Israeli Security Doctrine between the Thirst for Exceptionalism and Demands for Normalcy[1]

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Israeli security has been invoked time and again to explain Israeli behavior and justify Israeli actions vis-à-vis neighboring states and peoples. Yet there have been few insights into the manner in which Israeli security doctrine[3] has been formulated, the various factors that have shaped and influenced it, and the events that have re-shaped it over the years.

Since 1991, Israel's regional standing and relations with Arab states and other actors have undergone major changes, owing in part to a number of events, chief among them the Gulf War (1990–1991), the September 11 2001 events in the US, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the capture of three Israeli soldiers in June–July 2006 and subsequent conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon. How have events in the region and beyond impacted Israeli strategic and security thinking? And how has Israeli security thinking in turn impacted the course of events in the region, as well as relations between the various state and non-state actors? It is difficult to assess let alone prove that there is a causal relationship between any of these events. Yet assessing ways in which they may potentially to provoke or encourage shifts in policies would increase our understanding of at least some aspects of the dynamics of Israeli security doctrine and appreciate its domestic, regional, and global determinants. In this respect, an examination of the historical record of Israeli security doctrine would enable one to assess the resilience of the doctrine in, as well as its adaptation and transformation in response to, both periods of full-scale war as well as of constant low-scale conflict. This paper examined both the historical and

contemporary nature of Israeli policies, with emphasis on key elements such as: existential threats, wars of choice, unilateralism, and the war on terror.

Demise of the Existential Threat

Historically, Israel's security doctrine was based on the assumption that Israel was engaged in a struggle for its survival. This view comprises not only an assessment of Arab attitudes towards Israel, but also a national (or ethno-religious) consciousness and reference to the broader historical predicament of Jews and their continuous collective struggle for survival.[4]

The 1948 war, despite bringing about a decisive victory against the Arab armies, nevertheless did not bring peace to Israel. On the contrary, it resulted in a series of coups and a subsequent alignment of Syria and Egypt along the Soviet axis (Yaniv 1993, 5). In terms of security, the 1948 war was not without its lessons for the Israelis. According to Israel Tal, the Vice Chief of the General Staff of the IDF in 1973, one of the primary lessons that were learned from the 1948 experience was the importance of "offensive as a basic strategy, reliance on assault power, and eventually the doctrine of preemptive attack and taking the fighting into enemy territory" (2000, 121–122).

In the first two and a half decades the Arab–Israeli conflict, the threat to the State of Israel emanated primarily from regular Arab armies, which were *quantitatively* superior to Israel and therefore may have indeed posed an existential threat. To offset the asymmetry, Israel's focus throughout this period was on the acquisition of *qualitative* superiority. Furthermore, individual acts of infiltration were met by disproportionate responses;[5] the aim of which was to force upon the Arabs the conviction that violence and attrition would not bring about a change in the status quo, effectively erecting a "wall" of deterrence, aided by Arab regimes' fears of domestic instability which might ensue from reprisals. In short, these attacks contributed to Israel's "deterrent image" (Tal 2000, 125–126). Moreover, the assumption was that successive costly defeats would bring about political change in the Arab world (Lustick 1996, 16).

The 1956 Israeli (with France and Britain) initiated conflict serves as a clear example of Israel's attempt to polish its deterrent power (Tal 2000, 129). Yet if Israel's actions in 1956 had earned it a military victory, the ensuing political situation gave Egypt the upper hand. This was to be Israel's first – but not last – encounter with the limits of military power. In many respects, the 1967 campaign was a correction of the mistakes of 1956, in terms of the convergence of military objectives and plans on the one hand, and political calculations on the other. The war was also the first time that Israel would put into practice its newly-

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[4]   Joseph Adler sums up this predicament as "survival at the edge of the existential abyss" (Adler 1994, 231).

[5]   One example is the Qibya massacre, which occurred on 14–15 October, 1953. For details see: Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: Norton, 2001), 90–93.

formulated security doctrine against multiple confrontation states (as opposed to the 1956 campaign solely against Egypt). The components of this campaign were: pre-emption; capture of territory; and a quick war (Tal 2000, 139).

Thus, post-1967 the concept of strategic depth became the dominant element in Israeli security thinking. This aspiration for maintenance of occupied territories was rooted in the quest to strengthen the military's maneuverability and the country's ability to survive a surprise attack and mobilize the army to deal a second blow.

The feelings of invincibility that followed the victory of 1967 brought about unwillingness on the part of Israel to accommodate the voices in the Arab world that had become convinced of its invincibility.[6] Moreover, the successful achievement of strategic depth blinded Israel to the necessity of adjusting and reformulating not only its foreign policy but also its security doctrine, a failure that would exact a not insignificant price from Israel in 1973.

