to highlight its own status) has largely fallen into line with the other members. This is particularly noticeable in broadcasts by the Qatari-owned satellite channel al-Jazeera.

Saudi Arabia is also devoting significant efforts to keep Egypt from drawing closer to Iran. After Mubarak's ouster, comments were made in Cairo about the need to renew diplomatic relations with Tehran. Iran welcomed statements by the Egyptian leadership concerning its intention to turn over a new leaf in relations with Iran, and it even noted that Egypt's opposition to Israel was creating common ground between the two countries. In response, Riyadh stepped up coordination with Cairo, dusted off a series of joint initiatives that were intended to strengthen relations between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and committed itself to transfer $4 billion in order to help the Egyptian economy stay afloat (the UAE is reportedly transferring an additional $3 billion).

It appears that this investment has paid off. Egypt has expressed support for Saudi policy, including in Bahrain, and has made it clear that it considers the security of the Gulf to be the security of Egypt itself – a clear signal to Iran to stop its negative involvement in the Gulf states. Indeed, it is unlikely that Cairo actually intends to implement one of the most fundamental changes in its foreign policy since the Islamic Revolution, particularly in light of various long term goals. At the same time, and particularly if the Muslim Brotherhood attains substantial influence in the future Egyptian regime, Egypt's relations with Iran may

grow stronger despite the different ideologies because of common short term goals. And indeed, according to Israeli Military Intelligence chief Major General Aviv Kochavi, Iran "is funding and strengthening its ties with the Muslim Brotherhood in order to influence the results of the political process in Egypt."[7]

Flinging Down the Gauntlet to Iran

Classic balance of power considerations and Sunni-Shia rivalry are intertwined with Saudi activism in an attempt to contain Iran and create a Sunni front as a counterweight to Iranian influence. Indeed, the turbulence in the Arab world has revealed the depth of, and has perhaps even increased, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. In the first stages of the Arab spring, Iran attempted to present the protests as an achievement for itself. For Iran, the protests, at least until they reached its Syrian ally, looked like a golden opportunity, an opportunity to weaken the Sunni front and take credit for the achievements of the masses. And in fact, Saudi Arabia fears that one of the results of the Arab spring will be to tip the regional balance of power in the direction of Iran, given that Saudi Arabia's friends in the "moderate" camp have been undermined, and given the increasing threats to its security with the collapse of the old order around it.

The uprising in Bahrain, which has clear ethnic characteristics, looked to Riyadh like a critical event in the Sunni-Shiite conflict and an opportunity to redesign the rules of the game with Iran. In its involvement in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia sought to establish: first, when there is a danger to the stability of the kingdom, it will act, even against the advice of Washington. Second, it will use force openly if required, as evidenced in the battle Saudi Arabia waged in 2009-10 against the Houthis on its border with Yemen, who it claims are receiving Iranian support (this was the largest military battle in the Arabian Peninsula since the Gulf War). It appears that the events in Bahrain, which were seen as an Iranian plot, provided a sense of urgency for the need to contain the influence of Iran. The House of Khalifa, from many points of view – geographic, historical, and even familial – is closest to Saudi Arabia, and therefore, it was no surprise that the Saudis sent forces to protect it.[8] The Saudis also sent (on March 15, 2011) military forces to their neighbor Bahrain in order to ensure that the House of Khalifa would not become a constitutional monarchy and that the Shiite protests would not "infect" the Shiite population

centers in the northwest of the kingdom. Calm has been preserved for now, though at the price of tension in relations with the Americans as well as with the Iranians, all of whom did not view the Saudi intervention favorably, though for different reasons.

This dispatch of forces was intended to prevent the Shiites, who are the majority in the tiny archipelago, from threatening the rule of the al-Khalifa family, but also to send a clear signal to Iran that Bahrain is located deep within the Saudi realm of influence. Saudi forces have not yet completely left Bahrain, even after the state of emergency was canceled, and it was reported that there is an intention to establish a permanent base in the country for the Gulf states' joint military force. The vigorous response of the Saudi-headed Gulf camp to the events in Bahrain also included closure of dozens of Iranian and Shiite media channels; expulsion of Iranian diplomats by Kuwait and Bahrain; a serious escalation of anti-Iranian rhetoric; calls for waging economic warfare against Iran by sending Iranian workers back from the Gulf; a letter to the Security Council on the matter of Iran; and even calls for incitement of the Arab population in Khuzestan in response to Iranian incitement of the Shiites in the Arab Gulf states.[9]

Another issue troubling Saudi Arabia is that Iraq is becoming increasingly identified with Iran.[10] This can be seen in Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's recent expression of support for the Shiite protest in Bahrain, in the closer economic relations between Iraq and Iran, in Iraq's support for the Asad regime, and even in Iraq's support for Iran in its struggle against Saudi Arabia within OPEC.

Syria, like Iraq, is liable to become a theater of conflict between Iran and the Arab states, this time led by Saudi Arabia, which does not hesitate to oppose Bashar al-Asad openly and lend active support to the Sunnis. The Saudis have sought to limit Iranian influence in various areas, but their realization that placing themselves at the head of the anti-Iranian camp in Syria would bring them into conflict with Tehran has thus far prevented them from adopting a more assertive policy. Now Saudi Arabia is seeking to oust Asad, if only because this will cause Iran to lose a major ally, undermine the radical camp, and give Saudi Arabia an opportunity to lead a Sunni camp that is larger and more cohesive than in the past. In addition to sending ambassadors home and using an increasingly strident tone against Asad, it was reported that Saudi Arabia and the

other Gulf states have stepped up the pace of oil production in order to cover the deficit in Syrian oil in the European markets, and that they are actively aiding the Sunni rebels. In the Saudi view, it is still not too late to take advantage of Asad's weakness and offer him a "deal": implement "reforms" and stay in power in exchange for cutting off relations with Iran and Hizbollah. Saudi Arabia hopes that undermining the Asad regime will reduce Iran to its "natural size." This would be the best scenario for Saudi Arabia, second only to the fall of the Islamic Republic.

Riyadh appears readier than ever to harness all of its resources in an attempt to cope with Iran's regional aspirations. Turki al-Faisal, former Saudi intelligence chief and ambassador to Britain and the United States, was quoted by the *Wall Street Journal* as saying that "Iran is very vulnerable in the oil sector, and it is there that more could be done to squeeze the current government."[11] Furthermore, al-Faisal threatened that Saudi Arabia would not hesitate to use the oil weapon and increase production in order to cover the deficit in Iranian oil in the markets. This may be a signal that Saudi Arabia is prepared to take it upon itself to reduce the expected damage to the world economy if the sanctions against Iran are tightened and an oil embargo is imposed, perhaps even to minimize the consequences of any possible attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, first among them, harm to oil export from the Gulf.

Saudi Arabia has thus offered not only an incentive, but also a threat. In recent months, statements have been made implying that Saudi Arabia will seek to develop its own nuclear option: an Iranian nuclear device "would compel Saudi Arabia . . . to pursue policies which could lead to untold and possibly dramatic consequences,"[12] Turki al-Faisal declared in a closed meeting with NATO. This comment, along with similar statements made in March at a conference in Abu Dhabi, constitutes a change in the Saudi approach to the issue. For the first time, senior officials of the royal house are publicly and explicitly addressing the nuclear military issue, which strengthens the assessment that Iran's nuclearization is liable to bring about increased nuclear proliferation in the region. The purpose of these statements may be to put the spotlight on events within the kingdom in the context of the Arab spring, and to induce the West to solve the Iranian nuclear problem, but the possibility that these comments are motivated by a desire to examine the nuclear path cannot be ruled out.

Increasing Independence from the United States

In his May 2011 speech to the Arab world, President Obama declared that promoting reforms in the Arab world is now a primary goal of the administration. Criticism of the administration's double standards – military force against the Qaddafi regime versus a weak call to Bahrain to maintain freedom of speech – led Obama to change his priorities, at least publicly, and to make promoting reforms the top priority. Although Saudi Arabia was not mentioned in the speech, Riyadh understood the message. In the Saudi view, this speech recalls the ease with which the United States abandoned its significant allies, such as Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt. The fear that if forced to choose again between freedom and stability the United States could "abandon" Saudi Arabia as well is becoming tangible in Riyadh.

