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IDF Strategy Documents, 2002-2018: On Processes, Chiefs of Staff, and the IDF

Meir Finkel

Writing and releasing strategy documents has become a norm in the IDF in the last two decades; most were published internally within the military. This article presents the contents of the documents published from 2002 to 2018, focusing on several questions: Why were they published; what needs do they address? What was the process of developing the knowledge, and what staff work was required to prepare each document? How was the Chief of Staff involved in this process? What are the main changes from previous documents? After presenting the documents, the article considers the increasing frequency of updates, the purpose of each document as seen by the Chief of Staff, and the influence of the document on the IDF as part of the "open discourse space" between the IDF and the political echelon. The article is a preliminary comparative study of this developing phenomenon in the IDF, giving an important glimpse into the General Staff processes.

Keywords: IDF strategy documents, Chief of Staff, learning processes, political-military discourse, civil-military relations

Introduction

The *IDF Strategy document* prepared and published by Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot in August 2015 made waves in the media and brought this type of document to public attention. Eisenkot released the document in order to increase the transparency between the IDF, the political echelon, and the public, and to encourage the political echelon to relate to the ideas expressed in it as a response of sorts to the absence of official national security documents. Eisenkot's document was the fourth of this type since 2002. This article describes the four documents (in fact five, since Eisenkot updated the document in 2018) with the focus on the following questions:

a. What was the reason for release, i.e., what needs did this document address?

b. What type of process and what staff work was involved to develop the knowledge required for its preparation, and how was the Chief of Staff involved?

c. What were the main changes introduced in each document?

> In recent years the IDF has produced more and more conceptual documents. These documents are based on in-depth thinking and provide a systemic analysis and definition of the context in which the concept was developed, so that it can be challenged and adapted as the context changes.

Each document is described separately with reference to these questions, followed by a discussion of the broader theme: What does this series of documents tell us about the IDF as an organization, and what role do they play in what the literature calls "the open discourse space" between the different echelons of Israeli society.

The various documents share a number of features. The first is their structure, consisting of the following elements: clarification of the threats in the strategic environment; principles of IDF approaches to action in the face of these threats; the basic organization of command and control; and the capabilities to be developed through force design. Documents of this kind do not include a detailed analysis of a specific enemy or a specific response to that enemy. They present what the IDF calls "operational concepts," in effect, the IDF strategies employed in the different arenas (for example, dealing with Iranian activity in the north). These concepts utilize the terminology and processes described in the strategy documents with reference to a defined operational problem, and propose a concrete response that is developed pursuant to war plans or routine security campaign plans.

Compared to the past, when such concepts were not put into writing and the outcome of the thinking process was a plan that in most cases was not implemented, in recent years the IDF has produced more and more conceptual documents. These documents are based on in-depth thinking and provide a systemic analysis and definition of the context in which the concept was developed, so that it can be challenged and adapted as the context changes. It is therefore surprising that the IDF strategy documents are not actually strategy documents in the familiar sense of a targeted response to a military challenge in a concrete context, requiring a new strategy when the problem or the context changes, but rather descriptions of the concepts that help to develop these strategies. For this reason, the document titles often include the words "operational concept" together with the word "strategy" (the problematic name for these documents resembles the problem with the term "chief of staff," referring to the person who is actually commander of the IDF and not head of the staff).

The second common denominator is the opening statement that in view of the ever-changing reality, it will be necessary to review and update the documents regularly. Another shared feature is that all the strategy documents are intended to show changes and learning in the IDF and present their products, particularly in areas such as the range of threats to be faced

and the principles of types of action. Most of them deal with the past and the present, and with respect to the future, it is generally a matter of continuing existing trends, and the perceived horizon is just a few years ahead. The fourth common denominator is that all the documents were written for the army's internal needs and therefore use military language, with concepts that are not always clear to the political echelon or the general public (for example, the documents of 2015 and 2018). Moreover, the interface between the top ranks of the IDF and the political echelon with regard to approval of the documents was quite limited. This was not because of IDF unwillingness to present them for discussion and approval, but because of the traditional Israeli lack of official national security documents, expressing an open preference by the political echelon not to commit to a particular approach, but to approve whatever the IDF presents, even if generally and in retrospect (Shelah, 2016). One could argue that there is a deliberate disconnect between the politicians and the military, apparently in order to maintain the freedom of action of the former, although in recent years there have been calls in the political echelon to close this gap (Shelah, 2016).

The final common denominator is that responsibility for preparing the document was assigned to the Operations Branch/J3 (Amatz), whose head was personally involved in the work, while the main staff element in its development was the Training and Doctrine Division (Tohad). Parts of the document were also prepared by the Intelligence Directorate/J2 and the Planning Directorate/J5.

The Strategy Documents: The Product of Knowledge Development Processes in the IDF

The IDF strategy documents are the product of preliminary studies of Israel's environment and the planned IDF response—in terms of force design, emphases in force employment, organizational changes, and more. Learning in militaries has been widely studied and includes, among other approaches, learning the lessons of one's own wars, learning by emulating other armies, and innovation based on experimenting with developing capabilities. (For a comprehensive review of various patterns of learning in militaries, see Finkel, 2020). Like any army, the IDF has its own strategic culture, which influences the attention given to each type of learning.

In the research literature on military innovation, the IDF of the 1990s and 2000s is described as an organization relying to a great extent on its own war experience, and afterwards as adopting American ideas without critical examination, with a tendency to look for technological solutions, a preference for practitioners over theorists, difficulty taking the long view due to the heavy load of routine security activity, and more (Adamsky, 2012, pp. 190-194). These descriptions paint a picture that contains some truth, but the reality during this period was far more complex (on the process of conceptual experimentation in the 1990s, and the cautious nature of Israeli learning from the American experience in the Iraq War, see Finkel, 2020). The sources of learning and the learning methods used while developing the strategy documents vary from case to case and incorporate, based on the period and its challenges, the types of learning mentioned above.

From a theoretical point of view regarding the types of learning used to develop the strategy documents (analytical learning that breaks down problems, which is characteristic of military post-action reviews, or holistic thinking that takes a systemic view of problems; see Lanir, 1997; 1999), the IDF strategy documents were not developed according to the design approach, as they were not intended to develop a concrete strategy for a specific enemy or to solve a problem, but rather to build the world of military concepts and terminology to be used for that purpose. In recent years the IDF has made intensive use of the design approach to develop operational

concepts regarding its enemies (for a partial list, see Finkel & Ortal, 2019) or concepts for force design. The knowledge development for writing IDF strategy documents is closer to what is called staff research and staff work, where the main discussion focuses on the array of concepts appearing in the document; how to define the nature of the enemy and its patterns of action; what is the IDF's modus operandi in principle; and what are the latest and most relevant definitions of defeat, deterrence, victory, and so on with respect to an enemy. In fact, the IDF strategy documents (although they contain the word strategy) are a kind of doctrinal document that institutes "a system of interpretive terms" (Lanir, 1998) that is relevant for that period.

> In the framework of the primacy of the political echelon over the military echelon, and the separation between them, it is vital to conduct a dialogue that is not the product of a simple hierarchical process in which the political echelon dictates tasks to the military echelon, but rather includes a joint investigation and clarification of the situation and the best way to use military force.

In the Inter-Echelon "Open Discourse Space"

The complexity of military activity in recent decades, particularly when dealing with terror organizations, led to a recognition of the difficulty faced by armies attempting to propose effective military actions, and the difficulty faced by political leaders attempting to define clear achievements for the army (for a review, see Michael, 2016 and the sources cited). This recognition led to the understanding that in the framework of the primacy of the political echelon over the military echelon, and the separation between them, it is vital to conduct a dialogue that is not the product of a simple hierarchical process in which the political echelon dictates tasks to the military echelon, but rather includes a joint investigation and clarification of the situation and the best way

to use military force in order to achieve political goals that are difficult to conceptualize—what Michael calls: "the open discourse space." The outcome of the process is the same as in the past—directives from the politicians to the military—but the way these instructions are developed is different and more complex.

A similar trend exists in the military echelon. On the one hand, several ranks must cooperate to develop shared knowledge, abandoning the hierarchical approach that divides them (Lanir, 1997); on the other hand, it is becoming more difficult to achieve conceptual unity with respect to dynamic and complex challenges, requiring more dialogue between the different ranks (Finkel, 2018b). Within this complexity, and perhaps as an inadvertent part of the response to it, it has become necessary to prepare and issue IDF strategy documents that enable the General Staff to work together with the various services and regional commands to develop a basic "system of interpretive terms," for use in the preparation of concrete strategies (and in the discourse with the political echelon).

IDF Strategy Documents and their Counterparts in the United States and Britain

Various kinds of strategy documents have been written in the United States over the years. The Goldwater-Nichols Act (Public Law 99-433, Oct. 1, 1986) defines the role of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as part of a wider reform of the US Armed Forces, and stipulates inter alia that the Secretary of Defense must prepare and publish an annual report. This document must include national security objectives and policies, priorities with respect to military tasks, and the allocation of resources for the period, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is required to assist the Secretary in this work (Section 153 of the Act). Since 2002, the following documents have been anchored in legislation: the National Security Strategy, signed by the President; the National Defense Strategy, signed by the Secretary of Defense; and the National

Military Strategy, signed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The latter document is written in the military, and by law must refer in detail to the manner in which the US armed forces respond to the main threats to national security, as described in the documents by the President and the Secretary of Defense. American law also specifies the frequency that documents must be updated, to whom they must be submitted for approval, and more. A critical article of 2017 claims that the result is a "cacophony" of strategic documents, and the number should be reduced to prevent overlap (Karlin et al., 2017).

In Britain, several documents have been written by the political echelon, under the general heading of Defence Review. In 2010 it was stipulated that such documents must be updated every five years (for a survey of these documents, see House of Commons Library, 2020).

In Israel, on the other hand, there are no such official documents published by the political echelon. A central attempt to formulate such a document was made in 2004-2006 by the Meridor Committee, but it was never published (Meridor & Eldadi, 2018). In August 2018 it was announced that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had updated Israel's security concept, but this was never fully disclosed (Prime Minister's Office, 2018). Consequently, the military documents are in effect the most significant official Israeli security documents written by senior figures in existence.

IDF Strategy: Trends and Basic Ideas for Force Design and Employment under Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz, April 2002

This document was published four months before the end of Shaul Mofaz's tenure as Chief of Staff, in effect a way of leaving his stamp on the organization by documenting his work. At a seminar in 2000, Mofaz explained that one purpose of the document was to define a shared strategic language for the IDF (*IDF Strategy*, 2002, p. 11).

In terms of process, the document presented areas of knowledge that developed in three largely separate channels. The first, the "Spring of Youth" work done in 1998-1999 on IDF organization, was reflected in the organizational change known as IDF 2000 (Mofaz presented its essence in a short article in *Maarachot*, Mofaz, 1999). The second channel was a series of conceptual workshops in 1999-2000 on defining the challenges and the responses by type of threat (the Palestinians, Syria, third circle). The third channel was knowledge developed during the terms of Ehud Barak and Amnon Lipkin-Shahak as Chiefs of Staff in the context of fighting the Syrian army. The chiefs of staff guided the process and discussed the material produced by the teams. The document was prepared by the head of the History Department, Col. (res.) Yigal Eyal, and as head of the Training and Doctrine division, Brig. Gen. Gershon Hacohen wrote in the introduction, "This book does not amount to instructions to be followed, but rather presents the reader with a comprehensive survey of basic ideas, formulated in the IDF over the last four years" (*IDF Strategy*, 2002, p. iii).

The introduction indicates the reason for writing the document:

> The new reality poses many additional challenges to the IDF—challenges that did not form part of the traditional security concept shaped by David Ben Gurion. Countries have left the circle of hostility (Egypt, Jordan) and distant countries with extremist ideological regimes (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan) have become threatening strategic elements; this affects the response and force design, and the Palestinian issue has changed from a refugee problem to a struggle with clear nationalist signs. (*IDF Strategy*, 2002, pp. 4-5)

Consequently, the nature of the hostilities has changed—limited confrontation with the Palestinians has developed and strategic

weapons, such as ground-to-ground missiles and nonconventional weapons, have entered the arena. In view of these needs, the writers of the document focused on the following:

a. *Definition of the threats by circles*: Four circles of confrontation were defined: the inner circle—the home front, the Palestinians (countering terror, guerrilla warfare, and a popular uprising); the first circle—the front; the second circle—Iraq; the third circle—Iran and Libya. Organizing the threats by range reflected the correct perception for the time, that in kinetic action, the range is the main factor that affects the type of response (*IDF Strategy*, 2002, pp. 98-103).

b. *Limited confrontation with the Palestinians*: A substantial part of the document was devoted to a description of the characteristics and the response—a strategic situation assessment specific to this type of confrontation, with emphasis on the rising role of the media as a weapon in the hands of the Palestinians, and on building a capacity to disperse demonstrations.

c. *Civil-military relations* and the subject of social cohesion are discussed at length in the document, apparently because of what developed regarding the withdrawal from Lebanon at the start of Mofaz's term, and particularly following the ongoing fighting in the West Bank (and the attacks within the State of Israel that accompanied it) (*IDF Strategy*, 2002, pp. 20-25).

d. *The idea of the offensive defense based on standoff fire in the face of a massive Syrian armored attack*: At that time Syria was the main motive for building IDF strength in terms of army size and weapons purchase (but not with regard to training, which was channeled to the struggle with the Palestinians). The idea of offensive defense addressed the systemic destruction of armored fighting vehicles (AFV) through standoff fire, in order to break an armored Syrian attack. This capability, whose development began in the early 1990s, reached full maturity under Mofaz (for details of the idea of AFV destruction, see Finkel, 2018a, pp. 159-167).

e. *Organization of the General Staff and its contribution to strengthening the IDF's ability to deal with new challenges*: The document establishes the move by Mofaz to reorganize the General Staff and other high level headquarters under the heading IDF 2000 and included: fully dividing the Staff Directorate (Agam) between the Operations Directorate (Amatz) (a new body) and the Planning Directorate (Agat); converting the Ground Forces Headquarters (Mafhash) to the Ground Forces Command (Mazi); and uniting the combat service support corps in the Technological and Logistics Directorate (Atal) (*IDF Strategy*, 2002, pp. 123-125; for details of this move, see Finkel, 2020).

Since the organizational change in the IDF was far-reaching, perhaps the largest since its inception, the document dealt at length with the reasons, focusing on changes in the strategic environment:

> The organizational change arose from the obligation to improve and adapt operational capability (the response) to changes in the strategic environment, to resource constraints, and to develop capabilities (technology, weapons, human capabilities, and so on)….The biggest change in the IDF in recent years arose from the understanding that without the change, the IDF will have difficulty fulfilling its mission, and that its commanders have the duty of initiating a process that will enable the IDF to deal with future challenges. The organizational change is therefore a component of the ongoing strategic thought process (the army as a learning organization). The changes in the framework of IDF 2000 must be examined continually in order to monitor the army's ability to provide a response to changes in the

strategic environment. (*IDF Strategy*, 2002, pp. 28-30)

Thus, the document formalized knowledge developed during Mofaz's tenure as Chief of Staff about the nature of the confrontation and fighting in the Palestinian arena, the response to a challenge such as the Yom Kippur War, and the organizational changes implemented. While the first four subjects dealt with the establishment of knowledge already existing in the system (which was developed previously), the last subject, the reorganization of the General Staff, was a new idea.

The IDF Operational Concept under Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, April 2006

Notwithstanding the name of the document, which lacks the word "strategy," this document matches its predecessors and successors. Of the various versions of IDF strategy documents, this is the most familiar and was discussed at length in the Winograd Commission Report (Winograd Commission, 2007, pp. 268-274; Preisler-Swery, 2017; a detailed analysis of the assimilation of the concept appears in Finkel, 2020) because of its links, or attributed links, to the failures of the Second Lebanon War. The document was published about a year after Chief of Staff Halutz took office, although it is based on far-reaching work that was mainly done during the term of his predecessor, Moshe (Bogie) Ya'alon in 2004-2005. The document was partly implemented and shelved after the Second Lebanon War.

In the context of process there was a development of new knowledge for the IDF in a range of fields, led by Ya'alon in a series of positions that he held—GOC Central Command, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Chief of Staff (the process was presented from a number of viewpoints, including by Tamari & Kalifi, 2009; Adamsky, 2012, pp. 163-174; Finkel, 2020). The process was managed by the head of the Training and Doctrine Division, Brig. Gen. Meir Kalifi, and the head of Amatz, Maj. Gen. Israel Ziv. It included workshops with

numerous participants and a wealth of exercises and practical experiences of the various fields. Chief of Staff Ya'alon was personally involved in developing the concept and spent much of his time on the matter. The answer to the question of why he did not publish the document lies apparently in his approach to the process of knowledge development as an ongoing learning effort, and not a process that ends with the release of the document. Chief of Staff Halutz was involved in the processes as part of his previous jobs—Deputy Chief of Staff, and before that, head of Amatz/J3—and when he took over as Chief of Staff he completed the process. This was the only time among the cases described that development of the concept occurred in parallel to the process of developing the national security concept, led by Knesset Member Dan Meridor (the work led by Meridor focused on the military aspects of national security). The various documents contain some shared ideas, such as the rising importance of home front defense and the use of standoff fire, at the expense of ground maneuvers and seizure of territory.

The contents of the document were discussed after the Second Lebanon War; suffice it here to mention the article by Dana Preisler-Swery, a researcher at the Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Studies, who showed that the concept dealt with a number of central ideas, some in the context of general methodology—how the IDF needs to organize and think—and some in the context of the main enemy. Most of the ideas were new for their time (Preisler-Swery, 2017):

a. *The Methodological Aspect—the SOD (System Operational Design) process at the strategic-operational levels:* a methodological process that adapts the learning theory to the challenges faced by senior ranks.

b. *Definition of the command and control approach, whereby the head of the relevant command also commands the campaign*: The new approach was based on the

operational level in the IDF, which the concept identified as the focus of influence, headed by the "operator." This level is a separate intermediate layer that connects the strategic level with the tactical level, and its task is to bridge the gap between abstract strategic ideas and concrete military action.

c. *Effects-Based Operations* were developed in the United States and adopted by the IDF, despite some criticism. The concept is intended to achieve decision through a focused attack on various centers of gravity in the enemy's system, creating effects that will lead to a strategic victory.

d. *Jointness*: An organizational concept that was developed in order to enlarge the range of options and the abilities to take relevant and effective action in the face of existing and emerging challenges, and in particular to create the needed integration of forces (military and non-military) to ensure the suitability and optimal utilization of the force at any given time.

e. *With respect to specific enemies*: a decisive end to the limited and ongoing confrontation with the Palestinians, operational level fire to decide hostilities with countries, instead of maneuvers to capture territory (perceived as a burden because of the guerrilla warfare IDF forces will have to face).

Some of the changes mentioned above— with emphasis on military language, the ability of heads of regional commands to command the campaign, and the element of fire—were criticized in the Winograd Report (Winograd Commission, 2008, pp. 268-275). An important fact for understanding the difficulties of developing and introducing the concept was the attempt—as defined by Itai Brun, commander of the Dado Center after the war, who investigated the concept, and Preisler-Swery (2017)—to include in the document a broad and varied array of elements. Each element was at a different stage of development and practical experience (Finkel, 2020). The close link between the three most complex

issues for implementation—SOD; effects-based operations; and the regional command as the campaign "operator" meant to implement the first two elements—where each was at a different stage of maturity in the IDF, was apparently the main source of the challenge of introducing the concept and the fact that it was not utilized in the Second Lebanon War. It is also possible that the IDF of that time lacked a culture of implementing innovative ideas from above and intellectual criticism from below, to examine, challenge, and offer concepts that stimulate fruitful tensions.

The need for a new document in this case lay in the new ideas developed in the IDF after studying how the United States Army functioned in the Iraq War in 2003, and the development of systemic thinking, which began as a response to the complexity of the challenges in the West Bank and was later applied to all IDF modus operandi (Finkel, 2020).

IDF Strategy under Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, October 2013

This document was published in late 2013, almost three years after Gantz took over as Chief of Staff, well into the civil war in Syria, and during the negotiations on a nuclear deal with Iran. In terms of process, work on the document began during the term of Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi and continued under Gantz, with the actual writing done by the Dado Center in the Operations Branch/J3 (Amatz), and later handled personally by the head of Amatz, Maj. Gen. Yoav Har Even.

Gantz underwent a personal learning process during his tenure (which was not by means of the General Staff work or workshops), the results of which were published in an August 2013 document called "IDF 2025—Vision and Directions for Action." The insights he gained from his personal learning process fed the strategy document published in October 2013— there was no process of developing knowledge through workshops, expert teams, and so on. Gantz approved the document at a number of

General Staff discussions. Unlike its predecessor, this document was not intended to innovate but to reflect the existing situation, and thus formed a platform for shared language rather than guidance for force employment or design (Har Even, 2020).[1]

Four main new subjects appeared in the concept:

a. *Conceptualization of three IDF operational modus operandi—"emergency situation" was added to the "routine" and "wartime" situations defined* by his predecessor Ashkenazi. The need for this new category arose from Operation Pillar of Defense in Gaza (2012), which was neither a routine situation nor officially a war, but was a situation that might develop from the "campaign between wars" (CBW):

> The use of force in a state of emergency includes operations characterized by high-intensity use of military force. As a rule these operations are restricted to one arena or one front. The disruption to routine life on the home front will be limited as far as possible. The rationale for using force in an emergency includes retaliation, (significant) damage to the enemy's force development, and renewal of deterrence. (*IDF Strategy*, 2013, p. 22)

For the purpose of emergency action, a "deterrent operation" was defined: "The logic underlying the idea of deterrence is to 'persuade' the enemy that the price and/or the risk of a particular course of action that it might choose is greater than any foreseeable benefit to be gained from that action" (*IDF Strategy,* 2013, p. 27). This type of operation was not presented as a substitute for decisive operations, but as an additional type of operation suitable for emergencies.

b. *Definition of a new pattern of action—CBW*: "The rationale for force employment in the campaign between wars in routine times is to damage the enemy's attempts to build strength, to create deterrence and better conditions for operations and wars, and to create the potential to delay high-intensity use of the force (in emergencies [see above] and wars)" (*IDF Strategy,* 2013, p. 29). The principles of CBW force employment were later defined.

c. In the framework of operations whose purpose is a decisive victory, significant emphasis was given to the need for action in operational depth. Based on this insight, Gantz set up a Depth Command in early 2012.

d. *Cyber*: Throughout the document there is emphasis on the threats in cyberspace that demand increased protection, as well as the need to make maximum use of this space for intelligence and attack. The document does not deal with the General Staff organizational changes required in this regard.

The need for a new document arose when the operational concept of 2006 was suspended following the Second Lebanon War. One of the main objectives of the Operations Directorate in the period following the war was to update the operational concept. Apparently the General Staff work was not completed under Chief of Staff Ashkenazi due to the general trend in the IDF of "back to basics," which characterized his term of office and was correct at the time (Finkel, 2018, pp. 122-142). This trend postponed changes of various kinds, some that developed under Ashkenazi, and others that were initiated by Gantz. The strategy document under Gantz formalized the knowledge that was developed in those years (2006-2012).

IDF Strategy under Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot, August 2015/January 2018

The *IDF Strategy* document issued by Chief of Staff Eisenkot in 2015 includes "the strategy for force employment…focusing on the common elements of the various operational arenas in which the conflict is against a sub-state enemy

(such as Hezbollah and Hamas organizations)" (*IDF Strategy*, 2015, p. 7). It was written for internal purposes, such as the General Staff framework for operational concepts to be developed by the regional commands that were deemed very important by Eisenkot, but was used in an unusual way compared to its predecessors for the purpose of an open dialogue with the political echelon. The reason for this novel use apparently lies in Eisenkot's experience of the interface between the politicians and the military when he served as the Prime Minister's Military Secretary and then as the head of Amatz in the Second Lebanon War. The Gideon multi-year plan, which was based on his strategy document, stressed the development of the IDF's ability to act against Hamas and Hezbollah, although at the time of the publication of the strategy and the preparation of the Gideon Plan, Prime Minister Netanyahu stated that the main threat to Israel was from Iran. A special report of the Knesset Sub-Committee on the Security Concept stated:

> "Gideon" was designed "from the bottom up" by and within the IDF: and this was with no written, approved, and published national security concept, and for most if not all of the process, even without preliminary instruction from the political echelon. This could lead to a return of the failures from the previous campaigns, both in terms of a missing critical mass of real capabilities, and because of the danger that an army that was built and prepared for its mission with one rationale may be required to act according to another rationale. Meanwhile the congruence necessary in today's operations between instructions from the political echelon and the willingness to implement them, and the operational plans and consequent force design, is

> absent. (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 2017, p. 6)

Whatever the case, in view of the importance of the matter, Chief of Staff Eisenkot did everything in his power to encourage a professional dialogue between the military and the political echelon on this subject.

The process of knowledge development took the form of staff work coordinated by the head of Amatz, Maj. Gen. Yoav Har Even, and with the help of the Dado Center, and its content was influenced by two elements: an analysis of Operation Protective Edge (2014) and the personal learning process experienced by Eisenkot before he became Chief of Staff. The results were published in March 2015 (a month after he took office) in a document called "Core Messages to IDF Commanders," which stated that there was "a need for a joint and thorough clarification of 'IDF strategy and the operational concept,' with a discussion of the basic ideas arising from it" (Office of the Chief of Staff, 2015). The General Staff discussed the outcomes of the work at a two-day workshop in late March 2015, and the decisions of the Chief of Staff guided the continuation of the work. The document was presented to Defense Minister Ya'alon in July 2015 (Har Even, 2020).

The main issues highlighted in this document were:

a. *The focus on the "first circle"—Hezbollah and Hamas*: This focus is a change from previous documents, which defined the range of hostilities but did not define any order of priorities.

b. *Within the first circle—focus on a war scenario*: The classified version of the document included quantitative aspects of the range of action of the ground forces and the scope of targets that the Air Force was required to attack (here too it differs from previous documents that were more general): "The ability to activate effective Operational-Level fire (air, land, and sea) is required in all war arenas, at full strength,

at any time, with an output of thousands of targets for a single day of fighting, and for the rest of the time—the ability to generate and attack hundreds of targets per day" (*IDF Strategy*, 2015, p. 40).

c. *Engagement with the cyber domain*— broader in comparison with the document from the Gantz era, defining the need for "establishing a cyber arm which will serve as a principal command, subordinate to the Chief of the General Staff, for operations and force buildup of the IDF cyberspace capabilities. It will be in charge for planning and implementing the cyber domain campaign" (*IDF Strategy*, 2015, p. 42). The arm was not established, but there were a number of organizational processes in this area, including the establishment of the Cyber Defense Division in the C4I Directorate (which later became C4I and Cyber Defense Directorate).

d. Following international reports of IDF actions in Gaza, the subject of the struggle over the legitimacy of IDF actions occupied a relatively large part of the document, with details of measures the IDF must use in order to maintain this legitimacy (*IDF Strategy*, 2015, pp. 29-30).

Following Eisenkot's decision that the *IDF Strategy* required updating in view of developments, a new version was issued in January 2018. The updates were the product of staff work led by the head of the Training and Doctrine division, Brig. Gen. Motti Baruch, and were discussed by the head of Amatz, Maj. Gen. Nitzan Alon, and the Chief of Staff himself. In the foreword, the Chief of Staff wrote:

> This document updates the *IDF Strategy* of 2015, in view of changes affecting several aspects. One concerns the way in which the IDF analyzes the strategic environment and threats. These were divided between the "complex of conflicts" that the IDF must confront, alongside the "complex

of cooperation" and coordination that the IDF develops. The second concerns force employment, and defines two main approaches—decision, and prevention and influence, based on the understanding that these approaches reflect ideas on how to deal with threats, and that there is reciprocity between them. Third, the document also expresses the growing importance of the campaign between wars (CBW) and of other efforts, such as the cyber and cognitive (information operations) efforts, in addition to the continued effort of reinforcing joint ground maneuver capability. (*IDF Strategy*, 2018, p. 3)

Behind the IDF Strategy Documents: Reflections on the IDF

It appears that the various documents are not products of personal caprices by the respective Chiefs of Staff (i.e., a document intended is to leave the imprint of the new Chief of Staff by replacing his predecessor's document, or to introduce his changes as soon as he enters office). Mofaz published the document at the end of his tenure; Ya'alon, who worked on developing the concept throughout his term of office, did not complete it and the document was published under his successor, Halutz; Ashkenazi did not publish a strategy document; Gantz published the document halfway through his term, while Eisenkot published two versions of the document during his term—a year after taking office and about a year before leaving.

Presumably the Chiefs of Staff felt a genuine need to explain to the IDF—a large and complex organization—a number of developing aspects: the conceptualization of enemies and conflicts; the reasons for organizational changes; directions in the central force design issues, and so on.

Second, in recent years, in addition to the IDF strategy documents, more and more operational concept documents have been written, serving

as the basis of war plans. Operational concepts also existed in the past, but most of them were a kind of shared understanding that was never put into writing. The IDF has become more formally established in institutional terms, and in recent years a concept document has almost become a condition for formulating and writing plans. This trend is similar to the increasing rate of updates to IDF strategy documents in the last two decades, and above all it shows that the IDF is a learning organization that invests considerable resources into updating its concepts.

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Additional reasons for the increasing engagement in writing concepts include various failures since the Yom Kippur War, leading to the understanding that devising plans without a concept is a fundamental lapse; conceptual confusion deriving from the increasing complexity of warfare (in the broadest sense, including CBW), and the rapid rate of change in the geopolitical environment, requiring renewed interpretation of the situation; imitation of the American attitude to the publication of official concept documents as a feature of a "serious" and well-ordered military organization (in terms of procedure, not content); and the need for an organizational "compass"—regulation of a shared world of terms, focus on new areas of importance to the Chief of Staff, and so on.

The conceptual confusion reflected in the strategy documents is directly linked to the rise in the complexity of warfare as perceived in the IDF. For many years, the pattern of waging war did not change in principle, and was based on fighting between a regular military force against the regular military forces of Arab countries.

Until the early 2000s, the IDF fought in a variety of less intense conflicts (the War of Attrition [1968-1970], the first intifada [1987-1991], and others) but these were not seen as related to the core of the IDF concept, which was fairly clear—take the fighting to the enemy's territory by the use of overwhelming force as soon as possible, and defeat the enemy with air and armored warfare. In the eyes of IDF commanders, the relative stability of the threat and the response did not require any change to the fundamental (and unwritten) concept of the use of force. Since the second intifada (2000-2005, and as the threat of fighting between armies has faded) until today, the IDF has been occupied by different, less familiar threats, some very close to policing, others dealing with a semi-military enemy, and others in distant circles, and these trends are what have led to the complexity under discussion.

Under Mofaz the IDF had to deal with new areas, such as suicide terrorism operating within a broad-based popular uprising, and with threats from afar, while the IDF had recently solved the problem of dealing with the swarm of Syrian AFVs. Under Halutz, the IDF had already defeated suicide terrorism in the West Bank, withdrawn from Gaza, and tried to emulate the United States army that was victorious in the Iraq War (2003), but missed the main problem that it encountered just after publication of the strategy: the short-range rocket capabilities of Hezbollah and Hamas. This threat received very limited mention in the concept document, which focused on dealing with state armies and the Palestinians. In the days of Chief of Staff Gantz, the IDF had two operations in Gaza behind it (Cast Lead and Pillar of Defense), and the third, Protective Edge, took place after publication of the document. The IDF was uncomfortable with the results of these operations and tried to define them as "deterrence campaigns," which under Eisenkot became "limited campaigns." The political echelon shared this conceptual confusion, and it led to the phenomenon described by Michael (2016) in the context of

the war on jihadi terror in the context of civil-military relations. In the case of IDF strategy documents, the focus changed over the years from Palestinian terror organizations in the West Bank during the Mofaz era, to the semi-state terror organization Hezbollah in the Eisenkot era (or the "terror army," according to the definition of Chief of Staff Kochavi, Lev Ram, 2019), but they also dealt with more distant circles, and here too there is confusion, and concept and achievements must be defined. This confusion illustrates the need for the "open discourse space" between the echelons within the army, and between them and the political echelon, and the documents analyzed here are part of that type of discourse that has developed in recent decades.

Another explanation for the quickening pace of updated IDF strategy documents is the slow rate of update of more official binding documents—General Staff Doctrine – Operations (the main doctrinal document in the IDF, which defines issues such as types of war, the organization of the fighting space—arenas, fronts, and so on, principles of processes of command and control, and so forth). It is unnecessary to specify the conceptualization of the conflicts in the IDF strategy documents ("the circles" in the time of Mofaz; the division into routine/emergency/war and the deterrent operations of Gantz; the limited campaigns and the campaign between the wars of Eisenkot), but rather in military doctrine documents, since these definitions are used by the IDF not only for conceptual guidance but also for planning needs and writing orders. However, in a reality in which this was not updated from the last version in 2006 until 2019 (when the updated General Staff Operations Doctrine was published), the IDF had no choice but to bridge the gap by means of the strategy documents.

