Strategic ASSESSMENT

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

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The Role of the Court in Reaching Judicial Decisions that Concern the State of Israel's National Security

Esther Hayut

Since its establishment, the State of Israel has committed itself to the principles of the rule of law and the protection of human rights, both in times of combat and in times of calm. Israel's battle against threats to its national security must be waged within the framework of the law, and in accordance with the legal norms practiced among the family of democratic nations. One of the supervisory and control mechanisms to ensure that these legal norms are indeed followed is judicial review conducted by the Israeli Supreme Court in relation to matters of national security. The judicial review, which is not intended to replace, and cannot replace, the operational decision making process of IDF commanders, is not only a key element of national security; in many respects it is the source of Israel's strength and reflects the State's commitment to the rule of law. The Supreme Court, not a distant and detached critic, is familiar with Israel's security needs and the unique reality the State confronts. This familiarity enables the Court to apply the law in a way that is most applicable to the facts at hand.

Keywords: Supreme Court, judicial review, national security

"In times of war, the laws fall mute." This statement ("*silent enim leges inter arma*") is attributed to Cicero, a Roman philosopher and orator from the 1st century BCE.[1] Countries that chose to establish a democratic-liberal regime, however, did not adopt this principle. For example, British Judge

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Lord James Atkin noted in a World War II-era judgment discussing the legality of security measures:

> In England, amidst the clash of arms, the laws are not silent. They may be changed, but they speak the same language in war as in peace. It has always been one of the pillars of freedom, one of the principles of liberty for which...we are now fighting, that the judges are no respecters of persons, and stand between the subject and any attempted encroachments on his liberty by the executive, alert to see that any coercive action is justified in law.[2]

Israel, a young democracy, advocates that same view. In essence, one could posit that had Israel adopted Cicero's statement, it would have been sentenced to life without law and justice, because it appears that even after seventy years of independence, Israel is still under constant existential threat.

However, since the day of its establishment, the State of Israel has committed itself to the principles of the rule of law and the protection of human rights, both in times of combat and in times of calm. Moreover, by adopting this principle, Israel did not need to memorize Lord Atkin's doctrine, cited above. It was sufficient to refer to our Biblical origins to understand the root of this idea. In Deuteronomy it is written that when the Israelites reach their land and the king "is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching [the Torah] written for him...Let it remain with him, and let him read in it all his life."[3] The Midrash [an ancient commentary] adds that "based on this, they said that the king went off to war and it was with him"; in other words, the king is commanded to remember that even when waging war, the book of laws is not left behind but is always with him.

One of Israel's most illustrious judges, Justice Haim Cohen, who was as knowledgeable in Jewish sources as he was in the law, gave expression to this idea in an opinion he wrote nearly 40 years ago, in the *Kawasma* case:

> What distinguishes the war of the State from the war of its enemies is that the State fights while upholding the law, whereas its enemies fight while violating the law. The moral strength and objective justness of the Government's war depend entirely on upholding the laws of the State: by conceding this strength and this justness, the Government serves the purposes of the enemy. Moral weapons are no less important than any other weapon, and perhaps more important. There is no weapon more moral than the rule of law. Everyone who ought to know should be

> aware that the rule of law in Israel will never succumb to the state's enemies.[4]

This statement by Justice Cohen delineates the difference between the State of Israel as a law-abiding state, and the terrorist organizations that are among its bitterest enemies and do not see themselves as obligated to any rules of law or morality and believe that all means are justified.

Indeed, the challenges facing the State of Israel in maintaining the rule of law in times of combat, and not only during times of calm, have become more complex over the years. The region's changing strategic environment, in addition to other concerns, is characterized by a weakening of the state framework. These changes, coupled with the advantages they offer when the focus of the fighting in some countries in the region is internal, also entail disadvantages. With the weakening of the state framework, Israel faces many more threatening elements that do not consider themselves obligated to uphold international law or even any internal state laws. This is undoubtedly an extremely complex challenge in terms of maintaining the rule of law during times of combat.

Anyone perusing "The IDF Strategy" document, which was published in April 2018, will recognize that despite the nature of these threatening elements, the State of Israel and the forces defending it adhere to the fundamental tenet that the rule of law must be maintained both in times of combat and times of calm, along with the democratic norms concerning human rights – this, of course, while ensuring the appropriate balances.

"The IDF Strategy" states: "The State of Israel acts as a Jewish and democratic state according to rules of combat ethics and according to international law, and is judged by the international community in light of these laws and ethics, while the enemy does not conduct itself in like manner."[5] This is the ethos that has accompanied the IDF since it was formed. It appears in the ordinance establishing the IDF, which David Ben-Gurion signed approximately two weeks after the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel,[6] and every soldier inducted into the IDF since then takes an oath, pledges allegiance to the State of Israel, and affirms the commitment to uphold its laws and respect its authorized governing institutions.[7]

Guided by this ethos, Israel is proud that as a Jewish and democratic state its soldiers are continuously guided by the principles of the rule of law and human rights. A clear and important expression of this may also

be found in recent statements by the outgoing Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot. In referring to criticism regarding possible over-legalization in military operations, Eisenkot emphasized that "the Military Advocate General's corps is part of the IDF's strength and stands shoulder to shoulder with the commanders and combatants, to help the IDF fulfill its operational mission and be victorious in war."[8]

These important statements point to the linchpin designed to shape Israel's battle against threats to its national security, specifically, that this battle must be waged within the framework of the law and not outside it, and in accordance with the legal norms practiced among the family of democratic nations. In order to ensure that these legal norms are indeed followed, supervisory and control mechanisms are needed. One of these mechanisms is judicial review conducted by the Israeli Supreme Court in relation to matters of national security as part of the decades-long tradition of judicial review of executive authority activities, including security forces. Indeed, the Court is charged with ensuring that security activities are conducted lawfully.

However, it is important to emphasize that the judicial review performed by the Court is not intended to replace, and cannot replace, the operational decision making process of IDF commanders. It is not the Court's role to choose between operational alternatives or to debate considerations requiring purely professional expertise. The role of the Court within this context focuses on the question of whether a particular security activity meets the national and international criteria defining its legality.

Accordingly, many petitions have been denied over the years when it became evident that they overstepped the aforesaid judicial question and sought the Court's intervention in the operational discretion that is the sphere of expertise of the security agencies. For example, a petition seeking an order that would prohibit the IDF from employing tanks armed with flechette shells during its activities in the Gaza Strip region filed by Physicians for Human Rights was dismissed in 2003.[9] A flechette shell contains a cluster of steel darts; when it detonates, these darts are dispersed over an area of several hundred square meters and are intended to be used against field targets, as opposed to pinpoint, individual targets.

In dismissing the petition, the Court stated that it had conducted an examination and found that the use of this ammunition is not prohibited by international warfare conventions, and held that it would not intervene in the choice of combat measures used by security forces. The Court further

emphasized in its judgment that the State clarified that this ammunition's scope of use is regulated by the IDF, which issues directives defining the conditions under which commanders of the forces operating in the field are authorized to use it. The question of whether the prevailing circumstances in the combat arena in each individual case justify the use of flechette shells is subject to the decision of the authorized commander.

A similar decision was handed down in 2011 following another petition by Physicians for Human Rights alleging that the safety buffer distances of artillery shelling toward the Gaza Strip defined by the IDF are illegal. In denying the petition, the Court ruled:

> The petition at hand is directly linked to clearly professional-operational aspects of the planning of the IDF's combative and defensive activity against the Qassam rockets that are launched toward Israeli territory with the aim of harming its residents, since a remedy was requested in the petition to order the IDF to refrain from taking action in a particular operational manner while preferring a different one. This demand is problematic, since it involves clearly military operational aspects and, as is known, the military authorities responsible for such matters possess the expertise in this regard. Therefore, the Court will be inclined to back away from intervening in them.[10]

It is important to emphasize that the Court's restraint in these issues is reasoned restraint, in the sense that it is accompanied by scrutiny of the rules and provisions under which the security agencies exercise their operational discretion.

A recent judgment that illustrates this policy of the Court is a decision handed down in May 2018 that dealt with petitions filed to protest Israel security forces' rules of engagement and the way in which they are applied in the area of the security barrier between Israel and the Gaza Strip.[11] The context preceding the petitions was the violent and large scale incidents that attracted tens of thousands of Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip, and that were organized and funded by the Hamas organization, among other terrorist groups. The organizers' goal for these incidents was to breach the border fence, infiltrate Israeli territory, and commit terrorist attacks against the Israeli security forces and Israeli residents who live on the other side of the fence, i.e., within Israel.

And indeed, under the guise of the demonstrations, various actions were taken to create a smokescreen, like burning tires, hurling grenades

and Molotov cocktails, planting and hurling explosive charges, firing at the Israeli forces, and launching incendiary kites, causing widespread fires and destroying fields and considerable property in Israeli communities adjacent to the fence. During one of the incidents, the Kerem Shalom Crossing, used for the transfer of goods, fuel, and gas from Israel to the Gaza Strip, was set ablaze and largely destroyed.

These incidents well demonstrate the complexity previously discussed. Indeed, during these incidents, the security forces faced – and continue to face – one of their greatest challenges, derived from the need to contend with the deliberate intentions of the organizers of these incidents to conceal the terrorists among the civilian population. This concealment serves to blur and create difficulty in identifying the terrorists among the masses of people participating in the incidents, to enable the terrorists to commit the terrorist attacks described while taking shelter among the civilian population.

It is customary in international law to refer to two paradigms that regulate legally the operational actions of security forces. The first is a paradigm for handling acts of hostility that generally relates to combat situations, while the second is a paradigm for law enforcement that regulates the forces' conduct in situations of law enforcement and maintaining public order and safety. Each of the two paradigms delineates different rules for authorizing the use of force.

However, during the war against terrorist activities and terrorist organizations, Israel – and in recent years, additional countries – faces complicated challenges contending with complex scenarios that do not clearly fall under one of the two aforesaid categories: combat operations or law enforcement operations. Consequently, as stated in the judgment, Courts are often required to characterize the operational activity in concrete cases and to define criteria that will ascertain, for example, if at issue is an incident of "warfare" that is sheltered under the exemption from the tort liability pursuant to Section 5 of the Civil Wrongs (Liability of the State) Law, 1952.[12]

With respect to the incidents at the border fence, it became clear that the issue essentially was that the incidents combined characteristics of both paradigms, and therefore, the Israeli security forces face an extremely complex mission: they must alternate and conduct themselves differently, during the same incident, according to the different rules dictated by each paradigm.

The petitioners sought to invalidate the IDF's rules of engagement and their method of application against unarmed civilian residents of the Gaza Strip during these incidents. The State asked to present explanations and clarifications to the Court *ex parte* with regard to the rules of engagement, including presenting confidential intelligence material and classified rules of engagement under which the IDF operates during the incidents in question. The petitioners objected to an *ex parte* hearing, and therefore, the Court limited the examination of the rules of engagement to the unclassified description presented by the respondents in their brief.

We found that the rules of engagement prescribe criteria for use of graduated means to contend with the dangers deriving from the incidents, and that these criteria maintain a direct correlation to the gravity of the danger and the certainty of its materialization. We further found that according to the prescribed rules, the use of potentially lethal force in a concrete instance is subject to the strict principles of "necessity" and "proportionality" prescribed in international law in each of the paradigms relevant to that instance.

The petitioners claimed that based on the outcome and considering the number of fatalities and wounded among the Palestinians, even if the rules of engagement are legal, the use of live ammunition contravened international and Israeli law. We rejected this argument and, according to the rule referenced above, stated in the judgment that within this context,

> As opposed to the examination of the legality of the Rules of Engagement, with which the Court is entrusted, there is doubt whether the Court possesses the tools to perform the examination of the manner in which these Rules are implemented, as it relates to professional aspects – particularly when the events are still taking place.[13]

We also referred to the various mechanisms that the IDF has in place for assessing operational conclusions. For example, while the incidents are underway, the IDF conducts an orderly process for the purpose of drawing conclusions and subsequently issues emphases and clarifications to the forces on the ground, and particular cases are referred for examination by an independent General Staff mechanism that investigates aberrant incidents.

At the same time, and in addition to the non-intervention policy that the Court applies in appropriate instances, some of which are outlined above, the Court does not hesitate to conduct a judicial review when

fundamental legal questions are submitted to it that justify intervention. Within this framework, at least three important judgments may be cited. The first concerns the question of whether the General Security Service may employ physical measures during its interrogations.[14] The second concerns targeted killings,[15] and the third concerns the "early warning procedure."[16]

In each of these cases, the Supreme Court delineated what is permitted and what is prohibited in terms of the law, and that is why these cases are so important. Indeed, these judgments engaged in sensitive and complex issues, and the very nature of these issues arouses public debate.

A question that usually arises within this context is whether judicial involvement, by way of a review of the legality of the war against terrorism, is warranted. There are those who claim that it would be advisable for the Court not to engage in these matters.

In an article about judgment, democracy, and terrorism, President Aharon Barak (ret.) wrote that "these arguments are heard from both ends of the political spectrum. On one side, critics argue that judicial review undermines security. On the other side, critics argue that judicial review gives legitimacy to actions of the government authorities in their battle against terrorism."[17] In the same article, basing himself on an age-old tradition, Barak emphasized: "Judicial review of the legality of the battle against terrorism may make the battle against terrorism harder in the short term. Judicial review, however, fortifies and strengthens the people in the long term." He closed by saying that in his view, "the rule of law is a key element in national security."

This is a precise and correct insight, also reflected by President Shamgar in the *Barzilai* case, when he said that:

> The rule of law is not an artificial creation. It is to be observed in a concrete day-to day manner in the maintenance of binding normative arrangements and their actual application to one and all...The rule of law, the public welfare and the approach of the State to problems are not opposing conceptions but complement and sustain each other. The court is specially charged with the practical realisation of these expectations, but all of the State organs are committed to the attainment of the stated objectives... National security also leaned on the rule of law, both in protecting internal policy measures, and in aiding the creation of means to combat hostile elements. There can be no organized activity of any body of persons, or any discipline, without norms based on binding legal provisions.[18]

Furthermore, the judicial review conducted by the Supreme Court is not only a key element of national security but in many respects is the source of the State of Israel's strength. First and foremost, it reflects the State's commitment to the rule of law and the State's meticulous care to maintain a set of checks and balances between the executive authority, the judicial authority, and civil society. Second, Israel's Supreme Court is familiar with Israel's security needs and the unique reality the State confronts. It is not a distant and detached critic. This familiarity enables the Court to apply the law in a way that is most applicable to the facts at hand, reflected both in its identification of the relevant normative framework and in its interpretation.

For example, in the *Mara'abe* case,[19] the Court referred to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague, which reached the conclusion that Israel was in violation of international law when it built the security fence in the West Bank, while the Israeli Supreme Court reached the opposite conclusion and ruled that the construction of the fence is consistent with the law. President Barak noted that the primary reason for the differing conclusions is the different factual foundation that the Israeli Supreme Court possessed, giving it a deeper understanding of the security needs.

In addition, even though this is not a purpose of judicial review, one of its important byproducts is its contribution to Israel's international legitimacy. Conducting judicial review underscores the State of Israel's commitment to act lawfully, whether the Court affirms the legality of the security activity, or whether it invalidates it. This also contributes to national security.

Within this context, considering that the Court is objective and possesses many years of experience deliberating complex questions about counterterrorism efforts, the judgments issued by the Court also resonate loudly outside of Israel. They are read by foreign and international courts, and by universities and government ministries, and they affect the way the players in the international community understand and interpret international law. A well known example of this is the judgment in the "targeted killings" case, which had a considerable impact on the judicial discourse concerning injuries to civilians involved in the fighting. Another recent example is the judgment previously mentioned concerning the legality of the IDF's rules of engagement when contending with violent incidents in the area of the security barrier between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

An additional and important byproduct of the Court's judicial review of issues pertaining to national security, chiefly in the context of decisions pertaining to criminal enforcement, is that they support the State of Israel's claim of "complementarity" when it comes to dealing with criminal proceedings before foreign courts in the international arena or in other countries.

It is known that foreign courts have no jurisdiction to exercise their authority in relation to incidents under the jurisdiction of the Israeli judicial system when that system conducts independent and sincere inquiries, investigations, trials, and judicial proceedings.

In conclusion, the uniqueness of Israeli democracy is derived from the fact that the State of Israel has been under a constant existential threat from the day it was established to this very day, and in this reality, it is particularly challenging and complex to maintain fundamental constitutional principles and human rights.

In 1987, one of the illustrious justices of the United States Supreme Court, Justice William J. Brennan, presented a lecture at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and spoke about this uniqueness of the Israeli democracy and the considerable appreciation that its judicial system has earned, due to the way it contends with these complex challenges when employing judicial review:

> It may well be Israel, not the United States, that provides the best hope for building a jurisprudence that can protect civil liberties against the demands of national security...The nations of the world, faced with sudden threats to their own security, will look to Israel's experience in handling its continuing security crises, and may well find in that experience the expertise to reject the security claims that Israel has exposed as baseless and the courage to preserve the civil liberties that Israel has preserved without detriment to its security.[20]

Considering the threats of terrorism and other strategic threats faced today, unfortunately, many countries in the free world have turned Justice Brennan's statements, voiced more than thirty years ago, into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Indeed, the judgments of the Israeli Supreme Court, and particularly those addressing the clash between the State's security needs and the rule of law and the need to protect human rights, are studied and cited throughout the world and viewed with considerable respect and admiration.