Subsequent to the 1973 war, Israel entered a new era. The four successive defeats of Arab armies in twenty-five years eroded Arab states' ability to pursue any serious strategies to destroy Israel or carry out large-scale conventional attacks against it. The decline of the conventional threat, especially in the wake of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979, limited Israel's ability to market its case in the international arena as being exceptional,[7] a claim that would have justified the extraordinary measures and rejectionist policies it would continue to pursue in its dealings with Arab states and the Palestinians. Moreover, the neutralization of one of the biggest and potentially dangerous adversaries – Egypt – boosted Israel's security and strengthened its strategic and political position. The Camp David peace accords with Israel isolated Egypt from other Arab states and encouraged Israel to pursue the idea of separate agreements as a countermeasure to the Arab insistence on a comprehensive settlement of the conflict. The legacy of the 1973 war, however, was far from entirely positive. Israeli security policy had, prior to 1973, emphasized the idea of self-reliance. Post-1973, however, Israel's increased dependence on the United States, militarily and politically, was consecrated. Notwithstanding this de facto dependence relationship, Israeli leaders were wary of increasing the state's dependence on the United States; this wariness, along with a combination of other factors, reduced the appeal of "preventive" war (Yaniv 1993, 40).

From the perspective of Israeli security, the post-1973 period was one of decline if not complete the complete removal of the idea of an existenti-

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6   This was a clear violation of the concept of the "Iron Wall." See Ian Lustick, "To Build and to Be Built By: Israel and the Hidden Logic of the Iron Wall," *Israel Studies* 1.1 (Spring 1996): 196–223.

7   For a thorough discussion of the claim that Israel's national security predicament is exceptional, see Gil Merom, "Israel's National Security and the Myth of Exceptionalism," *Political Science Quarterly* 114.3 (Autumn 1999): 409–434.

al threat.[8] Furthermore, chief among the lessons learnt from the war was the burdensome nature of such immense a strategic depth as Israel had acquired in 1967, which had thinned Israeli troop concentration and strained Israeli forces' operative maneuverability and flexibility. Notwithstanding these negative aspects of territorial conquest and maintenance of occupation, the idea that occupied territory could be used as a bargaining chip for normalization of ties and neutralization of threats by diplomatic means – namely the "land for peace" concept – retained its centrality in Israeli strategy. The 1973 war also brought about a change in the nature of Israel's interest in the occupied territories. Whereas these territories, perhaps with the exception of East Jerusalem, had previously been viewed from a strategic-security perspective, in the post-1973 era they acquired an additional – ideological and religious – angle. The concept of the State of Israel gave way to the idea of the Land of Israel. Prior to 1973, only few settlements were established in the territories occupied in 1967. The large-scale settlement drive began after 1973[9], and gained further momentum with the rise of the Right and the election of Likud's Menachem Begin in 1977.[10]

Clausewitz Redux: Wars of Choice

The first signs of major transformations in Israeli security doctrine, after the 1973 war, were made in the early eighties, with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The rationale behind the invasion was neither prevention nor deterrence, but rather for the achievement of political aims. Dan Horowitz notes that 'Operation Peace for the Galilee' was a clear endorsement of the Clausewitzian doctrine of war as a continuation of diplomacy by other means (Yaniv1993, 41). Thus, in the early 1980s, there was a great disparity over international consensus and Israeli mythmaking over the reasons Israel was waging war in Lebanon – this disparity rested on the notion of 'wars of choice,' rather than 'wars of necessity.' The idea of waging 'wars of choice' posed a challenge to the dominant discourse, and despite the fact that Israel continued to frame its official discourse in terms of security threats, a departure from the idea of collective security was affected in its security doctrine. The main security policy

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[8] The only exception was the Iraqi nuclear program, which greatly worried Israeli leaders and military strategists, culminating in the decision to strike the nuclear power plant, Osirak, in 1981. The destruction of the plant effectively put an end to the existential threat.

[9] For data on Israeli settlements, including year of establishment, see the document compiled by the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights, B'Tselem, http://www.btselem.org/English/Settlements/Settlement_population.xls (last accessed: June 2007).

[10] Begin's government framed the importance of settlement in terms of the security argument, at the same time emphasizing the concept of the "Land of Israel": "Settlement of the Land of Israel is a right and an integral part of the nation's security." As Arye Naor points out, "it was the new government, not the security establishment that decided on the security value of the settlements. Ideology was the basis for the new policy." See Arye Naor, "The Security Argument in the Territorial Debate in Israel: Rhetoric and Policy," *Israel Studies* 4.2 (Fall 1999): 161.

became the quest to guarantee personal safety and security for the citizens of the state (Naor 1999, 151).