The IDF strategy documents should generate new concepts if necessary, but these must be incorporated as an agreed update of the Operations doctrine. The strategy documents should make use of this conceptualization

in order to develop the principles of force design and employment (something that the Operations doctrine is not intended to include by virtue of its definition as a doctrine). For that purpose it will be necessary to continue updating the military doctrine at the level of the General Staff.

It is also important to note what is not included in the IDF strategy documents. Due to their focus on conceptualizing the threats and current modus operandi in the IDF, they do not deal with the medium-range and long-range future.

It is also important to note what is not included in the IDF strategy documents. Due to their focus on conceptualizing the threats and current modus operandi in the IDF, they do not deal with the medium-range and long-range future. Ever since the document published by Mofaz in 2002, the IDF strategy documents have not reflected concepts of the future battlefield, of the type found for example in the US Army, and therefore they have not driven significant change. They dealt largely with the present and the near future, and were therefore suitable for driving the size of the IDF in the course of the multi-year plan (closing/opening units) and matters of training and ammunition stocks, and for driving organizational changes (for example, in the strategy document of 2015—setting up the Commando Brigade, organizing the field of cyber, and so on), but not for longer ranges. The engagement of Chief of Staff Kochavi with the "Operational Concept for Victory," which gives practical guidance (and not only in terms of quantity) for force design, reflects the important introduction of a new concept. It is still too early to analyze the implementation of the concept, although in terms of methodology it was based on the design approach, and was led personally by the Chief of Staff. It is possible that the Operational Concept for Victory, if implemented, will resolve at least some of the conceptual confusion linked to the operations

in Gaza that is reflected in the most recent IDF strategy documents.

The IDF Strategy Documents and their Role in the "Open Discourse Space"

The impact of these documents was mainly in regulating and introducing the latest concepts at the time to the IDF as a whole, and in this they were successful. With the security challenges growing more complex (see the confusion described above), this matter was extremely important, both to create a shared language within the IDF, and as the basis for developing new concepts. Since each document was published in a different context with different purposes, it is hard to compare them vis-à-vis long term force design. The 2002 Mofaz document describes changes already made during his tenure; the 2006 Ya'alon-Halutz document is unusual in the scope of the changes announced, although the Second Lebanon War led to a freeze of most of the elements, except for the integration that developed in the years after the war.

The connection imagined by the Winograd Commission between the document and the outcome of the Second Lebanon War was significantly greater than the actual one, since the document was published a few months before the war and considerable parts had not yet become IDF praxis. The idea of Effects-Based Operations was declared a mistake after the war, although in fact elements can be seen in the concepts that guided IDF action in operations following the Second Lebanon War; the strategy document of 2015 states that the commander of a campaign is the Chief of Staff and not the commander of the regional command; the design approach apparently disappeared after the war, although its necessity was understood and it returned as an official approach to the development of concepts at the end of the Gantz era and the start of the Eisenkot era.

The Gantz document of 2013 was similar to that of Mofaz. It was published toward the end of his term as Chief of Staff and its contribution was to the regulation of terms rather than to force design (such as for operational depth).

Eisenkot's document is the most focused, with the emphasis on the response to Hezbollah and Hamas, and in the directions for force design, most of which were implemented, such as extending the capability for attack by air fire, development of cyber capability, the Commando Brigade, and more.

In IDF culture, conceptual breakthroughs do not usually come from written documents, but through an interactive process between the idea and the operational and/or technological experience of implementing it (Adamsky, 2012, pp. 190-194). Sometimes it happens following a political instruction or understanding of a change in the external environment, but this should not be seen as evidence of a lack of conceptual innovation in the IDF, but as an organizational pattern that sees written documents as secondary to action. Writing the document usually marks the end of the process, and is not its catalyst. However, as in the strategy documents themselves, there have been changes in this area, as shown by the Operational Concept for Victory document from Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi, which summarizes the stage of designing the concept before moving to planning and execution.

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Brig. Gen. (res.) Dr. Meir Finkel is currently head of research at the Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Thinking and was formerly head of the Center, head of the Military Combat Doctrine and Concepts Department in the Ground Branch, and Commander of the Armored Corps in the Second Lebanon War. He holds three doctoral degrees: in evolutionary biology, in political science, and in prehistoric archaeology. His latest book, *The Chief*

of Staff, was published in 2018, and his next book, *The General Staff*, is due to be published in 2020.

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Note

1   Maj. Gen. (res.) Yoav Har Even served as head of the Operations Branch during the writing of the IDF Strategy documents 2013 and 2015, and before then, as assistant to Chief of Staff Ya'alon, and as Bureau Head for Chief of Staff Mofaz.

Prime Minister Netanyahu at the Southern Command, November 2019. Photo: Amos Ben Gershom, GPO

Containment over Decision: Internalizing the Limits of Political Militarization in Israel

Kobi Michael, Limor Regev, and Dudi Kimchi

Security threats play an essential and influential role in Israeli discourse, and some claim that this strengthens the militaristic approach of Israeli society and its political and military echelons. In practice, however, Israel has demonstrated military restraint over the last decade. This ostensible contradiction is the focus of this article, which examines political, military, and civilian realms, as well as the political civil control over the IDF. Israeli society can certainly be defined as culturally militaristic, with military symbols embedded in ceremonies, language, and icons. Yet when it comes to political militarism vis-à-vis supporting, prioritizing, and legitimizing the use of military force in order to resolve political problems, the political echelon is cautious, accountable, and responsible; the military echelon serves as a restraining actor; and the Israeli public is sober and realistic as to the possibility of resolving political problems by using military force. Therefore, that political militarism is a pervasive policy or strategy in Israel today is at the very least questionable.

Keywords: Israel, civil-military relations, militarism, IDF, strategy, existential threats, terror, civil control

Introduction

The State of Israel was established in May 1948, only three years after the end of World War II and the most extensive genocide in modern history. It was perceived by its Arab neighbors as a local aberration, an ultimate outcome of European colonialist and imperialist endeavor, a historical sin, a catastrophe for the Palestinian people, and a humiliation of the entire Arab world. Beside existential threats, a small population, and the challenges of a small country with no natural resources, and with the absence of any defense alliance or superpower protection, Israel was embedded in a hostile sphere that enjoys resources and military might far more extensive than its own. Under these circumstances, Israel faced, at least during its first two decades, an ongoing existential threat (Barak & Sheffer, 2010; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Yair, 2014; Del Sarto, 2017).

The existential fear of the Israeli Jewish psyche is deeply rooted in the history of its persecutions in general and the trauma of the Holocaust in particular. The Holocaust was not only the physical extermination of millions of Jews; it was solid proof of two basic conceptions: Jews can be under a concrete and genuine existential threat anywhere and anytime; and given that the world abandoned the Jews to their tragic fate, they clearly can rely only on themselves and their own power to ensure their survival. The existential anxiety functioned in a dual manner: on the one hand as an accelerator of defense mechanisms vis-à-vis essential threats, and on the other hand, as a barrier to a rational approach to a reality that enables taking calculated risks, realizing historical opportunities, and making essential strategic choices and decisions (Abulof, 2019).

Against this historical background, security threats play an essential and influential role in Israeli discourse. Some claim this encourages and strengthens the militaristic approach of Israeli society and its political and military echelons. But in practice, Israel has demonstrated military restraint over the last decade. This ostensible contradiction is the focus of this article, which examines political, military, and civilian realms, as well as the political civil control over the IDF.

Security threats play an essential and influential role in Israeli discourse. Some claim this encourages and strengthens the militaristic approach of Israeli society and its political and military echelons. But in practice, Israel has demonstrated military restraint.

The article begins by defining the essence of existential threat in the Israeli context, followed by the main argument and a short discussion about Israeli militarism as discussed in the literature. It presents the core disputes about the essence of the existential threats among leading Israeli scholars, statespeople, and military professionals, and then introduces the idea of militarism as reflected in the Clausewitzian triangle: the political echelon, the military echelon, and the public. It concludes with a discussion regarding the essence of Israeli militarism and civil control as reflected in the encounter and discourse of the political and military echelons.

Existential Threats in the Israeli Context

The term "existential threat" in the Israeli case is defined by Kobi Michael (2009), who identifies four main dimensions: physical; governmental (i.e., sovereignty, loss of effective control over territories and population); political (international legitimacy to the existence of the State of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people); and issues related to identity that risk the state's existence, its agreed sovereignty, and its character as the democratic nation of the Jewish people and have the potential to cause severe damage to the state's capacity to tackle external and domestic threats successfully (for further reading, see Winter, Michael, & Shiloah, 2020).

The term "existential threat" is used in the public and academic discourses in Israel to describe both external threats, like the Iranian nuclear threat, and domestic threats to Israeli society, such as the ramifications of socio-political rifts for social cohesion and national resilience. An existential threat can be real or imagined. It might reflect a military balance assessment, or subjective and controversial perceptions disputed among societies and individuals (Abulof, 2006; Hirshberger, 2014). Due to the potential devastating ramifications of existential threats and because a state might take far reaching steps in order to prevent them (Manners, 2002), there is crucial importance to their definitions.

Given the status of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and its centrality in the Israeli ethos and daily life, many scholars describe Israel as militaristic. Indeed, in terms of cultural militarism, Israel can readily be described as a militaristic society, where military symbols are embedded in the public sphere—in ceremonies, language, and icons. Yet when it comes to political militarism in the sense of supporting, prioritizing, and legitimizing the use of military force in order to resolve political problems, the political echelon is cautious, accountable, and responsible; the military echelon proves to be a restraining actor; and the Israeli public is sober and realistic as to the possibility of resolving political problems by using military force.

This paradox can be explained by the processes the IDF went through over the last 15 years, which led it to understand and internalize the limits of military force in the era of hybrid conflicts and non-state actors and its full subordination to the political echelon—vertical civil control (Kuehn & Levy, 2020)—on the one hand, and its restraining influence over the cautious political echelon on the other hand. This dynamic is supported by the public that understands the importance of military power in unstable and dangerous environments but internalizes the limits of using military force in order to resolve political problems.

In this regard it might be claimed that the political echelon and the Israeli public perceive the military echelon as subordinate and mandated to follow the political echelon's directives. Therefore, both see no problem of deviation from the principles of civil or horizontal control in a democratic country, which means they are satisfied with the efficiency of the vertical civil control. Such satisfaction enables the IDF greater and broader professional autonomy, which increases its status as an epistemic authority (Michael, 2009) regarding security matters and its restraining influence over the political echelon, decision making processes, and the shaping of national security strategy. This increasing influence could be understood as a reflection of weak or ineffective horizontal civil control (Kuehn & Levy, 2020) because the IDF gains unlimited independence regarding military strategy that under the Israeli circumstances—where in most cases, no prime minister or security cabinet will act against the IDF recommendations—becomes the state's security strategy.

The Main Argument

Although the political echelon in Israel casts the Iranian threat as existential, and others include Hamas and Hezbollah as well, the military echelon perceives it differently. For its part, the Israeli public perceives Iran as a serious threat but not necessarily existential. With regard to the other major security threats, Hezbollah and Hamas, the Israeli public is concerned but not terrified, frustrated and angry that Hamas dictates or influences its daily life. While it expects the government and military to retaliate in a more aggressive manner in order to exact a price and improve deterrence, it understands and internalizes that it must live with these threats.

The military echelon internalized the nature of hybrid warfare, and stopped believing in victory vis-à-vis non-state actors like Hamas and Hezbollah. It defines victory as the realization of the political objectives that should be

determined by the political echelon, and prefers containment over decision. Its doctrine has been adjusted accordingly; thus, the "main goal of this 'hybrid' military strategy is to maintain the security status quo rather than changing it by military means" (Barak, Sheniak, & Shapira, 2020, p. 2), and it becomes the moderating player in the encounter with the political echelon.

If militarism is defined as the clear preference and legitimacy for using military force in order to resolve political problems, the definition of contemporary Israel as militaristic is highly equivocal. In other words, that political militarism is currently a pervasive policy or strategy in Israel is questionable, at the very least.

Militarism in Israel

In many research studies relating to the Israeli context there is an emphasis on the uniqueness of the Israeli case (Siniver, 2012) and the ongoing feeling of existential threat and siege (Del Sarto, 2017; Yair, 2014, Bar-Tal, & Antebi, 1992). In addition, there is a broad consensus among leading Israeli scholars like Baruch Kimmerling (1993), Yagil Levy (2003), Uri Ram (2008), Lev Grinberg (2008), and others that Israeli society is militaristic, marked by decided Israeli militarism, which in turn accounts at least largely for Israel's security reality.

Kimmerling (1993) identifies three dimensions of militarism: political/force, cultural, and cognitive. Political militarism is evident under direct or indirect military rule and is based on force and absolute loyalty to the military leadership. In such cases army generals are the decision makers and establish national policy. In Israel one may not find political militarism within its borders, but the West Bank may reflect this dimension of militarism. Cultural militarism is referred to as civilian militarism by Alfred Vagts (1937), reflected by the central role of the army in collective experience and identity. Cultural militarism is one of the central collective symbols and

the full embodiment of patriotism. Wars are perceived as a dominant, necessary social process, internally and externally. Education, industry, science, technology, and other fields are recruited to the needs of the "homeland." Robin Luckham (1971) notes that in such cases the border between the military and social institutions is blocked politically but penetrable culturally. Military generals gain respect and prestige but not actual political power. The third dimension is civilian/cognitive, expressed when militarism penetrates structurally and culturally into the collective "state of mind." The essence of civilian militarism is when military considerations defined as "national security-related" will be always prioritized and located above political, economic, or ideological considerations.

If militarism is defined as the clear preference and legitimacy for using military force in order to resolve political problems, the definition of contemporary Israel as militaristic is highly equivocal. In other words, that political militarism is currently a pervasive policy or strategy in Israel is questionable, at the very least.

Kimmerling notes that all three dimensions can be found in various forms in Israel. In 2019 Uri Ben-Eliezer, one of the leading scholars among Israeli critical sociologists, published an extensive book in which he explains the development of ethno-national and militaristic ideology during 100 years of Zionism, with the religious dimension added recently, and defines it as the central element for understanding the sources of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the concluding chapter he introduces the main argument and conceptualizes it as "militaristic nationalism": "This approach became an ideology in the sense that it introduced a clear worldview…that shaped reality by force and was routinely translated into use of and reliance on military force" (Ben-Eliezer, 2019, p. 600).

According to the approach of critical scholars, the roots of Israeli political militarism were not inevitable. Some explain the phenomenon as a reflection of the IDF's dominant status in Israeli society; others refer to Israeli militarism as an outcome of the post-1967 occupation and the ongoing control over the territories and the Palestinian population (Gur, 2005). Some see the power of the political right wing and messianic religious groups as enabling the perpetuation of Israeli militarism (Levy, 2007; Ben-Eliezer, 2012), while others even reject the idea of existential threats and perceive them as political manipulation to justify militarism. Some claim that even if Israel is under existential threats, it can handle them by non-military means, and therefore there is a need to prioritize political arrangements and peaceful strategies for conflict management and resolution.

Thus historically and almost traditionally, Israel and Israeli society are described in the literature as militaristic. The historical context of many wars and military campaigns, the Israeli control over the territories since 1967 until the Oslo accords (1993-95), and its security control over part of these territories until today, as well as the unique societal status of the IDF have provided factual and interpretive bases for strong conclusions about Israeli militarism. But since the Second Lebanon War (2006) and maybe even after the disengagement from the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria in 2005, significant transformations have occurred in Israeli society and politics, joined by far-reaching changes and developments in IDF strategy and military thought regarding the limits of military force.

The Disputes about Existential Threats among Israeli Experts

If until 1973 (the Yom Kippur War was the last war between the IDF and regular Arab armies) the assumption was that the principal effort by the Arabs will be a military effort, the outcome of the war convinced Arab leaders that they will not be able to destroy Israel through conventional military means, and therefore they turned to alternative efforts, chiefly, nonconventional efforts (WMD, mainly nuclear weapons) and sub-conventional efforts (terror and delegitimization, including boycotts). They believed that such efforts will enable them to exhaust Israeli society, by undermining Israel's economy and international legitimacy (Ya'alon & Friedman, 2018, pp. 9-10).

The collapse of the USSR, the Oslo process with the Palestinians, the Iranian efforts to export their religious revolution and expand their influence and hegemony in the region, and the Arab upheaval that began in 2010 have changed the geo-strategic reality and the threat perceptions in the region. The heightened Iranian and Salafi-jihadist threats, the collapse of the territorial nation state order, the multiplying state failures, and the increasing presence and influence of non-state actors (Michael & Guzansky, 2017) created new alliances in the region that face common threats and share strategic interests. Israel finds itself cooperating with Arab states against those threats.

The familiar regional geo-political order based on the territorial nation state was replaced by a bloody struggle for hegemony and influence between four main camps or axes: the Shiite axis led by Iran; the Salafi-jihad axis led by ISIS and al-Qaeda; political Islam, supported by Turkey and Qatar; and the pragmatic Sunni Arab countries axis led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Heller, 2016, pp. 19-21). This struggle changed the perception of the pragmatic Sunni Arab leaders. At a time that the pragmatic camp faces three severe external and domestic threats—Iran, Salafist jihadism, and political Islam—its leaders find Israel a reliable and desirable, if not necessary ally for tackling these threats (Yadlin, 2016, p. 161).

With the changes in the regional order, the importance and centrality of the Palestinian issue decreased, and became more marginal and problematic in the eyes of the pragmatic Arab leaders (Ben-Menachem, 2019). Therefore, for Israel, the Palestinian issue has become a

security threat because of Hamas and other organizations operating mainly from the Gaza Strip, which is not under the PA control, and due to organizations and factions in the West Bank; it is a domestic threat because of the political dispute about the political stalemate and its implications for the Zionist vision of Israel as the democratic nation state of the Jewish people (Gavison, 2006).

Summarizing the current strategic reality regarding the external threats that Israel faces, the conventional military threat has been removed; Palestinian terrorism from the PA territories has been contained after five bloody years of war against terror (the second intifada 2000-2005); delegitimization efforts and campaigns have achieved limited success and failed to undermine the international legitimacy of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people (Yogev & Lindenstrauss, 2017); and even the economic damage caused by the BDS movement has been marginal.

Therefore, the significant external threats to Israel's strategic stability today are the Iranian threat, Hezbollah, and Hamas. The latter are perceived as severe with the potential of disruption of the daily routine in Israel and extensive damage to essential strategic infrastructures, mainly with regard to Hezbollah's capacities, which are far greater than Hamas's, but not existential threats. The Iranian threat is perceived by the political echelon as the most severe and even an existential threat (the military and the public share this assessment, but to a lesser degree), due to Iran's determination to achieve nuclear capabilities and the goal of the extremist regime to erase Israel from the map—objectives that are met by the international community, at least in Israeli eyes, with decided weakness.

On the other hand, there are experts who deny the existential nature of the Iranian threat due to Israel's capability to delay and undermine Tehran's efforts to achieve nuclear capabilities and the assumption that Iran will not dare to attack Israel with nuclear weapons because it

knows that Israel has second strike capability and its estimation that the US will intervene and attack Iran with nuclear weapons. The more significant fear among many in the political and military echelons is the nuclear arms race that will develop in the region because of Iranian nuclearization (Yadlin & Guzansky, 2012), which will lead to regional chaos and undermine regional stability completely.

Despite the analysis of the geo-strategic threats and reality that Israel lives in, many security experts and professionals in Israel who do not underestimate the severe threats believe that there is a tendency, primarily among the political echelon and other politicians, to exaggerate the threats and depict them as more dangerous than they really are.

Despite the analysis of the geo-strategic threats and reality that Israel lives in, many security experts and professionals in Israel who do not underestimate the severe threats believe that there is a tendency, primarily among the political echelon and other politicians, to exaggerate the threats and depict them as more dangerous than they really are. To the Executive Director of INSS and former head of Military Intelligence Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin, "generally speaking, Israel's strategic situation today is the best since its establishment" (2018). Indeed, experts and security professionals like Yadlin believe that the IDF is the strongest and most advanced military in the Middle East and that Israel has many strategic strengths, including technological capacities; its status as a "start-up nation"; its international status, in particular, the special and close relations with the US administration; developed economic and scientific relations with China; upgraded strategic relations with India; strategic intimacy with Russia; tight relations with the Eastern Mediterranean countries, mainly Greece, Cyprus, and Italy; improved relations with countries in Eastern

and Central Europe; blossoming relations with the African continent; close strategic and intelligence relations and cooperation with some Arab states; the diplomatic connections of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his close ties to the Trump administration; economic strengths; and in the near future, energy independence.

Assessing Threats and Militarism in the Clausewitzian Trinity

The sense of existential threat and willingness to use military force in order to remove such threats can be analyzed according to the Clausewitizian trinity of government (the political echelon), army (the military echelon), and people (the public) as follows: the actual policy realized by the political echelon, and the way it chooses to use military force in order to resolve political problems; IDF strategy and modus operandi as articulated in doctrinal documents and by senior officials in the public sphere and in encounters with the political echelon; and Jewish public opinion in Israel as reflected in different public opinion polls and surveys since 2006.

The last decade under Netanyahu could be characterized as a decade of cautious and restrained policy. This policy includes limited political aims vis-à-vis the external threats and restrained military strategy.

The Political Echelon

In the last two decades, the political echelon has internalized the essential changes in the nature of external conflicts as reflected in the respective strategies of state (mainly Iran) and non-state (Hamas and Hezbollah) actors. This internalization was demonstrated in the decisions on unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon (May 2000), the disengagement from the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria (summer 2005), and the withdrawal to the international borders (Evstein & Avidar, 2019), in both cases despite IDF opposition.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin can be considered a forerunner of this approach because of his decision to advance the Oslo agreement with the Palestinians. He was followed by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who decided on the unilateral withdrawal from South Lebanon; Prime Minister Arik Sharon, who led the disengagement from the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria; and his successor Ehud Olmert (who served as Prime Minister 2006-2009), who led his Kadima party and won the 2006 elections with the promise to continue Sharon's vision, in the spirit of the 2005 engagement, by disengaging from most of the territories in the West Bank.

Prime Minister Barak is quoted (Evstein & Avidar, 2019) as saying: "We have no illusions. The dreams and aspirations of many in the Arab world haven't changed…we live in a villa in a jungle." Evstein and Avidar believe that the shift in Israeli strategy has presumably led to the new and increased threats along the borders. The enemy that gave up on the option of conventional military decision has emphasized and improved its capacities on exhausting and undermining the IDF and Israeli society by terror, conflict, and friction along the borders and political warfare (lawfare and delegitimization). The development of semi-military forces that operate methods of terror, guerilla, and nonconventional warfare pushed the IDF to concentrate on defense. The political directive that supported the IDF's decision to give up on the offensive efforts enabled the enemy to organize itself in its territories and to "knock on the villa's walls" (Ibid., pp. 150-151).

The last decade has been marked by ongoing military conflicts with Hamas in and along the Gaza Strip, the "lone wolf" terrorism in the West Bank and Jerusalem (2015-2017), Hezbollah's increased missile and rocket threat, and the Iranian military entrenchment in Syria. The US withdrawal from the JCPOA, the Arab world's weakness in the wake of the Arab upheaval, the international community's increasing weakness, and the US distancing

from the Middle East have led Iran to intensify its subversion efforts, and in turn, to increased regional instability.

Benjamin Netanyahu, who has served as Prime Minister since 2009, has consistently demonstrated restraint vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip despite severe public criticism, including from his political opponents on the ideological right. He has avoided expanding the military campaign and reoccupying the Gaza Strip or embarking on a significant military campaign to topple Hamas or neutralize its military capabilities. Even in face of Hezbollah's strengthened efforts, the political echelon demonstrates restraint through the mutual deterrence that has been maintained since the Second Lebanon War, avoids operating against these efforts in Lebanon, and concentrates the efforts primarily on Syrian soil (with one exception in the summer of 2019, for which Israel did not assume responsibility).

The political echelon pursues an offensive doctrine vis-à-vis the Iranian threat only—and even these measures are pursued according to the principles of the campaign between wars. The essence is to undermine the Iranian efforts to entrench military facilities and capabilities in Syria, while continuing to prevent and disrupt the Iranian efforts toward military nuclear capabilities. The political echelon retains this strategy despite repeated declarations by the Prime Minister defining the Iranian threat as an existential threat, comparing it to Nazi Germany, and criticizing the international community's soft approach. In most cases, Israel avoids taking responsibility for attacking Iranian targets and prefers to operate in ambiguity; it maintains a high level of cooperation and intimacy with Russia that controls the Syrian air space and has its own interest in preserving the Syrian regime, and is able to curtail Iranian and Syrian retaliation. Thus far and despite some cases in which Iran chose to retaliate against Israel and was rebuffed aggressively by Israel, in order to preserve and ensure deterrence, this strategy has proved successful.

The last decade under Netanyahu could be characterized as a decade of cautious and restrained policy. This policy includes limited political aims vis-à-vis the external threats and restrained military strategy. An article published in *Commentary* described Netanyahu as follows:

He has shown himself to be a careful thinker, a leader whose reading of complex situations has allowed him to outmaneuver adversaries and protect Israel's interests. ….Netanyahu has been quietly shaping the situation to protect his country's interests.… Though often portrayed as a warmonger, Netanyahu is extremely cautious around military campaigns. Netanyahu, recall, did whatever he could to avoid a ground incursion in Gaza in 2012.…He also sought repeated cease-fires before ordering a ground invasion in 2014. And despite massive support for an expanded push into Gaza, Netanyahu made do with a limited incursion to deal with Hamas's tunnel network. If anything, his approach to Hamas reveals an excess of caution, not zealousness. (Berman, 2016)

The Military Echelon: From Decision to Containment

The criticism against the IDF about the shift in its thinking and operational modus operandi since the end of the second intifada and mainly after Second Lebanon War focuses on the IDF commanders. According to critics, the commanders gave up on decision, and continue the politicization process in the IDF, evident since the military's partnership with the political echelon in the Oslo process, which prompts the military echelon to consider political considerations that should not be within the IDF's purview. The critics from within the IDF and without blame the military echelon for the

loss of will and determination to win. Even if good answers can be provided to those critics, the fact that military thought has gone through significant changes cannot be ignored. These changes are articulated in the *IDF Strategy* and other doctrinal documents, and mainly in the way the IDF has operated vis-à-vis the different fronts, particularly the Palestinian arena, where the daily friction level is the highest.

> Hesitation, avoidance, or tendency to delay out of fear of complication and loss of achievements in the different levels of war have influenced the willingness to operate ground formations during the campaign between wars.

The restraint demonstrated by the military echelon relies in part on the "strategic avoidance model" (Derouen & Sprecher, 2006; Fordham, 2005), influenced by the perceptual crisis that leads to mistrust in the ability to win or decide, and mistrust regarding the main formation—the ground maneuver. In addition, the common belief reflects both the absence of existential threat and an aspiration to keep and preserve the status quo, i.e., the absence of territorial aspirations or the drive to redesign the geo-strategic environment. Eventually, the military echelon internalized the meaning of domestic and international delegitimization to the way war is conducted and its price, as well as the importance attributed by society and the political echelon to defend and preserve the population's routine and daily life. The developments in the US military, perceived as a strategic ally with which the IDF maintains close cooperation, influence the IDF as well in adopting the strategic avoidance model.

The outcome is reflected in the noticeable objective to shorten wars and violent conflicts as much as possible, and this is the logic behind the idea of a "lethal military" (Dostri, 2019) developed by Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, the current IDF Chief of Staff. The aim is to return quiet and ensure the status quo. The drive to guarantee

that wars are as short as possible leads to enthusiasm for technological innovation, mainly regarding deadly precision weapons and aspirations for intelligence superiority and dominance. Along with these preferences, the military echelon continues the effort to transfer the responsibility for designing offensive campaigns, aimed at changing the geo-strategic reality, to the political echelon, as part of the attempt to prompt it to define the essence of victory and political goals and priorities. *The IDF Strategy,* published in 2015 and updated in 2018, is a salient expression of this effort, and some even interpret it as a challenge to the political echelon (Michael, Elran, & Siboni, 2016; Even & Michael, 2016).

This approach differs entirely from the territorial expansion approach defined by Dov Tamari (2014), based on IDF operational plans, as "spatial nationality." This approach characterized the IDF since the War of Independence (1948) until the First Lebanon War (1982). Its organizing rationale relies on the principle that the ultimate solution for Israel's security problems is significant capture of territories beyond those that were determined in the 1949 armistice agreements. This translated into an initiated or imposed war as a result of an external crisis; the war then aimed to occupy large swaths of territory that could subsequently be annexed to state territory by Israeli governments (Tamari, 2014, p. 6).

The conceptual change signals the beginning of the maneuver crisis in the IDF ground forces (Brun, 2008; 2010; Tamari & Kalifi, 2009; Ortal, 2009), and it signals a delay in realizing the deciding strategy aimed for the creation of a strategic change. Hesitation, avoidance, or tendency to delay out of fear of complication and loss of achievements in the different levels of war have influenced the willingness to operate ground formations during the campaign between wars (for more about the campaign between wars, see Shabtai, 2011) or in intensive conflicts. The ground maneuver became the

last resort for limited decision (Tzur, 2016, pp. 58-59; Shelah, 2015, pp. 41-43, 119-120).

The avoidance and containment approach was ultimately reflected in the IDF's preferred policy vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip and West Bank after the second intifada was close to an end. The IDF pursued a policy of relief for the civilian population based on the principle of differentiation between the uninvolved civilian population and those waging acts of terror. The attempt to gain leverage by pressuring the civilian population to encourage a restraining influence over the Palestinian leadership that collaborated with participants in terror activity was replaced by a policy based on the differentiation between the civilian population along with the Palestinian leadership and terror performers, and a combination between civilian and military efforts in the operational activities against terror.

Even the professional military literature exhibits restrained and framed discourse that encourages the discussion on deterrence over decision. Many articles discuss theoretical and doctrinal aspects of victory, decision, and deterrence in militarily journals published over the last decade.[1] This diverse and rich writing undermines the validity of the concepts of victory and decision in the context of contemporary conflicts, and suggests strategic and conceptual alternatives for these concepts and IDF strategy (see, for example, Tira, 2007; Eisenkot, 2010; Shabtai, 2012). Rather than decision and

territorial occupation to change the strategic situation, the emphasis is on building quality means for creating and preserving effective deterrence. The military restraint has begun focusing on denying the enemy's capacity over occupying its territories.

The *IDF Strategy* document first publicly issued in August 2015 could be defined as a "wake-up call" for the political echelon. "According to the document, the IDF sees its role as achieving 'victory,' which does not necessarily mean defeating the enemy; the political echelon together with the chief of staff must define the concept of victory before the military is deployed. The publication of the *IDF Strategy* was unprecedented in Israel's civil-military relations" (Michael & Even, 2016, p. 19). In this regard, it seems that the Chief of Staff created an infrastructure for a new theory in the world of civil-military relations in the sense of concrete clarification of the required discourse between the echelons regarding the political directive and the definition of victory. The document reflects the military echelon's expectation and even demand from the political echelon to take upon itself the responsibility for defining the expected victory yielded from exercising military force, by clear wording of the political objectives and defined priorities. No more "galloping horses" that urge their government to "let them fight and win"; on the contrary, cool and moderate generals internalized that the short-term achievements

Table 1. Israel's greatest external threat (in percent)

	Hamas	Hezbollah	Iran	Palestinian conflict	Isolation/ delegitimization
2014	32	32	21	19	18
2015	22	22	23	30	12
2016	16	12	21	27	13
2017	13	31	21	21	5
2018	14	29	20	21	6
2019	12	32	26	14	8

Note: Poll sample is of Israeli Jews
Source: The figures are collected in the INSS annual National Security Index surveys from the years 2015-2019.

the politicians want to attain must suit the protracted ideological hybrid conflicts and the limits of military force.

In the *IDF Strategy* the restraint is reflected in the context of the avoidance approach, maintenance of the status quo, and absence of efforts toward a clear strategic victory (*IDF Strategy*, 2015, p. 14) which is beyond the required achievements as defined by the political echelon (the political definition of victory). In other words, to the IDF, war or military conflict is not an ultimate opportunity for generating an essential strategic change.

Civil Society

In order to assess the existence and/or level of militarism in Israeli civil society in recent decades, this section examines three aspects: threat perception among the public; faith in the ability of the military to handle the threats; and willingness of the public to use military force. A principal resource here is a research study conducted by Zipi Israeli at the Institute for National Security Studies (2020), which presents an overview of the National Security Index monitoring public opinion polls during the years 2015-2019.

Threat perception

Israeli (2020, p. 45) notes that threat perception is influenced by psychological, sociological, economic, and cultural factors, and is shaped heavily by the leadership. Indeed, the establishment defines threats for society and hence creates a sense of threat, which eventually becomes deeply rooted in society.