Notes

1 Cicero, Pro Milone 11.
2 *Liversidge vs. Anderson* [1941], All E.R. 338, 361 [HL] [dissenting opinion on the outcome].
3 Deuteronomy 17:18-19, translated by the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962.
4 HCJ 320/80 – *Kawasma vs. Minister of Defense,* PD 35(3), 113, 132 (1980) [dissenting opinion on the outcome]. Translation taken from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, "Judgments of the Israel Supreme Court: Fighting Terrorism within the Law," January 2, 2005, https://bit.ly/2UvrRch.
5 "The IDF Strategy," April 2018.
6 Defense Army of Israel Ordinance, *5708* – 1948.
7 General Staff Ordinance 33.0915, "Pledging Allegiance to the IDF and Distribution of Weapons to Recruits," July 20, 1982.
8 Press release by the outgoing Chief of Staff, Gadi Eisenkot, November 13, 2018.
9 HCJ 8990/02 – *Physicians for Human Rights – Israel Organization vs. GOC Southern Command*, PD 57(4), 193 (2003).
10 HCJ 3261/06 – *Physicians for Human Rights – Israel Organization vs the Minister of Defense*, clause 10 of President D. Beinisch's judgment, January 31, 2011.
11 HCJ 3003/18 – *Yesh Din – Human Rights Volunteers vs. the IDF Chief of General Staff*, May 24, 2018 (hereinafter: the matter of the rules of engagement).
12 Civil Wrongs (Liability of the State) Law, *5712* – 1952.
13 The matter of the rules of engagement, paragraph 13.
14 HCJ 5100/94 – *The Public Committee against Torture in Israel vs the Israeli Government*, PD 53(4), 817 (1999).
15 HCJ 769/02 – *The Public Committee against Torture in Israel vs the Israeli Government* (14.12.2006).
16 HCJ 3799/02 – *Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel vs. IDF GOC Central Command*, PD 60(3), 67 (2005).
17 Aharon Barak, "Human Rights and National Security," *Selected Essays – Volume III: Constitutional Inquiries* 339 (2017).
18 HCJ 428/86 – *Barzilai vs. the Government of Israel*, PD 40(3), 505, 554-555 (1986).
19 HCJ 7957/04 – *Mara'abe vs. the Prime Minister of Israel*, PD 60(2), 477 (2005).
20 William J. Brennan, "The American Experience: Free Speech and National Security," in *Free Speech and National Security*, ed. Shimon Shetreet (*International Studies and Human Rights*, vol. 16), pp. 10, 18-19.

Iran's Missile System: The Principal Means of Deterrence

Ephraim Kam

Iran has built up the largest arsenal of missiles in the Middle East. The majority are located in Iran, while the remainder are among Iranian proxies in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and most of all in Lebanon, under Hezbollah. For Iran, this missile arsenal is currently its most important means of deterring its enemies and defending itself, and thus Tehran has adamantly and successfully refused to discuss the imposition of restrictions on its missile program. In recent years, Iran has worked to improve the quality of its missiles and rockets – expanding their range, and improving their precision. Thus far, it has only used its missiles on a few occasions against its adversaries – whether from Iran itself or by means of its proxies – and to a limited extent, including against IDF forces in the Golan Heights, in response to Israeli aerial attacks in Syria. This restraint may signify that Iran will not rush to launch missiles toward countries with significant retaliatory capability, such as the United States and even Israel, and that if it were to decide to do so, it would probably prefer that such launches – at least in the initial stage – be carried out by its proxies, especially Hezbollah.

Keywords: Iran, Hezbollah, missiles, rockets, deterrence

In September 1980, Iran's deterrence strategy failed. The major resources that the Shah's regime had invested in military buildup and high quality weapon systems, as well as Iran's geographical advantages, did not deter Saddam Hussein from dragging Iran into a full scale, prolonged, and painful war. This failure stemmed from the strategic weakness in Iran's military

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preparedness resulting from the Islamic Revolution – first and foremost the military severance from the United States, the weapons embargo that the Western governments imposed on Iran, and the extensive purges of Iranian officers – and the military advantage enjoyed by Iraq due to its large missile arsenal. This failure led the new Iranian leadership to build its post-war deterrence strategy on different foundations: a large missile arsenal, asymmetric warfare, Shiite militias, chief among them Hezbollah, and perhaps also nuclear weapons in the future.

The most significant of these foundations is the large and improving arsenal of missiles that Iran has amassed, bolstered by the arsenal of rockets and missiles that Iran has built for Hezbollah in Lebanon. This article surveys the nature and importance of this arsenal, the considerations that could drive Iran to use it, and its implications for Iran's adversaries.

Background to the Missile Program

The roots of Iran's missile program lie in the Iraq-Iran War. When the war broke out in September 1980, Iran did not have any surface-to-surface missiles. In contrast, before the war Iraq had built up a relatively large missile arsenal, which included mainly Scud-B missiles acquired in the Soviet Union, whose range was extended to 600 km. Iraq began firing Scud missiles toward Iran in October 1982, and by the end of the war in August 1988 had fired over 500 missiles – mainly toward urban centers and military areas. Iraq carried out its primary missile attack, some 190 missiles, in 1988, as part of the fighting known as the War of the Cities.

During the first years of the war, Iran had no ability to respond to the missiles fired by Iraq, and it made great efforts to acquire Scud missiles in Libya, Syria, and North Korea. These acquisitions allowed it to start launching missiles toward Iraq only in 1985, and by the end of the war it had fired some 120 missiles, most of them during the War of the Cities. Iran's missile inferiority stemmed mainly from the fact that its missile arsenal was depleted quickly in 1988, and served as an important factor in Iran being forced to agree to end the war at a time and under conditions that it did not want.[1]

A large missile arsenal will help Iran expand its influence in the region and achieve regional hegemony.

The War of the Cities convinced the Iranian leadership to invest its armament efforts mainly in the field of missiles. Iran reached the conclusion that missiles are the weapon that can win a war, and that its lack of a

missile arsenal in 1980 undermined its ability to deter Saddam Hussein from waging war against it. The Iranian population's fears of Iraqi missile strikes, and specifically the fear that Iraq could also arm its missiles with chemical warheads, contributed to this conclusion. The population's loss of morale had an important impact on the Iranian leadership's decision to end the war in an inferior position.

Since the late 1980s, Tehran's approach to missiles as a strategic weapon related mainly to the Iraqi threat. It was the Saddam Hussein regime that introduced missiles as a central weapon of war in the Middle East, attacked Iran, and left the Iraqi threat in place even after the war. Thus, once the war ended, Iran saw an urgent need to rebuild its forces in order to deter Saddam Hussein from another military campaign, and prevent another failure if Iraq were to attack. As part of this, Iran planned to build a modern air force, a large armored corps, and a state-of-the-art navy, based on an extensive weapons supply from Russia.

But the Gulf Wars brought about a significant change in the strategic balance of power with respect to Iran. In the 1991 Gulf War, the United States damaged Iraq's military capabilities significantly, and during the 2003 war and the occupation of Iraq by the United States, most of these capabilities were eliminated. Thus, Iraq's military threat toward Iran was removed, and Iraq lost its ability to counteract and block Iran's penetration and influence in the region. At the same time, since the early 1990s, the United States has constituted the most serious threat toward Iran – as a result of the occupation of Iran's neighbors, Iraq and Afghanistan, and the expansion of the US military presence near Iran; and as a result of the United States perceiving Iran as the main threat to its allies and interests.

Along with the rise of the American threat, in Iran's eyes another threat has appeared – the Israeli threat, which developed in response to the Iranian regime's extreme approach toward the Jewish state and threats to eradicate it. In addition to the religious-fundamentalist elements infusing the attitude toward Israel, the Iranian leadership believes that Israel incites the United States to attack Iran, damage its economy, and overthrow its regime. Israel is also seen by the Iranians as a formidable regional power that has significant military strength and seeks to block Iran's drive toward regional hegemony. The rise of the American and Israeli threats, and the reduction of the Iraqi threat, transferred the emphasis of the Iranian leadership's concept from nearby threats to distant threats, and required a response in the form of a long arm against new adversaries.

Joining these threats is a third, regional threat. The internal upheaval in Syria since 2011, and the intensification of the upheaval there and in Iraq since 2014 following the Islamic State's takeover of large portions of their territories, posed new challenges for Iran. These threats prompted Iran to operate military forces hundreds of kilometers from its territory, where its aged air force is of little assistance. The changes in Iran's map of threats have therefore influenced the goals of its military buildup. The decline of the Iraqi threat reduced the imperative to build a large and modern air force. In addition, Iran would not have been able to contend with the United States or Israeli air force, and even in the best case, achieving the ability to do so would take many years. Saudi Arabia and some of the Gulf states have built air forces that rely on high quality planes. In contrast, Iran's assessment seems to have been that investing in a large arsenal of ballistic missiles would quickly provide it with a long reach and deterrence toward Israel and other countries in the Middle East, and if necessary, perhaps even toward American targets in the Middle East and European targets.

The missile arsenals for proxies allow Iran to create another front against its adversaries, first and foremost Israel, far from its borders. Iran can then claim that it is neither involved in its proxies' actions nor responsible for them, and that they are engaged in their own defense. Such a front expands Iran's attack capabilities and strengthens its deterrence.

In Iran's eyes, there seems to be another consideration behind its missile program, namely missile and rocket arsenals for its regional allies. An enormous such arsenal has already been built for Hezbollah, and Iran is currently working on improving it, especially with respect to precision capability. Israeli intelligence estimates that Hezbollah's arsenal comprises 150,000 rockets and missiles, including Fajr-3 and Fajr-5 rockets with ranges of 45 and 75 km, respectively; Zelzal-3 missiles with a range of 300 km; and M-600 missiles, which are a Syrian version of the Iranian Fateh-110. Hezbollah's missile and rocket arsenal is the largest and most important that Iran has built for its proxies.

In addition, in 2018, several sources reported that Iran had transferred dozens of Fateh-110, Zelzal, and Zulfiqar missiles with ranges of 200 to 700 km to Iraqi Shiite militias that have ties with Iran. These missiles can hit targets in Israel and in Saudi Arabia and are meant to provide backup for Hezbollah's arsenal. Iran is also helping these militias assemble missiles in Iraq.[2] Furthermore, since early 2017, Iran has transferred a significant number of missiles and rockets to the Houthis in

Yemen and has transferred parts of missiles for assembly in Yemen as well as missile production technology. Since November 2017, the Houthis have fired missiles and rockets at targets in Saudi Arabia at least eight times, including at Riyadh and the major international airport next to the capital.[3]

From Iran's perspective, building missile arsenals for its proxies has an important advantage. These arsenals allow Iran to create another front against its adversaries, first and foremost Israel, far from its borders, claiming that it is neither involved in these actions nor responsible for them, and that its proxies are engaged in their own defense. Such a front expands Iran's attack capabilities and strengthens its deterrence. It is clear that Iran does not have any actual means of building airpower for its proxies, and has thus concluded that a large arsenal of missiles and rockets is the most suitable means of creating deterrence for both its proxies and for itself.

It seems that there were two additional reasons for Iran's decision to prioritize its missile program over conventional forces, especially a high quality air force. One is that a large missile arsenal will help Iran expand its influence in the region and achieve regional hegemony. The use of missiles and rockets will help deter and harm rivals and will boost allies, including in countries that do not border Iran. The other reason relates to Iran's nuclear program. Despite the 2015 nuclear deal, Iran has presumably not given up on its intention to achieve nuclear weapons. Ballistic missiles are the main launch mechanism for nuclear weapons, and if Iran achieves such weapons, its missiles will be ready.

Development of the Missile Program

At the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran War, not only did Iran not have a missile arsenal, it did not have the infrastructure or capability to produce missiles. Thus from the outset, when Iran decided to build up a large arsenal of missiles, it also decided to develop domestic production capability. This decision was the main reflection of a broader outlook whereby Iran would aspire to self-sufficiency in weapons acquisition. This goal stemmed from lessons learned in the Iraq-Iran War; before the war even began, Western governments imposed a complete embargo on weapons supply to Iran, and the Soviet Union also refrained from supplying it with significant amounts of weapons until the end of the war. Iran decided therefore to develop technological capabilities – first for assembling missiles, and later for producing and developing them. During the first years of this program, Iran received help mainly from China, North Korea, and Russia.

Along with production of short range rockets, the Iranian missile program entered a significant phase with the production of the Shahab-3 missile – a ballistic missile with a range of 1,300 km that was built on the basis of the North Korean Nodong missile, which was developed and improved by Iran starting in 1993, and became operational in 2003. From then on, Iran produced a long line of ballistic missiles whose performance seems to have gradually surpassed that of the North Korean missiles, and the Iranian missile program increasingly reduced its dependence on North Korea.[4]

The best known Iranian missiles fall into two groups. One group includes missiles with a range of 500 to 700 km. These missiles are intended for use against hostile organizations in Iraq and Syria, as well as in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and they can be fired from Lebanon and Syria at targets in Israel. An example is the Qiam missile, which was first tested in 2010 and runs on liquid fuel; its range was increased from 700 to 1,000 km. The Qiam was transferred to the Houthis in Yemen, and since 2018 these missiles have occasionally been fired from there into Saudi Arabia. However, it seems that the most important missile in this group is the Fateh-110 – a missile that runs on solid fuel that was developed from the Zelzal non-precision rocket, but now has a significant degree of precision. Its original range was 250 km, but its modern version, called the Zulfiqar, reaches a range of 700 km. The Zulfiqar is considered the most precise missile in Iran's arsenal.[5]

The second group includes medium range missiles with a range of 1,000 to 2,000 km. These include the veteran Shahab-3, which is not a precise missile; the Ghadr missile with a range of 1,600 km, which in tests has reached a range of 1,900 km; the Emad missile with a range of 1,700 km; and the Sejjil-2 – a two-stage missile that runs on solid fuel, with a range of 2,000 km, that is undergoing tests and seems not to be operational yet.[6] In September 2017, Iran announced that it had successfully launched a missile called the Khorramshahr, which can carry several warheads to a range of 2,000 km, but American sources claimed that the launch failed.[7]

Iran has built up the largest arsenal of missiles in the Middle East. It includes rockets, ballistic missiles, cruise missiles for surface attacks, and various kinds of satellite launchers, including over 1,000 short and medium range missiles, and over 10 kinds of ballistic missiles. Some of these missiles, such as the Khorramshahr, can carry nuclear weapons, and some of the "smart" rockets and missiles have a high degree of precision – especially the short range missiles, such as the Fateh-110 and the Zulfiqar,

but also the Emad and the Qiam. At this stage, the medium range missiles are mainly effective against large targets, including population centers.[8] The short range missiles can be used by Iran for hitting nearby targets, particularly enemy targets and hostile organizations in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Yemen, and Iraq. As long as Iranian/Shiite forces are in Syria, they can fire missiles toward Israel or opposition targets in Syria itself. In addition, Iran can operate its medium range missiles from within its territory against targets in Israel, which is 1,200 km away, not only from western Iran, but also from deep within Iran's territory.

In the current situation, short range missiles launched from western Iran can hit targets in the Gulf itself, in Gulf states, in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia, including its oil facilities, in most of Iraq, and in part of Turkey. Israel is outside of the range of these missiles. Medium range missiles launched from Iran can hit targets not only throughout Israel, but also in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Turkey, all of the Arabian Peninsula, and around half of Egypt, as well as parts of Eastern Europe.

Currently Iran does not have an intercontinental ballistic missile, that is, a missile with a range of over 5,500 km, nor, apparently, is it close to developing such a missile. This means that it does not have the ability to threaten missile fire against targets in Western Europe, not to mention the United States. Nonetheless, Western governments are concerned that if restrictions are not imposed on Iran's missile program, Iran will eventually succeed in developing an intercontinental missile too. This concern stems in part from the fact that since 2008, Iran has launched satellites into space, for intelligence purposes and for scientific and other purposes, and to this end it has built at least two kinds of vehicles for launching satellites into space. That said, Iran's level of success is not clear, and its activity in this field seems to have encountered difficulties. Some believe that the space launch efforts are connected to developing an intercontinental missile, since developing this missile and developing a space vehicle use similar technologies, and developing a space vehicle can provide the Iranians with the experience and knowledge for building an intercontinental missile. Thus, some in the American intelligence community believe that Iran does seek to develop an intercontinental missile, for the purpose of strengthening its deterrence toward the United States.[9]

Restrictions on the Missile Program?

From the beginning, Iran's missile program was not included in the talks that led to the nuclear deal that was achieved in 2015, and therefore no agreement on it was reached. Exclusion of the missile issue from the agreement stemmed from Iran's firm opposition, claiming that it has no connection to the nuclear issue, and from the willingness of the other partners to sidestep an agreement on the missile issue, fearing that insistence on the missile program would sabotage the nuclear deal. The only limitation that was imposed on Iran's missile program was Security Council Resolution 2231, which was passed immediately after the nuclear deal was reached, and calls on Iran not to carry out tests with ballistic missiles that can carry nuclear warheads. The wording of the resolution, which went only so far as to "call upon" Iran, seemed flimsy and not decisive enough, and enabled Iran to interpret the decision as non-binding. Indeed, since the approval of the nuclear deal, Iran has carried out a series of tests with medium range ballistic missiles, satellite launchers, and cruise missiles, following which the Trump administration stated that these tests are a violation of the Security Council resolution.

Iran's stance on its missile arsenal is unequivocal. The ability to carry out massive missile fire against its adversaries is the most important element of Iran's deterrence and defense capabilities, especially toward the United States and Israel – at least as long as it does not have nuclear weapons. The need to maintain and develop this element prompts its refusal to discuss the imposition of any restrictions on its missile program. Thus, former Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehghani announced in August 2015 that Iran will develop any missile that it deems appropriate in order to strengthen its deterrence capability, and will not agree to any limitations on the range or performance of its missiles. To this end, Iran also built systems of tunnels and underground production, storage, and launch facilities in different areas of Iran, some of which were displayed to the media, in order to strengthen Iran's deterrence capability. These underground structures, the largest of their kind in the Middle East, are meant to protect and conceal elements of the missile program.[10]

Iran's overt efforts to improve the quality and range of its missiles have led to a certain change in the stances of European governments toward restrictions on Iran's missile program. While the governments of the UK, France, and Germany disagree with the Trump administration's position regarding the nuclear deal, they too understand, more than in the past, that

it is important to impose certain restrictions on Iran's missile program, which already creates risks for Middle East countries, and theoretically for several European countries as well.

