

ISRAEL: A STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

ISRAEL: A STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by

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ABSTRACT

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The security environment in the Middle East is presenting new challenges to the state of Israel. To the traditional threat coming from unfriendly, when not openly hostile, states, Israel should now add others such as the likely perspective of a nuclear Iran, the collusion of groups like Hamas or Hezbollah, supported by Iran and Syria and bent on the destruction of Israel, the growing influence of the Shi'a branch of Islam in the region with the implications it will surely have in some countries like Lebanon, or the action of international terrorist groups of Islamic base. Israel will have to confront these challenges in the face of an adverse demographic balance and of a growing dispute for scarce natural resources, water the most important among them. After proposing a formulation of the objective of Israeli strategy, this paper analyzes the evolution of the Israeli security environment since Independence, identifying its permanent principles. It then examines the current security challenges Israel is facing, discussing possible strategic options to them and trying to elucidate the validity of the principles defined as permanent.

ISRAEL: A STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Israel is a beleaguered nation. On May, 14th 1948, it declared its Independence in the land of Palestine. The next day, military units of all of its Arab neighbors invaded the infant state with the declared intention of “liberating” the territory from the Zionist enemy and the undeclared one of taking as much of its spoils as possible at the expense of the Palestinians whose liberation they were proclaiming.¹

Some sixty years later, and after reality has forced some of its neighbors to accept the existence of that nation, Israel is still subject to the same existential threat although presented in a somewhat different guise. The country has had to adapt to every new challenge to deliver the adequate response that ensured the preservation of the integrity of the state. In this endeavor, Israeli policy-makers have often demonstrated a high degree of initiative and creativity.

Today, the threat is particularly complex and combines the well known elements of the conventional armies with others like insurgencies in different places. Furthermore, the near future will very likely bring the thus far unknown possibility of a declared enemy reaching the territory of Israel with nuclear weapons. On top of that, other threats to the future of Israel, of a totally different nature, loom over the horizon. Besides fighting its enemies, the country has to struggle with an ever more unfavorable demographic balance vis-à-vis its Arab neighbors, as well as with dwindling natural resources, water above them all.

After venturing a formulation of the Objective of the Israeli Grand Strategy,² this paper reviews the history of the state of Israel since its Independence. It tries to define how the threat to Israel was configured along it, what strategic solution the state

adopted in each case to meet its security needs and how the threat adapted to the new situation. This analysis ends by considering the features of the current security situation in Israel, raising the questions of whether or not the current strategy of the state is bringing the country closer to its objective.

The Israeli Strategic Objective

The history of Israel is punctuated by a series of wars (see Table 1) of different nature and intensity during which the military element of the Israeli national power has come to the forefront as the most relevant of all to advance and protect the national interests.

However, to say that Israel has fought ten wars since the state was founded sixty years ago, does not automatically imply that, out of those periods, peace has presided over the life of the Israelis. Rather than of peace, the interwar periods of the Israeli life should better be described as of “no-war” to better depict the reality of a situation of perennial conflict and permanent confrontation. In fact, as of now, Israel has signed peace agreements with only two Arab states, Egypt and Jordan with which it maintains a relationship that could be better termed as of cold peace.

Year	War	Participants	Outcome
1947-1949	Independence War	Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, Egypt	– Israel extends control over the Negev and Galilee – Arab refugees
1956	Suez War	Israel, France, United Kingdom, Egypt	– Israeli temporary occupation of Sinai – Egyptian gravitation towards Soviet orbit – Increased IDF reputation
1967	Six-Day War	Israel, Syria, Jordan, Egypt	– Israel occupies West Bank, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights – Destruction of the Egyptian Armed Forces
1968-1970	War of Attrition	Israel, Egypt	– Conflict escalation to implication of superpowers

1973	October War	Israel, Syria, Egypt	– Conservation of territories won in 1967 – End of Labor hegemony – Camp David Agreements
1982-1985	First Lebanon War	Israel, Lebanese factions, Syria	– PLO leadership expelled from Lebanon – Sabra and Chatilla – Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon – Hezbollah
1987	First Intifada	Israel, Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank	– Madrid Peace Process – HAMAS
2000	Second Intifada	Israel, Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank	– Security barrier – Gaza withdrawal 2005
2006	Second Lebanon War	Israel, Hezbollah	– Hezbollah attrited but morally reinforced – Unclear victory for Israel – IDF prestige damaged
2009	Operation “Cast Lead”	Israel, HAMAS	– HAMAS infrastructure in Gaza debilitated

Table 1. The wars of Israel

If Israel is still waging a war or, at least, a protracted conflict with its neighbors, we have to assume, following Clausewitz, that Israel is pursuing a political end. Consequently, the political decision-makers of Israel should have defined a strategic objective guiding the application of all the elements of the national power to meet that political end.

Arguably, and despite the internal differences within their society, the Israelis are generally pragmatic. They do not normally like to indulge in formalities or in long term planning, showing a tendency to tactical, short-term and immediate solutions to problems. In the realm of security, this tendency would have its expression in the absence of a written formulation of the strategy and its objectives.³ Some authors maintain that unlike in most Western countries, strategy formulation in Israel is left in the hands of only the prime minister, the defense minister and the chief of staff of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)⁴ so that, as a consequence, all elements of the national power

but the military one are systematically neglected or, at least, not sufficiently incorporated into the strategic design of the country.⁵

The deduced objective of the Israeli National Strategy could be formulated by saying that this country seeks to complete the construction of Israel in Palestine as a Jewish state. Ensure its survival as a Jewish, democratic and secular state, member of the International Community, behind safe and stable borders.

This statement shows two distinct and somewhat contradictory dimensions that reveal the security dilemma Israel is facing. On the first dimension, the focus on survival behind stable borders would indicate a defensive strategic approach that often requires the application of offensive tactics. On the second dimension, a more opportunistic approach permeates the National Strategy: every Israeli action in this domain should bring Israel closer to its definitive borders⁶ and promote “Aliyah”⁷ and that would imply an expansionist attitude. Today, unless it abdicates from its democratic principles, Israel cannot pursue territorial expansion. Instead, it should keep this part of its objective at bay and be ready to trade land for peace. But if, anytime in the future, the conditions permit it, Israel will seize the opportunity and will expand beyond the current borders. That may happen many years from now. After two thousand years of Diaspora, time is not always an important factor in Israeli strategy.

Evolution of the Israeli Security Environment

Along its history, Israel has tried to achieve its strategic objective employing the instruments of its national power, adapting their application to the specific nature of a changing security challenge. For the purpose of facilitating analysis, we can divide the Israeli recent history in a number of periods in which that security challenge remained

unchanged. The strategic response of Israel in each case resulted in an adaptation of the threat, which opened a new period with a somewhat different challenge.

From 1945 to 1949. This period, centered around the Israeli Declaration of Independence in 1948, saw the creation of the elements of the Israeli national power upon the weak base of the Jewish Agency and of the Hashomer, the Zionist self-defense force.

During these days, the threat came from different directions. Until Independence, the Jewish community in Israel had mainly to do with Arab Palestinian groups, loosely rallied around the Arab Higher Committee, that resorted to insurgency tactics aimed at the Jewish settlements. The Jews had also to oppose the British Mandate, seen as an obstacle to Zionist aspirations for independence. And, since 1948, they had to confront all the neighboring Arab states and their armies, initially superior in equipment and numbers and presenting a conventional threat.

Before Independence Israel military power was rather weak so, for lack of better options, the country had to rely on its diplomatic reach, used extensively to lobby nations in the United Nations to get Resolution 181 passed,⁸ to raise funds in the United States to finance the purchase of weapons⁹ and in efforts to divide the fragile Arab alliance, approaching Transjordan in a last-ditch effort to keep the kingdom out of the war.¹⁰

Militarily, Israel had to start by creating a military instrument, building upon different, very motivated, underequipped and undertrained groups often competing against one another for hegemony until David Ben-Gurion unified them in July 1948 as Israel Defense Forces under state authority.¹¹ Initially, the military arm was purely

defensive, evolving during the war to become more capable, which permitted it the adoption of an offensive posture to consolidate the allocated territory and to expand the Jewish state beyond the UN-earmarked partition borders as much as possible and to arm the state with defensible borders.¹²

The economic element of power was almost negligible. Israel could only count on the resources of the Jewish Fund applied to land purchases strategically selected to obtain territorial continuity and to alter the ethnic balance at the local level.