The reality of various military confrontations and terror attacks, especially since 2000 and the second intifada, has led Israelis to see the potential of war as more evident than the potential for peace (Israeli, 2020). Between 62 and 64 percent of the Israeli public have embraced the notion that there is no partner for peace, and therefore the citizens of Israel are forever destined to "live by their swords" (Israeli, 2020, pp. 50-51, 203-204).

It seems that since 2017, the public has regarded the northern arena as the greatest external threat, presumably because the Syrian civil war has led to an increased Iranian presence and influence in Syria (Table 1). As the Syrian regime faced growing, more intense threats, Iranian involvement deepened. With an emphasis by the Israeli government and military on this sphere, the gravity of the situation penetrated the public discourse in Israel and contributed to a rising sense of an actual and substantive threat, followed by an assessment that the northern arena may evolve into a highly volatile confrontation. Indeed, the National Security Index of 2015-2018 found that a substantial majority of the public—over 80 percent—believed there is a concrete threat of a military confrontation in the northern border and/or Gaza within three years (Israeli, 2020, p. 50).

The Iranian nuclear threat has remained dominant and the perception of this threat has even grown slightly. Hamas is no longer a major threat in the eyes of the public, and international delegitimization is also substantially less intimidating. Israeli (2020, p. 202) finds that 82 percent believe that Israel should rely only on its own power. This notion is reflected in the low percentage of Israelis that regard isolation as a threat.

Confidence in the military and civil ability to handle threats

In the face of concrete, ongoing threats, and a belief that war is interlocked with the fate of the Jewish state, the public demonstrates a strong sense of confidence in Israel's ability to handle any threat. In April 2018, 59 percent of the public agreed with Netanyahu's statement on Independence Day that "we are stronger than ever," and 59 percent thought the emergency systems are ready in case of an all-out war (Table 2). The confidence in Israel's military abilities is so profound, that 45 percent believed that in the case of an all-out war, Israel will suffer only dozens of casualties. The National Security

Index in 2018 found that only 38 percent of the public were concerned mainly with external security-related threats (Israeli, 2020, p. 47). This relatively low figure may be explained in that 87 percent of the public in 2016-2018 believed that Israel will be able to successfully fight a war with Hamas and Hezbollah simultaneously, and 57 percent had faith in the ability to deal with the Iranian nuclear ability to attack Israel (Israeli, 2020, p. 55). In 2019, the survey found that 93 percent of the public had confidence in the IDF, and 87 percent felt that the IDF is highly prepared for any future military confrontation (Israeli, 2020, p. 213).

The Israeli Voice Index published by the Israel Democracy Institute found that in May 2018, 58 percent of the public were optimistic regarding the future of Israel's security. In August 2019, 56 percent thought that Netanyahu did a very good or good job strengthening Israel's military power, and 50 percent thought Netanyahu did a very good or good job coping with Iran. Moreover, the Israeli Voice Index (2020) notes that 67 percent of the Israeli Jewish public demonstrates faith in Israel's military ability to handle war. Similar findings appear in the Peace Index public opinion polls, which found that Israelis are mostly optimistic and see their security situation as generally good, despite the existing threats. The National Security Index in 2018 found that 52 percent believed that Israel's strategic situation has never been better. A certain shift is noted in 2019 when only 44 percent shared this notion (Israeli, 2020, p. 205).

Table 2. Faith in Israel's ability to handle external, physical threats (in percent)

	All-out war	Ongoing terror
2015	63	82
2016	84	86
2017	85	83
2018	87	78
2019	73	81

Source: Figures are collected from annual reports of the National Security Index, INSS.

The findings illustrate that even though Israelis see themselves as isolated and able to rely only on their own military capabilities, the Jewish public has adjusted to this reality. It projects optimism and faith in Israeli military capabilities, along with a permanent soberness that war is highly possible at any given time. In 2018 the Israeli public demonstrated the highest sense of optimism regarding the future measured in the past fourteen years.

Willingness to use military force in order to handle external threats
According to the National Security Index, in 2018 63 percent agreed with the notion that Arabs understand only force; 81 felt that if someone seeks to kill you, you should kill preemptively (Israeli, 2020, p. 41). Presumably, then, the Israeli public might support a militaristic approach and a tendency to use military force in the face of threats. However, the public's perception regarding external threats on the one hand and its confidence in the state and IDF ability to successfully tackle these threats on the other converge in a sober approach that leads to reduced willingness and legitimacy for using military. Furthermore, 55 percent of the public believed that the military echelon restrains the government as far as using military force against the Palestinians is concerned; 66 percent considered this approach by the IDF to be correct.

At the same time, notwithstanding this clear and restrained approach, in times of concrete security crises, Israelis are not reluctant to use force, to the point of disregarding potential international complications. For example, when the political-military establishment defined the Iranian presence and Hezbollah in the northern arena as an extremely grave threat, this had a direct effect on the Israeli public, and 70 percent supported an initiated military action against the Iranian presence in Syria, even if it leads to war. Fifty-one supported a military attack against Iran. At the same time, 68 percent claimed they are not preparing for any state of war.

These findings indicate that the public supports an initiated military action mainly when threats are perceived as concrete and evident. Use of force is restricted to such specific circumstances and threat levels, and is not an immediate or desired response to threats in general. Such restraint as demonstrated by the public indicates lack of inherent political militarism in Israel. Peri (1996) notes that when military force is used successfully, a natural tendency for using excessive force might occur, but in Israel this prompts the public to seek to limit and restrain military power. He argues that Israeli society is constantly struggling to define the boundaries for the use of military force.

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an Israeli proclivity to use force—but represents mainly frustration when terror attacks occur and obstruct civilian lives—and the public's actual willingness to use force. The mainstream does not appear impulsive, but rather demonstrates a profound understanding that force will not necessarily solve the threats, and that diplomatic channels are preferable whenever possible, despite Israel's frequent inherent distrust of these channels.

When closely analyzing threat perception and willingness to use force, public opinion polls demonstrate that despite the threats and the historical background, Israelis demonstrate optimism, confidence, and faith rather than a militaristic tendency to use force in order to obtain stability. The Israeli public supports an extensive use of force only when reality provides no other option. When that does happen, the Israeli public is united in its support of political

and military leadership, and ready to face any challenge.

Conclusion

The most notable finding in this essay is the dialectical approach of the Jewish public in Israel regarding the significance and necessity of military power. The Jewish public adopts Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" mentality and understands the necessity of military force as a critical component for the existence of the State of Israel and as a display of military strength needed for deterrence. It supports military operations in response to provocations or actions against Israel, is frustrated and angered by Hamas acts that blatantly impede routine life, and at the same time is sober about the ability to solve political foundations through military force.

Martin Shaw (1991) makes a significant distinction between militarism as an active preparation for war and a militaristic ideology that illustrates a social set of values and faith lending extremely high value to military activity. This distinction between the heart and the mind is prominent in Israel. Different polls since the Second Lebanon War (2006) indicate this duality among Jewish public opinion. Other salient indications of this duality are the significant majority for a two-state solution, support for an agreement with Hamas to achieve calm in the Gaza Strip, and opposition to a broad military campaign against Iran.

The military echelon in Israel has undergone significant changes since the Second Lebanon War, with military thinking and conduct in various arenas guided by principles of containment and restraint, resulting from the recognition and internalization of the inability to defeat Hamas and Hezbollah militarily and the futility of widespread military moves that will bring the parties at the end of any lengthy and bloody campaign back to the starting point. This approach has been criticized by those who have come to view the IDF of recent years as being a containing rather than a deciding

military, and oppose the changes undergone by the military, which is reflected in the allocation of resources to the air force, intelligence, and means for precision firearms at the expense of the maneuvering combat ground forces (Siboni & Bazaq, 2019). For example, Brig. Gen. (ret.) Chico Tamir defines the second intifada as evidence of the senior military's reluctance to suppress terrorism and as an attempt to evade the pressure applied by Prime Minister Sharon's efforts to achieve decision over terrorism, because they were enslaved to the perception of Oslo and security cooperation with the Palestinian security forces. Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yair Golan, who was the deputy chief of staff, spoke about a problematic attitude for the combat / maneuvering ranks—more investment in the air force, technology, intelligence, and less in the maneuvering level, which heightens the inability to arrive at a decisive outcome.[2]

The military's concept of containment is even more pronounced in relation to the West Bank, and especially during the so-called knives intifada of 2015-16. Then-Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot expressed on more than one occasion that he did not want to see an IDF soldier empty a rifle magazine on a girl with scissors (Steinmetz, 2016). Along with intelligence efforts and operations against the individual perpetrators, the military echelons urged the political echelon to continue efforts to improve the economic reality in the West Bank, to allow more Palestinian workers to enter Israel, and to avoid collective punishment as much as possible (Eichner & Zeitun, 2018). This position of the military is also reflected in its recommendations to the political echelon regarding the threat of Hezbollah on the northern border, expressing reactions to events exceptional in significance, such as the terror tunnels dug by Hezbollah from Lebanon into Israel or damage to the precision weapons project on Lebanese soil. The military echelon strongly opposes a proactive attack to neutralize Hezbollah's military capabilities but has prepared for severe harm by Hezbollah's

capabilities in the event of a military escalation (Dekel, Orion, Ben Haim, & Magen, 2018).

> **The findings indicate a real discrepancy between a rhetorical level that is sometimes characterized by expressions of militarism, and the sense of preference against using military force to solve political problems or willingness to use military force for these purposes.**

An interesting and expansive reference to the issue of threats facing Israel, which may also reflect ideas among the military echelons, appears in a comprehensive document entitled *Guidelines for Israel's National Security Strategy*, written by Eisenkot and his colleague Gabi Siboni (2019). In the section dealing with the presentation and analysis of the threats, the concept of "existential threat" does not appear. Rather, the authors emphasize instead the high risk of internal threats—the threat to Israeli solidarity as an element of national resilience. Their approach to external threats is characterized by clear restraint and linkage between the use of military force for policy purposes and the political echelon's responsibility. They introduce a deep understanding of the limitations of the military's force and the need to design a broad and comprehensive national security concept that brings about a combination of state-wide efforts, with the use of military force as only one mode of effort. The military echelon is a containing and restraining factor, and in some cases, it even limits the political level when it seeks to respond with a significant military attack to a threat it views as severe or a red line crossed. Thus, for example, Eisenkot said: "It happened to me as a Chief of Staff, and not only once, that a political official called me and said, 'We must go to war here, a war there,' but it did not end that way" (Fishman, 2019). On the other hand, despite the tendency of the political echelon to exacerbate the portrayal of external threats to Israel, and despite statements about

the willingness and even preparedness for a severe military response (especially against Hamas), the political echelon does not criticize the containment and the measured military response, due to its understanding of the limitations of military force and its questionable relevance to the problem's solution.

The findings indicate a real discrepancy between a rhetorical level that is sometimes characterized by expressions of militarism, and the sense of preference against using military force to solve political problems or willingness to use military force for these purposes. Consequently, there is a desire to minimize threat potentiality by maintaining effective deterrence against the threat generators; neutralizing/thwarting threats perceived as cross-border (mainly in the Iranian context, but the same applies to Hezbollah's terror tunnels); formulating a regional coalition; and gaining US backing for a military move, if required, against Iran, and international legitimacy for more significant military moves against Hamas and Hezbollah in the event that a red line is crossed.

Consequently, Israeli policy vis-à-vis the principal external threats emerges as a responsible, restrained, and contained policy, with notable differences regarding offensive and preventive approaches to the Iranian threat and reactive approaches to threats from Hamas and Hezbollah. But despite the differences, Israel is cautious against the deterioration to an all-out war and exercises its military force in a focused and responsible manner.

The political and military echelons and the Israeli public do not believe in the possibility of reaching more than a limited agreement with Hamas or Hezbollah, which is why Israel chooses to respond militarily and sometimes intensively (for example, the Second Lebanon War and the three anti-Hamas campaigns in the Gaza Strip) whenever Hamas or Hezbollah crosses the red lines defined by Israel and exercises military force against it, in order to retaliate or preserve deterrence. Military

conduct, backed by political decisions and policies, goes beyond this principle when it comes to Iran's military establishment in Syria, and more recently in Iraq. Regarding Iran's military nuclear threat, Israel is preparing for an independent military operation in case all hope is lost. But at this stage, it prefers to exhaust any political and economic possibility left under the US leadership, together with persuading the partner countries of the JCPOA.

Israel is situated in an environment fraught with violence, threats, and instability, among many actors in the region who object to Israel's very existence and call for its destruction. The military remains a major and significant institution in Israel. Israel's mandatory conscription model, which endeavors to preserve the IDF as "a people's army," and the military's significant presence in the Israeli ethos and in state and nation life are reflected in cultural militarism, which is significantly more salient than in the West. However, with regard to militarism in its political sense, the restrained conduct of the political and military echelons, as well as the attitudes of the Jewish public in Israel, seems to indicate a much lower level than that presumed by social scientists and other analysts over the years.

As far as civil control is concerned, the reality is not less dialectic. Where the formal (vertical) civil control is realized by the obedience and subordination of the military to the political echelon—although essentially, the political directives, in most cases, are in high concordance with the military's recommendations and it is rare to find examples where the political echelon decided to act against the military echelon's recommendations—the horizontal civil control does almost not exist. It seems that it is, at least partly, because of the full independence the IDF has regarding military issues, including the way of operating military force, and the indifference of the political echelon and public to these matters because everybody seems satisfied with the way that the vertical civil control is realized.

Dr. Kobi Michael is a senior research fellow at INSS and editor of *Strategic Assessment*.

Dr. Limor Regev, a former intern at INSS and future guest researcher at the Leonard Davis Institute the Hebrew University Jerusalem, specializes in conflict resolution and mediation and territorial negotiations.

Col. (ret.) Dudi Kimchi, formerly the head of the doctrines division in the IDF, is a senior advisor to the IDF on command and control, and a doctoral student at the University of Haifa working on institutional resistance to learning among commanders in IDF.

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Notes

1   For example, the second issue of the journal *Iyunim Bebitahon Leumi* (*National Security Issues)*, July 2001, was devoted to lectures given in a joint seminar of the Center of National Security Research at Haifa University and the IDF National Security College under the title "Between Decision and Victory." See https://bit.ly/3bHt6i6 [in Hebrew].

2   Both figures spoke at the Israel Victory Project conference in Kfar Maccabiah, September 8, 2019, sponsored by the Middle East Forum.
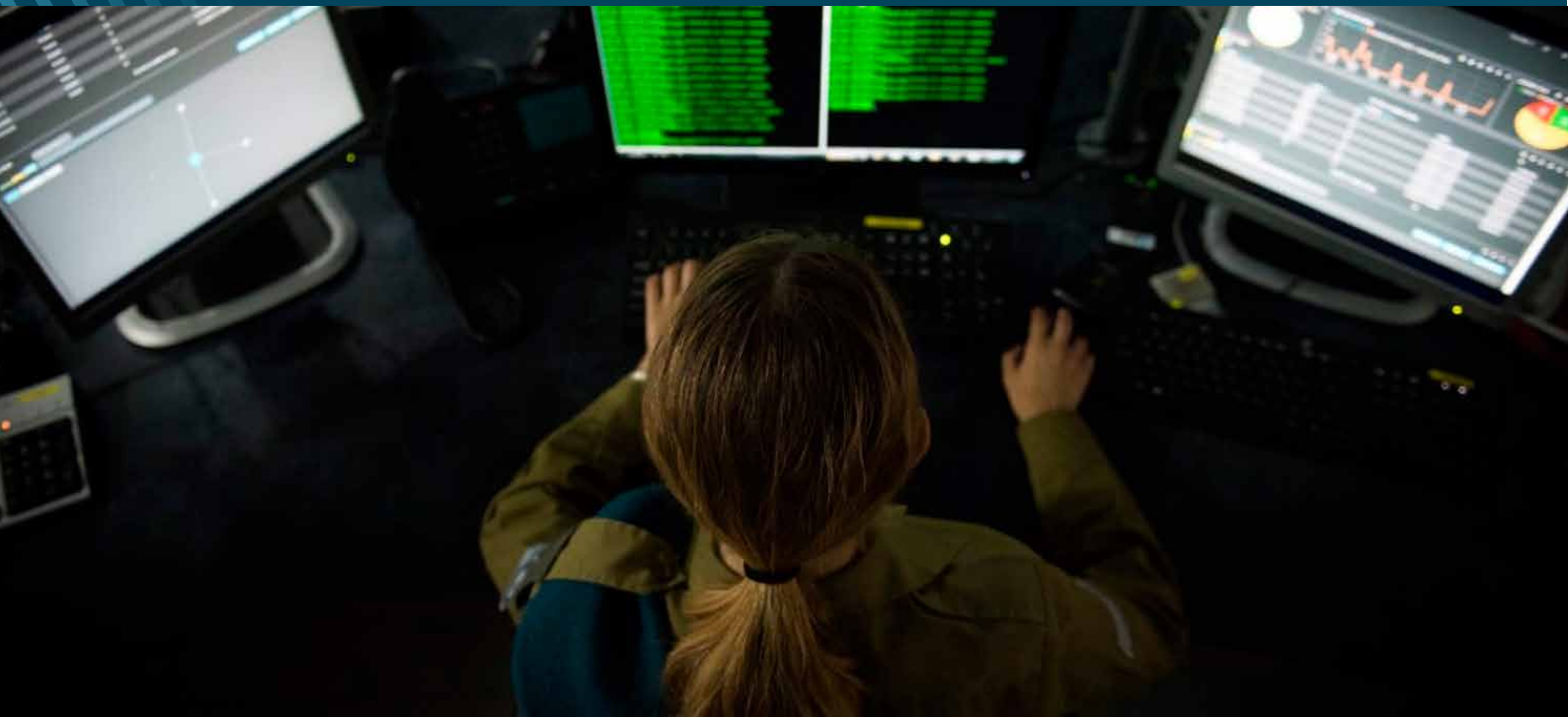
Using artificial intelligence in the IDF Computer Service Directorate. Photo: Bamahane website

Research in the Intelligence Community in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Shmuel Even and David Siman-Tov

By their very nature, intelligence communities are ideal customers for new information technologies. This article addresses two questions: How do new information technologies, primarily artificial intelligence, contribute to the intelligence community's research activities? What challenges are posed by the assimilation of artificial intelligence in this field? The integration of artificial intelligence in strategic research may provide intelligence agencies with enhanced capabilities in helping leaders understand an emerging reality, detect changes of course early, and manage risks and opportunities. However, the path to achievement of these capabilities is replete with challenges.

Keywords: intelligence research, intelligence assessment, war alert, situation assessment, decision making, strategy, artificial intelligence, machine learning

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a major evolutionary step in the broad field of information technologies. The elements enabling AI technology applications are the augmentation of computerization capabilities, growth in the volume of information, better algorithms, and growth in investments (Grimland, 2018). AI-based applications are increasingly integrated in daily life, and their impact can be expected to expand and intensify in many spheres ("How to Ensure Artificial Intelligence Benefits Society," 2020). The same is true with regard to AI-based applications in the security and intelligence systems. By their very nature, intelligence communities are ideal candidates for employing artificial intelligence, since the majority of their activities involve collecting enormous amounts of information from a variety of sources, processing data, conducting research, and formulating scenario-based assessments and predictions.

This article discusses information technologies in the age of artificial intelligence, in the context of intelligence research in intelligence communities, particularly strategic research. It will attempt to clarify how IT capabilities ("the technology" or "the machine") can contribute to intelligence research activity and to the formulation of intelligence assessments, and what challenges are posed by the assimilation of artificial intelligence in intelligence research.

The Artificial Intelligence Concept

There is no fully accepted definition of the term "artificial intelligence." The following section is based primarily on official United States national security texts. According to the definition in the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, artificial intelligence is:

1. Any artificial system that performs tasks under varying and unpredictable circumstances without significant human oversight, or that can learn from experience and improve performance when exposed to data sets.

2. An artificial system developed in computer software, physical hardware, or other context that solves tasks requiring human-like perception, cognition, planning, learning, communication, or physical action.

3. An artificial system designed to think or act like a human, including cognitive architectures and neural networks.

4. A set of techniques, including "machine learning," that is designed to approximate a cognitive task.

5. An artificial system designed to act rationally, including an intelligent software agent or embodied robot that achieves goals using perception, planning, reasoning, learning, communicating, decision making, and acting.

(US Congress, 2019)

These definitions are partially based on the similarity between the mode of operation and output of an AI system and human modes of thinking. In this article, the achievement required of the machine will be examined primarily according to the degree of its "intellectual capacity" to benefit humans in achieving their goals, and in this context, benefit research entities in the intelligence community, while exploiting the relative advantages of machines that are capable of performing specific tasks at levels of accuracy, speed, volume, and complexity that far exceed the capabilities of the human mind.

The brief description below of the nature of artificial intelligence is based on the article "A DARPA Perspective on Artificial Intelligence" (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, an agency of the United States Department of Defense responsible for the development of advanced technologies) by John Launchbury, the Director of the Information Innovation Office at DARPA (Launchbury, 2017). His article presents four characteristics of artificial intelligence capabilities:

1. The ability to grasp the environment outside the machine (perceiving): the machine's

ability to detect, analyze, and respond to information that it or systems connected to it collect from outside of the computer, such as a system that detects and analyzes vehicular traffic data, images in an environment, and so on.

2. The ability to learn (learning): the system's ability to learn from examples and apply the knowledge to new circumstances.

3. The ability to abstract (abstracting): for example, the ability to take knowledge discovered at a particular level and apply it at a higher level. This ability enables the creation of new meanings, but it requires a contextual capability.

According to Hallman, the main challenge is "taking the vast volumes of digital intelligence that the CIA receives from around the world and transforming them into a digital, dynamic and credible picture of the future." Hallman adds that "intelligence, in this context, becomes almost a super power."

4. The clarity of causality (reasoning): for example, to what extent can a human user of a machine understand the correlation between the raw data and the machine's conclusions. This is a critical ability for planning and decision making.

According to DARPA, the development of artificial intelligence may be differentiated by three waves:

The first wave is the programmed ability to process information. Experts take knowledge that they have of a particular subject, characterize it according to rules that are computer-compatible, and in turn, the machine processes the data according to algorithms that they wrote and generates output according to a defined pattern. Examples of this are logistics software, chess software, and tax computing software. At this stage, the capabilities of artificial intelligence are characterized by high "clarity of causality," in

the sense that the researcher understands the logical cause-and-effect connections that are operating in the machine, and the source from which the machine took or received each item of data. However, this clarity is limited to a specific deterministic process that the person dictates through an algorithm and through the information that it feeds into the machine. The capabilities at this stage (which have been implemented in recent decades) are still of considerable value today. For example, in a DARPA project to augment cyber security, the first-wave systems succeeded in helping detect cyber security vulnerabilities.

The second wave is now at the center of the discourse and action in particular areas of artificial intelligence. The second wave includes applications of voice recognition, facial recognition, photo sorting, and more. The second-wave systems are highly capable of perceiving the environment outside the computer (using sensors and a link to big data). These systems are characterized by statistical learning and include the use of artificial neural networks that are characterized by deep learning. Using this technology, an AI system knows how to identify a phenomenon based on characteristics that it learned independently from examples (such as from a series of imaging of a disease) and not solely according to characteristics that the researcher input into the machine. DARPA uses second-wave technology, inter alia, to analyze the spread of cyberattacks and to gain autonomous tools. Despite all of these advantages, second-wave systems engage in specific tasks and have minimal capability of presenting reasoning. They do not have the ability to give an explanation (explainability).[1] Another limitation is that second-wave systems need an enormous amount of data in order to learn,[2] and they are not immune from errors.

The third wave is still at its initial research and development stages. It is supposed to overcome some of the limitations of the earlier waves and create additional capabilities. Sources in DARPA believe that the third wave

will be designed using contextual models that will enable, inter alia, the design of systems that know how to learn from a limited number of examples, how to provide explanations for their results, and how to create new meanings from data (the ability to abstract).

Thus, first-wave artificial intelligence is still relevant; the second wave provides high capabilities in particular areas; and the third wave reflects expectations of advances in the coming decade. It certainly will not be the last wave.

Table 1. Characteristics of AI technologies

	Situation	Perceiving the natural environment	Learning capability	Abstracting capability	Reasoning capability
First wave Logical data processing	Applied in recent decades and still evolving	Low	Nonexistent	Nonexistent	High
Second wave Statistical learning, neural networks	Applied, expanding, very effective in particular areas	High	High	Low	Low[3]
Third wave Contextual adaptation	R&D underway	High	High	Medium	High

Information Technologies in the Age of AI: Possible Contributions to Research in the Intelligence Community

In October 2015, early in his tenure as Deputy Director of the CIA for Digital Innovation, Andrew Hallman talked about the challenges in the field. According to Hallman, the main challenge is "taking the vast volumes of digital intelligence that the CIA receives from around the world and transforming them into a digital, dynamic and credible picture of the future." Hallman adds that "intelligence, in this context, becomes almost a super power" (Tucker, 2015). In June 2019, Hallman noted that artificial intelligence may help intelligence officers improve their ability to focus on their highest value activities, from the automation of routine tasks to the rapid exploitation of data, pattern recognition, and predictive analytics.

The American intelligence community is assimilating and advancing AI technologies—the CIA alone is developing about 140 projects that leverage AI technologies in order to streamline the performance of intelligence tasks such as photograph deciphering, analyses, and predictions. The Defense Department is taking action to form a headquarters called the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center, which will coordinate the efforts to develop and transfer AI technologies to operational uses (CRS, 2019).

There are several possible contributions to research and to intelligence assessments by the three waves of artificial intelligence technology, combined with other familiar information technologies, such as technologies of big data management, data merging, data fusion, and so forth. Some of these capabilities are not yet available at an adequate level for the variety of applications below:

Potential Contributions to Routine Research Activity

Facilitate processing and optimal use of big data: The information age provides researchers with more raw information from a variety of sources,

but the flow of information increases and accumulates at speeds and volumes that exceed their ability to even comprehend the information using existing means and integrate it into the intelligence analysis (Cruickshank, 2020). For example, the United States Army operates more than 11,000 UAVs, each of which takes pictures daily, and the volume of information that they acquire exceeds that of the high-resolution filming of three seasons of the National Football League, but the Defense Department does not have sufficient personnel or an adequate system to comb through this volume of data in order to derive actionable intelligence analysis (CRS, 2019). Artificial intelligence, in combination with big data management technologies, could help researchers and intelligence collection agencies contend with the massive volumes of information from distributed databases by processing, deciphering, and sorting information according to priorities. This technology can be particularly beneficial if there is a connection between the data system in the researcher's computer and those of other researchers and intelligence collection personnel, and other databases—including the information flow from UAVs, satellites, news websites, social networks, research institutes, and more.

AI technology may help present in quick, full, integrated, and ongoing fashion an intelligence analysis and intelligence assessment that will also include implications and predictions.

Improve researcher access to the original information: AI technology may help with language translation, so that researchers will be able to receive original information in various languages directly, thereby reducing their dependence on information collection and processing performed by the collection agencies (Recorded Future, 2019). Machine translations are not yet sufficiently accurate.

Help authenticate information and detect deception through AI's ability to ascertain whether information is authentic or edited, by checking the reliability of the information sources behind the text (checking their computer-documented history of inaccurate reporting of information), and cross-checking the information received with information from other sources.

Identify details, correlations, habits, patterns, and anomalies: We can expect to become able to identify events and behavioral patterns of an enemy swiftly, for example, through learning and monitoring phenomena that are identifiable from aerial photos and in the media, such that AI technology may help researchers assemble a richer and more reasoned intelligence analysis and even issue alerts about anomalous activities.

Facilitate data merging and data fusion: AI will improve these processes. For example, data on attacks on forces will be merged into the intelligence analysis; the system will display the ratio of the enemy's forces that were destroyed and its remaining capabilities (Buhbut, 2020).

Reduce human errors: AI technology may enable a reduction in cognitive errors and natural biases among intelligence personnel—an issue that the intelligence community grapples with constantly (CRS, 2019). For example, at issue are anchoring (when an individual depends too heavily on initial information), bias deriving from collective thinking, the use of partial information, and exaggerated importance of information that supports the researchers' position (Heuer, 2005). In all of these instances, AI technology may provide data and assessments that are immune to typical human bias (unless humans tendentiously introduce bias through the data that they choose to input into the machine), thereby serving as a control over human assessments. Second-wave AI technology may actually challenge researchers' logic, because it bases itself on statistical conclusions. For example, while researchers assess whether there will be a social uprising in a particular country based on the rationale of the situation, the machine

examines whether the data show an anomaly in the norm and whether there is any similarity to past uprisings, regardless of the rationale.

Improve the continuity of intelligence work: Digital systems can function fully and continuously 24/7 when human researchers are unavailable, apart from the skeleton crew whose abilities are inferior to those of the organization during routine workhours.

Help manage the research desk: Researchers in general and on-duty figures in particular may find value in using a virtual assistant (like "Siri" and "Alexa") for the purpose of managing the research desk.

Potential Contributions to Intelligence Research Products

Formulate an intelligence analysis and an intelligence assessment: AI technology may help present in quick, full, integrated, and ongoing fashion an intelligence analysis and intelligence assessment that will also include implications and predictions. This advantage is very significant considering the long and protracted process currently needed to produce a comprehensive strategic intelligence assessment (such as a national intelligence assessment)—which limits the number of these assessments—while leaders are looking to streamline the decision making process. Furthermore, it will be possible to generate reports of changes in the intelligence analysis at different cross-sections and strata. This technology already enables the presentation of force deployments on maps. Technological systems may notify researchers and collection units about locations where there are information gaps or a lack of updated data, so that they can supplement the intelligence analysis. Such systems may continuously integrate an enemy's intelligence analysis (the "red side") with that of one's own forces (the "blue side"), which will contribute to a dynamic situation report.

Provide intelligence and a digital representation of the intelligence to consumers:

Consumers may benefit by receiving a rapid and ongoing supply of digital intelligence reports, including dynamic intelligence assessments, and the presentation of the intelligence using advanced visualizations, at any time and according to their needs.

The machine may learn from network activities about anomalous indications of preparations for violent and terrorist activities, and may even provide swift alerts about the start of an outbreak of a wave of violence and terrorist activities, like the second intifada.

Provide alerts about strategic course changes: The critical tests of strategic assessments by intelligence analysts are in identifying strategic course changes and issuing alerts about them in time, as well as in providing assistance with the formulation of strategic decisions and with the management of risks and opportunities (Even, 2017). Machines may help analysts by providing strategic alerts through "learning," the detection of anomalies and changes in the behavioral patterns of populations, leaders, and organizations. For example:

1. Alerts about war or other hostile activity initiated by an enemy: The machine will detect anomalies that may indicate abnormal activity by an enemy and help analysts understand their significance. It will present a picture of the anomalous indications, the correlations between them, and previous occurrences.

2. Alerts about domestic instability or social crises: The technology will enable early detection of a rise in social unrest in various countries or among population groups. This is one of the signs indicating an increased risk to regime stability, as occurred during the "Arab Spring" events (McKendrick, 2019). The CIA Deputy Director for Digital Innovation, Andrew Hallman, said that IARPA (Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity), which is subordinate to the

American intelligence community, launched a program in 2011 for the development of methods for continuous automated analyses of publicly available data in order to detect or anticipate major societal events, such as political crises, humanitarian crises, mass violence, riots, mass migrations, disease outbreaks, economic instability, resource shortages, and responses to natural disasters (Tucker, 2015).

3. Alerts about terrorist attacks or an intifada: The machine may learn from network activities about anomalous indications of preparations for violent and terrorist activities, and may even provide swift alerts about the start of an outbreak of a wave of violence and terrorist activities, like the second intifada. The machine can also identify connections among suspects, and between them and people who were not previously suspects (Eichner, 2017).

4. Exposes strategic forgeries or manipulative perceptual attacks: An example is the tactics that the American intelligence community attributes to Russia during the United States presidential elections in November 2016. However, artificial intelligence also enhances an enemy's ability to impersonate a person and launch an attack using fake news and deep fakes. This technological capability was demonstrated in a video clip showing how an actor impersonated former President Barack Obama, using voice and image processing software (Vincent, 2018).

Facilitate identification of security opportunities: AI technology may help with analyses of a broader spectrum of possible actions and propose unexpected decisions that appear to be irrational, but will surprise the enemy and give one's forces the upper hand (CRS, 2019).

Facilitate forecasting through scenarios and simulations: Significant improvement in the ability to present scenarios and simulations can be expected, and perhaps even to present estimates of the probability of scenarios. Such scenarios will enable the presentation of optimal courses of action from an enemy's perspective according to assumptions based on familiar and less familiar patterns of behavior. AI technology will contribute to the presentation of scenarios that integrate intelligence about the enemy with the conduct of one's forces. This may enable leaders to obtain higher quality intelligence assessments and situation assessments quickly, and even more relevant scenarios about wars and their outcomes—before making decisions. From this perspective, technological systems may reduce instances of miscalculation, and constitute a restraining factor against launching or continuing a war. On the other hand, opposing situations are also possible, in which leaders treat these systems as if they were crystal balls and are tempted to launch a military operation based on an optimistic simulation, or instances may occur in which the speed of the AI system's response will contribute to an escalation (see below, risk of losing control and of escalation).

