



THE IMPACT OF THE IRAQ WAR ON ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SECURITY CONCEPTION

By Jonathan Spyer*

Abstract: This article deals with the effects and implications of the Iraq War, and the current situation of insurgency in that country, on Israel's perception of its national security. Specifically, it examines the extent to which the war has impacted on and transformed the three tiers of threat facing Israel--namely the irregular, conventional and non-conventional levels of warfare. The article outlines the nature of each of these three levels of threat, observing the impact of the Iraq War on it. It then moves toward some general conclusions on the Iraq War of 2003 and the events that have followed it as viewed through the perception of Israeli thinking on the region. In each area, this article observes the responses emerging from the Israeli strategic and policymaking echelon to the new situation opened up by the war of 2003. In this regard, it considers Israel's current unilateralist turn in the context of the broader view of current political trends in the region which prevails in the Israeli policymaking echelon.

Israel is a country unique among members of the modern states' system in that the basic legitimacy of its existence as a sovereign body is rejected by its neighbors. The dominant political currents of the Middle Eastern region place the perception of Israel as a foreign, illegitimate implant in the Middle East somewhere near the center of their view of the world.¹ The struggle against Israel, of course, takes many forms, not all of them military, but all of them with significance to Israel's strategic perceptions. In order to grasp Israel's national security stance, it is crucial that this basic existential predicament of the country be kept in mind.

In this regard, it is also important to bear in mind the unique nature of the Middle East state system as a whole and the security environment in which Israel operates. The Middle East is the most heavily armed region of the world.² It is an area which has proved until now remarkably impervious to the waves of political change which have swept the world in the last decade and a half. The

same dispensation, the same regimes, the same prevailing ideas, often even the same individuals (or their sons) dominate the region as did so in the late 1970s.

The region remains stymied by economic stagnation, and the failure of the regimes to develop the potential of the populations under their control. Middle Eastern economies are in poor shape: growth is slow, corruption rampant. Economic stagnation is matched by high population growth and educational failure. The societies of the Middle East are largely closed systems.³ The ideas of nationalism and politicized religion remain dominant, with liberal reform movements very weak. For these unelected regimes, legitimacy is a central issue. In the key ideological systems of Arab nationalism and Islamism, rejection of the right of Israel to existence is an important factor.⁴ The use of slogans and propaganda against Israel is thus a widespread phenomenon. Developmental failure, however, limits the ability to pursue aggressively anti-Israel strategies.

The rest of the article will observe in detail the specific security challenges which Israel faces and its responses.

ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SECURITY CONCEPTION: THE BACKGROUND

There does not exist in the public domain a definitive statement of Israel's national security doctrine. There are a number of explanations for this: firstly, considerations and traditions of secrecy in a country still in a situation of conflict prevent the open discussion of key matters by individuals involved in policymaking in this area. Secondly, long-term strategic thought and consideration have not traditionally been the main concern of Israel's defense establishment, which has an inbuilt respect for matters of immediate and tangible relevance. This has traditionally gone hand in hand with a mistrust of "intellectualism."⁵

These elements notwithstanding, there exists a large body of academic literature attempting to isolate key conceptions underlying Israeli thinking regarding the challenges facing the country in the field of defense policy. In addition, statements and written work by policymakers and strategists past and present enable the tracing of clear trends and perceptions in Israeli thinking in this area.⁶

Israel faces strategic challenges and threats on three basic levels. These three levels cannot be seen as hermetically sealed from one another.

THREAT #1: IRREGULAR, GUERRILLA, AND TERRORIST OPERATIONS

Since 1973, this threat has accounted almost exclusively for actual loss of Israeli life deriving from the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Israel has since 2000 been involved in a low intensity conflict with Palestinian irregular formations in the West Bank and Gaza areas, and to a lesser extent within Israel proper. There is evidence both of involvement by non-Palestinian groups (Hizballah) and of state support (Syria, Iran and Saddam's Iraq) for Palestinian paramilitary groups. An emerging additional threat is that constituted by the organizations of the global jihad.