The consequences of the Israeli strategic action in this period were manifold and paved the way for the next years. The reputation of the state was dramatically reinforced after the victory. The war resulted also in territorial gains for Israel going way beyond the UN-allocated territory and into Arab areas.¹³ However, it ended without real peace, and with the Arab states claiming for retribution after their humiliating defeat in what came to be called "Al Nakba".¹⁴ The war also created some seven hundred thousand Palestinian refugees that were settled in all the neighboring nations, sowing the seed of a new kind of conflict in the future. Politically, it shook the foundations of the Arab power in the region, provoking regime changes that would facilitate the landing of the superpowers in the region, thus making the Middle East a venue of their Cold War disputes.

From 1949 until 1967. Certain elements give unity to this long period of tension punctuated by two wars: Suez in 1956, an opportunistically waged preventive war, and the 1967 war, a pure example of preemptive war. The world order resulting after World War II brought with it the emergence of two superpowers, the USSR and the United States, which replaced the old European colonial powers and that started to play an

ever bigger role in the scenario of the Middle East. The period also witnessed the ascension of Egypt to the status of regional power leading the efforts seeking to destroy Israel.

As we saw earlier, the defeat in 1949 produced regime changes in the Arab world that brought about leaders more radically opposed to Israel. Of note here is the accession of President Gamal Abdul Nasser to power in Egypt. Nasser, a young officer in the Fallujah pocket during the 1948 War, maintained a hostile stance vis-à-vis Israel¹⁵ that could be rooted in his personal experience of the conflict.¹⁶

The threat in this period is basically of conventional nature and coming from the Arab states ever more supported by the Soviet Union, which trained and equipped them. The disputed leadership of Egypt tried to forge pan-Arab alliances against Israel with limited success. Coupled with that, Israel had to face a continuous trickle of infiltrators penetrating Israel, sometimes with hostile intentions and using insurgency tactics, and that Israel linked to the general Arab-Israeli security problem.¹⁷

The aftermath of the 1949 war made Israel aware of its lack of strategic depth to absorb enemy blows in future wars. Realizing that it would not be its last war, the state reacted by reshaping its military arm and strategy, developing the doctrines, already outlined in 1948, of offensive and preemptive attack and of deterrence. The first one crystallized in several elements as the organization of mighty air forces and armored units, the development of a responsive mobilization system and the establishment of a forward line of settlements along the armistice lines meant to absorb the first blow in order to win time to mobilize and take the war to enemy territory, as some military professionals advocated.¹⁸ The doctrine of deterrence, used since the early fifties, not

without internal opposition,¹⁹ to stop infiltrations of irregular elements into Israel, led the Israeli efforts to develop an own nuclear capability during these years.

Meanwhile, the Israeli diplomacy sought the security of the powers of the day. In the 1950s, France played this role not only equipping the Israeli Armed Forces, but also setting the stage for the Suez War in 1956, when France forged an ad-hoc alliance of both countries with the United Kingdom and supported Israel moves to inflict a blow to Egypt after it closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli navigation, a clear “casus belli” for the state²⁰, in exchange for Israeli support to Anglo-French actions to retain control the Suez Canal.²¹ More importantly, France would have provided Israel the know-how to start a nuclear program in Dimona.²² This honeymoon lasted until the mid-1960s, when France left Israel in an attempt to salvage its colonial policy in North Africa.²³

Strategically, this long period had many consequences that would project into years to come. First and foremost, it transformed the Middle East into the scenario of the Cold War, with Israel clearly aligned with the United States and the Arab world tilted towards the Soviet Union. Second, after 1967, the period ended with a reaffirmed Israeli military supremacy and the neutralization of the Arab military power for some years. Third, the period resulted for Israel in the largest territorial gain of all its history, which gave it the strategic depth it so desperately needed at the expense of having to administer thousands of Arabs living in Gaza and the West Bank. These gains also brought to Israel the idea that no return to the pre-1967 borders should happen.²⁴ Fourth, the annihilation of the Arab armies in 1967 created a feeling of Israeli invincibility that led the war-weary Arabs to ask the Palestinians to assume a more important role in the fight for their rights. The idea was already there when the Palestine Liberation

Organization (PLO) was born in 1964. But after 1967, under the leadership of Yassir Arafat, the idea got its actual meaning, introducing a new era and significantly reshaping the security environment for Israel. Last, but very importantly, that same feeling of invincibility made the Israelis overconfident and relaxed in security matters. That, united to the Arab desire for revenge after the humiliation, could have been tragic for Israel as we will see in the next period.

From 1967 to 1985. This period is clearly marked by the consequences of the 1967 war we have seen in the previous section. During that period, Israel still had to contend with the usual conventional threat, as exemplified in the long War of Attrition as well as in the 1973 War.²⁵ But what gives unity to this period is the accession of the PLO and its insurgency-like approach to the forefront of the conflict, adding a new and important element to the Israeli security equation.²⁶

Although Israel made some attempts to use its diplomacy and economic leverage during this period²⁷, the strategic reaction to the threat clearly relied on the use of the military power, was heavily influenced by the outcome of the Six-Day War and, despite the Israeli prevalence in all armed conflicts, flawed by tackling the symptoms of the conflict rather than its roots, as the 1982 invasion of Lebanon would prove.

At the outset of this period, the War of Attrition proved the limitations of the Israeli military power when it became clear how much the Soviet alignment with the Arab nations constrained the Israeli military options lest it provoked an escalation of potentially catastrophic consequences.²⁸ More importantly, the climate of relaxation prevalent in Israel after 1967 led the state to disregard clear signals of an incoming Arab offensive and to abandon the basic doctrinal principle of offensive, to rely instead on a

system like the Bar-Lev Line that proved incapable of giving early warning and containing the initial Egyptian thrust during the 1973 War. Again, some circumstances, like the need not to appear as the aggressor, so as not to alienate the support of the United States²⁹ and the American pressure on Israel not to destroy the Egyptian Third Army at the end of the war showed how the elements of the national power other than the military one, can be applied to the resolution of a security problem.

Operation “Peace for Galilee” in 1982 is probably the case where the overreliance on the military tool and flaws in the decision-making system became most obvious. The operation, initially conceived to put an end to the PLO terrorist activity from Lebanon, ended up in direct confrontation with the Syrian army, was tainted with atrocities like the massacres of Sabra and Chatilla and resulted in the IDF stuck in the Lebanese quagmire for years to come and with its reputation eroded. All that proved the inadequacy of relying only on the military element of national power to solve conflicts.

Strategically, this period had important consequences for Israel. On the positive side, the experience of the 1973 War set the stage for permanent peace with Egypt in what constitutes a case where Israel, thanks to the mediation of the United States and its “shuttle diplomacy” used the diplomatic element of national power as a way to reach a permanent arrangement with Egypt. As a result of these efforts, the Camp David process opened the way for Israel to leave the Sinai Peninsula trading land for peace. On the negative side, the period in general and its wars in particular inflicted an important damage to the Israeli image of invulnerability, which impacted negatively on deterrence. Both wars (1973 and 1982) ended up without a clear-cut Israeli victory at the political level even if operationally the victory was unquestionably Israeli. Moreover,

the invasion of Lebanon gave birth to Hezbollah, called to be one of the most important concerns for Israel in the future. Finally, the wars of this period introduced a wedge in the Israeli society, up to these days unanimously united in security matters. 1973 gave way to a wave of criticism for the way the government had conducted the war. The split was further exacerbated by the invasion of Lebanon, seen by some as a “war of choice” of dubious legitimacy.³⁰

From 1985 to the Present. This last period has to be reviewed within the framework of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and Operation “Desert Storm” in 1991. Both events shook the strategic situation of the Middle East at its heart.

After repeated Israeli military victories and in lack of Soviet support, the Arabs started to realize at the beginning of the 1990s the futility of using conventional means to defeat Israel. Consequently, the conventional threat, if not altogether eliminated, was at least, contained as long as Israel maintained military superiority over its enemies. But the threat adapted and transformed itself. So, if the intervention in Lebanon brought about the emergence of Hezbollah, the frustration of the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories for their situation and the inefficiency of the absentee Fatah leadership of the PLO, exploded in 1987 in the “Intifada”, a grassroots uprising soon utilized by that same PLO leadership. The Intifada confronted the IDF with a situation totally unknown since Independence.³¹

Other elements came to complete the threat. The collapse of the Soviet Union left important parts of its nuclear arsenals and know-how out of control and open for potential rogue elements to use. And in addition to that, “Desert Storm” awoke Israel to

the possibility of a distant enemy reaching its territory by means of Theater or even Strategic Missiles. The need for strategic depth gained a new meaning.

