

Strategic ASSESSMENT

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Strategic ASSESSMENT

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

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Abstracts

Is Iran in Strategic Equilibrium?

Ron Tira and Yoel Guzansky

Historically, Iran's military strategy has been defensive, based on deterring potential rivals, developing restraining leverage over enemies, keeping adversaries pinned down in secondary theaters, and undermining the will of potential enemies, while attempting to create both influence and a defense zone that will provide it with strategic depth beyond its borders. The goal of this essay is to consider whether as a result of the upheaval in the Middle East Iran has been drawn into a regional policy with new characteristics, and whether its "strategic toolbox" is appropriate for this new policy. The essay also examines how Israel can obstruct Iran, given the emerging lack of equilibrium between Iranian policy and the strategic tools at Tehran's disposal.

Keywords: Iran, regional upheaval, United States, nuclear agreement, Israel, overstretch

Israel, the United States, and the Nuclear Agreement with Iran: Insights and Implications

Zaki Shalom

The conclusion of the nuclear deal with Iran was a major political success for President Obama. At the same time, the deal raises strong doubts about the seriousness of President Obama's commitment to his oft-reiterated policy of prevention rather than containment toward Iran. This deal also raises questions as to what extent, if at all, the United States is prepared to use military force in defense of Israel against the Iranian challenge. This uncertainty might lead the Israeli leadership to the conclusion that it has been left alone to deal with the Iranian threat.

Keywords: Iranian nuclear agreement, Benjamin Netanyahu, Barack Obama, Congress

The Routinization of Nuclear Ambiguity

Adam Raz

Israel's decision to adopt a policy of nuclear ambiguity was taken after a heated debate. Supporters argued that the policy would weaken the motivations for nuclearization among neighboring countries, and that therefore the factual, public dimension of Israel's nuclear program should be minimized. This article differentiates between factual questions and normative questions regarding the nuclear issue, and argues that the policy of nuclear ambiguity has mushroomed beyond its initial objectives. The routinization of nuclear ambiguity has led to excessive secrecy on the part of the "nuclear bureaucrats" about any topic pertaining to the nuclear project and not merely those pertaining to factual issues, and as such, harms Israeli democracy. The article names a number of issues that could be discussed without jeopardizing nuclear ambiguity, and proposes a way to begin restoring the policy of nuclear ambiguity to its original parameters and objectives.

Keywords: nuclear project, nuclear disarmament, democracy, nuclear ambiguity policy, secrecy, Atomic Energy Commission

Israel and American Jewry: Moving Beyond the Core

Owen Alterman

For decades, outreach among American Jews has focused on shoring up the core. As non-Orthodox Jews drift away from Jewish life, the establishment invests billions to reach them through campus centers, youth movements, trips to Israel, and other programs. Demographic realities now dictate an additional approach: on the one hand, mobilization of the emerging "Jewish Background" and "Jewish Affinity" sectors, and on the other, moves to increase Haredi involvement in mainstream philanthropy and pro-Israel activism. These growing sectors must become targets for outreach. For Israel and American Jewry, the time has come to move beyond the core.

Keywords: American Jews, Jewish background, Haredim, outreach

Key Challenges Facing the Israeli Economy and their Ramifications for National Security

Eran Yashiv

Two topics taking center stage in the public economic discourse in Israel are the government's fiscal policy, particularly the defense budget, and the

various factors contributing to economic inequality. This essay surveys the latest developments in both topics, discusses their ramifications for Israel's national security, and offers policy insights about the macroeconomic challenges facing the economy. In the short term, the economy needs to be managed on the basis of informed fiscal policy, helped by the establishment of a fiscal council. This policy would include a rationalization of defense budget planning. In the long term, the country must fundamentally tackle the inequality in the economy by, inter alia, changing tax policy, incentivizing work, and significantly investing in the human infrastructure of the economy.

Keywords: Israeli economy, defense budget, fiscal policy, inequality and security

“Peace, Peace, but there is no Peace”: Do Israel and the Palestinians Share a Political Horizon?

Shmuel Even

The accounts by participants in the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians on a permanent agreement seem to reinforce the claim that to date, Palestinian demands do not reflect any shared political horizon with Israel. Indeed, what more can the Palestinians be offered than the establishment of a Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 lines, as Prime Ministers Barak and Olmert already proposed to Arafat and Abu Mazen? The door for peace must remain open, but from today's perspective, absent a common political horizon for a permanent resolution, Israel must make do with partial solutions. Mindful of both domestic needs and international partners, Israel must outline a political position (borders, for example) that it will not undermine, while at the same time not expand settlement areas beyond the separation fence, making it possible at some point to realize the two-state solution. Israel must help create socioeconomic prospects for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while for its part, the Palestinian Authority must stop propaganda and incitement in the schools, as this is a platform for terrorism and an obstacle to a common political horizon.

Keywords: negotiations, permanent agreement, Israel, Palestinians, United States

Changes in Indian Foreign Policy: The Case of Israel and the Palestinians

Oshrit Birvadker

Although India was freed from the chains of colonialism in August 1947, independence did not provide it with the suitable surrounding and conditions for defining its role in the international arena. Rather, economic growth and the ambition to become one of the world's strongest economies have led India to adopt a realpolitik approach in its foreign relations. This essay will address India's attitude towards the Palestinian and Israeli question as a test case. After establishing itself as an independent nation, India allied itself with the Palestinians, and this affiliation became an integral part of the fabric of India-Israel relations. India's establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992 did not change New Delhi's traditional position concerning the Palestinian issue. However, the media and academic circles have been quick to label Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as Israel's new friend. This essay tracks the changes in the Indian attitude to the Palestinian issue since Modi took office in May 2014 in light of the changes in India's foreign relations.

Keywords: foreign policy, post-colonialism, India-Israel relations, India-Palestine relations, Narendra Modi

Back to Square One? The Collapse of the Peace Process with the Kurds in Turkey

Gallia Lindenstrauss

The Kurdish question is one of the fundamental problems facing the Turkish republic. From 2008, and with even greater intensity from late 2012, a peace process between the government and the Kurdish minority was underway. In July 2015, the process collapsed and fighting between the sides resumed, particularly in the country's southeast. While previous talks between the government and the Kurdish minority have also known low points, it seems that this time there is a deeper crisis in relations. This article analyzes the factors that led to the collapse of the peace process and the strategic implications for the region, in particular how the collapse of the peace process contributes to Turkey's suspicions regarding Western support for the Kurds in Syria in the context of the international coalition's struggle against the Islamic State.

Keywords: Kurds, Turkey, peace process, Syria, Iraq

Is Iran in Strategic Equilibrium?

Ron Tira and Yoel Guzansky

Iran's Security Characteristics

Despite its imperial roots, for the past 200 years – including since 1979 – Iran has perceived itself as a country defending itself against stronger forces.¹ From its perspective, Iran has been a victim of Russian aggression that led to the loss of territory in its north and the Caspian Sea; aggression by the Ottoman Empire and the Afghan Pashtuns; British aggression that also led to a loss of territory; invasions by Russia (or the Soviet Union) and Britain into its heartland on a number of occasions; and aggression by Saddam Hussein. Iran also regards itself as threatened by American military deployments along almost all of its borders – in the Gulf, and following American invasions of two neighboring countries, Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2003, Iran believed that it was the next in line of American targets. Iran is also fearful of conspiracies, to a great extent because it was indeed a victim of actions taken in an attempt to overthrow its regime or in an attempted foreign takeover of its natural resources.²

According to its narrative, Iran stands alone against a threatening world, with no natural allies and no trust in the international system. For example, from its perspective, in the 1980-1988 war, it was supported mainly by the Syrian Alawites, while Iraq enjoyed the backing of almost “the rest of the world.” This belief has instilled in Iran security-related instincts based on the assumption that it is on the weak and defensive side, as reflected in the definition of its national objectives, policy, strategy, military doctrine, and force buildup.³ Iran's national objectives were the preservation of the state and its territory, and from 1979, also the preservation of the revolutionary-religious identity of its political system – the *nizam*. The Iranian policy objectives in recent decades toward the “south and west”

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have therefore been mainly preventive: preventing the emergence of threats and neutralizing existing threats.⁴

Historically, then, Iranian policy has sought to destabilize potential enemies, as well as to chart strategies positioning itself and its potential adversaries on the same side. For example, as the Iran-Iraq War erupted, Iran sought close relations with Syria and founded Hezbollah, inter alia to attempt to blur the Persian-Arab and Shiite-Sunni fault lines by emphasizing the Muslim-Israeli conflict – which places both Iran and the Arabs on the same side.

Tension exists between Iran's defensive characteristics and its ideological agenda as an exporter of revolution. Tension also results from its multiple identities: Persian, Islamic, Shiite, and revolutionary. Ideology dictates a degree of antagonism toward the Sunni and Western worlds, but it can be argued that most of the time, Iran has recognized the limitations of its power and has made practical decisions. It can also be argued that when ideology conflicted directly with realpolitik, Iran chose the utilitarian path⁵ (including, for example, the agreement ending the war with Iraq despite the previous ideological stance of Ayatollah Khomeini; withdrawal from the Tanker War; and suspension of its nuclear program in 2003). This policy was implemented through a defensive military strategy, based on deterring potential rivals, developing leverage to restrain enemies, keeping adversaries occupied in secondary theaters, and undermining the will of potential enemies, while attempting to create influence and a defense zone providing it with strategic depth beyond its borders.

The buildup of Iranian military power and the doctrine for its application has rested on three levels.⁶ The first is the regular army (Artesh) and quasi-regular elements of the Revolutionary Guards; the second is covert forces (headed by the al-Quds force); and the third is an array of proxies and clients. The Iranian army is exceptional among the world's armed forces: a regular army characterized by an asymmetric quasi-guerilla buildup.⁷ In the years immediately following 2003, the main reference scenario was an American invasion, and the Revolutionary Guards and the Artesh therefore developed concepts such as the Mosaic Doctrine, which consisted mainly of avoidance of major symmetric battles, decentralized and prolonged attrition in urban areas, and increased costs of war to the enemy – primarily in the stages following the occupation of parts of Iran. Naval doctrine was also based on guerilla ideas, attrition, and disruption of the free use of seaways, and

air doctrine was based on disruption of enemy air operations in Iranian skies, mainly through the use of surface-to-air missiles.

The buildup of the regular Iranian armed forces (parts of the Revolutionary Guards and the Artesh) was therefore characterized by a preference for surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles over fighter jets and bombers, and a preference for shore-to-sea missiles, naval mining, and swarms of small boats over frigates. This force buildup is also attributed to lack of confidence in external supply sources, and a consequent preference for weapon systems that can be produced in Iran. The Iranian military, therefore, is not built for a large scale conventional ground offensive against a peer competitor, nor for dispatching large conventional expeditionary forces. The Iranian navy is also not built for a high intensity symmetric conflict, certainly not in blue water.

The covert forces, headed by al-Quds, serve two purposes: first, they are the “boots on the ground” in the various conflict theaters (albeit mostly covert boots), and second, they liaise with and operate the proxies and clients. Indeed, a cornerstone in Iranian force buildup and doctrine is the use of ethnic groups and organizations that are usually already active in the theaters in question. Iran wraps its proxies in a wealth of assistance, including religious education, *da’wa* (social aid), funding, strategic guidance, military training, weapons, means for self-manufacture of weapons, intelligence, operational advice, and sometimes also concrete combat assistance. The covert forces and proxies make it possible to operate with plausible deniability and to wear down the enemy for a prolonged period and pin it down to less important, secondary theaters, while aiming to avoid high intensity conflicts and the entanglement of Iran itself in combat.

Showcases: Iraq and Hezbollah

One example of the policy, strategy, doctrine, and distinct characteristics of the Iranian force buildup was Iran’s struggle against the American presence and the Sunni establishment in Iraq, where Iran was successful in both wearing down the Americans and undermining their willpower to shape Iraq (together with a concurrent Sunni effort against the US), and in destabilizing the Sunni order in Iraq. Tehran enhanced its influence on the Arab Shiites in Mesopotamia and turned Iraq into a zone where Iran was the most influential foreign player. Iran demonstrated expertise in understanding, penetrating, and shaping the human-social-political internal Iraqi environment at its various levels – from grassroots to the

emerging security establishment to the cabinet. Iran thereby neutralized potential threats – from Iraq itself and the concern that the US would use Iraq as a springboard against Iran – before these potential threats even began to emerge. In effect, Iraq became an Iranian security zone giving Iran strategic depth to its west.

Iran achieved this mainly through its proxies and covert forces, while tapping all its means of national power (including, for example, exploitation of religious affiliations with the Shiite majority in Iraq), and combining what is regarded by the West as unorthodox sticks and carrots (from money, bribery, and political intervention in tribal politics to kidnappings and assassinations). Iran operated in the heart of its competitive advantage envelope, and in effect defeated the US in a war over the shaping of Iraq, while keeping its costs and risks low, and without even approaching the threshold of a direct confrontation with the US or a Sunni threat to Iran itself.

Hezbollah also demonstrates Iranian utilitarianism and effectiveness. This organization, which portrays itself as a defender of (Arab) Lebanon and an ally of the Palestinians, has enabled Iran to attempt to invoke the Muslim-Israeli conflict, thereby blurring the Persian-Arab and Shiite-Sunni fault lines (at least up until the outbreak of the Syrian civil war). The organization also made it possible to engage (and sometimes wear down) Israel in a secondary theater, and it constitutes a lever of deterrence against Israel. Hezbollah provides Iran with one-sided access: Iran is present on Israel's border, and its reach extends into Israel's heartland by way of its proxy, while Israel must cross more than 1,000 kilometers and two countries on the way to Iran. Hezbollah provides plausible deniability, and Israel has indeed taken care to confine its retaliation against Hezbollah's aggression to Hezbollah, while not acting against Iran. Hezbollah has thereby enabled Iran to reduce its risks to a minimum. Furthermore, the economic cost of Hezbollah is low – in state terms, and in comparison with the cost of a conventional military expeditionary force consisting of warplanes, ships, and tanks aimed at attaining the same power projection so far away from Iran.

Has Something Changed in Iran's Behavior?

It could be said that starting in 1988 and especially since 2003, until recent years, Iran managed to achieve its basic national objectives – defending its territory and *nizam* – by dismantling potential threats before they emerged. During these years (mainly in 2003-2011), Iran was in strategic equilibrium.

It defended its vital interests in an environment saturated with threatening rivals, while managing to avoid expected costs. Indeed, despite the material friction forced by Iran on its rivals, Iran itself has kept out of direct and open participation in major hostilities since 1988.

Gradually, however, the map of threats to Iran has unraveled. The Soviet Union dissolved, and new countries (mostly Muslim) now buffer Iran from its traditional northern threat. The US withdrew from Iraq, and is planning to withdraw gradually from Afghanistan. It has remained in the Gulf, yet the scars from Afghanistan and Iraq have eroded the American appetite for hostilities with Iran. The US dismantled the Baath regime in Iraq, thereby removing the most concrete threat to Iran, and practically eliminated the Arab-Sunni threat on Iran's western front. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states are perhaps capable of defending their territory and intervening in third countries, but they are certainly incapable of invading Iran. Turkey is casting about in the dark for a concrete policy and strategy to achieve its oscillating national objectives, and Israel has demonstrated that it was deterred and therefore refrained from attacking the Iranian nuclear program at the optimal timing – in 2010-2012. A large part of this process of the dissolution of these threats took place without any action by Iran, but Iran is certainly benefiting from the outcome.

Iran has found itself in an environment that is not only less threatening than it was before, but is also characterized by a power vacuum: players have disappeared, disintegrated, and lost power or self-confidence. Iran has been drawn into this vacuum. No structured process of Iranian reassessment of its national objectives, policy, and strategy is known in view of the evaporation of threats, the emergent power vacuum, and the nuclear agreement, but it can be argued that a glance at Iran reveals a drift in its behavior toward a new working premise that deviates from the country's traditional defensive patterns. Moreover, even if this is not fully the case, the proverbial statements about Iran's footprints in four Arab capitals⁸ – Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Sana'a – surely denote a certain reality and attitude. Iran is present in more and more theaters – from the Horn of Africa to Afghanistan and Central Asia – and the Iranian fleet is leaving its green water for blue water more frequently than in the past. The talk about regional hegemony (whether justified or not) is becoming more frequent.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is expected to provide Iran with a dividend valued at tens of billions of dollars in the initial stage, and enable it to fund the enhancement of its various strategic efforts. The

JCPOA has not changed the Iranian policy of obtaining nuclear weapons. It has left Iran with certain uranium enrichment capabilities, has not affected its ability to develop more advanced centrifuges, and has not significantly dealt with the continued development of Iran's weaponization and nuclear missile capabilities. The JCPOA effectively recognizes Iran's status as a nuclear threshold state (with the ability to break out to nuclear weapons within a short time), and legitimizes the Iranian nuclear project in the eyes of the Western powers. The JCPOA might therefore strengthen the school of thought that views Iran as a stabilizing factor and part of the solution for the regional challenges, rather than part of the problem. The combination of its nuclear program, unfreezing of funds, and international legitimacy is liable to further empower Iran, bolster its self-confidence and freedom of action, increase its gravitational pull as a regional power, and detract from the Western powers' ability to oppose Iran on various issues, out of concern about an Iranian retaliation on JCPOA issues.

Loss of Equilibrium between Policy and Strategic Tools?

Iran's actual behavior shows some deviation from its traditional patterns. It can be asked, however, whether a player with security characteristics like those of Iran – a defensive and asymmetric force buildup, part of which consists of regular albeit quasi-guerilla military forces, and part of which consists of activity through sub-state proxies – is appropriately structured to act as a regional hegemon, and whether the strategic and doctrinal expertise that has served Iran's defensive policy can be stretched to building an empire. The various theaters of friction can be compared to a field of thorns in the summer. Iran has usually behaved like an actor who has thrown a burning match and stood by watching the results. This is an inexpensive action requiring specific expertise and limited resources. Iran's opponents have acted like an actor forced to call out a fleet of fire trucks and put out the fire – an action that requires many more resources, and requires both time and higher expertise. Throwing a match is not the act of a hegemon; it is a subversive act of an actor that challenges the status quo. A hegemon puts out fires, which are designed to challenge its status.

Iran is gradually being drawn away from the role of match thrower toward the status of a firefighter: from Iraq to Syria, and in the future possibly also in Lebanon, Iran is called upon to protect its assets (in some cases, new assets it acquired only a few years ago). A change in role, however, requires a different set of expertise and capabilities. There is no similarity

between the expertise and capabilities required to incite in Iraq, make it unbearable to the US, and undermine Sunni hegemony, versus the expertise and capabilities required to protect Iraq as a unified and functioning state, despite the lit matches being tossed around by non-Shiite challengers.

Indeed, Iran has found itself using capabilities it is not accustomed to wielding – such as conducting high signature large scale symmetric battles through its proxies and covert forces, as well as attacks by Iranian warplanes in Iraqi territory – capabilities remote from the Iranian comfort zone and competitive advantage. Not surprisingly, its achievements in defending the new Iranian order in Iraq are far short of its achievements in destabilizing the American or the Sunni order in Mesopotamia.

Iran and its proxies are also underperforming in the Syrian civil war. Over the past five years, Iran has found it difficult to defend the Alawite regime in the Sunni and Kurdish areas. Indeed, the relative ineffectiveness of Iran and Hezbollah in Syria – a deficit in the relevant power they were able to deploy on the battlefield – were among the factors that created the conditions for Russia’s military intervention in Syria. Since Russia is acting in its own interest, not that of Iran, such a major Russian foothold involves substantial risk from an Iranian perspective.

The al-Quds force has usually operated other parties, but developments in Iraq and Syria have pushed it into engaging in actual major battles, including committing thousands of fighters into Syria, in which it had to demonstrate capabilities not needed by Iran since 1988, and which exacted losses from it.⁹ According to reports, these losses caused Iran to withdraw a large part of its forces from Syria, while weakening the Iranian commitment to direct involvement in the fighting in this vital theater. Hezbollah has found itself conducting major high signature battles, some of which were highly taxing, over geographic space of unprecedented size. Despite the potential threat posed to Lebanon by jihadists groups, Hezbollah may be weakening its status as a “defender of Lebanon,” and appearing as an Iranian proxy. Iran’s competitors, on the other hand, such as Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and Turkey, are operating in Syria and Iraq through proxies at little cost and low risk – Iran’s former pattern of behavior.

After the Houthis conquered Sana’a, Iran sent warships to the coast of Yemen. In response, the US, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia sent their own ships to the area, and Iran quickly withdrew its ships. Iran almost made an error, thinking it was capable of force projection as a conventional power. It realized its mistake in time, but this course of events indicates

that it cannot be taken for granted that Iranian capabilities are suitable for a policy of attaining regional hegemony. Indeed, Iran is having difficulty rendering effective aid (and even in establishing stable, meaningful supply lines) to its allies in Yemen, who have gone from being on the offensive to losing ground. In some cases, the drift of Iranian policy has made it the reacting side, instead of the initiating side. Having once thwarted threats before they could emerge (e.g., as in the initiative to dismantle the Iraqi system and wear down the American forces in Iraq), Iran now finds itself responding to challenges emerging in Iraq, Syria, and to some degree also in Lebanon, or to military initiatives by the Arab Gulf states in Yemen. Iran is having trouble managing the contours of each conflict, its duration, and the means it requires. There is no better example of this than the stalemate that led to Russian boots being placed on Syrian ground.

The Yemeni theater raises another question: Iran has usually defended its first order national interests, such as eliminating the threat of attack from Iraq (by the Iraqi or American forces), using Hezbollah to deter Israel

Once a player acting from “negative” motives (preventing threats), Iran is becoming a player trying to achieve “positive” goals (strongholds and hegemony). It is therefore possible that Iran is moving toward lack of equilibrium between its traditional defensive toolbox and entry into the power vacuum around it.

from attacking its nuclear facilities, and protecting its most important ally in Damascus. These are three examples of “no-choice theaters” – Iran had no alternative but to deal with them. It is possible, however, that Yemen (like Sudan in the past, the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, and other new spheres of interest) represents second or third order Iranian interests, not first order interests.¹⁰ While there are clearly advantages to Iran regarding a foothold in Yemen, as a lever over the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and in order to keep Saudi Arabia pinned down in a theater of secondary importance, Iran could certainly have chosen not to intervene in Yemen. This is an “optional theater,” and Iran intervened there simply because it was able to.