The Israeli-Palestinian Situation: conflict management, not conflict resolution

Israeli strategists are unconvinced of the current feasibility of conflict resolution in terms of reaching a final status accord to end the pivotal conflict with the Palestinians.⁷ Given the essential incompatibility remaining in important elements of the Israeli and even the moderate Palestinian conception of how a final status agreement would look--particularly on such matters as the demand for return of Palestinian refugees and their descendants, or future arrangements in Jerusalem--it is considered that some form of "conflict management" is likely to remain a necessity for the foreseeable future. This notion of conflict management currently stands at the center of Israel's strategic perceptions.⁸

Israel has developed a number of measures for the implementation of conflict management. The Disengagement Plan from the Gaza Strip and part of the northern West Bank was an example of a measure deriving from the strategy of conflict management. The Disengagement Plan was above all an attempt to regain the initiative, to prevent a static situation in the conflict, which would not be considered to be to Israel's advantage for a number of reasons--

centrally, because of the ongoing attempts to delegitimize Israel internationally, and because of the worrisome demographic challenge to Israel's desire to remain both a Jewish and a democratic state.⁹

Israeli policymakers sought to demonstrate to the Palestinians that violence will not bring them the ability to dictate terms to Israel. Nor will they be permitted to benefit from a general descent into chaos leading eventually to a situation of inter-communal violence throughout the area of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza (the scenario advocated by Palestinian supporters of the so-called "one state solution.")¹⁰ Rather, Disengagement was intended to allow Israel to use its military superiority to dictate an arrangement on the ground to its own liking.

The Disengagement Plan--which was implemented between August 15 and September 12 --developed in such a way as to lead to the de facto drawing in of Egypt into the process, in addition, of course, to the extensive involvement of the United States.¹¹ The full ramifications of the withdrawal, however, still remain open to question. In the first place, as events in the short period since the implementation have already amply demonstrated, the absence of an Israeli security presence in Gaza may result in increased Palestinian attacks, using mortars and rockets developed in a Gaza Strip now empty of Israelis, or smuggled in through the southern border of the Strip. The Hamas leadership have sought to interpret Disengagement as constituting a victory for the tactics of violence adopted since 2000.¹² According to this interpretation, while a decade of Palestinian involvement in negotiation failed to bring about the dismantling of a single settlement, the tactics of violence have forced Israel to undertake a strategic retreat. Additionally, regarding the actual likelihood of a decline in terror as a result of the Disengagement, it

should be borne in mind that hardly any successful infiltrations from Gaza took place throughout the four years of conflict since September 2000.¹³ The Strip is surrounded by a fence which has proved a very effective measure in frustrating the ability of Gaza-based paramilitaries from reaching into Israel to attack Jewish communities.

The trial of strength which emerged between Israeli security forces and the Hamas organization in the weeks following the implementation of Disengagement was thus not unexpected. In this period, Israel sought to demonstrate to the Palestinian organizations that in the post-Disengagement context, Israel would respond to attacks by inflicting a response so harsh that it would make the launching of attacks not worthwhile.¹⁴ At the moment, it is too early to say if Israel has succeeded to any degree in achieving this desired deterrence vis-a-vis paramilitary organizations in the Strip. The achievement of such a balance, in the absence of a meaningful political process of any kind, will constitute a decisive factor in determining the success or failure of the Disengagement.¹⁵ The round of Qassam attacks by Hamas in the days following the Disengagement, and the unilateral decision by the movement to return to ceasefire after a determined Israeli response indicates that a certain level of deterrence has been achieved.

In the wake of the Disengagement, a debate within policymaking circles may be discerned regarding the likelihood and advisability of further unilateral moves. Recent comments by key strategists, including Military Intelligence commander Aharon Ze'evi and IDF Planning Directorate Head Udi Dekel indicate that senior figures in Israel's defense establishment now favor the adoption of additional unilateral measures.¹⁶ This

thinking is based upon pessimistic expectations regarding the likelihood of diplomatic progress emerging from negotiations, given the widely divergent basic positions of the sides, and what Israel increasingly regards as the inability of the Palestinian Authority's leadership to impose its will upon the totality of actors on the Palestinian side.

The recent comments of these senior commanders have been echoed by influential voices in the political echelon, including Finance Minister Ehud Olmert, prime ministerial adviser Eyal Arad, and former Prime Minister Ehud Barak.¹⁷ Much will depend, as noted above, on Israel's ability or inability in the months ahead to impose a continued decision by rejectionist Palestinian groups to refrain from large-scale violence against Israel. Additional unilateral moves, however, are in any case unlikely in 2006, a year of elections in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

A second, complimentary means of conflict management conceived of by Israel is the security barrier. Though the construction of the barrier has not yet been completed, and this project has led to Israel being subjected to unprecedented condemnation by much of the international community, the effectiveness of the barrier as a security device--at least for the short to medium term--is apparent. In areas where it has been completed, it has reduced successful Palestinian incursions to close to zero. Attacks on Israeli communities close to the Green Line, such as Hadera, Afula and Netanya, a frequent occurrence since September 2000, have been sharply reduced since the completion of the northern section of the barrier.¹⁸ Successful incursions, such as the suicide bombing in Beersheva on August 31, 2004, were possible because the

barrier in the area in question has not yet been built or is incomplete.¹⁹ The barrier has not, of course, achieved 100% results even in the areas protected by it, as recent successful bomb attacks in Hadera and Netanya indicate. Nevertheless, it has undeniably contributed to Israel's achieving a steep drop in the number of successfully executed terror attacks in 2004 and 2005, compared to preceding years.