In the face of this new threat, Israel started by delivering the usual military response. As it became evident that the military power alone was not effective, Israel started looking for other options directly dealing with the roots of the conflict. The use of diplomacy and negotiation, favored by the post-1991 international situation, surfaced as the logical answer. In October 1991, under American leadership, the so-called Peace Process opened up with the Madrid Peace Conference.

Although the Process ultimately derailed in 2000, it showed the possibilities of the diplomacy when used in conjunction with the rest of the elements of power, producing results like the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords between Israel and the PLO, which set the bases for further efforts for peace and brought about the recognition of the Palestinian claims for sovereignty; or like the 1994 Peace Agreement with Jordan.

The use of diplomacy as a way to advance the strategic objective created an internal rift in Israel that limited the options of the Israeli decision-makers. This fact, united to the Palestinian stiffness in certain points as the right of return of refugees or the status of Jerusalem, led the Process to its final failure. Then, on September, 28 2000, the visit of Ariel Sharon to Jerusalem's Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa Mosque unleashed a new uprising, this time clearly orchestrated by Yassir Arafat, known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada.³²

The end of the negotiations signaled the return of the military response. This period, dubbed as "Ebb and flow," started with restraint so as to give American diplomatic efforts a chance to succeed, until it became clear that they were not bringing

Israel any closer to the resolution of the uprising. Then, in March 2002, the government decided to launch Operation “Defensive Shield,” more offensive and aiming at making irrelevant the Palestinian leadership.³³ Other measures like the withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 complemented a military option whose most recent chapter has been Operation “Cast Lead” in Gaza at the beginning of 2009.

The strategic options chosen by Israel in this period have had different effects on the country and its security environment. The 2006 War damaged the reputation of the IDF, perceived as having been incapable of putting an end to Hezbollah, more debilitated as a result of the war, but morally strong and in the process of recovering and resembling ever more to a conventional army. In Gaza and the West Bank, the Palestinians are in the middle of a virtual civil war confronting a discredited Fatah faction and Hamas, claiming to be the real representative of the Palestinians after the landslide victories in the 2005 and 2006 elections. At the beginning of 2009, Israel embarked in a full-scale operation in Gaza to put an end to the activity of Hamas against Israel. And, to further complicate the picture, Iran has filled the vacuum left by Iraq in the region after the American invasion of 2003 and has raised the stakes with its efforts to develop nuclear weapons. All these elements taken together configure a new strategic reality in the region whose consequences are yet unclear.

Basic Principles of the Israeli Security Strategy

An analysis of the Israeli strategy since the foundation of the state will identify a common thread that makes what we could define as a unique “Israeli Grand Strategy” whose features would be dictated by the particular circumstances of the country. Certain aspects like the lack of geographical depth combined with densely populated

areas³⁴ or the central position Israel occupies with respect to its adversaries, play a very important role in the strategic design of the country. Other ones like the Israeli demographic disadvantage vis-à-vis the Arab nations, the sense of insecurity embedded in the mind of the Israelis,³⁵ or the external pressures acting upon the conflict³⁶ are of no less importance. This section examines those features.

Strategically Defensive, Tactically Offensive-Very consistently in its history, Israel has operated with an aggressive offensive spirit in which the defense has played only the limited role of avoiding surprise and gaining time essential to mobilize and attack,³⁷ with the conviction that he who strikes first wins the battle,³⁸ and that defense can be mistaken as weakness. This spirit finds its roots in the “never again” mindset installed in Israel after the experience of the Holocaust in which the Jewish people accepted extermination.³⁹ It also has to do with the lack of strategic depth that forces Israel to take the fight to enemy territory as soon as possible, which requires an offensive attitude.⁴⁰

Related to this tenet is the application of the doctrine of preemptive attack. The efficacy of preemption by means of an offensive maneuver into the depth of the enemy’s territory, one of the basic lessons learned during the 1956 war very successfully applied in subsequent wars, has been adopted as unwritten doctrine.⁴¹

The principle of being “Strategically Defensive” implies the idea that Israel does not entertain currently territorial ambitions beyond those dictated by the need to implement the concept of the “defensible borders.”⁴² Facts like the withdrawal from the Sinai in 1979, from Southern Lebanon in 2000, or from Gaza in 2005 would support this idea. Similar defensive considerations could be behind the security barrier erected in the West Bank with the intention of putting an end to the infiltration of terrorists into

Israel.⁴³ These facts, however, should not conceal the internal cleavage in the Israeli society in regard to this central question of the future of the West Bank and the Golan Heights. In fact, the issue of the “land for peace” principle and of the territorial configuration of Israel is one of the most divisive ones in the political life of the country.⁴⁴ The dependence the mainstream parties frequently have on the religious ones, normally opposed to make territorial concessions, very much limits the options in this domain.

Engagement in Quick, Decisive Wars-With a population of roughly six million of which some 2.9 million are in military age,⁴⁵ Israel lives surrounded by some three hundred million Arabs and has 925,000 Arabs living inside the borders of the state. In this situation, the security of the state literally depends on every able-bodied Israeli, male or female. That, in turn, makes the Israeli defense very dependent on a swift mobilization of reserves that, if protracted, risks crippling the Israeli economy, destroying the very nation it should preserve. It is therefore essential for Israel to reach a military decision before that moment arrives, returning as soon as possible to normality. Equally important, a quick resolution of a conflict will give Israel the possibility of attaining the war objectives before the pressures of the International Community to stop hostilities are brought to bear.⁴⁶

Forging a Strategic Alliance with at Least One Power-This principle, flowing from the need to offset the Israeli demographic disadvantage vis-à-vis the Arab nations has been historically applied differently based on the situation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the support of the British Empire resulted in the Balfour Declaration endorsing the idea of a Jewish Home in Palestine. When this support drifted away for reasons of British national interests, the Zionists found the useful support of the Soviet

Union, the first nation to internationally recognize the Israeli state, and of the United States, to gain a favorable vote for partition in the United Nations General Assembly.

When the Soviet Union started courting Nasser and the Arabs, Israel forged an alliance with France, in collusion with Great Britain that led to the Suez War in 1956. This alliance lasted until the mid-1960s, when President Charles de Gaulle realized that it was a liability in his efforts to control the insurgency in Algeria and other French Arab colonies, as we have mentioned earlier.

This abandonment, though, had the beneficial effect of leaning Israel towards the United States, Israel's key ally since then, especially after the 1967 War. The strategic alliance with the United States has been a blessing for Israel, although it has not been devoid of hurdles. It is based on the moral responsibility towards Israel assumed by the United States after the Holocaust, as well as in shared values and interests in the region.⁴⁷ Also, the role of the Israel lobby in the United States in making the case for Israel⁴⁸ cannot be underestimated. During the Cold War days Israel was the bastion that helped to counter Soviet penetration in the Middle East.

The practice of forging strategic alliances with the powers of the moment has proven to be very beneficial to Israel. But it is also true that they somehow limit Israeli strategic options, lest they alienate a support that Israel sometimes takes for granted⁴⁹ and that dearly needs, especially in a protracted conflict.

Prevalence Through Quality-Equally related to the Israeli numerical inferiority, this principle considers the need for Israel to maintain a qualitative military superiority to offset that disadvantage.

This tenet has to follow the double path of human excellence and technical superiority. The first stems directly from the conviction of the moral justification of the fight and can be seen in the ethos of the IDF, a real “army of the people,” as well as in the technical proficiency of the uniformed services, far above the one of their Arab counterparts. Drawing on highly qualified human resources, Israel developed a military where creative thinking, aggressiveness, and non-conformism were the hallmark.⁵⁰ In what concerns technology, the experience of the first wars made very clear to the Israelis the need to maintain a high degree of technological superiority and to reduce as much as possible its dependence on foreign support.

The nuclear realm deserves separate consideration. Israel is thought to have developed a nuclear arsenal that would increase the nation's deterrence options. The preservation of the nuclear monopoly in the region would be of the utmost importance to Israel, so that, any attempt by another nation to break it will very likely be considered by Israel as a “casus belli.”