Saudi-American relations have seen ups and downs over the past decade, especially after the September 11 terror attacks and the US invasion of Iraq, but the kingdom has remained the keystone of what remains of the pro-American Arab camp. Indeed, although Washington is not satisfied with the decisions being made in Riyadh, the United States cannot permit itself to lose Saudi Arabia. With the thinning of US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States increasingly needs Saudi Arabia to use its influence to stabilize the situation, and likewise in places such as Yemen and Lebanon, where Saudi influence acts as a counterweight to Iranian intervention. Washington also needs Riyadh to work to moderate oil prices, as it attempted to do in the summer of 2011, whether through OPEC or by exploiting Saudi surplus production capability. In addition, the United States intends to sell the Saudis more than $60 billion worth of weapons in the coming years. This deal, like others in the pipeline, is a form of Saudi leverage, because loss of the deal would have a negative impact on the US economy in general and the arms industry in particular. And despite the tensions, the two sides are continuing their security cooperation: the United States has announced that Saudi Arabia is seeking to significantly upgrade the aging Saudi fleet, including missile defense capability (the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense). The US is also continuing to train the new 30,000-man Saudi force for protecting strategic facilities, including government buildings, oil terminals, and refining facilities. These various considerations

perhaps explain why the entry of Saudi forces into Bahrain did not result in a significant American condemnation.

In spite of continued security cooperation, however, senior Saudi officials have leveled criticism at Washington in recent months, unprecedented in its severity, because of US policy toward the events in the Arab world. According to a senior Saudi official, this "ill-conceived" American policy is one of the reasons that Saudi Arabia is adopting a policy that will sometimes conflict with US interests in the region. Furthermore, in Riyadh's view, "Washington has shown itself . . . to be an . . . unreliable partner" in face of the Iranian threat. The official stated that the decades-long US-Saudi arrangement of "oil for security" is at an end.[13] The Saudis have also brought a new-old weapon into the battle: unprecedented public criticism directed at the Obama administration for not pressuring Israel enough on the peace process, in what appears to be an attempt to take the spotlight off the kingdom.[14]

Access to the economy of the Gulf, the fight against terrorism, the struggle against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the peace process in the region will continue to be basic American interests. How the Saudis will be included in these objectives in the future is not clear. It is also unclear how events will influence the ability of the United States to secure these interests and whether they will have an impact, for example, on the location of the bases, e.g., the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, and the US force structure in the region. It is still too early to assess how any change in the deployment of bases will affect future US military missions, especially with regard to containment and deterrence of Iran. The unrest in Bahrain is liable to cause the United States, if it has not already done so, to reconsider maintaining its base there. An evacuation of some of the forces, or even an indication that the United States is considering this, would be a victory for Iran and would further weaken the willingness of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states to rely on US security support. From the Saudi point of view, the inability to coerce Iran looks like American weakness. Add to this the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, which is

> Overall the Saudi policy can be understood as an attempt to redesign relations with the United States. This will likely limit even further the ability of the United States to wield influence in the region.

seen in Riyadh as a terrible error, and the result is that the United States appears in fact to be abandoning the arena to Iran.

The chill in relations between the capitals can also be seen in the Saudi street. In a poll conducted in the kingdom published in July 2011, 70 percent had negative opinions of the United States, as opposed to 60 percent who had such opinions in 2009 (the killing of Bin Laden may have influenced the results).[15] Riyadh's concerns about the Arab spring are similar to its concerns after the September 11 terror attacks: that the events would have a negative impact on the kingdom's image in the United States, and that in the long run, the willingness of the United States to defend Saudi Arabia would be damaged. Relations with the United States, in spite of their decisive contribution to the kingdom's security against external enemies, cannot help it to face the new-old challenges at home. On the contrary, the royal house's connection with the United States is problematic, and was also a major factor in the establishment of al-Qaeda. In addition, even a massive investment in advanced weaponry cannot bring relief to the security challenges it confronts, most of them internal.

Overall the Saudi policy can be understood as an attempt to redesign relations with the United States. These relations, which have borne the characteristics of patron-client relations, are likely to be different in the future. Beyond the fact that the United States is a source of criticism by opposition figures in the kingdom, over time protests in the Gulf are liable to highlight ever more clearly the significant ideological distance between Washington and Riyadh and drive a wedge between them. This would likely limit even further the ability of the United States to wield influence in the region. Currently, there is no substitute for the American defensive force. However, the Saudis are seeking to leave most of their options open, and are also looking eastward toward China for political support and at Muslim states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan in an attempt to recruit mercenaries and other means of defense.[16]

It is not easy to break off relations built over the course of sixty years that are based on the deep material interests of both sides. The American need for access to the Gulf economy will continue, as will the Saudi need for effective security support. It is true that an assertive Saudi policy, especially if aimed at Iran, is consistent with Washington's interests. Nevertheless, preserving the framework of relations with Riyadh, certainly with the continuation of the protests, is liable to be more

expensive for Washington and in the future force it to decide between its liberal values and the need to preserve stability even after it withdraws a significant portion of its troops from the region. It appears that Riyadh is not only expressing doubts about the utility of adhering to the alliance with the United States; it is attempting to mold the alliance so that it will allow it greater freedom to maneuver than in the past. In addition, Riyadh is also likely to seriously consider parallel security arrangements.

Saudi Arabia's assertiveness vis-à-vis its stance towards Iran is apparently viewed positively in Jerusalem. In recent years, what has connected the Gulf states with Israel more than anything is the growing fear of Iran, and it was even reported that several Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, have been holding an intelligence dialogue with Israel, directly as well as indirectly. It is possible that this dialogue does not touch specifically on Iranian nuclear development, but it is not inconceivable that the sides are working to expose and foil activity by Iran or its proxies in the region. Beyond an intelligence dialogue, the sides may also be coordinating policy on one level or another, vis-à-vis the US administration as well, whose policy on the Iranian issue is not entirely consistent with their policy. Israel and Saudi Arabia are anxious not only about Iran, but also about the turbulence in the region. And in fact, since the beginning of the Arab spring, they have both demonstrated a clear preference for maintaining the status quo, which is another reason for the tacit alliance between them.

Assessment

Saudi Arabia tries to neutralize dangers to its national security by hedging its bets, avoiding use of open military means, and attempting to avoid leadership roles. Diplomacy and cash are the preferred tools, and at the same time, there is an attempt to work behind the scenes. It is true that the kingdom is equipped with relatively good tools for coping with potential domestic protests – including economic capability, religious legitimacy, and the loyalty of the National Guard – but Riyadh may understand that traditional methods through which it has shaped its foreign policy are now insufficient. It must also harness new means to neutralize dangers to its national security, and if necessary, attempt to take the reins of leadership in the Arab world. This would expose it to conflict with its chief rival on the one hand, and its main ally on the other.

The turbulence in the Arab world, which is redrawing the map of alliances in the region, provides Saudi Arabia with an opportunity to position itself more forcefully as the leader of an Arab camp more united than in the past, even if it is weakened and battered. But along with the opportunities there are also risks, chiefly to the relationship with the United States, which constitutes a significant if damaged layer in Saudi Arabia's national security. In addition, over time Saudi Arabia will find it difficult to lead the Arab camp alone, without Egypt and the united Gulf bloc behind it, and the recent burst of activism is liable to end quickly. The Saudis are also ambivalent about Turkey's attempts to return to a position of leadership in the Middle East. On the one hand, the opposition to Israel and the Sunni alternative to Iran are viewed positively in Riyadh. On the other hand, Turkey's "return" to the Middle East is liable to be at the expense of Saudi Arabia's standing in the Sunni world. The negative memory of Ottoman rule is still fresh in Riyadh, and the model of Islam in Turkey that is preached by Erdoğan threatens the conservative character of the kingdom.

The overthrow of the Sunni regimes in North Africa, the continued unrest in Bahrain, the chronic instability in Yemen, and Iraq's increasing move toward the Iranian sphere of influence increase Riyadh's fear of the collapse of the existing order and increased Iranian influence in the region. It is not clear whether the unconventional means used thus far to assist the aging royal house to better cope with the old-new challenges, both domestic and foreign, is sufficient. Saudi Arabia's advantage is in indirect conflicts; it has no battalions, only money and a leading role in the Muslim world. This is no small edge, but the role it seeks to play depends, apart from repairing the rift with United States, on backing the Arab-Sunni region, and on the illusory character of the "Arab revolution," which may topple enemies but also eventually reach Saudi Arabia's doorstep.

Notes

1   Joseph Kostiner, *The Marginal Peace: The Attitudes of the Persian/Arabian Gulf States toward Israel and the Peace Process* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2008).
2   For the official draft of the bill in Arabic, see http://www.amnesty.org/sites/impact.amnesty.org/files/PUBLIC/Saudi%20anti-terror.pdf.
3   "Amnesty: Saudi Terror Law 'Would Strangle Protest,'" BBC News, July 22, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14239259.