The next challenge was how to deal with rogue elements and non-state actors that posed a more elusive security challenge but not an existential threat. Despite retaining only limited military capabilities, these elements proved to be far more difficult for Israeli security doctrine to cope with, and find a solution to, than entire Arab armies combined, in part thanks to the guerilla tactics they employed. Another factor was the political dimension, namely, the lack of progress on the peace front.[11] Thus, Israel found itself in a dilemma: on the one hand, it was unwilling to compromise; on the other hand, it was unwilling to accept the security challenges associated with such political blockage. Accordingly, the ground was set for the use of force to bring about change in neighboring states. The most fertile ground for such policy was Lebanon, which had already become a battleground and a sphere in which Syria manipulated to its interests the various parties to the civil war.

Israel's involvement in Lebanon aimed to eliminate, or at least impinge on Syrian local capabilities on the Golan, and to secure its vital political and strategic interests, encourage a friendly Lebanese regime that would sign a peace agreement with it (as manifested by the infamous May 17 agreement), which would bring about economic benefits and possibly a water sharing agreement. Israel's thirst for water has meant that this resource would be a major component of Israeli security and a vital strategic interest, one which might impact Israel's chances for survival in the long run.[12] The annexation of the Golan Heights,[13] the continued occupation of water-rich Sheba'a Farms, and Israel's water policies in the West Bank attest to the importance of water in Israeli security and strategic doctrine, and by extension, its foreign policy and attitudes towards the peace process.

Commenting on the invasion of Lebanon, Menachem Begin insisted that it was a war of choice waged "in order to avoid a costlier, more terrible war in the future" (Yaniv 1993, 41). Yet slightly more than two decades later, Israel would find itself fighting a full-scale war against an enemy far more deadly than that it had set out to destroy. Clearly, the events stretching over the 18-year period of occupation of South Lebanon demonstrated the weakness of

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[11] This factor was explicitly recognized during electoral campaigning, leading to the conclusion that a military analysis alone cannot solve Israel's security problems, but on the contrary is likely to perpetuate them. See Jonathan Marcus, "The Politics of Israel's Security," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–)* 65.2 (Spring 1989): 245.

[12] For more on Israeli water strategy, see Harald D. Frederiksen, "Water: Israeli Strategy, Implications for Peace and the Viability of Palestine," *Middle East Policy* 10.4 (Winter 2003): 69–86; and Nadav Morag, "Water, Geopolitics and State Building: The Case of Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37.3 (July 2001): 179–198.

[13] For a detailed walkthrough of Israel's water strategy vis-à-vis the Golan Heights, see Frederic C. Hof, "The Water Dimension of Golan Heights Negotiations," *Middle East Policy* 5.2 (May 1997): 129–141.

Israeli strategic thinking and assumptions, if not the underestimation of its enemies' commitment to the struggle against it. Moreover, as the Lebanon war would demonstrate, the new, "post-existential" phase in Israel's strategic thinking required a cost-benefit analysis.

Advent of Unilateralism

The break-up of the Soviet Union ended bipolarity internationally and in the Middle Eastern context. The Iran–Iraq war wore down two of Israel's potential rivals for regional hegemony and obstructed the proliferation of non-conventional weaponry in the region. In the late 1980s, Israel was busy with the first *Intifada*, which it attempted to deal with through several policy tools including: the deployment of limited military force, economic, and administrative pressures (Inbar 1998, 69). The most crucial event from the perspective of Israeli security, however, was the 1991 Gulf War, which revealed Israeli vulnerabilities to sustained rocket attacks against its civilian population. Israel's self-restraint in the face of Iraqi Scud missiles is perhaps an indication of the difference that political leadership can make on the decision to go to war.[14] Furthermore, as Charles D. Freilich notes, Israel's reaction to the 1991 crisis necessarily had to be based on the "complex web of regional and global considerations." An Israeli response could have had consequences on a global scale (Freilich 2006, 638).

A second important event in the post-Cold War period, was 1993 the signing of the Oslo Accords. The Oslo negotiations were facilitated by the intensity of the first *Intifada* and Israel's inability to find a decisive military solution to the uprising (Celso 2003, 69). The failure of the Oslo process boosted the rejectionist front in Israel, which argued that Oslo brought more terror, facilitated by Palestinian perceptions of Israeli weakness. According to Isaac Ben-Israel, "the 'soft' image of Israel created in the Palestinian mind was the outgrowth of the jettisoning of several basic principles in Israel's security doctrine" (Ben-Israel 2002) – chief among them deterrence.