Territorial Gains-This principle, arguably not so obvious as the other ones we have here considered, and not to be applied “à outrance” but rather with a criterion of opportunity, can be formulated by saying that any Israeli strategic design has to bring Israel closer to its final objective of completing the territorial integrity of the state even if, paradoxically, it means giving up land for peace for tactical reasons. It has a pragmatic, short-term approach in the so-called concept of the Israeli right to “defensible borders”⁵¹ and establishes the Israeli right to delineate borders that provide it with the security the country needs for its survival.

The actual delineation of these borders, very much dependent on the nature of the threat, is an object of debate both internally and internationally. Arguably, such borders should address not only insurgency-like threats, but also the conventional one, that cannot be ruled out even with peace agreements in force.⁵² The importance of these considerations will likely grow in a nuclearized Middle East.⁵³ To a certain extent, they will impose some limits to the Israeli strategy and to eventual negotiations on the two-state solution.

Current Strategic Environment

The current security environment facing Israel can be described as very complex. At this time, Israel has to confront a convoluted quilt of threats of a very broad nature that demand responses across the whole spectrum of modern conflict. Some have been present since Independence, some others are new and others are still under formation. More than speaking about a “threat,” we should more properly talk about “multiple threats” interrelated and influencing one another, so that they cannot be tackled in isolation.

The present situation has to be analyzed against the backdrop of a massive presence of United States troops in the Middle East that has shaken the regional balance of power and that impinges on the strategic options of all the other players, both imposing limitations and opening new opportunities. How Israel decides to resolve its strategic conundrum will depend on the strategy America will adopt for the region.

Some of the challenges that configure the strategic environment are of military nature and can be dealt with using the military element of national power. Some others

are of a totally different nature and come to confirm the need to consider non military options in their resolution.

The Conventional Threat. Leaving aside the recent and limited 2006 34-day war with Hezbollah, halfway between conventional and irregular warfare, Israel has not fought a conventional war since 1982, that is, more than twenty years ago. Since then, several factors like the superiority of the Israeli conventional forces, probably reinforced with a nuclear capability, the demise of the Soviet Union or the American presence in the Gulf region since the early 1990s, have precluded the possibility of another conventional conflict between Israel and its neighbors. Moreover, Israel has signed peace agreements with two nations: Egypt and Jordan, which has reduced the risk of conventional attack.

Admittedly, the chances of any Arab state or an Arab coalition launching a conventional attack against Israel are to be considered as low today. That does not mean, however, that the possibility can be dismissed altogether, particularly in the fluid environment of the Middle East and if we consider the history of the region is one of many wars between Israel and the Arab world. For many reasons, all the Arab nations and Iran are in a “prerevolutionary” state, what means that they can easily fall prey to revolutions that can drastically change the outlook of the region, turning it more hostile to Israel.⁵⁴ Under such circumstances, a conventional attack could be possible, no matter how irrational we can consider it. The possibility includes the nations that have signed peace treaties with Israel.

The Insurgencies: Hezbollah and Hamas. Hezbollah, a movement of Shi'a orientation supported and funded by Iran, was founded in the mid-1980s, partly as a

reaction to the Israeli occupation of Lebanon during Operation “Peace for Galilee.”⁵⁵ In its programmatic document “Downtrodden in Lebanon and in the World” (1985), the movement declares its goals of replacing Western ideas by Islam as a form of governance⁵⁶ and of obliterating Israel from existence and liberating “venerable Jerusalem from the talons of occupation.”⁵⁷ For tactical reasons it has adopted the more pragmatic position of participating in the Lebanese political life, with a lot of success⁵⁸ and without revoking its programmatic objectives. In fact, rather than actively pursuing a revolution, Hezbollah now is seeking to subvert the rules of the game from inside.⁵⁹ With the financial support of Iran, Hezbollah has developed a very intense program of reconstruction and social support to the Shi’a population of Lebanon, which has earned the movement a very good reputation within the country.

After the 2006 war, Hezbollah has been living a sweet moment. Certainly, the war diminished its military capability, although probably not so much as many would desire.⁶⁰ If the period of quiet with Israel persists, Hezbollah may soon not only regain the pre-war levels but improve them.⁶¹ More importantly, Hezbollah emerged from the war as the real victor with its legitimacy reinforced after having been the only force confronting Israel during its occupation of Southern Lebanon. This outcome raised Shi’a power within a Lebanon more divided and polarized along confessional lines⁶² that at any time since its civil war. After the war, Hezbollah continues to use the Israeli occupation of Shebaa farms to cement the Shi’ite population in Lebanon around its program.

Thus, far from being resolved, a new conflict with Hezbollah will likely recur in the future if the current conditions persist, and despite the presence of UNIFIL along the

Blue Line.⁶³ It is difficult to predict the shape this future confrontation may have.

Experience gathered during the 2006 war shows for many that Hezbollah is departing from the asymmetric, guerrilla warfare type of movement towards a conventional model.⁶⁴

Although its base is not Shi'a but Sunni, Hamas shares some similarities with Hezbollah. The movement was born during the first Intifada in 1987 as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Its members are mainly Palestinian refugees of Gaza. Like Hezbollah, Hamas actively pursues Islamization and the elimination of Israel and has developed an extensive network of social support which gives it prestige and massive popular support. At the moment of its foundation, Hamas employed non-violent tactics. However, it started soon to make extensive use of terrorist and insurgency tactics, including the use of suicide terrorists, considered as "shuhada," or martyrs. Since the Intifada, Hamas has competed with the secular movement Fatah for the support of the Palestinians, winning a landslide victory over the latter in the 2006 elections to the Palestinian National Authority. Since then, both factions are involved in an internal civil war over the legitimacy to represent the Palestinian people. In this struggle, Hamas has totally replaced Fatah in Gaza. Like Hezbollah, the movement is backed by Iran and Syria, with the latter last country harboring the headquarters of the group.

Iran. Iran is probably the main single element of concern for policy-makers in Israel today. Since its independence, Iran has been struggling to be recognized as the regional power it believes it is because of its particular conditions. The country's efforts to reassert its position in the Middle East have led it to confrontation with other countries, and even to war, as the eight-year war with Iraq (1980-1988) shows. The

triumph of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 came to add an ideological element to the Iranian pretensions. Iran started to seek the expansion of the Shi'a branch of Islam and to use an inflammatory rhetoric calling for the destruction of Israel that translated into active support to proxies in Lebanon and Palestine like Hezbollah and Hamas, both of them declared enemies of Israel.

The disclosure of the Iranian nuclear program has introduced a new element in the Israeli security equation. The possibility that Iran develops a deliverable nuclear bomb is, by far, the most dangerous challenge Israel has faced since its independence because of its potential to make the annihilation of Israel a reality. According to the information available, the program would be based on some key facilities like a nuclear plant in Busher, not yet operational, a uranium enrichment facility in Natanz, and a heavy water production plant in Arak. A myriad of other facilities, some of them unknown to the international community and geographically dispersed to diminish their vulnerability,⁶⁵ would complete the network. A program based on North Korean technology that developed vectors to deliver nuclear warheads⁶⁶ completes the endeavor.

The possession of a nuclear arsenal is an old Iranian aspiration that started under the Pahlavi regime and continued after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. In 2002, some details of the Iranian nuclear program surfaced,⁶⁷ but it probably was making progress covertly for twenty years.⁶⁸ Its purpose remains unclear. Iran consistently claims its right to conduct research in this field and to enrich uranium⁶⁹ and denies the program's military nature, even if the steps we know the country is taking belie that

claim. Besides, it is difficult to understand why a nation with such vast natural energy resources needs to develop such a program.

