MERIA

AN EXCHANGE ON ISRAEL'S SECURITY DOCTRINE

Editor's Note: In the Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal, Vol. 5, No. 3 (September 2001) appeared David Rodman's article, "Israel's National Security Doctrine: An Introductory Overview." [http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2001/issue3/jv5n3a6.html]. In this exchange, Stuart Cohen raises additonal issues on this subject and the author, David Rodman, responds.

DAVID RODMAN'S "ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE": SOME SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS
By Stuart A. Cohen*

David Rodman's "Israel's National Security Doctrine: An Introductory Overview" (MERIA Journal, Volume 5, Number 3, September 2001) is an admirable exercise in condensation. Based on extensive reading, not only does it present a succinct overview of the major principles that have undergirded the history of Israel's strategic behavior. It also presents an analytical synopsis of the major stages in that history.

For all these reasons, it commands attention and deserves a wide audience. Precisely because of its many qualities, however, it also warrants review and suggestions for modification. The following remarks are offered in that spirit. They do not seek to quibble with details of Rodman's analysis. Rather, they aim to present a somewhat different focus on some of its major tenets.

For purposes of presentation, I have arranged my remarks under two headings:
1. Missed opportunities
2. Missing categories

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES
Under this heading I list some of the issues that Rodman's own analysis might have been expected to lead him to discuss, and that do not seem to me to receive due attention in his text. The reasons, I suggest, do not lie solely in lack of space (although the need to keep the article concise is certainly apparent). Rather, they seem to reflect a wish to sustain an

analytical structure that, in fact, is insufficiently discreet to encompass the multiplicity of themes that the article discusses.

At the heart of Rodman's article lies a description and analysis of what he defines as eight "basic security concepts" that have, in his words, together "clearly driven Israeli thinking and conduct over the course of the state's existence." These he lists "in no particular order" as: geography; manpower; quantity versus quality; offensive maneuver warfare; deterrence; conventional versus unconventional threats; self-reliance; and great-power patronage.

This, surely, is too mixed a bag of categories to be thus indiscriminately lumped together.

For one thing, the order of their appearance, *should be* of importance – at the very least, their ranking might provide an indication of the relative importance that the author considers to have been attached to each of these "concepts" at different points in time. It might also allow for an examination of the fluctuations in their degree of mutual reinforcement. As matters stand, Rodman's higgeldy-piggeldy style precludes either issue from being explored. Take, for instance, the first of his concepts, "geography" (for which, by the way, a better term – and one more current in Israel's own strategic parlance - is "absence of strategic depth").(1) As Rodman himself points out, the salience of this

"concept" has not been constant in Israeli strategic thought. In some periods, and against some classes of enemies, it was thought to have dictated "offensive maneuver warfare"; at other times, and against other foes, it was considered to mandate "deterrence" (on which more below). The task of the analyst is surely to account for these fluctuations, and to construct some framework for their interpretation. Sadly, Rodman failed to take advantage of the opportunity to show – however briefly – how this might be done.

Other missed opportunities – all the more frustrating because Rodman has clearly mastered the necessary data – seem to be the result of some conceptual confusion. Rodman applies the generic term "concepts" to the eight security topics that he discusses. But this term is misleading, since it obscures the basic distinction between those categories in his list that have always been considered security "constraints" and those that are better defined as "responses". Under the first rubric come the conditions arising from Israel's smallness (in size, population, economic resources, etc.), conditions that the vast majority of Israel's security community have always considered to be permanent operating factors, over which they can themselves wield very little influence at all.(2) But these have to be analytically distinguished from other "concepts", that encapsulate the strategic solutions that the same community has offered to the problems thus identified. The IDF's traditional preference for military "preemption", for "taking the fight to the enemy's territory", and for "self-reliance"(for instance) constitute deliberately chosen responses, selected from a wider range of possible options. Much the same is true of the political insistence on "great power patronage" and on swift results on the field of battle.(3) Thus to object to the use of the generic "concepts", and to insist on a distinction between "constraints" and "responses", is not merely to quibble over semantic niceties. Only once we recognize some of the "concepts" in Rodman's list to be no more than preferred responses to perceived constraints can we appreciate why, in practice, their application has been fairly selective. A taxonomy of Israel's uses of force indeed reveals a remarkably wide spectrum of force applications.(4) The reasons are not difficult to discern. The vast majority of those who have formulated and implemented Israel's national security doctrine (there have been a couple of exceptions) have been pragmatists, above all else.(5) Although they certainly favored certain forms and postures of strategic conduct, very rarely did they allow those preferences to automatically dictate their behavior.