Against this backdrop, in one respect, Iran has shown some flexibility in its position on the missile issue – in setting a maximum range for its missiles. Since the end of the first stage of talks on the nuclear deal in November 2013, senior Iranian officials have reported limiting the range of Iran's ballistic missiles to 2,000 km. Thus, in December 2013, before the approval of the nuclear deal, Revolutionary Guards commander Mohammad Ali Jafari said that Iran can develop missiles to a range of over 2,000 km, and the Guards wish to do so, but Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has directed that the range of missiles be limited to 2,000 km. Jafari explained that this range is sufficient for Iran for now, since it includes Israel and the American bases near Iran.[11]

It is clear that setting this range is a voluntary limitation and is not binding for Iran if not stipulated in an international agreement. The restriction stated by senior Iranian officials during the negotiations over the nuclear deal was presumably intended to deflect the pressure on Iran to include the missile issue in the nuclear deal. Indeed, after the approval of the nuclear deal, senior Iranian officials hardened their approach toward the 2,000 km range. Iranian Defense Minister Dehghani said in August 2016 that Iran had not set a limit on the range of its missiles, and in November 2018 the deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards warned that if the European countries were to pose a threat toward Iran by intervening in its nuclear program, Iran would increase the range of its missiles, whereby they would cover Europe.[12]

Implications

In the current situation, there is no genuine external limitation on Iran's missile program, and Iran continues to carry out tests with various kinds of missiles. Iran rejects any agreement outright that would impose restrictions on the program, and any negotiations that are meant to lead to such an agreement. However, it is possible that if its difficult economic situation continues, Iran would be willing to consider the imposition of restrictions on the range of its missiles – for example to a distance of 2,000 km – if the US administration would agree to the framework of the nuclear agreement, including canceling the sanctions that have been reinstated. Iran would have two main considerations: one is that Iran's main targets are within this

range in any case – Israel, the American bases in the region, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states; and the other is that improving the precision of its missiles is currently more important to Iran than extending their range. However, even if Iran were willing to make such a concession, it is very doubtful whether it would lead to the restoration of the nuclear agreement, since the Trump administration has additional stringent demands regarding the nuclear issue and Iran's actions in the region that would be very difficult for Iran to accept.

If no way is found to negotiate restrictions on the missile program, Iran will likely continue to develop it in the coming years, quantitatively and qualitatively. The expected improvement in the precision of missiles could enable Iran to hit military and infrastructure targets in the coming decade. And if Iran decides to work toward nuclear weapons, especially after the expiration of the nuclear deal, it will have an arsenal of missiles that can be used for launching such weapons. This change would pose a significant challenge for Iran's adversaries, and especially for Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States, which would need to develop or acquire improved missile defense systems, if they have not yet developed them.[13]

The heightened threat from Iran's missile program is not the end of the story. In addition to Iran's missile arsenal, the large arsenal of missiles and rockets under the responsibility of Hezbollah in Iran, the Iranian effort to improve and expand the deployment into Syria and Iraq, and to a lesser extent Iranian activity toward a missile arsenal in Yemen that will threaten Saudi Arabia are all important examples of Iran striving to establish fronts that rely in part on missile arsenals, as part of its attempt to expand its regional influence and deterrence capability.

Since the end of the Iraq-Iran War, Iran has used its domestic missile arsenal against its adversaries only on a few occasions. Iran has never launched missiles from within its territory against American, Israeli, or Saudi targets. In contrast, in April 2001 Iran launched dozens of missiles and rockets toward bases of the Iranian opposition group People's Mujahedin in Iraq; in June 2017, it launched six Zulfiqar missiles from Iranian territory toward Islamic State bases in eastern Syria; and in October 2018, six Zulfiqar and Qiam missiles were launched toward Islamic State targets in southeastern Syria, in response to a serious attack by the Islamic State in Iran. In September 2018, missiles were fired from Iran toward Iranian Kurdish rebel targets active in northern Iraq.[14] In addition, Shiite militias stationed in Syria have fired missiles/rockets toward targets belonging

to organizations that oppose the Assad regime, and Iraqi Shiite militias connected to Iran have fired missiles/rockets received from Iran toward their adversaries in Iraq. Iran has also responded to Israeli Air Force attacks in Syria by firing rockets toward IDF forces on the Golan Heights – in May 2018 Iranian forces in Syria fired 32 rockets at IDF outposts, and in January 2019 Quds Forces in Syria fired a "smart" rocket toward an IDF force on the Hermon; in both cases the rocket fire was ineffective.[15]

Conclusion

There are thus several considerations guiding Iran regarding the use of its missile arsenal and those of its proxies. First, Iran has no interest in deteriorating into a missile war like the costly War of the Cities. Thus, if Iran were to decide to begin a confrontation by launching missiles or respond in this way to an adversary opening fire, it might carry out limited missile fire for the purpose of deterrence. If Iran were to see it necessary to carry out extensive missile fire toward its adversaries, in most cases it might prefer that the missiles be fired by its proxies, at least in the initial stages of the confrontation. Missile fire by its proxies would provide Iran with greater freedom of action, enable it to try to absolve itself of responsibility for the missile fire, and might reduce the risk of retaliation against Iranian targets.

Second, Iran has no interest in becoming entangled in a confrontation that includes missile fire with an adversary that has significant retaliatory capabilities. Above all, Iran is expected to continue to refrain from massive missile fire on American targets in the Middle East, considering the military and economic retaliatory capabilities of a superpower like the United States, including an American effort to topple the Iranian regime. Iran might also refrain from extensive missile fire against Israel for several reasons. Israel has a multilayer defense system against missiles that would reduce their damage. The United States might aid Israel in a confrontation with Iran. Iran does not have a sufficient response to the use of the Israeli Air Force in response to missile fire. Israel might carry out a full scale aerial attack on Iranian/Shiite forces if they are still operating in Syria. Above all, Israel could see an Iranian missile attack as an opportunity and justification for attacking Iran's nuclear sites.

This does not mean that the US retaliatory capability would deter Iran from challenging the United States in every situation. Despite the large strategic advantage that the United States has over Iran, Iran also has a deterrent effect on the United States, especially its missile arsenal – partly in

light of Iran's ability to threaten Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, including its threats to their oil facilities and the flow of oil in the Gulf, and the concern that a confrontation in the Gulf could deteriorate into a regional war. Indeed, the Obama administration was deterred from attacking Iran's nuclear sites in part due to concerns that the Iranian response to an attack would include harming United States allies and deteriorate into a regional war.

In Israel's case as well, there is no doubt that the Iranian regime is impressed by its capabilities in central fields, including technological developments, aerial warfare, intelligence, and the missile defense systems that it has developed. This impression has caused Iran to refrain in most cases from responding to Israel's attacks against Iranian and Shiite targets in Syria. At the same time, Iran likely understands that Israel is also careful to avoid entanglement in an extensive confrontation with Hezbollah and Hamas, which could develop into rocket and missile salvos toward population centers, and perhaps also toward strategic targets. Thus far, this mutual deterrence has had an important role in preventing deterioration into a missile war.

Therefore, Iran would prefer not to be the first to open fire with missiles from within its territory toward American targets, and perhaps also Israeli targets. However, it could instruct its proxies, especially Hezbollah, to fire missiles toward targets in Israel, and perhaps even American targets, if these were to strike first against Iranian targets. In the case of extensive fire by them, it might also launch missiles from within its territory toward Israeli targets, or even American targets.

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Bashar al-Assad and Israel: Back to the Past?

Eyal Zisser

The coming end to the civil war in Syria and the victory for Bashar al-Assad raises the question of which Syrian president Israel will now face. The likely answer is that it will be the "old, familiar" Bashar, a ruler who sticks to the status quo, to what is tried and true, including – and perhaps especially – with respect to his approach toward Israel. This seemingly returns Israel to the point it was at with respect to Bashar before the outbreak of the war in Syria in the spring of 2011. Israel remains positioned against a defiant ruler who alongside his continued dependence on Russia, his most important patron and ally, works to strengthen relations with Iran and with Hezbollah, but who also exercises restraint and maintains quiet along the border and is even willing to engage in peace negotiations with Israel.

Keywords: Israel, Syria, Bashar al-Assad, Iran, Russia

The prevailing tendency in Israel is to ignore Bashar al-Assad and focus instead on Russia and Iran, which Jerusalem sees as "masters of the house" in Syria. Yet despite the decisive contribution of these two actors to Bashar's success in the long civil war, this victory is first of all the victory of Bashar al-Assad the man, his regime, and even the Syrian state that he heads. In time, and as he returns to being a legitimate and accepted ruler in the regional and international arenas, his power will presumably increase – first and foremost, his political maneuvering and bargaining capabilities, both with respect to his rivals, and with respect to his patrons, Russia and Iran.[1]

On the question of which Bashar we can expect, the answer is the "old familiar" Bashar: the devil we know, a ruler who returns to the path he took

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and the policy that has guided him until today, including and especially with respect to his approach toward Israel. After all, Bashar's main conclusion from the war is that retaining the status quo, and in any case refraining from any action, not to mention initiative, is the key to his survival, while the attempt to pursue a new path of changes and modifications is what brought the civil war upon him.

For Israel, this return to the past is seemingly refreshing – a return to the years before the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, during which Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah tightened their strategic cooperation but Bashar maintained complete quiet along the border with Israel, and was even willing to engage in peace negotiations with Israel in order to regain the Golan Heights. Post-war Syria is a different country than the Syria of eight years ago. It is a devastated and destroyed state that lacks effective control over significant portions of its territory, and whose populations and demographics have changed over the years.[2] However, when it comes to Israel-Syria relations, it seems that the future does not herald any reversal or novelty.

Bashar's Syria, Approaching the End of the War

At the end of eight years of battles, the civil war in Syria is nearing its end, with the victory of Bashar al-Assad and his patrons, Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah. In the summer of 2018, the campaign in the south of the country near the border with Israel ended in victory. On July 12, 2018, the Syrian regime regained full control over the city of Daraa, where the Syrian revolution broke out in March 2011. Two weeks later, on July 26, 2018, the Syrian flag – the flag of the Ba'ath regime – was also raised over the border crossing with Israel near Quneitra, which was taken by the rebels in the summer of 2014.[3] This site was reopened as a crossing for civilians and goods on October 15, 2018, under the supervision of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). The event came on the heels of the September 13, 2018 report that the IDF ended the activity of Operation Good Neighbor, which was responsible for the ties and aid to the civilian population in rebel-held territories on the Syrian side of the border in the Golan Heights.[4]

With the end of the war approaching, the expectation and even hope in Israel that the war in the neighboring country would continue for many more years disappeared. For Israel, the reality of the "strategic tie" in the killing fields of Syria, in which none of the opposing sides had the strength or the ability to overcome its adversaries, was something of a blessing.

This stalemate meant the continued rule of Bashar al-Assad in Damascus – strong enough to continue to maintain quiet along the border with Israel, but too weak to challenge or take action against Israel, let alone respond to its actions, such as the air attacks that Israel carried out in Syrian territory against Iran's weapons deliveries to Hezbollah.[5]

The continued rule of Bashar in Damascus was seen by many in Israel as preferable to his overthrow, which could have led to the collapse of the Syrian state and the rise to power of radical Islamic groups. On the other hand, some in Israel called for the overthrow of Bashar due to his close relations with patrons and allies Iran and Hezbollah, which these Israelis saw as a greater strategic threat than the Islamic State and other radical Islamic groups.[6]

But official Israel refrained from defining its long term interests in Syria – the fall of Bashar or his survival as ruler – and let itself be influenced by events on the ground. Its policy thus smacked of a tactical response to the chaos that took hold in Syria and especially in the Golan Heights area, which on more than one occasion spilled over into Israeli territory. Israel established a buffer zone (although it refrained from calling it that) along the Israeli-Syrian border. It established relations with some of the rebel groups that were active on the Syrian side of the border in the Golan Heights, provided them with logistical and monetary assistance, and according to media reports even provided them with weapons. Alongside this, Israel exploited Bashar's weakness and began operating within Syrian territory in an attempt to prevent the transfer of advanced weapons from Iran to Hezbollah, as well as to thwart Tehran's attempt to advance the production of precision missiles in Syria and Lebanon.

From the moment the Russians arrived in Syria in September 2015 and began to fight alongside Bashar (and with them, the Iranians), the possibility, as theoretical as it was, of active Israeli involvement in the war in Syria was no longer on the table. Nonetheless, the recognition that the war in Syria was nearing its end did not lead to any change in Israel's approach toward Bashar al-Assad. After all, in Israel and also in the West it was assumed that in light of the fact that the military victory in Syria's battlefields was achieved thanks to the military involvement of Russia and Iran, it is these two countries that became the masters in Syria and will maintain influence and even control for many years. Therefore, Israel chose to ignore Bashar, the man and the

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regime, and to take action – militarily against Iran and politically vis-à-vis Russia – in an attempt to prevent the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Quds Force and Shiite militias that the Iranians created and brought to Syria from establishing themselves in Syria.[7] The fact that Bashar exercised restraint each time Israel attacked within his territory was seen in Jerusalem as an expression of weakness, and strengthened the sense that there is no need to include Bashar in policy calculations.[8]

However, the victory in the war in Syria is first of all the victory of Bashar al-Assad, the man and the regime that he heads, and only afterwards the victory of the allies that joined the war effort, supported him, and prevented his fall. Bashar has proven his personal strength, political acumen, and maneuvering capability – as an individual, and backed by the Alawite sect, the institutions of the regime and the state, foremost among them the armed forces and security forces, and in effect the same coalition of social forces that serve as the basis of the Ba'ath regime in Damascus.[9] Bashar did not survive the war in order to become a puppet or tool in the hands of others. Thus as time passes and Bashar regains legitimacy and acceptance in the international and regional arenas, his power may increase, and especially his ability to maneuver vis-à-vis his adversaries, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel, but first and foremost vis-à-vis his allies and patrons who helped him achieve victory.

Bashar al-Assad and Israel: What Lies Ahead?

As the war in Syria ends, the victory of Bashar raises the question of which Syrian president Israel will now face. Will it be the "good old" Bashar, familiar to Israel in the years before the outbreak of war in his country – a ruler who ties himself to the axis of resistance led by Iran and Hezbollah, defies Israel and the United States, but at the same time exercises restraint along the border and is even willing to negotiate a political agreement with Israel? Or will it be a new Bashar who thinks outside the box and is willing to adopt different and bolder methods of action than in the past regarding Syria's internal as well as external behavior, and especially regarding Israel?

A key to understanding Bashar's future path may be what lessons the Syrian President has learned from the war he weathered and barely survived. In addition, what are the implications of the war for the man, his path, and his conduct? The answer to these questions is complicated. It seems that the following can be said about Bashar of 2019:

First, he is a determined and confident ruler who has successfully passed a difficult personal test that only few believed he could survive. In addition, he is a cold, calculating, and ruthless individual whose hands are stained with the blood of his people, whom he did not hesitate to butcher or target with chemical weapons; in addition, he expelled hundreds of thousands and even millions from their homes. At the same time, he is a sober-minded ruler who knows the limits of force and knows how to play the game and stop at the edge of the abyss.

Second, he is a ruler who seemingly has nothing to lose, who is the head of a failed state lacking resources and infrastructure that in the past allowed Israel to maintain a "balance of terror" against it. Thus, the concern of more than a few Israelis that Bashar could adopt a tactic of limited conflict against Israel, for example renewing or enabling low intensity acts of terrorism along the border between the two countries, is understandable. The response to this, however, is that this is exactly the situation that existed between Israel and Syria in the summer of 2006 after the Second Lebanon War – then too Bashar felt that he was the victor and threatened Israel with resistance activities (*muqawama*) along the border in the Golan Heights. But in the moment of truth in September 2007, when Israel destroyed the nuclear reactor that the Syrian President sought to build in northern Syria, he refrained from responding and was even willing to enter peace negotiations with Israel.

> The victory in the war in Syria is first of all the victory of Bashar al-Assad, the man and the regime that he heads, and only afterwards the victory of the allies that joined the war effort, supported him, and prevented his fall. Bashar did not survive the war in order to become a puppet or tool in the hands of others.

At the same time, it seems that Bashar will focus on his survival – mainly on rebuilding his army rather than reconstructing his country's economy or taking in the Syrian refugees who fled Syria and whom he would be happy to keep as expatriates. It is well known that Bashar sees the refugees as a blessing, since they helped lessen the economic burden that was created due to one of the highest natural population growth rates in the world, which was one of the causes of the revolution in Syria. In this respect, it is worth quoting from Bashar's speech from August 2017: "We have lost the best of our sons in this war. The state's economic infrastructure has been almost entirely destroyed. We have spent much money and the war has cost us blood and sweat. All

this is true, but in return we have earned a healthier and more harmonious society in the true, rooted sense of the term harmony."[10]

In addition, Bashar might focus his efforts on achieving the ultimate immunity for himself and his regime, i.e., nuclear weapons – as well as working to rebuild his capabilities in the field of missile systems and chemical weapons, which were depleted or destroyed during the war. After all, Saddam Hussein, who failed in his attempts to achieve such weapons after the nuclear reactor that he sought to build was destroyed by Israel in June 1981, was overthrown by the United States, as was the regime of Muammar Qaddafi in Libya. The latter surrendered the nuclear option in the early 2000s as part of a deal with the West, but the regime was overthrown by insurgents who were helped by the West, the same West with which Qaddafi had reached an agreement only a decade earlier. In contrast, the regime in North Korea, which has nuclear capabilities, enjoys immunity. For his part, Bashar has retained chemical weapons, despite commitments to destroy them, and has not hesitated to make use of them again and again, and in addition maintains connections and military cooperation with North Korea.[11]

And finally, Bashar will no doubt continue to be suspicious of the West and especially of the United States and Israel, but will refrain from reaching a confrontation with them, although he will not necessarily let Israel continue to operate as it pleases in Syrian territory. In any case, he will show loyalty and commitment to his patron Vladimir Putin as well as to the long term strategic alliance with Iran. However, Bashar will aspire to regain his freedom of action and maneuverability vis-à-vis these patrons.