Admitting then the military character of the Iranian nuclear program and in lack of official recognition, we cannot but speculate as to what its real intentions are. The main reason why Iran is developing nuclear weapons would be the need to assert its role as regional power. Having nuclear weapons would be a matter of prestige and a way to gain decisive leverage in the international arena and upon other regional competitors like the Gulf countries that look upon Iran with suspicion. The possession of a nuclear arsenal would also enhance its role as standard-bearer of the international expansion of the Shi'a cause. The desire to deter a potential attack from Israel or the United States constitutes indeed another strong motivation for Iran to develop its own nuclear weapons. By making more difficult an eventual strike, or even invasion, from any of these countries, Iran would have more leeway to pursue its dreams of regional hegemony. Finally, on a more irrational key, it is also possible that Iran wants to use the nuclear capability in an offensive way, threatening to use the weapon against its rivals or enemies, even without provocation or as a retaliatory measure.⁷⁰

For Iran, pursuing the nuclear program is both an existential need and a matter of prestige. Therefore, believing that pressure or sanctions may force Iran to give up its efforts may be not very realistic, since it could be perceived as the regime accepting the prevailing world order, showing a docility and vulnerability that could prove fatal.⁷¹

It is unclear how far Iran is from actually acquiring nuclear weapons capability. Predictions have been made in the past that have proven to be inaccurate when the predicted deadline was passed without materialization of the threat.⁷² To begin with, we

cannot rule out the possibility of Iran focusing on achieving the elements necessary to a bomb and then stopping short of physically producing it until the circumstances so dictate. Iran could be very close to this. If, on the contrary, Iran wants to develop a complete bomb, then it is estimated to need something between five to nine years,⁷³ if not less.

An important part of the discussion about the Iranian nuclear program refers to the use the regime can make of the weapon once it has achieved it. The possibilities depend on whether Iran behaves as a “rational” player or not. Considering rationality as the likely behavior, Iran is expected to use restraint and make a defensive use of the weapon. It could show a more aggressive attitude towards its neighbors without crossing a threshold that would lead to an Israeli or American response. After all, and despite the rhetoric of the ayatollahs, Israel’s destruction is not a vital interest for Iran.⁷⁴ By the same token, it is highly unlikely that Iran would provide nuclear weapons to any of its proxies like Hezbollah and Hamas, because any weapon of mass destruction use could very easily be traced back to Iran, probably leading to a nuclear retaliation upon its territory.

Even if we consider rationality as the most likely option, we cannot exclude irrationality altogether. It is unlikely, but it may occur under certain circumstances like a perceived existential threat to the regime, or in the case of an uncontrolled group toppling the current leadership. There is also a risk of nuclear material escaping control in the case of internal unrest leading to a vacuum in power. Then, the dynamics of the region would certainly lead to a nuclear race with other countries trying to develop their own nuclear programs. The question of the “rationality” or “irrationality” of the Iranian

leadership is for Israel of secondary importance, since it must consider this threat as very real and act accordingly because of the risk the threat poses to its existence.

The Demographic Bomb. Although not of military nature, the disadvantageous regional demographic balance between Israelis and Arabs in Palestine is a threat and as such, requires the attention of the Israeli decision-makers if they want to bring Israel closer to its strategic objective.

Population figures vary depending on the source. According to the Israeli census the total population living between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River would be 9.4 million, with about 5.4 million Arabs, of which some 2.4 million would live in the West Bank and Gaza, which leaves the number of Israeli Arabs as some 3 million versus 5.4 million Jews.⁷⁵ If we consider that the birth rate of Israeli Jewish women is of 2.7 children per woman versus 4.7 for Arab women,⁷⁶ we can make the projection that the current Jewish majority of 56 percent of the population may fall to 47 percent in 2020 and to 37 percent by 2050.⁷⁷ This situation is perceived by most Israelis as a threat because a sufficient Arab minority can water down the vital interest of maintaining Israel as a Jewish state, ultimately meaning the end of the Zionist dream.

There is no easy solution to this riddle. Its recognition has led the Israeli authorities to abandon any annexation policy over the Occupied Territories that would worsen the current demographic balance. However, that does not imply that Israel is ready to relinquish control of all of the West Bank, especially if we consider the estimated 122,000 Jewish settlers living in it.⁷⁸ The obvious solution of population exchange or of forced population transfers to Jordan or other Arab countries is unacceptable for a democracy from the point of view of human rights and is excluded,

although it receives support from Jewish minorities. Instead, Israel advocates a two-state option that takes into account the “defensible borders” concept. It is also implementing other measures like the issuance of a directive in 2002, later a law that freezes the naturalization of Palestinians of the Occupied Territories living in Israel as spouses of Israeli citizens.⁷⁹

Jewish immigration, a course of action Israel has pursued since the foundation of the state, offers some hope to change the demographic balance in immigration,⁸⁰ although the possibilities of this system are very limited because of the dwindling bulge of the 10 million Jews living outside of Israel willing to immigrate into Israel. Only another wave of anti-Semitism or harsh economic conditions in the host nation would make some Jews consider immigration. But that possibility is not near the horizon.

The Problem of Water. On top of the security challenges we have described, Israel happens to be located in one of the regions with the least water resources in the world. According to a 1995 report of the World Bank, the Middle East and North Africa countries are home to 5 percent of the world’s population but have less than 1 percent of the world’s renewable fresh water.⁸¹ This regional picture is particularly severe in Palestine. Israel’s annual water consumption is some 580 billion gallons, and its water reserves total only about 450 billion gallons.⁸² The demographic projections we have outlined in the previous paragraph indicate that, if nothing is done to solve it, the problem will surely worsen.

The problem is not limited to the chronic water scarcity of the region, a major difficulty in itself. Israel should share the water with the Palestinians and with the neighboring countries. And, to further complicate the issue, some of the Israeli water

sources are astride the 1967 Green Line.⁸³ All this come to aggravate the problem to the point of making it a real security threat for Israel.

All the factors here delineated clearly indicate that the necessity to ensure the water supply the country needs to live and sustain its economic growth is a permanent requirement of any Israeli security strategy. Water has been in the origin of some of the wars Israel has waged with its neighbors. But, interestingly enough, in none of those wars have the warring parties made use of water as a weapon. It is also clear that Israel will oppose territorial concessions or exchanges for as long as it sees its water supply in jeopardy.

Several different solutions may contribute to mitigate this problem. But the first and most important one should be a comprehensive regional agreement on water sharing that addresses the legitimate needs of all players, and that includes their projections for future development. Fortunately, all nations involved recognize the need to find a solution acceptable to all as the inclusion of clauses related to water sharing in the peace agreement Israel signed with Jordan and the Oslo Accords have recognized. No matter what solutions the nations find separately, no solution will be met without regional cooperation.

This review of the security environment clearly illustrates the varied nature of the many challenges that threaten the Israeli security, the resolution of which demands a good deal of creative thinking from the Israeli policy-makers, who should rise above purely military responses to design a broader design that combines all instruments of the national power as I am going to suggest now.

The Israeli Strategic Options

It is certainly difficult to prescribe clear-cut solutions to the security situation Israel has to face simply because they just do not exist. The existence of the state has been threatened since the very moment of its independence. All the attempts since then to erase Israel from the map have failed. For some, that would prove the success of the Israeli strategy. However, the question is whether the military victories have actually brought Israel closer to the strategic objective that was defined at the start as “Complete the construction of Israel in Palestine as a Jewish state. Ensure its survival as a Jewish, democratic and secular state and member of the International Community behind safe and stable borders.”

As a first conclusion, Israel should formalize its strategy formulation process at the political level and clearly define the strategic objective the country is pursuing. Then, it should delineate a comprehensive security strategy that synergizes all elements of the national power under political direction. Examples like the 2006 War in Lebanon show the disconnection between the political and the military levels.⁸⁴ The challenge is doing it without adding an unnecessary and cumbersome bureaucracy that hampers swift decision-making.

The Israeli strategic design has to be far-sighted, daring and realistic. It has to recognize that the implementation of lasting solutions for the strategic problems requires a long time and that hastily taken solutions, although apparently successful, may backfire with time and have long-term second order effects. It should be daring and not conditioned to short-sighted concerns, yet ready to make painful tactical concessions for the sake of a higher benefit. It should also be realistic, taking into account how much the Israeli public is ready to endure and cognizant of the red lines it is not prepared to cross.

Any Israeli strategy should always take into account the “domestic front” and the need to rally around as much domestic support as possible. This principle, basic in any democracy, is particularly important in Israel, where the society is internally divided along different lines that are reflected in the composition of the Knesset and of the Government. History has shown how failures to recognize the importance of this principle have led to electoral defeats or to public demands for changes in policy. Of note here is the fact that, statistically, a consistent majority of the Jewish population considers the preservation of the Jewish nature of the state as the most important value of Israel, well ahead the construction of a “Greater Israel,”⁸⁵ which indicates a certain preference for the idea of trading land for peace.