The route of the barrier is problematic, and has led to legal proceedings both in the Israeli Supreme Court and in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague. The ICJ ruling has been rejected by Israel as politically-motivated. The ruling dismissed Israel's claim that the barrier is a necessary means of self-defense. The court maintained that self-defense would be an admissible justification only in a conflict between sovereign states. Furthermore, the ICJ maintained that other less disruptive means were available to Israel to safeguard its security, though it refrained from giving any specific examples.²⁰ The Israeli Supreme Court, meanwhile, accepted the justification for building the barrier, but has ruled in favor of the claimants in certain areas, requiring that it be re-routed to take better account of the needs of the local Palestinian population affected by its construction.²¹

A third notable aspect of Israel's strategy has been the use of targeted assassinations of senior members and operatives of Palestinian organizations engaged in the use of terror. These have attracted particular controversy because of occasions, such as the assassination of senior Hamas operative Salah Shehadeh, when civilian bystanders have also been killed as a result of IDF operations.²² Such assassinations take place when the arrest of suspects is operationally

impossible or would likely endanger large numbers of civilians and IDF soldiers. IDF practice requires effort to ensure correct targeting and minimal risk to bystanders, goals which have been achieved in the majority--though not all--of the operations of this kind carried out in the course of the last four years of conflict.

Other than the disappearance of the financial support offered by Saddam to the families of Palestinian *shahids* (martyrs), the immediate physical results of the war in Iraq on this tier of conflict are minimal. None of the insurgent organizations involved in low intensity conflict with Israel, (with the exception of the tiny Palestine Liberation Front) was a direct client of Iraq. As such, the launching of the Iraq War, the conclusion of its conventional phase, and the insurgency that has followed, have had little tangible effect either on the resources available to Palestinian organizations, or on their willingness or otherwise to continue their fight with Israel.

It is important here to consider the larger implications, however, of the U.S. strategy in Iraq. The war was presented in part as an element of a larger attempt to root out what were perceived as the sources of terrorism in the region. To this, the United States added support for democratization in the Arab world.²³

Israeli thinking remained skeptical throughout regarding any likelihood of rapid political transformation toward democracy in the Arab states as a result of western action in Iraq. In the Israeli view, empirical evidence to date for such a process taking hold is minimal. The working assumption is that for the foreseeable future, the region's current regimes and ideas are likely to remain dominant.²⁴ The issue of ideas is of significance here: given the strength of Islamist oppositional movements in the region, the likelihood of upheaval resulting

in gains for radical Islamists rather than the tiny liberal and democratic forces in the Arab world is also a factor in Israeli thinking. Beyond the Palestinian sphere, however, Israel is largely a spectator with regard to such developments.

Israel and the Global Jihad

The threat posed by international terror networks not emerging from among the Palestinians has also become a factor demanding the attention of Israeli strategists and policymakers. The al-Qa'ida network cites "the Jews" as one of its central targets in the document that articulated the aims of its campaign of international terror in 1998.²⁵ A recent document captured by U.S. troops in Iraq suggests that war against Israel is seen as a central goal for the movement, but one to be postponed to a later stage, after the "caliphate" has already taken over some Arab states, and is in a position to wage a conventional war.²⁶ The authenticity of that document, however, has been questioned.²⁷

The network has carried out attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets, including the bombing of a hotel where a large number of Israelis were staying in Mombasa, Kenya, in November 2002, and the attack on a synagogue in Djerba, Tunisia, in April of the same year. Nevertheless, al-Qa'ida's main foci have been the Gulf, its war on the West, and now also Iraq. The network thus appears to view operations against Israeli and Jewish targets at this stage as an important, though subsidiary element in its strategy. It is noteworthy that the specific Israeli-Palestinian issue only began to feature prominently in al-Qa'ida propaganda starting with Bin-Ladin's broadcast following the 9/11 attacks. Al-Qa'ida is aware of the mobilizing value of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Arab and broader Muslim world. Thus, despite its

main focus on other areas, Israel's security forces are engaged in countering the threat, in cooperation with allied Western countries.²⁸

There have also been reports of efforts by al-Qa'ida to build networks in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.²⁹ Israel is particularly concerned with the possibility of infiltration by al-Qa'ida and other terror elements into the Gaza Strip via the inadequately policed border separating the Gaza Strip from the Sinai Peninsula. Since Disengagement, large amounts of weaponry and explosive materials have entered Gaza via this border.³⁰ Israel is currently concerned both at the possibility of al-Qa'ida conducting attacks against Israel from Gaza, but also at the network's potential for subverting the Palestinian Authority itself, harming hopes for a return to the diplomatic process.³¹ Recent reports of activities by a group in the Gaza Strip calling itself al-Qa'ida in Palestine should be seen against this background, although the extent to which this group is in operational contact with any actual structure of the global jihad movement is not yet clear.