4   It will be easier for the Gulf states to accept Jordan than Morocco, which is also geographically detached from the bloc.

5   Mohammad Tayseer, "Saudi Arabia Grants Jordan $1 Billion for Budget, Al Arab Says," *Bloomberg*, July 26, 2011, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-07-26/saudi-arabia-grants-jordan-1-billion-for-budget-al-arab-says.html.

6   "The Gulf Cooperation Council: A Club Fit for Kings," *Economist*, May 19, 2011, http://www.economist.com/node/18713680/print.

7   Moran Azoulay, "Intelligence Chief: Asad's Reforms are Important, but Not Enough," *Ynet*, July 5, 2011, http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4091260,00.html.

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Relying on a Splintered Reed?
Intelligence about Allies and Partners

Udi Golan

Israel has recently been thrust into a tenuous and declining situation with regard to its allies and strategic partners. The toppling of President Mubarak in Egypt surprised intelligence organizations in Israel and the West; the Israeli embassy in Cairo was attacked by mobs and evacuated; and uncertainty hovers over the future of Israel's relations with Egypt. The web of strategic relations with Turkey has collapsed and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has sounded militant declarations against Israel. The unrest in the Middle East raises questions about the stability of the Jordanian regime and the future of Israel's relations with the monarchy. Even with regard to the United States, voices have warned of cooler relations and in the longer term, of the waning of the strategic alliance with Israel.[1]

It is only natural that intelligence focus on the enemy – gathering intelligence and studying the states that represent a threat to the country and are liable to go to war against it. However, as recent events have shown, a surprise on the part of a nation's ally or partner can also have far reaching implications. A warning about relying on a questionable ally or unreliable partner was issued already in the time of the Bible by Assyrian King Sennacherib to Hezekiah, King of Judah, who rebelled against Assyria and sought to rely on Egypt: "You are relying on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which enters and punctures the palm of anyone who leans on it" (Isaiah 36:6).[2]

In contemporary times, Israel has encountered a number of instances where a change in an ally had strategic meaning (such as the fall of the

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Shah in Iran; the alliance with the Christians in Lebanon 1975-83; the collapse of the South Lebanon Army and its effect on Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon). Today too Israel is forced to confront a complex reality in which intelligence not just about its enemies but also about its allies and partners is of the utmost importance. Pressing current questions in this vein include: can the Palestinian security forces stand up to Hamas? is it possible to put together a coalition against Iran consisting of moderate Arab nations? how stable are the moderate Arab regimes?

This essay addresses the growing importance of intelligence about allies, particularly in light of the scant academic research on the topic. "Allies" and "partners" refer here to states or non-state actors with which a state maintains security relations, and not only states with which official treaties have been signed. The essay does not deal with political and/or diplomatic intelligence routinely gathered about various states, rather intelligence about allies that is important from strategic and security perspectives. The essay claims that intelligence organizations confront unique challenges and dilemmas (in terms of gathering, research, relations between the intelligence community and the political leadership, and more) when the object is an ally or partner (intra-alliance intelligence) rather than an enemy. Most of the information in the field of intelligence about allies is classified. The essay is based on non-classified information and uses some prominent examples from the Israeli and American experience in order to present the complexity and dilemmas of intelligence about allies.

The Need for Intra-Alliance Intelligence

Espionage and the use of intelligence services vis-à-vis allies and partners are common phenomena in the world of intelligence. Even where there may be operational or intelligence cooperation between allies in a certain area, such as the war on terrorism, at the same time allies gather intelligence about one another and relate to this as a straightforward intelligence objective.[3]

Given the nature of the subject matter, which because of its political sensitivity has remained classified for many years, intelligence gathering among allies and its role in creating and managing alliances and coalitions has been studied little at the academic level (though in the 1990s there was some academic interest in economic and industrial espionage between

allies). In a 1998 essay in the journal *Intelligence and National Security*, Prof. Martin Alexander quoted a definition of intelligence as "the missing dimension" in the study of international relations, and named the secondary field of intra-alliance intelligence as "the missing dimension of the missing dimension."[4] Following the September 11 attacks, academic research on intelligence liaisons and cooperation between intelligence organizations grew.[5] However, these areas do not sufficiently address the expanding phenomenon of deviations from traditional alliances (NATO) and cooperation between the US and random allies and partners whose loyalty is suspect and might even represent a potential threat (Pakistan, Karzai's regime in Afghanistan, the new regime in Iraq, and others). The need for intelligence surveillance about these new or occasional allies is critical.[6]

For the US the question of intelligence gathering about allies is particularly apparent in the case of Pakistan, on the one hand an important ally in the war on terrorism, but on the other hand, a nuclear power suffering from political instability and a state suspected of providing assistance or harboring elements that provide such assistance to the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The US has cooperated with Pakistan in the war on terrorism, but has also carried out independent intelligence operations in Pakistan, including surveillance of the Pakistani armed forces and intelligence services. The elimination of Osama Bin Laden by US special forces on Pakistani soil without prior coordination with the Pakistani government and military is an excellent example of the problematic relations between the two allies.[7]

Though obviously in a different category, Israel too is the subject of American intelligence gathering activity, primarily because of Israel's ability to make unilateral moves that affect American interests in the Middle East. The US has followed the development of Israel's nuclear program, continues to follow construction in the territories, and in general takes a great deal of intelligence interest in Israel (e.g., will Israel attack the Iranian nuclear installations), but it is only rarely that information about this is made public.[8]

Academic research in the field of intelligence has dealt extensively with the question of intelligence surprises and failures, especially surprise attacks on the part of a hostile nation (Operation Barbarossa, the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the Yom Kippur War).[9] However, there

has been virtually no study of the phenomenon of surprises by allies. It is important to distinguish between allies/partners that do not represent a threat and are unlikely to become an enemy, though there is an interest in conducting relevant surveillance, as opposed to allies/partners that are liable to become future enemies. Likewise, it is important to distinguish between intentional changes initiated by the leaderships of allied states (such as severing relations) on the one hand, and on the other, events that lead to material changes (e.g., a revolution that surprises even the leader of the ally in question), consequently affecting the relations between the nations. Allies may generate several types of surprises:

a. A state ally/partner undergoes a transition and becomes a state enemy.
b. The ally/partner deserts the alliance and becomes neutral and uncooperative.
c. The ally/partner undergoes a political/military collapse in wartime (e.g., the quick collapse of France in the face of the Nazi attack in May 1940, surprising Great Britain).[10]
d. The ally goes to war or undertakes a military operation without prior coordination, with ramifications for the state, including the risk of being dragged into the fighting (Great Britain, France, and Israel went to war in 1956 without coordination with the United States).
e. A revolt or a change in the regime of the ally/partner leads to a change in relations and possibly even the loss of the ally/partner (the fall of the Shah and the rise of Khomeini's regime led to the loss of Iran as a central ally of the US and Israel).

Intelligence vis-à-vis an Ally/Partner

How are different stages in the intelligence cycle, i.e., the work of intelligence, affected when the object is an ally rather than an enemy?

Critical Data Identification

The first task in intelligence work is critical data identification (CDI), i.e., setting priorities (determining which states and areas should be of focus), and deciding how to use available resources (recruiting agents, wiretapping, training investigators, acquiring language capabilities, and so on). The highest priority of CDI has traditionally been given to early warning of war; in recent decades, terrorism and the proliferation of non-conventional weapons have also assumed primacy in critical

data identification. During the Cold War, the US directed most of its intelligence efforts to the USSR. In the first three decades of the state, Israel focused its efforts on states with which it was in conflict and the risk of conventional war; Egypt was the primary object until the 1979 peace agreement. Over the next twenty years, Iran headed the list of priorities, alongside Syria, Hizbollah, and Hamas. Allies too, especially those whose actions have important implications for national interests, are included in CDI, but fewer resources and much less attention are directed to them.[11]

Intelligence Gathering

At least on official levels, allies and partners assume certain restrictions in espionage and intelligence gathering activities against one another. In 1951, Israel and the United States (the Mossad and the CIA) reached an agreement about intelligence cooperation that included an understanding that they would not spy on one another. However, in 1952-53, the FBI claimed that some Israeli intelligence representatives in the United States were involved in illegal espionage activity on American soil.[12] Since the peace treaty with Egypt, Israel has imposed limits on covert intelligence gathering there. Over the years there have been several Egyptian reports about arrests in Egypt of people accused of spying for Israel, the best known among them being Azzam Azzam and more recently Ilan Grapel. Israel has denied that either acted as spies on Israel's behalf.[13]