Iran’s current pattern of behavior not only does not allow plausible deniability, but also highlights the vector in which it moves. Iran is increasingly perceived in the Arab and Sunni world as a threatening force, and its operation, mainly through Shiite communities,¹¹ is arousing primal fears. Not only is Iran no longer successful in blurring the Persian-Arab and Shiite-Sunni fault lines (through an attempt to invoke a Muslim-Israeli

divide, for example), but Iran's expansion and its challenge to the other regional peers is creating a new fault line of "all the regional actors against Iran" (though this is offset somewhat by Iran's rapprochement with the global powers). To a great extent, even the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq is, in part, a reaction to concerns about an Iranian takeover in Mesopotamia.

Iran is nowhere near being economically overstretched, since the economic dividend of the JCPOA¹² and the Iranian modus operandi enables Iran to continue funding its regional efforts. In many cases, Iran operates through groups and organizations that are already present and fighting in the relevant theater of interest; Iran merely empowers and guides these groups. Its standard aid package does not incur substantial costs for a state actor, and in the Middle East, where the military depots of crumbling armies and the American weapons left in Iraq or supplied to the Yemeni government are open to scavenging, the cost of the weapons supply is negligible. The Iranian aid package for the Houthis, for example, is not significant in Iranian terms. The number of Iranian boots on the ground in all the relevant theaters combined is estimated as much less than ten thousand, and the number of Iranians returning home in body bags each year has not yet caused any significant upheaval in the Iranian public theater.¹³

Significance and Recommendations for Israel

It appears that from a player acting from "negative" motives (preventing threats), Iran is becoming a player trying to achieve "positive" goals (strongholds and hegemony). It is therefore possible that Iran is moving toward lack of equilibrium between its traditional defensive toolbox and entry into the power vacuum around it. It is possible that the attempt to establish regional hegemony with a foothold in a number of Arab capitals is less effective when conducted through covert organizations, proxies, and an asymmetric doctrine. Iran may be moving away from its competitive advantage when it sends its fleet to the shores of Yemen, its air force to the skies in Iraq, and the al-Quds force to major battles in Syria.

This also detracts from Iran's deterrent. Strategic mathematics do not predetermine in advance rivalry between Iran and Israel, but as long as Iran decides to act as Israel's primary enemy, Israel has an interest in weakening it and in keeping it preoccupied elsewhere. If Iran does move towards a lack of synchronization between its ends and its ways and means, this provides Israel with an advantage – and perhaps also an opportunity to engage in measures that will aggravate this lack of synchronization: a

paradigm shift in the strategic dynamic vis-à-vis Iran, and a reversal of roles between the challenger and the challenged.

Israel and its regional partners in the effort to contain Iran – such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf states (and possibly Turkey too) – will be able to consider a policy whose objectives are keeping Iran pinned down in secondary theaters, thereby restricting its freedom of action against them; weakening Iran through a strategy designed to prolong the conflicts in which Iran is engaged in the above-mentioned theaters; and raising the price exacted from it. The price is multidimensional, involving economics, political diplomacy, and manpower, with the possibility that this price could exert destabilizing pressure on the regime in Tehran in the future. As such, the price is also tallied in terms of focus and management attention. Furthermore, the price's currency might be legitimacy (Persian-Shiite hegemony in an Arab-Sunni region), and is already reflected in the sharpening of the fault lines between Iran and other regional players, thereby deepening Iran's isolation and expanding the coalition against it by exposing its measures against other regional players, including measures through its proxies and covert forces.

To effect this paradigm shift and role reversal, actors that are already at loggerheads with Iran can be supported and provided with weapons, training, funds, and intelligence. As part of inverting regional dynamics, distance and deniability should be maintained, and risks and costs minimized. Since the objective is to confine Iran to secondary theaters for an extended period and weaken it, these are the parameters through which the success of this policy should be measured (and not the degree of rolling back Iran's hegemony endeavor in such theaters). Insofar as Iran seeks to consolidate its hegemonic status in additional theaters, it will therefore become more vulnerable to this policy and strategy. One third of Iran's population, if not more, is not Persian, and some of the minorities have confrontational relations with the Persian majority, at least from time to time. This provides an opportunity to engage Iran even inside its own territory.

Iran is an intelligent and calculated player, with a high degree of self-awareness. If Iran does indeed change its policy, it is liable to try to adjust and adapt its strategy, doctrine, and force buildup to this new policy. Israel will have to consider whether such an Iranian adjustment process will make Israel's situation better or worse. On the one hand, if Iran adjusts, it is liable to become more effective and quicken the pace of its regional hegemony bid. On the other hand, an Iranian investment in warplanes,

warships, and armored vehicles – instead of missiles, covert organizations, and guerilla organizations – is likely to move Iran away from its competitive advantage, and put it on a playing field in which the Israeli advantage (as well as the American advantage, and perhaps that of Saudi Arabia and Egypt) is much more distinct. Indeed, it is possible that challenging Iran in direct military power – despite its preference for conducting indirect proxy wars – is the most effective method against it.

If Israel does assess that an Iranian process of adjustment designed to build a force more suitable for its new policy is not in accordance with its interest, it will be possible to take action to disrupt this process. In contrast with the current Iranian force buildup, which is based primarily on domestic Iranian production, imports from countries like North Korea, and weapons that are easy to obtain (such as anti-tank missiles), the weapon systems that Iran is liable to need in the future (such as warplanes, frigates, and armored vehicles) are usually imported from industrialized countries. Diplomatic action can therefore be taken to disrupt the supply of such weapons (similar to the way Israel has acted in the past to delay the delivery of S-300 missiles from Russia).

These circumstances may generate a number of opportunities, involving:

- a. Exploiting the declining Iranian effectiveness resulting from Iran's use of its traditional security tools in the service of a policy other than the one for which they were devised;
- b. Exploiting Iranian ineffectiveness in the use of symmetric state military tools in which Iran does not benefit from a competitive advantage, including the possibility of challenging Iran symmetrically;
- c. If Iran begins the process of building a force suitable for attaining hegemony, taking diplomatic action to delay the buildup of such a force, or alternatively, benefiting from the diversion of Iranian resources to types of warfare far from Iran's competitive advantage, and which lie at the core of the competitive advantage of Israel and the US;
- d. Exploiting changes in Iran's situation, including a change in its position from challenger to challenged, and increasing the price paid by Iran for holding various assets;
- e. Exploiting the fact that Iran's own actions are pushing most regional actors into a coalition against it, highlighting the fault lines between Iran and most regional actors, and increasing Iran's regional isolation and the cooperation between Israel and the surviving Sunni governments.

Both the changing circumstances and the resulting processes of adjustment are likely to create opportunities for Israel to develop policy, strategies, a network of proxies, and operational concepts that will engage, weaken, and challenge Iran.

Notes

The authors would like to thank Amos Yadlin and Udi Dekel for their helpful comments on a previous draft of this article.

- 1 George Friedman, "Iran's Strategy," Stratfor Global Intelligence, April 10, 2012.
- 2 For further discussion, see Ephraim Kam, *From Terror to Nuclear Bombs: The Significance of the Iranian Threat* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 2004), p. 27.
- 3 J. Matthew McInnis, *Iran's Strategic Thinking, Origins, and Evolution*, American Enterprise Institute, May 2015.
- 4 This essay does not deal with Iran's policy toward the "east and north" – the Caucasus and Central Asia – or its energy policy toward Russia and Turkey, and touches on the nuclear question only in passing.
- 5 McInnis, *Iran's Strategic Thinking, Origins, and Evolution*, p. 6, and David Menashri, *Iran: Between Islam and the West* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 1996), pp. 144-61.
- 6 Ahmed S. Hashim, "The Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine," Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 9, 2013.
- 7 Michael Connell, "Iran's Military Doctrine," *The Iran Primer*, United States Institute of Peace, 2010.
- 8 David Hearts, "Saudi Crapshoot in Yemen," *Huffington Post*, September 28, 2014.
- 9 "Iranian Casualties Rise in Syria, as Revolutionary Guards Ramp up Role," *Reuters*, December 22, 2015.
- 10 Saeid Jafari, "Why Iran Doesn't Want to Stay in Yemen," *al-Monitor*, October 27, 2015.
- 11 Although Iran is also successfully gaining support from non-Shiite players, such as the Alawites, the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, Sudan, and so forth.
- 12 The long term effect of the drop in oil prices is not analyzed in this essay.
- 13 Arthur MacMillan, "As Iranian Deaths in Syria Rise, Debate Opens at Home," *AFP*, October 27, 2015.

Israel, the United States, and the Nuclear Agreement with Iran: Insights and Implications

Zaki Shalom

Despite many predictions to the contrary, the Obama administration managed to prevent rejection of the nuclear agreement within Congress with relative ease and without having to cast a presidential veto.¹ Clearly the opponents of the agreement failed to create sufficient negative public opinion against the agreement. Beyond the fact that many high ranking officials believe the agreement is a good one per se, and that it serves United States national interests, the heightened support for it was helped, *inter alia*, by the following factors:

- a. The agreement's critics had no real answer to the administration's claims, especially those made by President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry, that at present no one has a better alternative. No one could deny the factually correct claim that even before the agreement, Iran managed to advance its nuclear project significantly without anyone stopping it.
- b. The President's threats that the lack of an agreement would worsen the situation and perhaps even lead to a military confrontation deterred many in the United States from rejecting the President's request. The trauma resulting from US military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq seems to have sparked fear of a deterioration that would require new military involvement in the Middle East.
- c. The fact that President Obama, who is concluding his term in office, placed himself squarely behind the agreement, which he called "the strongest

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non-proliferation agreement ever negotiated,” and an achievement of which “we should be proud,”² made it difficult for many to oppose him out of concern that their reservations would be seen as detrimental to the status of the presidency.

- d. Finally, the administration’s claims that even were the agreement to be rejected by Congress, the European nations, Russia, and China would continue as they saw fit – i.e., move toward the gradual lifting of the sanctions – also encouraged support for the agreement. The United States, warned senior administration officials, would find itself in such a case isolated on the international arena.

The agreement between the P5+1 and Iran (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) creates a new reality for Iran’s position on the international arena and for its relations with the United States. The agreement will almost certainly have implications for Israel’s relations with the United States. With the requisite caution, this essay seeks to examine possible implications of the agreement on a variety of levels.

From Prevention to Containment

Over the years since his election and in different formulations, President Obama has stressed that he is determined to prevent Iran from attaining nuclear capabilities. At the same time, the President always emphasized that he would try to achieve this goal using first and foremost diplomatic and political means. Only if those measures failed would he consider using the military option. In order to back this stance, early on in his presidency he instructed the Pentagon to prepare for the use of force should this become necessary, and he strengthened the United States military presence in the Gulf, including with escort aircraft carriers. He also instructed the security establishment to demonstrate willingness to help Israel – “be very responsive” – when it came to acquisitions and intelligence.³ Even after the agreement was signed, he stressed again that if the Iranians did not stop the development of nuclear capabilities for military ends, then all options, including the military one, would still be “on the table.”⁴

However, in practice, President Obama’s conduct on the Iranian issue to date clearly indicated the tendency, from a relatively early stage of his presidency, toward containment rather than prevention. Former Senator Joseph Lieberman stresses the fact that for years the administration vehemently rejected Congress’ initiatives to impose sanctions on Iran: “Much like today, the White House repeatedly argued that sanctions

would isolate the United States and alienate our allies whose help we needed.”⁵ When referring to the agreement with Iran, Alan Dershowitz, who supported Obama’s presidential candidacy, says that the facts support the assumption that the President decided to realize the policy he had always embraced. Therefore, he was less than honest to those whom he told that the military option was on the table and that Iran would never be allowed to reach nuclear capabilities.⁶

In an essay on United States policy towards Iran, Dennis Ross notes that the Obama administration was deeply divided over its Iran policy. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen did not support the option of using military force against Iran, even if it turned out that the diplomatic efforts and sanctions were not stopping Iran’s nuclear ambitions: “They were not in favor of the use of force if all other means failed to stop the Iranian nuclear weapon pursuit,” Ross claims.⁷ Both, says Ross, stressed the “terrible cost” that would be involved in using force against Iran. The President, Ross continues, “kept his counsel to himself.” Before Vice President Biden’s visit to Israel in March 2010, the President asked Biden to try to convince the Israeli public of the administration’s determination to prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons. The President proposed a somewhat vague formulation that said that Iran attaining nuclear capabilities would be “unacceptable” to the administration. Only after it was made clear that this was too lukewarm a phrasing did the President accept the more unequivocal wording of “the United States is determined to prevent.”⁸

It thus emerges that the two most senior personnel in charge of leading a military move against Iran – Secretary of Defense Gates, who served until July 1, 2011, and Chief of Staff Admiral Mullen, whose term ended on September 30, 2011 – opposed it. In fact, they supported the policy of containment. Leon Panetta, who replaced Gates as Secretary of Defense, also expressed his doubts about the effectiveness of a military option. At the Saban Forum in December 2011, he maintained that at best, the military option would achieve a one or perhaps two year deferment of Iran’s nuclear activity.⁹ Officially, of course, the president can decide on a military move despite their opinion. Nonetheless, one can assume with a high degree of certainty that no US president, especially not a president who explicitly recoils from the use of military force, such as President Obama, would dare initiate so complex and danger-ridden a military attack under such circumstances. In other words, at least until the end of 2011,

when President Obama declared that all options, including the military one, were on the table, in practice, the chances of taking a military option were exceedingly low.

It is almost certain that this was the background to President Obama's determination to accelerate efforts toward the political, diplomatic option. As early as December 2011, writes journalist David Ignatius, President Obama sent John Kerry, then still a senator, to Oman to propose it serve as the mediator that would lead to negotiations between the United States and Iran. At the end of those talks, Kerry – for the first time – proposed making a significant gesture toward Iran, namely, agreeing to allow Iran to “keep some of its enrichment capability” if a comprehensive agreement were to be formulated. This was presumably the background for senior administration personnel William Burns and Jacob Sullivan being in touch with Iran clandestinely during 2012. The breakthrough, writes Ignatius, came in the middle of 2013 when Rouhani was elected President of Iran. President Obama sent him a personal message and a proposal to engage in dialogue; Rouhani's favorable response started the secret talks between the nations. It is nearly certain that all of this occurred on the basis of an understanding that the agreement would allow Iran some enrichment capability. Ignatius does not specify what the scope of the enrichment would be, but presumably it involved a level that leaves Iran with the nuclear weapons option.¹⁰ If so, it does not tally with the President's declaration that the agreement with Iran was meant to allow it only peaceful nuclear activity.¹¹

At the same time, the President honed his message toward Iran with a direct, unequivocal formulation: in an interview on March 2, 2012 with journalist Jeffrey Goldberg, the President stressed the following: a) a nuclear Iran represented a “profound” menace to the national security of the United States, regardless of Iran's explicit threats against Israel; b) therefore, it was a “profound” national interest of the United States to prevent Iranian nuclearization; c) a nuclear Middle East was a threat to the entire world; d) an Israeli strike against Iran would help Iran present itself as the victim and might deliver it from the isolation in which it found itself; e) one could understand Israel's fears of Iran, but they could not be the only foundation for action; f) the Israeli government was well aware that the President of the United States does not bluff.¹² At the AIPAC conference two days later, the President repeated the same points even more emphatically. He stressed that a nuclear Iran was a development opposed to the national interests of

both Israel and the United States. The United States would use all means available to it to prevent a nuclear Iran.¹³

Ross cites two basic motivations that may explain these remarks: the President's need to strengthen his status within the Jewish community in the United States on the eve of the presidential election; and the desire to prevent an Israel attack against Iran in that period. As former Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said, Iran was nearing the "zone of immunity" that would make it difficult for Israel to take action against it.¹⁴ The conclusion is that the President's threats to take military action against Iran did not necessarily express a genuine intention to realize this option at that point in time.

Ross stresses that this was also the impression Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came away with after a conversation with President Obama on November 8, 2013. Netanyahu made it clear to Ross that the message the President conveyed to him was that the internal situation and atmosphere in the United States did not allow an attack: "politics ruled out the use of force." Ross tried to convince the Prime Minister that this was not the President's approach, but Netanyahu was not moved: he felt that the message from Washington was that the political situation of the United States left the President no choice but to reach an agreement with Iran: "Our domestic reality left him little choice but to do a deal."¹⁵

In an interview with *Foreign Policy*, Chuck Hagel, who succeeded Panetta as Secretary of Defense in the Obama administration and served from February 26, 2013 until November 24, 2014, noted his "skepticism about resorting to military force." The interviewer thought that Hegel erred: "At one point," the interviewer notes, "Hagel misstated the President's policy on Iran, saying the aim was to 'contain' Tehran."¹⁶ Was Hagel, however, indeed mistaken?

In his speech shortly after reaching the agreement, the President stressed that he knew full well that the agreement did not quell the serious concerns the United States and the Middle East nations – especially Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states – have about Iran and its intentions.¹⁷ To confront the Iranian threat, the United States would offer its regional allies an impressive aid package, especially on the military level.¹⁸ The fact that immediately after signing the agreement, writes Ambassador Bolton, the President sent Secretary of Defense Ash Carter to the Middle East to conclude arms deals with the regional nations allied with the United States, especially Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and Israel, is a strong indication

of the fact that, with regard to Iran, he adopted the policy of containment rather than prevention.¹⁹

Excluding the Military Option

The conclusion from this discussion is that President Obama's policy on Iran and its nuclear activities reflects a clear trend toward containment rather than prevention. Taking a broader look, one can say that this policy of the Obama administration reflects a far reaching worldview about the role of military power in United States foreign policy. In a speech at West Point on May 28, 2014, President Obama clarified his position on the use of force in what came to be called "the Obama doctrine." "Since World War II," said the President, "some of our mostly costly mistakes came not from our restraint, but from our willingness to rush into military adventures without thinking through the consequences – without building international support and legitimacy for our action; without leveling with the American people about the sacrifices required." The result of such unrestrained action was entanglements in conflicts with high costs, including in lives, that in no way promoted the national interests of the United States.²⁰

The administration under his leadership, Obama said, would not embrace this policy. From his perspective, so his remarks lead one to infer, the United States would use military force only if and when there was an immediate and clear threat to the United States itself or to one of its most important national interests. It appears that the Obama administration did not see the Iranian nuclear threat as falling into this category. Iran threatens first and foremost the United States' allies – Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states, and to a certain extent Egypt as well. But Iran, at present and in the foreseeable future, does not endanger the United States itself. The clear conclusion is that to the administration, the fact that the United States has the ability to strike Iran harshly does not obligate it to use this ability. In President Obama's words, "Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail."²¹

In his speech at the AIPAC conference on March 2, 2015, Prime Minister Netanyahu made it clear that he is well aware of the administration's worldview. He noted that there are some fundamental differences between Israel and the United States that inevitably lead to different assessments of the Iranian threat and, as a matter of course, to the United States' lack of willingness to take military action against Iran. "The United States of America," said Netanyahu, "is a large country, one of the largest. Israel is a

small country, one of the smallest. America lives in one of the world's safest neighborhoods. Israel lives in the world's most dangerous neighborhood. America is the strongest power in the world. Israel is strong, but it's much more vulnerable. American leaders worry about the security of their country. Israeli leaders worry about the survival of their country...I think that encapsulates the difference."²²

The apparent reluctance of President Obama to consider favorably the use of military force against Iran was especially prominent after achieving the agreement with Iran. Although the President made great efforts to enlist the support of Congress for the agreement, he did not agree to show a definitive commitment to use force against Iran should Iran make a clear and verifiable effort to achieve nuclear capabilities. According to Robert Satloff,

The most noteworthy aspect of these three letters [the President's responses to members of Congress] is what they do not include — namely, any specific commitments beyond the letter of the Iran deal text... In his various letters, the President addressed the issue but only in descriptive terms; he specifically did not adopt the definitive declaratory language legislators sought. To Nadler and Wyden, he used exactly the same formulation: "Should Iran seek to dash toward a nuclear weapon, all of the options available to the United States—including the military option—will remain available through the life of the deal and beyond."²³

Thus, infers Satloff, the President is clearly reflecting an unwillingness to commit to the use of force even when it is clear that Iran is racing toward nuclear capabilities. While the sentence about the military option "may be analytically accurate," Satloff adds, "it falls far short of making any commitment to act even in event of an Iranian 'dash' toward a bomb, begging the question 'if not then, when?'" Moreover, Satloff maintains, since the agreement was signed, Iran has violated UN resolutions in at least two ways: it has fired ballistic missiles and placed Iranian troops on Syrian soil. These acts failed to arouse any discussion in Washington about taking retaliatory steps against Iran.²⁴

The worldview that President Obama chose to adopt has led him to accept the assessment that in practice, there is no real option of stopping Iran's nuclear ambitions other than a political agreement. The sanctions, said the President, brought Iran to the negotiating table but did not and would

not bring it to stop its nuclear activities. In his opinion, an aerial attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would result in at most a two to three year deferral of the nuclear project, and there was no certainty that after a bombing the Iranian leadership would decide to retreat from its nuclear project. On the contrary, the chances were that Iran would decide to accelerate the project.²⁵

Entrenched in this almost axiomatic assessment, the administration took pains to characterize the dialogue with Iran as one being held in a friendly atmosphere. According to Secretary of State Kerry, "We were, both of us, able to approach these negotiations with mutual respect, even when there were times of a heated discussion, I think he [Zarif, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs] would agree with me at the end of every meeting we left with a smile and with a conviction that we were going to come back and continue the process."²⁶ Under these circumstances, one is not surprised by the fact that throughout the talks Iran was accorded the status of a legitimate partner making unequivocal demands of the United States in exchange for every concession it was willing to make in the context of its nuclear activities.²⁷

Conclusion

The nuclear agreement with Iran and its effective ratification by Congress represents an impressive political and diplomatic achievement by the Obama administration. *Washington Post* analyst David Ignatius describes the mere fact of an agreement and its approval in Congress as "an enormous victory" by the President, the "most determined strategic success" of the Obama presidency.²⁸ Even an analyst as critical of the agreement as Robert Satloff complimented the President on his handling of the Congress: "You were masterful," he said.²⁹

The agreement with Iran expresses profound, far reaching mindsets and worldviews on the United States' current status and manner of functioning. At core is the recognition that the US military will be asked to fight for extended periods of time only if there is a definitive and present threat to the United States or its most critical interests. The Obama administration does not seem to view Iranian nuclearization as such a threat.

Israel will have to take this reality into account. It means that even if there is evidence that Iran is violating the nuclear agreement and is, contrary to the agreement, taking action to attain nuclear capabilities, there is no certainty that the United States will be prepared to take military action against Iran in order to obstruct this trend. Under these circumstances, Israel

must internalize that the heavy burden of preventing Iranian nuclearization falls on its shoulders alone.