Beyond its attempts to attack Israeli targets using Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, the al-Qa'ida network itself is the prime suspect in the triple bombing that killed at least 64 people in July 2005 at Egypt's popular Red Sea resort of Sharm al-Sheikh on the southern tip of the Sinai. This attack came 10 months after bombings at two other Sinai resorts near the Israeli border, Taba and Ras al-Shitan, which killed more than 30 people. Israeli analysts believe that the Sinai will continue to be a favored area for the launching of new jihad operations, designed to hit at western and Israeli targets with maximum propaganda effect. The Sinai offers prime geographical

terrain for training, and operations conducted there hit not only the Egyptian regime, but Israel and the West as well by targeting large numbers of tourists in the area.³²

Israeli and western researchers have recently identified a growing division within the ranks of the Sunni global jihad, of potential importance to Israel. There is widespread criticism of the tactics being adopted by the jihadists in Iraq led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In particular, the large numbers of Muslim deaths, and the increasingly sectarian (anti-Shi'a) character of the insurgency in Iraq have been condemned by significant, senior figures within the global jihadist movement. Particular attention is being paid to recent statements by individuals influenced by the writings of Abu Musab al-Suri, a senior ideologue of al-Qa'ida, of Syrian origin. Al-Suri has condemned the current direction of the insurgency in Iraq as alien to the principles of the global jihad, as formulated by Abdallah Azzam.

Lebanese Hizballah

An additional, separate international terrorist challenge facing Israel is that posed by the Shi'i Islamist movement Hizballah. This movement, which is backed by Iran, is known to have extensive practical involvement with Palestinian paramilitary cells in the West Bank and Gaza, in particular those affiliated with the Islamic Jihad movement and the Fatah al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. Israel considers Hizballah to be an instrument of Iran, determined to disrupt any possibility for progress in the diplomatic process between Israelis and Palestinians. Hizballah operates in close cooperation with Lebanon-based operatives of the Iranian Revolutionary

Guards Corps, dominating southern Lebanon and maintaining training facilities in the Bekaa Valley.³³

Region-wide terror networks such as al-Qa'ida and Hizballah stand to benefit from regional instability and strife. Israel is acutely aware of the threat represented by these organizations, and in addition to work on the security and defense level, strives to focus international attention on the general threat to the western democracies posed by international Islamist terror groups.

THREAT # 2: CONVENTIONAL ARAB MILITARY FORCES

Conventional military contests, of course, formed the main element of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1948-73 period. Throughout, Israel has sought to offset its quantitative inferiority vis-a-vis the Arab states (in terms of territory, geography, and population) by the maintenance of a qualitative edge, credible deterrence, and a secure supply of quality arms--most notably from its domestic defense industries. Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Israeli advantage in this regard over its neighbors has been widening. This, combined with the treaty-based peace arrangements achieved with two of Israel's four immediate neighbors, greatly reduced the perceived likelihood of conventional confrontation between Israel and any combination of Arab states in the period preceding the 2003 Iraq War.

Prior to Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the Iraqi military had been seen as one of the most significant existing threats to Israel, given its 40 division-strong army, and the very extreme anti-Israel rhetoric employed by Saddam Hussein. Following the Gulf War in 1991, however, Iraqi conventional strength was very significantly depleted. UN sanctions and isolation during the decade that followed meant that by

2003, Iraqi forces had suffered a severe decline in both equipment and manpower. As such, it is questionable whether Saddam's Iraq constituted a significant threat to Israel on the eve of the war of 2003.³⁴

For the immediate future, the war of 2003 clearly further decreased the likelihood of conventional, state-to-state conflict between Israel and neighboring states. In effect, it freed Israel (for the foreseeable future) from the threat of conventional conflict against a combination of Arab armies on its eastern front. The possibility of an Iraqi-Syrian coalition entering Jordan and threatening Israel had been a central scenario occupying strategists prior to 2003. The removal of Saddam put an end to this.³⁵ However, since the final outcome of the 2003 War is still uncertain, with the future dispensation that will emerge in the area that once constituted Saddam's Iraq far from clear, it would be premature to conclude that the War in Iraq has had a conclusively beneficial effect from the point of view of the conventional threat facing Israel. This is particularly so given the volatile internal state in Iraq, and the question of growing Iranian influence in the internal affairs of that country.³⁶