One may distinguish between active, invasive means of intelligence gathering, whose use against allies would be considered illegitimate, and passive means of intelligence gathering, which would be considered less problematic. Humint – the deployment of spies or other human sources – is considered illegitimate, as illustrated by the Pollard case. Jonathan Pollard, a US Navy intelligence analyst who spied for Israel, did not collect intelligence about the US, but gathered information about Arab states from American databases. However, the very fact that Israel, an ally, operated a spy in the US was seen as highly problematic, evidenced by the heavy sentence imposed on Pollard and the refusal to grant him a pardon. The affair damaged relations between the nations (intelligence relations were suspended for a short while) and Israel consequently made a commitment not to engage in espionage in the United States.[14]

Signals intelligence (Sigint) – planting wiretaps on the soil of a friendly nation or in its embassies – is also illegitimate, though ambassadors operate on the assumption that their conversations are tapped and take necessary precautions. However, more passive eavesdropping – by means of satellites or other means not located on the ally's soil – is less problematic. In the field of visual intelligence (visint), sorties of planes taking aerial photographs in the airspace of an ally are problematic, whereas satellite photography does not violate the sovereignty of a nation. Likewise, intelligence gathering by means of special units is unacceptable with regard to an ally.

Embassy staff and/or military attachés stationed in an allied nation can also be considered intelligence gathering operatives. They operate under clear limitations and are not authorized to use covert methods associated with intelligence operatives. The gathering of internal political and even security intelligence is seen as legitimate if it is done using acceptable methods (e.g., open sources, meetings of diplomats and military attachés for debriefings). Here too, however, there may be a blurring of the line separating diplomatic activity and military liaisons from covert intelligence activity. There have been cases in which embassy personnel and military attachés have been expelled from the host nation on the basis of accusations of espionage.[15]

With regard to intelligence gathering, relating to an ally as if it were an enemy is liable to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The exposure of espionage on allied soil or publicizing the very fact that intelligence relates to the ally as if it were a threat is liable to damage relations between allies and be the source of considerable tension.

The fall of the Shah in Iran in 1979 demonstrates the importance as well as the limits and advantages of intelligence gathering about an ally. Israel's representatives in Iran, Ambassador Uri Lubrani and Mossad representatives Reuven Merhav and Eliezer (Geizie) Tzafrir, identified the growing destabilization of the Shah's regime – thanks to their experience and ability to travel through Iran and gauge the mood – and submitted warnings to that effect. In March 1977, the Israeli government held a discussion about the stability of the Shah's regime and Lubrani made the assessment that the regime was in danger and capable of lasting three years. An emergency plan for evacuating Israeli personnel from Iran was prepared and steps were taken to minimize the damage of the regime's

collapse. By contrast, the American intelligence services failed to foresee the Shah's fall from power.[16]

However, the Israeli representatives still found it difficult to gather information about the situation in Iran precisely because it was an ally: Israel's connections were with the regime rather than with any opposition element. Personnel of the SAVAK (the Iranian internal security organization) did not discuss the regime's stability with their Israeli colleagues, and Mossad headquarters did not authorize its representative in Iran to contact opposition elements for fear of damaging relations with the regime. Only at a later stage, when it was clear that the regime was in danger, was an intelligence gathering effort made to contact opposition elements. Similarly, the Israeli representatives made use of Israeli citizens working in Iran and Iranian Jews in order to gather information about the country's internal situation.[17]

Intelligence Liaisons

Intelligence services of allied nations routinely exchange information and assessments on shared interests, yet however intensive or extensive the exchange of information may be, it is always subject to limitations. The information is never shared in its entirety between allies for reasons of source confidentiality, contradictory interests, differences of opinion regarding the use that will be made of the intelligence, and more. When the ally is liable to become a future enemy, there is another consideration to withhold information, means, and methods of cooperation, as these might later be used against the nation. Intelligence services are not in the habit of providing their counterparts with information about the internal situation in their own countries (the stability of the regime, internal politics).

Since 9/11 intelligence services around the world have expanded and deepened cooperation on the subject of terrorism with the emergence of a broad shared interest of fighting al-Qaeda. Israel too is a partner to this effort. During the tenure of Meir Dagan, the Mossad reportedly lifted limitations and greatly expanded cooperation with foreign intelligence services, thereby also increasing intelligence reliance on them.[18]

David Ignatius, a senior intelligence commentator for the *Washington Post*, has described a process whereby since the 9/11 attacks, the CIA works in close cooperation with the intelligence services of the Arab nations (Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia) in the war

on terrorism. American intelligence relies more and more on this cooperation, as it has yielded good results. At the same time, the CIA has curtailed some of its own intelligence activities (intelligence gathering) in these nations so as not to damage relations with the hosts and the willingness of the political leaders and intelligence services to cooperate. According to Ignatius, during the recent uprising in Egypt the CIA had several intelligence sources in the country, but far fewer than in the past. Edward Walker, a former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern affairs and Ambassador to Israel and Egypt, has also claimed that, "We became far too overreliant on those networks. When you are totally dependent on local intelligence organizations, you tend to protect them." As a result, America too was blind to what the regime would not see, i.e., the revolutions in the Arab world.[19]

Research

The IDF Military Intelligence Directorate is Israel's foremost strategic, military, and political research element. The ongoing attempt to create research pluralism has been only partially successful: the research division of the General Security Services (GSS) has been strengthened and is now Intelligence's equal on the subject of the Palestinians. Research at the Mossad has also developed, though it specializes primarily on specific issues (such as non-conventional weapons), while the Center for Political Research at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has failed to become a significant factor in the intelligence community. Military Intelligence is still predominant when it comes to formulating a comprehensive national intelligence assessment. Its Research Division is divided by geographical area and subdivided by country. In each branch dealing with a country, there is an internal division into areas (political, military), but there are also differences in research emphasis: for non-enemy states (Egypt, Jordan) there is greater emphasis on the political aspect and the question of regime stability. Research on allies is usually accorded fewer resources (researchers), quantitatively and possibly also qualitatively, than research on enemies. As a result, gaps may be created in research information about allies.[20]

One of the frequent claims is that the unusual situation in Israel, whereby Military Intelligence is responsible for strategic and political research, is problematic: given the nature of officers' training, their

short terms of service, their rapid job turnover, and their organizational subordination to the military, these officers are experts in the military realm but are less trained to handle assessments in the affairs of state, internal political matters, and social issues that are critical when it comes to regime stability. Research in these areas requires a long period of specialization, more varied experience, and a broad civilian and/or academic approach. This claim is particularly relevant for research about allies. In recent years, Intelligence has worked to improve its research capabilities in the non-military areas and to give their researchers academic training as well as to recruit researchers with academic backgrounds. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Mossad could potentially improve the level of research about allies should their research capabilities be strengthened. A researcher working on a certain country who served as a diplomat, a military representative, or intelligence officer in that country may have an advantage over a researcher who never lived there. Former head of Military Intelligence Aharon Zeevi (Farkash) claimed that in 2003-4 Intelligence presented the nation's leaders with an assessment about the instability in the Arab world and thereby provided a strategic warning about the revolutions of 2011, even though it did not predict when precisely the upheavals would begin. It may be that in this case too, concentration on the enemy, i.e., Iran, the second intifada, the Second Lebanon War, the bombing of the Syrian reactor, and Operation Cast Lead, earned more of the attention of intelligence personnel and pushed aside consideration of the possibility of a revolution in an ally as important as Egypt.[21]

Dissemination of Information

Another problem concerns the critical stage of information dissemination. Intelligence that fails to reach the right personnel who will analyze it and grasp its significance and is therefore not used might as well not exist. Covert information about allies, especially information touching on the ally's relations with the nation in question, is particularly sensitive. Intelligence in which Israeli statesmen and senior personnel are mentioned is the most classified, because of the involvement of internal politics and the possibility that political use might be made of it. Generally, therefore, such material is made accessible to a few individuals

only. The compartmentalization is liable to have a negative impact on the ability to gather information and conduct research on an ally.[22]

Intelligence and the Political Leadership

Relations between intelligence and the political leadership, by nature complex and prone to tensions,[23] become more complex when the subject is intelligence about an ally. Regarding an enemy state, especially when there are no diplomatic relations or contacts between leaders (Israel and Syria, the US and Iran post-1979, the US and North Korea), intelligence personnel have a monopoly on knowledge: they study and are familiar with the enemy nation and its leadership. They present their information and assessments to the political leadership and advise it. The political leadership may formulate its own assessment about the enemy on the basis of ideology or a different interpretation of the material with which it was presented, but it is dependent on the intelligence personnel who represent the political leadership's source of knowledge.[24] With regard to an ally, the political leadership (or in certain cases, a special envoy) is in personal contact with the ally's leader, receives information from him/her, and formulates an assessment about him/her. The political leadership may choose to share this with the intelligence community or shelter the information. In the case of Egypt, it was Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer who met with President Mubarak on many occasions, developed a close personal relationship with him, and was considered an expert on Egypt.[25]

In addition to the upper political level, the security and military echelon may also maintain contact with their counterparts. The intelligence services may participate in this dialogue, but they have no exclusivity and usually, with the exception of secret relations, are not the leading element. The strategic dialogue may be an additional channel for information gathering and clarification of the ally's positions, although this channel may also be used to conceal information and practice deceit.