The Syrian regime's relationship with Iran and Hezbollah has been forged in blood during the long years of fighting in Syria. Bashar is still in need of the military backing that Iran provides him in order to contend with and even deter internal and external enemies. Iran's military presence on Syrian soil does not worry him, but at the same time, Bashar continues to act to prevent Iran from establishing religious and cultural influence, certainly among the members of his community, the Alawite sect. Despite Iran's efforts to advance a process of Iranian-style "Shiitization" in Syria, there are no signs that it is succeeding in these efforts.[12] Needless to say, Bashar, like his father before him, never saw himself as in Iran's pocket or obligated to follow it into a confrontation with Israel and spill Syrian blood for it. In view of the possible eruption of an Israeli-Iranian confrontation

in Syrian territory, he has even acted, with the help of Moscow, to distance Iran from the border with Israel.[13]

The Golan question: The end of the war with a victory for Bashar, along with the effort to reach a settlement in Syria, and especially to find a solution to the crisis regarding the refugees who have fled Syria, could open up the "Golan case," which many in Israel tended to see during the long years of the war in Syria as "signed and sealed." This could happen as part of the attempt of the international community to reach a deal that would regulate the reality in Syria and enable the state to stand on its own two feet in return for severing itself from Iran as well as repatriating the Syrian refugees.[14] But the concerns in Israel on this issue are premature, and certainly in light of President Trump's announcement regarding United States recognition of Israel's sovereignty in the Golan.[15] It is hard to believe that Bashar would lift a finger to advance steps toward peace with Israel, as opposed to a hesitant and cautious willingness to engage in diplomatic negotiation, mostly through intermediaries – exactly as he did throughout the first decade of his rule.

These questions are of enormous importance to Israel in light of issues that concern the future of Syria, first and foremost Israel's expected campaign against Iran in order to prevent it from establishing itself on Syrian soil, but also regarding the question of Israel's presence in the Golan. This question has perhaps been sharpened by President Trump's decision to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which was rejected almost universally immediately thereafter by other international actors.

> While the eight years that have passed since the war erupted have changed the face of Syria entirely, they have changed very little for Bashar al-Assad, and it seems that they have actually strengthened his commitment to the status quo and his reluctance to jump into the unknown.

Despite Israel's reluctance to take part in shaping the future of Syria, in practice it does play such a role, even if indirectly and in its ability to influence and promote or alternatively to sabotage or even stop the efforts to end the war in Syria and rebuild the country. Moscow is attempting to raise funds for reconstruction, exploiting the cracks in the wall of international opposition to Bashar and his regime.[16] The Arab world has already started accepting his return to Damascus, and in Europe too some are putting out feelers toward Bashar in the hope that he will agree to take back the refugees that have fled Syria. As for the United States, in December 2018 President Trump announced that he had ordered the withdrawal of

American forces from Syria after the defeat of the Islamic State, which was the reason for the Americans' arrival in Syria in the first place.[17] With respect to all of these actors, Israel has the ability to maneuver and bargain, and it can influence their decisions and actions on the Syrian question.

Conclusion

The end of the war in Syria with the triumph of Bashar al-Assad puts Israel in a situation where it faces a ruler who has survived the war that ravaged his country and emerged victorious, albeit thanks to the mobilization of Russia and Iran on his side, two countries that for now have influence and even control in Syria. While the eight years that have passed since the war erupted in Syria have changed the face of Syria entirely, they have changed very little for Bashar al-Assad, and it seems that they have actually strengthened his commitment to the status quo and even to the "tried and true," and in any case his reluctance to jump into the unknown.

Now that the war in his country has ended, Bashar will work to strengthen the foundations of his regime and Syrian society that have ensured his survival – first and foremost, the army and the security forces, and the members of the Alawite sect, along with the rest of the coalition at the basis of his regime. Bashar will maintain his connections with Russia and Iran, although he presumably does not see himself as a puppet ruler in the hands of these two countries.

With respect to Israel, Bashar will likely try to restore the balance between the two countries, but at the same time refrain from reaching a confrontation with Israel, certainly now that the war in his country has ended.[18] This returns Israel to the starting point vis-à-vis Bashar before the outbreak of the war in Syria in the spring of 2011 – a defiant ruler working to strengthen relations with Iran and Hezbollah, but who exercises restraint and quiet along the border and is even willing to engage in peace negotiations with Israel.

Thus, it is quite possible that the future of Israel-Syria relations will look like the past.

Notes

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Achievements According to the BDS Movement: Trends and Implications

Amir Prager

Between July 2017 and December 2018, the BDS movement published four lists presenting what it casts as significant achievements by the movement during that period. This article analyzes the insights and the trends emerging from these lists with reference to the BDS campaign in particular, and the delegitimization of Israel in general. The article determines that the direct impact of many of the apparent achievements was limited, although some earned significant exposure and caused real damage. The main challenge posed by the BDS movement is at the cognitive level, in other words, its aim to instill negative attitudes toward Israel and blacken the country's image. The campaign for Israel's legitimacy is long and ongoing, and designed to influence the outlooks of different target audiences. Therefore, it is essential to measure and assess the threat represented by BDS activity and delegitimization efforts as a basis for shaping and planning Israel's counter efforts.

Keywords: BDS, delegitimization, awareness, boycott

The BDS movement (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions)[1] was founded in 2005, and today encompasses hundreds of organizations all over the world that with no unified hierarchy or directive promote campaigns to boycott Israel, withdraw investments from it, and impose sanctions on it and associated elements. Contrary to the BDS image as a liberal, humanitarian organization struggling for Palestinian rights, the movement seeks above all to promote the delegitimization of Israel and Zionism.[2] The movement is currently headed by the BDS National Committee (BNC), which operates out of Ramallah and consists of non-governmental Palestinian organizations.

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Between July 2017 and December 2018, the BNC published four lists of what the committee considers the main examples of success of the BDS movement in this period: 12 "achievements" to mark 12 years of activity (published July 9, 2017);[3] 30 "achievements" at the conclusion of 2017 (published February 6, 2018);[4] 70 "achievements" and events to mark 70 years since the Nakba (published August 8, 2018);[5] and 18 "achievements" to summarize 2018 (published December 3, 2018).[6] There is considerable similarity and even overlap among these lists.

This article surveys the achievements boasted (rightly or wrongly) by the BNC in the name of the BDS movement, presents the main insights from an analysis of the lists with reference to trends in the BDS campaign and the phenomenon of delegitimization of Israel in a broader sense, and offers recommendations for the pro-Israel camp as it relates to the balance of achievements in the fight against delegitimization.

Lists of Achievements: Main Findings

The lists marking 12 years of activity and summarizing the years 2017 and 2018 are intended to present the outstanding achievements of the BDS movement in those years, and therefore deal only with issues relating to the boycott of Israel. By contrast, the list of 70 events marking the Nakba, in addition to the subject of the boycott (40 of the events on the list), also covers expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians, and corresponds with recent events such as the violent events since March 2018 on the Gaza border (21 events). The list thereby tries to link the leading motifs of the BDS movement, which promotes a boycott of Israel, with Palestinian national memorial days, events on the ground, and the latest issues at the heart of international public attention.

Among the events presented in the lists: declarations of support and calls for a boycott by various elements (public figures, politicians, artists, scientists and intellectuals, organizations, and authorities); cancellations of scheduled performances, visits, and events; and legal rulings and laws, either passed or canceled. It is clear that those who drew up the lists tried to present a wide range of areas of activity as well as a broad geographic spread, inter alia, to reveal the "social justice" expressed by many of the players involved in the work.

In terms of areas of activity, there is a prominent focus on political and cultural events; in the lists referring to 2018, activity in the local authority arena is also striking.

In terms of geographical distribution, most of the activity charted is in European countries (more than half the items on the list of events marking the Nakba, and about a third of the 2017 achievements) and in North America. In Europe, the most prominent activity is in Ireland (8 events in the list marking the Nakba), Britain, Italy, and Spain.

It appears that the broad distribution in terms of fields of activity and the various arenas is designed to emphasize that the movement's activity is global, and to strengthen the perception that the BDS movement has established a hold in many countries and among a variety of target populations, while at the same time boosting the organizations on the ground that are active in these arenas.

Noteworthy Trends

In recent years there has been a gradual erosion of Israel's status among liberal-progressive groups in the West. It is hard to assign decisive weight to the role of the BDS movement in these trends, but it is clear that the movement is working to heighten these trends and uses them to promote its objectives and broaden the circle of its supporters. And indeed, the effect of most of the events described in the lists is cognitive and directed at the erosion of Israel's status among various segments of the public. The direct impact on Israel of many events listed was at most negligible, in economic, political, and awareness terms. However, there were also events that attracted significant media exposure, hurt Israel's image, and exacted a concrete price, such as the cancellation of the soccer match between Argentina and Israel in June 2018. The damage caused by such events is not just in their immediate impact, but also in their cumulative impact and the reciprocal effects between prominent events that attract media coverage and the efforts to create negative branding among the publics, leading to the entrenchment of negative attitudes toward Israel.

The effect of most of the events described in the lists is cognitive and directed at the erosion of Israel's status among various segments of the public. The direct impact on Israel of many events listed was at most negligible, in economic, political, and awareness terms.

The contents of the lists to a great extent reflect a number of trends and ideas highlighted in previous BDS publications and in conferences organized by prominent delegitimization organizations in the United States and Britain in 2017 and 2018. Inter alia, there is the striking phenomenon of intersectionality as a central platform of the activity, the apartheid narrative

as a leading idea, and the use of the support of Jewish public figures and organizations to counter accusations of anti-semitism in the movement and stress the gap between Israel and Diaspora Jewry. Other trends and emphases include the attention and resources directed to local authorities, turning Ireland into a significant arena of activity, and support for the movement by left wing parties all over the world. In addition, it is often possible to identify a gap between the reported achievements and actual events. This gap questions the reliability of the reports, but perhaps in terms of cognitive awareness in the current era, reliability carries little weight.

Inter-Sectionality

One of the most prominent issues emphasized by BDS groups in recent years is the phenomenon of inter-sectionality, by way of cooperation with other bodies in order to broaden their support base. In other words, they reinforce the link between BDS activities and the Palestinian struggle with the promotion for the rights of disadvantaged groups, in the local or global arena, in an attempt to create an "alliance of the oppressed" that includes blacks, the LGBTQ community, migrants, women, and various minorities, as well as activists on behalf of the environment, human rights, trade unions, and more.

On the list of achievements for 2017, several events were notable in this context, such as the cancellation of planned visits to Israel by players from the American National Football League (NFL) in February 2017, where the majority who signed the request to the players were Afro-American activists. Similarly, the Nakba and 2018 lists include events of this kind, such as the expression of support for the Palestinians from the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) and the demand to stop American security aid to Israel; support from Afro-American cultural figures for the demand of the Dream Defenders movement to release Ahed Tamimi and stop security aid; and support of organizations from the Indian Women's Movement for the release of Tamimi and for BDS.

The Apartheid Narrative

In order to reinforce the claims about the lack of Israel's legitimacy, the BDS and other delegitimization organizations promote the analogy between Israel and the apartheid regime in South Africa.[7] Accordingly, the achievement that opens the list for 2017 is the publication of a report from one of the UN committees determining "beyond a reasonable doubt" that Israel has

established an apartheid regime, and shortly after that, it presents support for BDS from South African organizations following a report entitled: "Apartheid in the Holy Land – Israel." Similarly, the list marking the Nakba contains repeated references to Israel's actions as an apartheid state, such as: "apartheid system," "Netanyahu's apartheid regime," "Israeli apartheid," and so on. In this context, the summary for 2018 stresses the support for BDS from the grandson of Nelson Mandela.

Support of Jewish Organizations

The lists stress the support for BDS from Jewish organizations, by indicating their participation in the boycott of the PopKultur Festival in Berlin, and mainly by indicating the protests of Jewish groups against accusations of anti-semitism directed toward BDS activity, in the organization's attempt to repudiate repeated criticism of this kind. In this context, various delegitimization organizations have opposed the definition of anti-semitism of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) that was adopted by many governments, parties, and organizations, because it refers to some anti-Israel actions as expressions of anti-semitism. In addition, it appears that the emphasis on support from Jewish organizations is an attempt to highlight a widening rift between Israel and Zionism on the one hand, and Diaspora Jewry on the other, and to establish a narrative that Israel does not represent Judaism or the whole Jewish world.

Activity with Local Authorities

The list of events marking the Nakba differs from its predecessors by having a separate parameter on local authorities. The addition of this field to the list, noting resolutions passed during 2018 by various authorities, in Europe, the US, and South America, is evidence of the efforts focused by the organization. This is a way of establishing its activity on the ground, while also demonstrating support and expressions of legitimacy from official public institutions representing the "mainstream" of the countries concerned. This effort has arisen, following the limited success to date of the movement's activities directed toward governments and national authorities.

Efforts to Counter Legislation, Regulations, and Restrictive Government Policy

This issue was a central focus of BDS activity in 2017 and 2018. It is a reaction to efforts to introduce legislation, regulation, and government

policies in various European countries and the US designed to limit the movement's activities. So far 26 states in the US have adopted legislation against BDS, and federal legislation on the subject is pending. In Europe, France has passed legislation that bans boycotts, and Britain has imposed government restrictions on a policy of divestment by local authorities.[8] The list of achievements in 2017 describes a number of positive developments on this matter for BDS in Europe, and the Nakba list of 2018 also noted such events in the US. They include a ruling by a federal court in Kansas that overturned anti-BDS legislation, and the rejection of similar legislation in one of the Senate committees in Massachusetts. There is currently a public and political debate in the US regarding anti-BDS legislation, and a number of petitions have been filed against such legislation on the grounds that it is contrary to free speech. Many Democratic representatives have expressed opposition to legislation on this matter.[9]

Not surprisingly, those who prepared the lists chose not to mention a negative legal development, in which the Court of Apeal in Britain overturned a ruling by a previous legal forum that was presented as one of the 2017 achievements, and approved a decision by the UK to ban local authorities from adopting divestment initiatives.[10]

Support for the Palestinian Issue from Left Wing Parties and Organizations

A recurring theme in the lists is the support for the Palestinian struggle from left wing parties throughout the world. In some cases there are detailed criticisms of Israel, while others are declarations of support for BDS. One of the most significant events in this context was the adoption of the BDS campaign by the Socialist International Council, which unites representatives of 140 left wing parties worldwide. In addition, there is reference to the British Labour Party, including leader Jeremy Corbyn, who is known for his criticism of Israel on the Palestinian issue. There has recently been a broad campaign in Britian against Corbyn, led by the Jewish community, for what are perceived as his anti-semitic attitudes.[11] There are also references to the Podemos party in Spain, PSOL in Brazil, the Green Party in Scotland and in Canada, and a branch of the US Democratic party in California. These parties are represented in the their countries' legislatures, and so their expressions of support for the Palestinians and the BDS movement show how these issues have penetrated "mainstream" parties in various countries.

Activity in the Security Field; Focus on Foreign Companies

The lists published during and after the violent hostilities in Gaza in the course of 2018 describe a large number of initiatives, declarations, and allegations calling for the cancellation of American security aid to Israel, the prevention of security and police collaboration, and the imposition of an embargo on the sale and transfer of arms to Israel. However, while the list summarizing 2017 deals with Israeli commercial companies, and in particular the security industries (Elbit Systems and IAI), the 2018 lists are mainly concerned with the activity of foreign international corporations in Israel, for example Airbnb. In 2019 the Human Rights Council of the UN is expected to publish a blacklist of Israeli and foreign companies active in the settlements.

Focus on Israeli Activity in the West Bank

The lists present calls from various elements to boycott Israeli activity in the West Bank. Such calls appear to conflict with the declared position of BDS, which calls for a full boycott of Israel,[12] but they are intended to illustrate expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians, and to represent an issue considered more legitimate and accepted among many groups, governments, and organizations. Accordingly, this focus allows the movement, which is trying to undermine the legitimacy of the State of Israel, to blacken Israel's reputation and recruit critics of its policies to their struggle. It also enables the movement to show additional achievements.

Glorifying Partial and Inaccurate Reports

The lists sometimes refer to events as achievements even if this is not the case, often omit relevant details, and give only a partial picture. Examples include the account of how actress Natalie Portman canceled her visit to Israel, which ignores her assertion that she does not support BDS;[13] the reference to the protests against the Giro d'Italia race in Israel, which omits the failure of the campaign to prevent the event; and the description of the withdrawal of Adidas sponsorship from the Israeli Football Federation as due to the BDS campaign, which contradicts the fact that the campaign was launched five months after the withdrawal of sponsorship was announced.[14] Another example is the erroneous and exaggerated description of the potential danger to HP as a result of the boycott campaign against the company.

Conclusion

The four lists of achievements intended to glorify the successes of the BDS movement do not provide an objective portrait, including regarding the campaign to delegitimize Israel. The lists show a number of significant achievements, such as cancellations of participation by celebrities in cultural and sporting events, along with many events that were eventually seen as exaggerated or having negligible effect, or activities that failed due to counter moves by Israel and its supporters.

A full analysis of the events cited in the lists suggests that the campaign over the legitimacy of Israel, including the campaign against BDS, is long and ongoing. The campaign is conducted, inter alia, around the important "flagship" memorial days in the Israeli and Palestinian calendars, developments on the ground such as the violent clashes on the Gaza border, and prominent events such as the 2019 Eurovison in Tel Aviv. Both sides invest considerable efforts to score achievements in geographical arenas and in many areas of activity, but ultimately this will be a drawn-out campaign that seeks to affect target audiences around the world and gain their support. Therefore, the link between "winning a battle" and "winning the war" is neither direct nor inevitable.

The efforts of the BDS movement correspond to a large extent with counter moves by the pro-Israeli network, and both sides are engaged in an ongoing "learning contest." Israel and its supporters have in recent years scored achievements in promoting legislation and other moves by government institutions in various countries, designed to damage the legitimacy of the BDS movement and its freedom of action. Examples include the adoption by entities and states of the IHRA definition of anti-semitism, the legislation and regulation against boycotts, and the financial damage to various BDS organizations. These moves are met by counter moves from BDS and its supporters, designed to neutralize any restrictions, while recording achievements in new arenas of activity. Thus, the activity involving local authorities and the links with left wing parties are a substitute for efforts to wield direct influence on government institutions, by strengthening support among "mainstream" populations in various countries. The emphasis on the support of Jewish organizations is intended to provide a defense against accusations of anti-semitism. Legislative moves are met by legal, political, and media moves (such as the Right to Boycott campaign[15]), as seen recently in the United States, for example.

The BDS movement invests much effort in extending its support base and operating among a variety of movements and population groups in order to create collaborations and alliances with different groups. Accordingly, there is also a prominent attempt to promote issues that are more widely accepted, such as opposition to Israeli activity in the West Bank, or the call to limit Israel's military power following reports of violence and casualties in Gaza. This phenomenon ("inter-sectionality") enables a radical, marginal group to amass achievements and support among important mainstream populations, and thus must be addressed with a comprehensive response from Israel and the global pro-Israel camp.