Finally, the conclusion of the deal also reflected the success of the administration in having the P5+1 ignore the deep disagreements among the sides (especially the divides between the United States and Russia on a range of international issues) for a considerable period of time and instead focus all their attention on the Iranian nuclear problem. The success of this model could lead the administration to conclude that it is possible to apply it also to other conflict areas, such as the Israeli-Palestinian arena.

Notes

- 1 Even as veteran and experienced a senator as John McCain estimated in mid-August 2015 that 60 senators would vote against the agreements and thereby reject the president's request for ratification. See Kristina Wong, "McCain: Senate will Reject Obama's Iran Deal," *The Hill*, August 11, 2015, <http://goo.gl/yLdRw0>.
- 2 The White House, "Remarks by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal," August 5, 2015, <https://goo.gl/qsupiZ>.
- 3 Dennis Ross, "How Obama Got to 'Yes' on Iran: The Inside Story," *Politico Magazine*, October 8, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/10/iran-deal-susan-rice-israel-213227>.
- 4 "Remarks by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal."
- 5 Joseph I. Lieberman, "Congress Should Step Up to Block the Terrible Iran Agreement," *Washington Post*, August 14, <https://goo.gl/sYWAvZ>.
- 6 Paul Miller, "Dershowitz: Obama Is an Abject Failure—By His Own Standards," *Observer*, August 5, 2015, <http://observer.com/2015/08/dershowitz-obama-is-an-abject-failure-by-his-own-standards/>.
- 7 Ross, "How Obama Got to 'Yes' on Iran."
- 8 Ross, "How Obama Got to 'Yes' on Iran."
- 9 "The indication is that at best it might postpone it maybe one, possibly two years." Remarks by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta at the Saban Center with Q and A, CIE, December 2, 2011, <https://israeled.org/>.
- 10 David Ignatius, "How the Iran Deal Became the Most Strategic Success of Obama's Presidency," *Washington Post*, September 15, 2015, <https://goo.gl/cshZNz>.
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- 17 The White House, "Statement by the President on Iran," July 14, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/14/statement-president-iran>.
- 18 "Ash Carter Visits Israel in Attempt to Ease Concerns over Iran Deal," *The Guardian*, July 20, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/20/ash-carter-israel-iran-deal>.
- 19 John R. Bolton, "Facing Reality on Iran: The Vienna Deal Sets up a Choice of Bad and Worse," *National Review*, August 24, 2015.
- 20 The White House, "Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony," May 28, 2014, <https://goo.gl/LkXOiz>.
- 21 "Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony."
- 22 "Full Text of PM Netanyahu's Speech to AIPAC," *Jerusalem Post*, <http://goo.gl/ErntVf>.
- 23 Robert Satloff, "Unfinished Business from the Iran Nuclear Debate," *American Interest*, November 5, 2015, <http://goo.gl/XrqNP4>.
- 24 Satloff, "Unfinished Business from the Iran Nuclear Debate."
- 25 Gideon Sa'ar and Zaki Shalom, "An American Military Option against Iran: A Vanishing Idea," *INSS Insight* No. 712, June 23, 2015, <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=9929>.
- 26 US Department of State, July 14, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/07/244885.htm>.
- 27 "I also didn't think," said Alan Dershowitz, "Obama would be naive enough to take the military option off the table during the negotiations, and that's what he did and led the Iranians to believe that they wouldn't face the tiger and could negotiate with us as equals." See Jas Chana, "A Conversation with Alan Dershowitz," *Tablet Magazine*, August 24, 2015. Even those who support President Obama and the agreement with Iran, such as journalist Tom Friedman, could not avoid expressing surprise at the United States being unable to bring its many pressure levers to bear against Iran in order to achieve an arrangement that would prevent it from reaching nuclear abilities. See Tom Friedman, "Obama Makes His Case on Iran Nuclear Deal," *New York Times*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/opinion/thomas-friedman-obama-makes-his-case-on-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.
- 28 Ignatius, "How the Iran Deal Became the Most Strategic Success of Obama's Presidency."
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The Routinization of Nuclear Ambiguity

Adam Raz

Birth of the Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity

Much has been written about the importance of the nuclear ambiguity policy. In the early 1960s, following a heated dispute at its top political echelons, Israel adopted a policy whereby it would continue to develop its nuclear program, but refrain from taking measures that would normally define it as a nuclear state, i.e., does not conduct nuclear testing. This has been Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity – encapsulated by the familiar pronouncement that Israel will not be the first to introduce a nuclear program into the region. This policy has played a significant role, and indeed, the region has not been nuclearized and the nuclear dimension has played a negligible role in regional, security, and political history.

The policy was a compromise between two opposing schools of thought regarding the repercussions of nuclear capability in the region: the conventional school of thought versus the nuclear school. The conventional school, according to the literature and foreign sources, opposed intensive nuclear development, but after the decision on the nuclear project was nonetheless taken, supported building the necessary infrastructure (with an option of implementation) so that if other countries in the region embarked on this nuclear route, Israel could be a few steps ahead. In contrast, the nuclear school urged adoption of a defense concept based on explicit nuclear deterrence (with an option of use). Because of this difference of approach among policymakers who had to reach some *modus vivendi* given the various developments in the nuclear program, the policy of nuclear ambiguity was adopted as a compromise and became one of the cornerstones of Israeli policy.¹ Despite various attempts to overturn it, this policy has remained steadfast for more than 50 years.

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The arguments by the opponents of the use of the nuclear option concerned the repercussions of a nuclear program and explicit nuclear deterrence on the character of Israeli society and democracy. Yigal Allon captured this sentiment when he warned against a reality in which there is a nuclear reactor (in Dimona) that has a country (Israel), and not a country that has a reactor. The documentation shows that issues such as the concern that parliamentary supervision would infringe on the security and nuclear fields, the concern about excessive secrecy of a nuclear project underway behind the scenes, the circumventing of state institutions, and the transfer of budgets through unauthorized channels played a part in the opposition to nuclear development and the adoption of a strategy of explicit deterrence.

It appears that after nearly 60 years of a nuclear program, Allon's concerns did not materialize. The policy of nuclear ambiguity has undoubtedly contributed to this, since another outcome of this policy is that the nuclear program does not have a "presence" in the public experience and is not perceived as a solution to "security" problems. Nevertheless, nuclear ambiguity and its decades-long institutionalization have led to a situation whereby even its proponents today (a majority of the political establishment) do not periodically review the various desired and undesired outcomes of the policy.

Criticizing the Policy without Fracturing It: Three Categories of Questions

A public discussion of the Israeli nuclear issue is not tantamount to undermining the nuclear ambiguity policy. The main objectives of the policy are to weaken neighboring countries' motivations for nuclearization on the one hand, and to strive to sustain the global agenda that supports limiting nuclear proliferation on the other hand. The logic underlying the nuclear ambiguity policy is that there are political disputes in various countries – including Israel – about the advantages and drawbacks of a nuclear capability. Indeed, were it not for the dispute at the top political echelons, there would be little purpose in the nuclear ambiguity policy. In other words, if the Egyptian or Saudi leaderships were of like mind about the value of a nuclear program, they would not need motivation from Israel.

Does every discussion about the nuclear issue undermine the policy of nuclear ambiguity? Following the distinctions made by Professor Ruth Gavison, three categories of questions should be posed: the first concerns

factual questions, such as, does Israel have nuclear weapons, and in what quantity? Does it have hydrogen bombs? What are the rules guiding decision makers in relation to using such weapons? Where are the weapons stored? and so on. The second category concerns normative questions, led by: does Israel need to have a nuclear capability? The third category, of a different nature, concerns the issues of obfuscation and secrecy on the part of the state vis-à-vis the first two categories of questions.²

The history of more than half a century proves that both writing about the Israeli nuclear issue and decision makers' responses to questions of the second category about nuclear development have not increased neighboring countries' motivations to "go nuclear." There are no significant disagreements about this among researchers and commentators.³ In fact, a discussion among researchers of Israeli nuclear strategy and Israel's nuclear capability (under the first category of questions) likewise does not influence the political considerations of neighboring countries.

A review of the public responses from the top political echelons in Arab countries finds that it is not any particular discussion that brings the nuclear genie out of the bottle, but rather the identity and credibility of the speaker. In other words, when information about Israel's nuclear capability comes from a senior political player or from any person who played some role in the nuclear project (e.g., Mordechai Vanunu), then it makes an impact.⁴ The faux pas by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in December 2006 during an interview with a German television channel, namely, the slip that Israel has nuclear capabilities, triggered a tempest in the Israeli political establishment and also led to a flood of reactions in the global media.⁵ It goes without saying that no research study attains such a buzz in the media.

The policy of nuclear ambiguity is a "diplomatic fiction," because the world has been aware of Israel's capabilities for many years. Nevertheless, this fiction has "diplomatic weight"; i.e., despite the overt information about Israel's nuclear capability, the policy of nuclear ambiguity serves those who strive to reduce nuclear proliferation and therefore has substantive political value.⁶

However, the logic in the nuclear ambiguity policy – which is still valid – does not obviate the possibility of criticism of the Israeli nuclear program and its repercussions on domestic and

Over time, the routinization of the nuclear ambiguity policy is affected by various constraints so that the implemented policy diverges from the objectives that framed the initial political decision.

foreign policy. In fact, a review of Israeli political history shows that not infrequently “nuclear” issues have been publicly debated by decision makers (in the realms of the economy, environment, civilian matters, parliamentary oversight, and others), and the policy of nuclear ambiguity was not adversely affected. Nevertheless, for some years, questions about nuclear issues that are addressed to representatives of the political and bureaucratic establishments trigger a reflex reaction both internally and externally. Externally, they declare the need for ambiguous responses for reasons of state security, and therefore reject any discussion of the subject; internally, there has been a collective “turning of a blind eye” by the governmental institutions in relation to many “nuclear” topics.

It seems, therefore, that the policy of nuclear ambiguity and its outcomes may be discussed and criticized without concern and, indeed, with the intention of sustaining it.

The Routinization of the Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity

Within the political arena, there has been a process of routinization and formalization of political activities. The institutionalization of a political decision means that the decision must be converted into a set of rules and orders that direct the actions of the bureaucrats. Over time, the routinization is affected by various constraints so that the implemented policy diverges from the objectives that framed the initial political decision. Thus while one can talk about the routinization of the policy of nuclear ambiguity, it is far more complicated, since it did not take the form of defined mandatory and prohibitory injunctions that guide the bureaucratic and political establishment. In fact, to the best of our knowledge, the decision about the nuclear ambiguity policy was taken at the highest political echelon without protocols and according to the political balance of powers. Yet the political echelon’s considerations that existed in the past and led to the adoption of the nuclear ambiguity policy do not exist today. As evidenced by various statements, there were those who thought that the nuclear ambiguity policy should be revised; however, they were already entrenched in the reality of this policy, and it was this reality that they sought to change.

One of the main objectives of the nuclear ambiguity policy (from the perspective of opponents of explicit deterrence) was that Israel’s nuclear program not lead to a blatant nuclear security orientation – a kind of autonomous nuclear “secret kingdom” inside Israel. Nevertheless, the routinization of the nuclear ambiguity policy created failures and led to

decision makers turning a blind eye, which enabled them and the “nuclear bureaucracy” (the Israel Atomic Energy Commission – IAEC, the Director of Security of the Defense Establishment – DSDE, or “Malmab,” in its Hebrew acronym, and the military censor) to operate too freely. They were able to interpret and institutionalize the unwritten orders of the nuclear ambiguity policy in a manner they considered correct (or, according to some of its critics, that maintained their status), and more important, to extend the ambiguity, the veil of obfuscation, to areas that far exceed the factual security questions.

Consequently, the legitimate secrecy about questions of the first category has expanded to encompass issues under the second and third categories and include any discussion of the nuclear issue. The routinization has led to various measures being taken that quash public and parliamentary discussions (that are unrelated to security issues) that are vital to the existence of a democracy and that materially infringe on freedom of speech. Both the military censor and the DSDE wielded their power (i.e., authority and scare tactics) and prevented the holding of informative discussions of various issues relating to nuclear energy: from various military capabilities to civil and research applications.

Nuclear Ambiguity Policy, Democracy, and Freedom of Speech

Historically, the policy of nuclear ambiguity was adopted concurrent with the initial phases of the nuclear program, and since then, not only has the program become more extensive, but the decision making processes have become institutionalized and more complex. Despite the fact that the nature of the supervision over the nuclear program bothered some political figures, it appears that they thought that the policy of nuclear ambiguity would help muzzle civil criticism.

During the first two decades following the establishment of the state, some of the proponents of the nuclear project were ready to breach democratic and governmental norms, while opponents expressed concern over the creation of a “nuclear monarchy” – i.e., over negative repercussions on the young Israeli democracy.⁷ The latter argued – and global historic experience corroborates the argument – that the establishment of a nuclear project leads to excessive secrecy and to the circumventing of proper governance. Furthermore, the critics were (and are) concerned that any discussion of controversial “nuclear” decisions with numerous implications might be barred under the pretext of “security considerations.”

The political compromise, whereby it was agreed that Israel will not become a nuclear state, was made contingent upon excluding the nuclear topic from the public domain. Nevertheless, while there were indeed objective grounds for censoring the discussion of factual issues falling under the first category of questions, some of the decision makers were not concerned by criticism of anti-democratic elements accompanying the program. In fact, not only did they not see any danger in discussing the nuclear program (i.e., questions not falling under the first category) – but rather, they even supported holding a lively discussion.

A look at nuclear programs of other countries reveals that secrecy is built into them. Nevertheless, discussion and public debate of issues that do not jeopardize state security must be distinguished from all other issues. Clearly, nuclear ambiguity will not be compromised if a discussion is held on the issue of nuclear waste, the enormous budgets allocated to nuclear development, the existence of institutions and organizations mandated to supervise the safeguarding of the secrets, the health hazards that the reactor in Dimona poses to the reactor’s personnel and to residents in its vicinity, and more. In the United States and in Britain, which established enormous nuclear complexes, there have been heated discussions of these

Nuclear ambiguity will not be compromised if a discussion is held on the issue of nuclear waste, the enormous budgets allocated to nuclear development, and the health hazards that the reactor in Dimona poses to the reactor’s personnel and to residents in the vicinity.

and other issues for years, and they are regulated under legislation and in overt agreements. In Israel, both the institutions responsible for silencing the discussion (the DSDE, the military censor) and the self-censorship by members of the Knesset, ministers, and “nuclear bureaucrats” have resulted in the discussion of any nuclear issue being considered as jeopardizing state security.⁸

These paragraphs are seemingly paradoxical: on the one hand, they affirm the importance of the policy of nuclear ambiguity, while, on the other hand, they endorse a discussion of particular “nuclear” aspects. However, incorporated in this pseudo-paradox are one mistake that has become axiomatic and one problem. It is a mistake to think that the policy of nuclear ambiguity must necessarily silence all

discussion of the nuclear issue, and proponents of the policy among the top echelons never believed this should be the case. For example, we could decide that factual information about nuclear capabilities and various

nuclear developments will not be open for discussion; while a discussion of other aspects, such as oversight, decision making processes, the impact on environmental quality, and the cost of the project will be open for discussion.

The problem, which is no less important, concerns Israeli democracy. Much has been written and said about the importance of oversight and public discussion of security topics to the sustaining of a high quality democracy. The nuclear issue confronts society with questions that relate to the essence of democracy, national security, and the difference between a citizen and a subject in modern society. For issues as critical as the nuclear issue, should the subject be banned from the public debate? In Israeli public circles, heated debates are held about the defense budget, the treatment of security prisoners, the use of firepower, the imposition of curfews, and more – and these are all testimony to the strength of the Israeli democracy. On the other hand, the nuclear issue – whose importance cannot be overstated – is concealed under a nearly opaque veil that infringes on freedom of speech, excludes the issue from the public agenda, and prevents the public from exercising one of the fundamental principles of democracy: the public's participation in the decision making process.

The routinization of the policy of nuclear ambiguity and the excessive secrecy has not only sought to eliminate public discussion of questions even under the second and third categories, but also served as a political tool to denigrate the policy's critics as if they were "anti-patriotic." For example, Minister Yuval Steinitz, who is currently in charge of the IAEC, made cynical comments in the past about the criticism voiced regarding the age and condition of the nuclear reactor, saying that "there are people among us who are voicing concern about the safety of the reactor, but [actually] their intention is to denounce its existence."⁹

Issues that Would Not Undermine the Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity

The Israel Atomic Energy Commission is responsible for all nuclear-related activities in Israel. The head of the commission is appointed directly by the prime minister, and the IAEC is subject solely to his authority. Almost nothing is known about the IAEC's history and decision making processes; its (meager) website states that its role is to advise the government on all matters pertaining to the advancement of nuclear research and development; to recommend priorities and policies relating to the nuclear issue; to implement government policies; and to represent Israel at national and international nuclear-related institutions.¹⁰ In February 2011, "the IAEC was restructured

... in order to adapt it to the new reality," but in fact, the IAEC remained both an operational and oversight body.¹¹ Over the years, allegations were raised that in essence the IAEC operates as a nuclear lobby in the Prime Minister's Office.¹² According to various reports, the nuclear issue is discussed by a secret sub-committee of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee (the names of the committee members are not publicized), but beyond this, the public (and its representatives in the Knesset) know nothing about the decision making processes and the oversight. Any attempt to raise the issue in the Knesset at the requisite level of seriousness has failed.

A second issue concerns oversight and the regulation of safety matters. The IAEC website describes the four tiers of safety measures at the reactors: inspection of the reactors by the professional team; the Safety Division (the safety departments) at the reactors; the Licensing and Safety Division (LSD); and the Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC), which has the ultimate authority. The NSC is an external commission, whose members are independent of the IAEC; it is appointed by the Prime Minister and submits an annual report to him. The commission's coordinator is a member of the IAEC, and "the responsibility for following up on the implementation of the recommendations is delegated to the NSC's coordinator and to the LSD."¹³ Since all information on the safety issue, radiation, and so on is not disclosed to the public, it is difficult to rely on the reliability of the inspections, the supervision, and the possibility of the prime minister comprehending the technological and environmental complexity entailed in nuclear development. In fact, during a meeting of the commission that

convened to clarify the safety issue at the reactor (a one-time event about a decade ago), attended by three representatives of the Knesset, some of the commission members said that they do not know whether the information provided to them by the IAEC is sufficiently credible.¹⁴ While experts in nuclear reactor safety and world leaders have repeatedly warned about the latent dangers in aging reactors, the public has not received information about aging management of the nuclear reactor, even though this issue has no security aspect and relates

Normative questions about the nuclear program need not remain unanswered due to the policy of nuclear ambiguity, as their discussion would not undermine the policy.

only to safety.¹⁵ Even on other topics with no connection to security issues such as cancer morbidity among workers at the Dimona reactor, the DSDE and the military censor have taken a hard line and are not willing to disclose

information.¹⁶ This is also true in relation to disclosure of information about radiation and radioactive waste. In fact, there is no law regulating the handling of radioactive substances, apart from a few pinpoint references in a number of laws.

The third issue is the weakening of the motivation for regional disarmament agreements (e.g., a MENWFZ – Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone). In the 1970s and 1980s, the official policy of Israeli governments was to strive to reach regional disarmament agreements (Yigal Allon and Yitzhak Shamir were clear advocates of this viewpoint). Nevertheless, for years Israel's position (which was called Israel's "long corridor" policy) shows that there was opposition at the political and bureaucratic levels to agreements and discussions about disarmament agreements before peace agreements and arrangements concerning conventional armament are in place. Actually, the "long corridor" policy is a reversal of the trend that emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s. The diplomatic measures that secure this are irrelevant here, but the developments following the NPT review conference in 2010, after which a few rounds of unofficial talks were held in Switzerland, also did not lead to any significant development, and one comment was that "Israel, for its part, made every effort to impede the talks and prevent progress."¹⁷

The fourth issue is budget. The costs of the nuclear project are hidden under various budget items and they range, according to different reports, between NIS 4.5 billion and NIS 7 billion (12 percent of the defense budget).¹⁸ Who oversees and controls the distribution of the budget? In articles published in the media in recent months, one can read about "irregularities" and nepotism in the management of the reactor. The State Comptroller's report devoted to the subject was barred from publication by the Prime Minister (who is also in charge of the IAEC), even though he was informed that the report does not contain any references to security issues.¹⁹ What considerations led to the shelving of the report, which does not address security issues? In any event, the Prime Minister, upon the recommendation of DSDE, reached the decision to not publish the report, and he is under no obligation to do so.

The fifth issue concerns the DSDE and the military censor. The DSDE is a department in the Ministry of Defense that is responsible for the security of the ministry. The tremendous secrecy surrounding its activities (e.g., neither its budget nor its activities are known) has turned it into a major independent entity whose activities are not regulated by law. In essence,

it is not at all clear under what authority and law it operates and, in the past, it was alleged that it is sliding into areas of other authorities and is running independent investigations – which is not within its purview. Even though the DSDE, the military censor, and the IAEC are separate bodies, the three often act in collaboration and prevent the disclosure of official publications and research studies on the nuclear issue, while infringing on freedom of speech. For example, about three years ago, it became evident that the military censor forwarded a documentary film that was made about the construction of the reactor to the DSDE. The latter applied pressure on the interviewees in the film to cancel their participation, with the argument that the film was “too left wing.” In an unusual step, the chief military censor, Sima Vaknin-Gil, apologized and said that at issue was a serious mistake.²⁰ Again, it is unclear according to what rules publications are censored and at times banned.

Six, over the last fifty years, there have been numerous discussions about purchasing nuclear reactors for civil needs (electricity, water desalination) and this topic made the headlines recently. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this issue for Israel’s future, and it relates to the openness of the Israeli leadership in relation to all matters pertaining to the nuclear program. While an unprecedented public discussion is underway about the natural gas issue, almost nothing is said about any topic pertaining to the possibility of building nuclear power stations. Whatever the positions are in favor and against, a discussion of this is vital – although presumably the “nuclear bureaucracy” will not be sympathetic to the opening of such a discussion. Not allowing a public discussion of this issue is a warning sign, compared to the decades of lively discussions of these issues elsewhere in the world – certainly after the Fukushima disaster.

Not a few questions arise after studying Israeli nuclear history. Who makes the decisions and what parliamentary oversight is there? Is the oversight over the operation and working order of the Dimona reactor conducted properly? What are the environmental impacts of the nuclear program? Does the excessive secrecy afford the leaders of the nuclear program tremendous power and place them outside of proper supervision? By virtue of what authority does the DSDE operate? Who provides guidelines to the military censor in relation to nuclear issues? These and other questions that do not pertain to factual questions about the nuclear program need not remain unanswered due to the policy of nuclear ambiguity, as their discussion would not undermine the policy.