Acquaintance between the political leaderships and channels of dialogue between them and/or between other echelons in the two states offer valuable advantages in understanding the other side. The intelligence services no longer have a monopoly on the information and assessment about the ally. In certain cases, however, this may be a drawback: the political leadership may be swayed by personal

impressions or personal relations that have developed and discount information provided by intelligence sources that contradicts its own assessment. A related question is: does a nation confront an ally with intelligence about its activities, thereby revealing its spying activities?

The complexity of the relations between intelligence and decision makers in the context of an ally was clear in the case of the relationship between Israel and the Lebanese Christians in 1975-83.[26] The Mossad was responsible for creating and managing the secret contacts with the Christians and supported cultivating them as an ally. Military Intelligence opposed this relationship with the Christians, claiming they were unreliable as an ally and it would be wrong to base the plan for a war in Lebanon on cooperation with them. At a certain point, the decision makers in Israel – Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan, Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon, and to a lesser degree, Prime Minister Menachem Begin – started meeting in person with Bachir Jemayel and other Lebanese Christian leaders to coordinate the war in Lebanon with them. It seems that they generated a set of expectations about an alliance with the Christians based on the promises made and personal relationships that were created, choosing to ignore the warnings issued by Military Intelligence and the reservations of some people in the Mossad. When the war broke out, however, Bachir Jemayel refused to respond to most of Israel's requests; the Christians hardly participated in the fighting; and in 1982, Prime Minister Begin was surprised when in a meeting with Jemayel the Christian leader told him that at that time he was unable to sign a formal peace agreement with Israel. After Bachir Jemayel was assassinated, a peace agreement between Israel and Lebanon, led by Amin Jemayel, was signed, but the agreement was not approved and never implemented. The assessment by the intelligence services about the intentions and limitations of the Christians' power proved to be accurate.[27]

Israeli Intelligence regarding Allies and Partners

Egypt: After President Mubarak was deposed, the press reported that since the peace treaty with Egypt, Israeli Military Intelligence has neglected intelligence gathering about Egypt, especially its military: the army was unwilling to devote intelligence resources to Egypt given the assessment that should there be a regime change in Egypt and the risk

of a military confrontation with it return, Israel would have years-long warning in order to prepare for such an eventuality.[28]

Warning of a popular uprising such as took place in Egypt is a very difficult − perhaps impossible − challenge, but intelligence services are still required to attempt to assess the stability of a regime. This requires devoting intelligence gathering and research efforts to social and political forces and processes beyond the traditional fields of the military and regime. The difficulty in predicting regime change and consequently a change in policy may lead to the conclusion that it is necessary to strengthen military research (i.e., focus on capabilities) also with regard to an ally/partner that is liable to become an enemy or at least a potential threat.

Turkey: Following the *Marmara* episode and the subsequent charges of an intelligence failure in information gathering and risk assessment, the head of the security and political division at the Ministry of Defense, Brig. Gen. (ret.) Amos Gilad said that Turkey had never been included in intelligence coverage. He supported this by saying, "Intelligence cannot gather information about everything; it has limited resources." Turkey was a central ally of Israel in the region. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was included in Israel's peripheral alliance; relations grew closer in the 1990s and a strategic alliance was created. Thus, Turkey was never considered a threat or an intelligence target.[29] However, the change in Turkish policy and the waning of the strategic alliance with Israel emphasize the importance of political intelligence and warnings of a change in relations that also has serious security implications.

Jordan was an enemy state and an object of Israel's intelligence services, but at the same time the Jordanian regime maintained secret relations with Israel. Jordan may be considered a strategic partner of Israel at least since 1970, when Israel helped save King Hussein's regime. King Hussein held secret meetings with Israel's political elite while the Mossad maintained routine contact with Jordan. In September 1973, King Hussein met with Prime Minister Golda Meir and transmitted a general warning that lacked specific details about the risk of war. After the Yom Kippur War erupted, Israeli intelligence was asked to assess whether Jordan would join the effort alongside Egypt and Syria. (Jordan sent a force to the Golan

Heights front but did not open an additional front and informed Israel of its moves.) During the Gulf War in 1991, King Hussein cooperated with Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and Israel again found itself wondering about a possible Jordanian threat. In a secret meeting between King Hussein and Prime Minister Shamir, the two formulated understandings whereby Jordan would not allow operations against Israel from its soil.[30] In 1994, the Israel-Jordan peace treaty was signed and security cooperation between the countries was formalized. Today, Israel is primarily concerned with a risk to the stability of the Jordanian regime.

United States: The US is Israel's primary ally, and thus information about its policies and intentions (will the US attack Iran? how would the US react to an Israeli attack on Iran? will the US launch a new peace initiative?) is of extremely high importance. The two nations maintain close relations at all echelons (including decision makers, military and intelligence personnel) and a periodic strategic dialogue. An understanding of intelligence cooperation was arrived at already in 1951. It included a mutual commitment not to spy on one another, and it preceded the formulation of the strategic alliance between the two nations. However, there are issues about which the US is likely to conceal information from Israel, or have considerations that are not shared with the decision makers in Israel.[31] The issue of intelligence in the US is especially sensitive (the Pollard affair) and Israel avoids seeing the US as an intelligence target. However, subject to limitations, Israel's intelligence services gather information and undertake research about the US, primarily in the political field.[32]

The Palestinian Authority: Since the Oslo Accords in 1993, there has been a framework in place for security cooperation with the PA to fight terrorism. The PA was thus considered a partner, albeit problematic. The Palestinian arena was the focus of an Israeli intelligence effort during the peace negotiations, but there were gaps, such as information about the Palestinian security forces. The GSS relied on cooperation with the Palestinian security forces and reduced its independent intelligence gathering activities.[33] After the al-Aqsa Intifada broke out, the PA was defined as a target in the war on terrorism; security cooperation with the Palestinians was suspended, and the GSS once again established a massive

intelligence presence on the West Bank. In 2005, the cooperation with the Palestinian security forces was renewed and the latter won accolades for their anti-terrorist activities. However, the reconciliation agreement with Hamas and the Palestinian statehood bid in the United Nations have increased Israeli concerns that the Palestinians security forces will take a neutral stance in a confrontation and perhaps even turn into an enemy. According to one report, alongside preparations for popular protests, Military Intelligence, the GSS, and the civilian administration are busy identifying signs that would indicate the deterioration of relations between the PA and its institutions, on the one hand, and Israel and its security services, on the other. The question of intelligence gathering with regard to the Palestinian arena is quite complex: the very question of whether to define the PA as a partner or an enemy was hotly debated in the Israeli intelligence community and within the political echelons. Intelligence work with regard to the PA was also affected by the direct relations that Israeli intelligence personnel (especially in the GSS) and decision makers maintained with their Palestinian counterparts.[34]

Conclusion

Intelligence work quite rightly gives preference to "know your enemy" (warnings of war, terrorist attacks, the proliferation of non-conventional weapons) and will continue to devote most of its resources and attention to those potential threats. However, surprises on the part of allies can have strategic implications, so that "know your friend" is also imperative. Intelligence work with regard to allies is subject to certain limitations and encounters dilemmas that do not exist – or exist in less serious form – when it concerns the enemy (lower priority to critical data identification, limitations on intelligence gathering, political leaders maintaining direct contact with the leaders of the target nation, and so on.). In light of the upheaval in the Middle East, what has already occurred and what has yet to come, Israel's intelligence must be prepared not only to issue warnings and follow the state's enemies, but also to assess the changes likely to occur within allied nations, warn of the weakening of existing treaties, and note the possibility of creating new alliances and partnerships (with opposition elements requesting aid or with new regimes in the Arab world), while still examining the risks and limitations of such pacts. The first steps in improving intelligence regarding allies might be to

increase the intelligence community's awareness of the possibility of a surprise by an ally; demonstrate the challenges and dilemmas involved in intelligence work on an ally, and formulate ways of confronting them.