In conclusion, BDS and delegitimization are a complex, multi-layered threat – both physical-concrete and cognitive-abstract. There is ongoing mutual feedback between the negative branding of Israel, with cognitive and emotional dimensions, and real steps in the areas of legislation, law, economy, culture, and policy, even if there is no full and detailed coordination between all the activities and efforts. Until now the BDS and delegitimization efforts have not had significant economic consequences for Israel in terms of measurable effects at the macro-economic level that can be unequivocally attributed to BDS.[16] While there have been some problems for certain companies, it is difficult to measure, quantify, isolate, and attribute these problems to those efforts in real terms as part of an overall picture.

Until now efforts have not had significant economic consequences for Israel in terms of measurable effects at the macro-economic level that can be unequivocally attributed to BDS. Nevertheless, an important component of the campaign lies in the area of cognitive awareness, and in this framework there is a decline in Israel's image internationally.

Nevertheless, an important component of the campaign lies in the area of cognitive awareness, and in this framework there is a decline in Israel's image in international centers, mainly in Europe but also in the United States, among broad segments of the population, and particularly among the educated age group of the next generation of leaders. This is expressed by a drop in support for Israel, in erosion of its image as a democratic and legitimate state, as accepted in the West, and as a state that maintains human and civic rights and respects them.

An informed assessment of the achievements of BDS, and more important, of the trends in the broad campaign over Israel's legitimacy, requires a definition of clear metrics and processes for measurement and

assessment over a long period of time. Such measurement must include documentation of events and verification of how they are reported, together with an examination of their direct and concrete impact; the cumulative effect on feelings about Israel and its support among various population groups; and the effect of such developing feelings on relevant actions and decisions by individuals, population groups, and institutions. This is a particularly complex measurement challenge, but it is essential. The establishment of measurement and assessment processes of this kind would provide the State of Israel and its supporters with an important tool to shape and plan efforts in the campaign for Israel's public legitimacy and its international political standing. In addition, these processes are essential to support the formulation of Israeli policy and decision making on domestic and foreign issues, which have an impact on Israel's international status and its ability to strengthen its legitimacy and external support.

Notes

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A Decade of Close Greece-Israel Relations: An Assessment

Gallia Lindenstrauss and Polykarpos Gavrielides

This article explores what lies behind the significant improvement in relations between Greece and Israel over the past decade. Greece and Israel have managed to move their relations forward in ways that would have been difficult to envision in the past, given Athens's strong pro-Palestinian stance and the close Israel-Turkey relationship in the 1990s. The article points to the energy-related, security-based, and economic motivations on both sides to move ahead with closer relations, and shows how these drives were strong enough to assist the sides to continue cooperation, despite notable changes in the political leadership in Greece.

Keywords: Greece, Israel, Cyprus, Turkey, Palestinians

The improvement in Israel-Greece relations that took place over the last decade is remarkable. Given the strong anti-Israel rhetoric employed in the early 1980s by Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, such a change did not appear to be on the horizon. As Israeli political scientist Amikam Nachmani aptly put it, "Greece and Israel, so close geographically…during the first 40 years of Israel's existence could not have been farther apart in terms of diplomatic relations."[1] Public opinion in Greece toward Israel was also negative, due to anti-American feelings, given that Israel was seen as a protégé of the US;[2] the Palestinian issue; and the strong relations between Israel and Turkey in the 1990s, which made the Greeks suspicious about the common aspirations of these countries. According to comparative surveys conducted by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in 2014 and 2015, anti-semitic perceptions in Greece were the highest in the non-

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Middle East and Northern Africa countries surveyed.[3] Thus, in analyzing Israel-Greece relations, two puzzling phenomena are apparent. The first, as Greek political scientist Aristotle Tziampiris presents in his book on the emergence of Israeli-Greek cooperation, is the speed with which these relations were transformed.[4] The second is that despite notable changes in the political leadership in Greece in recent years, relations with Israel have only grown stronger.

Overview

The genesis of the warming of relations lies in the efforts in 2009 of a group of Greek political advisors and a non-official Israeli counterpart, which Tziampiris named the Electra Group.[5] Following the Electra Group's efforts, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak telephoned Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou (the son of former Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou), who later also spoke with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In December 2009, Papandreou met with Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman, and in February 2010, Papandreou and Netanyahu met at Café Pushkin in Moscow, a meeting that paved the way for the close relations that were soon to form between the two states.[6]

The flotilla incident in May 2010 evoked a Greek condemnation and caused the postponement of a joint military exercise, but the relations deepened when George Papandreou visited Israel in July 2010, the first visit of a Greek Prime Minister to Israel in three decades. In August 2010, Netanyahu made a reciprocal, historic visit to Athens – it was the first visit ever of an Israeli Prime Minister to Greece.

After a call between the Prime Ministers during the disastrous fire in Israel in December 2010, Greece sent help to Israel. The following spring, Greece assisted Israel in curtailing the sailing of the Freedom Flotilla II. Later, in September 2011, the Defense Ministers of both countries signed a memorandum of understanding between the ministries, and in October 2013, there was a first government-to-government meeting in Jerusalem. In September 2014, the Greek parliament passed a law forbidding the denial of the Holocaust, and in March 2017, it also voted in favor of granting Greek citizenship to descendants of Holocaust survivors from Greece.

Since 2012, a trilateral relationship has evolved between Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, and the three countries now cooperate in numerous areas. January 2016 saw the first trilateral summit at the heads of state level; the fifth trilateral meeting between the Prime Ministers of Greece and Israel

and the President of Cyprus was held in Beersheba in December 2018, with the participation of US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman. It was agreed that a permanent secretariat for the coordination of tripartite cooperation mechanisms would be established in Nicosia and begin operating in July 2019. A sixth summit took place in Israel in March 2019, with the participation of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Main Areas of Cooperation

Energy

It is impossible to talk about energy cooperation between Israel and Greece without mentioning Cyprus. While the construction of a pipeline to transfer natural gas between Israel, Cyprus, and Greece seems unrealistic to many experts, in April 2017, the European Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy and the four Energy Ministers of Italy, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel revealed their plans for the Eastern Mediterranean (EastMed) natural gas pipeline. This will be a 1,300 km offshore and 600 km onshore pipeline from Eastern Mediterranean natural gas sources off the Israeli coast to Cyprus, from Cyprus to Crete, from Crete to the Peloponnese, from there to western Greece, and then linked to another pipeline, the Poseidon, to Italy. The estimated cost of the project is $6-7 billion.[7] The initial research conducted by the Natural Gas Supplier Corporation (DEPA) of Greece showed that the project is technically feasible,[8] and this was supported by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) program and categorized as a Project of Common Interest (PCI) by the EU Commission.[9] Beyond existing technical and economic considerations, it seems as if within the EU, objection to future additional funding for the pipeline may come from those who lobby for the development of renewable energies, and from Spain, which will see such a pipeline as competition.[10] Also, despite the initial support from Italy for the project, domestic objections led the Italian government in March 2019 to press the sides to delay the signing of a formal agreement.[11]

> While Greece was once one of Israel's strongest opponents in the European Union, the warming of Greek-Israel relations actually turned Greece into one of Israel's staunchest partners in the EU.

An alternative idea has been the construction of a cheaper ($2.4-4 billion) 600 km underwater pipeline, to connect Israel with Turkey.[12] This alternative, however, faces two major problems. The first is that since Israel would like to avoid a situation of a pipeline in Lebanon and Syria's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), it prefers

that the pipeline run through Cyprus's EEZ. However, the intractable conflict in Cyprus also makes that route highly problematic. The other problem is the state of relations between Israel and Turkey, including the deep mistrust between their leaders.[13] Since it does not seem that Israel will be able to find a location to construct its own onshore LNG facility, there were talks of Israel using joint LNG facilities that would be built in Cyprus for its exports, but due to both the price of building such facilities and security concerns, this idea was not advanced. Israel and Cyprus are contemplating the idea of exporting gas via Egyptian LNG facilities, but Egyptian priorities related to its own natural gas discoveries may hinder this idea as well.

Beyond possible cooperation on the export of natural gas, Greece, Israel, and Cyprus are moving forward in the development of the EuroAsia Interconnector, which if materialized, will be an undersea bi-directional cable that will connect the electricity grids of Israel and Cyprus to Crete and mainland Greece (1518 km in length). The European Union has also categorized this project as a PCI, secured funding of 1.5 billion euros for the project, and viability studies have been concluded.[14]

The Security Realm

Cooperation in the security realm predated the noticeable warming of relations. The two countries signed their first defense cooperation agreement in December 1994 but did not move forward to implement it.[15] It was in 2008 that Israel and Greece conducted the Glorious Spartan joint military exercise, which featured 80 Greek and 100 Israeli F-15 and F-16 aircraft. According to the international press, the exercise resembled a dress rehearsal for an attack on the nuclear facilities in Iran.[16] Since then there have also been many bilateral drills. In June 2018, for example, 40 Israeli air force planes took part in an exercise with the Greek side. The aim of the exercise was to simulate a war on multiple fronts, including a bombing campaign against targets in the Gaza Strip.[17]

In 2014, for the first time, Israel appointed a military attaché to Athens. Until then, Israel-Greece military relations were managed by the Israeli attaché based in Romania.[18] The Greek decision to send a defense attaché predated that of Israel.[19] In 2015, the two states' Defense Ministers signed a "status of forces" agreement, whereby Greek and Israeli soldiers could be stationed either in Greece or in Israel to participate in military training exercises.[20] In March 2019 it was reported that Israel and Greece are building

a marine radar system in Crete.[21] Due to Greece's difficult economic situation, arms purchases from Israel are limited in scope, but there have been some small deals.[22]

Trade and Tourism

Israel and Greece are not big bilateral trading partners, but improved relations have resulted in growing commercial relations. While in 2010 bilateral trade amounted to $412 million, in 2017 it reached $610 million.[23] Due to the economic crisis in Greece and the subsequent austerity measures, it was difficult to promote trade relations beyond this level. However, in March 2018, an Israel-Greece Chamber of Commerce was launched.[24]

There has also been a significant rise in the number of Israeli tourists visiting Greece. While in 2010 they numbered 150,000,[25] in 2018, 600,000 Israelis visited Greece, and it is expected that in 2019 the number will reach 700,000.[26] As Greece hosted more than 33 million tourists in 2018, this does not make Israel one of the top 10 source countries for tourists to Greece. However, tourism accounts for around a fifth of Greek GDP, and one tenth of the Greek population is employed in the tourism industry.[27] An indication for the importance of tourism in the closer relations is evidenced by the visit of Greek Minister of Tourism Elena Kountoura to the International Mediterranean Tourism Market (IMTM) exhibition in Israel in both 2017 and 2019.

Impetus behind the Growing Cooperation

Greece believed that Turkish secret services were involved in the 2010 flotilla incident,[28] which was thus seen as evidence of greater Turkish assertiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean. From Israel's perspective, the crisis in Turkish-Israeli relations prompted a reconsideration of its regional realignment, since the close Turkey-Israel relations in the 1990s and early 2000s were one of the main pillars of Jerusalem's strategic outlook on the Middle East. Yet beyond the flotilla incident, there were additional warning signs that Turkey-Israel relations were not only a pale shadow of what they used to be, but were going downhill. These included Turkey's attempt with Brazil in May 2010 to broker a nuclear compromise with Iran, which resulted in both countries voting against sanctions on Iran at the UN Security Council, and Turkey disclosing a spy ring in Iran working for Israel in 2012.[29]

In addition, there were practical reasons for Israel to draw closer to Greece, such as a need for airspace for training after Turkey closed its airspace to the Israel Air Force in 2009. Moreover, the Arab upheaval, which began in December 2010, created a need in Jerusalem to avoid a situation of greater isolation, and that encouraged it to seek new partners. In this respect, closer Greek-Israeli relations could be seen as part of a reincarnation of the periphery doctrine.[30] The refugee crisis that resulted from the Syrian civil war also precipitated closer cooperation between Israel and Greece. The waves of refugees that arrived from Turkey to Greece in 2015 were seen by some Greeks as an intentional attempt by Ankara to create greater instability in the country.[31]

Clearly the global economic crisis of 2008 and the Greek debt crisis were factors in the need for Greece to rethink its policies. While Israel could not itself provide significant assistance, Netanyahu did try to convince European leaders to provide Greece with financial aid.[32] Growing trade relations, as well as the sharp rise in the number of Israeli tourists coming to Greece, were also benefits (albeit limited) from Greece's perspective.

The natural gas discoveries were a strong impetus for closer collaboration, primarily between Israel and Cyprus, although Greece wanted to have an active role in this energy relationship. In addition, export options involving EU markets have made Greece an attractive option. This was even more so once it became clear that a pipeline from Israel to Turkey was increasingly less likely.

From Netanyahu's perspective, improved relations with Greece suit his broader belief that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should not be the main determinant of Israel's ability to form close relations with other actors.

While Greece was once one of Israel's strongest opponents in the European Union, the warming of Greek-Israel relations actually turned Greece into one of Israel's staunchest partners in the EU. Over time, Greece even began to diverge in part from the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy toward Israel.[33] Thus for example, in November 2015, following Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's visit in Israel, Greece informed Israel that it would defy European Commission guidelines on labeling goods produced in West Bank settlements.[34]

Relations between Israel and Greece developed mainly at the initiative of Athens and Jerusalem. The Obama administration made efforts to repair relations between Turkey and Israel and was less enthusiastic about Greek-Israeli cooperation. The Turkish veto on

Israel-NATO cooperation paved the way, however, for joint US-Greek-Israeli military exercises, such as the Noble Dina annual naval exercises. Moreover, due to growing tensions between the US and Turkey, the Trump administration seems to envision more potential in the warming of relations between Israel and Greece, as evidenced, for example, by the presence of the US ambassador to Israel in the December 2018 trilateral meeting between Greek, Cypriot, and Israeli heads of state, and the participation of Secretary Pompeo in the March 2019 meeting. Moreover, there has been growing cooperation between Hellenic-American and Jewish-American organizations operating in Washington.[35]

From the leaders' perspective, it seems that George Papandreou was interested in opening a new page in Greek-Israeli relations even before the flotilla incident, and used the crisis in Turkish-Israeli relations as a way to explain the new policy to the Greek public. Former Israeli Ambassador to Greece Arye Mekel suggests that because of Papandreou's upbringing and education in the US, he absorbed some of the positive attitude toward Israel in the US. Mekel also claims that Papandreou wanted Greece to have a growing role in the East Mediterranean and that he understood that for this Greece needs to have close relations not only with the Arab world but with Israel as well.[36]

Papandreou's suggestion of a referendum on Greece's acceptance of the Eurozone bailout plan was understood as a referendum over a Grexit. It was greeted with harsh criticism, did not take place, and Papandreou was forced to resign in November 2011. Greece's new Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras, continued Papandreou's policy toward Israel, since despite being from a different political party, he also believed that a more balanced policy toward the Middle East was needed. Samaras was the Greek Foreign Minister when Athens upgraded diplomatic relations with Israel to full ambassadorial level in 1990 (the last European Economic Community [EEC] member to do so), which may also help explain his positive attitude toward warming relations with Israel.[37]

Alexis Tspiras's assumption of the Prime Minister's Office in January 2015 (followed by his confirmation in the snap September 2015 elections) initially caused concern in Jerusalem, since many of the members of his far-left Syriza party hold strong pro-Palestinian views. Prior to his election, Tsipras himself criticized Israeli policies toward the Palestinians, and the party had previously voiced its objection to the 2010 Netanyahu visit to Greece and criticized the way the government assisted Israel in curtailing

the Freedom Flotilla II. In the Syriza platform, there was even a call to stop the defense cooperation with Israel.[38] However, Israeli fears of a chill in relations did not materialize for several reasons. First, Syriza needed a coalition partner to form a government, and that partner was in favor of a continued relationship with Israel. Second, the refugee flow into Greece increased the sense of crisis within Greece and the fear of malign Turkish intentions. Third, the prospect and later the signing of the normalization agreement between Israel and Turkey only encouraged Greece to strengthen its formal ties with Israel. Lastly, Tsipras had hopes that he might mediate between Israel and the Palestinians.

From Netanyahu's perspective, improved relations with Greece suited his broader belief that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should not be the main determinant of Israel's ability to form close relations with other actors. According to this approach, Israel could considerably expand its relationships despite a lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In his view (and even some of his sharp critics agree with him on this issue), he has managed to advance Israel significantly in the diplomatic arena.[39] Netanyahu also had an ambivalent stance toward the normalization process with Turkey, and while he ultimately consented to the agreement, his mistrust of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan remained and prompted him to strengthen ties and forge closer relations with Greece and Cyprus.[40] Foreign Minister and later Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman was also an advocate of the "bypass Ankara axis."[41]

Conclusions and a Look Ahead

The fact that the positive change in Greek policy toward Israel survived the political reversals in Greece, and that different Prime Ministers have not only continued their predecessor's policy but have even pushed the positive agenda forward, has been very encouraging from Jerusalem's perspective. There is also no reason to suspect, regardless of the political outcome of the general elections in Israel and Greece in 2019, that the countries will not continue this relationship in the near term. At the same time, Israel has a history of close relationships, e.g., with Iran, South Africa, and Turkey, that ended in major crises.

Warming relations between Israel and Greece reflected uneasiness with Turkey's growing assertiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean. When Turkey and Israel signed the normalization agreement in 2016, it seemed as if Israel might be less enthusiastic about advancing its relations with Greece

further. However, Turkish-Israeli rivalry persisted, and following the May 2018 crisis between Turkey and Israel around the events in Gaza and the US embassy move to Jerusalem, is seems as if Ankara is not planning to moderate its negative attitude toward Israel. There does, however, seem to be an effort on the part of Ankara and Athens to relieve some of their tensions, as was evident in the December 2017 historic visit of Erdogan to Greece (the first visit of a Turkish president to Greece in 65 years), and the February 2019 visit of Tsipras to Turkey. While Erdogan's visit was marked by several statements that were problematic from a Greek perspective, such as his talk of a need for revisions in the 1923 Lausanne treaty, Tsipras's 2019 visit was more successful.