Initial Steps to Change the Situation

The Israel Security Agency / General Security Service was formed shortly after Israel's declaration of independence, and its roles, structure, and authorities were defined by government resolutions until the enactment of the Israel Security Agency law in 2002. The Mossad was established in 1949 and the Mossad Law has still not been legislated – which would enable it to operate extra-territorially. The head of the Mossad is appointed by the prime minister alone, without needing the approval of the government (there is a formal committee, but it is ineffectual), and the oversight over the Mossad's activities is lacking.²¹ Nevertheless, a discussion has been underway for years about the need to legislate the Mossad Law, and the organization itself supports this.

On the other hand, when it comes to regulating the standing of the IAEC and the “nuclear bureaucracy,” Israel lags far behind other nuclear democracies.²² Some of the issues raised here can begin to be resolved through legislative processes that initially regulate the rules applying to the IAEC and its head – the prime minister. The law would regulate the IAEC's objectives and authorities, its decision making processes, the structure of the commission and its subcommittees – coupled with instructions regarding the appointment of internal and external auditors and an institutional oversight system. The law would also address the issue of parliamentary oversight over the nuclear program (for example, who has the right to be privy to information), and issues of confidentiality, security, and safety. Some ambiguity would remain (as is necessary), but the law would force a distinction between supervisory authorities and operational authorities – an issue that is not now sufficiently clear.

Gavison said that there is “a danger that considerations of state security would be voiced in order to prevent a discussion of controversial policy decisions, and one of the arguments is that these decisions themselves adversely affect state security, and that they can be done only under the blackout curtain. The blackout, in such instance, not only does not protect state security, but rather, it is liable to *endanger it*.”²³ In this sense, the routinization of the policy of nuclear ambiguity does indeed jeopardize state security.

Notes

- 1 Adam Raz, *The Battle over the Bomb* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2015).
- 2 Ruth Gavison, "Freedom of Speech and Atomic Secrets," *Psifas* 3 (1996): 9-21.
- 3 See, for example, Yair Evron, "'The Nuclear Option and the Boundaries of Public Debate' or 'The Open Discussion and Fertilization of Strategic Nuclear Thought,'" *Politika* 13 (winter 2005): 19-32. See also Avner Cohen "Nuclear Ambiguity and the Question of Limits of Information in a Democratic Regime," in the same volume.
- 4 For responses to the Vanunu affair from the Arab world, see Adam Raz, "The Vanunu Case from a Political Perspective: Were State Officials Behind the Affair," *HaMerhav HaTziburi* 9 (fall 2014): 68-98.
- 5 There were numerous references to this in the media. See, for example, Attila Somfalvi, "Steinitz and Beilin: Olmert is Not Fit for Premiership," *Ynet*, December 11, 2006; and Greg Myre, "In a Slip, Israel's Leader Seems to Confirm Its Nuclear Arsenal," *New York Times*, December 12, 2006. For the numerous reactions in the Arab world, see "Debate on Olmert Nuclear Slip," *BBC News*, December 13, 2006.
- 6 There is some disagreement about this among researchers. Avner Cohen calls for revision of the nuclear ambiguity policy. See Avner Cohen, *The Last Taboo: The Secret of Israel's Nuclear Status and What Should Be Done with It* (Or Yehuda: Kinneret Zmora Bitan, 2006).
- 7 The term is borrowed from Elaine Scarry, *Thermonuclear Monarchy: Choosing between Democracy and Doom* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).
- 8 As a marginal note, excessive secrecy is not a phenomenon unique to the nuclear issue. Israeli history shows that the authorities have concealed controversial affairs, decisions, and even failures, under the pretext of classified and privileged security information.
- 9 Yossi Melman, "Are You Sleeping Well at Night?" *Haaretz*, May 24, 2005.
- 10 See the IAEC website at <http://iaec.gov.il/Pages/HomePage.aspx>.
- 11 See the announcement in the IAEC website: <http://iaec.gov.il/About/SpeakerPosts/Pages/speakerpostpag11061.aspx>.
- 12 Among the many examples, see Amir Oren, "Wanted: Man with an Axe," *Haaretz*, February 2, 2014.
- 13 See AIEC website at <http://iaec.gov.il/NuclearSafety/Pages/Nuclear-Safety-Commission.aspx>.
- 14 Melman, "Are You Sleeping Well at Night?"
- 15 Ran Edelist, "The Americans are Pressuring Israel to Shut Down the Reactor in Dimona," *News*, February 5, 1993.
- 16 There has been a complicated lawsuit on this in recent years. In 2002, the Knesset decided to postpone the formation of a committee of inquiry about incidents of cancer at the reactor. Former employees of the Nuclear Research Center were in attendance during the Knesset session and said, "They want to hide the truth from us. They have been lying to us for ten years and now they are recruiting ministers to prevent us from getting at the truth." See

- Aryeh Bender, "The Knesset Decided: A Committee of Inquiry about Cancer at the Reactor in Dimona will Not be Formed," *Maariv*, January 31, 2002.
- 17 Yossi Melman, "For the First Time Israel is Participating in the NPT Review Conference," *Maariv*, February 5, 2015.
- 18 Aluf Benn, "He Knows How to Decide in a Closed Room," *Haaretz*, June 3, 2014. The sum of NIS 7 billion was estimated by the ICAN Research Institute. See the summary of the study on the website: <http://www.icanw.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ICAN-DisarmamentDevelopment.pdf>.
- 19 In this regard, see the interview of Nir Gontarz with the spokeswoman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Yael Doron, in the section "Product of Israel," November 20, 2015; Haim Levinson, "Dimona Nuclear Reactor Gave Millions in Business to Cronies – at an Especially Low Price and Without a Tender," *Haaretz*, November 4, 2015.
- 20 Emily Greenzweig, "Film Forwarded to the Military Censor was Leaked to Interested Parties," *Haaretz*, July 11, 2012.
- 21 Zeev Segal, "Mossad Law to be Legislated," *Walla*, March 1, 2010.
- 22 It appears that a process was implemented during the tenure of Shaul Horev as the IAEC chairman (2007-2015) that was designed to increase the supervision and transparency in relation to safety issues at the reactor. "The policy I forged as the head of the IAEC is a policy of greater transparency, openness to the public and more willingness to undergo professional examination by external bodies, such as a visit by government officers at the IAEC's centers, [and] reporting to external bodies." See interview with Shaul Horev in the Negev Nuclear Research Center newsletter: <http://goo.gl/LSvkGY>.
- 23 Gavison, "Freedom of Speech and Atomic Secrets," emphasis added.

Israel and American Jewry: Moving Beyond the Core

Owen Alterman

Many Israelis have a particular image of the American Jew.¹ In the public mind, s/he is an upper-middle class Ashkenazi suburbanite who picks his or her kids up from Hebrew school at the local Reform or Conservative synagogue. This American Jew loyally supports (and sends a check) for the latest “emergency campaign” for Israel. This is the Jew who sits in the audience when members of the Israeli establishment come to speak – and whose kids are often the subject of Israeli satire.²

These American Jews still exist in their millions, but their future is bleak. The landmark 2013 study by the Pew Research Center showed, once again, that numbers are dropping. The decline of this sector presents challenges for Israeli national security policy. This article outlines the challenges posed by the shrinking American Jewish core and suggests how Israel can meet them. Largely, this means mobilizing the emerging “Jewish Background” and “Jewish Affinity” sectors and reaching out to America’s Haredim. This article explains why – and how.

The Problem: A Shrinking Core

In October 2013, the Pew Research Center released its long-anticipated study of American Jewry,³ and the findings prompted much anguish in the Jewish world. That angst is not new, of course; demographic studies of American Jews have generated anguish for decades, charting the consistent decline of non-Orthodox American Jewry. Still, the 2013 Pew study showed no sign of the drumbeat of decline stopping, and even indicated signs of its acceleration. Fully 72 percent of non-Orthodox⁴ American Jews – the children and grandchildren of the legendary American Jew – now intermarry.⁵ The

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Conservative movement is aging and shrinking,⁶ with the ranks of those most loosely affiliated growing.⁷ The demographic consequences of that change are already visible in New York, as shown in figure 1.⁸

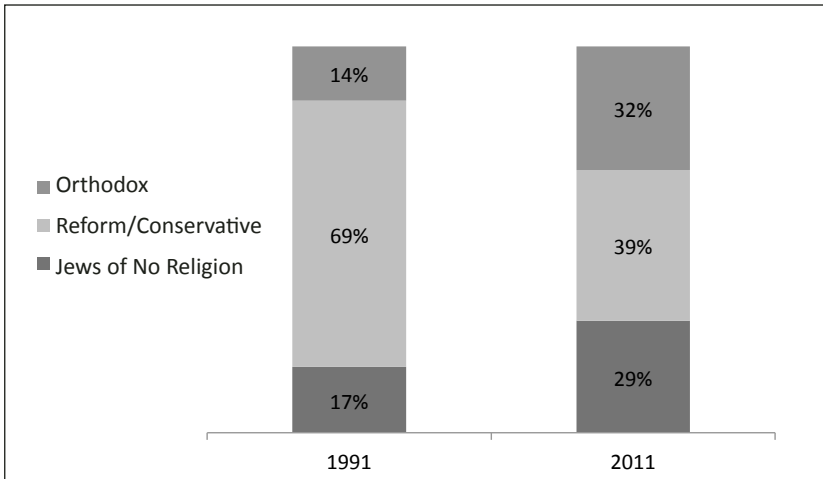


Figure 1. Changes in Affiliation, New York, 1991-2011

The New York numbers presage the future. “The drop in the number of Jews in the middle of the identity spectrum,” says leading demographer Steven M. Cohen, “is visible today only among children and young adults. But, in coming decades, the adverse impact of the small number of children in their households will become increasingly visible, clear and apparent. Put simply, the number of middle-aged non-Orthodox Jews who are engaged in Jewish life is poised to drop sharply in the next 20-40 years.”⁹ To the *New York Times*, Cohen added that numbers point to a “sharply declining non-Orthodox population in the second half of the 21st century.”¹⁰ Or, as he and scholar Jack Wertheimer put it, “American Jews now stand on the precipice of a demographic cliff.”¹¹

This demographic collapse has significant implications for Israeli national security policy. Strongly affiliated non-Orthodox American Jews have for decades been the natural partner for the Israeli establishment, the bedrock of support for the Israel-Diaspora relationship, and the linchpin for pro-Israel political activity in the United States. Other groups, especially evangelical Christians, have joined forces in pro-Israel lobbying in recent decades, but the foundation of support from the American Jewish world has provided the most comfortable of partners for Israel: economically

well-off, broadly secular, bound together by bonds of Jewish solidarity, deferential on policy matters, and connected to both American political parties. If this group sinks into decline, it could complicate Israel's ability to manage its relationship with the United States, a core strategic asset.

The convenience of this natural bond with non-Orthodox American Jews has led the Israeli establishment to redouble efforts to strengthen their flank. The investment in Taglit-Birthright Israel,¹² the reorientation of the Jewish Agency,¹³ and the creation – if not implementation – of the World Jewry Joint Initiative¹⁴ all testify to the basic strategy of shoring up non-Orthodox Jewish America. Here, the Israeli establishment is stepping into a well-trodden field that American Jewish organizations have sown for decades: investing in programs to strengthen the Jewish identity of non-Orthodox members of the tribe in hopes of a renaissance.

This strategy has become so dominant that nearly every prominent initiative in the American Jewish institutional world falls within it, including those relating to schools, synagogues, camps, community centers, Israel trips, youth movements, and campus centers. Even the most recent of initiatives do not stray from the conventional thinking.¹⁵ This dominance has blinded major players from thinking outside that strategic box and from seeing potential strategic alternatives.

The approach of shoring up the core, of course, has merit: given the importance of the non-Orthodox American Jewish sector, Israel wisely is not giving up on it. But the approach also has its limits. So far, three decades and billions of dollars of investments have failed to reverse the sector's decline in any strategically significant measure. Relying only on the strategy of outreach risks leaving Israel exposed to a "demographic cliff" that may, in large part, be sociologically inevitable, without an alternative strategy toward American Jewry.

For that reason, in addition to the strategy of non-Orthodox outreach, the Israeli establishment must look elsewhere. Efforts to develop support from evangelical Christians, from minority groups, and others are steps in that direction. Even this, though, ignores the imperative of developing ties within American Jewry itself and with those fellow travelers with a background or emotional affinity tying them with Judaism. Support from Jews provides something that other sectors may lack in depth and durability of commitment.¹⁶ Moreover, conscious policy moves by the Israeli and American Jewish establishments can materially help to maximize support

from American Jewry as a whole and not only maximize support from the non-Orthodox sector.

In this regard, data from the Pew study points in at least two promising directions. The “center” or “core” of the community may indeed be shrinking, as bemoaned by so many. But the two “extremes” are growing. Both the more diffuse sector of Americans with “Jewish background” or “Jewish affinity” and the more cohesive American Haredi sector are, according to the Pew study, experiencing fantastic growth. Both also potentially have strong pockets of support for Israel, ripe for the establishments in both Jerusalem and New York to target for marshaling support. This article makes the case for doing so, both conceptually and with policy recommendations.

Beyond the Core: “Jewish Background” and “Jewish Affinity”

While decades of intermarriage and assimilation have eroded the established core of American Jewry, they have also produced millions of Americans who do not self-identify as Jews but who have a familial or other affinity to Judaism. Intermarried couples have borne hundreds of thousands of children who are not Jewish but have a connection to Judaism through the Jewish heritage of their families. Non-Jewish spouses of Jews have a connection through their marriages and in-laws. More than a million other Americans tell pollsters that they, too, feel a special emotional attachment to Judaism even if they do not identify as Jews themselves. These groups have become a major presence in American life and show that just as Jews are assimilating into America, in some ways Americans are assimilating into the Jews.

The 2013 Pew study identifies and defines two distinct groups of Americans who themselves are not Jewish but who have a particular link to Judaism.¹⁷ The first is the “Jewish Background” group: Americans with a Jewish parent who do not (or no longer) identify as Jews. The second is the “Jewish Affinity” group: non-Jews without a Jewish parent who nonetheless see themselves as linked to Judaism in some way. The links to Judaism are varied, ranging from those citing that “Jesus was Jewish” to those citing their Jewish spouse or Jewish grandparents.¹⁸ Whereas the “Jewish Background” connection is a filial one, the “Jewish Affinity” connection is often one of choice and self-identification.

Taken together, these “Jewish Background” and “Jewish Affinity” sectors are enormous. Figures have grown so significantly that the 3.6 million American adults in this sector now nearly equal the total number

of adults in the core itself – some 3.7 million non-Orthodox American Jews by religion.¹⁹ A full 1.5 percent of the total adult US population is either “Jewish Background” (1 percent) or “Jewish Affinity” (0.5 percent).²⁰ The diverse sectors are also varied politically, split between Democrats and Republicans;²¹ and this is so even within the “Jewish Affinity” sector, whose seemingly substantial evangelical Christian contingent might have indicated a Republican tilt.

The “Jewish Background” and “Jewish Affinity” sectors show a reasonably strong connection to Judaism and Jewish institutions, which sets them apart from non-Jewish Americans. Over a quarter – some 972,000 people – donated to a Jewish organization in 2012, the year before the study.²² The sectors also show a strong emotional connection to Israel (figure 2).²³

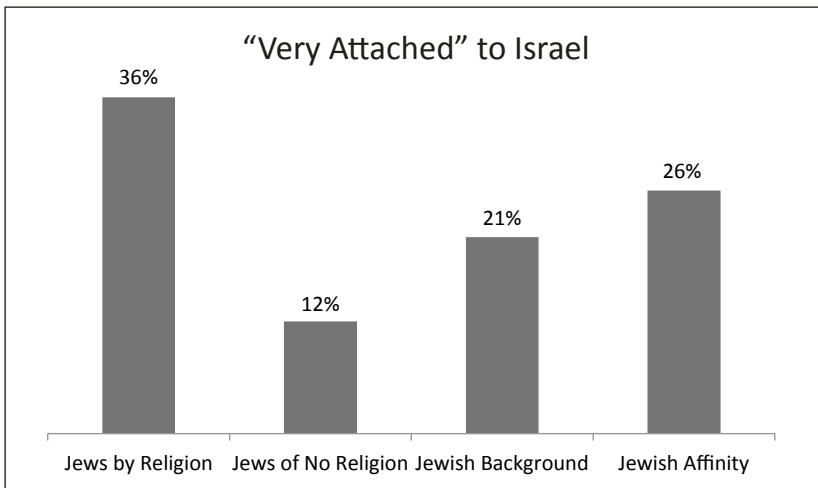


Figure 2. Emotional Attachment to Israel, by Sector, 2013

A large proportion of the sectors believe that the United States is “not supportive enough” of Israel. Significantly, the proportion of “Jewish Background” and “Jewish Affinity” respondents seeing the United States as not sufficiently supportive is actually greater than among the communal core itself (figure 3).²⁴

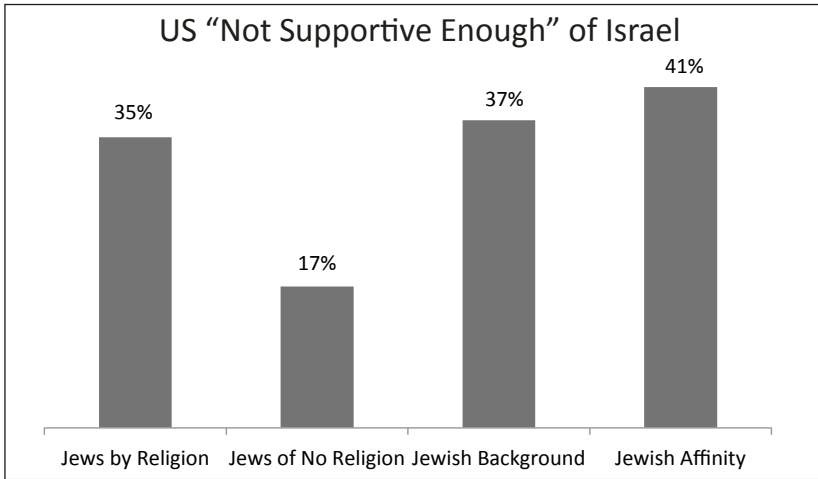


Figure 3. US Approach toward Israel, by Sector, 2013

Despite the sectors' professed connection to Judaism and to Israel, neither Israel nor the American Jewish establishment has done much to mobilize and organize this substantial number of people. A significant share of those with "Jewish Affinity" may be evangelical Christians²⁵ and engaged on Israel-related issues through evangelical institutions. Otherwise, though, no organizational framework exists for identifying or mobilizing either the "Jewish Background" or "Jewish Affinity" shares of the population. This leaves significant mobilization value untapped. If a network existed to bring these sectors to demonstrations, have them lobby for pro-Israel policies, or donate in even greater numbers to Jewish organizations, the benefits could be substantial and, from Israel's perspective, strategically significant.

One could imagine, for example, an "Americans of Jewish Heritage" network that hosts seminars and courses on Judaism, raises money for Jewish causes, sponsors partially-subsidized trips to Israel, and includes an element of pro-Israel political recruitment. A network such as this one could show the sector to be greater than the sum of its parts, since an organization lowers the search and information costs for those wishing to become politically or philanthropically active and so might encourage the marginally interested to take part.

An effort to organize and mobilize support from the "Jewish Background" and "Jewish Affinity" sectors could adopt elements from the organizational success of the Israeli-American Council, where a centralized effort managed

to organize what had been a loosely organized sector.²⁶ Even at a relatively early stage, the Israeli-American Council has shown its strength and potential.²⁷ So too could a “Jewish Affinity” organization become a relevant and even significant player on the American Jewish scene and in generating support for Israel in the United States.

It may be that among the “Jewish Background” and “Jewish Affinity” sectors, the yield would be relatively low. An individual “Jewish Background-er” or “Jewish Affinity-er” might well be less likely than an individual Israeli-American, or even an individual loosely-affiliated American Jew, to donate to Jewish organizations or become involved in pro-Israel activism. Still, because the numbers are so large, so too is the potential. A low yield from a huge pool could produce a significant benefit.

Outreach to such a large, diffuse sector poses several key challenges, not least of which is finding the target audience. Because the “Jewish Background” and “Jewish Affinity” publics are not organized, it may be difficult to find them. A useful first step would be to approach those who have already come forward: the 972,000 from the sectors who have donated to Jewish organizations, whose contact information is on file, and who have already shown some interest in engagement.

Beyond that, an outreach strategy to these sectors would benefit from deeper polling and research designed to identify what media these sectors read and in what institutions they can be found. At that point, outreach could target those media (whether traditional media or social media) and those institutions. Because of the potential expense, a gradual approach or localized pilot project might be the optimal strategy. Still, the potential benefits to Israel and American Jewry justify the costs.

Beyond the Core: Into the Haredi Sector

While the non-Orthodox core of American Jewry has shrunk, the numbers of Haredim (ultra-Orthodox) have grown exponentially. In the Orthodox sector generally, intermarriage rates are far lower than among the non-Orthodox, and birthrates are far higher (figure 4).²⁸

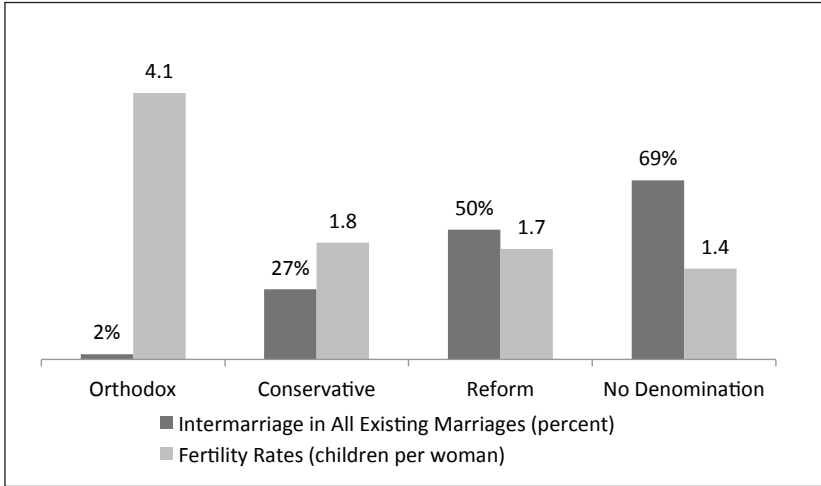


Figure 4. Intermarriage and Fertility Rates, by Affiliation, 2013

For the Haredi portion of the Orthodox sector, birthrates climb still higher.²⁹ Gaps in intermarriage rates and birthrates have, over time, led to a dramatic increase in the proportion of Haredim among American Jewry as a whole, particularly among younger generations.³⁰ In New York, nearly half of all Jewish children are now Haredi³¹ (figure 5).