Improve control: AI technology may assist with quality control of the intelligence assessments and situation assessments. The technology may be used to present the intelligence analysis according to the quality and updatedness of the information, and distribute it among intelligence collection agencies and sources, for the purpose of examining their contribution and the extent of dependence on them. Given good documentation, it will also be possible to use it for the purpose of monitoring the performance of the intelligence organization in the field of research and assessment, and to obtain information that will lead to improvement.

Potential Contributions to Improved Integration
Facilitate integration within and between research entities: Intelligence research is currently based on expert researchers working within hierarchical organizational frameworks (departments, divisions, and arenas), when not one has the comprehensive complete picture

at all times. A technological system can provide researchers with a shared, detailed, and up-to-date information and knowledge base. A technological system can help researchers identify at an early stage the emergence of phenomena that are already occurring in other countries, such as the phenomenon of the "Arab Spring," which began in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread throughout the Arab world.

Integration in the intelligence community: The technology will enable a significant increase in the integration between data collection and research systems and organizations within the intelligence community. For example, the data collection and research entities will constantly receive an up-to-date picture of the information gaps and of dynamic flagging of critical intelligence information, including ongoing guidance about areas where information gaps need to be closed. This integration may require interconnectivity between the databases in the community—which covert organizations are loath to do, whether due to considerations of data security or of competition.

Facilitate integration between intelligence agencies and planning and operational entities: AI technology will enable the integration of a dynamic intelligence assessment with a dynamic situation assessment, and will enable planning and operational entities to direct the intelligence agencies to accommodate their needs. This will contribute, inter alia, to an updated diagram of the line of contact during military operations and wars.

If the integration capabilities materialize, the technology may lead to a change in the organizational approach. For example, machines' ability to help with rapid, continuous, and compact integration in the above areas may have an influence on increasing the flexibility of the intelligence community's traditionally rigid structure, in which there is a sharp structural separation between information collection and research, and in security establishments that set up a sharp structural separation between

the intelligence agency and the operational division and the planning entities.

Challenges when Assimilating Artificial Intelligence in Research

Along with the numerous advantages in AI technology are difficulties, risks, and requirements for optimal implementation of artificial intelligence in research. All these constitute technological, cultural, and organizational challenges, such as:

Difficulties in Applying Artificial Intelligence in Research

Machines have difficulty "understanding" complex human language: In order to investigate an enemy's intentions, information must be thoroughly understood, including speeches and dialogues by and between leaders speaking in their native languages, as well as cultural nuances. Prof. Yosef Grodzinsky, the head of the neurolinguistics laboratory at the Hebrew University's Center for Brain Sciences, states that "industry has not yet succeeded in engineering machines that understand language, or that even translate language properly." And indeed, it is difficult to find anyone who will rely on Google Translate (which is based on statistical machine translation) to translate a document for legal use (Grodzinsky, 2020). The existing machines are not yet capable of correctly understanding texts containing dual meanings, hints, subtexts, jokes, innuendos, and complex linguistic compositions. Similar to humans, the second-wave development of an AI machine is capable of learning from examples, but unlike humans, it currently needs an enormous quantity of examples, and it is incapable of understanding emotional situations in the same way that human researchers understand them, since they actually experience those emotions.[4] The development of translation software whose output will approximate the output of a human expert translator may herald progress in this direction for intelligence needs.

Difficulties in applying software that is based on statistical deductions in strategic research: Learning capabilities of second-wave machines are based on many examples and on statistical deduction tools. However, most of the major research issues in strategic intelligence cannot be learned from many examples that are difficult to generalize. For example: every war is a unique case and there is no representative sampling of information about wars that would enable a statistical prediction of the timing of the next outbreak of war between countries. This may explain why attempts to assimilate awareness and statistical tools in the work of strategic intelligence researchers in the American intelligence community have been unsuccessful (Tetlock & Gardner, 2017). Furthermore, systems that are based on statistical deduction can present a correlation between variables (for example: a positive correlation between a rise in arson attacks and seasonal temperatures), but they cannot explain why this correlation exists, i.e., what is the logic behind this correlation. The challenge is to find ways in which AI systems containing statistical software can be integrated in research work, and to develop technologies during the third wave that will succeed in learning from fewer examples and succeed in presenting reasoned explanations.

Difficulty of Intelligence researchers to rely on and control AI systems: One reason is that intelligence researchers need explanations and reasons, and they will have a hard time understanding how the machine reached its conclusions, both because the machine's conclusions can be an outcome of many complex actions, including the use of nonlinear functions, and because second-wave learning machines are incapable of providing logical reasons for their conclusions, since they are based on statistical deduction software. Another reason is that most analytical software currently in use are closed systems (black boxes) that do not enable researchers to fine tune them. Intelligence researchers need systems that they can command, reconfigure, or revise the

informing algorithms according to the changing reality (Cruickshank, 2020). Furthermore, some researchers may object to machines, just like they object to any innovation that changes their world order, because they consider the possibility that machines might make them redundant or jeopardize their importance in the research enterprise.

Difficulty by consumers to accept AI outputs that cannot be directly explained. The final decisions are still in human hands and, for the most part, humans need to understand the logic behind the intelligence assessment and the recommendation to take action, which machines are still incapable of providing (CRS, 2019). This means that leaders and other intelligence consumers will have a hard time adopting and basing their decisions on intelligence assessments created by machines if they do not comprehend them (Vincent, 2019). Consequently, a significant amount of time will presumably be needed until leaders agree to base their decisions on assessments originating from machines without human mediation—at least until a series of successes of accurate strategic predictions of AI systems can be demonstrated, or until machines are developed that know how to respond to questions and provide detailed explanations that will satisfy decision makers.

Risks to Consider or Mitigate when Applying AI in Research

Overassessment by a machine: If intelligence analysts and decision makers have success with machine outputs, there is a risk that they might rely on them without understanding the logic behind the outcome and stop controlling them (CRS, 2019). The customary humanization of machine capabilities (capabilities of "learning," "drawing conclusions," and so on) and a machine's capability of simulating human dialogue are liable to mislead machine users into attributing extensive capabilities to a machine that it doesn't have. Sources at DARPA say that applications like voice recognition and facial recognition, which are based on

machine learning (from the second wave), have been so successful that people developed the misconception that the computer can just "learn things" (Launchbury, 2017).

Cybersecurity: For the purpose of applying artificial intelligence, the machine is supposed to have access to very large databases, some of which are also open and accessible to enemies that could perform manipulations and deceptions in them that will corrupt the machine's outputs. AI systems themselves are also exposed to cyber-hacking. Artificial intelligence can improve cybersecurity, but it is also liable to improve the attack capabilities of enemies in cyberspace. If an AI system's code is stolen, then within a very short timeframe the attacker will be able to use the system against that entity from which the code was stolen (CRS, 2019), thereby intensifying the magnitude and dispersion of the damage.

Risks of error: The machine itself does not guarantee certain identification, but rather only probable identification (a second-wave system may incorrectly recognize workers with tools as combatants). The machine may err due to errors in development, maintenance, and operation. The machine may encounter situations that its developers had not foreseen, due to a changing reality. Since artificial intelligence is liable to propose conclusions that may be incomprehensible or perceived as irrational, the machine's operators may perform erroneous corrective actions. In addition, it will be difficult to identify and repair the error in the machine and to investigate the source, as long as the machine is incapable of reporting its actions. Furthermore, unlike humans, an AI system is liable to repeat the same mistake a multitude of times at high speed in one or in several machines simultaneously, which could magnify the damage (CRS, 2019).

"Arms race": Artificial intelligence is merely another one of the new battlegrounds for a technology-based arms race (DNI, 2019). Colonel Avi Simon of the IDF's C4I and Cyber Defense Directorate noted that while in the past the technological power sources were held by militaries and governments, today they are in the hands of civilian companies like Facebook, Amazon, and Google, and such technological systems may be purchased online or used in civilian systems (Buhbut, 2020). In such a world, it is not sufficient to learn the behavioral patterns of a person or a population; it is also necessary to research and understand the "thought" pattern (the algorithm) of the enemy's computer, which will learn the thought pattern of the computer on one's own side and so on (the "double mirrors" effect). Consequently, the challenge is to develop, adapt, and implement artificial intelligence at a faster pace than one's enemies. This is also why supervision of exports of sensitive AI technologies is warranted.

Unlike humans, an AI system is liable to repeat the same mistake a multitude of times at high speed in one or in several machines simultaneously, which could magnify the damage.

Losing control and escalation by machines: At the techno-tactical level, the technology already enables autonomous tools to close circuits quickly, which includes: intelligence, decision making, and execution ("sensor to shooter")—such as detecting armed border infiltrators and opening fire, but the restriction on its application without human involvement is mainly an ethical restriction. Humans are liable to be tempted to rely increasingly on an intelligence analysis and on the "discretion" of machines due to their ability to respond rapidly to an enemy's activities, but this may create an increased risk that decisions to operate a strategic weapon might be made in the future without human involvement (Antebi & Dolinko, 2020; Johnson, 2020).

Infringement on privacy: The intelligence uses of artificial intelligence are sometimes at odds with the need to safeguard the public's rights to privacy, particularly in intelligence agencies operating in the domestic arena.

Therefore, on the one hand, a balanced regulatory framework that will improve the protection of civil rights against malign use of these technologies is warranted (Weinbaum & Shanahan, 2018). On the other hand, these systems may actually help safeguard privacy, because they can report phenomena and trends to the researcher without disclosing data on private individuals; or they can focus on exposing only specific people out of a large database, as opposed to the situation whereby human researchers comb through the entire database.

Increased dependence on the civilian sector: Since a significant share of the development of artificial intelligence comes from the civilian sector, the defense sector might develop dependence on it. Furthermore, the machine must undergo modifications before it enters the security system. This requirement, and the rapid development of artificial intelligence, could lead to security entities having to deal with an increase in the complexity of their procurement processes. In addition, civilian developers sometimes object to new uses of their software, due to ethical and/or commercial considerations. These considerations may deter some technology companies from agreeing to cooperative efforts with security entities (CRS, 2019).

> It appears that the subject of artificial intelligence should be a new addition to the methodological knowledge required of intelligence researchers. The requirement of digital literacy, including AI literacy, may also affect the nature of the human resources in intelligence organizations.

Organizational Needs when Assimilating AI in Research Units

The need to adapt human resources to the artificial intelligence age: According to Dr. Yoel Mark, Vice President of Research at Amazon, intelligence researchers need to adapt themselves to the new age, to learn the concept of algorithms, to analyze meticulously and understand the outcomes obtained from machines, and to understand how their own actions contribute to the learning machine's optimization (Siman-Tov & Lt. Col. Z., 2018). A similar message is contained in a document from 2019 on behalf of the head of the American intelligence community called "the AIM Initiative." This document, which discusses the increased use of AI for intelligence purposes, states, inter alia, that investments are needed in programs that train and equip the workforce with essential skills for working in an AI environment. This does not mean that every researcher must be an AI expert, but it does mean that everyone must understand how artificial intelligence is integrated in their work and how it can contribute (DNI, 2019). It appears that the subject of artificial intelligence should be a new addition to the methodological knowledge required of intelligence researchers. The requirement of digital literacy, including AI literacy, may also affect the nature of the human resources in intelligence organizations.

In addition to the adjustment processes that investigators will undergo, a change in the composition of the human resources in research units is expected. On the one hand, as a result of the massive introduction of machines into intelligence work, a reduction in the number of intelligence personnel who will be needed in particular fields is expected. On the other hand, this technological evolution calls for the creation of new roles, so that a change in the job descriptions of many roles and an increase in demand for new roles, including experts in the development and operation of AI-based systems, are certain. In light of the considerable demand in the civilian market for suitable human resources, the intelligence organizations must compete on the work conditions in this market (Eichner, 2017). Although it is difficult to compete with the monetary fringe benefits that the business sector offers, the United States National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence found that AI experts are willing to serve in the government sector in workplaces

offering a more compelling sense of purpose and a technical environment that will maximize their talents (CRS, 2019). The security system can also offer greater occupational stability than the civilian sector.

The need to adapt digital systems: Optimal communications must be created between databases and the machine. Even though AI is known for its excellent work in data processing from distributed databases, it would be advisable to plan and organize the architecture of the digital databases used by the intelligence community in order to fully tap the machine's capabilities (Cruickshank, 2020).

Conclusion

Integrating artificial intelligence in research work may provide intelligence researchers with ever-increasing benefits, in both their routine research activity and formulation and presentation of the research results, and in integration. In the coming decade at least, AI systems are not expected to replace researchers, but rather will continue to serve as tools, for example, that can differentiate between the important and the irrelevant in the information flow and can detect anomalies, correlations, and patterns that will generate important conclusions. The technologies may facilitate integrating the intelligence assessment in the assessment of the situation of forces, and enable

intelligence organizations to present scenarios to leaders for predicting the behavior of human actors and high-level strategic course changes at a visual quality and speed that far exceed the capabilities of the past.

In terms of the challenges, the lack of high-quality language processing appears to be a significant constraint in a substantial share of the uses needed for strategic intelligence research; the same goes for the machine's inability to explain or rationalize its findings. These two inadequacies relate to the mode of operation of second-wave AI machines. Ideally a solution will be found in the third wave development. Furthermore, enemies are beginning to use artificial intelligence. The ability to understand the reality and identify risks and opportunities before enemies do may be a highly valuable strategic asset for leaders. The general question that will remain on the agenda is not whether machines will be capable of influencing the presentation of reality to humans and helping them make decisions, but rather, to what extent will humans allow machines to influence and control their world.

In order to advance the development and assimilation of artificial intelligence in intelligence research efficiently, a strategy and plan for integrating artificial intelligence in such research should be prepared. A good example is found in American intelligence. In January

Table 2. Expected contribution of AI technology to intelligence research

Facilitated research activity	Contribution to integration	Contribution to the research products
Processing of large volumes of information from distributed databases	Integration between the various research entities will enable the production of a consolidated intelligence analysis	Broader, more reliable, and continuous intelligence assessments
Information authentication and deception detection	Integration between research entities and collection agencies will facilitate the formulation of a full and dynamic intelligence analysis	More developed scenarios, the creation of various types of alerts
Detection of anomalies, correlations, and patterns	Integration between research entities and "our forces" will create an integrative and dynamic situation assessment	Higher quality research products that are more accessible by consumers

2019, the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) published the AIM strategy (A Strategy for Augmenting Intelligence Using Machines). This initiative includes four key AI objectives (DNI, 2019):

a. Immediate and ongoing: to create a digital foundation of information using artificial intelligence and automation processes, and to revamp the workforce in the intelligence community.

b. Short term: to adopt commercial technology solutions from the private market, particularly AI technologies, and capabilities of exploiting overt sources.

c. Medium term: to develop technological capabilities that will close the remaining gaps, so that the American intelligence community will have a strategic advantage over anyone engaging in intelligence.

d. Long term: to invest in the development of joint human–machine analysis capabilities.

*

Dr. (Col. ret.) Shmuel Even is a senior research fellow at INSS and a strategic advisor, and has extensive experience as a director of business companies.

Lt. Col. (res.) David Siman-Tov is a senior research fellow at INSS in the program National Security and Democracy in an Era of Post-Truth and Fake News, and Deputy Director of the Institute for the Research of the Methodology of Intelligence at the Israeli Intelligence Community Commemoration and Heritage Center.

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Notes

1   For example: A second-wave system designed to classify photographs can identify a photograph of a particular tank. If the machine had the ability to speak, it would have said: after learning from a huge pool of examples and based on computations, it is highly likely that this is a T-72 tank (of Russian manufacture). But it cannot reason, because the identification process was not conducted according to tank features that researchers recognize: typical silhouette, particular continuous track system, 125 mm cannon, reactive defense, particular machine guns, and so on. That is, the machine has statistical recognition ability but it does not have the ability to explain the result logically.

2   For example: To train the system in handwriting recognition, you need to input into the system 50,000-100,000 examples. Sometimes it is difficult to provide relevant examples at such large quantities. By the way, humans can learn from a few examples, and the third-wave technology is striving to achieve this.

3   The reasoning of second-wave systems is lower than that of first-wave systems because first-wave systems generate output based on a logical algorithm that is usually understood by researchers. On the other hand, second-wave systems are based on statistical conclusions and on functions that are not familiar to the user.

4   In principle, although artificial intelligence will be able to detect signs indicating people's emotional situations, such as a demonstration of anger by learning examples of texts, vocal frequencies, facial expressions, and body language, it is highly unlikely that machines will be able to interpret all nuances of human cognitive and emotional behavior.

President el-Sisi (2nd from right) presents an economic plan for new universities, September 3, 2020. Photo: al-Ayam.

A Play in Three Acts: Could Egypt be Drawn into a Perfect Storm?

Moshe Albo

Egypt is experiencing the dangerous dynamic of simultaneous crises in different arenas, creating a complex and multidimensional threat to its national security: possible military defeat in the proxy war in Libya and growing Turkish influence in the arena; unilateral moves by Ethiopia in the Renaissance Dam crisis and the direct consequences for the Egyptian water economy; and the Covid-19 pandemic and worrisome signs of an emerging widespread economic crisis. How Egypt handles these threats will be a test of the government and the President in terms of public opinion, but no less important, in the eyes of political and security institutions. Failure accompanied by damage to Egypt's image and its national security could undermine the President's status and lead to more internal upheavals. A possible threat to Egyptian stability is looming, in view of the intensity and complexity of the challenges and the links between them. However, the dynamics and actions of various actors (the Egyptian leadership, the security-military system, the public, and regional and international systems) will have a decisive impact on the final outcome.

Keywords: Egypt, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, internal stability, decision making, superpowers, Libya

Introduction

Egypt is experiencing the dangerous dynamic of simultaneous crises in different arenas, creating a complex and multidimensional threat to its national security: possible military defeat in the proxy war in Libya and growing Turkish influence in the arena; unilateral moves by Ethiopia in the Renaissance Dam crisis and the direct consequences for the Egyptian water economy; and the Covid-19 pandemic and worrisome signs of an emerging widespread economic crisis.

The global and regional focus in recent years in the various conflict arenas in the Middle East has pushed Cairo's agenda to the sidelines, increasing the difficulty of making political moves to promote a solution to its central security issues. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has reshuffled the cards and commands most regional and international attention and energy. Therefore, Egypt's strategic-security concerns have been squeezed out of the global and to some extent regional agendas, and Cairo's ability to manage the various crises with political tools is shrinking. How Egypt handles all these threats will be the critical test of the government and President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in terms of public opinion, but no less important, in the eyes of political and security institutions. Failure accompanied by damage to Egypt's image and its national security could undermine the President's status and lead to more internal upheavals.

This article contends that the possible threat to Egyptian stability is gaining momentum due to the intensity and complexity of the individual and often intertwined challenges. However, the dynamics and actions of various actors (the Egyptian leadership, the security-military system, the public, and regional and international systems) in light of events will have a decisive impact on the final outcome.

The Stability of the Egyptian Regime after the Upheaval

Nobody can play with Egyptian security when we are here. I will die before I let anybody harm the country's security. I swear that I will not allow it, and I am ready to die for Egyptian security. I am ready to die but may 100 million live. I say this to you because I saw what happened seven or eight years ago, and this will not happen again in Egypt! Do those who failed then think they will succeed now? You know me and you know that I am speaking faithfully. By God's life! The price of homeland security and national stability is my life and the life of the army! I am not a statesman; I am not a man of words. I have never spoken like this, but we cannot build the country from words alone. (el-Sisi, al-Watan Hu al-Hadaf, 2018)

The extraordinary statement by President el-Sisi during the 2018 presidential race reflects the return of military hegemony and the authoritarian presidential regime to full control of the country's affairs. The Egyptian elections were held in March 2018, and even then it was clear that the main message of the elected President was that stability takes precedence over freedom, and that the January 2011 revolution—which as the regime sees it, caused serious damage to national security, undermined the Egyptian public's sense of safety, and led to the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood—will not happen again, if the army and political leadership can stop it. The slogan "the people and the army," which currently hangs on every street corner in Cairo, exemplifies the idea that the military is the main source of strength with responsibility for managing the country's affairs, and that any challenge to the regime is a direct attack on the interests of the army and national security. The "state of institutions" in Egypt in its current incarnation establishes the ruling hegemony by strengthening the dominance of the army and the security system, the police and the legal system, the religious establishment and the clerical bureaucracy, and the political system,

which accepts the authority of the presidential directive. Regime stability is based on the power of institutions and their loyalty to the presidential nucleus. A weakening of any of the supporting pillars could rattle the entire structure, and therefore the central effort of the regime of the July 2013 revolution is to avoid this at any price, and to ensure the loyalty of internal backing.

The regime learned the lessons of the January 2011 revolution and in recent years has led a gradual process of suppressing civil rights and eliminating any opposition that might develop in the public space. The regime acted in the framework of establishing the "new-old" authoritarian hegemony by arresting active members of liberal-civil political movements, and also outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood, which bears historical weight and a widespread organizational presence in Egyptian society. The regime likewise led a gradual process of taking control of the media (establishment and independent) and using aggressive enforcement tools on the internet, together with extensive use of social media awareness as a tool for shaping all aspects of the media agenda. At the same time, the President spearheaded legislation that curbed civil rights while establishing effective deterrence, in order to prevent any expression of public protest (Blaydes, 2019). In this context, the chronology of government suppression moves helps to show the gradual process of restoring regime military and security hegemony:

a. *The Protest Law,* which was passed in November 2013 by Prime Minister Adly Mansour and in effect deprived social groups of the ability to organize and hold public demonstrations, was strongly criticized by human rights groups, both domestically and internationally. The law reflected a symbolic and practical move by a regime that wished to prevent public protest, and was a "declaration of intent" by the security services of their readiness to use force in order to enforce the law. Above all, the

law expressed the public separation of the regime from the ethos of the Tahrir Square Revolution ("Egypt: New Protest Law," 2013).

b. *The Rab'ah al-Adawiya massacre and the outlawing of the Muslim Brotherhood*: On August 14, 2013, Egyptian army and security forces stormed two protest centers in Cairo, in al-Nahda Square and Rab'ah al-Adawiya Square, where Muslim Brotherhood leaders and activists had gathered after the overthrow of President Morsi. The military attack followed six weeks of sit-ins by leaders and activists of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party. The human rights organization described the military attack as one of the biggest massacres of demonstrators in modern history, in which some 817 people were killed ("All According to Plan," 2014). In September 2013, the Egyptian Court decided to outlaw the organization and ordered confiscation of its assets. Three months later the Court labeled the Muslim Brotherhood a terror organization, and this was followed by a large-scale wave of arrests of its members. The movement went underground, and its senior members were either arrested or managed to escape from Egypt.

c. *Arrest of senior members of the April 6 Group,* one of the most active and effective groups leading popular protests against President Mubarak and President Morsi. The movement consisted of politically aware young and educated people who wished to promote the idea of democracy in the country. The arrest of the movement's leaders was in line with a broad policy of arresting young activists who criticized the regime and wanted to bring about change in the spirit of the January 2011 revolution ("Egypt Arrests Two More Prominent Activists," 2019).

d. *The Cyber and Information Technologies Law,* which was passed by President el-Sisi in August 2018, banned the publication in social media of extreme ideas identified with terror organizations seeking to undermine

state security. The law allows websites to be blocked if they are labeled by the Court as a danger to national security, and permits the arrest of the people behind them. The Egyptian regime blocked hundreds of sites alleged a threat to national security, and increased control of local media while establishing effective deterrence with the threat of force (Feingold, 2018). However, the regime is unable to block critical discourse in the age of global communications. The media in Qatar and Turkey publish items every day that taint the actions of the regime in general, and the President in particular, and these join the fierce criticism in the international Western media. A striking example of a media event that spun out of control concerns the building contractor Mohammed Ali, who moved to Spain and from exile published a series of video clips in which he exposed the allegedly deep-seated corruption of the army and the presidency. The clips went viral, were viewed millions of times, were widely disseminated—mainly through al-Jazeera, and led to rare demonstrations in Egypt against government corruption. These demonstrations showed that in spite of extensive repression, the public can still initiate actions in the public arena, albeit limited ("Who is Mohammed Ali?" 2019).

e. *The Emergency Law*, which was in force almost throughout the Sadat and Mubarak presidencies, had a deep impact on human rights in Egypt, and enabled the regime to use unbridled and unsupervised force against civilians. The law was perceived by the Egyptian public as an expression of the arbitrary power of an unaccountable regime, and became one of the central issues in the public protest of January 2011. The law was repealed (January 24, 2011) by Minister of Defense and Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces General Muhammed Hussein Tantawi, who headed the interim government after Mubarak was ousted. The constitution of 2012 (under

the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood) and the constitution of 2014 (under el-Sisi's leadership) limited the application of the law to three months only, based on an understanding of public sensitivity on the subject. In April 2017, President el-Sisi reinstated the Emergency Law following terror attacks on Coptic churches that led to the death of 45 worshippers. From then on, the law was extended every three months. In April 2020 the Egyptian parliament approved an amendment to the law that significantly extended the powers of the President and the security forces, to allow the regime to deal with the coronavirus crisis without unnecessary bureaucracy. Currently the main criticism of the law is that it exploits the broad powers granted to the security forces and the army to restrict human rights and implement broad and systematic repression against any element perceived as a threat to the regime's stability. (Brown, 2017)

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In February 2019 a referendum was held that allowed President el-Sisi to retain his position until 2030. Over his last two terms of office, the President, who won an overwhelming majority of the vote (96.94 percent) in the May 2014 elections, has managed to establish a repressive authoritarian regime and block any organization by an establishment or public opposition. The Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed and its Egyptian infrastructure was dismantled. The liberal opposition has evaporated and has no significant presence either inside or outside parliament.

Alaa al-Aswany, one of the few intellectuals whose voices are heard, continues to call for the adoption of democratic principles in Egypt, the removal of President el-Sisi, and the dismantling of the military structure administered by the

state since the July 1952 Revolution. In March 2018 the Egyptian state prosecutor filed a charge against al-Aswany for causing damage to the presidency and the army because of articles published in the foreign press. Al-Aswany preferred to avoid the risk of imprisonment on returning to Egypt, and has spent the last two years in forced exile in the United States (Hincks, 2019). However, al-Aswany's criticisms are now directed at the public as well as at the regime. In his book *The Automobile Club of Egypt*, he portrays the public as not ready to spearhead change and accepting of its fate under a regime that provides security and stability, while suppressing any expression of freedom. "Democracy is the solution" is a slogan frequently used in al-Aswany's articles, but so far the people have chosen stability over basic freedoms.

> And so here they are, the cowards and the defeated, recovering their rights without rebelling against Elco or harming his honor, except by obedience, absolute surrender, and consent to accept his punishments, however cruel. They [the waiters] bore their suffering patiently and bowed their heads before the storm and were finally able to get the tips back, while the rebels destroyed their future and their families. (al-Aswany, 2017)

Has the public now resigned from its role as the leaders of the processes of political change, and lost its voice after internalizing the price of protest and its lack of value in the absence of a real political alternative? Has the public stopped being an element that "undermines stability" due to its fear of descending into anarchy? Or is this a concept that should be challenged from the existing research perspective? Will the next revolution actually emerge from the ranks of the security-military establishment, in view of the intense impending challenges facing the Egyptian leadership?

Regime Stability in an Age of Growing Inter-Power Rivalry

In recent years the Middle East has once again become the "backyard" of the heightened competition for influence between the great powers, where struggles over energy resources, international shipping lanes, arms markets, control of local national infrastructures, information technologies, and communications are affecting countries in the region and their ability to maneuver in the regional and international arena.

The growing competition between the United States and Russia in the Middle East, along with the entrance of China as an economic power that exerts influence through its Belt and Road Initiative and extensive investment in local infrastructure, enables Arab regimes to conduct a policy with far greater room for flexibility in the international arena but also with a far higher risk of becoming enmeshed in an unplanned crisis with one of the powers. The conduct of the Arab powers echoes the dynamics of the Cold War, through the adoption of a policy of diversifying sources of support and willingness to take calculated risks in their strategic ties with the great powers in order to realize national interests (Singh, 2020).

On the other hand, the upheavals in the Middle East have affected global interests and led to the direct military involvement of the powers in regional conflicts and crises. The issue of stability in the Middle East states has become the concern of various actors on the international scene, and not only the local regimes, due to the direct consequences of phenomena that undermine national security: the spread of terror groups and radical Islamic ideas; a heightened refugee problem; damage to energy sources; humanitarian and health crises; and more. In addition, international intervention is intended to promote particular geo-strategic interests and the effort to establish influence and demonstrate strength, while restraining competing powers in the context of increasing global competition (al-Din & Badi, 2020).

As part of the dynamics of growing involvement by regional forces and powers in Middle East conflicts, Egypt under the leadership of President el-Sisi has sought to reinforce its strategic ties with Russia and China, while preserving US support. This policy emerged against the background of a crisis in the relationship during the Obama presidency, particularly after the military coup on June 30, 2013 and the removal of President Morsi, and also in view of the Egyptian leadership's fears of an end to US security and economic aid. Cairo perceives American support to be tenuous, unreliable, and sometimes even dangerous to its stability, as shown by the negative role played by Washington during the January 2011 revolution, which led to the overthrow of President Mubarak. Nevertheless, Cairo wishes to retain the political and security aspects of US aid and support as much as possible, while developing alternative sources of assistance (Berman & Albo, 2020).

In this context, the Egyptian interest in strengthening strategic relations, particularly with Russia, derives from a number of motives: diversified sources of security and military procurement (since 2015 important purchase agreements have been signed for advanced aircraft, air defense systems, anti-tank systems, and more); the need for the backing of a global power in the event of a crisis in relations with the United States around the issue of human rights and democracy in Egypt; the development of large-scope and long-term joint economic and civil ventures (in this context are two prominent strategic projects: the construction of nuclear reactors in northeast Egypt, funded and built by Russia, and the establishment of joint industrial zones on the Suez Canal); closer military cooperation focused on involvement in the civil war in Libya; the understanding between leaders of issues relating to strategy and policy on conflicts and crises in the Middle East (Syria, Libya); and the shared idea that issues of human rights and democracy are irrelevant and do not affect the developing relations between countries (Mohamed, 2019).

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The Egyptian move was intended to reinforce the sources of political and security support for the regime by establishing strategic collaborations with Russia and China, mainly due to the fear of a change in American policy that could challenge the legitimacy of the regime in view of the severe abuses of human rights and democratic principles in the country. In concrete terms, the possible change in the US administration after the presidential elections in November 2020 could bring the subject of human rights back to center stage in the bilateral relations. In this scenario, the main concern is that US moves will provide a "tailwind" for waves of public protest and undermine stability, as happened after the overthrow of President Mubarak in January 2011. On the other hand, Egyptian policy that seeks closer security and economic ties with Russia and China involves a calculated risk with respect to the US administration, which wants to block growing Russian and Chinese influence in the Middle East, including by the use of penalties, reduced aid, and a political crisis (Wadhams, 2019; Kirkpatrick, 2018).

The coming year will present a complex challenge to the Egyptian leadership, as it faces a series of difficult, volatile foreign issues, including possible changes in US policy toward Cairo.

The Proxy Campaign in Libya: Dynamics of Escalation

Turkey is emerging as the winner of the proxy campaign in Libya. The Egyptian call for a

ceasefire and a start of talks between the warring parties ("Call for a Ceasefire and Start of Talks," 2020) was perceived as recognition of the failure of the military move by the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar to oust the Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Fayez al-Sarraj, and an expression of weakness. The victory consolidates Turkey's presence and influence in the arena and threatens Egypt's security and economic interests in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean.

In April 2019, LNA forces, which had consolidated their control in the east and south of the country, began a military operation to conquer Tripoli with the aid of Russian mercenaries and military support from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, in order to complete their takeover of centers of power in the country. At a certain stage it appeared as if the military operation had achieved its goals. International efforts to settle the crisis had failed, and the fall of Tripoli, which was under siege and subject to frequent shelling, seemed only a matter of time (el-Gamaty, 2020).

Turkish military aid arrived at a critical time. The Turkish President expressed Ankara's commitment to the GNA, and in November 2019, two agreements were signed with al-Sarraj's government: one marking the economic-maritime borders between the countries, and a military cooperation agreement. In 2019 Turkish army personnel arrived in Libya as advisors, together with militia forces from Syria, air defense systems, electronic warfare systems, and Turkish-made drones, which completely transformed the campaign (Wehrey, 2020). Turkey, contrary to the undeclared military support of Russia, Egypt, and the UAE, openly sent military aid to the al-Sarraj government. The capture of the al-Watiya air base on May 18 marked a turning point in the campaign, because the base served as the main operational and logistical command post of the LNA. In the following weeks, al-Sarraj's forces took control of most of the northwest of the country, leading to the crushing military defeat of Haftar's forces

("How Did Turkey Change the Direction of the War in Libya?" 2020).