The warming of Greek-Israeli relations was also closely related to the weakness of Greece resulting from debt crisis and the austerity measures. After several debt relief programs, the Greek economy has stabilized somewhat, and this may reduce the diplomatic need for the connection with Israel. Still, an expanding Greek economy might mean greater trade with Israel. Moreover, the signing and passing in the Greek Parliament of the Prespa agreement on the dispute between Greece and North Macedonia over the latter's name has also enhanced Greek prestige in the European Union and in NATO.

From the outset, it was clear that warmer relations did not mean a military alliance in the sense that Israel would come to the assistance of Greece or Cyprus in case of a military conflict with Turkey, nor would Greece or Cyprus take an active military role in support of Israel. Hence, the extent to which relations in the military realm can be further developed is clearly limited. For its part, energy is not only a basis for cooperation; it can also cause disagreements. Yossi Langotsky, a leading Israeli geologist who predicted the discovery of major natural gas reserves off Israel's shores, is now very pessimistic about the future. He has advised Israel against the export of any gas until more reserves are discovered.[42] Even if Israel maintains its current natural gas export plans, the chances of the realization of the EastMed pipeline still seem questionable. Israel and Cyprus also have to solve their joint development dispute in relation to the Aphrodite reservoir and Ishai (Aphrodite's continuation

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in Israeli territories). The two governments allowed the companies involved to try to solve this issue, but if they fail to come to an agreement, the governments will agree to an international arbitrator. The extended delay with regard to Cypriot energy plans has already caused frustration on the Greek-Cypriot side, and in case of further delays, the relationship between Israel and Greece might also be affected.

Thus, all factors that brought the sides closer in the past decade are still highly relevant, but the question marks that existed before nevertheless remain, and new points of disagreement seem likely to arise. However, what does potentially promise this relationship more longevity than what appeared a decade ago is the fact that the parties have made efforts to institutionalize it in many areas, and reversing course will therefore be more difficult.

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Bringing China to Punish Nuclear Proliferators

Taehwa Hong

Along with its rapid rise in global stature, China has become a key actor in the global nonproliferation regime. Striving to present an image of a responsible superpower, Beijing has largely sought to keep rogue states from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. However, when it comes to denuclearizing regimes that have already reached nuclear capacity, China has proved to be a relatively unreliable enforcer of the international sanctions regime. How does China provide hedging space for Iran and North Korea, and which key factors affect Beijing's calculations? This essay contends that China is motivated primarily by threats to its own economic interests and the risk of military confrontation.

Keywords: China, North Korea, Iran, nuclear proliferation, secondary boycott, great power rivalry

Along with its rapid rise in global stature, China has become a key actor in the global nonproliferation regime. Indeed, China has used the nuclear issue in Iran and North Korea primarily to strengthen its image as an influential powerhouse. This imperative is particularly strong regarding North Korea, as China traditionally considers Northeast Asia in its sphere of influence. It chaired six rounds of Six Party Talks since 2003 August, and of international actors, arguably exercises the greatest influence over North Korea.[1] As North Korea's only ally and its top trade partner, China virtually controls North Korea's economic – and to some extent political – survival, and thus holds the strongest leverage vis-a-vis Pyongyang.[2]

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China, therefore, has closely monitored North Korea's adventurism, partly to preserve its image as a responsible power.

In the negotiations on Iran that led to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, China was not on the main stage, while the United States, Russia, and the EU dominated the dialogue. China was largely seen as collaborating with Russia on contentious issues, protecting Iranian interests when they aligned with its own. As Iran's top oil export destination, Beijing strongly favors preserving Iran's production and export capacity, which was severely hit by international sanctions. Nonetheless, Beijing shares the international community's concern with nuclear proliferation, and subscribes in principle to US-led global sanctions on Iran's nuclear program.[3]

China's Motives

The rivalry between the United States and China on several issues is a dominant factor in Chinese foreign policy, and North Korea and Iran – two of America's toughest security challenges – are no exception. Xi Jinping's "Chinese dream"[4] rests on the strong foundation of "new great power relations,"[5] which in turn hinges on China's standing in the world as a respected player. China's contribution to resolution of the two nuclear quandaries provides leverage in dealing with the US on other core foreign policy issues, such as Taiwan or trade relations. China also wants to maintain an optimum environment for its Belt and Road Initiative projects in both East Asia and the broader Middle East, and it sees stability and peace as facilitating commerce and investments. In East Asia, a North Korean nuclear threat could spark an arms race among regional countries such as Japan and South Korea. China also wants to prevent Pyongyang and Tehran's nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of non-state entities or terrorist groups. To that end, China has generally sided with the US and its allies in pressuring the two proliferators to give up their nuclear programs. Similarly, its role as a mediator enhances Beijing's strategic importance as a key player. Concerned countries need to consult Beijing before making major moves, rendering Chinese input an indispensable component of any resolution.

At the same time however, Beijing does not want to subordinate its own interests to American concerns. With regard to North Korea in particular, China is apparently pushing its own broader agenda forward – weakening the US-Korea alliance, and bringing both Koreas under its own influence. North Korea canceled high level North-South meetings in March 2018,

citing Operation Max Thunder, a joint US-ROK military exercise.[6] This unexpected move came despite Kim's earlier explicit acceptance of joint drills, which was communicated to the South Korean envoys,[7] precipitating fears that China may be playing behind the scenes, given China's historical aversion to US-South Korea military cooperation.[8] It is no coincidence that China is using the diplomatic momentum between Pyongyang and Washington to renew its demand that South Korea withdraw America's Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD) from the peninsula; Beijing sees that as a symbol of American military hegemony in the region. China would like to see American presence in the region decline, either as a quid pro quo for North Korea's denuclearization or as a byproduct of America's unilateral move on North Korea against the will of its allies in Seoul and Tokyo.

Similarly, China would like to see the US bogged down in the Gulf, in order to divert its attention from the South China Sea.[9] America's Iran problem is an indirect advantage for China, which increasingly sees the bilateral Sino-American relationship as approaching a zero-sum game. Particularly with other JCPOA signatories agreeing that Iran is complying with the agreement, China sees less reason to align itself with US policy toward Iran. The UK, Germany, and France set up a special payments system as an alternative to SWIFT, which is subject to US regulations, with fellow JCPOA signatories China and Russia.[10] The system is expected to function as a "clearing house" connecting Europeans and Iranians for business, directly undermining President Trump's goal to renegotiate a deal with renewed sanctions as leverage. Just as a loosened American alliance system in Asia will promote China's ambitions for regional hegemony, a more independent European foreign policy could allow China to "play the US and Europe off against each other."[11] In the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping observed that the "trend of global multipolarity" is helping China's rise; the Iranian arena could be its opportunity to erode US leadership.[12]

> China is a highly calculating entity, and is relatively free to exercise full pragmatism. Unlike the US, which is sometimes restrained by its liberal values and intricate alliance systems, China makes key decisions based almost totally on material interests.

Regarding both North Korea and Iran, China genuinely sees the United States as a source of instability. In Beijing's view, Pyongyang and Tehran's obsession with nuclear weapons fundamentally stems from the threats they

face from an overwhelmingly powerful US. Against this backdrop, China has emphasized "fairness and reciprocity," accusing the US of pursuing regime change in North Korea and Iran, with denuclearization as a pretext. By contrast, China adopted parallel concepts of "mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination"[13] (Iran) and a "phased, synchronized approach"[14] (North Korea) in the process of denuclearization, arguing for a staged approach that gives time to clear away distrust. Although such an approach historically allowed North Korea to resort to "salami tactics"[15] – reneging on its promises after reaping sanction relief or economic aid – China continues to maintain that the proliferators deserve fair treatment from Washington and its Western allies. Hence, China's stance on North Korea and Iran should be interpreted in light of its own interpretation of the status quo.

Double Dealing

Over the last few years, China has clearly shown a willingness to prolong negotiations to its own advantage. Beijing frequently provided hedging room for both Iran and North Korea, exploiting loopholes in the international sanctions regime to continue trading with both. With both North Korea and Iran, it has resorted to a dual strategy of pressure and protection.

During the nuclear negotiations with Iran starting in 2013, China increased its purchase of fuel oil, which was technically not covered by US sanctions.[16] Chinese companies leveraged American sanctions to discount the price of Iranian fuel oil and then configure refineries to process the fuel oil into more valuable fuels. China's record purchase of Iranian oil coincided with the US suspending its effort to intensify Iranian sanctions in order to sustain the spirit of the Geneva talks. With respect to North Korea, China continued to assist North Korea's energy needs with piped oil, and frequently turned a blind eye to illicit financial transactions through its institutions.[17] To this day, Chinese vessels are involved in mid-ocean cargo swaps to evade the eyes of American and allied surveillance.[18] China has also actively violated the "spirit of sanctions" while abiding by their letter, dramatically increasing trade in areas that are not explicitly targeted in the codified UN sanctions to make up for the reduction in trade of banned products. By continuing to trade with proliferators, China reduced their incentives to engage in serious nuclear negotiations, thereby slowing down the pace of those negotiations.

China also provided diplomatic cover for Pyongyang and Tehran, acting on behalf of those regimes on the international stage. Keeping an eye on North Korea's drastic energy needs, China historically demanded exemptions on oil supplies to the country, citing humanitarian needs. Moreover, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929, which authorized the most "sweeping" sanctions against Iran, was passed only after it was watered down "to protect China's economic interests and to reduce damage to Iran's overall economy."[19] Chinese representatives insisted that the sanctions should be imposed under Article 41, which explicitly rules out military measures; the Security Council therefore agreed that "nothing in the resolution compels States to take measures exceeding the scope of this resolution, including the use of force or the threat of force." China also adjusted the wording of the resolution to call upon nations to abstain from doing business with the IRGC "only when there are reasonable grounds to believe that the transaction could contribute to Iran's nuclear program."

In the same vein, China provided insurance to the proliferators in case negotiations break down. China has shown a notable tendency to propose alternatives to American-led resolutions. Following the re-imposition of US sanctions on Iran, China willingly provided investments and assistance, ramping up infrastructure development deals and agreements. While European companies are quietly assessing the cost and benefits of challenging Washington's wish to continue trading with Tehran, Beijing and Moscow have increased their trade volume to pre-sanctions level.[20] Chinese investments in Iran also continue to expand, with China's national oil company poised to take over the development of the South Pars field from France's Total.[21] Although the US hoped to reduce Iranian exports to zero by November 2018, China began processing futures trading and oil imports in yuan to extricate itself from US dollar deals.[22]

Similarly, Kim Jong-un's three visits to China in 2018, after opening himself up to dialogue with the US and South Korea, prompted speculation that Xi Jinping may have promised support for North Korea regardless of the outcomes. China views the American alliance system as just as hazardous as North Korea's nuclear program − if not more so − and would like to see it weakened in the process of the denuclearization talks.[23] President Trump repeatedly blamed China rather than North Korea for sabotaging talks, speculating explicitly that the Chinese want to use North Korea as leverage to gain an upper hand in trade negotiations.[24]

Negative Incentives for Beijing

Against this backdrop, when and why China chose a more stringent approach to proliferators is important. The first watershed moment came in 2006 when Pyongyang conducted its initial nuclear test, directly undermining China's effort to create a facade that "everything is under control" after a slow follow-up to the September agreement the year before. The Chinese leadership was reportedly outraged, as seen in China's refusal then to veto the most powerful UN Security Council sanction on North Korea. While such fury is deeply rooted in China's view of North Korea as its junior partner, should Iran somehow significantly humiliate China – which now seems highly unlikely – Beijing could shift its stance, at least temporarily.

Risk of Armed Conflict

China is most incentivized by the risk of an armed conflict and the threat of secondary boycott on its own companies. Since the Clinton administration considered bombing the Yongbyon nuclear facility in 1994,[25] successive US governments have refrained from overtly discussing a preventive strike on North Korea. However, President Trump hinted in 2017 that North Korea would be met with "fire and fury" if Pyongyang continued to make threats against the US.[26] Unconfirmed reports claim that the administration directed the Pentagon to prepare a strike plan in early 2018. Then-US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley also commented that the President hinted at the possibility of an attack on North Korea in order to elicit Chinese and Russian support at the UN Security Council.[27] Trump's unorthodox approach to North Korea undoubtedly helped bring North Korea to the table, not only by unnerving Kim but also by changing Beijing's calculus.

China does not want a military confrontation in the Korean peninsula; it wants to avoid a humanitarian disaster on its border, and does not want a buffer state to collapse into the hands of American and its allies. It is no coincidence that China's pressure on North Korea intensified most following the dangerous escalation in the summer of 2017, when North Korea threatened to "envelop Guam with fire." Starting in the first quarter of 2018, China dramatically reduced its imports and exports to North Korea, contributing to the international sanctions regime at an unprecedented level. China's imports and exports to North Korea in March 2018 amounted to $12 million and $143 million, respectively, indicating respective drops of 89 percent and 56 percent from the previous year.[28]

Until early 2018, the Trump administration allegedly prepared plans to target North Korean leadership as part of a regime change operation,[29] and Beijing nervously persuaded Pyongyang to put forward at least some semblance of denuclearization. At the same time, China has visibly relaxed sanctions on North Korea in recent months following the detente, as the risk of war significantly declined. With a peace treaty in the Korean peninsula at least under discussion, a recent UN report highlights a "massive increase" in fuel shipments to North Korea from China and Russia, a renewed influx of North Korean workers into China, and rebounding Chinese tourism to North Korea.[30]

Iran's economic reliance on China is minimal compared to that of North Korea, and Beijing's leverage on Iran is therefore weaker to start with. However, a credible military threat on Iran is highly likely to force Beijing's hands as well, since it is averse to a costly war in the Gulf that could disrupt its commercial activities. Furthermore, given the Trump administration's well-known aspiration for regime change in Iran, China may fear that Tehran's forced denuclearization could lead to the removal of the Iranian regime: Tehran has turned increasingly pro-China in recent years and Beijing will not want to lose a useful partner in the region. There is little literature on China's stance following Russia's suspension of the S-300 delivery to Iran,[31] which left the regime even more vulnerable to a potential Israeli airstrike. Although the system was delivered to Iran later in 2016, Iranian generals acknowledged they were genuinely afraid that an attack was imminent. While previous analyses have scrutinized Iran's increased willingness to engage in dialogue in conditions of such vulnerability, it remains unclear how much Beijing was unnerved by such circumstances. A substantial shift in China's attitude toward the sanctions regime, if uncovered, could explain how a potential of military conflict influences China's calculation. As we see further radicalization of the Iranian regime by the religious factions under Ayatollah Khamenei's influence, a military standoff could be less implausible.

Secondary Boycott

Secondary boycott also proved to be an effective tool of persuasion. China views American secondary sanctions as harming the principles of non-interference and sovereignty. However, direct consequences for major Chinese companies that refuse to comply with international sanctions could force Beijing to subscribe to American policies. Secondary boycotts have

been working on two different levels. First, they limit Chinese companies' access to the US-led global financial and banking system. Second, they pit Chinese businesses against the government, as interest-driven companies lobby the central government to do its part in solving the problem so that they can safely deal with North Korean or Iranian entities.

On Iran, the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on Chinese companies and individuals for selling dual-use items that could contribute to Iran's missile and nuclear programs. However, Washington traditionally toned down its measures to respect Chinese interests in Iran. For example, Section 1245 of the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) issued bi-annual exemptions to China to reward Beijing's "significantly reduced" imports of Iranian oil.[32] On North Korea, the intensity of economic coercion was much higher, targeting key Chinese financial assets in institutions such as Shandong Bank, HSBC, and Banco Delta Asia at the risk of a diplomatic showdown.[33] While the extent of a secondary boycott did not dramatically expand since President Trump's inauguration, Washington's unprecedentedly hawkish stance regarding Beijing's trade practices became a key lever to force China to put more pressure on North Korea. The Trump administration's decision not to label China a currency manipulator in October 2017 was widely seen as influenced by the then-delicate situation in North Korea.[34]

Conclusion

Ultimately, China is a highly calculating entity. The leadership in Beijing views neither North Korea nor Iran as a true friend. Xi Jinping himself allegedly despises the young North Korean leader, and Beijing shares little historical or cultural attachment to Iran. In fact, China's faithful observance of the sanctions regime is at least partly motivated by the desire to maintain its bilateral advantage over the proliferators. China is often described as "punishing" North Korea for going against its will by imposing more sanctions, to ensure that Pyongyang properly respects Chinese interests.

Unlike the US, which is sometimes restrained by its liberal values and intricate alliance systems, China makes key decisions based almost totally on material interests. China is relatively free to exercise full pragmatism. China's position in nuclear negotiations, especially with Iran, is likely to remain fluid, affected by its overall foreign policy design. The trajectory of denuclearization in both North Korea and Iran is likely to continue fluctuating in the near future. With American unilateral sanctions mounting

significant pressure on the Iranian regime,[35] Israel should prepare a plan that enlists China's cooperation in case Iran leaves the JCPOA.

First, Israel needs to bolster the partnership with the US, to pressure China if necessary. It would be in Israel's interest to persuade Washington to increase pressure on Chinese businesses that continue to deal with Iran and ensure that a secondary boycott by the US on Chinese firms is on the table as part of the contingency plan. Further, Israel should work with the US to assess China's intentions and stakes in Iran by asking, "How important is China's relationship with Iran relative to its broader goals in the region?" and, "How far is China willing to go to defend Iran from Western pressure at the expense of its own interests elsewhere?"

Israeli officials also need to discuss Beijing's core interests directly with their Chinese counterparts. In turn, they must make a convincing case that Iran's nuclear program will not only dim the prospects for the Belt and Road Initiative in the broader Middle East, but also drive a wedge between China and other regional countries threatened by Iran, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. To that end, Israel could pursue a common diplomatic front with relevant parties – many of which can help reduce China's reliance on Iranian oil – to help bring China on board. Ultimately, growing commercial and technological ties between Israel and China should be a two-way street instead of a vehicle for one-sided advantage for Beijing. China seeks Israel's location for trade connectivity, as demonstrated by its investments in the Haifa port;[36] Israel should exploit China's ambition to precipitate more profound cooperation in countering Iran. In the most dire circumstances, Israel should also remind Beijing that a military approach remains on the table in order to convey the gravity of the situation.