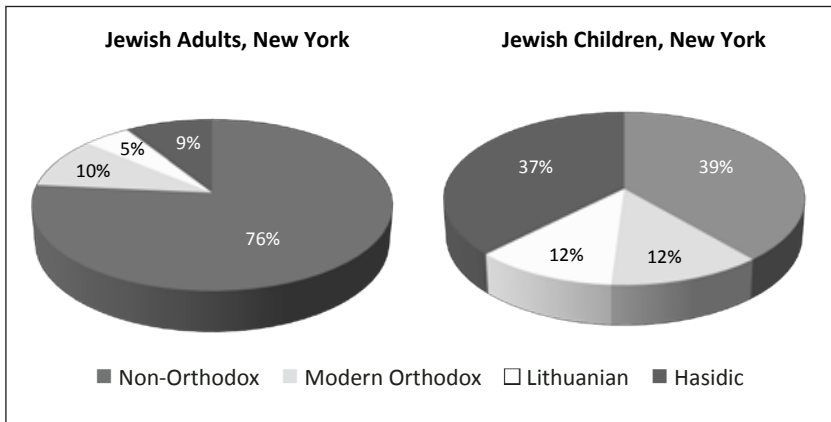


Figure 5. Jewish Adults and Children, New York, 2011

Despite this phenomenal growth, the Israeli and American Jewish establishments have not materially invested in leveraging the growing

Haredi numbers for participation in wider political activism and in pro-Israel work in particular. For the November 2013 planning summit of the World Jewry Joint Initiative, for example, the Prime Minister's Office invited 120 "Jewish leaders and senior Israeli government officials" that included "representatives of Jewish communities, organizations, and foundations, academics, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, both men and women, young people and veteran leaders from around the world."³² From the Haredi sector, though, the initiative's organizers invited only Chabad, leaving the masses of America's Haredim outside the tent.³³ Instead, the focus seems to have remained only on shoring up the non-Orthodox core and on engaging the Modern Orthodox sector.

The sidelining of Haredi groups might be the result of homophily. The institutional partners coordinating Israel's relationship with American Jewry are the traditional ones from the non-Orthodox American Jewish core, and the networks of these groups' leaders and members are likely oriented toward non-Orthodox American Jews similar to them. The Israeli and American Jewish establishments might also believe that Haredim are less willing and less able to engage in pro-Israel political activism: less willing because of the perception that Haredim are less connected to the political project of the State of Israel than are other segments of the American Jewish population, and less able because Haredim are perceived to be less well off and having lower levels of secular education.

These perceptions may be inaccurate, at least in part. The Pew study did not break down the Haredi sector into parts, but the 2011 survey of New York Jews, which did so, produced intriguing findings that call into question prevailing views of some American Haredim. Among "Lithuanian" (or "Yeshivish") Haredim,³⁴ for example, some 82 percent said they were "very attached" to Israel, higher than any other denominational group, including the Modern Orthodox (whose figure was 75 percent).³⁵ Even among many New York Hasidic groups, numbers of "very attached" were strong: 85 percent among Hasidim in Flatbush and 61 percent in Borough Park.³⁶ Only in Williamsburg, home of the staunchly anti-Zionist Satmar sect, were numbers weak, at 31 percent (figure 6).³⁷

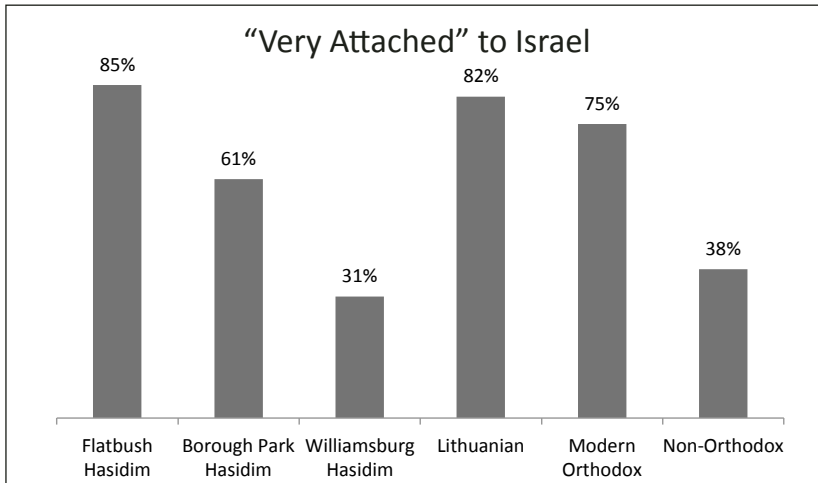


Figure 6. Attachment to Israel, New York, 2011

These figures may not represent only the traditional Haredi attachment to the Land of Israel, but also a connection to the Israeli political enterprise. For example, data analyzed by Pew shows that 48 percent of Haredim say that the United States is “not supportive enough” of Israel, a figure higher than for any cohort other than the Modern Orthodox.³⁸ The Pew numbers include both Lithuanian and Hasidic Haredim, so the Lithuanian numbers may well be higher.

Lithuanian Haredim in New York are also wealthier than many think. Some 11 percent of households have an annual income of \$250,000 or more, a higher proportion than Modern Orthodox New Yorkers or non-Orthodox New York Jews.³⁹ Data analyzed by Pew in August 2015 seems to corroborate that finding, noting that 24 percent of Haredi households earn more than \$150,000, a number nearly as high as that for non-Orthodox Jews.⁴⁰ Some of this added income might be needed to cover the expenses of larger families, but resources might well remain that could be solicited for pro-Israeli political causes⁴¹ or for Israeli or general Jewish philanthropy.

Findings from the Pew study, and even more so from the 2011 New York study, suggest that at least segments of the Haredi community could be ripe for increased pro-Israel political activity. That hypothesis should be tested. The establishment should reach out to relevant Haredi organizations, such as Agudath Israel of America, for an open discussion of how and whether Haredi involvement in general Jewish political activity could or should be

cultivated. The Agudah has some experience with pro-Israel political work, and it responded favorably⁴² to the conference presentation that preceded this article. Ideas could include briefings by Israeli politicians and security officials both in the United States and in Israel, special political-oriented trips to Israel tailored to Haredim, and political engagement with Haredim already in Israel for purposes of visiting and religious study. Even if some Haredi groups reject such overtures, the Israeli and American Jewish establishments could work with those parts of the heterogeneous Haredi sector that prove more receptive.

Collaboration with Haredi spiritual and institutional leaders could be important. On the one hand, given the decline of the American Jewish core, stepped-up Haredi involvement could contribute significantly to the sustained status of American Jewry and the security of Israel. On the other hand, the Haredi sector must want to be involved and must be comfortable with the ways in which that involvement is managed. One relevant question is structural: Should the establishment American Jewish organizations seek to integrate Haredim further into their own boards and committees? Or should Haredi activism be channeled separately through Haredi-focused organizations? These and other key questions must be addressed.

Another question surrounds the potential role of Modern Orthodox organizations and leaders in Haredi outreach. The Modern Orthodox themselves comprise a growing sector, important in American Jewry's future. Their numbers are much smaller than those of Haredim, and data indicate that Modern Orthodox are already highly mobilized and engaged in Jewish causes.⁴³ For these reasons, this article focuses on American Jewry's Haredi sector and not its Modern Orthodox one. Still, the Modern Orthodox may have a particular role to play in Haredi outreach, serving, potentially, as a bridge between the traditional American Jewish core and the Haredi sector.

Over time, the American Jewish establishment will on its own inevitably discover and seek to unlock the Haredi potential. As demographic changes continue apace, the organizations will eventually seek potential avenues of growth, and the Haredi sector will become a natural focus. Decision makers, though, should not wait for that natural process to unfold. Rather, they should be more farsighted: seeing the reality wrought by changing demography and moving actively to direct history. Haredi political involvement could reap significant benefits for American Jewry, and those benefits would be even greater the earlier they accrue.

Conclusion: The Core and Beyond

For the past generation, the demographic changes sweeping American Jewry have spurred an impassioned race to bring non-Orthodox Jews back to the fold. The billion-dollar investment in schools, summer camps, youth groups, campus centers, and trips to Israel has swallowed community resources and attention. This shoring up of the core is a worthwhile strategy and should continue.

The core, though, must not be the only target for mobilizing American Jewry or the only corridor for maintaining relations between Israel and America's Jews. "Right now," as Steven M. Cohen has said, "we speak of four streams of Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. In forty years, will Jews speak instead of four other streams: Haredi Orthodox, Yeshivish Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, and 'liberal' Jews?"⁴⁴ To these might be added the emerging sectors of "Jewish Background" and "Jewish Affinity," so loosely assembled as to have escaped notice from even renowned experts.

The "Jewish Background"-"Jewish Affinity" and Haredi sectors have much to contribute. Current policies risk leaving untapped those contributions and the benefits that could accrue from engaging and mobilizing these sectors in earnest. Both Israel and the American Jewish establishment can do much more to realize this potential. The time has come to move beyond the core.

Notes

- 1 This article is based largely on a presentation by the author and Cameron S. Brown for the 2014 annual conference of the Institute for National Security Studies and delivered on January 28, 2014. The presentation can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiWzJweSA2I>. Any updates, deviations, or additions to the content of the presentation are the product of the author alone.
- 2 For an example with English-language subtitles, see the clip from television series *Eretz Nehederet* ("A Wonderful Country"), <http://vimeo.com/35660324> (aired January 23, 2012). The above paragraph, in substantially the same form, appeared in Owen Alterman and Cameron S. Brown, "Support for Israel in a Changing America," *Strategic Assessment* 15, no. 4 (2013): 15, http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan15_4ENGe_Alterman%20and%20Brown.pdf.
- 3 *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, Pew Research Center, October 1, 2013, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/10/jewish-american-full-report-for-web.pdf> (hereafter "Pew Study").
- 4 Traditionally, lay leaders and the media have divided American Jewry into three segments: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. In the wake

- of the Pew study, a different triad is more descriptive: Orthodox, non-Orthodox “Jews by religion,” and “Jews of no religion.” The third category is an outgrowth of the Pew study, which found substantial numbers of respondents who said they have no religion but identify as Jewish nonetheless. In the text, the 72 percent statistic cited is for the second and third categories combined. In describing the traditional American Jewish core, though, a better shorthand is the second category: only non-Orthodox “Jews by religion,” who have higher rates of affiliation and form the traditional backbone of the American Jewish establishment.
- 5 Among non-Orthodox American Jews who have married since 2000, some 72 percent have wed a non-Jewish spouse. Gregory A. Smith and Alan Cooperman, “What Happens When Jews Inter marry?” Fact Tank, Pew Research Center, Nov. 12, 2013, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/11/12/what-happens-when-jews-intermarry/>.
 - 6 Daniel Gordis, “Conservative Judaism: A Requiem,” *Jewish Review of Books*, Winter 2014, <http://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/566/requiem-for-a-movement/>.
 - 7 Pew Study, pp. 32-33, 60 (showing growth in “Jews of no religion” and then their lower levels of membership in Jewish organizations other than synagogues, and lower levels of donating to Jewish organizations).
 - 8 Steven M. Cohen, Jacob B. Ukeles, and Ron Miller, *Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011*, UJA-Federation of New York, pp. 121, 122, <http://d4ovttrzyow8g.cloudfront.net/494344.pdf>. The authors of the study recalibrated the 1991 figures in order to reflect households and not individuals, and so make a comparison with 2002 and 2011 figures more reliable.
 - 9 Steven M. Cohen, “What Is To Be Done? Policy Responses to the Shrinking Jewish Middle,” May 22, 2014, p. 1, http://iengage.org.il/Fck_Uploads/file/What%20Is%20To%20Be%20Done.pdf. The original marks part of the text in bold.
 - 10 Laurie Goodstein, “Poll Shows Major Shift in Identity of U.S. Jews,” *New York Times*, October 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/01/us/poll-shows-major-shift-in-identity-of-us-jews.html>.
 - 11 Jack Wertheimer and Steven M. Cohen, “The Pew Survey Reanalyzed: More Bad News, But a Glimmer of Hope,” *Mosaic*, November 2, 2014, <http://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2014/11/the-pew-survey-reanalyzed/>.
 - 12 Partner, The Government of Israel, <http://www.birtherightisrael.com/TaglitBirthrightIsraelStory/Partners/Pages/The-Government-of-Israel.aspx>. In 2011, the Israeli government announced a substantial increase in funding, with \$100 million to be allocated for the trips. Josh Nathan-Kazis, “Government of Israel to Give More to Birthright Program,” *The Forward*, January 12, 2011, <http://forward.com/news/134636/government-of-israel-to-give-more-to-birtheright-pr/#ixzz3t9rDqADu>.

- 13 eJP, "Securing the Future: The Jewish Agency's New Plan," June 18, 2010, <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=7247>.
- 14 Ben Sales, "Israeli Ministry Plows Ahead with 'World Jewry' Project, Even as Funding and Future Remain Uncertain," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, September 24, 2015, <http://www.jta.org/2015/09/24/news-opinion/israel-middle-east/israeli-ministry-plows-ahead-with-world-jewry-project-even-as-funding-and-future-remain-uncertain>.
- 15 See, for example, "Strategic Directions for Jewish Life: A Call to Action" ("Statement on Jewish Vitality"), eJewish Philanthropy, October 1, 2015, <http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/strategic-directions-for-jewish-life-a-call-to-action/>.
- 16 Some, even within the evangelical Christian community, have questioned the durability of the sector's attachment to Israel. See, for example, David Brog, "The End of Evangelical Support for Israel?" *Middle East Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (2014), http://www.meforum.org/3769/israel-evangelical-support#_ftnref1. That said, these claims are not necessarily supported by polling data; see Alterman and Brown, "Support for Israel in a Changing America," pp. 10-11.
- 17 Pew Study, p. 107.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 48 (calculating the number of American Jews by religion who are non-Orthodox by subtracting the 12 percent of that cohort who are Orthodox from the total figure of 4.2 million Jews by religion).
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 112 (multiplying the total number of adults in each sector by the respective percentage donating to a Jewish organization).
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Within the "Jewish Affinity" sector, some 31 percent say they have an affinity toward Judaism because "Jesus was Jewish," *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- 26 Orli Santo, "In U.S., Israelis Claim a Foothold," *Jewish Week*, May 26, 2015, <http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new-york/us-israelis-claim-foothold>.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Pew Report, pp. 37, 40.
- 29 Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews," August 26, 2015, <http://goo.gl/uxBTJa>. Although the Pew analysis does not break down fertility rates for Haredim and Modern Orthodox Jews, one of its tables indicates Haredi households are far more likely than Modern Orthodox ones to have four or more children currently living at home, supplying strong circumstantial evidence for higher fertility rates. Moreover, the New York study found evidence of considerably higher fertility rates among Haredim than among Modern Orthodox. See *Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011*, pp. 214-15.

- 30 Josh Nathan-Kazis, "Orthodox Population Grows Faster than First Figures in Pew #JewishAmerica Study," *The Forward*, November 12, 2013, <http://forward.com/news/187429/orthodox-population-grows-faster-than-first-figure/>.
- 31 *Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011*, p. 216.
- 32 Prime Minister's Office, Press Release, "Strategic Planning Summit for Unprecedented Joint Initiative between Government of Israel and Jewish World Launches in Jerusalem," November 6, 2013, <http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Spokesman/Pages/spokestrategic061113.aspx>.
- 33 Sam Sokol, "Pew Studying Israeli Jewry," *Jerusalem Post*, January 28, 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-Features/Pew-to-issue-study-on-Israeli-Judaism-339664>.
- 34 "Lithuanian" (also called "Yeshivish") and "Hasidic" denote the two streams within the Haredi world. The divide dates to the eighteenth century and the rise of Hasidism, a mysticism-oriented movement centered on dynastic rabbinic courts. The new movement challenged the establishment of the time, which coalesced around a sage known as the Vilna Gaon. Because the core of opposition to Hasidism was in the Vilna Gaon's native Lithuania, non-Hasidic Haredim are known to this day as "Lithuanian." For further explanation, see David Assaf, "Hasidism, Historical Overview," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hasidism/Historical_Overview (referring to the "Lithuanian" Haredim as "Misnagdim," yet another synonym for the subsector).
- 35 *Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011*, p. 223.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews."
- 39 *Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011*, p. 220.
- 40 Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews." Unlike the New York study, though, the Pew analysis does not distinguish between Hasidic and Lithuanian Haredim, so a more precise corroboration is not possible.
- 41 For pro-Israel activism in particular, the Haredi sector's impact may be limited somewhat by geographical concentration. Some 89 percent of Haredim live in the Northeast (and, within the Northeast, may be concentrated in smaller enclaves). This may limit the Haredi sector's capacity to influence more far-flung legislators. For statistics on the sector's regional distribution, see Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews."
- 42 Sokol, "Pew Studying Israeli Jewry."
- 43 See, for example, *Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011*, p. 221.
- 44 Cohen, "What Is To Be Done? Policy Responses to the Shrinking Jewish Middle," p. 2.

Key Challenges Facing the Israeli Economy and their Ramifications for National Security

Eran Yashiv

Two topics taking center stage in Israel's public economic discourse are the nation's fiscal policy, especially the defense budget, and the various factors contributing to economic inequality. This essay surveys the latest developments in both topics and discusses their ramifications for national security. As background to these topics, the essay begins by surveying the main developments that occurred in the Israeli economy in 2015. It then discusses the government budget in general and the defense budget in particular, and economic inequality and its ramifications for Israeli society and social cohesion in the face of this challenge. The essay makes some proposals for improved fiscal policy planning and the ways the government could tackle inequality.

Major Macroeconomic Developments in 2015

The Israeli economy experienced a slowdown in 2015, primarily because of a global slowdown in economic activity. GDP growth dropped from 2.6 percent in 2014 to 2.3 percent in 2015, and the business sector product growth rate dropped from 2.3 percent to 2.1 percent. Israeli exports, which in 2014 rose by 4.9 percent, dropped by about 1.3 percent in 2015, according to the December 31, 2015 estimate of the Central Bureau of Statistics. The global slowdown is to a large extent a consequence of the slowdown in China's economy, where the annual growth fell from 7.3 percent in 2014 to 6.9 percent in 2015. On January 19, 2016, as a result of this slowdown,

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which sent shockwaves through the global economy, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) lowered the 2015 assessment of global growth from its 3.3 percent estimate in July to 3.1 percent.

Looking ahead to 2016, IMF economists predict a global growth of 3.4 percent with another drop in China's growth rate to 6.3 percent. On December 28, 2015, the Bank of Israel predicted a 2.8 percent growth rate for Israel for 2016. Table 1 shows a breakdown of Israel's growth rate by macroeconomic variables.

Table 1. Key Macroeconomic Variables

Variable	2014 (%)	CBS estimates (Dec. 31, 2015; %)
GDP	2.6	2.3
Business GDP	2.3	2.1
Private consumption	3.7	4.5
Public consumption (without defense imports)	3.3	2.8
Investment in economic branches	-2.8	-3.3
Investment in housing	-0.5	2.1
Exports (excluding diamonds and startups)	4.9	-1.3
Imports (excluding defense, ships, planes, and diamonds)	3.3	1.9

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics¹

When examining the development of the other GDP components this year, the drop in business investment is clearly evident. This development is worrisome because it involves investment in the economy's capital stock, which serves production in the present and future. Therefore, a drop in investment hurts economic growth. As it is, the capital stock in Israel and investment are low when compared to other countries, making this development all the more problematic. The government could encourage investment and work to increase the capital stock, both by investing more in infrastructure – necessary given its state in Israel – and by implementing a better tax and subsidies policy. The present conditions with low interest rates offer a particularly convenient window of opportunity, and economists, including those of the IMF, recommend this policy to many countries around the world (including the United States), as it may have a very positive effect on economic growth.

Fiscal Policy

Against the background of these macroeconomic developments, the 2015-2016 government budget was formulated and approved by the Knesset on November 19, 2015. What follows is a discussion of the budget's composition, implications for deficits and public debt, the problems associated with the budget process, and issues specific to the defense budget.

Budget composition. The original government budget for 2015 consisted of NIS 331 billion (about 29 percent of GDP) for expenditures, and NIS 260 billion (about 24 percent of GDP) as income from taxes. When adding other sources of income (about 2.6 percent of GDP), one arrives at a deficit of NIS 34 billion, representing about 2.7 percent of GDP.² In January 2016, the estimate was that the 2015 deficit in practice would amount to only 2.15 percent of GDP.

Around 40 percent of expenditures are budgets for social services (primarily education and healthcare), around 23 percent for defense and public security, about 15 percent for interest and debt payment, 6 percent for infrastructure, and the rest for other expenses.³ Prominent in this breakdown are the large parts apportioned for defense and debt payments, representing a significant limit to spending on civil matters. The economic slowdown discussed above further reduces the fiscal policy space, because income from taxes depends on economic activity. The defense budget too is, of course, subject to this limitation.

The deficit framework and the debt. It is common practice to assess fiscal policy in terms of the deficit-to-GDP ratio, in which the deficit measures the gap between the expenditures and income. A decrease in economic activity automatically reduces tax income and raises the deficit.

In early August 2015, the Bank of Israel warned of coming difficulties in the fiscal framework. The governor of the Bank of Israel noted the following:⁴

- a. By law, the deficit is supposed to drop to 2 percent of GDP in 2016 (about NIS 23 billion); at present, this looks like a very ambitious goal.
- b. After an ongoing decrease in the percentage of the debt-GDP ratio, it has, since 2013, stabilized at 67 percent. Interest payments on the debt represent 3 percent of GDP, or about NIS 30 billion, compared to an average of 1.7 percent in developed nations.
- c. According to the Bank of Israel, it is very important that the 2016 deficit not exceed 2.5 percent of GDP, representing a deficit level that stabilizes the debt-to-GDP ratio. The farther Israel moves from the 2.5 percent deficit level, the more this will be seen as the government's lack of

commitment to fiscal responsibility and will generate an increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio.

- d. To reduce the deficit to a level of 2.5 percent of GDP – the maximum that ensures that 2016 will not see an increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio compared to 2014 – there is the need for cutting about NIS 15 billion according to the Bank of Israel estimates; of this, the cost of the coalition agreements is NIS 8 billion.