The disappearance of the Ba'thist regime in Iraq also has implications regarding Syria. Relations between Baghdad and Damascus had been warming since the accession to power of Bashar al-Asad. The fall of Saddam removes Syrian strategic depth, leaving the country now faced by rival states on three of its borders. American anger at Syria's failure to effectively control the passage of anti-American insurgents across its borders further emphasizes the weakness and vulnerability of the regime. The growingly isolated and beleaguered situation of the regime in Damascus is at the present time

one of the key effects of the Iraq War.³⁷ It has brought about a decision by the regime of strategic importance--namely to withdraw its occupying forces from Lebanon--allowing for the latter to tentatively regain its sovereignty. The future of the Bashar Asad regime no longer appears secure, particularly in the wake of the crisis following the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Again, from Israel's point of view, the key question becomes what would be likely to replace Bashar, a leader universally regarded as weak and of mediocre abilities.³⁸ It may well be that Israel would prefer to see a weakened Bashar hold on to power, rather than the uncertainty of a wholly new dispensation emerging in Damascus.³⁹

THREAT #3: ADVERSARIES' ATTEMPTS TO DEVELOP WMD CAPABILITY

In this regard, in the period preceding the War of 2003, Israel perceived a threat from four neighboring states: Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya. The willingness of Saddam's Iraq to employ non-conventional weapons was made apparent in the Anfal operations in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1988.⁴⁰ His desire to strike at Israel was also demonstrated in 1991. Libyan hostility to Israel and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) ambitions were also well-documented. Israeli policymakers have long considered, however, that the central threat in this regard emanates from Tehran. The combination in Iran of long-standing nuclear ambitions (preceding the Islamic revolution of 1979), an advanced scientific and technological sector relative to the region, and extreme hostility to Israel

deriving from the Islamist ruling ideology gives the Iranian threat unique gravity.

Israel is particularly vulnerable to attack by weapons of mass destruction. The country is small--20,000 km². Two-thirds of the population lives in three metropolitan areas within a 75 km radius. Israel's small population makes it very dependent on the rapid mobilization of reserve forces in time of war--a process which could be devastated by the employment of non-conventional weapons.⁴¹

Regarding the effects of the Iraq war on the WMD threat to Israel, the toppling of Saddam has obviously nullified the Iraqi challenge. The failure to find WMD in Iraq following the war, however, raises the question of the gravity or extent of the pre-war threat, regardless of what was sincerely believed prior to the invasion. Israeli strategists, certainly, were on record prior to the war as considering that Iraq possessed a residual quantity of WMD, and Israeli citizens were issued with renewed gas masks and updated atropine (an antidote for nerve gas) in the weeks leading up to the war.⁴²

The decision by Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi in December 2003 to dismantle his country's non-conventional weapons program, and allow U.N. weapons inspectors access to key sites is a direct result of the toppling of Saddam and is another of the clearly beneficial outcomes of the war for Israel and the West. During inspections by US and British experts, it was discovered that the Libyans had developed their uranium enrichment capability further than had been expected. Libya was also found to have maintained extensive stockpiles of chemical weapons, including mustard gas, and a fledgling nuclear weapons program.⁴³

However, the war has had no effect on Iranian WMD ambitions. Israeli strategists regard this issue as perhaps the central threat facing the country. Iran is making rapid advances in both missile technology and WMD development. The Shihab-3 missile, with a range of 1300 km, is already operational. The development of the Shihab-4 and 5 is in progress. Iran possesses one of the most advanced chemical warfare programs in the developing world.⁴⁴

The Iranian nuclear program is the most serious source of concern. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors were invited to inspect Iranian nuclear facilities in September 2003. The inspections clearly revealed that centrifuges had been used to enrich two types of uranium to 20 percent or more. This is far more than the two to three percent required for the production of nuclear fuel, and non-proliferation experts agree that uranium enriched to 20 percent could be used to make a very primitive nuclear device.⁴⁵ The discoveries thus place Iran in clear violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to which it has been a signatory since 1970. The treaty allows for signatories to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, but requires them to declare all facilities and make them open to the IAEA for inspection.

While ostensibly maintaining cooperation with the IAEA and the EU-three (France, UK and Germany), Iran has refused to give up its independent nuclear fuel cycle production capability, which, as mentioned above, it maintains is for peaceful purposes only.