Overall, Israel should appeal to China's intention to remain a stakeholder in the region. Xi Jinping's foreign policy leadership suffered a significant setback due to a costly trade conflict with the US. The Belt and Road Initiative is already facing global cutbacks. China does not want any more foreign policy debacles that can undermine its great power status; what it certainly would like to avoid is to be singled out as an accomplice of the Iranian regime's pursuit of nuclear weapons, as it has been in the case of North Korea.

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Afghanistan: A New American Strategy?

Or Yissachar

Seventeen years into the war in Afghanistan, the Trump administration has an opportunity to fashion a delicate balance between isolationism, the imperative to keep America safe from terror groups, the need to find a way out of the Afghan theater, and the obligation to give sovereignty to the Afghan people. President Trump's lenient approach has allowed the military to respond to the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which the Taliban have used to take more territory and intensify their terror activity to a level not seen since the beginning of the war. Facing a struggle between global forces over Afghanistan, the United States must present a clear vision for the country and depart from past approaches that have led to unsatisfactory results elsewhere, for example, in Iraq. This article proposes several paths to rebuild trust and hand Afghanistan over to local actors, such as tribal leaders, and regional actors, such as China and India, while preserving key American interests.

Keywords: Afghanistan, United States, NATO, resolute support, Barack Obama, Donald Trump

In August 2017, some seven months into his presidency, President Donald Trump laid out his administration's strategy for Afghanistan. Though Afghanistan was by then overshadowed by other issues of higher priority, this was still an opportune moment to discuss the path the United States would choose to take, sixteen years into the longest war in its history.

In his policy speech, President Trump appeared to be looking at old issues from a fresh perspective. This was characteristic of this administration's behavior on many fronts, domestic and international alike. The new approach to Afghanistan, dubbed "principled realism" – a term used to describe the

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administration's national security strategy as a whole – holds that America should adjust itself to the situation on the ground and not dictate its way of life to other nations, but instead offer partnership and support.[1] The ultimate goal was to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan through a consensual political process supported by measured military power.[2]

In simple terms, the President expressed his aspiration to implement his "America First" agenda: he adopted the traditional conservative perspective by rejecting the notion of nation building, echoed nostalgia for isolationism, put the basic goal of hunting down terrorists high on the agenda, and repeated a single word – "win" – many times. Some commentators even noted that in his 15-minute speech, Trump used that word more times than Barack Obama did during his entire eight years in office.

However, Trump did not specify concrete solutions, did not lay out his idea of the kind of Afghanistan he would like to see, and did not commit to any specifics about future action. In short, there was a lack of a greater vision. The strategies of each of Trump's predecessors had their advantages and disadvantages. What they had in common, however, was that at the end of their terms in office, the situation in Afghanistan had not moved in the direction of peace and stability, America had not moved closer to ending its involvement in the region, and the various frameworks to resolve the conflict were not working. These outcomes were largely due to the nature of the war in Afghanistan, which is much more complex than the traditional battlefield, because it involves asymmetrical combat with guerilla fighters in the context of a foreign culture and a different ideology.

The Trump administration's ultimate strategy must seek the fine balance between "America First" and sustainable self-government for Afghanistan, in circumstances in which a perfect solution simply does not exist.

That fact, however, did not prevent President Trump's officials, such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, and even the former commander of NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson, from issuing repeated statements claiming that the President's strategy in Afghanistan was working. Moreover, since November 2017, President Trump's new and less restrictive rules of engagement gave the military broader freedom of action. This was manifested in intensified attacks on the Taliban's financial infrastructure, with some 113 strikes aimed, inter alia, at its currency and at opium warehouses valued at $44 million;[3] more ordnance dropped by US aircraft in May 2018

than was dropped in both 2016 and 2015, and close to the 12-month totals for 2013 and 2014;[4] and the use of new, more lethal weapons such as the 20,000-pound "mother of all bombs."[5] General Nicholson also claimed that violence initiated by insurgent groups had dropped 30 percent and that more than 80 percent of these groups' attempts to conquer territory were rebuffed, while territory lost in the other attacks was quickly retaken.[6]

However, critics of the policy noted that this all simply looked like more of the same, an à la carte menu instead of a new, cohesive strategy. Now, over two years into his presidency and some twenty months after that speech, the war in Afghanistan still has no apparent end. The question is whether the current US administration is implementing a strategy that indeed addresses the problematic aspects of its predecessors' policies and offers an effective path, if not to a resolution of the issue, then at least to the best possible outcome under imperfect circumstances.

The Afghan Quagmire

Afghanistan offers a unique situation that appears to interest all the major global forces: the United States and the West, Russia, China, and Islam (though the latter is hardly a unified force). The Afghan quagmire is a thorn in the side of all those who meddle in it. As a strategic crossroad in the middle of Asia, this "graveyard of empires" has always attracted foreign conquerors, but none have managed to gain stable control once the conquest stage was over. Furthermore, no void remains once abandoned, and respective elements continuously attempt to undermine one another's hegemonic aims.

In 2001, twelve years after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan returned to global prominence following the September 11 attacks. That blow to the United States forced the world's greatest superpower to respond one way or another, and in a speech to Congress on September 20, 2001, President Bush demanded unequivocally that the Taliban extradite al-Qaeda officials to the United States and stop all terror activity. "These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion," he added. Despite the aggressive rhetoric, the United States actually gave a generous present to Taliban and al-Qaeda officials by providing them with over two weeks – an eternity in military terms – to slip into neighboring Pakistan. On October 7, as the whole world watched the onset of the American offensive in Afghanistan, the "big fish" were no longer around, and the asymmetric warfare against the stubborn schools of "little fish" was only just beginning.

The initial success was staggering: Afghanistan was conquered in just two months, the Taliban were toppled, international military and political support was recruited, troops from over 50 countries participated, and Hamid Karzai was appointed to serve as a temporary president. In April 2002, President Bush gave a speech that was referred to as the "Afghan Marshall Plan," in which he committed to strong military and financial support for Afghanistan. However, there was no realistic vision to the American and international presence in the country, and even worse, the United States failed to recognize other powerful and influential public elements in Afghanistan, relying heavily on the Northern Alliance, an organization that despite its impressive-sounding name, did not prove to be effective on the ground. After 2003, military and public focus shifted to Iraq, and President Bush found himself bogged down in nation building in both theaters with no long term vision. This seemed to be a guaranteed recipe for failure.

Inheriting the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and mindful of his campaign promises to end them, President Obama vowed to focus on clearing these countries of insurgents and handing them over to local governments, while training local forces. He delineated the new foundation of Resolute Support and promised to end the war within a clearly limited timeframe. In doing so, however, he repeated his predecessor's pre-invasion mistake of giving the insurgents advance notice. That proved to be self-defeating, since the insurgent groups had prepared in advance to retake areas that would effectively be ceded to them according to this very timeframe. Once a vacuum was left by the mass departure of international forces − from a peak of over 140,000 in 2011, to just over 13,000 in 2016 − this is exactly what happened.

For example, already in 2012, intelligence showed how al-Qaeda was planning a comeback, but no change in policy was implemented.[7] The American goal to secure the country and deliver it to well-trained Afghan security forces simply did not correspond with reality. The same failed strategy of withdrawing according to a strict calendar rather than a nuanced assessment of the situation on the ground was also adopted in Iraq. There, the consequences of the completion of a total withdrawal resulted in the flourishing of the Islamic State / ISIS, the crumbling of the Iraqi military when it came under attack, the arrest warrant issued for Tariq al-Hashemi, Maliki's Sunni vice president, and the deterioration of the country into

complete chaos. Iran inadvertently gained the most from its neighbor's disarray.

Instead of informing the public of the outcome of its policy, the Obama administration tried to cover it up in two ways: first, civilian contractors rather than larger military forces were dispatched to Afghanistan, in order to meet the promised troop quotas. Second, the reports of senior officials sugarcoated the reality on the ground. For example, in 2010, CIA Director Leon Panetta publicly downplayed the number of al-Qaeda operatives in the country and pegged it at 50 to 100.[8] A few months later, however, a raid on a major al-Qaeda compound resulted in the death of 150 fighters affiliated with the organization.[9] Because of that discrepancy, Congress launched a probe in 2015 to "investigate numerous allegations of the manipulation of intelligence by Centcom officials."[10] The administration's narrative turned out to be overly optimistic, if not altogether false and misleading.

"Sir, I Believe We're in a Stalemate"

The Trump administration inherited an Afghanistan in which – according to official reports – at least 20 different terrorist groups were operating, making it the leading jihadist incubator in the world. The Congressional Research Service subsequently reported that "while U.S. military officials maintain that Afghan forces are 'resilient' against the Taliban, by some measures insurgents are in control of, or contesting more territory today than at any point since 2001."[11] The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report of October 2018 painted a no less alarming picture, in which government control or influence over Afghanistan's districts fell to the lowest level since 2015 – encompassing 55.5 percent of the territory (compared to 72 percent three years earlier), or just 65 percent of the population.[12] That meant that the Taliban kept challenging allied forces while already controlling over 12 million Afghans and benefiting from greater familiarity of its home terrain and, according to US assessments, cooperation with al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and countries like Russia, Iran, and Pakistan.

In 2016 alone, there were over 6,700 casualties among security forces and 8,300 civilian deaths, representing a 22 percent increase in the number of security incidents over the previous year.[13] Those were the highest single-year figures ever recorded by the United Nations Assistance Missions in Afghanistan.[14] Furthermore, one report after another affirmed that the situation on the ground was deteriorating rapidly; the opium trade problem

was worsening, and a severe drought led to the displacement of more than 263,000 Afghans in addition to the more than 2.5 million refugees, most of them living in neighboring Pakistan and Iran.[15]

Furthermore, the costs of the war were mounting, not just in terms of American casualties, but also in financial terms. After all, the investment of $132 billion in reconstructing Afghanistan and the $783 billion in military spending (as well as billions diverted to the rehabilitation and pension of veterans) have not yielded very impressive return-on-investment.[16] Over the seventeen years, no less than 147,000 lives have been lost in Afghanistan, of which over 6,000 were American.[17] That prompted the late Senator John McCain to ask General Nicholson during a Senate hearing: "Are we winning or losing the war in Afghanistan?" Nicholson replied, "Sir, I believe we're in a stalemate."[18] From the perspective of an administration headed by an impatient businessman searching continuously for the ultimate deal, that was almost certainly a highly unsatisfactory answer.

At the heart of the Trump administration's strategy for Afghanistan is the will to "win." However, the major gap in achievement of this strategy is the lack of a defined vision of victory. Asymmetrical warfare on the ground is more complex than simply winning or losing. Modern lessons, such as those the United States learned in Vietnam and in Iraq or Israel's conflicts with Palestinian groups and with Hezbollah, instruct that small but decisive guerilla groups may not win militarily, but they can take on superior armies by exploiting their own advantages as non-state actors. Specialists like James Dobbins referred to this predicament as choosing between "losing and not losing."[19]

President Trump recognized the fact that military power alone was not enough to win the war in Afghanistan, but he maintained that his administration's top goal was to prevent the reestablishment of a terror sanctuary, and in doing so upheld his isolationist "America First" agenda. Many specialists remarked that for the first time, an American president publicly cited Afghanistan on its corruption when declaring, "America will work with the Afghan government as long as we see determination and progress. However, our commitment is not unlimited, and our support is not a blank check." Ironically, President Obama used this very expression – "blank check" – in his Afghanistan strategy speech in 2009: "The days of providing a blank check are over…going forward, we will be clear about what we expect from those who receive our assistance." While President

Trump used blunter language, it remains to be seen whether this will lead to a different outcome.

Setting a Clear Goal

Since the policy speech in 2017, the Trump administration's strategy has begun to bear fruit: NATO yielded to his demand to share the burden and in its 2018 summit dedicated a day of discussions to Afghanistan, when it extended its financial commitment to the Afghan government until 2024; the UK also agreed to send 400 more troops. Furthermore, Trump has authorized the military to escalate its activity in Afghanistan, and agreed to send 4,000 more troops, to "train and advise" Afghan forces. As a result, he was criticized for going down the same path as his predecessors, whose policies he criticized fiercely.

A case study for the administration's new approach is Pakistan, which has seen American military assistance frozen until it ceases providing sanctuary to terror groups. Some Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officials, for example, serve as top members in the Haqqani network. "It's hard to argue the status quo has been working, so we are looking at changing it to advance our security objectives," said Brian Hook from the State Department.[20] This is yet another example of this administration's drive to face reality as it is, look at it from a new perspective, and act accordingly. Such behavior is typical of a learning organization and is an asset in the search for a way out of the current imbroglio in Afghanistan.

However, the United States still does not appear to be able to leverage its many tactical, short term achievements into a strategic victory. It can annihilate warehouses full of opium crops but has not persuaded the population to cease cultivating it in the first place. It can eliminate senior terrorists, but new insurgent groups continue to pop up. What the administration most lacks is a defined strategy: a clear plan to create a secure and stable long term reality that paves the way to the kind of future the United States would like to see in Afghanistan. More troops alone will not suffice; even a troop level of 140,000, which was the case in 2011, did not prevent the evolution of the current situation. As James George Jatras wrote in *Strategic Culture*, President Trump's new strategy for Afghanistan was "neither new, nor a strategy, nor Trump's."[21]

The Trump administration must decide if its top priority is to put the Afghan story to rest, and if so, it must show creativity in designing a plan to cut back the deep American involvement in this theater. One measure to

promote that end would be to integrate tribal leaders more substantively in the country's political evolution. These individuals know the local population and the nuanced politics on the ground better than anyone else, and they can win the hearts and minds of the people facing insurgent groups, if given the authority and tools to do so. That could be pursued simultaneously with the intensified training of woefully ill-prepared Afghan forces, now 40,000 men short of their target strength of 352,000.[22] Mass recruitment under the direction of tribal leaders, for example, could help lift people out of poverty, attract them away from opium production, and rebalance troop numbers in favor of those who will benefit from the outcome – the local population. Injection of financial aid worth hundreds of billions of dollars has not proved sufficient in and of itself. However, it is still unclear how to find the leaders, in a large part of Pashtun origin, who would not just be a variant of Taliban leaders, many of whom are themselves Pashtuns (as are many of the government officials accused of corruption).

The US can also invite other countries, like India or China, to become involved in monitoring the country's security – President Trump specifically mentioned India in his speech as a "critical part of the South Asia strategy for America" that could "help us more with Afghanistan, especially in the area of economic assistance and development." Taking a leading role in Afghanistan might be seen by India as a strategic benefit, with the establishment of a presence in the rear of its arch-rival, Pakistan, and New Delhi has already funneled $3 billion in financial aid to Afghanistan as well as military support.[23] To be sure, Pakistan might be expected to respond to a growing Indian presence in Afghanistan by boosting its own military profile on the border and involving itself more in internal Afghan affairs – a contingency that any American demarche to India would need to take into account. China, for its part, may be willing to take the lead in local industrial and human development that will boost the economy. That could draw people away from the opium trade that already accounts for 7 percent of Afghanistan's GDP and has grown swiftly with rapid spread of the cultivated area, including a 63 percent increase in 2016-2017 alone.[24] China is already integrating Afghanistan into its programs for global influence, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Belt and Road Initiative. However, there is no assurance that any other country will agree to relieve the United States of the major military and financial burden and allow it to confine itself to what it does best, such as surgical

military strikes against terrorists, as it has done in other theaters, such as Yemen and Somalia.

In any case, it would be ill advised for the administration to repeat President Bush's mistake and offer partnership to "elements of the Taliban" in forming a coalition government. According to General Nicholson, the current strategy is "talking and fighting," meaning that as they wage an intensified military campaign, top US officials are simultaneously holding talks with Taliban members, most recently in Qatar.[25] Such talks failed to yield results in 2001 and there is no reason to believe they would work now – especially while the Taliban still constitutes the biggest security threat in the country. It is quite ironic that after sacrificing so much American blood and treasure to topple the Taliban, the United States is now wooing the same Taliban to be a partner in the future of a country it destroyed. Legitimizing the Taliban will be a step in the wrong direction for Afghanistan. Similarly, it would be counterproductive to withdraw too much or too quickly, thereby allowing the terror sanctuary there to re-emerge and undermine regional and global security.

Finally, one of the top countries on the current US foreign policy agenda is Iran, a neighbor of Afghanistan that already hosts more than a million Afghan refugees and has sent thousands of them to fight in Syria as mercenaries under the banner of Lesghar-e Fatemiyoun. This issue, as well as the diversion of the Helmand River, is a source of ongoing tension between the two countries. Iran has shown growing interest in Afghanistan in recent years, expanded the bilateral trade, and involved India in the supply of goods to Afghanistan through the Iranian port of Chabahar.[26] As a predominantly Shiite country with ties to the significant Shiite minority in Afghanistan (some 10-15 percent of the population) and to Shiite holy sites such as the Blue Mosque of Mazar al-Sharif, "Iran is ready and will spare no effort to help establish sustainable peace and fight terrorism in Afghanistan," stated Iranian President Rouhani. "Iran is determined to expand relations with [its] neighbors, particularly Afghanistan, and run a joint venture in various development projects such as transport infrastructure."[27] The US will naturally be wary of allowing Afghanistan to become a "second Iraq," that is, of facilitating an increase in Iranian presence and influence that could operate contrary to US interests in the region.

The Trump administration's ultimate strategy must not be guided either by the will at all costs to pursue a "victory," which most officials consider unattainable, or by the desire to withdraw at all costs. Instead, it

must seek the fine balance between "America First" and sustainable self-government for Afghanistan, in circumstances in which a perfect solution simply does not exist.

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Global Trends, Local Challenges, and What Lies Between

Yahel Arnon, Ron Deutch, and Yoel Guzansky

A methodology focusing on global trends may help to identify early signs of challenges to Israel's national security in the broad sense of the term, be these challenges direct or indirect. This article illustrates the methodology using four general trends that have possible implications for the world order, affecting either Israel itself or its strategic arena. The article proposes improving and incorporating the global trends methodology in the decision making process in Israel as an analytical component of situation reviews and long term, smart political planning.