Once again, by failing to recognize the prevalence of the pragmatic strain in Israeli strategic thought and behavior Rodman has missed an opportunity to explore its consequences, positive and negative alike. These certainly deserve mention. Very briefly, the most obvious advantage of the traditionally pragmatic Israeli mind-set on security affairs lies in the large measure of flexibility that it has granted to the country's national security behavior. One of its most blatant disadvantages, on the other hand, is that it has dissuaded (perhaps even precluded) most attempts to formulate anything like a coherent and cohensive national security doctrine that might be subjected to periodic and constitutionally authorized review. Altogether, in fact, the formulation of Israeli national security policies has tended to be a haphazard affair.(6) It has always owed more to the random predilections of individual political leaders and generals than to a systematic process of reasoned analysis. David Ben Gurion did make some stabs at sketching a national security strategy which integrated political and military elements (indeed, it was he who introduced such concepts as "deterrence" and "lack of strategic depth" into the Israeli security lexicon). But the exercise was never formalized. More important, no institutional framework was established in order to facilitate its repetition. Rodman fails to remind us of a fact that other observers have long considered to be critical: the absence of a truly powerful and well-entrenched national security council that might look beyond quotidian pressures and develop a coherent long-term strategy, based upon a detailed assessment and categorization of many of the

same notions that Rodman lists as "concepts".(7)

Undoubtedly the most serious casualty of this situation has been the IDF. This is somewhat ironic, since it was the IDF which for many years lead the opposition to the establishment of a national security council, and which has been largely responsible for the fact that the body that was eventually established in 1999 has never exercised very much real influence. Retrospect suggests this to have been a very short-sighted policy. Bereft of clear strategic guidelines, formally thrashed out during the course of periodic dialogues between exponents of different points of view in both the civilian and military elites, Israel's generals have, in intellectual terms, tended to live from hand to mouth. Instead of attempting to conceptualize the principles underlying their mission statements, they have invariably resorted to variations on the shoulder-shrugging theme of *ein bereirah* ("we have no choice"). Indeed, there is a strong case to be made for including that phrase in any check-list of Israeli strategic concepts/principles – and not very far from the top of the pile at that.

MISSING CATEGORIES

For all its comprehensiveness, Rodman's introductory survey is in some respects curiously incomplete. It certainly touches the main points, but sometimes does so in a manner that hardly does justice to the richness of their nuances. Again, the need to keep the article short must certainly bear some responsibility for this feature. But that constraint seems also to have been compounded by what seems to have been the rigidity of the author's own framework of analysis.

One example of the resultant failure to explore certain subjects in sufficient depth ("missing categories") is provided by Rodman's analysis of deterrence. He is absolutely correct to identify this as a central concept in Israel's military doctrine, and he does a fine job in providing examples of some of its manifestations. Even so, the reader is left with a wish that the author had been a little more forthcoming. As we all know, "deterrence" is itself an umbrella term, that can be sub-divided into "deterrence by denial" and

"deterrence by punishment". Many years ago, the late Avner Yaniv sought to explore Israeli applications of both of these forms, showing how their use has fluctuated over time.(8) More recently, Efraim Inbar and Shemuel Sandler have suggested that Israeli "deterrence", in both its manifestations, has suffered erosion.(9) At the very least, one would have wished for Rodman to refer to these studies, and then to suggest how their results they might be synthesised with the other "concepts" in his list, thus demonstrating their interaction.

Societal considerations constitute another, and somewhat different, example of a missing category. Certainly, Rodman is sensitive to the importance that these factors have always played in Israeli security thought – as both "constraints" and "responses". Yet, at no point in his analysis does Rodman make explicit reference to what Michael Howard long ago referred to as "the societal dimension" of strategy.(10) Instead, he largely restricts his analysis of the influence exerted on Israel's military doctrines by the size and composition of her population to his sections on "manpower" and on "quantity versus quality". This is a pity, because by thus seeming to relegate societal factors to the status of a dependent and subsidiary variable, he appears to overlook one of the most important independent components of Israeli security thought, and one in which the extent of recent change has been particularly marked.