In this context, the Egyptian President presented his initiative for a settlement in Libya, which included a call for the UN to convene a meeting in Geneva to start talks between the warring parties; the imposition of a ceasefire from June 8; the dismantlement and removal of all foreign militias from Libya; establishment of a forum with representatives of the three main areas of Libya (south, east, and west) to draw up a constitution; and the establishment of a Council of Presidents that could at a later date choose and appoint a prime minister. However, the declaration that was presented in Cairo in the presence of General Haftar and the speaker of the Libyan parliament, Aguila Saleh, was not intended to put an end to the campaign, but to exert pressure on the GNA forces to stop the counter-attack, and to recruit international public support for the obstruction of Turkish moves in Libya ("Call for a Ceasefire and Start of Talks," 2020).

The military defeat in the campaign over Tripoli and the withdrawal of the LNA forces and Russian mercenaries led to increased Russian involvement in the arena. Russian war planes were sent from Syria to the al-Jufra airfield in central Libya, to help Haftar's forces establish aerial superiority before the next stage of the campaign. On the other hand, the weakness shown by Haftar's forces in the Tripoli operation, in spite of the extensive assistance they received from Russia, Egypt, and the UAE, poses question marks over Haftar's ability to reach a decisive outcome in Libya. Moreover, the antagonism that General Haftar arouses in Moscow and Cairo could lead to the imposition of a settlement with Russian and Egyptian pressure—with or without Haftar. The call from President el-Sisi for a ceasefire and renewal of talks reflects Egypt's understanding that at this stage of the campaign, it must use political tools to serve Cairo's security interests, and also block the possibility of further defeats that would change the situation in Libya. The GNA first rejected

the Egyptian initiative, and launched a military campaign to capture the strategic coastal town of Sirte between Tripoli and Benghazi, which is very important for the country's oil industry. The driving force is in the hands of the GNA army, and the capture of the Sirte-al-Jufra line could lead to the fall of Benghazi and Tobruk, and establish Turkish influence over the whole of Libya. For Egypt, such a situation would be intolerable (A'anmi, 2020). In August the GNA accepted the call for a ceasefire, urged that parliamentary and presidential elections be held in March, and called for an end to the oil blockade. The ceasefire that was agreed upon freezes the current operative "on the ground" status quo, but is considered fragile, due to the deeply conflicting interests. For now, the ceasefire is sustained because it serves the interest of the regional powers, but the nature of the Libyan conflict can lead to a quick renewal of the fighting.

The proxy war in Libya is heating up and the similarity to the Syrian arena is increasing, because of the growing involvement of the powers and of rival regional forces, and because of the inability of the international system to enforce a continual ceasefire and impose an effective embargo on the transfer of weapons. A further resemblance is that the physical battlefield in Libya reflects only one dimension of the regional and international competition over the architecture of the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, and the ideological rivalry between the political Islam camp and Egypt.

Egypt is eager to become a regional energy hub, given the gas liquefaction facilities at its disposal. Cairo established the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), intended to focus regional efforts on gas development in the Eastern Mediterranean and combine existing collaborations under one organization. Winter and Lindenstrauss (2019) showed how closer security and economic ties between Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus preceded the establishment of the Forum in the shape of a series of agreements: the laying of gas pipelines from

Cyprus to the Egyptian liquefaction facilities, connection of electricity networks, the outline of economic borders in the Mediterranean, the development of joint tourism ventures, joint military training, and more. In this context the claim was that the deliberate exclusion of Turkey from the EMGF and the strengthening of Egypt's strategic ties with Greece, Cyprus, and Israel encouraged Turkey to make contrarian moves that were designed to block the initiatives of Eastern Mediterranean countries.

> **The lack of an Egyptian response to a Turkish drilling move will directly harm Egypt's economic interest and could puncture el-Sisi's image as a leader in the eyes of the public, and more importantly, in the eyes of the security system.**

Turkey contests the validity of agreements signed between Cyprus and the Greek islands, and Egypt and Israel, and interprets them as a move to isolate it in the region. The memorandum signed with Libya to mark the economic marine borders was intended to hinder the efforts of Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and Israel to develop gas reserves, and it puts substantive difficulties in the way of plans to lay a gas pipeline to Europe, which must pass through Turkish territorial waters. Turkey wants to expand its influence toward Africa and Europe and establish its footprint in the arena by exploiting the gas and oil reserves in its economic waters and gaining hold of Libya's oil reserves. Ankara's vision clashes directly with Cairo's.

Another front where Turkey will test the determination of Egypt and its allies is already emerging in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Ankara intends to send drilling vessels to find gas reserves, pursuant to the economic waters agreement signed in November 2019. The central question that at this stage is unanswered is: will the Egyptian fleet block the Turkish move and risk direct military friction? Meanwhile, Egypt is restricting itself to deterrent threats and

recruiting international support to condemn Turkey. The lack of an Egyptian response to a Turkish drilling move will directly harm Egypt's economic interest and could puncture el-Sisi's image as a leader in the eyes of the public, and more importantly, in the eyes of the security system ("Erdogan: Turkey to Start Gas Exploration," 2020).

While Egypt has military tools that it can use in the context of direct involvement in the Libyan campaign, it will not rush to use them. Ground entry into Libya could lead to entanglement in a long campaign with no benefit, causing direct friction with Turkey and the international arena. The political and military costs of this scenario are too high. Egypt will apparently continue its support by supplying advanced weapons and equipment to Libya as well as required aerial assistance, but as much as possible will avoid ground intervention that could lead to political and military complications.

At the same time, the dynamics of escalation between the parties continues. The Egyptian President stated publicly (June 20) that Egypt has international legitimacy for its military intervention in Libya, and instructed the army to prepare to defend the motherland ("Direct Egyptian Interference," 2020). El-Sisi stressed that Egypt has the right to defend itself against the entrenchment—which has occurred with the support of foreign forces (Turkey and Qatar)—of terror organizations on its western border that openly threaten its security and stability (Mourad, 2020). El-Sisi's message is intended to rouse the international community, and above all the United States, to take action to prevent regional war in Libya, and to deter Turkey and the GNA from capturing the Sirte-al-Jufra line, which is currently held by Haftar's forces. In turn, the White House expressed strong opposition to any military move leading to further escalation in Libya, and called for an immediate ceasefire by all parties, while accepting Cairo's initiative and the political process drawn up in Berlin as the basis for talks ("US Says it Opposes Military Escalation," 2020).

In addition, the fact that Turkey hosts representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood who fled Egypt and is in effect the head of the political Islam camp only intensifies and complicates the existing hostility between the countries. The establishment of a regime that supports the Muslim Brotherhood on Egypt's western border is seen by Cairo as a direct threat to its security, in view of the risk of flows of funding, weapons, terror activists, and radical ideas that can challenge the stability and whip up opposition and terror forces at home.

Egypt's political tools are limited, but it is trying to exploit them also in view of the limitations of the international dynamic, which is currently focused on checking the spread of the coronavirus and finding a response to the global economic crisis. Cairo has succeeded in recruiting Washington to support its initiative, but this is not necessarily evidence of a practical change in American policy. The Trump administration is preoccupied with its political survival, the coronavirus, and preparations for the approaching elections, and it is not clear whether it will expend much political energy on stabilizing the Libyan arena. Also, the Pentagon views the growing Russian involvement in the region with concern. In spite of its public support for the Egyptian position, the United States is in no hurry to use leverage in the arena for fear that this will aid the entrenchment of Russian forces, similar to the Syrian model (Starr, Burrows, & Sirgani, 2017).

The current dynamic could lead to escalation and even direct friction between the parties, although this would not necessarily suit their interests, in view of the possible price. In this context, President el-Sisi met with tribal leaders from Libya (July 16) at a conference called "Egypt and Libya: One People, One Fate." There he linked Libyan security and stability with Egyptian national security, and expressed his commitment to the use of military force, if necessary, to prevent "foreign terror militias and terror organizations" from taking control of Libya. However, alongside the threat to use

military force, el-Sisi called on the parties to return to the political framework and impose an immediate ceasefire while accepting the "Cairo paper" as the basis for settling the conflict. The Egyptian parliament subsequently authorized the President to use military force in Libya if the circumstances require this ("Egypt's Parliament to Mandate Sisi," 2020).

At this stage, the President's moves are perceived by the public as necessary in view of Turkish aggression and their legitimate effort to defend Egypt's western border. If the Egyptian move deters the GNA in Libya and brings about a lasting ceasefire, el-Sisi will be seen as having successfully maintained national security while avoiding being dragged into unnecessary fighting. However, if the fighting develops, the red line is crossed, and the Sirte-al-Jufra line falls, Egypt will have to decide on the nature of its military involvement in Libya. In this context, Egyptian military success or failure in Libya—whether as part of a limited move (aerial attacks) or as part of a wider campaign (air and ground)—will have direct implications for the stability of the President's status, in the eyes of the public and the military-security elite.

The Campaign on the Nile: The Renaissance Dam and the Egyptian Dilemma

On April 8, 2020, the Ethiopian government declared a state of emergency following the outbreak of coronavirus. The Finance Minister announced that the government would have to review its priorities regarding national projects, but there would be no delays of the Renaissance Dam, and the project would keep to the scheduled timetable (Gebre, 2020). Construction of the Renaissance Dam, also known as the Millennium Dam, began in April 2011 on the Blue Nile within Ethiopian territory, about 15 km east of the border with Sudan. The hydroelectric power station under construction on the dam will be the largest in Africa and the seventh largest in the world, and it is intended to supply electricity to millions of Ethiopians,

generate profits from the sale of electricity to neighboring countries, and bolster Ethiopia's status in the African arena. The $5 billion cost is astronomical for the country's economy, but Ethiopia sees the dam as a strategic project intended to help the country's economic and energy development (Lazarus, 2018).

The Nile is perceived both symbolically and practically as Egypt's lifeblood. The Nile Agreements signed between Egypt and Britain and between Egypt and Sudan (1929) granted Egypt actual control over the river with an annual allocation of 55.5 billion cubic meters of water, and a smaller annual allocation of 18.5 billion cubic meters to Sudan. No allocation was made to countries through which the Nile flows, including Ethiopia, home to the source of the Blue Nile. In 1999 the countries of the Nile Basin started a move to change the 1929 agreements and define new allocations of the Nile water. Egypt and Sudan rejected all proposals raised at the talks, which led to a unilateral decision by Ethiopia in 2011 to build the dam, in complete opposition to the position of Cairo and Khartoum (Lazarus, 2018). Cairo, surprised by the move, strongly criticized its legitimacy, but the 2011 internal upheavals in Egypt sidelined the Renaissance Dam from the political and public discourse. In June 2013, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi announced to a cheering audience that Egypt would not accept any threat to its water economy, and that "all options are open" if that happened. Morsi threatened that "if Egypt's allocation is reduced by even one drop, the alternative will be Egyptian blood."

President el-Sisi, who ousted Morsi in a military coup, abandoned the threatening tone in favor of an attempt to resolve the crisis with Ethiopia by political means. At this stage it was clear that the mega-project—which was expected to generate 6,000 MW of electricity for local use and export, and was perceived by the Ethiopian leadership as vital for the country's economic and social welfare—was already at an advanced stage, and it was not possible to turn

back the clock. Since then, Egyptian diplomacy is concerned particularly with issues relating to the policy of managing the dam and the water reservoirs, and promoting agreed moves to minimize the threat posed by the dam to the Egyptian water supply. At the same time, Cairo sought support for its position from Sudan and other African countries, and in the international arena, particularly from the United States.

Sudan, which from the start shared Egypt's concerns over the effects of the dam on its water supply, gradually grew closer to the Ethiopian position. Although Sudan suffers from a water shortage, it is not as severe as Egypt's, and the main threat to Sudan is massive flooding if the dam should collapse. However, Sudan has recognized the positive aspects of the Ethiopian project—regulating the flow of water which will help local agriculture, and the purchase of cheap electricity from Addis Ababa—and therefore moderated its stance (Winter & Ben-Israel, 2018).

In March 2015 a tripartite (Egypt-Ethiopia-Sudan) agreement in principle was signed in Khartoum, as an agreed framework for a future agreement on the policy of filling reservoirs and operating the dam, after an examination of the consequences of its operation for Nile Basin states. El-Sisi stated: "The Renaissance Dam project will be a source of growth for millions of Ethiopian citizens by generating clean energy, but for the sister countries of the Nile Basin, and particularly for Egypt, which has a similar number of people to Ethiopia, the construction of the dam is a source of concern" (Egypt-Sudan-Ethiopia Agreement in Principle, 2013).

The tripartite agreement did not bring about the hoped-for breakthrough, and in view of the deep suspicion and mistrust between the parties, there was no progress in talks. In May 2018, Ethiopia agreed to an Egyptian demand to set up an independent scientific research committee, to provide an assessment of the dam's impact on water flow to Egypt. Cairo hoped to use the research findings to influence the method of filling the reservoirs and operating

the dam in order to minimize the damage to the Egyptian water economy. The talks seemed to be going well, with a visit by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to Cairo (June 2018) and a joint declaration of understandings about the dam ("Egyptian President and Ethiopian Prime Minister," 2018). However, the gaps remain considerable, and there has been no practical progress on resolving the disputes. A new low in relations was reached when the Ethiopian Prime Minister announced in parliament that there was no power in the world that could prevent Ethiopia from constructing the dam, and if they were forced to go to war, they would recruit millions to defend the country's rights ("Ethiopian Prime Minister: If We Have To, We Will Recruit Millions," 2020).

At this stage, the United States tried to lend sponsorship to the talks in order to settle the disagreements. In November 2019 a first meeting took place in Washington between the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia, led by the US Secretary of the Treasury and the Governor of the World Bank. However, Ethiopia announced it would not attend the third meeting scheduled for February 27-28, 2020 in Washington, where the parties were supposed to move toward signing a joint agreement. The collapse of the talks and Ethiopia's announcement that it would not wait for an agreement with Sudan and Egypt, but would start operating the dam by July 2020, raised the level of fears in Egypt and the fiery rhetoric on all sides. The United States called for a resumption of talks and avoidance of unilateral moves. So far, the White House, which accepted the Egyptian version of the dispute, has not managed to influence the Ethiopian position. Sudan for its part declared that filling the reservoirs without an agreement would endanger the dams in Sudan, and that Khartoum wished to reach a joint agreement on matters relating to the safety of the dam and the method of filling the reservoirs. It expressed its opposition to any unilateral moves by Ethiopia that could set a dangerous precedent for other

future projects on the Blue Nile, but was careful to avoid strong rhetoric, and opted to serve as a mediator to bridge the gaps (Amin, 2020).

Egypt is at a crossroads of difficult decisions in view of Ethiopia's determination to operate the dam, even unilaterally, and the ever-present risk of future severe damage to the Egyptian water supply, if Cairo's terms are not met. Egypt has managed to recruit the White House to support its position and mediate talks, and in recent months even persuaded Sudan to take its side. However, as with Libya, at this stage the American pressure lacks effective leverage to force Ethiopia to change its direction. Egypt is trying to dissuade Ethiopia from making unilateral moves, including by means of indirect threats of force, but so far without real effect. A further round of tripartite talks mediated by South Africa is underway, but so far without success. Meantime, satellite pictures show that the dam reservoirs are starting to fill, apparently following the heavy rain in early July. Subsequently, senior Ethiopian personnel announced that the reservoirs would be filled even without the agreement of Egypt and Sudan, which raised the level of tension in the Egyptian public (Morsy, 2020).

Even if Egypt has a military option to stop operation of the dam, the cost of such action in the regional and international arenas would be both high and prolonged. In concrete terms, the failure of an Egyptian military action could lead the Ethiopians to take a more extreme position and directly harm the Egyptian water supply. No less important, it would have a clear effect on how President el-Sisi is perceived by the Egyptian public and security establishment. Cairo's main card at this stage is to exert pressure in the tripartite talks and try to reach a negotiated compromise. It is essential to coordinate their position with Sudan, since Khartoum is playing an important role of mediating between the two parties. In view of the weakness of the UN and international institutions, the support of the White House is also very important, since it has leverage over Ethiopia (including behind

the scenes) to persuade it to soften its stance (Gramer, 2020).

President el-Sisi has declared several times in recent years that the only way to resolve the crisis between the countries is through diplomacy. A failure of the talks, leading to a unilateral move by Ethiopia and filling of the dam in a way that affects the Egyptian water supply, would directly affect how the President is viewed by the public and the security-military establishment. On the other hand, reaching an agreed compromise would strengthen el-Sisi, casting him as a leader who can recruit international and regional support for Egypt's position, and thus prevent damage to the country's lifeblood. The drama surrounding the Renaissance Dam is reaching a climax, and the possibility of worsening relations between the countries is growing. The ball is in the Ethiopian court, and Egyptian pressure is reaching a boiling point.

The Coronavirus Pandemic and the Fear of an Economic Depression

In the last weeks of July, coronavirus cases in Egypt began to drop below the rate of 1000 new cases per day, and the Egyptian Health Ministry estimated that the first wave of the pandemic in the country was receding. In recent months, the health system almost reached a breaking point, with medical personnel badly affected by a lack of protective equipment and replacement staff, and a steadily rising death rate. At the same time, the Ministry of Health numbers should be regarded with caution, due to considerable evidence of widespread illness in the general population and aggressive moves by the regime to censor news items or studies that challenge the official statistics.

Although at this point the pandemic appears to be on the wane, the fear of a second wave, which could severely affect the performance of the health system and lead to extensive mortality, is reflected in the establishment of a public information campaign and some moves to limit social interaction. However, the

scenario of a broad and uncontrolled health crisis, where the state is unable to meet its obligation to provide the public with health security, is secondary in the eyes of the regime, in view of the more dangerous scenario of a collapse of the economy, leading to widespread poverty, hunger, and a breakdown of the public and political order. The Egyptian dilemma is the need to choose between two bad options, so at present the government is focused on managing the risk of an economic collapse, even if that means an increase in morbidity and mortality.

The trauma of the huge economic crisis of 1929 still forms part of Egypt's historical memory. Dr. Ismail Saraj al-Din, former Vice Chairman of the World Bank and a leading economic commentator, claims that the present economic dynamic on the world stage is reminiscent of the 1929 depression, and like a crisis that lasted more than a decade, this crisis has the potential to persist and have serious consequences for Egyptian society and economy in the coming years. Saraj al-Din warned that Egypt could experience extensive hunger and a crisis in food security, as happened in the twentieth century (Saraj al-Din, 2020).

The 1929 economic crisis affected people at all levels of Egyptian society—those with means and those without, laborers and peasants, traders, and the middle class. In 1928-1933 the relative value of Egyptian exports fell by a third, as well as annual per capita income and buying power. Unemployment in agriculture and industry reached record lows due to the shrinking of global trade and closure of markets, leading to increased migration of people seeking work from the countryside to the cities. Whole communities collapsed and were left with no work and no income. Some villages were hit by severe hunger, and the government had no real way of helping. The crisis led to new political and social phenomena: in the 1930s, the Muslim Brotherhood led by Hassan al-Bana became Egypt's leading popular movement, and the Communist Workers party and nationalist

Fascist movements appeared on the scene, influenced by European ideological movements. Politics and society were split, alienated, and violent, and this was one of the factors that shaped the Free Officers Coup on July 23, 1952 (Gershoni, 1999).

Today the Egyptian economy is intertwined with the global economy, and vulnerable in view of external fluctuations; a global collapse could have disastrous consequences for Egyptian society and politics. Egypt still faces severe basic problems: uncontrolled population growth (Egypt has over 100 million people) and increasing overcrowding in cities create ongoing difficulties in the supply of basic services (health, employment, education, modern infrastructures). The fear of a lengthy global recession, together with these unresolved issues and the inability to bring about fundamental structural changes that allow greater efficiency and reordering of priorities in the allocation of resources (such as cutbacks in the army and the inflated and inefficient civil service) all heighten the uncertainty over the future of the economy.

In fact, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) already expects a sharp drop in Egyptian growth next year (from 5.6 percent in 2019 to 2 percent in 2020). In 2019 the tourism sector reaped $12.6 billion for the country and accounted for 10 percent of all employment, and its severe curtailment has extensive implications for all economic activity. Moreover, the expected drop in income from the Suez Canal as a result of the global recession in trade, accompanied by the loss of revenues from Egyptians working in the Gulf states (in 2019, Egyptians working outside the country brought in $25.2 billion) who are now returning to Egypt in droves, will have enormous negative impact on economic performance. The main indicator, apart from the drop in growth, will be the rise in unemployment (which is predicted to exceed 10 percent in 2020), and even more serious—a dramatic drop in the quality of life and a sharp rise in poverty. If the global recession persists beyond 2020, the Egyptian collapse will mirror the 1929 crisis

and lead to waves of protest as well as new political movements (inside and outside the establishment) that will challenge the existing political order (Suleiman, 2020).

All this has led to the partial imposition of social and economic restrictions, of which the most striking were the halt to international flights, the closure of educational and cultural institutions, and the enforcement of a nightly curfew. At the same time, most of the economy continued to operate normally during the day, including the crowded markets and public transport. The government allocated 5.8 billion euros as "aid packages," half of which were transferred to the collapsing tourism sector, which is so vital to Egypt as a source of employment and revenues. In the framework of moves taken to save other sectors, the IMF approved a loan of $2.8 billion, and later approved an additional loan of $5.2 billion to fight the pandemic ("IMF Approves 5.2 Billion Loan," 2020).

The Egyptian government also announced the "living in the presence of the coronavirus" plan, which meant the gradual reopening of the economy from mid-June. The aim is to restore international flights, open hotels, and holiday resorts to revive the tourism sector, limit lockdowns and restrictions, and encourage the return of investment ("Egypt Reopens Airports and Welcomes Tourists," 2020).

At the same time, the regime is acting aggressively to repress any criticism of how it is handling the pandemic. It is not willing to tolerate voices that affect Egypt's image. A striking example is the arrest of doctors who expressed open criticism of the Ministry of Health. The arrest led to an unusual public call by a syndicate of Egyptian doctors for their immediate release and legal protection. In the campaign over its image, the regime acts aggressively to silence voices that undermine its narrative ("Egyptian State Media Accuses Doctors," 2020).

The expected global recession and its severe impact on the Egyptian economy, together with the most serious health crisis in modern Egyptian history, present a complex and dangerous challenge to continued stability. The central fear is of an economic tsunami, while the underlying assumption is that Egypt can cope with the health crisis due to the young median age of its population, as well as the lack of any benefit to a policy of social restrictions and lockdown in a country with such high population density and poor infrastructure. The price of a mistake in this policy could be high, including further upheavals in society and politics, but in view of the alternatives and the lessons of history, the choice of the economy over health is apparently unavoidable.

Conclusion

We are standing together at a historic moment in the annals of the people, in the struggle against the coronavirus, which obliges us all to join hands and show solidarity so that we can overcome this crisis in peace, while preserving everything we have succeeded in achieving in various fields. The efforts of the Egyptian state—the government of the people—are directed at fighting this virus while continuing to implement development plans and maintaining economic stability during this difficult period. The enemies of the state are trying to sow doubts about the country's achievements and efforts. I place my trust in the Egyptian people, who have always known how to show determination when facing challenges like this. May God bless Egypt and the Egyptian people. (el-Sisi, quoted in Natzar, 2018)

This passage illustrates the pressures facing el-Sisi, as he stresses the need to reinforce economic stability and social cohesion, while pointing at the "enemies of the state"

who disseminate "lies" about the country's failure in the fight against the pandemic. The regime, which expanded its powers under the Emergency Law as part of the struggle, is exploiting this measure to suppress systematically any expression of criticism or opposition to government policy. The public was deterred and at this stage there are no wide public protests, while the concrete threat of operation of the Renaissance Dam and Turkish entrenchment on the western border of Egypt means that attention can be diverted from internal matters to Egypt's "real" enemies, who pose a substantive threat to its national security.

In recent years the regime responded to public protest with a closure of public spaces and an unprecedented attack on any kind of political or social organization that was perceived as threatening. Contrary to President Mubarak—who allowed relatively free discourse in the independent media and on social media, and even allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to participate in Egyptian society and politics, based on the assumption that a certain balance was necessary (even if only for appearances) in order to create essential valves for the public to let off steam—the policy of the current regime demonstrates a lack of tolerance for any kind of opposition. The government seeks to establish effective deterrence by weakening any ideological or organizational alternative and by creating a perception that "there is no alternative" based on driving home the message regarding the price of undermining national stability and security.

In recent years a number of models have been developed to deal with the research goal to assess the probability of regime stability and the potential for regime change. In studies conducted following the upheavals in the Arab world, researchers from the academic world and from intelligence organizations expressed their basic surprise at the undermining of local leaderships. Brun estimated that the era of stable leaders in the Middle East had come to an end due to the nature of the period and an

understanding by all the actors that regime change was in fact possible. He proposed a model that he sees as a framework for open research debate, focusing on three main contexts: states and organizations (the public, local elites, army and security mechanisms, etc.); the region and the zeitgeist (regional dynamics, political reciprocity, social ties, etc.); and the international system and its impact on local systems. Brun argues that there are two main failures in the research on the stability of leaders: a failure of imagination by the researchers, and the clinging to preconceptions, which prevent a critical examination and presentation of scenarios involving system change. These failures cast doubt on the researcher's ability to correctly analyze the complexity of the subversive dynamics that can lead to change (Brun, 2018).

The assessment model of Yadlin and Golov seeks to answer the question of whether the probability of government stability in a country is low, medium, or high, and which country has the highest probability of erosion of stability. The model presents four parameters as influencing the development of uprisings and coups in the Middle East: the internal arena, the international arena, the economic arena, and factors that inhibit regime change. The model is based on the "expert's choice" and is intended to help researchers in assessments of stability through thorough analysis of these parameters, and their qualitative and quantitative components. This method allows critical examination of basic assumptions by dismantling and reassembling all the defined parameters. Contrary to other models, the results are expressed as numbers. The main criticism of this model concerns the indexes that are inherently not objective and usually anchored in a research concept (Yadlin & Golov, 2013).

The argument presented in this article is that a research focus on the issue of stability requires critical humility and an understanding that there is no clear answer to questions dealing with predictions, particularly of emerging

situations, where the dynamics have driving significance. Brun and Cordesman describe the problematic aspects of relying on models to establish an assessment of leadership stability, due largely to the complexity of the issue—a multitude of actors that shape and influence at any given moment, plus the objective difficulty of responding to the many questions that arise when using a generic model (Brun, 2018; Cordesman, 2018).

Moreover, quantitative models for assessing regime stability are controversial due to the inherent subjectivity of the process and the question of the reliability of the researcher's sources. In this context, Brun and Roitman argue that in the age of fake news and post-truth, there is a genuine growing difficulty of defining and understanding reality as the basis for making decisions that are vital to the core issues of national security. This assumption is relevant to questions concerning research on stability. The fact that Middle East states use methods involving subconscious influence and denigration in order to take control of public awareness only intensifies the problem for researchers wishing to separate fact from fiction when marshaling the data for their studies (Brun & Roitman, 2019).

In concrete terms, Egypt is experiencing an unprecedented combination of crises that could undermine its security, economy, and political stability and impose a complex test of leadership on President el-Sisi. The use of various models to examine Egyptian stability could help to focus research perspectives and the analysis of variables, while mapping links between them. However, the dynamic process of decision making based on the conduct of the actors in the different contexts, miscalculation, the test of outcomes in the arenas of action, and the direct, indirect, and unexpected consequences of the coalescing of the threats to Egyptian national security all have a decisive impact on regime stability. Therefore, for this research, the job of the models is to provide a basis for discussion and indicate possible

directions of development; at the same time, subjective conduct, irrational reality, and unknown unknowns play an important role in the ability to correctly assess developments that affect the issue.

In conclusion, this article illustrates the possible cost for the Egyptian regime of decisions responding to complex challenges in various spheres. At this stage, Egypt's regional strategy is to block Turkish moves in Libya, prevent the unilateral operation of the Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia, and stabilize the economy while avoiding the collapse of the health system. Cairo is relying mainly on political tools, while threatening the use of force in Libya and Ethiopia. However, Egypt will try to avoid any military adventures that could drag it into unnecessary, costly, and destructive entanglements. The dilemma is real: military failure could have direct implications for the status of the President, but a failure to use force in the face of dangerous developments in Libya or Ethiopia could draw severe domestic criticism of the weakness of the leadership in protecting national interests. In addition, the intensity of the health crisis and the fear of a future economic tsunami demand the ability to manage a complex policy of opening the economy to business, while trying to contain the spread of the pandemic. However, an ongoing global recession will cause direct damage to the Egyptian economy leading to a deep crisis, irrespective of any Egyptian policy of opening the economy in a coronavirus routine, and this could have far-reaching consequences for Egyptian society and politics.

Over the coming year Egypt could find itself in the "perfect storm," which will be a real test of the President's internal support (the army, the security establishment, government ministries, and public bodies) and of public willingness to embark on further protests, in spite of repression and the absence of a political or social opposition. Decisions made in the next few months by Egyptian, regional, and international actors, the resulting dynamics, the

outcome, and how it is perceived will all have a direct impact on the President's image and status, and the stability of the entire system. The issue of stability in Egypt is once again on the agenda.

Dr. Moshe Albo, a senior researcher at the Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Studies, specializes in modern Egyptian history and strategic issues of security and policy in the Middle East. During his military service, Lt. Col (res.) Albo served as arena head in the Research Division of the Intelligence Corps, and was commander of the Egyptian Liaison Unit in the Foreign Relations Division of the Planning Directorate.

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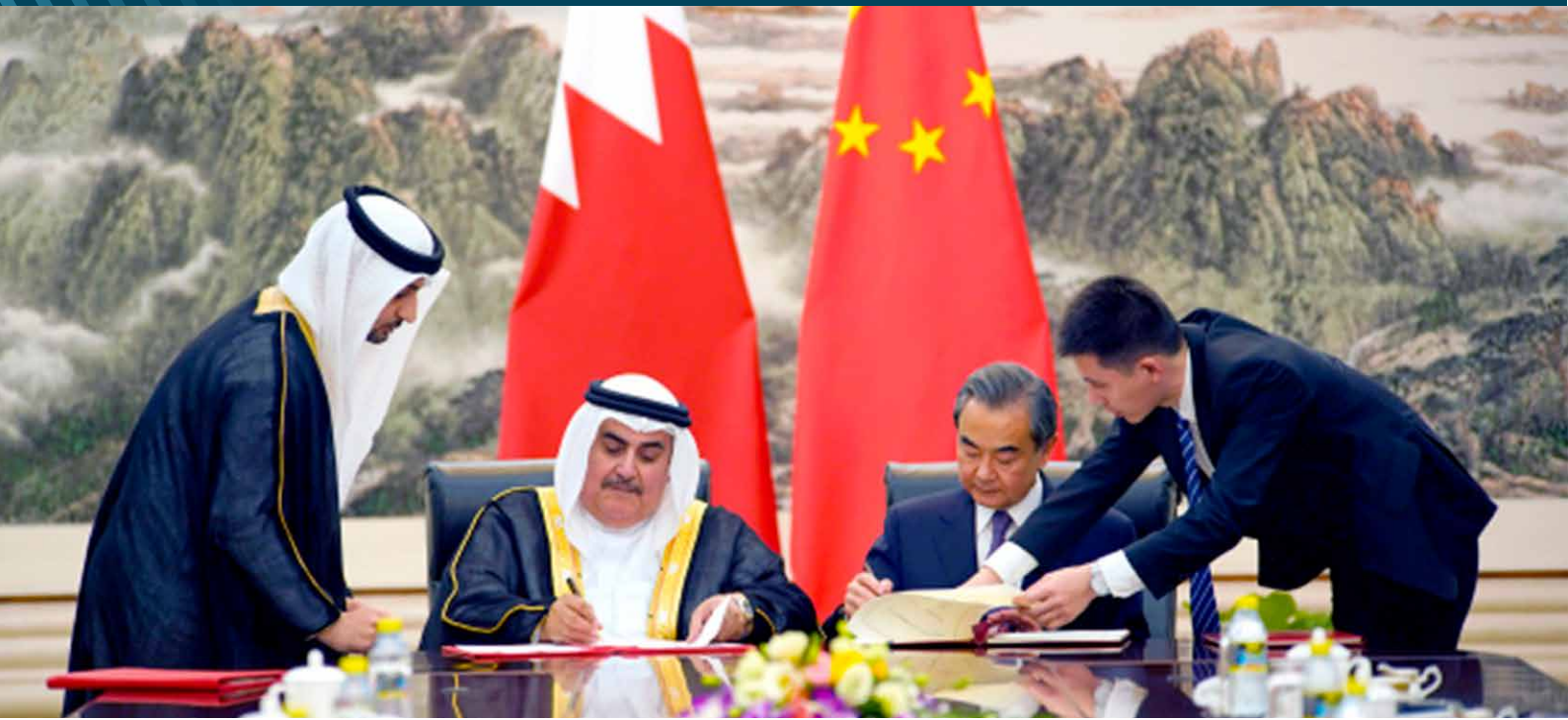
Bahraini Sheikh Khalid and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang sign agreement, July 10, 2018. Photo: al-Ayam

China-Bahrain Relations in the Age of the Belt and Road Initiative

Mordechai Chaziza

China's relationship with the Gulf countries revolves around energy demand and the new Silk Road. Nonetheless, a critical question is how close the political and economic relationship between China and the GCC in general, and Bahrain in particular, can become when there is a strategic alliance between the US and each of the GCC members. Notwithstanding Western fatigue and the decline of US hegemony in the Middle East, Bahrain and other Gulf states are aware of China's limitations as a security provider and therefore manage their relationships with the US carefully. China's friendly cooperative relations with the Kingdom are based on shared or mutual commercial interests and Bahrain's strategic geographical position, and from a policy standpoint, strong Bahrain-China links are expected. However, it should not be concluded that Bahrain has bound itself exclusively to China or that the PRC will pour resources indiscriminately into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Bahrain. Against this background, a geopolitical approach is warranted to analyze the extent to which the BRI will be realized, and its political effect on participating countries from the Persian Gulf.