The IAEA's report of June 2004 was accompanied by trenchant criticism of Iran, and this was followed by the issuing of a resolution by the IAEA Board of Governors on September 18, 2004, which openly called on Iran to "immediately suspend all

enrichment-related activities."⁴⁶ The report set November 25 as the date for further review of Iran's nuclear posture. On November 22, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi announced that Iran was ceasing all enrichment activities, for a three-month period, having reached agreement on this with the EU-three.⁴⁷

Western sources suspect that Iran has stockpiled large quantities of uranium hexafluoride, a precursor to enriched uranium, in anticipation of the freeze. In September 2005, the IAEA finally passed a resolution requiring that Iran be referred to the UN Security Council for failing to convince the international community of the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.⁴⁸ The IAEA's governing board approved the resolution in the face of Iranian threats to curtail IAEA inspections and begin enriching of uranium. The resolution was drafted by the EU 3 and approved by the United States. The resolution failed, however, to set a specific date for the referral of Iran to the Security Council, allowing for the matter to continue getting dragging out. The resolution was partly the product of the confrontational style adopted by the new hardline president, Mahmud Ahmedinijad. Ahmedinijad addressed the General Assembly on September 17, and was expected to put forward a counter-proposal to EU proposals. Instead, the Iranian president used the occasion for a discussion of historical grievances, and theories regarding the true perpetrators of the September 11 attacks. He also bluntly rejected attempts to create what he referred to as "nuclear apartheid."⁴⁹ In an interview with a UAE newspaper in early October, Ahmedinijad was quoted as asserting that if Iran's case does in fact go to the Security Council, Iran may respond by "holding back on oil sales or limiting inspections of our nuclear facilities." (Although the Iranians later denied that this interview had

taken place.)⁵⁰

The growing power of conservative and radical Islamist elements in the Iranian regime, and the regime's ongoing support for proxies engaged in terror against Israel, is of deep concern to Israeli strategists and policymakers. Israel's central fears relate not so much to the prospect of an imminent launch by Iran of a WMD attack on Israel. It is considered that the regime's own survival instincts are likely to be sufficient to make such a move improbable. Rather, the concern is that possession of nuclear arms will embolden the Iranians and their allies in their already extensive use of low-intensity and terror warfare against Israel, setting the stage for increased uncertainty and volatility in the Middle East. Possession of a nuclear capability by Iran would also tilt the regional balance of power, encouraging other regional players to enter alliances or closer relations with Iran. In addition, there is the possibility that Iran would become a distributor of nuclear technology to countries with which it made alliances. Finally, there is near certainty that an Iranian nuclear capability would act as a spur to other regional powers to pursue similar nuclear efforts.⁵¹

CONCLUSIONS

The operational doctrine of the IDF is currently in the midst of a process of transformation, reflecting advances in military technology, the changing nature of Israeli society, and the changing order of gravity of the three tiers of threat faced by the country. The conventional military threat has declined, while the threat of terrorism and WMD remain equally or even more worrisome. The Iraq war at the time of writing appears to have altered the strategic picture in the region by removing

the Saddam regime without bringing about any deep paradigmatic shift in the nature of regional politics. The essential contours of regional politics, of Israel's threat perception, and the nature of its response thus remain untransformed by the war. This said, in important specific areas (as outlined above) its impact has been felt.

Israel's national security posture is shaped by the combination of the rejection of its legitimacy, which still forms a key aspect of regional politics, combined with the undisputed technological and military superiority possessed by Israel, which makes the actual likelihood of conventional state-to-state warfare very low. Despite the swift conclusion of conventional hostilities in Iraq, the eventual outcome of the 2003 invasion is still far from certain. A failure to establish a stable, pro-western regime in Baghdad will be perceived as a victory for those regional forces hostile to Israel. But whether this would substantially alter the direction of events of immediate relevance to Israel is questionable. The emergence of a stable, unified Iraq, would form a significant contribution to regional stability. But again such an outcome--even were it to be achieved--is not expected to substantially alter the basic contours of Israel's threat perceptions and responses to regional challenges.

** Dr. Jonathan Spyer has served as a special advisor on international affairs to Israeli Cabinet ministers. He is currently a research fellow at the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center, Herzliya, Israel.*

NOTES

¹ For a useful explanation of the role played by Israel in the political language of the region, see Fouad Ajami, "The Orphaned Peace," *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), pp. 253-312. See also Edward Said, *Peace and its Discontents* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), and Barry Rubin, *The Tragedy of the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For an internal criticism of prevailing orthodoxies on both the Israeli and Arab sides, see Mohammed Sid Ahmed, "Post-Zionism," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, June 8-14, 2000.

² Anthony Cordesman, "Military Balance in the Middle East, an analytic overview: Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, Major Arms by Country and Zone, and Qualitative Trends," Center for Strategic and International Studies, March, 2004. http://www.csis.org/burke/mb/me_mb_book.pdf.