In this respect, too, the obvious deserves brief re-statement. Despite multiple signs that the IDF is set on a course towards inevitable professionalization,(11) the Force continues to adhere to a system of military service which still rests on the twin principles of universal conscription (for Jewish females as well as males) and of mandatory reserve duty. This militia framework does much to buttress the traditional image of the IDF as a "people's army"; it also helps to sustain the overall character of Israeli-Jewish society as a "nation in arms". However, and as observers have been pointing out for over a decade now, notwithstanding that surface impression of apparent structural resilience and cultural continuity, domestic affinity with the IDF no longer constitutes so prominent a feature of Israel's strategic landscape.(12) Instead,

military service, once a core component of Israel's overall "civil religion", is in many quarters now being marginalized. Likewise, public esteem for the Force as a whole is steadily eroding. Once the darling of the press, the military is now the object of criticisms by an increasingly intrusive media, which delights in publishing sensationalist exposes of mismanagement, corruption and – sometimes – sheer incompetence at every level of command. That process has been paralleled by other manifestations of a similarly unprecedented nature: the increasing readiness of the law courts to intrude upon areas previously considered to be the military's exclusive preserve; a growing tolerance towards "conscientious objection" to military service (by both the right and the left of the political spectrum); friction between senior military echelons and the political elite; and – most dramatic of all – clear indications that society at large might no longer be prepared to sustain the risks and burdens which a state of war necessarily entails.(13)

Precisely why such phenomena might be occurring is a topic that occasions lively debate.(14) In the present context, more important are their consequences. Rodman himself provides a clue towards the very end of his article, where he suggests that the term "post-heroic" (which he cites Eliot Cohen as applying to the contemporary phase of Israel's development in general) might now be specifically applied to her national security doctrine. Unfortunately, however, he has not taken this insight to its logical conclusion – and refrains from asking how it might have affected and informed many of the "concepts" he has earlier itemized.

Take, for instance, the IDF's recent apparent shifts to a preference for fire-power over maneuverability, and hence for stand-off weapons rather than for direct infantry action. To suggest that these shifts (that Rodman identifies in his discussion on "Offensive Maneuver Warfare") have been almost entirely influenced by technological developments is, surely, to tell only part of the story. Analysis indicates that they have equally (at least), been generated by societal pressures, of which undoubtedly the most influential has been the overriding imperative to reduce Israel's own military casualties to a minimum.(15) The same considerations, it ought to be noted, seem also to constitute primary engines of change in two other spheres of military conduct: force deployments (in particular, the relatively limited use of combat reservists in both the final stages of the Lebanon campaign and in the first year of the 'al-Aktza' intifada) and force compositions (notably, the movement towards the incremental professionalization of the IDF and its modernization). It remains to be seen precisely how these processes might in turn mandate re-adjustments to other elements of Israel's traditional military behavior. What is already apparent, however, is that the need to assess anew the precise calibration of the multiple components of the country's national security doctrine now constitutes one of Israel's primary strategic challenges.

As Rodman points out in his concluding paragraphs, Israel's national security doctrine is certainly experiencing a period of flux. Only in part, however, can that situation be attributed to the fundamental changes taking place in the overall geo-strategic situation (at both the regional and global levels) and, perhaps no less drastically, in the technological-military environment. Equally important are the pressures exerted by domestic cultural changes – whose roots lie deep in the transformations in structure, composition and values now being experienced (at various paces and in different ways) by individual segments of Israeli society. Rodman is probably correct in concluding that "If the past is any guide to the future… Israel's national security doctrine will contain solutions that prove up to the task of defending the state's survival." But the growing prominence of societal considerations as a factor of strategic-military importance requires policy-makers and analysts to develop new conceptual frameworks that are appropriate to the task at hand. Useful though check-lists of the old principles undoubtedly are, they cannot serve as substitutes for innovative modes of thought and behavior.

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NOTES

1. See Aaron Yariv, "Strategic Depth – An Israeli View" (Hebrew), *Ma'archot* [IDF journal], 270-1 (October 1979), pp. 21-25.

2. Israel Tal, *National Security: The Israeli Experience* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000).

3. The distinction here outlined specific in Ariel Levite, *Offense and Defense in Israeli Military Doctrine* (Tel-Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1989), a work that Rodman does cite in other contexts.

4. Stuart A. Cohen & Efraim Inbar, "A Taxonomy of Israel's Use of Force", *Comparative Strategy*, 10/2 (April 1991): 121-38.

5. This, indeed, is one of the principle conclusions to emerge from Efraim Inbar, *Rabin and Israel's National Security* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

6. Yehuda Ben-Meir, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

7. The formation in Israel of an agency akin to the USA's National Security Council was advocated as long ago as 1974 by the Agranat Commission, that investigated Israel's military failures prior to the Yom Kippur War and during its early stages. Opposition on the part of the IDF and successive Ministers of Defense obstructed this initiative until 1999. Even thereafter, resistance remained powerful enough to emasculate the skeleton body which was then established.

8. Avner Yaniv, "Deterrence and Defense in Israeli Strategy" (Hebrew), *Medinah, Mimshal ve-Yahasim Beinle'umiyim*, 24 (summer 1985), pp. 27-62.