Despite the economic slowdown, the law on reducing the deficit, and the Bank of Israel warning, the government determined that the 2015-2016 debt would be 2.9 percent of GDP for both years. The Ministry of Finance also announced a cut in VAT from 18 to 17 percent starting October 1, 2015, and a reduction in corporate profit taxes from 26.5 to 25 percent on January 1, 2016. Should the slowdown continue and if the Bank of Israel warnings are realized, we can expect the public debt to grow and fiscal space will be even more constrained than before. This means that at a time when the world is extremely worried about deficits and public debt and is taking steps to rein them in, Israel is adopting a contradictory policy. This has implications for the interest the Israeli government will have to pay on its debt. However, the debt in practice in 2015 was lower than expected (as noted above), and the public debt-to-GDP ratio in 2015 decreased from 66.7 percent at the end of 2014 to 64.9 percent at the end of 2015.

A key issue in this context is the defense budget. When the Knesset approved the budget in mid November 2015, the defense budget was NIS 56 billion, and it was clear that between NIS 4-7 billion would be added in the course of 2016. This means that the government is liable to exceed the desirable level of debt. Any further slowdown to the economy will only exacerbate this deviation because of the decreased income from taxes.

Fundamental problems in the process of budget formulation and ways to resolve them. The process by which the government budget is formulated involves three major problems: a) Drafting the budget is done mainly in incremental fashion. It is therefore impossible to re-examine national priorities on which it is based. b) There is no body (except for, potentially, the budgetary division of the Ministry of Finance) that has the tools and time to come up with alternatives and present them to the government. c) The budget doesn't usually reflect multiyear planning, i.e., the annual budget is not based on the perspective of multiyear planning. The result of these problems is that the process is not informed, and is swayed by political battles and coalition and sectorial pressures. In practice, this

process gives preference to the short term and reduces the budgetary field of vision. Under such circumstances, it is very difficult to promote issues that could serve as a response to the social protest movement that began in the summer of 2011 about civil spending and, in that sense, systemically confront the high cost of housing or promote tax reforms. The government does not have the tools to decide knowledgeably on a division of the budget among the needs of defense, education, healthcare, welfare, and other fields.

There are solutions to these problems that are successfully applied in other countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. One possible solution that can be applied in Israel is the establishment of a fiscal council. The IMF recently published a survey of the activities of such councils in various countries; its conclusion was positive. The head of the fiscal council would be a senior, established, government-appointed expert. The relevance of this council in Israel's governing system would be ensured if it becomes part of the budgetary division of the Ministry of Finance. As part of this fiscal council, a committee of experts – senior economists and contents experts – would closely examine the various budgetary issues. Just as the monetary policy committee of the Bank of Israel (established by former Governor of the Bank of Israel Stanley Fischer) outlines monetary policy, so would the fiscal council be able to engage in multiyear planning that would shape the budget structure while formulating alternatives to be decided on by the government. The establishment of the council must be enshrined in legislation so as to guarantee its independence and position in the government system. The budget could remain annual but would be part of a longer term and broader vision than at present.

The defense budget. The argument over the defense budget was especially vehement in 2015, both because of media attention and because of the publication of the Locker Committee recommendations in July 2015 and their rejection by the defense establishment. At the same time, the IDF announced Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot's multiyear Gideon Plan, which became part of the public debate. Critics of the defense establishment and the establishment in general both share the sense that one must take Israel's changing threats into account. The critics claim that the system is not reducing spending on means that are currently less relevant than they were in the past, and stress the need for budgets to handle new threats, such as the Iranian nuclear program, cyberwarfare, missiles and rockets on civilian targets, and more. Others, however, contend that the defense

budget has already been severely slashed and that the Gideon Plan relates to current threats. The mechanism proposed above should be prepared to consider changes in the nature of the country's security threats. Therefore, professional experts must participate in formulating alternatives as part of an ongoing, continuous process that is part of the formulation of the defense budget. These experts can be former members of the defense establishment, especially those who dealt with budgetary matters during their military service.

The most recent negotiations between the Ministry of Finance and the defense establishment revisited the topic of pensions for standing army personnel given the agreement signed with them in 2008 and new proposals, including those of the Locker Committee in June 2015. The crux of the debate was the bridging pension paid out starting at the military retirement age of 45 until 67, the retirement age stipulated by law. A study conducted by the accountant general at the Ministry of Finance of salary and pension data received from the IDF revealed that the cost of the bridging pension was dozens of percentage points higher than that of the current budgetary pension. These figures are the basis for the new agreement between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Defense, which involves the following amendments to the pension formula: the retirement grant will no longer serve as the base for calculating the bridging pension, the bridging pension formula will be revoked, and the budgetary pension formula will be restored with a reduction component that is still to be negotiated. This new agreement does not meet the Locker Committee recommendations, whereby the budgetary cost to the state would have been significantly reduced. Because the agreement will cost about NIS 2.6 billion a year, it would be wise to appoint a special committee to evaluate the various alternatives in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance and the defense establishment, as well as independent pension experts.

Inequality and its Implications

One of the fundamental problems of the Israeli economy is a high level of inequality; which has grown worse in recent decades, even if there has been some stabilization in the last few years. A high level of inequality causes social tensions and exacerbates the divisions within an already fragmented society, manifested in many types of social strife: between religious, ultra-religious, and secular; between Jews and Arabs; between new immigrants and native and/or long-time Israelis; between residents of

the center and those on the geographical periphery; and more. The protests of the Ethiopian community in 2015 and the harassment of Israeli Arabs during times of security tensions were stark expressions of this strife.

Income inequality. Inequality is measured in various ways, including the incidence of poverty (a relative measure), income gaps among different population sectors, and more complex statistical indices, the best known being the Gini Index. Below are some comparative figures from the 2014 Annual Report: Poverty Indices and Social Gaps, published by the National Insurance Institute of Israel in December 2015:⁵

- a. The gaps between the top tenth percentile and the bottom tenth percentile in net monetary income in 2014 were very wide.
- b. The top decile's income is 8.1 times greater than that of the bottom tenth percentile, and spends 2.5 times as much.⁶
- c. The incidence of poverty has risen over time and reached 25 percent at the end of the previous decade; since then, there has been a small drop, to 22 percent.
- d. On the basis of the most recent available data from 2014, 444,900 families are living below the poverty line, affecting 1,709,300 people, including 778,500 children.
- e. In terms of the poverty rate, Israeli society is heterogeneous. While in 2014, the average poverty rate for families was 29.1 percent, the poverty rate among Israel's Arab citizens was 57.2 percent and among the country's ultra-Orthodox Jews 66.7 percent.
- f. The percentage of families in the poor population at large suffering from *persistent* poverty rose continuously over time and now stands at 58 percent.
- g. Israel is very high on the poverty scale relative to OECD nations – second only to Mexico in the 2013-2014 rankings.
- h. The Gini Inequality Index for disposable income attributes the value of 0 for total equality and 1 for extreme inequality. In 2014, Israel's index was 0.37, representing an increase of 4 percent compared to 1999.⁷ Among OECD nations, this index places Israel fourth in the level of inequality, after Mexico, Turkey and the United States.

Asset inequality. In addition to income inequality, there is also asset inequality. Apartments and houses are the main assets for the vast majority of households. A study by the Institute for Structural Reforms⁸ shows that the wealth gaps in Israel are greater than the income gaps. The upper tenth percentile controls about half of the assets, whereas the top percentile

controls 23 percent of national assets. Based on the study, the average wealth of Israeli households is NIS 2.1 million, compared to the average of NIS 10.8 million in the top tenth percentile and NIS 47.9 million in the top percentile. By contrast, 11 percent of Israeli households have assets totaling less than NIS 1,000, and 5 percent of households have debts that are greater than their assets. About 17 percent of the Israeli population (about 425,000 households) suffer from asset poverty, and the total value of their assets is enough to support them for only less than three months.

The implications of these figures. What emerges is that Israel is notable for high inequality both in income and in assets compared to developed nations, and that this situation is persistent. A key challenge for the economy is confronting this inequality and preventing its perpetuation. This type of inequality has several important implications for Israel's national security. First, the poorer groups – the ultra-Orthodox and the Arabs – are precisely the groups whose demographic weight is rising. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, each of these groups is expected to reach one quarter of the population by the middle of this century. Currently, the rate of IDF enlistment among these groups is very low and their contribution to the economy's GDP is likewise relatively low. Should these trends continue, the army's resources – both in terms of recruits and budgets (as taxes are a function of the size of GDP) – will be greatly reduced.

Second, inequality contributes to social rifts and, as a direct consequence, to political schisms. Even now, the above-mentioned poorer groups have 26 members of Knesset representing totally sectorial political parties, which is more than one fifth of Israel's parliament. Studies from around the world note that a rise in inequality is closely related to political divisions and a decline in democracy. Third, economic inequality is closely associated with inequality in contributions to national security via military service and tax payments. This creates social tensions and raises the rate of social disagreement over the very objectives of Israeli policy. These tensions were evident in the social protests in 2011. As the above data demonstrate, there has been no improvement in the relevant indices in recent years.

Thus, inequality influences security. While the sharpest political disagreements center on relations with the Arab world (both near and far); the territories and the Jewish settlements; the country's culture of democracy; and the state's involvement with religion, there is also a connection between all of them and economic inequality. Israel will find it difficult to maintain a functioning democracy with so profound a political rift, part of which is

a direct consequence of inequality. Another difficulty will be maintaining the nation's technological prowess if the population segments responsible for that strength leave because of social tensions, the gradual loss of the culture of democracy, and an unequal sharing of the national burden.

Policy to reduce inequality. There are many ways to change the situation, three of which are particularly prominent. One is expanding the negative income tax program, currently called the Work Grant Program. This grant is given to low income earners in order to incentivize them to continue working and to incentivize others to join the labor force. This policy works well in the United States. In Israel, it is used to a relatively low extent both in terms of the size of the grant and in terms of its coverage. Thus, for example, the maximal grant in Israel is 6.8 percent of the average wage for women and 4.5 percent of the average wage for men; by contrast, in the United States, it is 11 percent of the average wage. The rate of people actually taking up the grant in 2012 was 62 percent; among Arabs, that rate was even lower – 53 percent. One could increase the size of the grant to that of the United States and change the way the payment is made in order to increase its take-up rates, making the assistance much more effective. Recommendations of this sort were provided by the Committee to Fight Poverty in Israel (the so-called Alalouf Committee) in July 2014.⁹

The second way of changing the situation would be investing in the human infrastructure. There is room for a wide array of policy steps to strengthen weak population segments, first and foremost the Arabs, the ultra-Orthodox, and the Ethiopian immigrants. These are the primary groups representing the vast majority of the poor. These steps include essential improvements in the level of education, transportation infrastructure, help to working mothers (such as day-care centers), employment matching centers, legislation against discrimination and effective enforcement of such laws, encouraging the employment of academics, and more. Such steps are being taken today, but at a much lower scope than needed.¹⁰

The third way to reduce inequality concerns the existing distortions in the tax system, which deepen inequality, especially via very high indirect taxes – first and foremost the value added tax – and the many tax benefits. Reducing indirect taxation while abolishing many tax benefits could create more scope for maneuvering to increase social expenditures, including incentivizing work and investing in the human infrastructure, as explained above.

Conclusion

Israel is facing serious policy challenges when it comes to its fiscal policy and inequality. While these two topics top the agenda in many economies, in Israel the scope of these problems is large. The defense budget, for example, represents a large segment of the budget, unlike in many economies, and Israel has a very high degree of inequality compared to other countries.

This paper has suggested some solutions, although the probability of their implementation is low, because the severely divided political field makes it very difficult to implement reforms and the legislative changes required by these solutions. Thus the large gap between the scope and severity of the problems and the government's ability to resolve them to a significant degree remains intact. The many discussions and debates on these topics, both in the government and in the public sphere and media, do not translate into action of commensurate scope.

Notes

- 1 See Central Bureau of Statistics, "Preliminary National Accounts Estimates for 2015," <http://goo.gl/H0Tmgr>.
- 2 The Ministry of Finance, "2015-2016 Budget Synopsis," September 2015.
- 3 See Ministry of Finance, Budget Department, <https://goo.gl/PpCkEj>.
- 4 Taken from a publication called "Statement of the Governor at a Government Session: Budget Aggregates and the Deficit," August 2, 2015, <http://goo.gl/FNsmkA>.
- 5 National Insurance Institute of Israel, "2014 Annual Report: Poverty Indices and Social Gaps," <http://goo.gl/YeibU9>.
- 6 Initial data from "Findings from the Household Expenditure Survey 2014 Data on the Israeli Households Income, Expenditure and Durable Goods," Central Bureau of Statistics, for 2014, <http://goo.gl/q4KSaQ>.
- 7 "2014 Annual Report: Poverty Indexes and Social Gaps."
- 8 Maor Milgrom and Gilad Bar-Levav, "Inequality in Israel: How Is Wealth Distributed?" Institute for Structural Reforms, November 2015.
- 9 Data from Ilanit Bar, "Description and Analysis of Implementation of Work Grant Program by National Distribution," Research and Information Center of the Knesset, January 22, 2015.
- 10 For specific and detailed examples, including budgetary costs, see: Eran Yashiv and Nitza Kassir (Kleiner), "Israel's Arab Labor Force: A Survey of Characteristics and Policy Alternatives," Tel Aviv University, 2013.

“Peace, Peace, but there is no Peace”: Do Israel and the Palestinians Share a Political Horizon?

Shmuel Even

“I sat in front of Abu Mazen and said to him: ‘We are willing to concede sovereignty of the Old City... including the Western Wall.’ It was the toughest moment of my life.” Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert divulged this interchange in an interview with Raviv Drucker for the television series “Hamakor” (Channel 10 TV, November 2015). The series presented interviews with senior politicians and officials involved in the negotiations over a permanent settlement with the PLO (“the Palestinians”) during the Barak and Olmert governments (1999-2001 and 2006-2009, respectively). Those interviewed included Israeli Prime Ministers and members of the negotiations delegations, PLO leader Abu Mazen and negotiator Saeb Erekat, and the representatives of the US administration at the talks. In effect, the series offered a review of the failed peace process from the perspectives of the respective political echelons.¹

The accounts in “Hamakor” suggest that since Yitzhak Rabin’s 1995 vision for a permanent settlement, there has been a profound shift in the positions Israel presented in the negotiations, whereas the Palestinian positions have remained constant or become more demanding. The series shows that time after time, Palestinian demands of Israel did not end with a Palestinian state whose capital is East Jerusalem, and that at least thus far, do not converge with Israeli positions enough to forge a common political horizon. However, there could well be a political horizon in the future if there is a change in the Palestinian position.

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This essay explores the topic on the basis of the accounts presented in "Hamakor," along with supplementary information. The essay presents an analysis of the shift in Israel's positions regarding the Palestinian demands, explains the failure in achieving a permanent settlement, and analyzes the possibilities currently open to Israel.

The Shift in Israel's Positions in the Negotiations

On October 5, 1995, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin presented his vision for a permanent settlement with the Palestinians before the Knesset:

We would like this to be an [Palestinian] entity which is less than a state, and which will independently run the lives of the Palestinians under its authority. The borders of the State of Israel, during the permanent solution, will be beyond the lines which existed before the Six Day War. We will not return to the 4 June 1967 lines.

And these are the main changes, not all of them, which we envision and want in the permanent solution:

- a. First and foremost, united Jerusalem, which will include both Ma'aleh Adumim and Givat Ze'ev...
- b. The security border of the State of Israel will be located in the Jordan Valley, in the broadest meaning of that term.
- c. Changes which will include the addition of Gush Etzion, Efrat, Beitar and other communities...
- d. The establishment of blocs of settlements in Judea and Samaria, like the one in Gush Katif.

...We are embarking upon a new path which could lead us to an era of peace, to the end of wars.²

Rabin was speaking of an Israeli withdrawal from some 70 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip areas conquered from Jordan and Egypt in 1967 ("the territories"). This vision underwent significant change during the Barak and Olmert governments.

Under the Barak government: According to "Hamakor," in April 2000, in a meeting with the Palestinian delegation in Eilat, Israel proposed the establishment of a Palestinian state on some 86 percent of the territories, which would be handed over to the Palestinians in two stages (66 percent initially, and the remaining 20 percent at a later time), with Israel annexing the other 14 percent. The Palestinians demanded a full withdrawal to the 1967 lines with land swaps of up to 4 percent on a 1:1 ratio. In July 2000 at the Camp David summit, Israel proposed the establishment of a Palestinian

state on 92 percent of the territories. The talks failed. The United States and Israel blamed Arafat, who rejected or evaded every Israeli proposal, including Barak's initiative, which the United States called "brave" and which, for the first time, included an agreement on a division of Jerusalem.

In follow-up talks in Taba in early 2001 (based on Clinton's December 2000 initiative), Minister Ben-Ami offered the Palestinians 95 percent of the territories and sovereignty over the Temple Mount, and also gave the number of refugees Israel would be willing to accept.³ The Palestinians rejected the proposal. At that time, Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state was not a bone of contention and was clearly taken for granted by both Israel and the United States, as reflected in Clinton's proposal: "The solution will have to be consistent with the two-state approach that both sides have accepted as a way to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: the state of Palestine as the homeland of the Palestinian people and the state of Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people."⁴

Under the Sharon government: In the summer of 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip and evacuated four Jewish settlements in the northern West Bank. This act proved that Jewish settlements can be dismantled without a political agreement. In a June 2004 interview with *Haaretz*, which dealt in part with the disengagement plan, Arafat noted that only 2-3 percent of the area would be eligible for land swaps and that he "definitely understands" that the Jewish nature of the State of Israel must be preserved. The interviewers took this to mean that "this is the first time that Arafat has announced his recognition of the state's Jewish identity, something he has to date avoided doing so as not harm the status of Israel's Arab citizens."⁵ However, it seems this is not what Arafat had in mind, but only sought to "reassure" Israel about the number of returning refugees.

Under the Olmert government, the shift in Israel's negotiating position was even more pronounced, from the "advanced" positions that Israel presented at Annapolis (November 2007) to the personal meeting between the leaders in September 2008 where Olmert went out on a limb even further. In the interview with "Hamakor," Olmert related that in 2008 he offered Abu Mazen full withdrawal from the West Bank with 1:1

According to an Israel-Palestinian opinion poll conducted in July 2015, 54 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip oppose mutual recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and Palestine as the state of the Palestinian people.

land swaps (6.3 percent Israeli annexation of the West Bank in return for 5.9 percent compensation to the Palestinians from areas inside the Green Line plus 0.5 percent for the safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza Strip; see figure 1), as well as willingness to concede Israeli sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem (to international control over the Holy Basin), even though according to the Clinton parameters of December 2000, this area would remain under Israeli control. Olmert agreed to concede Israel's military presence in the Jordan Valley in exchange for the presence of a multinational force. Abu Mazen rejected the offer,⁶ agreeing to land swaps of only 1.9 percent. This position departed from Arafat's position in 2004 of 2-3 percent,⁷ and the 4 percent mentioned by the Palestinians before the Eilat talks in advance of the Camp David summit. Abu Mazen's position does not allow any solution that includes the settlement blocs, including Ariel (as emerged from the Palestinian proposal at Annapolis).⁸ In the interview, Olmert said that in hindsight, he thinks it would have been possible to settle at 4.5 percent.

As for the "right of return," as an opening position, Olmert agreed to the return of 5,000 refugees to Israel. There is evidence that Erekat understood Olmert would go as high as 50,000 or even 60,000, whereas he expected the number of refugees allowed to return to be at least 100,000-200,000.⁹ In the "Hamakor" interview, Olmert said that Abu Mazen told him he "doesn't want to damage the nature of Israel," from which he concluded that Abu Mazen recognized Israel as a Jewish state. But it seems that Abu Mazen, like Arafat before him, only meant to "reassure" Israel about the number of refugees who would realize their right of return to Israel.

Under the Netanyahu government (starting in 2009), the Israeli public became aware that in a permanent agreement, the Palestinians were demanding the establishment of the nation-state of the Palestinian people but rejected Israel's definition (as defined in its Declaration of Independence) as the nation-state of the Jewish people. Following a meeting in Ramallah in October 2010 between Abu Mazen and Israeli Palestinian members of Knesset, Deputy Speaker of the Knesset Mohammad Barakeh said: "Abu Mazen and the Palestinian leadership clearly refuse to recognize Israel as a Jewish state and the idea of population swaps [as part of the land swaps proposed in the framework of a permanent agreement]. The Israeli offers are a danger to the members of our people in the 1948 lines and outside the territories" (Barakeh avoided using the term "Israel"). Barakeh added that if "the Palestinian leadership were willing to concede its principles,



Annapolis Process (2008): Israeli Proposal (Approximation)



Figure 1. Israel's Offer at Annapolis, Rejected by the Palestinians

Source: www.shaularieli.com

it would have signed an agreement long ago," and that the statement was a reassurance issued to Israel's Arabs.¹⁰ When Prime Minister Rabin sent Arafat a signed letter in September 1993, in which Israel recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, it is highly unlikely that he and Shimon Peres understood that the PLO also sees itself as the representative of Israel's Palestinian citizens to the State of Israel.

In a February 2014 interview with the *New York Times*, Abu Mazen again refused Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, saying it "was out of the question."¹¹ His position is supported by the Palestinian public. According to an Israel-Palestinian opinion poll conducted in July 2015, a majority (54 percent) of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip oppose mutual recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and Palestine as the state of the Palestinian people, even after a Palestinian state is established and all disputes, including the refugees and Jerusalem's status, are resolved.¹²

There were other disagreements between the leaders. In late 2014, Abu Mazen told the Egyptian newspaper *Akhbar al-Yom*, "Netanyahu told me: 'I want [responsibility for] security on the Jordanian border for 40 years.' I pretended not to have heard him right, and said, 'How many?!' He said, '40 years.' I said goodbye and told him, 'Let's shake hands.' I left his house and said to him: 'This is occupation.' I haven't seen him since."¹³ Abu Mazen demands an IDF evacuation from the West Bank within five years and wants to base the defense of the Palestinian state on international forces.