Israeli strategic planning experienced a major turning point in the late 1990s, primarily as a result of the increasing number of casualties in the ranks of the IDF in occupied South Lebanon, and the subsequent drive by civil society to "check the military's powers on security policymaking."[15] At the heart

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[14] In an article on the July 2006 war that appeared in Ha'aretz, Aluf Benn contrasts Shamir's ponderous and Sharon's artful conduct with the reactionary and adventurous conduct of the leadership that took Israel to war in July 2006. Shamir's rationale for avoiding involvement in Iraq in 1991despite the Scud missile attacks was that Israel had nothing to look for in Iraq. The comparison is a telling one, especially in light of the debate on the erosion of Israel's deterrence. See Aluf Benn, "Sleep on it." *Ha'aretz*, May 3 2007, http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/855153.html (last accessed: June 2007).

[15] Avraham Sela, "Civil Society, the Military, and Naitonal Security: The Case of Israel's Security Zone in South Lebanon," *Israel Studies* 12.1 (Spring 2007): 73. For a detailed study of

of the movement lay the rationale that soldiers deserved no less security than civilians.[16] This being the case, the psychological factor was crucial, not only in determining the outcome of the confrontation, but also in its impact on Israeli deterrence. Notwithstanding this fact, and for the first time in its history, Israel adopted the decision to unilaterally withdraw from South Lebanon.

Many critics of the withdrawal had argued that it would result in the erosion of Israeli deterrence and bring about catastrophic consequences for Israeli security. While it is true that the psychological impact of the withdrawal was immense, the discussion of deterrence must take into account the clear distinction between deterrence against irregular forces and one against regular armies.[17] Whereas the former was harmed, the latter was largely left untouched, though in reality enemy states continue undeterred in their view of non-state actors such as Hezbollah and Hamas as strategic assets. The withdrawal was based on a number of strategic considerations: first, the implementation of UN SCR Resolution 425 would set back Syria's attempts at linking UN SC Resolution 242 to Resolution 425; second, it would boost Israel's international diplomatic standing; third, it would legitimize in the eyes of the international community Israel's reaction to any future attacks emanating from Lebanon. Thus, in stark contrast to the harsh measures on Israel's northern front promised by the (Netanyahu) government in 1996,[18] the (Barak) government of 1999 adopted a toned-down, prudent and strategic position.[19] A number of analysts have pointed to the factional/political struggles and the breakdown of consensus in Israeli society, arguing that the failure to achieve strategic and national

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the changing nature of civil-military relations in Israel, see Sela, 53–78; and Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer, "The Study of Civil-Military Relations in Israel: A New Perspective," *Israel Studies* 12.1 (Spring 2007): 1–27.

[16] This argument would be advanced less than a decade later, albeit in a different context, namely to justify taking offensive military action in response to the capture of soldiers, as well as extensive use of air power as an alternative to "boots on the ground." Criticizing Israel's response to the capture of the three soldiers on the Gaza and Lebanon fronts, Gideon Levy aptly calls the rationale behind the response "Operation Peace for the IDF" (a pun on Operation Peace for Galilee). See Gideon Levy, "Operation Peace for the IDF." *Ha'aretz*, July 20, 2006, http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=10613 (last accessed: May 2007).

[17] For a discussion of Israeli deterrence post-2000 withdrawal, see Israeli strategic analyst, Shai Feldman's piece published by the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (at Tel Aviv University), "Israel's Deterrent Power after its Withdrawal from Lebanon," *Strategic Assessment* 3.1 (June 2000), http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/sa/v3n1p3.html (last accessed: May 2007).

[18] In the section on "peace, security, and foreign relations" in the Guidelines of the Government of Israel – June 1996, the government promises to "act to remove the threat to the northern border." For the full text of the guidelines, see the website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Previous+governments/Guidelines%20of%20the%20Government%20of%20Israel%20-%20June%201996 (last accessed: May 2007).

[19] The government's quest is framed in terms of "guaranteeing the welfare and security of residents of the north". See the Guidelines of the Government of Israel – July 1999, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Previous+governments/Guidelines%20of%20the%20Government%20of%20Israel%20-%20July%201999 (last accessed: May 2007).

policy planning could be attributed to these.[20] Sasson Sofer calls Israel's predicament a case of "diplomatic discontinuity" (Sofer 2001, 11). This schism has in recent years, especially after the withdrawal from Lebanon and the onset of the second *Intifada*, become all the more acute, and arguably grown beyond a manageable scope, leading to a number of strategic blunders.

The War on Terror

The second (al Aqsa) *Intifada* further enlarged the gulf in public opinion and lent credence to the predictions and warnings of the rejectionist front on the consequences of a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon. These elements maintained that the perceived success of guerrilla tactics by Hezbollah would heavily influence the Palestinians.