9. Efraim Inbar and Shemuel Sandler, "Israel's Deterrence Strategy Reconsidered", *Security Studies*, 3 (winter 1993/4).

10. Michael Howard, "The Forgotten Dimension of Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, 57/5 (summer 1979), pp. 975-86

11. Reuven Gal & Stuart A. Cohen, "Israel: Still Waiting in the Wings," *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War*, edited by Charles Moskos, John Allen Williams & David R. Segal (New York: OUP, 2000), pp. 224-241.

12. Moshe Lissak & Dan Horowitz, *Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 36-239.

13. Asher Arian, *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2001* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, memorandum no. 60, August 2001), p. 38.

14. One school of thought stresses essentially indigenous causes, such as Israeli society's "war weariness", itself sometimes thought to be engendered by the corrosive experience of the IDF's protracted occupation of the areas conquered in 1967. Another paints a wider canvass, depicting events in Israel as a local expression of currents affecting the tone of civil-military relations throughout the western democratic world. See: Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Civil-Military Relations in Israel in the mid-1990's," *Independence: The First Fifty Years*, edited by Anita Shapira (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1998), pp. 471-486.

15. S.A. Cohen, "Changing societal-military relations in Israel: The operational implications," *Contemporary Security Policy*, 21/3 (December 2000), pp. 116-138.

A REPLY TO STUART COHEN
By David Rodman**

I'd like to thank Stuart Cohen for his stimulating critique of my article. Let me begin by saying that, with respect to his two broad charges, I freely acknowledge my guilt. Unquestionably, the article is not the last word on Israel's national security doctrine either descriptively or analytically. But, in my own defense, it isn't meant to be. The purpose of the article is simply to provide a thought-provoking overview of that doctrine by

describing and assessing what I consider to be its bedrock components.

Furthermore, any framework for breaking down an exceedingly complex whole into more manageable parts for purposes of description and analysis is bound to oversimplify that whole in one way or another. Any framework that Cohen might devise to replace mine could not escape this criticism, though I will certainly concede that, because he is more of an expert on the subject than I am, he may be able to come up with one that promises a more thorough and compelling description and analysis of Israel's national security doctrine.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

These introductory remarks aside, let me now try to respond to Cohen's specific methodological and substantive criticisms, beginning with "Missed Opportunities." For starters, I'm not convinced that it's really possible to arrange the different components of Israel's national security doctrine in some general order of importance. Taking the state's entire history into account, can it really be persuasively argued that territorial considerations have had more of an impact on its national security doctrine than, say, manpower or diplomatic considerations? To my mind, all of the components mentioned in my article have been vital to shaping that doctrine over the course of the state's existence.

While it is true that some components have had a greater impact than others at discrete points in time—for example, the rise of unconventional threats, particularly the one posed by weapons of mass destruction, has become more acute over the past two decades—it would be necessary to split up Israel's national security doctrine by historical periods to determine which components were more important and which less important at any given point in the state's existence. Rather than a adopt a purely chronological approach, however, I chose a thematic one that not only separates out the different components of the doctrine, but also assesses them over time in terms of the conventional versus unconventional warfare distinction. It's my belief that this method of organization offers greater insight into the components of Israel's national security doctrine, as well as into the links among them, than a strictly chronological approach.

With respect to Cohen's comments about terminology, he's absolutely right— "constraints" and "responses" are more precise and evocative than "concepts," which is admittedly somewhat vague. Still, his comments notwithstanding, I do feel that his quibble is largely about a semantic issue. In my discussions of geography, manpower, quantity versus quality, etc., I do indicate the various "constraints" under which Israel has operated at different times, and I also point out its various "responses" at these times.

Finally, before moving on to "Missing Categories," let me finish with a brief substantive comment about "pragmatism" versus "strategic planning." I certainly did not intend to suggest that Israel's national security doctrine has been anything other than a set of pragmatic responses to the constraints under which the state has had to operate. I completely agree with Cohen on this issue. I disagree with him (and others), however, that a lack of strategic planning has undoubtedly harmed the state's national security. First, as I'm sure Cohen would agree, Israel has done a rather remarkable job of protecting its national security over the last half century. Not only has it grown from a weak and impoverished state into a strong and prosperous one, but it has also transformed itself into a regional superpower and, by global standards, a medium power on par with certain European states—all without the benefit of an integrated "grand strategy."

Second, while I surely do not want to leave the impression that strategic planning is a bad thing, it is not necessarily a recipe for success. Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union are two cases in point. Both articulated coherent grand strategies, yet both ended up in the dustbin of history in a short span of time. True enough, Israel has made mistakes in the past; but there's no guarantee that it would be in a better place today if its national security doctrine had been guided by an integrated grand strategy instead of *ad hoc* solutions.