Keywords: global trends, regional upheaval, Israel, decision making

The regional upheavals of the decade exposed one of the main failures in the process of decision making at the national level: the focus on events that are perceived as having immediate urgency, the "here and now," with little attention to underlying trends whose importance is not sufficiently recognized or addressed. In this sense, Israeli behavior is no different. The pace of events in the domestic arena, as well as the storms battering the surrounding region, prompts most individuals and institutions to direct attention to what is closest and most urgent. This focus, while natural and understandable, means that powerful global trends, processes, events, and momentum are largely ignored, certainly compared to issues that assume center stage. Ironically, however, the issues in the foreground are generally only symptoms or side effects.

Consequently, we tend to view internal and regional issues as core events, and often fail to link them to broader phenomena that are not in the

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foreground. This article studies the link between local events and processes and the global trends that shape them, and proposes that we identify these profound trends and recognize their impact on us. This understanding should be a basic and essential component of any analysis of reality, and a basis for a methodology that supports creating a fuller and more accurate picture of the situation in planning strategic and tactical moves. If this methodology is incorporated into the decision making process, it will facilitate broader and improved policy planning.

The attempt to attain an accurate forecast of the future in order to make decisions has a structural difficulty. Intuitive thinking about the process of forecasting sees it as an attempt to reach optimum insights about future patterns of behavior of an actor or system (at all levels of analysis), relying on generalizations and identification of patterns that cross borders and disciplines. In other words, the impulse is to construct a theory of behavior and use it to make predictions. However, basic human cognitive lapses make this task almost impossible.

A possible response to this basic difficulty is the addition of a new layer to the decision making process, known as "global trends." This level of analysis complements a traditional research perspective. Instead of creating a "bottom up" theory that seeks to characterize behavior patterns of the various players or systems, the global trends help identify limits to the room for maneuver of these actors and systems at lower levels, and thus to think "top down." Identifying and analyzing global trends could help elements in government weigh the priorities and possible courses of action from a broader perspective, as a way of looking at possible future situations. This viewpoint is essential for any process of strategic thinking.

The "need" to focus on what is immediate and urgent is an unconscious choice in face of the intellectual effort required to make unpopular decisions whose outcomes will only be clear to future generations. This is joined by the obstacles at the organizational level. Organizations that research and implement policies have limited resources and defined priorities, so their natural inclination is to address what seems most urgent. This limits the attention they devote to the analysis of long term trends, and above all to the way these two levels affect each other.

The challenge facing decision makers, therefore, is to cultivate and refine tools that can grasp the link between global and local processes, and can support, assist, and deepen understanding and analysis of the contemporary scene. This will facilitate the establishment of criteria for

proportionality while opening up new viewpoints, so that broad global trends can also be included in the equation of strategic planning based on an integrated and balance perspective.

The purpose of this article is to present critical global trends and analyze their possible impact on Israel and on actors relevant to Israel, and from there draw conclusions as to their importance for policymaking. This limited survey deals with the definition of global trends at four layers – economic, demographic, political, and technological – and analyzes the significance of these layers for the Middle East as a whole. The article does not purport to offer a detailed analysis of all the ramifications of global trends and their impact on each country in the region, rather, to derive concrete recommendations for policy. The scope of the article dictates that it suffice with an outline of some basic trends, but since so little attention is paid to this issue in Israel, the very fact of introducing the approach provides a basis for further work.

This article relies heavily on two reports on global trends. The first is a report from the United States National Intelligence Council (NIC) – the body responsible for long term US strategic thinking. This report is issued once every four years (since 1997), and seeks to analyze the influences that will shape the world over the next twenty years, with the aim of helping the elected government plan its policy. The writers of the latest report, published in early 2017, surveyed the views of 2500 people from various fields in 35 countries. The second report was produced by PwC Global, which seeks to understand emerging global trends in order to shape its policies. This article combines the insights offered by both reports in an attempt to paint a coherent picture of the contemporary situation.

Four General Trends

A number of trends can be distinguished that indicate a slow but steady movement within what myopic lenses deem unshakable facts. The first relates to economics. For some time, the traditional leading actors in the global economy, who belong to what is called "the Western world," have experienced a slowdown in growth, accompanied by a shrinking middle class.[1] At the same time, there has been a steady rise in the importance of large East Asian actors such as India and China, which are becoming the new focus of the global economy. The East Asian share of the global economy has increased from 37 percent in 2000 to over 50 percent today,[2] indicating a shift from the situation that prevailed for hundreds of years

when the center of the world was in Western Europe and North America. Apart from the economic significance, this change also has considerable political implications, deriving from the rise in the monetary worth of East Asian countries and their need to secure their access to trading routes and energy sources that are relevant to the Middle East. This will be reflected in the formation of new political and economic alliances, as can already be seen in the growing "look west" tendency in India, and the ambitious Chinese Belt and Road venture.

The change in the economic trend is closely linked to significant global demographic changes. In many countries, the rich population is growing older. Many developed countries, particularly in the West, have experienced a consistent sharp decline in birth rates. These societies are rapidly aging, leading to a shrinking population and a greater burden on a limited work force that is required to pay for older people. Against this background, governments will likely face growing pressure to raise taxes to pay for more social services and create jobs, particularly for older people and weaker social groups. In response, robots will be developed to compensate for fewer workers.

On the other hand, the poor are young. Developing populations are young and growing, creating an ever larger work force and consumer market. The combination of more young people in developing countries and awakening markets, together with limited economic opportunities and limited access to education, is likely to lead to unrest. This pressure stands to be reinforced by trends of rapid urbanization, particularly in Asia and Africa, where according to UN forecasts, by 2030 some five billion people will live in an urban environment,[3] leading to overcrowding and more strain on the infrastructures of already weak countries.

While it is possible to distinguish the shift of the economic and perhaps also political center of gravity from Europe and North America to the Asian arena, it appears impossible at this stage to determine which actors will be the big winners and which the clear losers.

Another factor contributing to demographic pressure, particularly in developing countries, is climate change, whereby sharp climate changes are expected to make it harder for governments in developing regions to meet the basic needs of their citizens, such as clean water, housing, and food security. The outcomes, some of them even in the short term, include natural disasters such as droughts, floods, and rising sea levels, leading to political agitation as

well as massive waves of migration among developing countries and from them to developed countries that are relatively nearby. These challenges will change patterns of life, and they demand a comprehensive response that is apparently becoming harder to achieve.

These trends are joined by political change at the domestic level in many countries and at an international level. Internally, demographic pressures, together with increased national and religious tensions between minorities, will affect politics in both the developing and developed worlds, potentially leading to violent conflicts. In some cases, the weakness of the sovereign state (particularly in overcrowded urban areas) will spur the emergence of political alternatives, including terror groups and organized crime.

At the international level, the change in the center of economic gravity and the shift of the focus of geopolitical importance from the West to East Asia is expected to lead to friction between forces on the rise and those that are declining, and in certain cases even to violent clashes. In such a situation, smaller actors must adopt strategic hedging: on the one hand put them at the center of any emerging political/economic world order, and on the other hand protect their medium and long term interests that are bound up with the old world order. All these factors combine with what looks like consistent devaluation of the status of globalization, as the existing world order is hit by internal political changes and by changes in the global balance of powers.

Finally, it is impossible to ignore global trends in technology. Technological breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, miniaturization, and nano-technology increase creative potential and offer opportunities for investments in completely new industries. These technologies accelerate the rate of change in terms of both behavior and perception. A prominent example is the development of the cyber dimension, which in recent years has forced decision makers to rethink a range of issues, from economics and commerce, regulation, individual rights, and protection, all the way to strategies for the battlefield of the future and the war on terror and crime. One of the possible consequences of technological development is interference with the ability to govern. Corporations and even individuals will have the ability to block or divert the actions of governments in their favor, and sometimes contrary to the public good.

These are some general examples of a number of trends that must be introduced into thinking processes; otherwise, what seems like a solid reality may suffer from structural deviation. Moreover, these trends are inter-

connected: economic trends affect birth rates, and both have consequences for political developments in the domestic and international arenas, which in turn affect demographics and economics, and so on in an endless cycle, and over all of them looms technological development.

The Impact of Profound Trends on the Middle East

These global trends have implications for the Middle East. The emerging shift in the center of global economic gravity, for example, has a direct effect on all actors in the region, for two reasons. One is the direct outcome of the change, and the other concerns the security and political implications, and the consequent threats. The growth of Asian countries such as China and India is accompanied by their growing economic intervention in the Middle East, particularly in the energy sector, and they are joined by Russia, which is also exploiting the growing US turn to the east. For example, Chinese economic involvement has increased in the Middle East in general, and in the Gulf in particular, even beyond the energy aspect; China and Russia labor to play a part in Syria's reconstruction; and there is growing cooperation between Russia and OPEC.

Global economic changes naturally have diplomatic and security consequences, given the actors' needs to protect their respective economic interests. Examples include the Chinese port under construction in Gwadar, Pakistan, at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz; the Chinese base up in Djibouti, providing control of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait; construction of the Indian port in Chabahar, Iran; and the rivalry between the powers over control of the strategic port under construction in al-Duqm, Oman. Similarly noteworthy is Russia's growing political and military involvement in Middle East arenas such as Syria and Libya and even the Gulf, partly derived from economic interests, including those concerning the energy market.

At the demographic level, the emerging trend in the Middle East reflects increasing pressure due to high birth rates, overcrowding due to urbanization, and absence of the infrastructures required by the growing population. In the Middle East, the legitimacy of a ruler generally rests mainly on his ability to provide the people's basic needs.[4] Therefore serious challenges for Middle East regimes are emerging, even for the oil kingdoms of the Gulf that still depend on a volatile oil market. This can be seen, for example, in the riots in early 2019 in a number of Arab countries – protests against the economic situation in particular and political situation in general, which

showed that the basic facts that led to regional upheaval essentially have not changed, and in certain cases have become even worse.

As in the political sphere, the weakening regional status and influence of the United States has created a vacuum that attracts increasingly brazen regional and international forces. These regional struggles also have domestic implications for Middle East regimes. The struggle for control of the power vacuum left by the United States and the difficulty of creating stable agreements require regional and international players to recruit allies from the countries they wish to influence. External involvement in Middle East countries reinforces existing ideological, ethnic, and religious rivalries, and whips up violent clashes, as in Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. These tensions compound the economic and demographic pressures mentioned above, all contributing to instability and the lack of effective levers to create regional balance and calm.

Ultimately, it is impossible to ignore technological changes and their significance for the region. Cyberspace, which has developed at an amazing rate over the past decade, is a new field that poses unprecedented challenges to regimes in the region. On the other hand, new technologies in the fields of medicine, water, energy, and food can make a significant contribution to the survival of regimes that are threatened by domestic problems, if they can muster the resources, access the relevant technology, and pay attention to the people. It appears that the lack of quality manpower in most Middle East countries deprives them of the ability to develop technologies themselves in the foreseeable future. The richer Gulf states can purchase technologies and experts, which is an important advantage, but this widens the gap between them and the others, and thus increases the threats they face. In the short and medium terms, regional and international players with access to technology have a lever to exert pressure. In the long term, the future of these countries depends on their ability to develop an educated population that can deliver technological and economic independence (as shown for example in the ambitious Saudi "Vision 2030"), and enable them to compete with regional elements.

Implications for Israel

The Global Level

A review of these global trends is the basis for the attempt to build a set of insights that are relevant for Israel. However, there is a structural problem in translating the trends that shape the international system to the operative

level. The global trends described above are evidence of threats facing Middle East actors, but it is hard to know where the next crisis will occur, within what time frame, and with what consequences. Nor is this necessarily the result of a particular Israeli policy, but part of broader trends. Alternatively, the choice remains whether to try to take part in and influence processes, or sit on the fence and tiptoe gingerly around them, based on narrow security needs.

In addition, while it is possible to distinguish the shift of the economic and perhaps also political center of gravity from Europe and North America to the Asian arena, it appears impossible at this stage to determine which actors will be the big winners and which the clear losers. Therefore, Israel must diffuse risks, while refraining from a gamble on one central actor, however promising it may seem (such as India or China). At the same time, it must avoid burning bridges with respect to Western players that could prove to be essential in the short and medium terms, and perhaps even in the long term, such as the European Union, and this should be reflected in Israel's allocation of its political resources and in the balance of strategic risks and opportunities.

The signs of trends toward political isolation, economic difficulties, and demographic slowdown severely reduce European bargaining power in the long term. Therefore even if Europe still holds important means of exerting pressure, or alternatively provides political support for Israel, these must not be taken for granted when planning twenty or thirty years ahead. At the same time, the emerging cracks in the European front open a window of opportunity for Israel to bypass the EU as a united player with strong bargaining power, and to reinforce its bilateral links with individual European countries, which naturally have less bargaining power.

Identifying the trends is the "easy" part, because after that it is necessary to determine their degree of relevance for national security, that is, if, when, and how Israel will encounter them, and what is the required response.

The other side of the coin concerns the Asian theater. Even if in the short term there appears to be a political price for rapprochement with the East (as shown for example by the Israel-China-US relationship), in the long term this arena offers considerable diplomatic and economic opportunities for Israel. Despite its small size, Israel can exploit its relative advantages in the field of technology, and leverage them into areas such as food, water, and energy technologies. These fields will become more and more relevant as

demographic pressure grows, and as climate change and natural disasters become more acute for the billions in Asia and Africa. If Israel continues to maintain its superiority in these fields, it will accumulate enormous bargaining power, even against far larger players.

The Regional Level

At the regional level, global trends appear to represent mainly threats for Israel, although there are also some opportunities. In the short, medium, and long terms the emerging trends create ongoing pressure that threatens the internal stability of many countries, and therefore regional stability as a whole. Accordingly, Israel must maintain a realistic approach in which the reliance on security regimes, international institutions, or established alliances should assume lower priority, if only due to the inability of fixed frameworks to adjust to the pace of change. However, in view of the growing involvement of foreign powers in the region, Israel must maintain an ongoing dialogue with each regarding relevant local issues, even as it avoids too much reliance on any one element, based on an understanding that the regional balance of rising and falling powers will continue to be dynamic.

In this situation, Israel must create bargaining power vis-à-vis as many local actors as possible, while seeking ways of acquiring guarantees from powers whose long term future in the region, like their ability to help, is unclear. This strategy has another benefit, namely, the spread of regional investments based on the assumption that sooner or later every local ally will face a real risk of falling due to interfacing pressures described above. Therefore, considering that further regional shocks are unavoidable, this will allow Israel to minimize the damage they could cause. Such bargaining power could work according to the "Jordanian model," whereby the Hashemite regime is to a large extent dependent on the water it regularly receives from Israel. If Israel is able to develop its superiority in water, energy, and food technologies, the dependence of other countries in the region facing climate problems and demographic pressures could make Israel an essential regional element whose security is a central interest of its neighbors.

Conclusions

This article presents a methodology, an extra level in the decision making process, whose purpose is to shed light on trends that are not necessarily part of the inter-community discourse in Israel and that could affect its future. It is grounded in the understanding that decisions must consider

various future possibilities, and not only the current situation. In this framework, the Ministry of Intelligence set up an inter-agency and inter-ministerial voluntary forum in late 2017, with the aim of establishing a mechanism to "horizon scanning," while taking into account, inter alia, global trends.[5] However, identifying the trends is the "easy" part, because after that it is necessary to determine their degree of relevance for national security, that is, if, when, and how Israel will encounter them, and what is the required response.

When attention is mainly directed toward ad hoc responses to immediate challenges, it is harder to take a panoramic view of global trends, far from immediate and urgent needs. But recognition and understanding of these trends, and highlighting their possible consequences could be important when outlining long term policy. Moreover, understanding the link between global processes and local challenges, along with their reciprocal effects and significance is essential for planning policy. For that purpose, at the thinking stages, it is recommended to involve elements from outside the government system, the academic world, and think tanks – a change in the accepted way that Israeli government entities usually act.

Perhaps Israel is not directly included in the demographic trends found in the Middle East. However, even if at first glance it appears that global trends could bypass some countries, including Israel, it is ultimately impossible to exclude them from the situation analysis and their impact on policymaking.

Israel is a small country with a unique character, and some global trends are not relevant to it. Growing demographic pressure, for example, leading to mega-urbanization and waves of migration in the Middle East has not found similar expression in Israel, for various reasons (although Israel was indirectly affected due to the massive demographic pressures that had security, political, and social implications on its immediate neighbors and on Europe). Similarly, climate changes reflected in droughts and food and water shortages all over the region should not significantly affect Israel, if only because of the advanced desalination knowhow and agro-technology available to it. Is Israel not implementing a policy that takes account of global trends and looks to the future? It is possible that the construction of water desalination facilities along the Mediterranean coast in order to deal with water shortages, and the construction of smart fences along its borders to deal with migration and refugees are signs of this – certainly since

construction of this response only began when these trends were already knocking at its door.

If this argument is raised, it misses the rationale underlying the global trends methodology. The idea is not to present political, economic, and social changes that have a direct and simultaneous effect all over the world, even in a limited regional framework. Rather, in places where the trends are making a direct impact (even if it is not overt and clear), their influence is sufficiently important for all players in the regional or international system to taken them into account when considering long term policies.

Perhaps Israel is not directly included in the demographic trends found in the Middle East. Perhaps it can limit the waves of migration into its territory by means of fences and walls, or minimize the effects of climate change using the wonders of technology. However, fences or technology alone cannot isolate Israel from the reality of instability and instability when these occur in its close environment. The conclusion therefore is that even if at first glance it appears that global trends could bypass some countries, including Israel, it is ultimately impossible to separate their impact from the process of analyzing the situation and making decisions for the medium and long terms.

Notes

1 *Global Trends: Paradox of Progress* (Washington: National Intelligence Council, 2017), p. 11.
2 "Competition, Disruption and Deception: Global Trends 2018-2023," Global Business Policy Council, 2018, p. 6.
3 "Five Megatrends and their Implications for Global Defense & Security," PwC, 2016, p. 12.
4 Kobi Michael and Yoel Guzansky, *The Arab World on the Road to State Failure* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2016), pp. 17-24.
5 Noam Alon, "Scanning the Horizon: A Process to Help Decision Making Processes at the National Level," Intelligence Heritage Center and the Institute for Research into Intelligence Methodology, July 2018, p. 1.

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