In order to have better chances of success, Israel would have to engage in a two-track strategy, focusing on the long term without neglecting the need to tackle (and win) the current battle, but giving preeminence to actions oriented to reach the final, long-term strategic objective we defined at the beginning of this paper. Actions on the “fast-track” of the short term need to keep the final objective in sight so as not to impair its attainment. Arguably, had this principle been kept in mind when Hezbollah kidnapped two IDF soldiers in 2006, the result of the crisis that ensued could have been different and more beneficial for Israel. Instead, Israel is struggling today to restore the credibility of the IDF, damaged by this ill-designed war.

I am not suggesting here that Israel should renounce the use of military power. On the contrary, non-military strategic responses will be credible only if Israel continues applying the strategic principles we have described earlier and unhesitatingly but wisely

makes use of its military, so as to make clear to its enemies that peace is the only solution.

For all the emphasis that Israeli strategists place on the idea that Israel has to be able to solve its security problems by itself, without having to rely on external support, the truth is that the dimensions of the problem make that impracticable. For example, no military option against the Iranian nuclear program will be feasible unless it has been previously cleared with the United States. Likewise, the feasibility of some strategic options like sanctions, regional agreements on resources, etc. require a broad multinational consensus and support if an effective and lasting solution is to be reached. Only a decided commitment of the United States to a lasting peace in the region will make peace possible.

Any Israeli strategic design will have to recognize this reality. Of course, Israel should keep intact its right to self-defense and to act unilaterally whenever this democracy sees its national security in danger. But this factor will always have to be a part of the Israeli security equation, and its impact will always have to be assessed. This is not new. After all, only this consideration led Israel to exercise restraint when, in 1991, Saddam Hussein decided to harass Israel with Scud missiles in an effort to break the coalition the United States built to restore Kuwaiti sovereignty.

The need to prevail through quality continues to be valid in the present strategic environment and will remain so in the foreseeable future. Maintaining a nuclear monopoly will continue to be essential in the Israeli security equation. For similar reasons, the preservation of the technological superiority in the conventional field is equally important for Israel. Israel continues to be surrounded by hostile or, at least,

unfriendly countries, not to forget the existence of a second ring of equally hostile states like Iran. With some of them, Israel is technically at war. With two of them, it has signed peace agreements. But even in the case of Egypt and Jordan, peace is somewhat fragile, because of the regular vilification of Israel in the media of these nations that make peace unacceptable to the general public and because, as happens with many Middle East nations, the socioeconomic conditions make them easy prey to revolutions seeking to overturn the political status.⁸⁶ The power emerging from such revolutions could well not honor the peace agreements and reopen hostilities towards Israel. Although admittedly this possibility is unlikely today, it cannot be excluded altogether. Therefore Israel believes it needs to maintain a significant conventional edge that if deconstructed, cannot be easily rebuilt.

Furthermore, the last 2006 War has shown that Hezbollah is progressively adopting the shape and procedures of regular armies,⁸⁷ moving away from the insurgency model towards a state-like one, a pattern imitated by other groups like Hamas.⁸⁸ It might therefore be a mistake to rearrange and reequip the IDF to specifically fight an insurgency. The IDF should, instead, maintain its conventional capability, establishing training priorities as a function of the threat perceived as most urgent and dangerous and adapting to improve its effectiveness without neglecting training for conventional warfare. In this line, despite the continued need to maintain the offensive spirit as its hallmark, the IDF should make progress on theater defense systems like the “Arrow” to improve early warning, detection and destruction capabilities vis-à-vis the threat of intermediate range or cruise missiles coming from Iran. It should also increase the survivability of the IDF and of the key nodes of the decision-making establishment in

face of a nuclear attack. Particularly important in this field are the civil defense system, as well as the capability to respond to a nuclear attack and of mobilizing reserves in the chaotic environment that would ensue in the event of a nuclear strike on the country. In the current strategic environment, the doctrines of pre-emptive war doctrine and forward defense remain extant.

Iran is the hub of the Israeli security conundrum. As has been seen, this country poses a direct military threat to Israel, even if it is geographically distant to Palestine. First and foremost, it is the power behind the scenes supporting Syria and its anti-Israeli policy and groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Iran is also trying to expand the influence of Shi'ism in the region, using to do that a very inflamed anti-Israeli rhetoric. Last, its regional policy and influence make Iran a major destabilizing factor, which complicates the resolution of other regional problems. Therefore, any far-sighted strategy designed to bring more peace and stability to the region has to aim at neutralizing the negative influence of this key player.

The very magnitude of the problem makes it impossible for Israel to solve it alone. More than in any other case, the application of some of the permanent principles we have defined is essential. Israel needs the decisive commitment of the United States which in turn, demands the support of the International Community to foil the Iranian influence.⁸⁹

The Iranian concern is shared by other nations of the region. It would be reasonable for Israel to build an "ad-hoc" coalition with those countries to counter this threat. In doing so, Israel has to be particularly careful so as not to make the leaders of

these countries appear as the champions of Israel's interests, something that would be clearly unacceptable for their subjects.

The most notorious element of the Israeli strategy for Iran should be the neutralization of a nuclear program that poses an existential threat for Israel. It is true that a number of reasons make questionable the efficacy of a military strike into Iran.⁹⁰ The challenges of such an option are so big that they make any other option preferable. A "stick and carrots" policy looks here as the more convenient to persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear program or, at least, to make it transparent to the IAEA regime. That solution, though, requires international consensus and time that Iran may use to continue making progress towards its objective, not to mention the fact that such policies fall more upon the shoulders of the civilian population than on the leadership and have a potential to backfire. Israel could eventually accept this solution, but only with a clear calendar, lest the negotiations drag on endlessly. Israel has also to make clear that, for the sake of its right to self-defense, the military strike will always be an option. In this case, it should try to involve the United States, whose support or, at least, acquiescence would be needed so dearly in this case. And Israel should aim at inflicting so much pain to the Iranian leadership as to confront it with the choice of either giving up the program or facing destruction.⁹¹

If the Iranian nuclear program is assessed to be the most dangerous threat to Israeli security, the one coming from groups like Hezbollah and Hamas is maybe the most imminent. Here, again, Iran and Syria are the key players through the support they render to both groups.

As I have already suggested, Israel should implement a two-track strategy. It should affirm its military dominance to persuade the insurgents that they will never impose their will militarily. Admittedly, the development of the 2006 War put into question the deterrent credibility of the IDF, so the restoration of this credibility became essential. The possibility that Israel launched operation “Cast Lead” with this idea in mind cannot be excluded.

While fighting the insurgency, Israel should concentrate its strategic efforts on the long term, mostly through the use of diplomacy and, again, with the decided commitment of the United States to a renewed Peace Process that today seems particularly far away. Iran and Syria should be at the heart of these efforts, whose goal should be depriving the insurgents from the material and ideological support they receive from these countries.

To achieve that, it will be extremely important to introduce a wedge in the Syria-Iran alliance to isolate the latter. Although difficult, it is feasible. Getting Syria to agree to break with Iran and sign a Peace Agreement with Israel will certainly require some painful concessions. For example, Israel would have to recognize the existence of a Syrian sphere of influence in Lebanon. It should also be ready to concede the sovereignty of the Golan Heights and the Shebaa farms. A possible formula could be based on a demilitarization of the Golan Heights that takes into consideration the right of Israel to maintain early warning stations in the area. A future agreement on the Golan Heights should include clauses to prevent use of Syria as a safe haven for Hamas and Hezbollah and to share the waters of the Hasbani, Baniyas and Dan Rivers. Equally important would be a Syrian commitment not to interfere in the political life of Lebanon

and probably the deployment of a robust and extended multinational force to verify compliance with the terms of the agreement. The multinational force should be credible to all parties and the possibility of entrusting it to the NATO could be considered. The release of certain Hezbollah prisoners could also be considered. In this way, Hezbollah would be deprived of the reason it continuously exhibits to justify animosity towards Israel.

On a different note, the problem of the chronic water scarcity of this region comes to reinforce the need for a dual-approach strategy. On the one hand, Israel should concentrate in unilateral solutions like the improvement of infrastructure, a better management of the available water or the search of new sources. On the other hand, a regional approach to find a just water-sharing system is imperative if a lasting solution to the problem is to be found.