In the field of intelligence gathering, it is necessary to exhaust gathering capabilities and gathering from open sources, subject to the necessary limitations. In terms of research, it is necessary to strengthen the research response to the different types of surprises, and to enhance the warning system regarding intentional policy changes (breaking off relations, allies going to war against a third party). Military and political research must be improved, and the issue of regime change requires research about social and cultural depth processes (e.g., heightened religious fundamentalism) that could have political manifestations, the rise of new forces to power, the effect of new elements on foreign policy, and others.

As shown by international and Israeli experience, intelligence services have on more than one occasion failed to assess and predict enemy moves; intelligence is not a magic solution. However, wise use of intelligence may reduce the region's uncertainty and help Israel's political leadership manage the nation's strategic relations.

Notes

1   For information about the events in Egypt and Turkey and the sense of isolation experienced by Israel, see Amos Harel, "Intelligence Experts did not Predict the Severity of the Change," *Haaretz*, January 30, 2011, http://www. haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/1212218.html; Aluf Benn, "Oops, Revolution," *Haaretz*, February 18, 2011, http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/1215943. html; Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, "Isolation Deepens," *Haaretz*, September 16, 2011; Zvi Barel, "Erdoğan: Let's completely freeze security and commercial ties with Israel," *Haaretz*, September 7, 2011. For information about the future of relations with the US, see Nadav Ravid, "Robert Gates: Netanyahu is an ingrate and is endangering his country," *Haaretz*, September 7, 2011; Lior Hadar, "A New Treaty for Israel," *Haaretz*, December 29, 2010; Natasha Mozgovaya, "Report in the US: Israel has become a contentious topic," *Haaretz*, September 16, 2011.

2   A similar reference to Egypt is found in 2 Kings 18:21.

3   When the "Echelon" scandal broke, exposing America's global wiretapping system, and it became clear that the US was listening in on its allies, the head of the CIA, James Woolsey, admitted that the US had been spying on its European allies, claiming that it was because the latter used bribes in order to close deals and compete against American companies. Fred Kaplan,

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4   Martin S. Alexander, "Introduction: Knowing Your Friends, Assessing Your Allies − Perspectives on Intra-Alliance Intelligence," *Intelligence and National Security* 13, no.1 (1998): 1-17.

5   For information about the expansion of intelligence cooperation and intelligence alliance, see Adam D. M. Svendsen, "Connecting Intelligence and Theory: Intelligence Liaison and International Relations," *Intelligence and National Security* 24 no.5 (2009): 700-29; Richard J. Aldrich, "Dangerous Liaisons: Post-September 11 Intelligence Alliances," *Harvard International Review* (Fall 2002); Stephane Lefebvre, "The Difficulties and Dilemmas of International Intelligence Cooperation," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 16 (2003): 527-42.

6   For information about America's problematic allies, see Steven Metz, "Unruly Clients: The Trouble with Allies," *World Affairs*, March/April 2010.

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9   For a brief overview of the extensive literature dealing with intelligence failures and surprises, see Gustavo Diaz, "Methodological Approaches to the Concept of Intelligence Failure," *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, No. 7, January 2005, pp. 1-16, at http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/redalyc/pdf/767/76711286004. pdf.

10 When Churchill visited France in 1940 and received a report about the dire situation of the French army, which was on the verge of defeat, he wrote, "'I admit this was one of the greatest surprises I have had in my life. Why did I not know more about it?" Quoted by Alistair Horne, To Lose a Battle: France 1940 (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

11 The critical data identification by Israeli intelligence as determined during the tenure of Prime Minister Sharon included: a. providing early warning and intelligence about hostile activity and terrorism; b. providing early warning about war; c. providing early warning and intelligence about surface-to-surface missiles and non-conventional weapons. It was only later that two more objectives were added: d. the PA; e. regime stability. See Shlomo Gazit, *Between Warning and Surprise: On Shaping National Intelligence Assessment in Israel*, Memorandum No. 66 (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2003), pp. 23, 29-30. In light of the discussion over cuts to the defense budget, Alex Fishman reported: "In light of the events in the Arab world, the need to examine in-depth the arenas Israel in the past could afford to neglect, such as Egypt, Jordan, Iraq , and to an extent, Turkey, was also discussed. This involves an enormous investment, particularly in intelligence." See "Everything's PR," *Yediot Ahronot*, August 12, 2011.

12 In a May 1951 meeting between Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and the head of the CIA Walter Bedell Smith, it was agreed that there would be intelligence cooperation between Israel and the US, including the exchange of liaison officers and avoidance of mutual espionage. The following month the head of the Mossad, Reuven Shiloah, met with senior CIA personnel in order to formulate the details of the understanding. According to Yaniv, the agreement was signed; according to Melman and Raviv, relying on the testimony of Meir de Shalit, there were only unwritten understandings. See Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, *Imperfect Spies* (Tel Aviv: Maariv Press, 1990), pp. 73-77; Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, *Partners in Action* (Or Yehuda: Maariv Press, 1994), pp. 54, 59-66; Avner Yaniv, *Politics and Strategy in Israel* (Tel Aviv: Hapoalim Press, 1994), pp. 90-91, 409. On FBI claims of Israeli espionage, see Melman and Raviv, *Partners in Action*, pp. 64-65.

13 For information about Israeli intelligence activity with regard to Egypt since the peace agreement, see Alex Fishman, "Ho Southwards," *Yediot Ahronot*, March 4, 2011; Alex Fishman, "The Burning Desert," *Yediot Ahronot*, April 29, 2011. For analysis of the alleged spying in Egypt, see Boaz Bismut, "The Heir to the Shark," *Yisrael Hayom*, June 17, 2011, at http://www.israelhayom.co.il/ site/newsletter_article.php?id=11650.

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16 Roni Cohen, "Intelligence: The Islamic Revolution in Iran – a 30-Year Perspective," *Intelligence and Terrorism Information Overview* No. 54, September 2009, pp. 10-13. Uri Bar Yosef, "American Failure – Israeli Success," *Intelligence and Terrorism Information Overview* No. 59, April 2001, pp. 32-35. Eliezer (Geizie) Tzafrir, *Big Satan Little Satan* (Or Yehuda: Maariv Press, pp. 40-41, 64-70, 100-2). For information about the failure of American intelligence in Iran, see Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010, pp. 15-122).

17 Tzafrir, *Big Satan Little Satan*, pp. 55-57, 61-63, 89-91, 151.

18 See note 5. See also Ronen Bergman, "Targeted Assassination," *Yediot Ahronot*, June 6, 2008; and "In Her Majesty's Service," *Yediot Ahronot*, February 5, 2010.

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28 Fishman, "Ho Southwards"; and "The Burning Desert"; Benn, "Oops, Revolution."

29 The Mossad and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are responsible for intelligence research about Turkey from the political perspective. For Gilad's declaration, see Yael Abadi, "Turkey Never Included in Intelligence Coverage," *IDF Radio Website*, June 6, 2010, at http://glz.co.il/newsArticle.aspx?newsid=63485; Orah Koren, "Exports to Turkey in the Billions of Dollars at Risk," *TheMarker*, April 28, 2010; Orah Koren, "From Strategic Partnership to Just Another Customer," *TheMarker*, April 28, 2010, at http://www.themarker.com/misc/1.564931. Recently, Erdoğan hinted that Israel tapped the meeting between the head of Turkish intelligence and PKK

representatives and leaked the contents. "Erdoğan Hints Israel Tapped and Leaked Information," *Ynet*, September 17, 2011, at http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4123306,00.html.

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31 See note 12. For information about the complexity of the Israeli-American dialogue on the issue of the Iranian threat, see Ronen Bergman, "Nuclear Alienation," *Yediot Ahronot*, June 10, 2011; Chuck Freilich, "Speaking About The Unspeakable: U.S-Israeli Dialogue on Iran's Nuclear Program," *Policy Brief 77*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 2007.