Former President Shimon Peres asserted he had achieved a breakthrough with Abu Mazen in 2011. In an interview with Channel 2 TV on May 2, 2014, he declared, "We reached an understanding on all points; what we needed was a conclusion."¹⁴ According to Peres, however, Prime Minister Netanyahu

Israel's management of the talks in face of the Palestinian strategy led to the erosion of Israel's fundamental positions.

preferred a plan proposed by Tony Blair. In any case, there was no evidence of Peres's breakthrough or of his version that Abu Mazen agreed to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. Other core issues were left open or had nothing substantially new about them (it was agreed to adopt the Arab League formula, whereby "the refugee problem would be solved justly and in an agreed-upon manner"). In the interview, Peres

attributed importance and courage to Abu Mazen's statement in November 2012 in which he said he had no intention of going back to live in Safed, his city of birth. In fact, however, that statement was not an indication that he

had changed his position that the right to return would be realized based on the individual decisions of the millions of the Palestinian diaspora. In July 2014, Abu Mazen's son and grandson declared their intention of going back to "Safed, Palestine"¹⁵ and in November 2014 Abu Mazen asserted, "There are six million refugees who want to return, and I, by the way, am one of them."¹⁶

Thus, despite the shift in the Israeli position between 2001 and 2008, which increased during Olmert's term in office, no permanent settlement was achieved even though Israel's position was now decidedly inferior to that of the Palestinians. While in Rabin's time the Palestinians' right to an independent state was to be negotiated and the question of Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state was not even raised, now the Palestinians' right to a state is globally unquestioned while Israel is fighting for Palestinian recognition of its identity as a Jewish state. Based on this shift, Abu Mazen is using the new situation to attempt to establish an independent Palestinian state without an agreement via international pressure on Israel to withdraw from the West Bank.

Why Negotiations Did Not End with a Permanent Agreement

The Palestinian positions never approached – in fact, they receded from – a political horizon shared by Israel. During the negotiations, it became clear that Abu Mazen does not recognize Israel as a Jewish state in principle because of the connection of the Palestinian people with Mandatory Palestine – an issue with profound ramifications.¹⁷ In other words, his opposition to recognition supersedes the clear Palestinian interest of establishing an independent state by agreement. He also demands the right of return for millions of Palestinians, and proposed giving every "refugee" the "right to choose" between immigration to Israel or compensation. His negotiators insist on the return of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to Israel, while giving preferential treatment to refugees from troubled areas, first and foremost those in Lebanon, instead of their return to the state of Palestine that would be established in the territories. According to him, the solution to the refugee problem is a condition for ending the conflict. This was not the view from Oslo.

These positions reinforce the impression that Palestinians view negotiations as a strategy to wrest concessions from Israel without making any of their own. According to a report by Ehud Ya'ari, Abu Mazen stated in a July 2002 lecture in Gaza that "Israel made the biggest mistake in its

history when it signed the Oslo Accords. In Oslo, we took land without giving anything in return; the issues of the final stage remain open."¹⁸ In June 2009, in an interview with the Jordanian newspaper *al-Dustur*, Saeb Erekat said that Israel has in any case retreated from its positions in the talks, so why should the Palestinians be in a hurry (to compromise on an agreement)? "Where have the talks with the Israelis gotten us? At first they [the Israelis] said that we have the right to run our hospitals and schools; after that, they were willing to give up 66 percent [of the territories], at Camp David they offered us 90 percent, and just lately [during Olmert's term in office] they offered 100 percent. In that case, why should we hurry after all the injustice that has been inflicted on us? In any case, no stable agreement will be reached unless it is based on international law and justice."¹⁹ The Palestinian method of managing the negotiations was consistent: Arafat and Abu Mazen evaded the talks after the Israeli side presented far reaching concessions and when they were asked to present concessions of their own. This strategy profoundly eroded Israel's positions.

At present, it does not seem as if any Israeli leader would agree to the Palestinian positions, or even to the compromises offered by Olmert. This is particularly the case given the negative implications of the Middle East turmoil on the potential agreements. The migration of refugees from the Middle East could reduce Western nations' willingness to take in veteran Palestinian refugees (most of whom are the descendants of the original 1948 refugees) as part of the permanent settlement. Instability for Israel from the east will make it difficult for Israeli leaders to concede reliable security arrangements in the Jordan Valley.

The Palestinians' main explanation for the talks' failure is that Israel did not sufficiently meet their demands. For media purposes and given Israel's assertions on the absence of a Palestinian partner for peace, the Palestinians inflate the claim (as they also did in the interviews with "Hamakor") that Israel made the most advanced offers precisely at a time when the Israeli Prime Ministers were on the political wane (Barak because of the dissolution of the coalition, and Olmert because of police investigations), at which point it was hard for the Palestinians to take them. It seems as if this is at best a secondary reason, especially given the fact that the claim is a double-edged sword regarding the status of Abu Mazen himself as a partner, in light of his weakness within the Palestinian camp.

Arafat and Abu Mazen came to the negotiations for a permanent settlement with decided unwillingness. Evidence from participants in

the talks shows that even when Barak's and Olmert's political position was strong, PLO heads made no proactive effort whatsoever, preferring instead to take a dismissive, evasive attitude to Israeli and US offers. According to Olmert in "Hamakor," starting in September 2006, he tried meeting with Abu Mazen on five different occasions, but Abu Mazen avoided him each time. Abu Mazen also tried to cancel a meeting with a concocted excuse that he was on his way to meet with Hamas in the Gaza Strip in order to free the abducted soldier Gilad Shalit. The meeting finally took place thanks to Olmert's perseverance, though it did not help him in the long run. In 2008, Olmert suggested to Abu Mazen that all agreements be anchored in UN Security Council resolutions, even before being authorized in Israel, in order to ensure their international standing for the Palestinians. But Abu Mazen cut off contact and disappeared from the talks. An analysis of the Palestinians' positions and conduct makes it clear that even if Barak and Olmert were at the peak of their political power when they made their offers, the Palestinian position would still not have allowed an agreement.

The Palestinian claim that Egypt and Jordan were not required to recognize Israel as a Jewish state in their peace agreements is beside the point, because between these states and Israel there was no dispute over the territory comprising the land of Israel, whereas with the Palestinians there must be an agreement not only between two states but also between two peoples.

The interface between Israel's management of the talks and the Palestinian strategy led to the erosion of Israel's fundamental positions. Members of the Israeli delegation were split among themselves. Erekat has been quoted as saying that the Israelis spent 95 percent of the time at the talks negotiating with one another. At times, there were different channels of communications, not all of which seem to have been aware of one another. Furthermore, Israeli politicians were in informal touch with the Palestinians and conducted "consultations" with them without coordinating this with the Prime Minister. Moreover, the talks were marred by haste and departure from acceptable negotiations methodology. For example, it is not customary for delegates at the table to have the authority to make significant concessions,

During Olmert's term in office, the Israeli side failed to learn the lessons of past negotiations. The Israeli mistake repeated itself throughout the talks, as if another 1 or 2 percent of Judea and Samaria, or an additional 10,000 refugees entering Israel would generate the elusive peace.

but Israeli representatives – such as Minister Ben-Ami – proposed far reaching concessions about the scope of Israel withdrawal (95 instead of 92 percent), Palestinian sovereignty over the Temple Mount, and a proposal for the number of refugees that would be allowed to enter Israel, without the Palestinians showing any willingness to move the talks along. Unlike their Israeli counterparts, the Palestinians did not have the sense that theirs was an “historic moment.” In addition, senior Israeli officials (including Olmert and Barak) parsed Palestinian statements as tactical, reassuring, and non-binding when it came to the refugees and mutual recognition, as if these were expressing fundamental Palestinian positions in the talks.

Israel’s red line policy, in which the lines become pink before disappearing altogether (as described by one US delegate to the talks), caused the Palestinians to believe that Israel does not have any end points, so that every Israeli concession will lead to yet another concession, with the sky the limit. So why not wait, as Erekat said.

Did Israel concede its assets in the negotiations too fast, or were the talks’ foundations shaky? This was the argument that broke out in 2001 after the talks collapsed. Back then, Ben-Ami rejected Peres’s claim that “there is no permanent settlement because we have gone too far” (i.e., in Israeli concessions to the Palestinians). By contrast, Ben-Ami said that the talks failed because they were built on the unsound foundations of the Oslo process (for which Peres was responsible). “The Oslo philosophy collapsed altogether,” said Ben-Ami. He explained that the Oslo process was based on a (flawed) Israeli approach that one could bring a group of people from Tunisia, give them land, have them maintain Israel’s security in the territories, and tell them that one day it would be possible to talk to them about a permanent settlement. The discussions of the permanent agreement held by the Barak government exposed this lapse.²⁰ The impression that emerges is that there is truth to both claims, as there is truth to Barak’s assertion that Arafat was not a partner in talks for a permanent settlement.

During Olmert’s term in office, the Israeli side failed to learn the lessons of past negotiations. It continued to look at the trees and failed to see the forest. The Israeli mistake repeated itself throughout the talks, as if another 1 or 2 percent of Judea and Samaria, or an additional 10,000 refugees entering Israel would generate the elusive peace. The breakthrough that Ben-Ami (2000-2001) and Olmert (2008) sought was not found even after Israel agreed to the establishment of a Palestinian state whose capital would be East Jerusalem and close to 1:1 land swaps. It took Israel many

years to understand that deep, qualitative – rather than quantitative – gaps divide the sides. It seems that the Israeli side failed to appreciate the strategy taken by Abu Mazen and the importance of 1948 (the refugees' return, non-recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, and the connection of these issues to the end of the conflict) in the eyes of someone who sees himself as a refugee from Safed and a revolutionary fighting for the rights of the Palestinians rather than a leader who could take an active part in the building of a Palestinian state after its establishment.

Olmert's claim in the "Hamakor" interview about his ability to bridge the remaining gap does not seem credible given the Palestinians' positions, regardless of how he came to end his term in office. There is no evidence to back his assertion that Abu Mazen was a "partner"²¹ in the effort to find a permanent settlement (as distinguished from routine cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel). Moreover, until the Second Lebanon War, Olmert clung to the "convergence plan" he had devised, which was based on the opposite assumption – namely, that Abu Mazen was not a partner to the process.

It is worth studying the way Israel conducted the talks with the Palestinians. Some of the lessons could have been learned already from the negotiations over the Oslo Accords.²² For one, the disagreements within the Israeli delegation played into the Palestinians' hands, and also affected the US mediator who increased his demands of Israel on the basis of the most compromising position he found within the Israeli delegation. Israeli concessions in the talks, even if declared non-binding, became intangible Palestinian assets that the Palestinian side would then use against Israel and the United States in future rounds of talks. The Palestinians, the Americans, and sometimes even the Israeli representatives would view previous concessions as the starting point of the next round of talks.

Paths Open to Israel

Given all of the above, there is at present no common political horizon for a permanent agreement. Perhaps this might emerge in the future, if and when the Palestinian leadership presents realistic positions that enable the idea of two states for two peoples and stops its efforts to undermine the Jewish identity of the State of Israel. For now, however, certain options are available to Israel:

- a. *Negotiations*. In principle, Israel must leave the door open to political negotiations. However, returning to talks on a permanent settlement in

their previous format is problematic because of the fundamental gaps. As great as the expectations, so are the depths of the disappointment and the extremes of the consequent violence, as demonstrated by the second intifada after Camp David. Therefore, it is best that as far as a permanent settlement goes, it be discussed within very restricted teams focusing on the core issues. In addition, experience has shown that Israeli initiatives did not advance the negotiations, and therefore there is little purpose in new Israeli initiatives that will not satisfy Palestinian demands and instead are apt to weaken Israel's position in the negotiations. Therefore, it is necessary to decide that any concessions proposed in talks will be measured and require the approval of the Prime Minister. At the same time, a socioeconomic future for the Palestinian people must be fashioned. Israel must continue to demand the end to incitement in Palestinian schools and public diplomacy, as this is a platform for terrorism and a cultural obstacle to creation of a common political horizon.

- b. *Preservation of the option of a permanent agreement in the long term.* It is proposed that Israel outline its own clear political horizon whether or not negotiations are underway, both for domestic purposes and vis-à-vis the international arena. This involves delineating future borders, which will not be a subject for negotiation, and a settlement policy that leaves an option open for a permanent agreement, even if this does not appear to be in the near offing. For example, Jewish settlement should not be expanded beyond the area of the separation barrier and the settlement blocs. This means not establishing any new settlements and not adding territory to existing ones, but maintaining the existing communities with full services (security, education, culture, transportation, and so on) until an agreement is reached, thereby preserving the territorial option for a permanent settlement even if it is currently not within reach. In the meantime, Israel can decide to make local withdrawals or transfer certain territories to PA control, as it sees fit.
- c. *Negotiations for separation under terms of an agreement.* Abu Mazen has rejected the possibility of a new interim agreement that does not include Israeli withdrawal to 1967 lines (with land swaps), but he might agree to negotiations on a "partial agreement," whose purpose is the establishment of a Palestinian state in the permanent borders, while leaving the issues of 1948 open (Palestinian refusal to acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state, without compromising on the right of Palestinian refugees to return,

- and without ending the conflict). Without a substantive change by the Palestinians on these issues, this appears to be the only possibility for achieving a long term agreement. This is of course less desirable than a permanent agreement, which Israel must continue to seek.
- d. *Unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank.* Another opinion maintains that Israel should undertake a significant unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank, similar to the 2006 convergence plan, i.e., a redeployment of the IDF and the evacuation of at least 80,000 civilians residing in the West Bank in areas outside Jerusalem, the settlement blocs, and the Jordan Valley. While this would reduce the routine friction between Israelis and the Palestinians in the West Bank, it is highly doubtful whether a new reality would emerge – one in which each side lives its separate life peacefully. A more realistic scenario is that terrorism would remain, internal stability would be undermined, and it would be more difficult to achieve a permanent settlement. Moreover, it is likely that such a move would not be recognized internationally as progress toward ending the occupation, would not free Israel of responsibility for the fate of the people in the West Bank, and would not strengthen Israel's status as a Jewish democratic state. There would also be heavy domestic costs: fierce internal opposition to evacuation, vast monetary expenditures, difficulties in integrating the evacuees, and more. It would be an event on a scale ten times that of the withdrawal from Gaza, whose results differed vastly from what Prime Minister Sharon envisaged.²³ It is doubtful if the risks and costs would be justified in the absence of a permanent settlement. Therefore, it would be better to wait for a political horizon to open up in the future, which will allow a permanent agreement – even if this is contingent on waiting for the rise of a new local Palestinian leadership that will see the establishment of a Palestinian state in the territories as a priority that serves the welfare of its population, over the unrealistic demands that seek to undermine the identity of the State of Israel.

Notes

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Changes in Indian Foreign Policy: The Case of Israel and the Palestinians

Oshrit Birvadker

India and the Palestinians: A History of Empathy

For many years, elements such as religion, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, the sanctity of the secular state, and a non-aligned policy shaped India's attitude toward the Palestinian issue. At first, the struggle between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League focused on gaining the support of the Muslim community in their struggle for national liberation. When the question of a Jewish state was brought before the UN, India became an important behind-the-scenes player. In the first session of the UN General Assembly in 1947, India foiled a boycott sponsored by the Arab Higher Committee and Arab countries. India also managed to be included among the members of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), and in this framework devised the "federal plan," an idea rejected by the UNSCOP majority. Once the State of Israel was founded and during all its wars, India expressed strong support for the Arabs.¹

In contrast to the faltering support by the Arab countries during India's 1965 war with Pakistan and the 1971 war in Bangladesh, Israel provided India with full backing, including a supply of artillery equipment. Many Indian MPs perceived a constant imbalance in India's relations with Arab countries. For the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) party (Indian People's Association), a nationalistic party opposed to minorities and an earlier version of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Indian People's Party), the idea of an alliance with Israel was natural, and Israel's victory in the Six Day War was comparable to India's victory over Pakistan in 1965.² Nevertheless, India's foreign policy continued along the previous lines.

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India attempted to partake in various Muslim conferences, condemned Israel's actions, and sent medical equipment for those wounded in the fighting against Israel. In 1974 India supported the PLO's participation in various frameworks as an observer, and in November 1975 backed UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 defining Zionism as racism.

The Janata Party, a coalition of parties opposed to the state of emergency declared by Indira Gandhi, among them the BJS, gained power in 1977. Many supporters of Israel were elected to Parliament, creating expectations in Jerusalem of an opportunity for change in the status quo. At the same time, the Janata Party owed its victory to support from Muslim voters. The Indian administration remained very cautious, and support for the Arabs continued.³

Several reasons lay behind the change in the Indian administration's policy toward Israel in the late 1980s. The role of internal politics was crucial to the matter, and the rise of a new party to power in 1989 reduced anti-Israel rhetoric and established a basis for a change. In the regional aspect, Islamic fundamentalist terrorism brought India closer to Israel. In addition, a drop in global oil prices diminished the leverage of the Arab countries. At the same time, India discovered the power of the United States, and aimed to establish relations in order to escape the crisis afflicting its economic plans. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 symbolized the end of the old order and the change in the international balance of power, and the emergence of a unipolar world led by the US. Hostility toward Israel constituted an obstacle to India's relations with the US; a public change in policy became easier when negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians began, following the Madrid Conference.⁴ Yet along with the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel in January 1992, India continued its traditional support for the Palestinians. These good relations were maintained through reciprocal visits, financial contributions, cooperation, and India's continued condemnation of Israel. The Palestinian issue remained popular in India, and has recently served as fertile ground for BDS activity in the Indian subcontinent.

Changes in Indian Foreign Policy on the Palestinian Question

The rise to power of Prime Minister Modi in 2014 signified both an historic change in India and changes in Indian-Palestinian relations. The right wing party in government announced significant reforms in India's foreign relations, and put three main issues on the agenda: a tough line in national

security, acceleration of the second phase in India's neo-liberal reforms, and promotion of cultural nationalism.⁵ The changing attitude toward the Middle East is one of the developing dimensions in Indian foreign relations.

No assessment of the changes in Indian foreign policy concerning the Palestinian question can ignore the changes in relations between Israel and India. The closer ties are reflected in a number of aspects: security, diplomatic visits, the change in the public's perception, and the pattern of voting in the UN. In recent years, Israel has strengthened its security ties with India, and has made the Indian subcontinent one of its major export destinations, primarily in military procurement. Israel is the fourth largest weapons supplier to India. Diplomatic visits between the countries have gradually increased since relations were established. In September 2014, during the UN General Assembly, Modi and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed both the Iranian nuclear program and extending cooperation between their two countries. In addition, the President of India made an historic visit to Israel in October 2015. One example of the tightening political alliance occurred during Operation Protective Edge, when Modi's government exerted pressure in order prevent a condemnation of Israel by the Indian parliament, an act that most sources believe was highly gratifying to Jerusalem.⁶

The UN has become an extremely interesting arena for testing changes in India's foreign relations. India's voting pattern to date has shown steady support for the Palestinians and a strong anti-Israel policy. During Operation Protective Edge, India was the object of much criticism for failing to condemn Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip. Apparently in order to balance its support for Israel, India voted in favor of the establishment of a special investigative committee for the Gaza Strip under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council. India eventually declared that it was "expressing concern" about escalating violence between Israel and the Palestinians. In July 2014, India, together with countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, Paraguay, and Macedonia, abstained in the vote on the UN report condemning Israel for Operation Protective Edge. Indian sources reported that Netanyahu had made a personal appeal to Modi to abstain in the vote.⁷ Palestinian Ambassador to India Adnan Abu Alhalija termed India's decision "shocking," and attributed it to the military relationship between Israel and India.⁸ In August 2015, Indian Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj, eager to win Arab and Muslim support, emphasized that there was no change in India's policy on the Palestinian issue, and that India's position remained steadfast in

support of the Palestinian struggle. She added that India was still guided by a special non-intervention, non-judgmental, and non-aligned policy. In other words, India was still willing to support the Arabs, but preferred that they take responsibility for their own fate.⁹

Some sources assert that the change in policy toward Israel began before the Modi government, in the Kargil crisis in May 1999, when the supply of arms from Israel enabled India's victory in its war with Pakistan. Starting in 2012, India "expressed concern," instead of condemning Israel for its alleged operations against Palestinian civilians. Although India continued to support a sovereign Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, its expressions of support for the Palestinian Authority have gradually changed.¹⁰ When Modi became Prime Minister, Israel-India relations were rebalanced, with the Indian vote signaling the warming in relations between the two governments. India's abstention in the vote does not show neutrality; on the contrary. After years of active pro-Palestinian activity in the UN, this abstention constitutes a change in India's foreign policy.

The Reasons behind the Changed Foreign Policy

Foreign policy, rarely designed to serve a single purpose, is a tool to pursue security, aid, trade, status, or prestige. Most countries in the world tend to zealously preserve the fundamental principles guiding their foreign policy.¹¹ Indian foreign policy, which was shaped by its first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, continued after his death. Over the years, as a country casting off the chains of colonialism, internal problems became the main focus of the Indian agenda, and prevented India from playing an active role in international relations.¹² At the same time, when economic reforms opened the Indian economy to the global market following the 1991 economic crisis, a substantial change in Indian foreign policy became evident. These reforms signaled the collapse of the old socialist-saturated politics and economy that had prevailed in India since its independence. A struggle is now taking place over the right way to conduct Indian foreign policy, in light of the new challenges facing the country. A number of factors dictating the current Indian policy are evident.¹³

India's Superpower Status

With the end of colonialism and independence, India's main task was strengthening and consolidating the new country. India as a country lacked a defined foreign policy other than what Prime Minister Nehru envisioned.

His diplomatic experience and power, and the lack of public attention paid to foreign affairs enabled him to play this role. With the rise to power of Lal Bahadur Shastri, India's second Prime Minister, the Indian bureaucracy became dominant, and India's global concerns were replaced by local and regional priorities. Overall, India's first years of independence focused on internal affairs helping to shape the nation, such as economic nationalism and anti-colonialism, with no major controversies regarding foreign policy. During these years, foreign relations were used to help deal with internal problems in the country.¹⁴

One key change in Indian foreign policy lies in the transition from a political-diplomatic discourse based on idealism to a discourse based on realpolitik. The realpolitik school holds that a country continually strives toward power, expressed mainly in terms of military capabilities.¹⁵ India regarded itself as promoting values such as pacifism, non-alignment, cooperation, and democratic self-determination, which were instrumental, rather than utopian. This was India's way of attaining a special independent status among the nations of the world. The urge to adopt an attitude of realpolitik came gradually, as a result of tension with China and Pakistan. While those countries armed themselves and attained aid from major powers, India was preoccupied with its internal situation. Relations with Israel are consistent with these elements of a realpolitik outlook on the part of the Indian administration. It appears that the military aid between the two countries took place during wars, both the 1965 war with Pakistan and the 1971 war in Bangladesh.¹⁶

Before the foreign currency crisis of the early 1990s, Indian foreign policy sought external support, given its development needs.¹⁷ Since its independence, India's economic development strategy emphasized the importance of government regulation, and its high customs duties and structural barriers were the most restrictive in Asia. During the 1980s, India began reforms in order to create a smoother import process, but its trade policy remained restrictive. India asked the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance, which was made conditional in part on trade policy reform. India faced pressure to compete in the global market, and in the absence of patronage from the Soviet Union, Indian diplomacy entered unknown territory.¹⁸

Determined to prove to the skeptics that it is a genuine candidate for superpower status, India has adopted a foreign policy combining nation branding with the use of soft power.