³ See the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) series for an in-depth detailing and discussion of the situation and trends in governance, society, and economy across the Arabic-speaking world. <http://www.rbas.undp.org/ahdr.cfm>.

⁴ See Kenan Makkiya, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), pp. 253-327 for an in-depth discussion of prevailing political ideas in the Arab world, including a focus on the centrality afforded the notion of struggle against Israel, to the exclusion of more local concerns.

⁵ Eliot A. Cohen, Michael J. Eisenstadt and Andrew J. Bacevich, "Israel's Military Culture: Conservative Innovation," in *Knives, Tanks and Missiles: Israel's Security Revolution* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), pp. 49-79.

⁶ For attempts to outline the key elements of Israel's national security conception, see Efraim Inbar, "Contours of Israel's New Strategic Thinking," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 111, No. 1 (Spring 1996), pp. 41-64; Gal Luft, *All Quiet on the Eastern Front: Israel's National Security Doctrine after the Fall of Saddam*, Analysis paper No. 2, Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, (March, 2004.); David Horowitz, "The Israeli concept of National Security and the Prospects of Peace in the Middle East," in Gabriel Sheffer, (ed.), *Dynamics of a Conflict: A Re-examination of the Arab-Israeli conflict* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation, 1975), pp. 235-77; Avner Yaniv, *Deterrence Without the Bomb: the Politics of Israeli Strategy* (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 1987).

⁷ Giora Eiland, "Security, Peace and Israel's Strategy of Disengagement," *Peacewatch* # 456, May 13, 2004. Washington Institute for Near East Policy. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org>

⁸ See Arnon Regular, " Hamas' Zahar: More kidnappings if Israel doesn't release prisoners," *Haaretz*, October 26, 2005. <http://www.haaretz.co.il>.

⁹ Eiland. See also Ori Nir, "Demographics Drive Likud's Shifting Agenda," *The Forward*, December 26, 2003. <http://www.forward.com>.

¹⁰ This idea, which is in essence a return to the pre-1988 PLO policy of the "democratic secular state" has re-surfaced in mainstream Palestinian debate over the course of the last five years of strife between Israelis and Palestinians. For an argument in its favor, see Tony Judt, "Israel: the alternative," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 50, No. 16, October 23, 2003. <http://www.nybooks.com>; See also Michael Tarazi, "Why not two peoples, one state?," *International Herald Tribune*, October 5,

2004. For a rebuttal, see Leon Wieseltier, "Israel, Palestine and the Return of the Bi-National Fantasy," *New Republic*, October 27, 2003. <http://www.tnr.com>

¹¹ Dennis Ross, "Gaza Disengagement: The US Role in Ensuring Success on the Ground," *Peacewatch*_#508, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 20, 2005. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org>

¹² Chris McGreal, " Hamas celebrates victory of the bomb as power of negotiation falters," *The Guardian*, September 12, 2005. <http://www.guardian.co.uk>.

¹³ David Makovsky, "A Fence that Makes Sense," *Los Angeles Times*, February 24, 2004. www.latimes.com.

¹⁴ Amos Harel, "Cabinet okays options of shelling Gaza, assassinations," *Ha'aretz*, September 25, 2005. <http://www.haaretz.com>.

¹⁵ For an analysis of the likely effects of disengagement on the internal Palestinian scene, written just prior to the evacuation, see Shalom Harari and Mark A. Heller, "The Effects of Disengagement on Palestinian Politics and Society," *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (August 2005). <http://www.tau.ac.il>. For a summing up of the choices facing Israel after the implementation of the plan, Shlomo Gazit, "Two Roads Diverged: Israel's post-Disengagement Strategic Options," *Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (August 2005). <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss>.

¹⁶ Attila Somfalvi, "Al-Qaida is in Gaza," *Ynetnews*, September 28, 2005. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles>; and Aluf Benn, "PM: Despite rumors, no plan for W. Bank pullout," *Ha'aretz*, September 29, 2005.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/630780.html>.

¹⁷ Benn, "PM."

¹⁸ According to figures produced by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <http://www.mfa.gov.il>.

¹⁹ Steve Gutkin, "Israel vows to hunt down Hamas leaders," *Irish Examiner*, September 2, 2005. <http://archives.tcm.ie/irishexaminer/>.

²⁰ "West Bank barrier ruling: Key points," *BBC Online*, July 9, 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

²¹ Molly Moore, "Israeli Court orders Changes in Barrier," *Washington Post*, July 1, 2004. <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.

²² See Findings of the inquiry into the death of Salah Shehadeh. <http://www.mfa.gov>.