In contrast to the longer-term planning and the projection of threats onto the future that characterized Israeli policy in the early years, the post-1973 era was one of improvisation and reliance on short-term policies based on trial and error. This was not without its reasons. The increasing strain placed on Israeli economy due to decades of large defense allocations and expenditures could be responsible for the shift from a longer-term strategy (which would require extensive and expensive investment in military technologies which may or may not work in future combat conditions) to a shorter-term adjustment to threats and situations as they came along.[21] Hence, a combination of strategic myopia and economic strains brought about a decline in Israeli ability to find solutions to the newly devised methods of resistance.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks also had an impact on Israel's regional and global positioning, as well as its strategies. First and foremost, 9/11 sharpened the emphasis on the differences between "Western values" (of freedom, democracy, etc.) and "non-Western despotism" – notwithstanding the fact that virtually all Arab dictatorships had enjoyed solid American backing. Second, it caused (or allowed) the U.S to adopt an active approach against "terrorism." Third, it raised the prospects as well as fear of the proliferation of WMD in the region, and their concentration in the hands of unfriendly regimes or non-state actors.[22] The introduction of terrorism into world public opinion meant that Israel's international standing would improve significantly and its actions against the Palestinians could be portrayed as part and parcel of the war against terror. Indeed, only nine days after 9/11, former

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[20] See the analysis of Charles D. Freilich (2006: 635–663) of the various components and processes of Israeli security decision-making.

[21] In 2001–2002 Israeli defense expenditure as percent of its GDP was at its lowest since 1956. See the graphs on defense expenditure prepared by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications/security/pdf/97_grafs.pdf (last accessed: May 2007).

[22] See the analysis of Major General Aharon Ze'evi (Farkash), "Israel's Strategic Environment," *Strategic Assessment* 5.2 (August 2002), http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/sa/v5n2p7Zee.html (last accessed: May 2007).

PM Benjamin Netanyahu at a hearing of the U.S House government reform committee on the subject of "preparing for the war on terrorism" insisted that "Israel's policy of pre-emptively striking at those who seek to murder its people is … better understood today, and requires no further elaboration."[23] A day later during an interview with CNN Ariel Sharon emphasized that the US and Israel shared fundamental values, which made them targets of terrorists and natural allies in the war on terror.[24] Perhaps most tellingly, however, is that of Minister of Foreign Affairs Shimon Peres in an article dated October 10, 2001. Peres emphasized the movement of the world "from a position of national strategy to a position of global strategy."[25] The movement that Peres was referring to would manifest itself in terms of Israel's support for the invasion of Iraq, which not only removed Iraq from the list of potential strategic threats in the long run, but also resulted in severe sectarian tensions in the Arab and Muslim world. Paradoxically, Israel's emphasis on the convergence of Israeli and American fate and course echoes the Syrian discourse of *wahdat al-masir wal-masar.*[26]

In the aftermath of 9/11, Israel sought to portray its conflict in the Occupied Territories as part of the war on terror. Yet despite the rhetoric emanating from official Israeli sources, Israel's policies and interests in the Occupied Territories continued to be driven by economic, territorial, and ideological interests rather than its fight against "terror." A study conducted by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) revealed that "70% of the groundwater on which Israel is dependent, and more than 40% of its sustainable annual fresh water supply, originate in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, mainly in its aquifers." Even more alarming is the fact that more than 90% of the recharge area of the Mountain aquifer *within* the Green Line, namely in Israel proper, is inside the West Bank. The study concludes that Israel views the maintenance of these water sources as a strategic goal.[27]

Following the decision to unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip, the question of deterrence was brought up once more. The enemies of withdrawal argued that a retreat would be tantamount to "rewarding terror", and encourage Palestinians to widen the scope of their actions. These voices remained

[23] See the website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the full text of the speech. http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches%20by%20Israeli%20leaders/2001/Statement%20by%20Former%20PM%20Benjamin%20Netanyahu%20at%20the%20H (last accessed: May 2007).

[24] See website of Israeli MFA for the full transcript of the interview. http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2001/Interview%20with%20PM%20Sharon%20on%20CNN%20-%2021-Sep-2001 (last accessed: May 2007).s

[25] Shimon Peres, "Terror – a Global Threat." http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2001/Terror+-+A+Global+Threat-+by+Shimon+Peres+-+10-Oct.htm (last accessed: May 2007).

[26] The Arabic phrase roughly translates to "the congruence of fate and course."

[27] "Watershed: The Role of Fresh Water in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", IDRC (1994), http://www.idrc.ca/openbooks/719-1/ (last accessed: May 2007).

powerless in the face of the unbending will of the government to go ahead with the withdrawal; nevertheless, the victory of Hamas in the January 2006 Palestinian elections confirmed Israel's worst fears.