Keywords: China, Bahrain, Persian Gulf, Belt and Road Initiative, Silk Road strategy

Introduction

In 2019, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Kingdom of Bahrain celebrated the 30th anniversary of their diplomatic ties, established on April 15, 1989. Over the decades, developing bilateral relations have maintained a favorable momentum (Olimat, 2016). While many have studied China's ties with the Persian Gulf region, Beijing's relations with Bahrain remain undocumented. As the Gulf's smallest and weakest country, researchers have preferred to examine China-Bahrain relations within the rubric of the Gulf states or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Yet while the PRC's relations with the Kingdom have been kept out of the limelight and received limited critical attention, they have developed well beyond initial diplomatic and political affairs (Rakhmat, 2014; Olimat, 2016; Qian & Fulton, 2017; Reardon-Anderson, 2018; Young, 2019).

The new Silk Road strategy, put forward in October 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping, seeks to connect the PRC to the global market by linking Asia and Europe via a set of land and maritime trade routes. The concept took shape over several years and has become a cornerstone of President Xi's foreign policy. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become a key theme of bilateral relations, and could also create opportunities for partnerships in the many promising emerging markets between China and countries in the Gulf region (Xuming, 2017). Although the Gulf region is not directly along the BRI trade routes, the Gulf countries have high economic and geopolitical stakes in the PRC's new Silk Road strategy. Moreover, Bahrain's geopolitical location and economic advantages make it a worthy candidate to fit into the BRI framework.

Indeed, Bahrain and Chinese economic interests and geopolitical stakes converge across the new Silk Road strategy. Since the Kingdom is ideally positioned to play a vital role in China's BRI, it is essential to examine some of the aspects behind the friendly cooperative relations between the two countries, and especially the synergies between the BRI and Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 (BEV2030) to understand the extent of economic engagement and the impact on US dominance in the Gulf. Close scrutiny shows that the PRC's friendly cooperative relations with the Kingdom of Bahrain are based on shared or mutual complementary commercial interests (integration of the BRI framework and BEV2030) and Bahrain's strategic geographical position.

China Partnership Diplomacy

The post-Cold War order has provided PRC (a rising power) with a unique strategic opportunity to develop power and influence in the Middle East without facing overt challenges from the United States. "Balancing" against Washington (allying with others against the prevailing threat) during the unipolar era would not advance Beijing's interests, but at the same time, neither would "bandwagoning" (alignment with the source of danger) or neutrality (Foot, 2006). Dynamic balancing is too risky, and bandwagoning or neutrality is not consistent with Chinese ambitions (Tessman, 2012; Goh, 2005). Instead, Beijing has taken advantage of the relative stability provided by US dominance to develop strong ties with strategically important states in the Middle East (e.g., Iran, Egypt, Turkey, UAE, and Saudi Arabia). These relations have been built mostly on economic foundations, but as they become increasingly multifaceted, there is a corresponding growth of strategic considerations.

Beijing has had to build a regional presence that does not alienate the US or any Middle East states while pursuing its interests. Chinese diplomacy has facilitated a methodical buildup of economic relations, while the US security umbrella provides a low-cost entry into the region. Beginning with trade, economic ties became increasingly multifaceted and sophisticated, incorporating finance and investment. The relationships with the Middle East states (e.g., Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar) have since progressed beyond the economic

to include political and security objectives, but have consistently allowed China the flexibility of being everyone's friend in the competitive regional environment (Fulton, 2019a).

In recent years, partnership diplomacy has become a primary foreign policy tool for the Chinese government. Since the end of the Cold War, the number of partnerships has steadily increased, and PRC has established partnerships with 78 countries and five regional organizations (African Union, Arab Union, ASEAN, CELAC, and EU), which is 45 percent of the 174 countries that have formal diplomatic ties with China. In addition to its comprehensiveness, the network also consists of different stratifications, from ordinary partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership (Quan & Min, 2019).

China's partnership diplomacy includes a scale of relations, ranging from a friendly cooperative partnership at the bottom to a comprehensive strategic partnership at the high end (Su, 2000). Each of the five categories of relations features specific priorities, signaling the level of importance Beijing attaches to that state. China's levels of strategic partnership diplomacy are (from highest to lowest): *comprehensive strategic partnership* (全面战略伙伴关系) involves the full pursuit of cooperation and development on regional and international affairs. *Strategic partnership* (战略伙伴关系) coordinates more closely on regional and international affairs, including military. *Comprehensive cooperative partnership* (全面合作伙伴关系) maintains the momentum of high-level exchanges, enhanced contacts at various levels, and increased mutual understanding on issues of common interest. *Cooperative partnership* (合作夥伴關係) develops cooperation on bilateral issues, based on mutual respect and benefit. *Friendly cooperative partnership* (友好合作关) strengthens cooperation on bilateral issues such as trade ("Quick Guide to China's Diplomatic Levels," 2016).

In the Middle East, China partnership diplomacy includes seven relationships, spread across the region, that fall into three broad categories in line with their importance. The first category comprises *comprehensive strategic partnerships* with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The second covers *strategic partnerships* with Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar. The third comprises *friendly cooperative partnerships* with the region's smaller states: Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

The past two decades have seen substantial changes in the global economy and geopolitical trends, with China's rise on the global stage. These developments create new opportunities for the Gulf countries as they look to diversify their economies, increase trade, and seek investment opportunities in emerging markets; this includes efforts such as forging strategic partnerships with China to promote the BRI and to incorporate it into their national development plans (Young, 2019). This reflects a growing drive among the Gulf states to benefit from the favorable business conditions in China, as well as Beijing's expertise and experience in its rapid path to economic development (Oxford Business Group, 2019).

The Gulf countries have strongly embraced and benefited from a network of cooperation with China in various investment and infrastructure projects and other fields. Hence, they have much to gain from the realization of the Belt and Road vision, as the project aims to enhance the PRC's diplomatic and economic relations with countries that maintain a positive view of Beijing's global economic and political ascendancy, and can provide the energy resources that it needs to fuel its economy (Cafiero & Wagner, 2017).

In the wake of Arab uprisings and the civil wars, the Gulf countries were pressured to rebuild their economy or boost economic growth to maintain social stability. To this end, they have actively rolled out plans for long-term development for reconstruction and encouraging economic growth, and comprehensive and upgraded Chinese engagement provides the impetus for it (Young,

2019). In this way, there is a common interest for PRC and the Middle East countries to integrate and synergize the new Silk Road strategy with major initiatives (e.g., Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, UAE's Vision 2021, and others) of future-oriented reforms for national rejuvenation (Cui, 2015).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

PRC's most significant 21st century diplomatic and economic activity is the launching of the Silk Road initiative. The BRI is the sprawling framework of trade and commercial ties between China and various world regions that have become the flagship foreign policy of the Xi administration. The BRI seeks primarily to open up new markets and secure global supply chains to help generate sustained Chinese economic growth, and thereby contribute to social stability (Watanabe, 2019).

The BRI, the most ambitious geo-economic vision in recent history, has a maritime and land-based component: the maritime element is the 21st century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI), and the land-based equivalent is the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB). The different sub-branches of the SREB (a series of land-based infrastructure projects, including roads, railways, and pipelines) and the MSRI (comprising ports and coastal development) would create a multi-national network connecting China to Europe and Africa via the Middle East. This is intended to facilitate trade, improve access to foreign energy resources, and give the PRC access to new markets (Xinhua, 2017).

The BRI's geographic scope is continually expanding, covering more than 123 countries and 29 international organizations along six main economic corridors: the New Eurasian Land Bridge; the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor; the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; the Bangladesh-China-Myanmar Economic Corridor; the China Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, and the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor. The BRI covers two-thirds of the world's population, 40 percent of global GNP,

and an estimated 75 percent of known energy reserves (Rolland, 2019). The exact total cost of the initiative is not known but according to some estimates, $8 trillion will be invested (Hoh, 2019).

The Persian Gulf and the BRI

China's relationship with the Gulf countries revolves around energy demand and the new Silk Road initiative. Energy is at the heart of the growing links between PRC and the Persian Gulf, which centers on the crude oil and petrochemical industries, although it extends to other commodities. Beijing's dependence on crude oil imports from the Gulf, a leading oil-producing region, has increased gradually since 1993 when it became a net importer of oil (Yetiv & Lu, 2007).

As the world's largest consumer of energy overall and the second-largest importer of crude oil, safeguarding a stable flow of crude oil from the region is a paramount concern (Zambelis, 2015). In 2019, roughly half (44.8 percent) of Chinese imported crude oil originated from just nine Middle East nations, and six Gulf states were among the top 15 crude oil suppliers to Beijing (Workman, 2020). Although China is trying to diversify its energy supplies from the Gulf, the most proximate source of oil, it will remain dependent on the Gulf for years to come.

> The Gulf countries are important key partners and will play significant roles in the successful implementation of the BRI due to their geostrategic location, energy reserve, and the fast and steady growth of the regional economy, with its rapid expansion of the market for consumer and merchandise goods. China can be a major supplier of these markets.

However, the BRI has become the main focus of strategic and economic engagement between the PRC and Gulf countries. As a strategically important crossroads for trade routes and sea lanes linking Asia to Europe

and Africa, the Gulf region is vital to the future of the BRI, which is designed to position the PRC at the center of global trade networks. This means the Gulf region will serve as a hub of the two routes, entailing many added economic benefits. Furthermore, Gulf countries could benefit not only from the BRI's focus on improved transportation across Eurasia, but also from exports to Asia that avoid the Strait of Hormuz's bottlenecks in favor of the greater affluence and stability in Central Asia (Chaziza, 2020). Thus, the Gulf countries are important key partners and will play significant roles in the successful implementation of the BRI due to their geostrategic location, energy reserve, and the fast and steady growth of the regional economy, with its rapid expansion of the market for consumer and merchandise goods. China can be a major supplier of these markets.

> Through its strong support for Bahrain's sovereignty and political stability, the PRC has conveyed an indirect message to Iran that it does not support any instability in the Persian Gulf region. This stance appears to be much appreciated by both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

The Importance of Bahrain to China

Bahrain has strategic geopolitical value for the PRC's new Silk Road strategy in comparison to other GCC states. First, the Kingdom is a gateway to the Gulf and one of the key Gulf countries along the new Silk Road route, enabling it to serve as a transportation hub for the region (Olimat, 2016). The island is surrounded by several of the Middle East's large oil fields and commands a strategic position amid the Persian Gulf's shipping lanes, which is the access route for much of the Western world's oil to the open ocean. Bahrain stands at the crossroads of China's new Silk Road strategy—an important nexus for trade, investment, science, and cultural exchanges between the Arab and Chinese and the greater Asian, African, and European worlds.

Second, the country benefits from a strategic geographical location on the crossroads of African, Asian, and European markets at the heart of the GCC market, which is currently valued at approximately $2.2 trillion. China has already become the GCC region's largest trading partner; bilateral trade now exceeds $260 billion per year, and is projected to reach $350 billion in the next decade.

Third, Bahrain, known as "the Pearl of the Gulf," is an important port on the ancient maritime Silk Road. The relationship is deeply rooted in shared history, geography, culture, and economic exchanges.

Fourth, Bahrain is also one of the most modern and dynamic countries within the top-ranking business environment in the Middle East (al-Mukharriq, 2018a; 2018b). Its open and liberal lifestyle, unique market access, world-class regulatory environment, and highly competitive taxation system, combined with the lowest operating costs in the region, high quality of life, and a technologically literate population make the Kingdom an ideal access point for Chinese companies to this $1.5 trillion GCC market ("Bahrain Strengthens Economic Ties with China," 2018). For Chinese investors seeking business opportunities in the Gulf countries and Africa, Bahrain can be a commercial hub of operations. Bahrain ranks first among the Gulf states in *Doing Business 2020*, including with the highest number of regulatory reforms. The low cost of doing business in Bahrain is a significant incentive for Chinese and foreign investors seeking a competitive advantage and gateway to large regional markets (World Bank Group, 2019).

Bahrain also has a unique role as the leading financial hub in the Middle East, for both conventional and Islamic banking. Most of the world's largest banks have operations in Bahrain from which China can do business throughout the Middle East and African region, and indeed, the rest of the world. The Kingdom is the region's banking hub because of its strategic location, its highly qualified labor

force, its excellent communications, and not least, its robust regulatory system and reliable Central Bank. In support of the BRI projects, the Kingdom's financial institutions are well placed and capable of working with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Silk Road Fund, and the New Development Bank (Alabdulla, 2019).

As the Gulf region becomes increasingly important for Beijing, the Chinese are expected to strengthen their relationship with Bahrain in the coming years. Bahrain could potentially serve as a hub for economic expansion in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia. Finally, Beijing's position on political stability largely corresponds to that of the Kingdom and Saudi governments. Through its strong support for Bahrain's sovereignty and political stability, the PRC has conveyed an indirect message to Iran that it does not support any instability in the Persian Gulf region. This stance appears to be much appreciated by both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (Chaziza, 2020).

Bahrain Economic Vision 2030 (BEV2030)

In 2008 the Kingdom developed a national roadmap for government strategy for the country's future, based on the three guiding principles of sustainability, fairness, and competitiveness. The country's national plan is to cultivate and diversify the economy by enhancing private sector growth and government investment in infrastructure, affordable housing, and human resources. Bahrain wants to attract foreign investment in five sectors: logistics, light manufacturing, financial services, digital technology, and tourism. The Economic Development Board (EDB) has led a coordinated economic and institutional reform intended to transform Bahrain from a regional pioneer to a global contender. The ultimate aim of the plan is to ensure that every Bahraini household has at least twice as much disposable income, in real terms, by 2030 (Kingdom of Bahrain, 2017).

Bahrain Economic Vision 2030 and the Belt and Road Initiative

PRC's friendly cooperative relations with Bahrain include four major areas for cooperation within the BRI framework: policy coordination, connectivity, trade and investments, and people-to-people bond. Inevitably, each partner addresses the new Silk Road framework through its own perspective and the consequences for its own national interests and international status. Therefore, in realizing the shared vision, the two countries have very different attitudes (Min, 2015). Nonetheless, BEV2030 and the BRI have converged on a joint economic development path, and their synergetic strategy will bring new opportunities for both partners. In July 2018, Bahrain and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop the Belt and Road project jointly.

> The two sides would continue to firmly support each other on issues concerning each other's core interests and promote pragmatic cooperation across the board under the BRI framework. The Kingdom highly applauds and supports the BRI and stands ready to strengthen all-round cooperation with China and boost bilateral ties. ("China, Bahrain Ink MOU," 2018)

Policy Coordination

China's friendly cooperative relations with Bahrain are translating into the promotion of bilateral political cooperation; mechanisms for dialogue and consensus-building on global and regional issues; development of shared interests; deepened political trust; and efforts to reach a new consensus on cooperation. These are all important to integrate the BEV2030 into the BRI framework.

Bilateral relations have gathered momentum since the King of Bahrain, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, visited China in 2013 when he strengthened the bilateral ties and opened

new channels of cooperation at several levels (Olimat, 2016). Major agreements were signed in education, health, culture, and investment, which boosted relations and bilateral cooperation (Toumi, 2013). Chinese President Xi Jinping said in talks with King Hamad that Bahrain is an important cooperative partner of China in the Middle East and Gulf region, and "the two countries should be jointly committed to building friendly cooperative relations of long-term stability" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 2013).

The friendly cooperative relations between the two nations have strengthened further over the past years because of Bahrain's fast-evolving startup ecosystem and the country's willingness to play a vital role in China's flagship BRI. According to the Chinese Ambassador to Bahrain, Qi Zhenhong, both countries have become friendly partners of mutual understanding and trust, cooperative partners of the win-win result, and respectable partners learning from each other and deriving mutual benefit. He added that a further strengthening of the friendly cooperative relations between China and Bahrain would not only benefit the two peoples, but also promote strategic cooperation between China and GCC countries, and safeguard regional peace, stability, and prosperity (Qi, 2018).

Connectivity

The facilitation of connectivity is one of the important ways to integrate the BEV2030 into the BRI framework, and the Kingdom would do well to optimize its infrastructural connections to those of the other countries in the BRI framework. This would lead Beijing-Manama to contribute jointly to the development of international transport maritime and overland routes and the creation of an infrastructural network that could gradually connect all the regions in Asia and at specific points in Asia, Africa, and Europe.

In the past, Bahrain traded pearls, dates, and copper, while it imported silk and musk

from China. It was a trading outpost along the old Silk Road connecting the Gulf to the world for thousands of years, and traces of the history of this long trading relationship between the two nations can be found at many of the archaeological sites around the Kingdom (Aboukhsaiwan, 2017).

The Kingdom's strategic location in the heart of the Gulf makes accessibility and entry into any Middle East market (whether by land, sea, or air) fast and economically feasible. The Khalifa Bin Salman Port (KBSP), the premier trans-shipment hub for the Northern Gulf, has enhanced the country's role as a primary supplier of goods to Saudi Arabia, the region's largest market. KBSP's strategic location in the middle of the Gulf, together with its deep-water berths and approach channel that enable it to accept the largest ocean-going container vessels, and its direct overland links to the mainland (Saudi Arabia and Qatar), position the port as a major regional distribution center (Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications Kingdom of Bahrain, 2019).

Bahrain is also linked to Saudi Arabia, the Gulf's largest economy, via the 25 km King Fahd Causeway, which is under expansion to handle increased traffic. Since 2014, a 45 km causeway has linked the Kingdom to Qatar, which has the world's third-largest natural gas reserves and is the second-largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter (NS Energy, 2019). The link will complete a single trans-Gulf highway, connecting the entire $1.1 trillion Gulf Market, with Bahrain at its center. By 2030, this causeway will also carry a freight railway, thus increasing its capacity. In addition, Bahrain International Airport is undergoing an extensive expansion and modernization program, which is expected to improve the country's status as a tourist destination and a center for logistics by 2020 (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2019). Hence, the Kingdom can be considered a great regional transportation hub and a good place for fulfillment centers for Chinese companies that operate along the new Silk Road.

A convergence of interests can forge a basis for cooperation and integration between the BEV2030 and development of the BRI framework by linking these two projects in a way to set up a unified development strategy in the interests of both countries. As Ambassador Qi said,

> I do believe under this big picture, the comprehensive cooperation between China and Bahrain is bound to face great and historical opportunity, especially with the integration and implementation of the BRI and BEV2030. (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2016)

Trade and Investments

Part of PRC's friendly cooperative relations with Bahrain include attempts to mitigate as much as possible the barriers to free trade, investment, industrial cooperation, and technical and engineering services, to facilitate the integration of BEV2030 within the BRI framework. Measures must be taken by both countries, such as expanding free-trade zones, improving trade structures, seeking new potential areas for trade and improving the trade balance, and devising new initiatives to promote conventional forms of trade (Qian & Fulton, 2017).

Economic relations gained momentum after King Hamad's visit to China in 2013. Since then, the two partners have launched a large number of commerce and trade investments. For example, in 2019, Bahrain attracted 134 companies with a total investment of $835 million (Sertin, 2020). According to the *China Global Investment Tracker*, PRC investments and construction in Bahrain from 2013 to 2019 reached $1.4 billion. Most of the Chinese investments are in utilities ($730 million) and real estate ($690 million) in the Kingdom (*China Global Investment Tracker*, 2020). Bahrain has also attracted some big Chinese companies to invest in the country, including Huawei Technologies, CPIC Abahsain Fiberglass,

China Machinery Engineering Corporation, and China International Marine Containers Company (CIMC). For example, in 2009, Huawei moved its headquarters to Bahrain, and it is now creating and accelerating the Kingdom's 5G mobile network ecosystem (Olimat, 2016).

According to *China Customs Statistics* (export-import), China-Bahrain trade volume increased to $1.6 billion in 2019, a rise from the $1.3 billion in 2018 (Hong Kong Trade Development Council, 2020). Although Bahrain has fewer natural resources to offer compared to other Gulf states, the country offers PRC a way to access untapped consumer markets for its exports, as well as lucrative investment opportunities. Since Bahrain offers a favorable business environment in the Gulf, leading Chinese companies such as Huawei have established operations in the Kingdom, with attractive policies for foreign direct investment. Currently, about 600 Chinese companies are registered in Bahrain, and the total investment has increased from $50 million to $400 million (Han, 2018).

In addition, the Kingdom is one of the largest financial service centers in the Middle East, with more than 400 well-regulated financial services companies and many financial institutions that have regional headquarters. Investors have a great number of opportunities in Bahrain's mature and sizable business system, and its global, transparent mechanism and strong regulatory system also provide strong support (Han, 2018). In 2010, the Bahrain-China Joint Investment Forum (BCJIF) was formed to facilitate the growth of economic links between the two countries, and 18 Chinese commercial agencies, including the Bank of China, opened operations in Bahrain (al-Masri & Curran, 2019).

In October 2019, Bahrain's al-Waha Fund invested in Beijing-based MSA Capital—its first investment in a Chinese fund. According to al-Waha, the $250 million Chinese funds have made ten investments across the Gulf region over the past year, facilitating exchanges for Chinese and Bahraini entrepreneurs (CPI

Financial, 2019). In November 2019, China's MSA Capital and al-Salam Bank-Bahrain launched a $50 million venture capital fund, using the Kingdom as a hub to invest in sectors such as e-commerce and financial technology in the Middle East. The fund is the first venture capital project between Chinese and Gulf money. The fund also plans to target big data, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and logistics and networking systems (Barrington, 2019).

In November 2018, a high-level business delegation from Bahrain led by the Capital Governor Sheikh Hisham bin Abdulrahman al-Khalifa and organized by the Bahrain Economic Development Board visited China's leading commercial centers in cities such as Beijing, Shenzhen, Hebei, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, and elsewhere. Such high-level visits across China emphasized the continuing interest of the Kingdom in fostering deeper economic ties with Beijing, and the spirit of collaboration has grown over the years. These visits also highlight the mutual desire to expand cooperation between the two nations at all levels, from financial services to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), tourism, manufacturing, transportation, and logistics services (StartUp Bahrain, 2018). The agreements and MoUs that were signed represent an important step toward stronger economic ties between China and Bahrain.

People-to-People Bond

China's friendly cooperative relations with Bahrain, enabling the people of the two countries to bond along with the new Silk Road initiative, are also vital to integrate the BEV2030 within the BRI framework. Extensive cultural and academic exchanges are promoted to win public support for deepening bilateral and multilateral cooperation, providing scholarships, holding yearly cultural events, increasing cooperation in science and technology, and establishing joint laboratory or research international technology transfer centers.

Tourism has become an important aspect of the China-Bahrain friendly cooperative partnership, and both nations have outlined their intention to expand the collaboration in this area in the coming years. PRC's links with the GCC states have strengthened due to the introduction of additional and direct airline routes, following the strong growth of the Chinese economy and Chinese tourists' increasing disposable income. According to data from Colliers International published before Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2019, the number of Chinese tourists traveling to the GCC is expected to increase by 81 percent, from 1.6 million in 2018 to 2.9 million in 2022. The GCC countries currently attract just one percent of China's total outbound market, but positive trends are expected over the coming years, with forecasts for as many as 400 million tourists in 2030 (Bridge, 2018).

The Chinese tourist arrivals in Bahrain as total arrivals to the GCC grew from 2012 (0.3 percent) to 2016 (0.4 percent), and the annual growth forecasted for Chinese tourist arrivals to the Kingdom is 7 percent. Given the desire of the Bahraini government to implement its Economic Vision 2030, this trend is expected to continue as more and more Chinese travelers seek to reach new, unexplored cities and cultures. The opening of new leisure attractions and business opportunities in the Kingdom and relaxing visa barriers for Chinese travelers to Bahrain will contribute to this trend (Colliers International, 2018).

Cultural cooperation has become another important aspect of the China-Bahrain relations, and both nations have outlined their intention to expand the collaboration in this area in the coming years. In mid-2013, a Chinese painting and calligraphy exhibition, hosted by the China International Culture Communication Center, was held in Bahrain, featuring over 70 works from more than 30 renowned contemporary Chinese artists. The Kingdom also participated in China's Arabic Arts Festival in 2014, a momentous event to improve understanding between

Chinese and Arab people ("Bahrain Takes Part in Arab Arts Festival in China," 2014). In 2016, China and Bahrain signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of a Chinese cultural center (Li, 2017). In 2018, Bahrain also participated in the Fourth Arabic Arts Festival in Chengdu that shows the latest achievements of cultural exchanges and cooperation between the two states within the framework of the BRI (Gen, 2018).

Linguistic cooperation is another important aspect of the PRC-Bahrain friendly cooperative relations. In 54 countries involved in the BRI, there are 153 Confucius Institutes and 149 primary and high-school Confucius Classrooms (Huang, 2018). There are eighteen Confucius Institutes and three Confucius Classrooms in the Middle East, including one in Bahrain (Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2020). In April 2014, PRC established the Confucius Institute at the University of Bahrain in collaboration with Shanghai University, which is dedicated to promoting the Chinese language and culture in Bahrain and furthering the understanding of contemporary China (University of Bahrain, 2016).

In education, the Chinese Government Scholarship Program (Bahrain) offers five full scholarships annually for Bahraini students to study abroad in China. The program was founded by China's Ministry of Education and aimed to increase mutual understanding between the two nations (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2019). According to the Chinese embassy in Bahrain, a few dozen Bahraini students have studied at different universities across China over the past decade. A strong focus on tourism, culture, and education is set to strengthen the bonds of friendly cooperation between the two nations (Rakhmat, 2014).

China-Bahrain Relations and the Impact on US Dominance

Since the 19th century, the Persian Gulf has been one of the most strategically important regions in the global competition for power, for two reasons: for the great sea powers not to allow the Eurasian land power access to the ports in the Gulf (and later to gain control of the oil resources), and for the vast energy resources. The unipolar international order that emerged following the end of the Cold War fundamentally shaped Washington's dominance in the Gulf. The United States established a regional security architecture that maintained the status quo it favored, and other foreign powers had to either work within that framework or challenge it (Fulton, 2019b). Historically American hegemony across the Middle East has been expressed by its capacity to transform or create major geopolitical crises, shape the behavior of regional states, and when necessary, reconfigure the domestic balance of power between local governments and societies (Yom, 2020).

The Gulf countries, including Bahrain, have started seeking ways to invest in stronger ties with the PRC and other powers, to strengthen their position in an increasingly tenuous geopolitical balance of power. Some are determined to preserve their strategic alliance with the US, but also seek to protect themselves against the threats emanating from regional crises or power competition.

In the past two decades, substantial changes have been seen in the global economy and geopolitical trends, with the rise of the PRC on the global and regional stages. These developments create new opportunities for the Gulf countries, and Bahrain among them, as they look to diversify or rebuild their economies, increase trade, and seek investment opportunities in emerging markets. They also want to promote the BRI and incorporate it into their national development plan or economic challenges. This is a growing trend among the Gulf countries that want to benefit from China's favorable business conditions, expertise, and experience in its rapid economic development (Chaziza, 2019).

The relative decline of US hegemony and power in the Persian Gulf and the emergence of a rising China that seeks significant roles in the region might affect power balance stability (Layne, 2018). In this context, the Gulf countries, including Bahrain, have started seeking ways to invest in stronger ties with the PRC and other powers, to strengthen their position in an increasingly tenuous geopolitical balance of power. Some of the Gulf countries are determined to preserve their strategic alliance with the US, but also seek to protect themselves against the threats emanating from regional crises or power competition to guarantee their security (Henderson, 2014).

The PRC recognizes that many Gulf countries, including Bahrain, are distancing themselves politically from the US. Engaging in a new style of relations with China (going from regular partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership), an economic power free of a historical past as an aggressor in the Gulf and one of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, offers the Gulf countries a bargaining chip with the US (Chaziza, 2019).

China has significantly increased its economic, political, and—to a lesser extent—security footprint in the region, becoming the biggest trade partner and external investor for many Gulf countries. While it is still a relative newcomer to the region and is extremely cautious in its approach to local political and security challenges, Beijing has been propelled to increase its engagement with the Persian Gulf due to its growing economic presence (Fulton, 2019a). This in turn is likely to pull it into a broader engagement with the region in ways that could significantly affect American interests. Many countries in the Gulf, including Bahrain, have longstanding defense ties and close alliance with the United States. However, some of these US allies, most notably the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have signed comprehensive strategic partnership agreements with China.

Indeed, US-Bahrain ties have deepened over the past four decades as the Gulf region has become highly volatile. The Kingdom plays a key role in regional security architecture and is a vital US partner in defense initiatives. Bahrain hosts the US Navy's Fifth Fleet and participates in US-led military coalitions, including the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Bahraini forces have supported the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, providing perimeter security at a military base. The Kingdom has received the preferential status for arms procurement from the US since 1987, and it was the first Arab state to lead a Coalition Task Force patrolling the Gulf and has supported the coalition counter-piracy mission with the deployment of its flagship. The US designated Bahrain a "major non-NATO ally" in 2002, which qualifies the Kingdom to purchase certain US arms, receive excess defense articles, and engage in defense research cooperation (US Department of State, 2018). The two nations extended the defense cooperation agreement for an unspecified period during the King's visit to Washington in November 2017.

As part of its relations with the US, Bahrain has long seen its security-related purchases from the US, and to a lesser extent other Western countries, as a form of insurance. Not surprisingly, about 85 percent of its weapons come from the US. Under the Obama administration, the US withheld some arms purchases from Bahrain (related to Bahrain's human rights record) following the 2011 uprisings, and publicly chastised the regime in 2016. In 2017, the Trump administration dropped human rights conditions for arms sales, though some restrictions remain on weapons used for crowd control.

Given that security procurement is a critical component of Bahrain's survival strategy, the country will fight back with threats, either to impose restrictions on the sale of Western weapons or to buy weapons from other suppliers, especially Russia and China. For instance, when Congress froze a sale of

small arms to Bahrain in 2011, the monarchy bought small arms elsewhere. Nonetheless, the Kingdom does not have a viable external protector aside from the US: neither China nor Russia at this time has the willingness or capability to take on that role (Vittori, 2019).

In the past years, US-Bahrain economic relations have expanded, even though Washington buys virtually no oil from Bahrain. US imports from the Kingdom include fertilizers, aluminum, textiles, apparel, and organic chemicals. More than 200 American companies operate in the country, and Amazon Web Services is slated to open its first regional headquarters in Bahrain. According to the United States Census Bureau, US goods and services trade with Bahrain totaled an estimated $2.4 billion in 2019: exports were $1.4 billion, and imports were $1 billion. The US goods and services trade deficit with Bahrain was $363 million in 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

The Kingdom's economy has been affected by series of anti-government protests led by the Shia-dominant opposition (which includes some Sunni minority elements) from 2011 until 2014, and by a decline in oil prices. The hydrocarbon exports still account for about 80 percent of government revenues, mostly from oil exports (300,000 barrels per day) from a Saudi field (Abu Safa) that it shares equally with Bahrain. The decline in oil prices from 2014 levels has caused Bahrain to cut subsidies for some fuels and some foodstuffs. Financial difficulties have also contributed to unfulfilled government promises to provide more low-income housing (Katzman, 2020). Bahrain has fewer oil and gas reserves than many of its neighbors in the Gulf, and as such, it is looking to diversify its economy from a hydrocarbons base and attract foreign investment. This is the main reason behind Bahrain's friendly cooperative relations with China.

A critical question is how close the political and economic relationship between China and Bahrain in general and the GCC in particular can become when a strategic alliance with the

US covers each of the GCC members. The US security umbrella helped PRC establish itself as a major economic and political power in the region. China has built its presence through strategic hedging—steadily increasing its economic engagement with the Gulf region, establishing relationships with all states there, carefully alienating none, and avoiding policies that would challenge US interests in the region. This approach has created a widespread perception of Beijing as an opportunist that takes advantage of the US security umbrella to focus on its commercial projects while providing a non-viable basis to maintain security and stability in the Gulf.