The need to control sources of water directly impinges on Israeli strategic options. Even with a comprehensive agreement on water, it is highly unlikely that Israel agrees to give up land on the West Bank or the Golan Heights unless it finds new sources of water. But, what is clear is that without such an agreement, the possibilities for that arrangement to happen equal to zero. As we saw earlier, all security problems are interconnected.

The demographic balance is another issue where the connection with the rest of the threats is clear. One of the measures that would contribute to the neutralization of the insurgency would be agreeing on the return of refugees. But that would dramatically change the ethnic balance within Israel to the point of jeopardizing the very idea of a Jewish state. Therefore, it is out of the question. Rather, the efforts should be oriented

at the option that some refugees are given full citizenship rights in other nations, namely in Jordan and Egypt. Or, clearly, to pursue the two-states solution, already accepted as the least of two evils by the mainstream opinion in Israel. Coupled with that, and with due respect to human rights, Israel should facilitate voluntary transfers of Arab Israelis outside Israel, even considering eventual territorial exchanges with third parties to give territorial continuity to the new Palestinian state. Beyond that, promotion of “Aliyah” still offers a possibility, although it is very limited due to the reduced bulge of Diaspora Jews and to the growing difficulty to attract volunteers to this project.

Conclusion

The confrontation of the Israeli strategic objective proposed in this paper against the security environment has revealed the complexity of the conundrum that the Israeli policy makers should try to resolve. As it has already been suggested, there is no clear-cut solution to the problem. How can Israel reconcile its intention of completing the construction of a Jewish state for Jews behind defensible borders with the occupation of the West Bank and of the Golan Heights? Is there a way out of this problem? After having carefully analyzed the keys to the current Israeli security environment, I cannot but recognize that I have not found the formula to take Israel to its desired objective and to bring the lasting peace the region needs. After all, the fact that the conflict persists after more than sixty years does not leave much room for optimism. I have been able to identify certain actions that could bring the country somewhat closer to its strategic objective. But, admittedly, that falls far short of Israel reaching it.

Without being pessimistic, I have to conclude that, in the present circumstances, Israel cannot reach its strategic objective as it has been defined in this paper. There is

no way for Israel to complete the construction of the state and remain democratic and Jewish. The territorial construction of Israel can only happen via annexation, something unacceptable for the international community. That annexation would dramatically change the demographic balance in Israel in favor of the Arabs so that, unless drastic and unacceptable measures like deportation of Arabs were taken, the state would become less and less Jewish. To avoid that, Israel would probably have to take some draconian measures like depriving the Arabs of their right to vote or the one to lend military service, something clearly antidemocratic. A non-democratic Israel would probably not count on the support of the United States.

A similar dilemma happens in the case of the Iranian problem. As suggested above, the solution to the threat Iran poses to Israel necessarily requires the active implication of the United States. Whereas for Israel a nuclearized Iran is an existential threat, to the United States it is not. It is therefore unlikely that the latter will support an Israeli offensive action or unilateral action of the former to eliminate such a threat. In fact, the policy of the Obama Administration in this regard seems to favor engagement with Iran. What should then Israel do to thwart a danger that it perceives as existential without alienating American support? There are not many options left. I have already suggested the need to forge regional alliances with some of the nations that feel also threatened, indicating how difficult its implementation is. Ruling out a massive air strike to cripple the Iranian nuclear program, Israel could try to force a change of regime through direct action with special units. But the possibilities that the new regime will be more amenable to Israeli interests are probably low if we consider the support the current regime seems to have. Probably, Israel has no other option as to accommodate

to a new regional landscape in which it no longer has a nuclear monopoly. In this case, the United States should give Israel enough guarantees so as to make futile an eventual Israeli unilateral action. The guarantees should include an American public statement equating aggression to Israel to aggression to the United States.

After all these thoughts, and unless dramatic changes in the situation take place, Israel will only solve its dilemmas by reducing the scope of its strategic objective, renouncing to its total achievement. If Israel wants to remain Jewish and democratic, it will have to give up its pretension to additional territorial gains and prepare itself to give away, at least partially, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. Recent developments like the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the redeployment from Lebanon in 2000 or even the erection of the security barrier would indicate that the Israeli leadership has recognized this fact and is willing to trade land for peace. This is probably not the definitive solution to the problem. But at least, it is the only one that may create the minimum mutual confidence required to bring some peace to the region.

Endnotes

¹ Benny Morris, *1948. The First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven, Yale University, 2008), 397.

² B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York, Meridian, 1991), 322.

³ Gadi Eisenkot, *Israeli Security in the 21st Century: Risks and Opportunities*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, March 20, 1997), 1.

⁴ Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox and Alvin Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy. Rulers, States and War* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 554.

⁵ The interesting topic of determining whether the Israeli strategy is the result of a masterly coordination of all elements of national power or the result of the desultory action of a kitchen cabinet goes well beyond the scope of this paper and would be worth some specific research. Suffice here to reiterate the fact of the inexistence of an officially sanctioned strategy,

so we are forced to deduce what its objective is, based on public statements and on a careful analysis of facts and past actions.

⁶ The question of the definition of the borders of Israel is extremely fascinating. A close study of this topic would take us back to biblical times, to the Kingdoms of David and Solomon and, more recently, to the days after the first World War, when the World Zionist Organization, then headed by Chaim Weizmann, defined the Jewish aspirations for real estate in Palestine, aspirations that go way beyond the current borders of Israel and that have never been rebutted. Unfortunately, the scope of this paper allows us only to delineate the problem, leaving it open for further research.

⁷ “Aliyah” is a Hebrew term meaning literally “ascent” in reference to Mount Zion. It is used as synonymous of “immigration” to Israel.

⁸ Morris, 1948. *The First Arab-Israeli War*, 51.

⁹ Ibid., 84.

¹⁰ Ibid., 191.

¹¹ The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are the result of a long process ended in July 1948 to unify different groups under the authority of the state. The process started in 1920 with the merging of the Hashomer, the Zionist self-defense association, with Jewish units that had fought with the British in World War I to create the Haganah. In 1947, one group of Revisionist inspiration –the Irgun-, and later the LEHI –Freedom Fighters, a splinter movement of the Irgun-, disputed the Haganah the monopoly of military action, embarking on terrorist tactics aimed both against the Arab population and against the British forces in Palestine. This division persisted until unification was traumatically attained in July 1948 after the “Altalena” incident.

¹² Morris, 1948. *The First Arab-Israeli War*, 397.

¹³ Israel occupied all Palestine except the West Bank and Jerusalem, under the control of Transjordan, and the Gaza Strip, that was allocated to Egypt.

¹⁴ In Arabic, “The catastrophe”.

¹⁵ Robert Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1971), 437.

¹⁶ Ibid., 84.

¹⁷ Mordechai Bar-On, *A Never-ending Conflict. A Guide to Israeli Military History* (Westport, CT, Praeger, 2004). 71.

¹⁸ Yuval Steinitz et al., *Defensible Borders for a Lasting Peace* (Jerusalem, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2008), 24.

¹⁹ Israel Tal, *National Security: the Israeli experience* (Greenwood, 2000), 87, <http://psi.praeger.com/doc.aspx?d=/books/dps> (accessed September, 25, 2008).

²⁰ Ibid., 88.

²¹ Moshe Dayan, *Story of My Life* (New York, Da Capo Press, 1976), 185.

²² Zaki Shalon, *Israel's Nuclear Option: Behind the Scenes Diplomacy between Dimona and Washington* (Portland, OR, Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 7. The cooperation ended in 1960 when de Gaulle change French policy to one of strengthened ties with the Arab world.

²³ Ibid., 313.

²⁴ Ibid., 98. It also opened the idea, consecrated in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, of "land for peace" to be used later in the diplomatic arena.

²⁵ During this period, Israel had to contend with the same threat coming from the conventional forces of the Arab nations, either in a "Case all" scenario, as was the case in the Yom Kippur war, or in a more reduced scale, as in the War of Attrition or in the "Peace for Galilee" operation in 1982.

²⁶ The movement, born among the Palestinian refugees in Syria and Jordan grew in influence in this last country, where it started to act as a "state within a state", what eventually led to the Black September incidents of 1970 and to the expulsion of the leaders of the movement to Lebanon, with consequences that would soon emerge.