A New Middle East

Notwithstanding Israel's preservation of more traditional interests in the Occupied Territories, one cannot deny that in the wake of 9/11 its perceptions of what the "new" Middle East should look like and what policies must be adopted to that end, have changed. Syria's primary interests lay in the Golan Heights, but also in countering the pressures exerted on it on the Lebanon file, chief among them the Syria Accountability Act of 2003 and UN SC Resolution 1559. Consequently, Syria (and Iran) tapped into the Iraqi quagmire to extract as many diplomatic benefits as possible. The situation in Iraq was the baptism of fire for the Iranian-Syrian axis and the first major test in a series of attempts by the Israeli-American axis to weaken it. This latter axis would come to include "moderate" and "friendly" Arab regimes, mainly Saudi Arabia, whose leadership of the Arab world was cemented in the latest Arab Summit in Riyadh.

The assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri on February 14, 2005 and the ensuing upheaval in Lebanon which culminated in Syrian withdrawal allowed for the commencement of the second stage of the regional struggle, at the center of which was Lebanon. It was assumed that the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon would weaken Hezbollah and effectively rob Syria of all its cards on the Golan Heights. From an Israeli strategic perspective, the assassination of Hariri was the best it could have hoped for.[28] Nevertheless, as it was soon to discover, this excessive optimism was based on a number of false assumptions, pertaining to the nature and dynamics of the relationship between Hezbollah and Syria, as well as the former's domestic position in the wake of the withdrawal of its patron from Lebanon.

On the Palestinian front, the strengthening of Palestinian Islamism was but one expression of the wider phenomenon of Islamism that had swept through the region in the 90s and especially after 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. Arab regimes, increasingly worried about the power of appeal of non-compliant Islamism, became more willing to sacrifice their support for the Palestinian cause in return for an improvement in relations with the U.S. The renewal of the Arab peace initiative at the 19th Arab summit (2007) in Riyadh could be understood as a function of this quest on the part of some Arab regimes, led by Saudi Arabia. Although often ignored in current analyses of both Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Lebanese fronts (and especially the former), Arab

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[28] The growing Israeli interest in Lebanon was crowned by the declaration, by the intelligence corps, that 2005 was the "Lebanon Year." See Yoaz Hendel, "Failed Tactical Intelligence in the Lebanon War," *Strategic Assessment* 9.3 (November 2006), http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/sa/v9n3p9Hendel.html (last accessed: May 2007).

regimes are a fundamental – and increasingly valuable – element in the new equation. The increased value is in no small part due to Israeli and American calculations and strategy vis-à-vis Iran's growing regional influence.

For its part, Israel's new strategy in the West Bank following the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip was the creation of facts on the ground, be it the cementing of existing settlements or the annexation of land and the construction of the "separation fence"[29] as part of the unilateral border delineation. The May 4, 2006 guidelines of the 31st government headed by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert clearly refer to Israel's quest for the unilateral determination if its borders. The guidelines also contain a clear indication of the growing convergence in and coordination of Israeli and American policies. In reference to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the government promises to "take action even in the absence of negotiations and agreement with [the Palestinians], on the basis of a broad national consensus in Israel and a *deep understanding with Israel's friends in the world, primarily the United States of America and President George Bush."*[30] Summer 2006 was the epitome of this cooperation and coordination.

Lebanon the Model

In a recently book on the July 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war, Michel Warschawski observes that "the war Israel has waged on the Palestinians and against Lebanon as well as Israel's ambitions with regard to Iran and Syria are simultaneously a laboratory for the U.S. neoconservatives' global war strategy and its most advanced front" (Achcar 2007, 75).

The intensification of an Iranian threat put into question the idea that the existential threat to Israeli security had indeed been overcome. This, coupled with US expectations of support for its "war on terror," and Hezbollah's warm relations with Iran and the direct military and financial support the latter bestows upon the former, meant that Israel's views of Hezbollah were necessarily tied to its views of Iran (as well as Syria). While it is possible that the war was waged in isolation from Israel's broader regional considerations, it could also be the case that the desire to prevent the regionalization of a future strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, which the latter might react to by putting into use the Hezbollah card against Israel, was central.[31] The second interpretation is

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[29] The Israeli MFA nevertheless insists that the "fence" is explicitly for security purposes and "does not have political significance." See the basic guidelines of the 30th government of Israel – February 2003. http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Current%20Government%20of%20Israel/Basic%20Guidelines%20of%20the%2030th%20Government%20of%20Israel (last accessed: May 2007).

[30] Emphasis added. See the Israeli MFA for the full text of the guidelines. http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Current+Government+of+Israel/Basic%20Guidelines%20of%20the%2031st%20Government%20of%20Israel (last accessed: May 2007).