In the last decade, US hegemony has ebbed due to a combination of factors. The US failure and overstretch in Iraq, public exhaustion; the 2008 financial crisis; and the election of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, who in different ways opposed heavy involvement in the Middle East, prompted more reluctance from the region to embrace ties exclusively with the US. The rise of China and greater interventionism from Middle East states saw the US's previous dominance further challenged. PRC, meanwhile, has significantly increased its economic and diplomatic engagement, designating the Middle East a "key partner" in its Silk Road initiative, and built a physical presence in Pakistan and Djibouti (Chaziza, 2016, 2018).

China still has a limited drive to challenge the US-led security architecture in the Middle East or play a significant role in regional politics (Lons, 2019). However, with the Gulf states' perception of US retrenchment from the region and as the architecture of the BRI takes shape, this reservation becomes increasingly challenging to sustain. Beijing's infrastructure projects complement domestic development programs throughout the region, with its substantial investments, trade, and aid, while the West suffers from Middle East fatigue. Rather than freeriding, China undoubtedly contributes to Middle East development and stability (Fulton, 2019).

As a rising power, PRC engages with Gulf countries in experimental and preliminary ways that are devoid of a clear strategy. Beijing aims to increase its popularity at home rather than seek a geopolitical rivalry with the US in the Middle East. It does so by maintaining stable, great power relations and expanding its commercial interests across the region. Thus, China avoids direct contests for control with established powers and does not establish military bases in conflict zones. Nor does it seek to establish a sphere of influence in the region. For the moment, Washington remains the indispensable player in the Middle East, and the Trump administration has warned its Middle East partners about the consequences of establishing deeper ties to China (Calabrese, 2019).

In the face of inconsistent policies from the US and with an eye to a future with greater Chinese power and influence, Bahrain and many Gulf states perceive PRC as a useful tool in their strategies to diversify not just economically but also politically at a moment of apparent US retrenchment. The BRI addresses their domestic development concerns, and at the same time, signals PRC's intention to become more invested in the region.

As the Persian Gulf region becomes increasingly essential for PRC's new Silk Road strategy, China is expected to strengthen its friendly cooperative relations with Bahrain and other local governments in the coming years.

However, Bahrain and other Gulf states are also aware of China's limitations as a security provider and are, therefore, carefully managing their relationships with the US (al-Tamimi, 2019). At this stage, it is hard to determine whether this is merely a hedging strategy designed to diversify their extra-regional power partnerships or if it signals the beginning of a realignment that stretches across the Middle East to East Asia. It is clear, however, that PRC will be an engaged partner with a clearly articulated approach to building a more substantial presence in the region.

The partnership between Bahrain and China is poised to continue to grow with its limitations, especially in the security, economic, and geopolitical fields. Beijing understands that while the Kingdom wants to maintain close relations with China, Bahrain would not risk jeopardizing its longstanding ties to the US, its closest ally and viable external protector. The same dilemma applies to the US desire to reduce its commitments in the Middle East. In its global rivalry with China, Washington cannot afford to create the kind of void that China would not be able or willing to fill in the short term. This is a situation and a set of relationships that requires careful management by all parties.

Conclusion

PRC does not seek to directly challenge or replace the US military presence in the Middle East, but is intent on strengthening its own economic interests and protecting its assets in the region. most likely to raise its stakes in the region. There is no doubt that Beijing is a rising power in the Persian Gulf, but that does not mean that it will replace Washington's dominance and play the role of a net security provider for the Gulf states. PRC does not have the capacity either to be a security provider in the Persian Gulf or to challenge the US. Still, China wields increasing power in the Middle East, and in particular, in the Persian Gulf. Even if the US is still the only external power that can provide a security umbrella in the Persian Gulf, the global balance of power has changed, both due to China's growing presence and due to the US growing strategic interest in the Pacific and hence lesser involvement in the Persian Gulf. In this respect, the BRI not only promotes global trade and connectivity but also creates an economic system outside Washington's control.

As the Persian Gulf region becomes increasingly essential for PRC's new Silk Road strategy, China is expected to strengthen its

friendly cooperative relations with Bahrain and other local governments in the coming years. Although Bahrain has fewer natural resources than other Gulf states, the Kingdom offers China a way to access untapped consumer markets for its exports, and lucrative investment opportunities. Bahrain also could potentially serve as a regional hub for economic expansion in the Middle East and a logistics center for the growing PRC-GCC trade flows.

Accordingly, PRC's friendly cooperative relations with the Kingdom of Bahrain are based on shared or mutual complementary commercial interests (integration of the BRI framework and BEV2030) and Bahrain's strategic geographical position. PRC's friendly cooperative relations with Bahrain include four major areas for cooperation within the BRI framework: policy coordination, connectivity, trade and investments, and people-to-people bond. BEV2030 and China's BRI framework have converged on a joint economic development path, and their strategic synergy will bring new opportunities for both sides.

From a policy standpoint, strong Bahrain-China links are expected. However, it should not be concluded that Bahrain has bound itself exclusively to China or that the PRC or Chinese companies will pour resources indiscriminately into the BRI in Bahrain to bring about its full implementation. Thus, a geopolitical approach is warranted to analyze the speed and extent to which the BRI is realized, and its political effect on participating countries from the Persian Gulf.

Bahraini and Chinese statements and commentaries paint a glowing portrait of the BRI in Bahrain. It helps the desert bloom both literally and figuratively as commerce, investments, and capital funds flow into Bahrain to cultivate and diversify the economy by enhancing private sector growth and government investment in infrastructure. Change occurs, but it remains to be seen if the BRI landscape will be filled in wholly, given the political and economic challenges in the Persian Gulf.

The BRI specifically is shaped by the sheer scale and complexity of many proposed mega-projects. These include turning the Kingdom into a regional transportation hub that presents immense design, construction, and financial challenges, which make it unlikely that mega-projects will advance quickly, if at all. Beyond that, it is unclear if specific projects will actually remain economically viable. It also remains to be seen if Chinese companies have the will and ability to invest or, similarly, whether China will be able and willing to loan the immense sums quoted in the headlines, given current circumstances and some of the problems encountered elsewhere along the BRI. Moreover, while trade between the Gulf countries and the PRC has expanded robustly, the commerce with the Kingdom is still relatively modest and is not expected to change dramatically or match other countries in the region in the coming years. Chinese investments in Bahrain are at an early stage, and it is difficult to assess what will be implemented and what will not.

Dr. Mordechai Chaziza is a senior lecturer in the Department of Politics and Governance at Ashkelon Academic College, specializing in Chinese foreign and strategic relations. He has focused on China's foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and its relations with individual states; China and the Arab-Israeli peace process; and China's non-intervention policy in intra-state wars.

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President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu display presidential proclamation recognizing Israel's sovereignty in the Golan Heights, March 25, 2019. Photo: Amos Ben Gershom, GPO

The United States and Israel vs. the Syria of Bashar al-Assad: Challenges, Dilemmas, and Options

Itamar Rabinovich

The crisis that began in March 2011 with the outbreak of the revolt against Bashar al-Assad's regime is now in its tenth year. The intensity and complexity of the crisis derive to a great extent from the fact that almost from the start it has been conducted at three levels: domestic, regional, and international. The United States and Israel are among the countries involved in the crisis; they are influenced by it and affect how it unfolds. At the same time, although Israel has profound interests in Syria and considerable military strength, and the United States is still a superpower with important interests in the Middle East, so far neither has played the key role in Syria of which it is capable.

Keywords: Syria, civil war, United States, Israel, Islamic State, Kurds, Russia, Iran

United States Policy toward Syria

Thus far United States policy in the Syrian crisis has been shaped by two Presidents—Barack Obama and Donald Trump—who were both hard-pressed to fashion a clear, coherent, and effective policy. The Obama administration saw the Syrian revolt in the context of the "Arab Spring." When the scale of opposition to the regime and its brutal conduct became clear, the US under Obama began to express support for the opposition, including support for the resignation of Bashar al-Assad, but the administration was determined to avoid any direct military involvement in Syria. Barack Obama believed he was elected in part to end long-term, expensive, and divisive American military involvement in two Middle East arenas (Afghanistan and Iraq), and he was deterred even from limited military involvement in Syria by the belief that this was a slippery slope that could lead to an extended and expensive third involvement in the Middle East. This policy continued even when it became clear that the civil war in Syria was a threat to regional stability and the regime was committing war crimes against the Syrian population. This issue reached a dramatic climax in 2013, when Bashar al-Assad crossed what Obama himself had defined, just a year earlier, as a red line with massive use of chemical weapons against the civilian population.

Over time, the issue of policy toward the Syrian rebellion has become more complex because Islamist and jihadi elements came to play a leading role in the revolt, and a strong link emerged between United States policy toward Iran and Iran's deep military involvement in Syria. Russia's military intervention in the Syrian civil war in 2015 has likewise been a formative development. Obama's last minute decision not to respond to the crossing of his red line significantly weakened the moderate opposition in Syria and encouraged Russia's decision to exploit the vacuum created by American passivity and send forces to Syria, so that ultimately, together with Iran, Russia would decide the military campaign between the regime and the opposition. The Obama administration tried to shape a political solution to the crisis—taking account of Assad's refusal to participate in talks with the opposition or to make any concessions—and enlist Russian cooperation with US policy. President Obama ruled out the option that took shape in 2012 to build the Free Syrian Army as a force that could successfully confront the regime, and subsequently was satisfied with providing partial military aid, largely indirect, to those cast as "moderate rebels."

The Obama administration's pressure on Putin's Russia ultimately led to Russian willingness in December 2015 to support Security Council Resolution 2254, which outlined a roadmap for a political solution to the Syrian crisis. The resolution was sufficiently vague to allow Russia to support it without abandoning Bashar al-Assad, even though it discussed the establishment of a "transitional government" and the start of a political process involving the opposition. Support for Resolution 2254 has remained a foundation of United States policy since December 2015.

The year before, in 2014, there was an important turning point in the Syrian conflict when the Islamic State entered the picture, replacing al-Qaeda as the main jihadi force in the Middle East and sending a threat of terror, particularly to Europe, but also to the United States. The Islamic State set up a quasi-state (caliphate) on both sides of the Syrian-Iraqi border and posed a threat to the stability of other countries in the region, above all Jordan, and to the very political order established in the heart of the Middle East after the First World War. In light of these threats, the United States formed a large international coalition to defeat the organization. The US participated in the warfare principally by means of an aerial force, and for ground fighting relied above all on the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-Arab militia, which was assisted by American advisors and special forces. While maintaining

this policy, the United States continued to avoid direct involvement in the Syrian opposition's revolt against the Assad regime. The United States and Russia collaborated in the fight against the Islamic State, but with respect to the opposition's struggle against the Syrian regime, Russia took the lead following its military intervention, while pushing the US into a secondary and even embarrassingly weak role.

> A central characteristic of United States policy toward the Syrian regime in the Trump era is the tension between the President's personal conduct and the attempt by the national security establishment to formulate a clear and methodical policy on this issue.

The Trump administration, which took office in January 2017, tended to criticize and belittle the policies of its predecessor, but with respect to the Syrian crisis, adopted the same principles: a struggle against the Islamic State and unwillingness to be dragged into the internal civil war. Moreover, President Trump was displeased with the presence of some 2000 US soldiers in northeast Syria, and expressed a desire to bring them home. At this point, serious differences emerged between the President and a large portion of the US national security establishment, which ascribed and continues to ascribe great importance to an ongoing limited US military presence in northeast Syria, and to a lesser degree, in the east. This approach holds that the military intervention or presence is negligible compared to the intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even when there were clashes with Syrian forces or Russian mercenaries, the United States suffered few losses, and the cost-benefit balance remained decidedly positive. Unlike Obama, Trump punished the Assad regime with a rocket attack for its additional use of chemical weapons, but this remained a one-time action. The tension between the President and the heads of the security establishment peaked when Trump

announced the withdrawal of US troops from Syria in December 2018. Secretary of Defense Mattis was among the critics of the decision and how it was taken (in a telephone call with Turkish President Erdogan), and resigned from his position. Trump ultimately reversed this decision, but returned to this course in October 2019 when he agreed to a Turkish military operation against the Kurds—US allies—and limited the number of US soldiers stationed in northeast Syria. The elements in Washington that consistently supported a continued military presence in the region managed to persuade the President—helped by the argument that they were protecting oil reserves—to leave a force of some 600 US troops in Syria, with the justified claim regarding the need to maintain the achievements of the fight against the Islamic State.

The alliance between the United States and the Syrian Kurdish YPG (the nucleus of the larger Arab-Kurdish SDF) is a source of tension between the United States and Turkey. The militia and the PYD organization to which it belongs are the Syrian proxy of the radical Kurdish organization PKK, which is active in Turkey. Erdogan considers the PKK to pose a major risk to Turkish security and is furious over US cooperation with an element that he sees as hostile and dangerous.

As a rule, American policy, particularly in the Trump era, is coordinated with Israeli policy. Israel would like to see a tougher and more active policy in view of Iranian entrenchment in Syria. It supports a continued US military presence in Syria, but is very cautious in its contacts with Washington and its announcements concerning President Trump. The United States supports Israel's struggle against Iran's military presence and activities in Syria (described below), and in March 2019 recognized Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights. In point of fact, Israel did not annex the Golan Heights, but in 1981 applied Israeli law to the area. The move by Washington was intended to be an act of support for the Netanyahu government, as well as another

expression of hostility to the Bashar al-Assad regime.

A central characteristic of United States policy toward the Syrian regime in the Trump era is the tension between the President's personal conduct and the attempt by the national security establishment to formulate a clear and methodical policy on this issue. The President has twice spontaneously decided on far-reaching moves in the Syrian context, and both involved his controversial relations with President Erdogan. A similar pattern emerged in talks between Trump and Putin that took place without involving the US national security establishment. Moreover, Trump's tendency to act gingerly with respect to authoritarian rulers like Putin and Erdogan also emerges in the Syrian context. In the face of this style, Trump's first Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, undertook a prominent attempt to shape and present a methodical policy over the Syrian crisis. In a lecture at Stanford University in January 2018, Tillerson listed what he saw as the main points of US policy in Syria: maintaining a military presence, continuing the struggle against the jihadi organizations, limiting the fighting in Syria, supporting the end of the Bashar al-Assad regime, and thwarting Iranian expansionism. However, shortly after delivering this talk, Tillerson was fired. The main professional element in the US establishment, representing the ongoing attempt to shape and promote an orderly policy in the Syrian crisis, is Ambassador James Jeffrey, who was brought out of retirement to coordinate US policy in Syria. Jeffrey himself presented the main points of his policy at a lecture at the Atlantic Council in which he defined three aims of the US in Syria: long-term defeat of the Islamic State; "a changed regime" (as distinct from regime change, since Jeffrey and others are careful not to speak explicitly about removing Assad, even if that is what they mean); and removal of the Iranian ground forces and their ability to fire long-range missiles from Syria.

Israel and the Syrian crisis

The Syrian civil revolt that erupted in March 2011 ended a twenty-year period of Israel-Syria dynamics, where alongside enmity and fighting there were also peace talks. Until the outbreak of the revolt, the Netanyahu government was conducting indirect talks with the Assad regime through US mediators (Fred Hoff and Dennis Ross). The Syrian civil war and the ensuing developments removed the option of a peace arrangement between the two countries, and Israel was left with the need to formulate a policy in view of the multiple dimensions of the Syrian crisis.

In the spring of 2011, when the extent of the rebellion against the Assad regime became clearer, Israel had two main options: one, to intervene by helping the moderate opposition and offering humanitarian aid to the population; and the other, to stay on the sidelines and look after Israel's vital interests. The temptation to help the opposition and bring about the replacement of Assad was palpable.

Five years previously, during the Second Lebanon War, the threat to Israel from the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah triangle was intense. The replacement of the Assad regime with a regime linked to the West and pragmatic Arab countries would have dealt a serious blow to Iran's regional policy, and contributed to a changed situation in Lebanon and an improvement in Israel's geopolitical situation. Mitigating the temptation to intervene were the weakness of the opposition, the early role played by Islamist and jihadi groups in the revolt, and above all the Israeli fear—a lesson from the First Lebanon War—of any attempt to intervene in shaping the internal politics of neighboring Arab states.

Therefore Israel preferred to avoid direct involvement in the fighting in Syria while defining the conditions and situations (red lines) in which it would intervene: one, in response to fire or an attack on Israel or the Golan Heights from Syrian territory; two, to prevent the transfer of advanced weapon systems to Hezbollah; three, to prevent weapons

of mass destruction (chemical or biological) from falling into the hands of terrorists. Over the years this initial policy became more complex in view of new developments, including the rise of the Islamic State and the jihadi terrorist threat it represented, the massive entry of Iran and Hezbollah into the fighting, and the Russian military involvement in 2015. Israel began providing humanitarian aid covertly to residents of the border area on the Golan Heights, and in view of Hezbollah attempts to entrench itself in the area, moved to a policy of supporting opposition forces on the Syrian Golan Heights, foiled attempts several times to transfer advanced weapons to Hezbollah, and developed a coordination system (deconflicting) with Russia, to prevent clashes between the Israeli Air Force and the Russian Air Force and its air defense units stationed in Syria.

Assad's relative victory over the opposition with the help of Russia and Iran in December 2016 (the end of the battle for Aleppo) and the regime's efforts to restore its hold on all of Syria presented Israel with the need to grapple with the question of the presence of the Syrian army, Hezbollah, and other Shiite militias close to its border. Israel was prepared for the regime's military presence and the return to the relations described in the 1974 disengagement treaties, but not for the presence of Iranian, Hezbollah, and Shiite militia forces along the border. These issues became more pressing in 2018, when the extent of Iranian ambitions to build military infrastructure in Syria became clear. In previous years Iran viewed Syria primarily as a strategic hinterland and a supply route for its store of rockets and missiles in Lebanon, built with Hezbollah's help. Iran's achievement in saving the Assad regime fed the Iranian appetite and led to a policy of striving to establish a strategic infrastructure in Syria similar to what it had built in Lebanon.

The Israeli government was firmly determined to avoid a return to the mistaken policy that allowed Iran over time to build a stockpile of some 150,000 rockets and missiles

in Lebanon. For Israel, of particular concern was the Iranian effort to place precision guided missiles in Syria from which it could attack strategic targets in Israel. In 2018 Iran also sent an armed drone from a Syrian base into Israeli territory, where it was brought down by the Israeli Air Force. Israel's retaliation signaled the start of an ongoing series of Israeli attacks against Iranian military targets, stockpiles of advanced equipment, and attempts to build an operational and military industrial infrastructure in Syria. Israel's efforts proceeded with the US blessing, while Russia in effect refrained from intervening in the Israeli-Iranian military struggle in Syria. There was a temporary reversal in this Russian policy in September 2018, when the Syrian air defense brought down a Russian military aircraft. Russia reacted strongly to Israel, accusing it of responsibility for the incident. As a result, Israeli military activity in Syria was somewhat disrupted for a few months, but eventually the crisis was resolved and Moscow returned to its passive policy toward the Israeli-Iranian struggle. Russia is not a party to the demand and goal of Israel and the United States for Iran to withdraw its forces from Syria, but there is sufficient tension and rivalry within the Russian-Iranian partnership in Syria to stop Russia from interfering in Israel's actions, as long as Israel is careful not to damage Russian targets or, for the most part, targets of the Assad regime as well.

Current Challenges

The Syrian crisis continues with no solution in sight. The Assad regime now controls some 60 percent of the country's territory, while the Kurdish militias and their Arab partners (the SDF) control about 25 percent, in the northeast. The area around Idlib and parts of it neighboring regions are the last territory still controlled by rebel organizations, mostly jihadi. Turkey has effectively annexed large areas around the border. The Islamic State, which was defeated by the international coalition, has returned to operations, particularly in the desert regions

of central and eastern Syria. The opposition is renewing its activity, mainly in southern Syria. Six million Syrians are outside the country—about a million have been granted refuge in Europe and the United States, while the rest are in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. A similar number of Syrians are displaced within the country. The Assad regime is refusing any attempt to reach an agreement or implement political reforms that could end the crisis, and is therefore unable to receive any Western aid that would allow reconstruction of infrastructures and the economy.

Against this background, and the continued activity and entrenchment of Russia and Iran in Syria, the regime's aim to take control of the Idlib region, and Turkish-Kurdish tensions, Syria remains the focus of a crisis that threatens the stability of its neighbors and the security of Europe. For example, Turkey objects to a military campaign by the regime in Idlib with Russian support, because this could send a further wave of refugees into its territory. Turkey itself is using the large refugee population in the country as leverage to exert pressure on Europe, with the threat of sending a new wave of refugees into Europe who would ignite a crisis similar to that of 2015. At any time, the Israeli-Iranian military struggle in Syria could spiral out of control. Hezbollah for its part is trying to create a new equation of deterrence toward Israel, by declaring that any Israeli attack on Hezbollah personnel in Syria will lead to a response on the Lebanese front. Both the United States and Israel are facing the need to formulate and conduct policy that can handle these issues and challenges.

United States Dilemmas

The main issue under discussion in the US establishment is the continued military presence in northeast Syria. At this time, President Trump has relented and agreed to a limited military presence in the Kurdish area and the border crossing with Jordan at al-Tanf, but if he is re-elected in November, he might return to his

original goal of putting an end to the US military presence in Syria.

Another issue concerns relations with Turkey, in the broader regional context (aggressive Turkish policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, involvement in Libya, acquisition of ground-to-air missiles from Russia) and with respect to US cooperation with the Kurdish militias in northeast Syria. The willingness of the administration to allow a US oil company to sign an agreement with the Kurds on the use of the oil reserves in their territory is a sign of continuing American support for the alliance with the Kurds, in spite of strong Turkish opposition.

> **The option of a political arrangement with Syria is off the table, because any arrangement with the Assad regime involving withdrawal will be unacceptable to the Israeli political establishment and public, and also because US recognition of the annexation of the Golan effectively demolished any hypothetical option for an Israeli-Syrian arrangement.**

The US position on the need for a political solution to the Syrian problem is pitted against a reality in which the process underway in Geneva, attended by 150 Syrians (50 representing the regime, 50 representing the opposition, and 50 representing civil society), is failing to produce any practical result. Putin's Russia is also interested in a political solution, but is not applying any pressure to speak of on Assad. In Assad's eyes, there is no room for any concession, however small. As he sees it, he has won the civil war, his policy proved successful, and any concession would amount to the first step on a slippery slope. Assad and the hard nucleus of his regime are also not interested in the return of Sunni refugees from Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, and they are more comfortable with a population with a larger percentage of Alawites. In this situation, the chances of receiving significant aid for

reconstruction—from Western countries or international economic organizations such as the World Bank—are minimal. Russia and Iran wish to derive economic gain from Syria's reconstruction, but they do not have the means or the desire to invest their own resources. The United States is granting humanitarian aid to the Syrian population and trying to ensure that the aid reaches the population and does not remain with the regime, but it sees the continuation of economic and diplomatic pressure as the main leverage that will ultimately bring about not only the fall of the regime, but also the end of the Russian and Iranian presence.

Additional leverage by the United States over the Syrian regime is sanctions. In June 2020 the Caesar Act passed by the Congress came into force, tightening the sanctions on the Assad regime. Now the results of the US elections in November come into play. Trump himself in his unique way has always striven for talks and a deal with Putin. A victory for Biden and a return to a Democratic administration could take US relations with Russia and Iran back to the Obama era. At present, the United States and Russia are trying to reach more limited understandings in the military sphere, in order to prevent undesirable clashes in the areas of active fighting in the northeast and northwest of the country.

The regional dimension of the Syrian crisis is currently dormant, but the potential for a reawakening exists. If this occurs, Israel could find new partners in the Gulf for the effort to drive Iran out of Syria and weaken its hold on Lebanon.

In the summer of 2020, Charles Lister published a short monograph titled *Syria Still Matters*. Lister argues that the ongoing crisis in Syria remains a vital regional and international focus, and outlined a roadmap for managing United States policy on this issue. His main argument is the need for a continued limited US military presence in Syria. Like other experts and members of the administration, Lister believes that a limited presence, which has so far led to almost no American casualties, is a "cheap" investment yielding significant assets.

Israeli Policy

At the moment Israel does not appear to have any attractive or realistic options for the policy described above. Intervention in the Syrian crisis does not appear practical, especially at a time when there is no effective opposition to the regime, except for the Islamist and jihadi concentration around Idlib and local activity in the south. In the past, several Israeli experts raised the suggestion that Israel could ally with the Kurds in northeast Syria, but the benefit and practicality of such a move now seem slight. The option of a political arrangement with Syria is off the table, because any arrangement with the Assad regime involving withdrawal will be unacceptable to the Israeli political establishment and public, and also because US recognition of the annexation of the Golan effectively demolished any hypothetical option for an Israeli-Syrian arrangement. Therefore, Israel's efforts in Syria are expected to continue to focus on thwarting Iranian entrenchment. A significant challenge to Israeli policy is the effort by Hezbollah to conflate the Lebanese and Syrian arenas and create a deterrence equation whereby any Israeli attack on Hezbollah fighters in Syria, as well as in Lebanon, will lead to a response on the Israeli-Lebanese border. Israel's restraint in the summer of 2020 in the face of Hezbollah's attempts to carry out a retaliatory attack on the Lebanese border for the killing of a Hezbollah member in an Israeli attack in Syria illustrates the depth of the problem.

At its height, the civil war in Syria was also the scene of a regional struggle, above all between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which to a large extent echoed the struggle between the moderate Sunni axis and the radical Shiite axis. Israel's sympathies lay with the moderate Sunni axis, but this did not translate into active involvement. In recent years the regional

picture has become more complex with the increasing importance of a third axis consisting of Turkey, Qatar, and organizations that support the Muslim Brotherhood. The normalization of Israel's relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain will reinforce the cooperation between Israel and the Sunni axis against both Iran and Turkey. The regional dimension of the Syrian crisis is currently dormant, but the potential for a reawakening exists. If this occurs, Israel could find new partners in the Gulf for the effort to drive Iran out of Syria and weaken its hold on Lebanon.

Prof. Itamar Rabinovich is Professor Emeritus of Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University. He was formerly Israeli Ambassador to the United States, chairman of the negotiations team on peace with Syria, and president of Tel Aviv University.

Foreground, l-r: Leaders of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Egypt in Addis Ababa, January 29, 2018. Photo: Minasse Wondimu, Anadolu

Egypt and Ethiopia on a Collision Course: And Where Lies Israel?

Ofir Winter and Asher Lubotzky

The tension between Cairo and Addis Ababa reached a boiling point in July 2020, when Ethiopia began filling the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam reservoir. This followed years of fruitless talks aimed at formulating understandings and months of accelerated discussions, including negotiations mediated by the United States and the African Union, which have thus far come to naught. For both sides this is a strategic, "existential" issue with practical and symbolic repercussions, which renders a compromise difficult. Israel has an interest in the sides reaching a diplomatic agreement, as it would increase stability in the region, advance constructive solutions to the water and energy crises of both countries, and prevent a regional arms race. However, involvement in this conflict at such a sensitive time could do Israel more harm than good; it is therefore best for it to remain neutral. At the same time, if understandings are reached between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan, Israel will be able to take part in the development of a Nile Basin regional framework.

Keywords: Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Israel, Renaissance Dam, Nile, water, energy

Background

In advance of the summer of 2020 (the rainy season in the region), Ethiopia announced that it was determined to begin filling the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) reservoir, even without an agreement with Egypt and Sudan. Indeed, satellite photos from July showed that the reservoir is being filled. After initial denials, Ethiopia admitted that it had begun filling it and that it had met its target for the current year, although it claims that this is a result of natural rainfall, and not necessarily a function of its activity. Consequently, Egypt is increasingly anxious about potential harm to the Blue Nile water supply, which accounts for 85 percent of all Nile water in its territory, and is Egypt's near-exclusive water source. Cairo has repeated its demand that Ethiopia avoid unilaterally filling the dam, a position that is currently supported by Sudan and the US, which also decided to suspend part of its economic aid to Ethiopia.

The GERD is an enormous hydroelectric project, which Ethiopia began building in 2011, with billions of dollars invested in the venture. At the heart of the dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt stand several issues. On one level, there is the question of historic rights to Nile waters and the legal implications of such rights. On a practical level is the pace of filling the reservoir; Egypt wants a slow process of about 12 years, whereas Ethiopia would like an accelerated process of 3-4 years. Egypt is also demanding rules for filling the dam during drought years, commitments that will limit Ethiopia's right to build additional dams along the Blue Nile, and a mandatory mechanism for settling future disputes to deny Ethiopia exclusive control of the Nile waters.

The charged issue of the dam demonstrates the contradictory interests of both parties in water resource use, which is critical to the national security of the two countries. Ethiopia would like to build and fill the dam quickly, primarily for economic and infrastructural reasons. The dam is supposed to solve its

electricity problem (65 percent of the population is not connected to the state electric grid) and improve potable water and irrigation supply. The dam is supposed to produce some 6,500 megawatts of electricity a year and allow regulation of the water flow of the Blue Nile for the benefit of agriculture, allowing Ethiopia to manage its frequent droughts better. The Ethiopian government is thus counting on the output of the dam and hoping that this will allow it to overcome major obstacles to national development of a country that has 110 million people and will probably surpass the 200 million mark by 2050. Egypt, which is also a country of over 100 million, already suffered from a severe water shortage prior to the filling of the dam. It refers to Ethiopia as a country with abundant water sources, questions the dam's ability to fulfill Addis Ababa's energy desires, and has warned about technical failures in its construction.

Over the last year, prior to the target date for filling the reservoir, Egypt worked vigorously in the diplomatic arena to pressure Ethiopia to sign an agreement to bridge the opposing interests of the two sides. It hoped that American mediation, and then UN Security Council intervention, would help soften the Ethiopian position. Ethiopia did in fact participate with Egypt and Sudan in US-sponsored talks between November 2019 and February 2020 (with World Bank involvement), but refused to accept the American formula, which it claimed was overtly pro-Egyptian. Egypt viewed Ethiopia's conduct as proof of Addis Ababa's obstinacy, and blamed it for deliberately torpedoing the agreement.

Ethiopia and several of its supporters in Africa (chiefly South Africa and Niger) opposed the Egyptian intention of involving the UN Security Council, claiming that the organization has no right to decide on the matter. In June 2020, the tripartite talks moved to mediation by the African Union and its head, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who was acceptable to both the Egyptians and the Ethiopians. In spite of some progress, however, no breakthrough

was achieved in these still ongoing talks. At the same time, Egypt had some success in bringing Sudan—which had previously sided with Ethiopia—closer to its position, but it is not yet clear whether that will have an impact on the Ethiopians.

> It is likely that Egypt will continue its intensive diplomatic activity in cooperation with Sudan, in an attempt to spur Ethiopia to reach an agreement with them that will place certain restrictions on dam operations. If these efforts fail and there is severe harm to Egyptian water resources, the probability of the use of force might increase.

In contrast to previous threats of military force against Ethiopia made by Egypt during the brief rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, current Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has put his trust in diplomatic channels as the most promising path for resolving the crisis. He has avoided explicit military threats against Ethiopia, although for their part, Ethiopian sources claimed they were ready to repel an Egyptian military threat. The Egyptian strategy focuses on applying international pressure on Ethiopia with an aim of postponing the filling of the dam or at least limiting the quantity of water filled, while warning that operating the dam is a violation of international law and endangers the security and peace of the continent.

Meanwhile Egypt is working to generate Arab and African pressure on Ethiopia. The Arab League published a statement calling on Ethiopia to refrain from filling the dam unilaterally, declaring that "Egypt and Sudan's water security are an integral component of Arab national security." In addition, Egypt is using its Gulf allies—who have invested in Ethiopian economic projects—to leverage their influence in Addis Ababa on its behalf, although it is unclear to what extent these allies are actually willing to promote Egyptian interests. Egypt is also trying to tighten its relations with Ethiopia's neighbors, including Eritrea, South Sudan, and

Somalia, and is reportedly involved in covert activity aimed at applying more pressure on Addis Ababa, such as support for separatists in Ethiopia or parties hostile to it in neighboring countries.

At the same time, Egypt is calling to turn the dam crisis into an opportunity to create a regional partnership with Ethiopia and Sudan and promote cooperation and integration in the Nile Basin, which will address Ethiopian aspirations for accelerated economic, energy, and agricultural development, without harming Nile water supply. This vision coincides with the Egyptian attempt to become a regional energy hub, which includes ideas of connecting the energy networks of countries in the region to allow the sale of Egyptian electricity to Ethiopia, as well as the export of electricity produced by the Ethiopian dam to Egypt, and from there on to Europe, specifically to Cyprus and Greece. In an article from June 2020 in the establishment Egyptian daily *al-Ahram*, Dr. Mohamed Fayez Farhat, the head of Asia studies at the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, explained President el-Sisi's policy doctrine and the "carrots" offered to Ethiopia:

> Regional resources can be a subject for cooperation rather than a subject for conflict. This is clearly reflected in the Egyptian positions on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and on Eastern Mediterranean gas. Regarding the former, el-Sisi still believes that the dam can be an opening for regional cooperation, so long as the parties commit to mutual non-harm; regarding the latter he has succeeded in building a network for regional cooperation on gas.