The market conditions dictated India's needs, which focused on a search for foreign investors and access to new markets. The economic reforms were slow moving but productive, and India succeeded in achieving rapid economic growth. This provided a basis for a change in India's relations with the major and regional powers, and with its enemies, China and Pakistan.¹⁹ India's annual economic growth in the late 1980s was 13 percent, thanks to its free trade regime and foreign investments. India is likely to accelerate its economic growth and position itself as the world's third largest economy in terms of gross national product.²⁰ With the combination of economic growth and factors such as military and nuclear power, growing economic prosperity, a population projected to become the world's largest, and a substantial population of young people comes the responsibility of being a major power.²¹

India is seeking to leverage its status in the BRICS organization (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in order to become more powerful in the global arena. Despite the desire of the ruling class for closer relations with the West, it was the BRICS group of countries that provided India with its entry to international organizations. The West, on the other hand, was not generous regarding a permanent seat for India on the UN Security Council and more power in the IMF. The BRICS group remained solid in its support for Palestinian rights and decolonization of Israel, and the BRICS position is likely complicating Indian policy regarding Israel. Other experts assert that in view of the respect India commands in these organizations, including from countries such as Iran and the Gulf states, India's closer relations with Israel and the US will require India to walk a tightrope.²²

The National Image

In the digital world, the internet has completely revolutionized the way consumers buy and evaluate products. Today, relations between the manufacturer and the customer do not end when the product is purchased. Through various media tools, the customer becomes part of the branding industry.²³ A country's image has become an important part of its power in the global market. Scholar Simon Anholt coined the term "nation branding," which combines business administration theory with disciplines pertaining to the subject of national identity.²⁴ Determined to prove to the skeptics that it is a genuine candidate for superpower status, India has adopted a foreign policy combining nation branding with the use of soft power.

India believes that it is capable of playing a significant role in the global arena and regards itself as a major power, but that it has to gain the respect of countries around the world. The image it nurtured in the past served its former interests as a backward country in need of external aid. Despite the many years during which it supported Arab countries in general, especially on the Palestinian issue, India was not regarded by them as a source of power.²⁵ Once it became economically and militarily stronger, it was necessary for India to reconsider its national image. In the past decade, this dimension has undergone dramatic changes, with clear results. Once labeled as a Third World country, India has become synonymous with expertise in computers, media, and services. These aspects are consistent with its desire for closer relations with Israel, which has similar expertise.²⁶

Changes in the Regional Balance of Power

Events such as the Arab Spring, the civil war in Syria, and Chinese militarization of the Indian Ocean have caused a reassessment of alliances. The current Indian government regards the Middle East as part of its extended neighborhood, and as critical to India's national interests.²⁷ India has observed the global acceptance of Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt and the growing power of the Islamic State. At the same time, India is increasingly concerned that the instability in the Middle East will lead to outbreaks of terrorism in India.²⁸ As a major energy consumer that imports 68 percent of its oil from the Persian Gulf,²⁹ any disruption of a regular supply of energy to the country is liable to have a negative impact on both India's economic development and the volume of remittances by the approximately seven million Indian workers in the Gulf. Anxiety about changes has culminated in increased military procurement by India. Military trade between Israel and India in 2015 totaled \$695 million. Since Modi took office, trade between the two countries has exceeded the cumulative total during the three years preceding his term. These changes are consistent with India's perception of Israel as a military power and exporter of advanced technologies.³⁰

In recent years, the United States, perceiving India to be rising power in the East, has gradually tightened the bilateral relations. Once both nations overcame the suspicion that formerly characterized their relations, the US and India have been successful in protecting their respective global and regional interests. New Delhi's attitude toward the Iranian nuclear program became Washington's criterion with respect to India, while the Indian nuclear strategy has been very cautious in a number of aspects:

energy-wise, strategically, and commercially. The tension between the two countries during the period of sanctions came to an end with the signing of the nuclear deal with the major powers in July 2015.

In turn, closer relations between India and the US are likely to confer a special significance on India's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Over the years, the US has been perceived by the Palestinians as an important, but not impartial, mediator. India's rising power, its profound commitment over the years to the Palestinian question, and its good relations with Israel can enable India to foster a broad agreement in which each side in the conflict feels supported by a power acceptable to both of them. The acceptance of India as an additional mediator in the prolonged conflict will enable it to induce the US to renew its involvement. This role is consistent with India's rebranding as a superpower seeking a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and will highlight its unique status as a bridge to tolerance.³¹

Prime Minister Modi's Policy

Since rising to power as the head of a nationalist party, Modi has been emerging as a representative of a new generation in Indian politics advocating a solid economic pragmatism. This view was expressed during his term as Chief Minister of the Indian state of Gujarat, when he visited Israel. Since his election as Prime Minister, he has made Indian foreign policy increasingly assertive. Realism has become the essential concept in achieving India's economic goals.³² The Indian economy cannot survive without rapid industrialization, and the government is following a neo-liberal policy. For his election campaign, Modi received a great deal of money from the business community, which is anxious to expedite capitalistic processes. After his election, he created a supportive environment for business, shortened bureaucratic procedures, and improved infrastructure. Under the inspiration of the Chinese model, the government is seeking to turn India into a manufacturing center. One of the prominent examples of this government policy is the Made in India program, which is aimed at attracting foreign investments, while boosting domestic industry.³³

Modi has shaped his relations with other countries in accordance with his policy of prioritizing economic growth. This coincided with the markets that Israel specializes in and has designated as export destinations, such as high tech, agriculture, communications, and defense. Until now, a major part of Indian foreign policy has been motivated by its rivalry with countries

such as Pakistan and China. Under Modi, however, India has striven to go beyond this by exploiting opportunities in order to redefine its role in the region. In this aspect, it is following in the footsteps of the Congress Party, which established diplomatic relations with Israel because it was the right and most useful time to do so. Modi is also continuing the tradition of his party, which regards relations with Israel as an alliance suited to both its internal and regional interests. Furthermore, Modi and Netanyahu, who share conservative, right wing, and capitalistic views, have developed warm interpersonal relations.³⁴

Conclusion

Until the 1990s, Indian foreign policy was based on solidarity with southern countries under the flag of the non-aligned movement. At the same time, a non-aligned policy is not necessarily a foreign policy; it is a tactical response to a specific disturbance in the superpowers' power arrangements. The shaping of Indian foreign policy is a work in progress, and the new directions of Indian diplomacy are highly visible. Considerations of building economic power in international relations are again bringing about changes in India's relations with Israel. Relations with the Palestinians are also becoming an integral part of the considerations of the newly powerful India. India has demonstrated its abandonment of the voting pattern at the UN, which was considered a significant dimension of Palestinian support. At the same time, events such as Operation Protective Edge demonstrated the situational complexity in which India finds itself. This visible confusion is typical of a country freeing itself from post-colonialism and trying to design an independent foreign policy, while at the same time striving to be a major power. India is trying to strike a balance between the new alliances it has forged and its evolving motivations, and should therefore not necessarily be tagged as anti-Palestinian. It is reasonable to assume that India will not abandon its support for the Palestinians, which is consistent with many Indian values.

Rising power, profound commitment over the years to the Palestinian question, and good relations with Israel can enable India to foster a broad agreement in which each side in the conflict feels supported by a power acceptable to both of them.

Indian foreign policy under Modi has complicated results. While many of his measures have won praise, his failure to develop a clear policy on the Middle East has drawn criticism.

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Back to Square One? The Collapse of the Peace Process with the Kurds in Turkey

Gallia Lindenstrauss

The Kurdish question is one of the fundamental problems, if not the most important, facing the Turkish republic. Since the 1980s, some 40,000 people have been killed in the violent struggle between Turkey's central government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the PKK. Serious efforts were made to promote solutions during the tenure of President Turgut Ozal in the early 1990s, but since its rise to power in 2002, the Justice and Development Party has made the most progress on the issue compared to previous governments. Since 2008, and in greater intensity since the end of 2012, Turkey promoted a peace process between the government and the Kurdish minority. However, in July 2015, the process collapsed, leading to renewed violence between the sides, especially in the southeast of the country. Compared to the past, the PKK is putting more emphasis on urban warfare. Consequently, one of the Turkish army's reactions to the renewed hostilities has been to impose an extended curfew on several neighborhoods and towns with a Kurdish majority, which severely disrupts the population's routine of life.

While past talks between the government and the Kurdish minority have also ended without a resolution and have seen the resumption of fighting, it seems that this time the escalation is more acute. Statements such as that made by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that Turkey's objective is "to annihilate" the armed Kurds¹ raise concern that it will be extremely difficult to revive the peace process anytime soon.

This article analyzes the factors that led to the collapse of the peace process, focusing on four main issues: the political considerations of

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Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party; divisions within the Kurdish minority in Turkey; regional developments; and the missteps taken during the peace process. The conclusion discusses the regional strategic implications of the collapse, focusing on Turkish suspicions about the Kurds gaining strength in Syria and Western support for the Kurds in the context of the struggle by the international coalition against the Islamic State.

Background

In May 2009, then-President Abdullah Gul declared that “good things are going to happen”² in reference to the Kurds. A process that was dubbed “the democratic initiative” was launched that entailed several reforms and general relief for the Kurdish minority, including a television channel that broadcasts continuously in Kurdish and permission to open Kurdish language and culture courses at the universities.³ In September 2011, recordings were leaked of secret conversations that began in 2008 between the heads of the Turkish intelligence community and highly placed PKK personnel in what became known as “the Oslo process,” as it was facilitated by Norway, as well as the United Kingdom. Erdogan accused the PKK of leaking the tapes,⁴ but thanks to the disclosure, the secret talks became an open peace process called the “Imrali process,” named for the island where PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan is jailed.

The Imrali process achieved results. In March 2013, the PKK announced a unilateral ceasefire, and some two months later the organization started withdrawing its troops from Turkey into northern Iraq. Given what was seen as the government’s lack of sufficient progress with the requisite reforms, the PKK stopped the withdrawal of its troops in September 2013.⁵ In July 2015, after the Islamic State attacked an aid delegation that assembled in the Turkish border town of Suruc to help the Kurds in Syria, the ceasefire collapsed, as the Kurds felt that government elements were cooperating with the Islamic State against them.

Political Considerations of Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party

There has been an increase in the nationalistic rhetoric of Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party, especially ahead of election rounds, in order to draw voters away from the Nationalist Movement Party, the MHP. Beyond the desire to win election rounds, Erdogan’s drive to change the

Turkish regime from a parliamentary to a presidential regime requires a clear parliamentary majority to pass the necessary changes to the Turkish constitution (for the parliament to change the constitution directly, a two thirds majority – 367 of 550 – is needed; to pass the required section via a referendum, three-fifths of the votes – 330 of 550 – are needed). Given that the Kurds also want extensive changes to the current constitution, which was composed following the 1980 military coup, Erdogan thought it would be possible to enlist them in order to pass the changes that he too seeks. Erdogan’s efforts to draw the pious Kurds to vote for his Justice and Development Party on the one hand, and the nationalist voters on the other, were evident before the parliamentary elections in 2011 and 2015 as well as the presidential election in 2014. These electoral considerations and the attempt to draw voters with contradictory agendas generated inconsistency in the policy on the Kurds, and caused regressions in the talks after progress had already been made.

In March 2015, after Selahattin Demirtas, the co-leader of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party, the HDP, declared that “we will not make you [Erdogan] the [omnipotent] president,” there was a sharp turn in Erdogan’s position on the peace process.⁶ That month, Erdogan said that Turkey has no “Kurdish problem,” in stark contrast to his August 2005 speech in Diyarbakir, the capital of the province by the same name and a Kurdish stronghold, when he said, “The Kurdish problem is my problem...We will solve all problems through democracy.”⁷

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Divisions within the Kurdish Minority in Turkey

As part of the Imrali process, the Turkish government held direct talks with PKK leader Ocalan. While Ocalan’s standing is still strong and many claim that most Kurds will support any decision he makes, his long incarceration (since 1999, and he has spent much of his time in solitary confinement, totally isolated from the world outside) has undoubtedly damaged his political abilities. To try to preserve his standing, become popular with the supporters of the hawkish factions of the PKK, and contend with the high ranking members of the organization who have taken shelter in the Qandil Mountains of northern Iraq, Ocalan from time to time makes non-compromising or equivocal statements.⁸ The different power centers

within the PKK also cause the Turkish side to wonder whether talks with Ocalan will, in fact, lead to all of the organization's armed forces leaving Turkish soil.

From the perspective of the authorities and that of much of the Turkish public, the ties between the PKK and HDP are strong, so much so that many view the HDP as the political wing of the organization (as was the perception about all previous Kurdish parties disbanded by the Turkish constitutional court).⁹ In truth, however, there are tensions between the PKK and the party. The increased strength of the HDP caused concern within the PKK that the organization was weakened,¹⁰ especially given the unprecedented success of the HDP in passing the electoral threshold in the June 2015 election, even without reforms in Turkey's high election threshold,¹¹ and given the increased popularity of Demirtas himself, which worried the organization.¹² That rise in power was also seen as a threat to the chances of senior PKK personnel finding refuge in the Qandil Mountains of ever being able to translate their long struggle into political positions within Turkey. For that reason, the leadership in the Qandil Mountains decided to renew hostilities as a way of announcing who was still the source of power and authority for the Kurds in Turkey.

From time to time, the Turkish government has also played with the idea of translating the good relations that have developed with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq and its dependence on Turkey for exporting energy into strengthening elements opposed to the PKK within Turkey. There were even hopes that the President of the KRG, Masoud Barzani, would succeed in establishing a new Kurdish party in Turkey with a moderate, pious identity, unlike the PKK's secular, nationalistic nature. The Turkish government was thus trying to use the rivalry between the PKK and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led by Barzani over who was the leading figure in the pan-Kurdish world.¹³

Regional Developments

The growing strength of the Kurds on the regional level and the empowerment of the Kurds in Syria were seen as a threat to the Turkish policy of progress in the negotiations with the Kurds in Turkey. Turkey is worried about unification between the Kurdish cantons in northern Syria and the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq, and in turn, about the tailwind such a development could provide to Turkish Kurds' separatist intentions. The West's support for the Kurds in Syria is also perceived in the context of the old imperialist

intentions of Western powers to weaken Turkey and break off chunks of its territory. A pro-government commentary stated that the West's objective is to seize control of Syria's oil fields and, by means of geographical contiguity among northern Syria's Kurdish cantons, provide them with an outlet to the Mediterranean.¹⁴ Moreover, the Kurdish successes in the battles in Kobani and Tell Abyad – particularly with the battle over Kobani seen as a type of Kurdish Stalingrad¹⁵ – contributed to a greater sense of unity among the Kurds scattered in different countries, and in particular identification between the Kurds in Turkey and the Kurds in Syria. Furthermore, the strong, dominant Kurdish force in Syria proved to be the People's Protection Units (YPG), the military wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), an extension of the PKK. Turkey's initial thought that it could enlist Barzani and the KRG to reduce the PKK's influence on the Kurds in Syria proved incorrect, which in turn gave even more impetus to the Turks to hunker down in their opposition to the autonomous status of the Kurds in Syria.

Turkey's initial unwillingness to help the Syrian Kurds in the battle over Kobani was read by the Kurds in Turkey as an expression of the government's insincerity in the peace talks. They went so far as to threaten that were Kobani to fall it would spell the end of the negotiations.¹⁶ On the other hand, when Turkey allowed the transport of aid (including human assistance) from northern Iraq to pass through Turkish territory on its way to the Syrian Kurds, masses cheered the forces,¹⁷ raising Turkey's suspicions about the Kurds' ultimate goal – if it wasn't separation from Turkey and unification with all other Kurdish parts after all. The fact that hundreds of thousands of the huge waves of refugees coming to Turkey from Syria are of Kurdish descent further complicated the Kurdish problem in Turkey. The weakening of Syria and Iraq, and the growing possibility that these nations will stop existing in their familiar format, make the Turkish demand that armed PKK personnel leave its territory problematic, because there are fewer forces to restrain them in neighboring countries.

Missteps during the Negotiations

The government chose to conduct the talks without either a roadmap or a clear timetable. The process was fluid, and the emphasis was more on the very fact of the negotiations in order to prevent a renewed outbreak of violence than on attaining an agreement and a long term resolution of the conflict.¹⁸ For their part, the Kurds also failed to present a well-defined vision with regard to their demands, although it is clear they retreated from

demanding independence and are interested in some sort of federative arrangement. In particular, some of the vague concepts the Kurds presented, such as “a democratic autonomy,” raised questions. The government’s unwillingness to discuss federative solutions seriously also stems from Turkey’s centralized form of government and the difficulty in changing this political culture.¹⁹ The government was not even willing to acquiesce to the Kurdish demand of having a significant third side present or of documenting the talks, which to the Kurds signaled a lack of seriousness about the process.

Despite the progress in the talks, the Turkish perception that the PKK could not change its spots and the Kurdish perception that the Turks do not actually accept them as a minority remain rooted. So, for example, the incident in October 2009, in which the return of unarmed PKK activists from Iraq – the first such return as a result of an agreement with the Turkish government – became, from the government’s perspective, a show of victory of the PKK, was among the key factors that led to the end of the “democratic initiative.” The government, however, was perceived as insincere in its intentions when it continued with arrests of Kurdish members of parliament. Moreover, violent events provoked by the PKK were seen as an escalation intended to break up the process, although it is possible they were only a means of applying pressure to the government to move the talks along.²⁰

While in recent years there have been hundreds of people killed every year in the conflict, the level of violence has been significantly reduced compared to the 1990s, and both sides have been careful not to end up in a mutually painful stalemate.²¹ While the PKK is not strong enough to

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cause significant damage to the Turkish army, it is still strong enough to have continued the struggle for more than three decades. It seems that for the sake of the peace process, the Turkish government significantly reduced enforcement in the country’s southeast, thereby helping to strengthen the PKK in these regions,²² a factor that may have contributed to the organization’s self-confidence.

The perception that as part of the peace process PKK fighters would remain armed and leave for northern Iraq instead of disarming and becoming part of the political scene in Turkey was apparently problematic. This notion helped preserve one of the PKK’s power centers and strengthened the organization’s more hawkish wings. Given the fact

that the Kurdish issue already crosses borders, it seems that the increased presence of the PKK in the Qandil Mountains worsened the problem rather than helped solve it.

While the religious view that unites the Justice and Development Party helped it to break some of the taboos around the Kurdish question, the party exaggerated its ability to harness the religious element to rebut the Kurds' nationalist demands. The party heads believed that the farther they got away from the secular Kemalist tradition, the more the Kurds, most of whom are Sunnis, would feel at home.²³ Still, although the Justice and Development Party won a not insignificant level of support from religious Kurds in the last rounds of election, the Kurdish demand for recognition as a national minority has not changed.

One of the government's mistakes was its inexperience in enlisting the opposition parties into the peace process, especially the Republican People's Party (the CHP), which in the 1990s presented ideas similar to – if not bolder than – those introduced by the Justice and Development Party in the 2000s.²⁴ The notion was that the opposition would fall in line in any case and support progress in the talks with the Kurds. However, in practice, the opposition's criticism pulled Erdogan in an even more nationalistic direction. Moreover, the process was identified personally with Erdogan, leaving the opponents of Turkey's leader hard pressed to support him even if, in principle, they supported some of the government's proposals. Thus, the polarization of the Turkish political system meant that in the delicate balance between those supporting a rigid line on the Kurdish issue in Turkey and those supporting a political resolution and a more liberal approach, the proponents of the more rigid stance carried the day.

Conclusion

The peace process in Turkey is an excellent illustration of some of the difficulties faced by those who want to promote negotiations over an internal state conflict that also has trans-national dimensions. Thus, strategic developments on the regional level with sometimes conflicting ramifications and the multiple voices that must be considered make it difficult to find a solution. On the other hand, while it is tempting to try to conduct negotiations with one element, not paying sufficient attention to other elements can damage the process in the long run.

There are two particularly prominent factors in the explanation for why the process collapsed. One is Erdogan's disappointment that it was

impossible to enlist the Kurds in favor of the restructure of the Turkish regime and its transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system. He was convinced that precisely because the Kurds desired changes in the Turkish constitution he would be able to enlist them in his plan for changing the political system. The other factor concerned developments in Syria that led to the Syrian Kurds gaining strength, which heightened the suspiciousness of the Turkish government toward its own Kurdish minority.

Along with the difficulties in the talks and the fact that they ended without positive results, it is important to note that many taboos were broken during the discussions. Michael Gunter claims that Erdogan accomplished more to solve the Kurdish problem than all of his predecessors combined.²⁵ In this sense, the disappointment with the collapse is especially great because much of the Turkish and Kurdish public believed that if anyone could promote a solution it was Erdogan. Nonetheless, the sides will hopefully be able to translate the progress that was made during the talks into a more flexible starting point in future negotiations.

The collapse of the peace process has several strategic meanings. It makes it difficult to enlist Turkey as a full partner in the efforts to fight the Islamic State, not only because the Turks are opposed to the West arming

the Syrian Kurds in their fight against the Islamic State, but also because the Turks are warring on two fronts. The Turkish unwillingness to relate to the Kurds in Syria differently than to the Kurds in Turkey may also make it difficult for the PYD to formulate a more independent identity and at least a partial severing from the PKK. Furthermore, the collapse of the peace process affects Turkish policy on northern Iraq and generates actions that are controversial internationally and in the eyes of the Iraqi central government, such as bombings in northern Iraq and the deployment of Turkish ground troops on Iraqi soil. The collapse of the peace process and the renewal of hostilities with the Kurds also makes it difficult for Turkey to meet Europe's human rights

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As to the Israeli angle, in the past, Turkey made use of Israeli military technology to fight the Kurds. As part of the explanation for the softening

in the Turkish stand vis-à-vis Israel since the November 2015 election, analysts have noted Turkey's renewed interest in Israeli technologies, especially UAVs.²⁶ Nonetheless, given the high level of suspicion still prevailing between the two states and Turkey's cooperation with Hamas, Israel will find it tough to sell these systems to Turkey. Furthermore, the importance Turkey currently ascribes to the demand for knowledge sharing so that it can, in the future, build these systems independently rather than buy them off the shelf, will make it difficult for Turkey and Israel to sign such agreements.

Notes

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