[31] In an interview with Ha'aretz correspondent Gidi Weitz, Brigadier General Yossi Kuperwasser, head of the research division of the Military Intelligence, argued that the confrontation

more in line with the revelations that Israel had planned for a war in Lebanon months before the capture of Israeli soldiers.[32] In this sense, the July 2006 war was but one stage in a multi-stage conflict, which could see the resurfacing of pre-emption in Israeli security doctrine.

Another explanation of Israel's preparations for war is its determination to restore the deterrence that was lost both in the north and in the south following the two unilateral withdrawals. It could also be viewed in the context of a plan for a double-crackdown on two militant groups both enjoying ties to and support from Syria and Iran. In a special cabinet communiqué issued on July 12, a connection was made between the attack from the Gaza Strip and the attack from South Lebanon, describing both actions as "the product of those who perpetrate terrorism and those who give it shelter."[33] The statement utilizes the anti-terror discourse and an implicit reference is made to Syria. In another cabinet communiqué dated July 16, the motives for the two operations are described in terms of the enemies' incorrect interpretation of Israel's "aspiration to live in peace."[34] In his address to the Knesset the following day, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert stated explicitly the goals – numbering five – of "Operation Change of Direction." Furthermore, he pointed out that Israel's enemies "misinterpreted [its] willingness to exercise restraint as a sign of weakness" – a clear reference to the need to restore its shattered deterrence. In addition, emphasis was placed on the fact that Israel had returned to the borders recognized by the international community.[35] This emphasis was arguably made not only to give Israel the cover of international legitimacy, but also to signal a change in Israel's attitude towards the idea of unilateral withdrawal.

In stating the goals of the operation in Lebanon and adopting an uncompromising stand both in rhetoric[36] and actions, the Israeli government and its strategists had fallen into the trap that Israel Tal warns against, namely, "taking aggressive, uncompromising positions and then showing flexibility" (Tal 2000, 56), an

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with Hezbollah was unavoidable, and that it was important to understand that "the timing is advantageous, because we are still ahead of the Iranian nuclear project." See Gidi Weitz, "To Beirut if necessary." *Ha'aretz*, April 28, 2007, http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=749190 (last accessed: May 2007).

[32] Conal Urquhart, "Israel planned for Lebanon war months in advance, PM says." *The Guardian*, March 9, 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/syria/story/0,,2029732,00.html (last accessed: May 2007).

[33] The full text of the communiqué is accessible from the website of the Israeli MFA. http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques/2006/Special+Cabinet+Communique+-+Hizbullah+attack+12-Jul-2006.htm (last accessed: May 2007).

[34] See http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques/2006/Cabinet+Communique+16-Jul-2006.htm (last accessed: May 2007).

[35] "Address to the Knesset by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert", Israeli MFA, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2006/Address+to+the+Knesset+by+PM+Olmert+17-Jul-2006.htm (last accessed: May 2007).

[36] In the Knesset address, Olmert warned that "we will not stop until we can tell the Israeli people that the threat hanging over it has been removed." Ibid.

observation echoed by the Winograd Commission.[37] Israel's military impotence in South Lebanon had the effect of luring Israel into abandoning its traditional adherence to the concept of "quick wars"[38]. Furthermore, whereas Israel's traditional concept of deterrence was based on the threat of and its ability to occupy Arab lands, in the aftermath of the July war, its deterrence is based more on its destructive capabilities and less on its strategic and military achievements.

  More significant however, was the effect of Hezbollah's rockets on the progress of the war. The toll, both civilian and military, the unprecedented damage that the rockets had caused, and the psychological impact of the rocket barrage on Haifa and beyond, established a "balance of terror."[39] It also neutralised Israel's airforce – a traditional tool for deterrence and coercion – and forced Israel into a security dilemma: on the one hand, of being dragged into a potentially protracted ground-war, which Israel had severe reservations against doing (owing to its 18 year occupation and ensuing war of attrition) as well as its sensitivity to IDF casualties;[40] on the other hand, take no action, which itself is a sensitive issue, given the immense rocket arsenal that Hezbollah had amassed between 2000 and 2006, a period characterized by Israeli inaction.[41] It is therefore likely that there would be a return to the doctrine of "boots on the ground" as a means to achieving victory as well as ensuring the security of the citizens in the north. This could result in the resurgence of the logic of buffer or "security" zones.[42]

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[37] "Winograd Commission submits Interim Report", April 30, 2007, http://www.mfa.gov.il/ MFA/Government/Communiques/2007/Winograd+Inquiry+Commission+submits+Interim+ Report+30-Apr-2007.htm (last accessed: May 2007).