MISSING CATEGORES

Before I respond to Cohen's comments on missing components of Israel's national security doctrine, I want to mention briefly one that both of us overlooked, as it arguably should have been incorporated into my article. That is, Israel's policies vis-à-vis non-Arab states and dissident ethnic/religious groups in the Middle East. With respect to the former, Israel has adopted what has come to be known as its "periphery" policy. It has, in other words, aligned with non-Arab states, such as Turkey and Iran, at different times in its history, based on common national security interests. Israel's past strategic relationship with the Shah's Iran and its current relationship with Turkey are well known, and need no elaboration here.(1) Suffice it to say that both relationships have brought strategic benefits to Israel and its partners.

With respect to the latter, which has seen Israel provide assistance over the years to groups as varied as the Kurds of Iraq, the Africans of Sudan, and the Christians of Lebanon, the results have been far less encouraging. Indeed, one respected scholar has unambiguously asserted that Israeli "intervention" in intra-Arab affairs has never enhanced the state's national security. In the case of Lebanon, he continues, it actually harmed national security to a significant extent.(2) Perhaps this line of reasoning explains Israel's reticence of late in supporting such ethnic/religious groups.

Regarding the concept of deterrence, I chose to look at it in terms of the common Israeli distinction between general and specific, because I thought that this frame of reference would resonate with the article's audience. Given that the concept of deterrence covers a very broad spectrum of conduct, one can also, of course, examine Israeli behavior in light of the more academic ideas of "deterrence by denial"—that is, the ability to stop an opponent from initiating an action that it would otherwise undertake by defensive measures—and "deterrence by punishment"—that is, the ability to prevent an opponent from initiating an action that it would otherwise undertake not by being able to defend against the action itself, but rather by being able to impose unacceptable costs through a retaliatory strike.

I would argue that Efraim Inbar and Shmuel Sandler are correct in asserting that Israel's deterrent posture in both areas has declined over time insofar as low-intensity conflict is concerned. As a result of the Oslo peace process, after all, Israel permitted what has now mutated into a terrorist army to be created and encamped on its eastern and southern borders, losing its previous ability to deny this territory to its Palestinian enemy. Moreover, the application of heavy retaliatory blows has not had the same "sobering" effect on terrorist groups in the past decade that it had in previous decades. On the other hand, in the realms of full-scale warfare and weapons of mass destruction warfare, I'm not convinced that Israeli deterrence by denial or deterrence by punishment has actually eroded of late. No Arab army has initiated a full-scale war against the IDF since 1973. And no Arab state has dared to attack Israel with weapons of mass destruction. Even though Iraq launched ballistic missiles at Israel in the 1991 Gulf War, it refrained from arming these missiles with non-conventional warheads.

Finally, I'll wind up my reply to Cohen with a few words about the impact of societal changes on Israel's national security doctrine, a subject of special interest to him. I agree with Cohen that society constitutes an important variable; however, I made only fleeting and hesitant references to this variable because, in my opinion, it's too early to make any definitive statements about its long-term impact on Israel's national security doctrine. For most of the state's history, society has been a constant—the Israeli public has essentially made whatever sacrifices the state has asked of it. To be sure, rumblings of dissent began to be heard in the wake of the 1973 War, and these voices picked up strength during the 1982 Lebanon War. Nevertheless, only in the last decade have the trends that Cohen cogently outlines—the increased distance between society and the IDF, the decreased willingness of influential segments of the population to serve in the military, the IDF's changed force structure, and so on—become very noticeable. Moreover, some (if not all) of these trends

may be reversed by the events of the current Israeli-Palestinian low-intensity conflict, which has clearly opened the eyes of even the most dovish members of Israeli society. Therefore, even though I largely endorse, for the moment, Cohen's view of the evolving impact of societal changes on Israel's national security doctrine, I still think that caution is indicated in drawing conclusions in this area. The future may well hold some surprises.

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1. For a thorough review of the Israeli-Iranian relationship see Samuel Segev, *The Iranian Triangle: The Untold Story of Israel's Role in the Iran-Contra Affair* (New York: The Free Press, 1988). For an equally thorough review of the Israeli-Turkish relationship see Efraim Inbar, *The Israeli-Turkish Entente* (London: King's College London, 2001).

2. Zeev Maoz, "Israeli Intervention in Intra-Arab Affairs," in Abraham Ben-Zvi and Aharon Klieman, *Global Politics: Essays in Honour of David Vital* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).