32 Military Intelligence's Research Division has an American Desk; the Mossad and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also deal with research about the US. One can learn about the fields of research from an advertisement for a research assistant for American matters at the Center for Political Studies at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "In charge of following up on American foreign relations and policies, following up on developments on the internal American arena (political, economic and social, the mood, the media, and more)." Tender #00015342 for position of research assistant for American matters at the Civil Service website, www.civil-service.gov.il. In his memoirs, Uri Saguy, who served as head of Intelligence in 1991-95, reviewed the chief intelligence assessments of those years, which dealt with the US, especially in context of its involvement in the peace process. See Uri Saguy, *Lights in the Fog* (Tel Aviv: Miskal, 1998), pp. 152, 171-72, 177, 181-83, 229-30.

33 For information about security and intelligence cooperation with the Palestinians and the differences of opinion about it, see Matti Steinberg, *Facing their Fate* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Press and Hemed Books, 2008), pp. 391-92; Moshe Yaalon, *The Long Short Way* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Books, 2008), pp. 95, 129-33; Boaz Ganor, *The Maze of War on Terrorism* (Herzliya: Interdisciplinary Center 2003), pp. 58-61, 117-18, 258-59. On the collapse of the security cooperation and the return of the IDF and the GSS to the West Bank, see Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *The Seventh War* (Tel Aviv, 2004), pp. 325-28.

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American Intervention in Israeli Politics: Past Experience, Future Prospects

David A. Weinberg

Introduction

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Washington in May 2011 highlighted major gaps between the governments of America and Israel. It also provided renewed basis for speculation that President Barack Obama secretly hopes to unseat Netanyahu's right wing government. Such speculation was rampant during the first year of Obama's presidency, with some analysts arguing that US pressure over the settlements was partly an effort to remove Netanyahu from office or pressure him to bring the centrist Kadima Party into his coalition.[1] However, such talk died down once the US adopted a more conciliatory posture by the middle of 2010.[2]

One way to assess the potential for US intervention in Israeli politics at this time is to survey the historical record. In fact, such behavior has been a recurring feature of American policy toward Israel since the 1970s, although there has been little systematic consideration of it to date. This absence is especially striking given the extensive attention paid to efforts by Israel and pro-Israel lobbyists to influence American policies toward the region. What then does the historical record imply about possible US efforts to shape domestic politics inside Israel today? This essay draws upon newly declassified American archives and interviews with numerous experts to address this gap.

The following article seeks to build a general theory of partisan intervention by the United States into Israeli politics in the effort to

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strengthen certain individuals or parties over others. It first defines and contextualizes the subject matter of partisan intervention by presenting a broad range of examples of such intervention – by Israel, other governments, and the United States. The article provides extensive documentation for cases of US intervention into Israeli politics over the years. It then builds a theoretical model that focuses on the role and beliefs of the president to explain whether such intervention is likely to occur. The article also explains why certain features of partisan intervention make it distinct from other areas of the US-Israel relationship in which American domestic forces – including Congress, lobbyists, and organizational interests of the bureaucracy – tend to wield more influence.

Contextualizing Partisan Intervention

Does partisan intervention happen? Absolutely. A nation's foreign policy is frequently geared toward influencing the behavior of other governments, and officials sometimes decide that the most promising route for producing particular effects winds through another government's domestic politics. Although this practice may appear to be a violation of national sovereignty, deviations from the principle of sovereignty are par for the course in international relations.[3]

Israel itself engages in this sort of intervention, for instance in trying to build up favorable interlocutors among the Palestinians. The practice is so deeply seated that it precedes the State of Israel's independence, going back to the pre-state days of the *yishuv*.[4] Years later, Labor Party governments sought to cultivate Palestinian partners through municipal elections in the territories in 1972 and 1976, and Likud subsequently sought to do the same by displacing those municipal bodies with more pliable village leagues.[5] In the mid 1980s both sides of Israel's national unity government cooperated to build up Jordanian influence in the West Bank.[6] Ehud Olmert's government scrambled to support Fatah leaders such as Salam Fayyad and Abu Mazen in the aftermath of the 2007 Hamas coup in Gaza.

Nor is the United States the only nation to pursue such a policy toward Israel. French President Mitterrand tried to bolster his friend Shimon Peres during Israeli elections in 1981[7] and 1988.[8] As prime minister of the UK, Tony Blair sought to boost the Israeli Labor Party in 1999[9] and 2003.[10] Egyptian officials tried to affect the outcome of Israeli elections

in 1981,[11] 1988,[12] and 1999,[13] as did Jordan in 1988[14] and 1996.[15] At least twice these Arab states even endorsed Likud candidates for the post of prime minister: Sadat backed Begin in 1981 and King Hussein supported Netanyahu in 1996.

Dramatic Cases of US Intervention

Consider the Israeli election of 1996. President Clinton believed that a Likud victory would destroy the peace process and panicked once Labor lost its early lead due to Hamas suicide bombings in February and March.[16] Clinton's team helped organize a thirty-nation summit at Sharm el-Sheikh to pledge support against terrorism and to join hands for a memorable photo opportunity with candidate Peres.[17] According to one Clinton aide, bolstering Peres was "the be all and end all" of that conference.[18] Clinton then took Peres back to Israel on Air Force One to address pro-peace rallies together and pledged new US aid when Peres soon thereafter came to Washington. The White House was in regular contact with the Peres campaign staff, and they coordinated their public messages to maximize joint political impact.

Another dramatic example was President George H. W. Bush's use of housing loan guarantees (HLGs) to force Likud from power in 1992. Conservative Israeli leaders and some historians have long asserted that this was the Bush administration's goal, and while they were hard pressed to produce concrete proof,[19] this was certainly the case. First, US memos demonstrate that Secretary of State James Baker explicitly urged Israel's Arab interlocutors to keep the post-Madrid negotiation process going so it would bolster the peace camp in Israel's upcoming election.[20] Second, the administration consciously kept Jerusalem out of calls for a settlement freeze for fear they would "kill Rabin" by including it.[21] Third, a former National Security Council official from that period recently acknowledged on the record that Bush and his NSC advisors felt "we had to get rid of him [Shamir]. And [we] consciously devised a strategy using the housing loan process…this was very much thought through that this will impact Israeli public opinion. We [were] tilting against Shamir."[22]

The United States also worked to oust Netanyahu after his first term in office. It floated vague public threats that US aid pledged through the Wye Accords would be withdrawn if the Prime Minister, who had reneged on his side of the deal, was reelected.[23] The administration worked hard to

persuade Arafat to postpone a Palestinian declaration of independence that had been scheduled before the vote, and at least one of Ehud Barak's foreign campaign advisors assisted him in Israel at the (informal) request of the president of the United States.[24]

Contrasting Patterns

Not all American efforts to shape Israeli politics fit these particular trends. First, many examples are much less dramatic. After the 1982 Lebanon War, Ariel Sharon became persona non grata in Washington for at least a decade, and US officials frequently adjusted their policies to ensure none of their actions might unintentionally benefit him.[25] The Bush White House searched in 1989 for ways it could "help bolster Rabin's position within Israel," especially within the Israeli Cabinet.[26] George W. Bush's letter to Sharon on settlement blocs was solicited by Sharon himself to strengthen his hand in the Cabinet on disengagement,[27] and Bush's visit to Israel right after the Annapolis Conference may have been a bid to bolster Olmert before the Winograd Report was released.[28]

Second, American presidents have not always gone to bat for the Labor Party, despite their typical aversion to the Israeli right wing.[29] Reagan advisor Howard Teicher writes that America's decision in 1983 to release technology-transfer licenses for the Lavi aircraft project was designed to strengthen Moshe Arens against Shamir and Levy within the Likud Party.[30] George W. Bush's gestures of support to Sharon and Olmert suggest that although US support was not Likud-directed in the past decade, neither was it directed at reviving Labor. Jimmy Carter once told the NSC that if he were Israeli he would probably vote for Yigael Yadin's Democratic Movement for Change in protest of Labor hegemony.[31]

Third, it is important to recognize that the US does not pursue evenly what might be considered equivalent opportunities to intervene. Major distractions sometimes preclude otherwise likely interventions. The Monica Lewinsky scandal probably blocked American efforts to undermine Netanyahu as early as Clinton would have liked.[32] Regional wars in 1983-84 and 1990-91 led the US to minimize interference in Israeli politics despite severe frustration with Likud.[33] Carter's single-minded focus on pushing the peace process led him to accidentally hurt Yitzhak Rabin at the polls, instead of helping him against his rival Menachem Begin.[34]

Could it Happen Today?