[38] While it is too early to base one's assessment on any preliminary reports about the conduct of the war, perhaps the statement by GOC Northern Command Major General Gadi Eisenkott to the effect that "the IDF had planned on a 4–6 day conflict" provides some insight into the military's focused perspective in contrast to the strategic ignorance and personal considerations of the political echelon. See "Top IDF Officer: we knew war would not get abducted soldiers back." *Ha'aretz*, April 28, 2007. Uri Bar-Joseph also accuses the political echelon of being "devoid of strategic thinking" and "succumb[ing] to narrow political interests." Uri Bar-Joseph, "Their most humiliating hour." *Ha'aretz*, May 3, 2007, http://www.haaretz.com/ hasen/spages/853115.html (last accessed: May 2007).

[39] Moshe Arens points out that "the government did not take into consideration Hezbollah's expected response to the Israel Air Force's bombardment of Lebanon." Moshe Arens, "Time for a change at the top." *Ha'aretz*, May 1, 2007, http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/854171. html (last accessed: May 2007).

[40] It is highly likely that the heavy casualties that Israel suffered in the last 3 days of the fighting will make future Israeli leaders and strategists rethink the threat and implementation of a large-scale ground operation for the sole purpose of achieving what the military had failed to achieve in 30 days of fighting. See Aluf Benn, "Final Lebanon push decided after PM met informal team." *Ha'aretz*, May 25, 2007.

[41] As Yoaz Hendel notes, an unprovoked attack on Lebanon to prevent the arming of Hezbollah "would have been denounced internationally, severely impairing the credit Israel earned following the withdrawal." Hendel, op. cit.

[42] In this context, an observation of Israeli attitudes towards UNIFIL II would provide some interesting insights.

A New Strategy?

Given the profound impact of the decision to go to war in July 2006, any discussion of Israeli security and strategic doctrine must take note of and assess this event. That Israel considered the capture of Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser a *casus belli* stands in stark contrast to its restrained reaction to the capture of three IDF soldiers and Elhanan Tannenbaum in 2000. Yet what explains this sharp divergence? Is it a mere difference in the modes of perception of different administrations, or is there a much broader strategic doctrine at work? An observation of Israel's actions post-9/11 lends credence to the argument that there has indeed been a major change in Israeli security doctrine, beginning with Operation Defensive Shield (2002), the Israeli lobby's advocacy for the invasion of Iraq, the Syria Accountability Act (2003), and UN SCR 1559 (2004), the siege of Hamas-led PA (2006), and finally reaching its apex in Lebanon in July 2006. Nonetheless, both in its confrontation against Hezbollah and its fight against the Palestinian resistance, Israel has been faced with the limits of military power. It has been unable to devise a solution to Hezbollah's Katyushas, as well as Hamas' Qassam barrages.[43]

Israel is undoubtedly at a strategic crossroads. A return to the negotiations table with Syria may possibly contain both Hezbollah and Hamas, and weaken the Iranian-Syrian axis. However, pending the initiation of negotiations, it could very well be the case that Israel has adopted a policy akin to the Bush administration's theory of "constructive chaos." Certainly, the official Israeli position towards the Hamas-Fateh tensions lends credence to the theory of an Israeli role in the clashes. It is more difficult to assess the nature and extent (if there is any at all) of Israel's involvement in the Lebanese turmoil. The latter, however, could potentially pour in Israel's favor and contribute to its attempts to weaken, isolate, and eventually neutralize Hezbollah. Should this option prove inadequate, Israel might find it difficult to avoid being drawn into both the Gaza Strip and Lebanon. It remains to be seen whether Israeli security doctrine would witness a return to pre-emption, in the form of a strike against Iran's nuclear facilities or, as recent tensions have suggested, against Syrian military facilities.[44] It is impossible to predict the path Israel will be taking; nonetheless, what is evident is that recent events have alerted Israeli leaders and strategists to the necessity of overhauling the security doctrine.

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[43] Military analyst Ze'ev Schiff, in an article on the situation in the southern Israeli town of Sderot, insists that Hamas has succeeded in setting up a system of mutual deterrence. He attributes this failure partly to the abandonment of the principle of transferring the fighting to enemy territory. Ze'ev Schiff, "An Israeli defeat in Sderot." *Ha'aretz*, June 8, 2007, http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=868471 (last accessed: June 2007). Arguably, this failure is also partly the result of the high cost of intercepting these rockets. Reuven Pedatzur places the cost of developing an interception system at hundreds of millions of U.S dollars, and the cost of intercepting each rocket at $100,000 (Pedatzur 2007).

[44] Jonathan Marcus, reporting for BBC News, analyzes the September 6, 2007 Israeli incursion into Syrian air-space as having "partially restored" Israel's deterrent capacity (Marcus 2007).

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