²⁷ In the economic and diplomatic arenas, Israel saw how its offensive in Africa to build a cordon of friendly nations around the hostile Arab world collapsed when the African states severed their diplomatic relations with Israel. After that, the only significant diplomatic endeavor was the ill-fated attempt to influence the Lebanese elections in 1982 to give the Presidency to Bashir Gemayel, a supportive Maronite that was assassinated that same year, in order to have a friendly state on the Northern border.

²⁸ Tal, *National Security: the Israeli Experience*, 103.

²⁹ Gadi Eisenkot, *Israeli Security in the 21st Century: Risks and Opportunities*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, March 20, 1997), 8.

³⁰ Ibid., 135.

³¹ Bar-On, *A Never-ending Conflict. A Guide to Israeli Military History*, 216.

³² Ibid., 231.

³³ Ibid., 237.

³⁴ Murray, Knox and Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy. Rulers, States and War*, 538.

³⁵ Ibid., 542.

³⁶ Ibid., 570.

- ³⁷ Even in this case, at the tactical level, the IDF units are trained to act offensively.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 73.
- ³⁹ David Ben-Gurion, *Memoirs* (Cleveland, OH, World Publishing, 1970), 72.
- ⁴⁰ This concept of taking the war to enemy territory does not only serve the objective of gaining necessary strategic depth. It also gives Israel important bargaining chips to be used in political settlements and supports eventual territorial extension of the state, arguably an objective of the Israeli strategy to be implemented when feasible.
- ⁴¹ Efraim Karsh, ed., *Between War and Peace. Dilemmas of Israeli Security* (London, Frank Cass, 1996), 173.
- ⁴² Yuval Steinitz et al., *Defensible Borders for a Lasting Peace*, 7.
- ⁴³ Isabel Kershner, *Barrier* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 2.
- ⁴⁴ Guy Ben-Porat et al., *Israel since 1980* (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 171.
- ⁴⁵ *Israel Central Bureau of Statistics*, <http://www1.cbs.gov.il> (accessed November 11, 2008).
- ⁴⁶ The restraint the Israelis showed at the end of the 1973 War, yielding to American pressures and not destroying the Egyptian Third Army encircled by the IDF, could be a case in point to illustrate how international pressures may have a significant influence in the outcome of a conflict.
- ⁴⁷ Kenneth M. Pollack, *A Path Out of the Desert. A Grand Strategy for America in the Middle East* (New York, Random House, 2008), 24.
- ⁴⁸ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 49.
- ⁴⁹ Murray, Knox and Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy. Rulers, States and War*, 573.
- ⁵⁰ Karsh, ed., *Between War and Peace. Dilemmas of Israeli Security*, 168.
- ⁵¹ Steinitz et al., *Defensible Borders for a Lasting Peace*, 7.
- ⁵² Ibid., 3.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 2.
- ⁵⁴ Pollack, *A Path Out of the Desert. A Grand Strategy for America in the Middle East*, 146.

⁵⁵ Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University, 2007), 33.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁸ In the elections of 1992, configured as a political party, Hezbollah and its non-Shiite allies captured twelve seats of the parliament. In 2000, under campaign slogans such as: "They resist with your blood, resist with your vote", an Amal-Hezbollah alliance won more than 25 percent of the seats in the Parliament. The campaign depicted the group as the only resistance movement actively opposing Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon. In the 2005 elections the shared ticket Amal-Hezbollah won thirty-five seats.

⁵⁹ In May 2008, Hezbollah challenged the government's authority when it tried to outlaw the group's private telephone network and reassign Beirut airport's security chief, who is close to the opposition. Hezbollah used its power to force an agreement in Doha to unblock the election of a new President by which the Party would obtain a number of seats in a national unity cabinet giving veto power. Very likely, Hezbollah is going to use this power to change the electoral system in a way that gives it more representation. Clearly, we are witnessing a progressive, peaceful revolution in Lebanon that may change the national political landscape in a way unfavorable to Israel interests. The attitude of a part of the International Community, namely the European Union, refusing to consider Hezbollah a terrorist group, is an element of dissension that is benefitting this Party.

⁶⁰ Anthony H. Cordesman, George Sullivan and William D. Sullivan, *Lessons of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War* (Washington D.C., The CSIS Press, 2007), 29. The authors sustain that this is partly due to ill-planning overconfident on the possibilities of the IAF. As is frequently the case in asymmetric conflicts, BDA is extremely difficult and often not reliable. The authors estimate that more than seventy per cent of the Hezbollah fighters had survived the fight and that resupplies have brought the group back close to the pre-war situation.

⁶¹ Stephen Biddle and Jeffrey A. Friedman, *The 2006 Lebanon Campaign and the Future of warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy*, (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, September 2008), 4. Hezbollah would be using the current period of peace to replenish and update its arsenal. Apparently, it is acquiring sophisticated material that dramatically improves its intelligence gathering and air defense capabilities, as well as its capability to reach the Israeli hinterland with rockets and missiles every time with longer ranges. The party is also making masterly use of the Internet and the media to present its case to a variety of audiences, local and foreign alike.

⁶² Cordesman, Sullivan and Sullivan, *Lessons of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War*, 27.

⁶³ The "Blue Line" is the name given to the border demarcation the United Nations established in 2000 to verify Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁶ The program would be centered on the Shahab-3 missile, based on the North-Korean “Nodong” missile. Apparently, Iran is developing a more sophisticated missile, the Shahab-4, with a range of around 1,800 miles, which would be sufficient to reach targets as far as Berlin.

⁶⁷ Jerome R. Corsi, *Atomic Iran. How the Terrorist Regime Bought the Bomb and American Politicians* (Nashville, WND Books, 2005), 36.

⁶⁸ Mitchell G. Bard, *Will Israel Survive?* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 73.

⁶⁹ Corsi, *Atomic Iran. How the Terrorist Regime Bought the Bomb and American Politicians*, 31.

⁷⁰ Ephraim Kam, ed., *Israel and a Nuclear Iran: Implications for Arms Control, Deterrence and Defense* (Institute for National Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv, 2008), 23.

⁷¹ Brig. Gen (ret.) Yossi Kupperwasser, “Halting Iran’s Nuclear Weapons Program: Iranian Vulnerabilities and Western Policy Options”, *Strategic Perspectives*, no. 1 (2007): 5.

⁷² Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iran’s Developing Military Capabilities* (Washington D.C., The CSIS Press, 2005), 125.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷⁴ Ephraim Kam, *A Nuclear Iran: What Does it Mean, and What Can Be Done* (Tel Aviv, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2007), 51.

⁷⁵ Bard, *Will Israel Survive?*, 55.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁷⁸ Ben-Porat et al., *Israel since 1980*, 65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸³ Israel draws water basically from three different sources: the Jordan-Yarmouk system that includes not only these rivers themselves, but also Lake Kinneret and the rivers that flow into it from the North –Hasbani, Dan and Banias-. This complex puts Israel in direct contest for water with Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, particularly with the latter, since all the rivers of the system ultimately flow from the Mount Hermon and the Golan Heights. The second source is the Coastal Aquifer, running along the Israeli coast from Haifa southwards into the Gaza Strip. The third is the Mountain Aquifer literally astride the Green Line between Israel and the West Bank.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁵ Yehuda Ben Meir and Dafna Shaked, *The People Speak: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security*, (Tel Aviv, Institute for National Strategic Studies, May 2007), 36.

⁸⁶ Pollack, *A Path Out of the Desert. A Grand Strategy for America in the Middle East*, 146.

⁸⁷ Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, December 2007), 35.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁸⁹ From this perspective, the announcement that President-elect Obama making clear that an attack on Israel by Tehran would result in a devastating U.S. nuclear response against Iran is a step in this direction, although to some, it could suggest that the American administration is ready to accommodate to a nuclear Iran.

⁹⁰ Among the difficulties of a military solution we can enumerate some as the lack of accurate intelligence about the real dimensions and status of the nuclear program, apparently dispersed across the country and concealed to a great extent, the possibilities of nuclear elements running out of international control if the regime is toppled and no clear replacement is in place, the possibility that Iran reacts to an Israeli strike attacking United States interests in Iraq and Afghanistan, the possibility of the conflict spilling into other countries, particularly into Pakistan, the need to conduct on-flight refueling, the protection of many of the targets, the need to overfly a region under the control of the United States military, the difficulty to conduct Battle Damage Assessment and to perform a second strike should it is necessary, etc.

⁹¹ Kupperwasser, "Halting Iran's Nuclear Weapons Program: Iranian Vulnerabilities and Western Policy Options": 17.