Skeptics might argue that partisan intervention by the United States is unlikely now because America is entering a presidential election year. Indeed, there is a longstanding notion that US presidents retreat from the Middle East peace process and are unwilling to pressure Israel during such periods.[35] However, this trend should be taken with a grain of salt: sometimes election years have less of an impact or even the opposite effect if the president feels personally concerned about his legacy in the region.[36]

Presidential elections did little to prevent US activity on the peace process in 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, or 2008, nor did they preclude major efforts to influence Israeli politics. Even though 2000 was a presidential election year, Bill Clinton engaged in a campaign to carefully frame and publicize the proceedings at Camp David to prevent PM Ehud Barak's pro-peace government from collapsing.[37] His efforts to highlight Barak's bravery and Arafat's obstinacy − though not necessarily inaccurate in important regards − were aimed at Israeli politics and took place in the midst of the Democratic and Republican Party conventions in 2000. Nor are such efforts exclusively the province of lame duck presidents at the end of their second terms. Clinton backed Peres during the year he himself stood for reelection, and George H. W. Bush fought what his team knew would be an "AWACs plus fight" over loan guarantees while preparing to run again.[38]

Nor will a Republican majority in the House of Representatives necessarily dissuade a Democratic president who cares strongly about this issue.[39] Periods of divided government do not seem to stop presidential attempts to influence Israeli politics. Before Obama, the only periods in the last three decades when the US was not divided in this manner actually witnessed a lower rate of such attempts.[40] Also, the low rates of American attempts during Reagan's presidency cannot be causally traced back to divided government despite the chronological overlap. Nor did divided government reduce the willingness of presidents to pursue large scale involvement in 1992, 1996, 1999, or 2000/1. If anything, Netanyahu's efforts to turn a Republican-controlled Congress against the Clinton White House may have reinforced the president's aggravation and his desire to have Netanyahu replaced.[41]

Why Presidents Still Matter

Obviously, American domestic politics play a major part determining Washington's overall approach to Israel. However, compared to other topics such as arms sales or overall levels of aid, this specific issue area – conscious efforts to influence Israeli politics – is one in which presidential preferences matter more than usual. This pattern can be attributed to the extraordinarily controversial nature of the topic. If conducted in the open, partisan intervention would no doubt backfire, at home and in Israel. Thus, leaders still pursue these objectives but in a manner designed to minimize the risks of exposure from leaks. They tend to avoid formal decision making channels, operating on a strict need-to-know basis and issuing verbal orders instead of written directives.

Because these efforts cannot take place through formal channels, it becomes difficult for bureaucrats to build winning coalitions across the government to initiate this policy of their own accord, even if they do have strong preferences about Israeli politics and the peace process. Nor can they block such efforts because they are left in the dark about the president's true intentions. For instance, even though the top official in the State Department's Near Eastern Affairs bureau working full time on the peace process suspected Bush was trying to push Shamir out in 1992, he acknowledges that he never once saw anything tangible to prove it.[42]

Under such restrictive circumstances, the only way officials can approve this kind of policy is if they are senior enough to dispense with formal procedure, limiting the pool to the president and his most trusted aides. And because presidents typically must not only approve but also initiate the effort, they thrust themselves into these situations on the basis of high resolve. This makes it quite difficult for Congress to block the president when he does seek to shape Israeli politics. Members of Congress rarely notice the president's smaller scale efforts to affect the internal balance of power in Israeli Cabinets, and they are often deterred from fighting the executive over more drastic interventions because he signals to them his determination and willingness to pursue such a fight.

For instance, President Bush the elder used exactly this approach in his efforts to squeeze Shamir out of office. Bush was informed that by linking the loan guarantees to a settlement freeze he would stir up a major domestic controversy. However, he persuaded Congress to back down in disputes over the HLGs in September 1991 and again in March 1992.

Both in public and in private, he threatened members of Congress with a drawn-out fight in which if necessary he would paint them as enemies of peace.[43] Indeed, the administration's legislative strategy was premised on getting out in front of Congressional leadership and pressuring them to avoid this fight.[44]

Presidential Factors

To estimate the chances of American involvement in Israeli politics, one must give special consideration to certain features of the president himself. Presidents are predisposed to undertake partisan intervention toward Israel at higher rates under two background conditions: when they believe that the peace process is of high priority among US interests, and when they have a hands-on managerial style. Both reasons help explain why efforts to shape Israeli politics were less frequent under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. Both were noted for their ambivalent attitudes toward the peace process as well as their detached approach to making decisions within their administrations.[45]

President Obama clearly differs from Bush and Reagan in his longstanding concern that the US should be "constantly present, constantly engaged" in the peace process because resolving it is "a vital national security interest" for America.[46] On the other hand, his decision making style seems to be a contrary factor. His managerial approach as president has surprised many of his early supporters as surprisingly detached, including on other priority issues such as health care.[47] Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently suggested that President Obama's decision to appoint his close advisor Daniel Shapiro as the current ambassador to Israel demonstrates a "personal commitment" to the Israel file, as could the news that Obama is planning a personal visit to Israel sometime soon.[48] Then again, recent reports that his administration is pursuing a "tactical withdrawal" from the peace process suggest that Obama's aloof style could do more to keep him from pursuing a partisan intervention in Israel than American domestic politics would.[49]

Certain features of how the president interprets the immediate situation also matter for evaluating whether American partisan intervention is likely. Presidents only get involved in Israeli politics when they conclude – rightly or wrongly – that an impending Israeli political contest will be close enough that the outcome can be influenced. This

may be one of the reasons why the United States shelved hopes of undermining Netanyahu's government after Obama's first year in office, since Israel's new coalition government has been perceived to be quite stable.[50] Similarly, America's strong desire to support the Labor Party throughout the 1990s gave way to relative indifference since the party has become increasingly unable to challenge – let alone overtake – the leading candidates for prime minister.

The final relevant factor is whether the president believes American interests are affected by Israel's specific current leadership struggle. Often this factor boils down to whether he thinks Likud can be a genuine partner for peace. It may explain President Carter's surprising disinterest in trying to push Menachem Begin out of office because of his faith in Begin's genuine desire to reach an agreement. Similarly, in 1989 Washington was intrigued enough by the so-called Shamir plan that it pushed Labor politicians to keep a Likud-led coalition together, not tear it apart.[51] However, by 1992 Bush and his team had rejected the idea that Shamir would be willing to move forward with the process, and Bush even took to calling Shamir "that little shit" behind closed doors.[52]

In this regard, a report of a few months ago should be setting off alarm bells at the Prime Minister's bureau in Jerusalem. During Netanyahu's May visit to Washington, the *New York Times* revealed, "President Obama has told aides and allies that he does not believe Mr. Netanyahu will ever be willing to make the kind of big concessions that will lead to a peace deal."[53] If this reporting is accurate, it may be the clearest signal that US intervention could be in the offing once an electoral contest emerges in Israel. Unless Netanyahu wants to gamble his government's future on the hope that Obama will be aloof on this issue, he may want to seriously consider ways to change Obama's assessment of him before Israeli elections are called.

The scheduling of elections in Israel was a crucial turning point for US policy the last time Netanyahu was voted out of office. The Clinton administration quickly switched modes from trying to work with the prime minister to trying to topple him once new Israeli elections were called. Nearly overnight, orders came down from the White House to cancel negotiations over restructuring US aid in a manner that would have boosted benefits to Israel, for fear Netanyahu could point to successful talks as a sign that bilateral relations were on an even keel.[54]

Conclusion

An important variable will be the diplomatic struggle begun in September at the United Nations and the recent Israeli-Palestinian prisoner swap. If these events ultimately create greater pressure on the administration to advance Palestinian aspirations and the Fatah-led PLO, it could feed into Obama's predisposition to pressure Netanyahu and provide him the pretext for doing so. Alternatively, these events could escalate into violence between the parties and a major resurgence of Hamas. This would likely strengthen the position of the Prime Minister's government and dissuade Washington from trying to influence Israeli politics in 2012.

Some may argue that any effort by President Obama to become involved in Israeli politics could only work to Likud's advantage because he is not trusted by the Israeli public. No doubt President Clinton's efforts to outmaneuver Netanyahu in his first term were aided by Clinton's extraordinary popularity in Israel. However, George H. W. Bush – not exactly beloved by Israelis – was similarly able to contribute to Shamir's downfall in 1992. This should serve as a cautionary tale for the current Israeli government. While it is certainly true that Obama is less popular in Israel than some of his predecessors, putting confidence in such arguments could be foolhardy.

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29 Even President Reagan preferred Labor to Likud; author interview with US Ambassador to Israel Thomas Pickering, April 9, 2011.

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