²³ For a variety of expert opinions on the issue of Mid-East democratization, see "Democratization in the Middle East: Solution or Mirage," A GLORIA Center Roundtable discussion, *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 7, No. 1, (March 2003). <http://meria.idc.ac.il>. This article showcases widely differing analyses in the period prior to the fall of Baghdad to U.S. forces. For a later in-depth discussion of Washington's Greater Middle East initiative, see Daniel Neep, "Dilemmas of Democratization in the Middle East: The 'Forward Strategy of Freedom'" *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 3, (Fall 2004).

²⁴ For a representative and articulate expression of the views of the mainstream Israeli policy community on this issue, see Shlomo Avineri, "On Democracy and the Pursuit of Peace in the Middle East," Lecture at the UCLA Faculty Center, October 18, 2004.

<http://www.international.ucla.edu/article>.

²⁵ See text of the "Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the

Crusaders," issued on February 23, 1998.

Available at: <http://www.fas.org>

²⁶ "US 'intercepts al-Qaeda letter'," *BBC Online*, October 7, 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

²⁷ "Al Qaeda in Iraq: Letter to al-Zarqawi a Fake," *CNN*, October 13, 2005. <http://edition.cnn.com>.

²⁸ See Reuven Paz, "Al-Qaeda's Search for New Fronts: Instructions for Jihadi Activity in Egypt and Sinai," *GLORIA Center*, The Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM) Occasional papers, Vol. 3, No. 7, October, 2005.

²⁹ Khaled Abu Toameh, "Al-Qaida Raises its head in Gaza," *Jerusalem Post*, October 9, 2005. <http://www.jpost.com>.

³⁰ "Worries about al-Qaeda in Gaza," *CBS News*, September 15, 2005. <http://wcbs880.com>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² See Paz, "Al-Qaeda's Search for New Fronts." Also see Bernard Heykel, "Terminal Debate," *New York Times*, October 11, 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com>, and Bernard Heykel, "Islamic Debates over the War in Iraq and Attacks on the West, Muslims, and Martyrdom," Chatham House. <http://www.riia.org/>.

³³ Ely Karmon, "Hizballah as Strategic Threat to Israel," *Heartland--Eurasian Review of Geopolitics*, 2-2005 (July 2005). <http://www.ict.org.il/>.

³⁴ Dore Gold, "Wartime Witch Hunt: Blaming Israel for the Iraq War," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, Vol. 3, No. 25, June 3, 2005. <http://www.jcpa.org/brief/>.

³⁵ Luft, *All Quiet on the Eastern Front*.

³⁶ Isaac Kfir, "Britain Blames Teheran for British Soldiers' Death," Institute for Counter Terrorism, October 6, 2005. <http://www.ict.org.il/>.

³⁷ Dina Ezzat, "Syria Under attack," *Al-Ahram*, March 3-9, 2005. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/>.

³⁸ See Der Spiegel Interview with Syrian President Asad, *Der Spiegel*, August 29, 2005. <http://service.spiegel.de>.

³⁹ Yoav Stern, "U.S offers beleaguered Assad deal to end political isolation," *Haaretz*, October 15, 2005. <http://www.haaretz.com>.

⁴⁰ Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence*.

⁴¹ Cameron Brown, "Israel and the WMD Threat: Lessons for Europe," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No.3, (September 2004). <http://meria.idc.ac.il>.

⁴² Gold, "Wartime Witch Hunt."

⁴³ Patrick E. Tyler, "Secret Diplomacy Won Libyan Pledge on Arms," *New York Times*, December 21, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com>.

⁴⁴ Brown, "Israel and the WMD Threat."

⁴⁵ Charles Recknagel, "Circumstantial Evidence," *Asia Times Online*, October 5, 2005. <http://www.atimes.com>.

⁴⁶ For full text of the IAEA Resolution of September 18, 2004, see *BBC Online*, September 18, 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

⁴⁷ Nazila Fathi, "Iran says it will halt uranium enrichment," *New York Times*, November 22, 2004. www.nytimes.com.

⁴⁸ See "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," IAEA Resolution adopted on September 25, 2005. <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2005/gov2005-77.pdf>. Also see

"Iranian Nuclear Issue headed for UN Security Council," *ABC News Online*, September 25, 2004. <http://www.abc.net.au>.

⁴⁹ "Iran is resolved to pursue nuclear program," *CNN*, September 18, 2005. <http://www.cnn.com>.

⁵⁰ "Newspaper stands by Iranian oil-threat story," *Yahoo News*, October 2, 2005. <http://news.yahoo.com>.

⁵¹ Ephraim Kam, "Curbing the Iranian Nuclear Threat: The Military Option," Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies Strategic Assessment, Vol. 7, No. 3 (December, 2004). <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/>.