However, the developments of the past year indicate that Ethiopia is in no rush to make significant concessions to Egypt. At the same time, the probability of Egyptian military counteraction is low at this stage. For

one, such an attack is operatively challenging. Egypt has a strong army and its air force is ranked tenth in the world, but it has limited experience in complex long range attacks. The long-term effectiveness of such an operation is also limited, given that attacking the dam will not change the basic situation whereby Ethiopia controls the sources of the Blue Nile. Instead, it is likely that Egypt will continue its intensive diplomatic activity in cooperation with Sudan, in an attempt to spur Ethiopia to reach an agreement with them that will place certain restrictions on dam operations. If these efforts fail and there is severe harm to Egyptian water resources, the probability of the use of force might increase.

More than Just Water

Apart from disagreements over actual water use, the dam crisis is unfolding alongside a public controversy over competing historical narratives, which make it difficult for Egypt and Ethiopia to reach a middle ground in their disputes. The struggle over the dam has become a symbolic national affair in both countries that extends beyond material issues.

First, the sides disagree over the fundamental rights to use the Nile's water. Egypt insists that it has the right to use most of the Nile's water and to veto actions that endanger its water allocation. It bases this claim on two agreements—one signed in 1929 between Egypt and Great Britain, which represented its colonies in Africa (including Sudan), and a complementary agreement signed between Egypt and Sudan in 1959. The latter agreement granted Egypt rights to use the lion's share of river water (some 55.5 billion cubic meters) and gave Sudan a smaller allocation (18.5 billion cubic meters), while nothing was allocated to the other countries of the Nile Basin. Egypt, which sees itself as "the land of the Nile," views its ownership of river water as inalienable "acquired rights" that are beyond question. This view is based on its historic link to the river and not merely on modern water allocation

agreements: the Nile has been the pulse of Egypt since the days of the Pharaohs, its lifeline and an inseparable part of its identity. Cairo thus refuses to recognize the right of other countries in the Nile Basin to change the water use formula unilaterally, without Egyptian consent.

On the other hand, Ethiopia sees the agreements that underlie the Egyptian claims as colonial relics of the exploitation of Africa: agreements that were forced upon Ethiopia (which did not sign them) by Britain and Egypt. There were many years of hostility between Ethiopia and Egypt, which included Egyptian occupation of parts of Ethiopia during the 1870s and 1880s, and Ethiopia sees Egypt as a colonial power in itself. Ethiopian propaganda has called the dam "the last straw that breaks the colonial camel's back," while casting it alongside other anti-colonial achievements from Ethiopian history. Ethiopia thus principally opposes any infringement on its sovereignty in decision making and is determined to be released from restrictions on using a natural resource in its territory. Egypt for its part has also cultivated an anti-colonialist national ethos of liberation since the Egyptian revolution of 1952, and has repeatedly stated in response to Ethiopian criticisms that its right to the Nile is based on historic foundations that predate the colonial agreements.

Second, the Nile is a material issue in domestic politics in both countries. The el-Sisi regime is concerned that "surrendering" to Ethiopia on such a central matter will be perceived as a failure of the regime, as the Muslim Brotherhood is already criticizing its conciliatory approach and trying to manipulate the Egyptian public opinion against it. In an attempt to contain the damage to its image, spokesmen affiliated with the regime say that the filling of the dam should not be considered an Egyptian failure; on the contrary, the struggle has entered a new diplomatic phase in which Egypt will insist on UN Security Council intervention, and if necessary will use international arbitration. In this context

some draw inspiration from the precedent of arbitration with Israel over control of Taba, which was decided in 1988 in favor of Egypt.

For Ethiopia the dam issue also has important political dimensions. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed strove to build his image as a proactive leader, reformer, and conflict resolver, and as the figure who will lead Ethiopia to the status of an African economic power. After resolving, at least on paper, the decades-long conflict with Eritrea, he is determined to get the dam up and running. The image factor has additional weight due to the domestic situation in Ethiopia, where the government must constantly celebrate its achievements due to the notable presence of separatist and opposition forces seeking to delegitimize the Ethiopian state. These domestic challenges are particularly evident this year, which was supposed to be an election year; Abiy claims that these will be free elections for the first time in Ethiopian history (though they have now been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic). An additional source of domestic pressure on the Ethiopian government is that most of the funding for the dam came from selling government bonds to citizens, who are waiting impatiently for the return on their investment.

Implications for Israel: From Absolute Neutrality to Regional Partnership

The fight over the dam is a conflict between two strategically highly important countries for Israel. Egypt is the most populous Arab country and was the first to sign a peace agreement with it. As neighbors along Israel's southern border, the two countries share many interests in the fields of security, politics, and economy. Ethiopia is a central country in the African arena, especially in the Horn of Africa that lies adjacent to the Red Sea. It is undergoing rapid development processes, and herein lies its importance to Israel, which seeks to expand its political and economic ties on the continent.

Israel also maintains close relations with the leaderships of both countries.

Israel has clearly decided to refrain from intervening in the dam crisis and is taking a neutral stance, advocating a "solution that would benefit both Egypt and Ethiopia." Israel certainly has a strong interest in the sides reaching a diplomatic agreement, which would increase stability within the two countries and in the region, advance constructive solutions to the respective water and energy crises, and prevent an arms race with the risk of escalation. At the same time, Israel could be drawn in, willingly or unwillingly, to this sensitive conflict. According to media reports in 2018, Egypt asked Israel to use its influence with Ethiopia regarding the dam. On the other hand, questionable sources linked Israel in 2019 to the establishment of an aerial defense system for the dam—a report that sparked an uproar in Egypt and led the Israeli embassy in Egypt to issue an official denial.

So long as the conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia is unresolved, Israel should maintain absolute neutrality and refrain from any involvement in this volatile issue, for several reasons. First, this is a sensitive and complex issue in which two of its allies have legitimate justifications for their claims, and Israel has no interest in choosing a side. Second, the chances of successful Israeli mediation between the countries are low, as Israel has no relative advantage over other countries or international bodies that have tried to mediate and failed. Third, Israel's ability to offer practical solutions to the water shortage at the heart of the crisis is limited, given Egyptian resistance to normalization in this field, and even more so, given the severity of the challenge due to limited water resources in the region, demographic growth, worsening climate change, and the difficulty of raising the capital needed to desalinate water in the quantities required. Fourth, the neutral Israeli stance on the dam is consistent with its preference not to make a legal decision in the historic and religious conflict between the Egyptian Coptic Church and the

Ethiopian Orthodox Church over the control of Deir es-Sultan in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Furthermore, involvement in this conflict entails the risk of harming Israel's image in Egypt, where it has been baselessly accused several times of conspiring against the Land of the Nile. One common accusation against Israel in Egyptian public discourse is that Israel encouraged Ethiopia to harm Egyptian national water interests. On the other hand, there are also more sober voices in Egypt that recognize the nature of relations with Israel and reject the conspiratorial discourse. Such accusations against Israel have been pushed aside of the center of public discourse in Egypt lately, and Israel would therefore be wise to maintain a safe distance from the dam crisis and not furnish any pretext to revive them.

On the other hand, if and when Egypt and Ethiopia ultimately reach a compromise, Israel will be able to consider positively participation in the regional cooperation that Egypt seeks in the Nile Basin. Israel has advanced knowledge and technological tools in water and agriculture, and could positively contribute to the development of countries in the region, should they be interested in its assistance. Israel's strategic ties with Egypt in the energy field as part of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) could serve as a platform for promoting additional collaboration in this field. Sudan's increased openness toward Israel, as expressed in the February 2020 Netanyahu-Burhan meeting, emphasizes Israel's ability to maintain open ties with the third party in the equation. In

the optimistic scenario, the dam will provide both Ethiopia and Sudan with tremendous opportunities to develop agriculture within their territories—an additional field in which Israel can contribute—and thus gradually expand its relations with Sudan.

Although Israel is not and should not be a part of the water conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia, it certainly can participate in regional initiatives after the dam becomes a fait accompli. At the same time, because this is an existential issue at the heart of the national security of all parties involved, Israel must continue to conduct itself with the requisite sensitivity.

Thus, although Israel is not and should not be a part of the water conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia, it certainly can participate in regional initiatives after the dam becomes a fait accompli. At the same time, because this is an existential issue at the heart of the national security of all parties involved, Israel must continue to conduct itself with the requisite sensitivity.

Dr. Ofir Winter is a research fellow at INSS and a lecturer in at the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Tel Aviv University. His work focuses on contemporary Egypt and its relations with Israel.

Asher Lubotzky is a doctoral candidate in African history at Indiana University. His work focuses on Israeli-African relations, past and present.

GCC leaders presenting a Memorandum of Understanding to US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, May 21, 2017. Photo: The White House

Engulfed in Dispute? The Future of the Gulf Cooperation Council

Yoel Guzansky

The diplomatic, economic, and transportation boycott by the Arab Quartet against Qatar is in its fourth year. The crisis, which is more severe than previous crises between the countries, casts a shadow over the notion of Gulf unity. The idea of unity, which originated even before some of the countries became independent, is the principle underlying the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Despite the common challenges facing the Arab Gulf monarchies, above all the Iranian issue and the question of United States commitment to their security, they are finding it more difficult than ever to present a united front. Some of them no longer feel committed to the organization framework that they founded 40 years ago.

Keywords: Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Iran, United States, Israel

Background: A History of Crises

June 2020 marked the third anniversary of the diplomatic, economic, and transportation boycott by the Arab Quartet (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt) against Qatar. The boycott is yet another expression of many years of suspicion, and even hostility, between the parties—a result of conflicting interests, personal rivalry, and even unresolved territorial disputes.

The current crisis did not spring from a vacuum, and is rather a continuation of previous crises in relations between the countries. The seeds of the deteriorating relations between Qatar and its neighbors lie in the seizure of power in Qatar in 1995 by Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani from his father, and the founding of the al-Jazeera media network, the voice of Qatar's independent policy, in 1996. Qatar's "independent" policy reflects what it regards as a balance between the need to avoid a conflict with Iran and its wish to limit Saudi dominance of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which since 1981 has comprised Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Since 1995, a number of attempts by Saudi Arabia to stage a coup in Qatar have been reported, and Riyadh is openly fostering opposition in its territory to Tamim bin Khalifa al-Thani, the current ruler of Qatar.

In March 2014, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain broke off relations with Qatar on the grounds that Qatar had not complied with the terms of the November 2013 Riyadh agreement, in which Qatar undertook to terminate its "intervention in their internal affairs"—a euphemism for Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood in the region and Doha's criticism of the three countries on the Qatar-owned al-Jazeera network. This criticism previously led to the closure of al-Jazeera's offices and even the arrests of its correspondents in Egypt. A new agreement reached by the countries in November 2014 that included a commitment by Doha to implement the Riyadh agreement enabled the return of the ambassadors to Qatar and a temporary restoration of normal relations. A few days later, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who is identified with the Muslim Brotherhood, and whose vehement rhetoric against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were a key issue in the crisis with Qatar, issued a written apology stating that his sermons (which had been halted on the orders of the royal house in Qatar) expressed his own opinions only.

The current crisis began immediately after a visit by United States President Donald Trump to Saudi Arabia in May 2017, in which he publicly identified with the complaints by Arab Quartet leaders against Qatar, and accused Qatar of encouraging terrorism and extremism (other administration figures adopted a more moderate attitude toward Qatar). This crisis is the most severe since the founding of the GCC. In the view of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, their demands from Qatar are consistent with the aim of "achieving unity" stated in the organization's founding charter. To Doha, these demands are no less than dictates by countries seeking to impose their foreign policy on Qatar.

The Boycott in Practice

At the outset of the crisis, the Arab Quartet made 13 demands of Qatar, including the termination of Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, restrictions on Qatar's ties with Iran and Turkey, and the closure of the Qatar-owned al-Jazeera network. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi reportedly threatened to use military force, and according to Qatar, even threatened to invade Qatar and overthrow its government. The Quartet expected, in part given the initial US support for their position, that Qatar would be unable to withstand their pressure. However, the joint objectives were overstretched, and ultimately their demands were scaled back.

No resolution of the crisis is on the horizon, despite mediation attempts, mainly by the former Emir of Kuwait and the US administration, which appointed General (ret.) Anthony Zinni as a special emissary to represent it (Zinni has since

resigned). Yet while the crisis is unresolved, it has not remained static—the attempts to reach a compromise at one point led to a temporary hope of a solution, and various developments have aggravated the crisis, such as the events of May 2020, when the Foreign Minister of Qatar accused the "sieging countries" of attempting a coup in Qatar—referring to a disinformation campaign on Twitter in May 2020 that reported on an attempted coup against Tamim bin Khalifa al-Thani within the Qatari royal house

The main difficulty faced by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in stepping up their measures against Doha lies in Qatar's huge wealth and resources as the world's leading exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Qatar's wealth has enabled it to find alternatives to a lot of the goods and services it formerly received from its neighbors, consolidate an initial independent production capacity, and obtain political support for its positions. In the response to the boycott, Doha halted its support for the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen, withdrew from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 2019, and even hinted that it was not as committed as in the past to membership in the GCC.

Qatar has also enjoyed better ties with the United States in the past three years. The two countries have had a security cooperation agreement since 1992, under which 10,000 American soldiers are stationed in Qatar. Washington and Doha launched a strategic dialogue in 2018. In order to draw closer to the United States and win its support, Qatar is now paying for renovations on the huge US al-Udeid Air Base in its territory, and is substantially increasing its procurement of weapons from the United States. Washington has reportedly considered moving forward with naming Qatar as a major non-NATO ally, a status that provides foreign nations with benefits in defense trade and security cooperation, a title even Riyadh and Abu Dhabi still don't enjoy.

The Gulf Cooperation Council: Situation Assessment

The Gulf Cooperation Council was established as a result of prolonged cooperative processes, mainly in trade and economics, and aimed "to effect coordination, cooperation, and integration in all fields." The organization reflected shared interests, the monarchial nature of the members' regimes, their economies, their religious affiliation as Sunni Muslims, and their common Arab origin, in contrast to revolutionary, Shiite, and non-Arab Iran. It was an expression of the attempts to find an agreed formula for security in the Gulf, which began even before the British left the Gulf in 1971.

The events in the late 1970s and 1980s accelerated the pace of cooperation and contributed to a change in its character. The countries believed that they were capable of putting aside the disputes that had hindered their relations, and of cooperating on the basis of common interests. A number of seminal events contributed to this, especially the revolution in Iran and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, which led the Gulf states to recognize that they had to cooperate in order to confront the potential threats against them more effectively. Yet while steps were taken toward cooperation, progress was especially slow, due to the cautious and calculating nature of the Gulf rulers, who were sensitive to any change in the status quo, and were suspicious of their Arab "brethren." Despite the obvious advantages of cooperation, due to the countries' military weakness and the threats directed at them (which were inversely proportionate to their size, location, and military capabilities), potential unification with Saudi Arabia, which has a geographic, economic, and military advantage over the smaller countries, complicated any such initiative. Saudi Arabia's neighbors complain that it wants to dominate over them through the GCC organization (based in Riyadh).

On the positive side, the GCC is the most successful model of inter-Arab cooperation.

The history of the organization's six member countries proved that as the threats to them increased, it became easier for them to put their disputes aside. It is possible, however, that some of them no longer believe that the organization can contribute to their security. In the first few years of the current decade, for example, when the region was in upheaval, a number of initiatives were proposed aimed at changing the GCC's position. These initiatives, the most important of which are reviewed below, originated in Riyadh and were never carried out—perhaps precisely for that reason.

The first initiative was "to move from cooperation to unification in the framework of a single entity," according to Saudi King Abdullah. The initiative toward full political union was quashed, likely because of disagreement about the organization's character and concern among the small countries about Saudi domination.

The second initiative was to add Jordan and Morocco to the organization, thereby consolidating a "regional-monarchial organization." This initiative also encountered difficulties because of anxiety on the part of several GCC members about a possible lowering of their status in the organization, and because of the economic burden that would follow the accession of relatively poor countries to the organization.

A third initiative was to add Jordanian (and possibly Moroccan and Egyptian) soldiers to the Gulf states' armed forces in exchange for generous economic aid to Jordan by the six GCC member countries. The initiative was also abandoned, because the member countries preferred hiring non-Arab mercenaries.

Throughout the GCC's 40-year history, the member countries have found it difficult to concede any symbols of their sovereignty in order to adopt a uniform political and security line. They failed to achieve this even when the threats that inspired the GCC's establishment mounted, and in spite of their similar economic, political, and cultural structures. The result is that since the GCC was founded, expectations from the organization have diminished. From hopes of union, or at least federation, the organization has become, like the Arab League, no more than a platform for a display of Arab unity. At the same time, this bloc of countries has also been able to adapt itself to regional changes and the different views of its members, while making tentative progress toward achievement of its goals.

The GCC members remain divided on almost every issue on the agenda, beyond disputes about the organization's purpose. The public displays of friendship and solidarity between leaders are a thin veneer for conflicting interests and personal hostility.

Indeed, it is the slow and flexible decision making process typical of the GCC that arguably has enabled Qatar, Oman, and even Kuwait to act more than once outside the Gulf consensus, thereby contributing to the organization's longevity. The organization's institutions have continued to function even during crises, and have been driven by joint economic ventures, such as a shared electrical grid and railway network, while the trade barriers between the countries have been gradually lowered. Coordination on political and economic matters is also underway, as well as cooperation on border controls, the war against terrorism, and consolidation of a joint military capability, albeit a limited one.

Nevertheless, the GCC members remain divided on almost every issue on the agenda, beyond disputes about the organization's purpose. The public displays of friendship and solidarity between leaders are a thin veneer for conflicting interests and personal hostility. The declarations by the organization's leaders about their shared challenges, relations of trust, and good neighborliness, which are repeated at every GCC summit, stand in stark contrast to the six countries' inability to formulate a consensus on matters of regional security.

The six Gulf states regard Iran as the main threat to their security, but they have adopted different policies towards it, based on their particular interests and different strategic outlooks. While Saudi Arabia has chosen a more belligerent attitude toward Iran over the years, Oman and Qatar have preferred to maintain correct relations with Tehran, in tandem with their membership in the GCC, as a way of coping with the threat posed by Iran.

Qatar is not the only country following an independent policy. For example, since the idea of full political union between the six monarchies was raised, Oman has publicly opposed it—a rare occurrence in the Gulf. During the annual conference of the six leaders in December 2013 in Kuwait, the Foreign Minister of Oman emphasized his country's opposition to the idea of a Gulf union, and threatened that Oman would withdraw from the GCC if such a union were instituted. This statement aroused subsequent Saudi wrath against Oman, reminiscent perhaps of Riyadh's anger about Oman's behind-the-scenes role in initiating the negotiations between the United States and Iran, when Saudi Arabia accused Oman of acting behind its back, to the point of betrayal.

Furthermore, Oman maintains close relations with Tehran, and shares control of the Straits of Hormuz with Iran. Relations between Oman and Iran warmed especially after Hassan Rouhani was elected President of Iran in 2013, and Oman has worked to take advantage of this, in contrast with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who are trying to induce Oman to follow their example. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have accused Oman of supporting Qatar and the Houthi rebels. Oman, which has tense relations with the UAE, recently accused it of espionage in its territory, and in April 2019 put five UAE citizens on trial on these charges. UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed visited Oman in December 2019, when the late Sultan Qaboos was undergoing medical treatment in Belgium.

The Feasibility of Compromise

Despite its continuation, the ongoing Arab Quartet boycott against Qatar has eroded over the years. For example, representatives of Qatar continue to take part in GCC activities. Qatar participated in the Dir al-Jazeera 10 (Peninsula Shield 10) military exercise in Saudi Arabia in 2019, which saw the participation of all six GCC countries. Qatar continues to export gas to the United Arab Emirates (the Dolphin Gas Project); the UAE renewed its postal service to Qatar; soccer players from the two countries played together; and Qatar's Prime Minister participated in the annual GCC summit in Riyadh in December 2019.

With the continuation of the crisis, it appears that the price paid by Saudi Arabia in damage to its status exceeds the benefit it sought. Saudi Arabia's difficulty in imposing its will on such a small (and "recalcitrant") country as Qatar detracts from its image as a regional power, and its relations with important Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Morocco have worsened because of their "neutral" stand in the crisis. Saudi Arabia's opponents see that it is unable to enforce order on its "home turf," and other countries will likely regard it as incapable of leading the Arab world. On the other hand, the crisis helps Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad gain internal legitimacy by fanning nationalistic feeling.

Furthermore, instead of Qatar cooling its ties with Iran and Turkey, as demanded by its neighbors, it has strengthened them, and these ties help Qatar weather the crisis. Turkey has since stepped up its economic and security cooperation with Qatar. It was reported that Turkey opened a second military base in Qatar in 2019, with naval and air capabilities, and that thousands of Turkish soldiers were stationed in Qatar. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi see Turkey's military presence in the Gulf as a direct threat and an element of instability in the region.

Iran also stood by Qatar in an effort to widen the split in the GCC, and sent various goods to Qatar as a substitute for the Saudi market.

As soon as the crisis began, Qatar renewed its diplomatic relations with Iran, and its airplanes have used Iranian airspace ever since. Moreover, the current crisis is not confined to the Gulf; the rivalry between the parties also affects various conflicts in the Middle East, including military—previously in Syria and now in Libya.

The front presented by the Arab Quartet members is also not uniform. Since the crisis began, Riyadh has softened its position and showed a more pragmatic attitude than Abu Dhabi. In this framework, it was reported that Saudi Arabia conducted direct talks with Qatar in 2019; these failed despite Qatar's willingness to downgrade its ties with the Muslim Brotherhood. It therefore appears that the main obstacle to a solution is the leaders' need to maintain their honor and show that they have not abandoned their principles.

The crisis with Qatar has affected not only relations between the GCC members, but also efforts to achieve security cooperation in the GCC under United States sponsorship, as well as recent US efforts to consolidate a solid Gulf bloc as part of the campaign to pressure Iran. In the summer of 2020, a renewed American effort was reported to reach partial agreement between the two sides, including opening Saudi airspace to Qatar, so that its airplanes would not use Iranian airspace (the United States wants to deny Iran proceeds from the passage of aircraft over Iranian territory). Riyadh insisted on retaining this bargaining chip—perhaps the last one it possesses. Even if US pressure is successful, however, and the countries reach a new agreement, it will not resolve the deeper disputes and distrust, which will continue to overshadow their relations in the future, and will exert a negative impact on the potential of a Gulf political union.

The Israeli Angle

Israel is not directly involved in the internal Gulf dispute; moreover, it has significant separate ties with all of the actors involved. Its interest is to maintain proper relations with these actors while keeping its distance from the dispute. In recent years, Israel's relations with several Gulf states espousing a similar view of the strategic environment have expanded to additional spheres of cooperation. In September 2020, Israel signed a normalization agreement with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, a measure likely to prompt other Gulf states to improve their relations with Israel. Israel's policy toward Qatar, on the other hand, is ambivalent. On the one hand, senior Israeli officials have sharply criticized Qatar in recent years, and ways to take advantage of the boycott to further isolate Qatar have been discussed. Israel may have seen this as an opportunity to score points with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and overall, the political tension in the region involving Turkey and Qatar played a role in expanding cooperation between Jerusalem and Cairo, Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi, who all see political Islam as an immediate, concrete threat.

On the other hand, Israel and Qatar have stepped up their cooperation since Operation Protective Edge in providing humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and in mediation with Hamas. Israel has a clear interest in the continuation of Qatar's aid, because it believes that improvement of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip will help ward off a conflict with Hamas. Mossad head Yossi Cohen reportedly visited Doha in February 2020 in order to ensure that Qatar's aid to the Gaza Strip, which has totaled over $1 billion since 2012, would continue. Qatar believes that giving aid to the Gaza Strip reinforces its regional status and contributes to strengthening is relations with the US administration, thereby improving its bargaining position in the dispute within the GCC.

There is fundamental tension between Israel's interest in improving the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the need to maintain good relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, which are concerned by Qatar's growing influence in the Gaza Strip. In this context, these countries may have asked

Israel to cool its relations with Qatar. Israel, however, has an interest in relieving the tension in the GCC in order to obstruct ties between Turkey and Qatar and lessen Doha's economic aid to Ankara, which could then undermine Turkey's status and lead it to adopt a more conciliatory policy toward Israel. Israel still regards Qatar as problematic, but is forced to cooperate with it on the basis of a shared interest.

Apart from the its wish to improve both its image in the US Congress and its access to advanced American weaponry, Abu Dhabi, through signing a peace agreement with Israel, is striving to score points with the US administration regarding its conflict with Qatar and to strengthen its status and influence in the regional and international arenas. Israel's continuing reliance on Qatar as its preferred broker in the Palestinian arena, together with the ongoing hostility and strategic competition between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, even if the Gulf boycott is lifted, will put Israel in a difficult position with the UAE. Against its will and due to circumstances, Israel could find itself caught in the struggle between Abu Dhabi and Doha, affecting its relations with them.

The Role of the Major Powers

Enhancing cooperation with its allies in the Gulf has always been a stated goal of the United States, which played a major role in the formation of the GCC. Paradoxically, however, the important US security role in the Gulf, especially since the early 1980s, has detracted from the six Arab Gulf states' ability to cooperate thoroughly and effectively in the GCC framework: Washington prefers to work directly with the respective capitals on substantive issues, such as economics and defense, and the small Gulf states prefer to strengthen their bilateral relations with the United States in order to improve their room for maneuver vis-à-vis their neighbors.

For the past 50 years, the Gulf has been a major theater of US dominance, especially in

security. The Arab Gulf states realize that at the present time, there is no attractive substitute for the US security support, but they have growing doubts about the reliability of the US political commitment. They are therefore also trying simultaneously to step up cooperation with Russia and China, while at the same time taking into account US sensitivities. Better ties with the Gulf states is also an important goal for Russia. Moscow especially regards Saudi Arabia and the UAE as key Middle East countries, and believes that ties with them will help it advance its political and economic interests; without these countries, Russia will have difficulty increasing its influence in the region. For their part, the Gulf states seek to drive a wedge between Russia and Iran, and enlist Russian support for stabilizing oil prices —a critical factor in their economic stability— despite their past disputes with Russia and covert competition with it in the energy sector.

The Gulf states do not regard their relations with China as a substitute for their strategic link with the United States. Their goal is to supplement their ties with Washington in certain aspects, including in security and strategic matters, and possibly even use relations with China as potential leverage vis-à-vis Washington, which for its part is showing growing sensitivity to Chinese involvement in the Gulf. As the political and security weight of Beijing and Moscow in the Gulf grows, the Arab countries there will find it increasingly difficult to maintain this delicate balance.

A Look Ahead

In 1981, when their security was at stake, the six Arab monarchies in the Gulf deemed it necessary to establish a joint mechanism for regional security. Four decades later, doubt is mounting about the relevance and necessity of the GCC. The crises with Qatar in 2014 and 2017 highlight the large gaps between the member countries in the organization, which are liable to end its existence in its current format. Already in 2017, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the most

important economic and military powers among the Gulf states, established a new framework for coordination and cooperation as a substitute for the unstable GCC framework, probably for the purpose of increasing Qatar's isolation, and in order to institutionalize the existing cooperation between them in the military, political, and economic spheres.

Should the conflict worsen, the inability of the Gulf states and external parties, headed by the United States, to resolve the current crisis in the GCC is liable to culminate in Qatar's withdrawal from the organization. Since the crisis began, there have been a number of reports that Qatar is planning to leave the GCC, and it may eventually decide to do so. Qatar clearly prefers to stay out of organizations dominated by Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have an interest in Qatar remaining a GCC member, although they would prefer it to follow their policy. The United States and Israel share the same interest. If Qatar leaves the GCC, Oman will face a dilemma, because it also wishes to follow an independent policy, especially on Iran. Despite Saudi and UAE pressure on Oman to conform to their policy on Iran, Oman preferred to retain its GCC membership for the moment, also because of its economic distress. Dissolving the organization will not resolve the existing disagreements between the countries; it is even liable to aggravate them. Iran and Turkey will in any case be the big winners from prolonging the crisis between the Gulf states.

Since the GCC was founded, its members have sought to present a united front. In practice, however, each has acted according to its own individual profit and loss calculations. The result is more autonomy in decision making, but little security in comparison with a conventional defense pact. Even if the Gulf states largely share recognition of the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program, political subversion, and sponsorship of terrorism, they are hedging the threat in different manners, in part because of

their respective geographic and demographic features.

Over the years, it appears that the tensions between the Gulf states wax in times of calm and wane in times of external conflict. When the region's security and the stability of the regimes were jeopardized, this joint security became a necessity. For example, when the minority Sunni regime in Bahrain was under threat in 2011, a military force entered the island under

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Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have an interest in Qatar remaining a GCC member, although they would prefer it to follow their policy. The United States and Israel share the same interest.

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the GCC flag in order to suppress the mainly Shiite rebellion. As the threat from Iran grows, the GCC's importance increases accordingly, and some improvement in cooperation is visible. For example, in August 2020, the six countries sent a letter to the UN demanding the continuation of the arms embargo against Iran and expressing concern about Islamic Republic policy.

For nearly 40 years and in light of its special conditions, the GCC, has displayed a considerable degree of coordination and cooperation, together with the almost inherent disagreement between its members. Only if the ruling elites are jointly convinced that the organization can contribute to their national security will they agree to strengthen it. Until that occurs, the GCC's contribution to security in the Gulf will continue to be marginal at best.

Dr. Yoel Guzansky, a senior research fellow at INSS, served on Israel's National Security Council in the Prime Minister's Office, coordinating the work on Iran and the Gulf, and is currently a consultant to several ministries. He was a visiting fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, an Israel Institute postdoctoral fellow, and a Fulbright scholar. He is the author (with Clive Jones) of *Fraternal Enemies: Israel and the Gulf Monarchies* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

Chinese soldiers preparing for a military parade in Inner Mongolia, July 2017. Photo: Xinhua

China's Core Interests and the Rising Tension with the United States: Implications for the World Order

Eyal Propper

The term "core interest" began to appear frequently in Chinese official statements in 2003, and has been used increasingly as China's sense of strength and self-confidence have grown. For China, core interests refer to issues not subject to negotiation and compromise, and which justify the use of force, if necessary. The South China Sea region became a substantial addition to these interests following the election of Xi Jinping as General Secretary of the Communist Party of China in late 2012, joining the existing core interests of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and stability in Xinjiang and Tibet. Recently, concern has grown that the rising tension between the United States and China in regions defined by Beijing as core interests is liable to lead to friction, and even a military conflict. This article describes China's core interests, and questions whether, if China becomes stronger, it will extend its core interests to additional regions. The article considers to what extent Chinese policy will affect changes in the future global order.

Keywords: China, core interest, sovereignty, global order, Taiwan, South China Sea, Tibet, Hong Kong, Russia, United States

Introduction

In mid-April 2020, at a time when most of the world's countries were occupied with measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in their territory, the State Council in Beijing announced the establishment of two new districts on island reefs in the South China Sea, in addition to Sansha City in the island province of Hainan. On May 28, 2020, *Global Times*, a Chinese Community Party official mouthpiece, reported that Chinese ships had "expelled" a US warship cruising near one of the islands in the South China Sea. In mid-June 2020, Taiwanese airplanes were sent to expel Chinese warplanes that penetrated into the airspace of Taiwan, whose territory is defined by China as among its core interests.

The term "core interest" began to appear frequently in official Chinese statements in 2003, and has been used increasingly as China's sense of strength and self-confidence have grown. In China's eyes, core interests are defined, both internally and to the international community, as issues on which China has an ironclad position that is not subject to negotiation and compromise, and which justify the use of force to defend them, if necessary. The basic core interests are Taiwan and the One China principle, Hong Kong and Macau, and stability in Xinjiang and Tibet—regions that contribute to China's idea of territorial integrity, and where China is also concerned about separatism and aspirations toward political independence. Inclusion of the South China Sea region in the Chinese list of core interests began late in the term of former Chinese President Hu Jintao, and became a significant part of those interests following the nomination of Xi Jinping as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in late 2012 (in 2016 Xi himself was referred to as a "core leader"). Core interests also include Chinese declarations of fundamental domestic interests, led by continued economic growth amidst strong internal stability and the absolute preservation of the one-party regime headed by the Communist Party of China (CPC).

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In recent months, concern has grown that the rising tension between the United States and China in regions defined by China as core interests, especially Taiwan, the South China Sea, and Hong Kong, is liable to lead to friction, and even a military conflict. This tension, particularly in the South China Sea, raises questions about Chinese policy: whether China's core interests will expand and spread to additional regions as its military and strategic capabilities grow; whether the Chinese classification of the South China Sea as a core interest is a sign of change and expansionism; and whether China will classify regions not currently included in Chinese sovereignty as part of its core interests. For example, Mongolia was under the sovereignty of the Chinese imperial dynasties (in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Mongolian Yuan dynasty controlled the entire territory of the Chinese Empire). In 1921, as a result of the weakness of the Republic of China, Mongolia was declared an independent state under the protection of the Soviet Union. The Republic of China (now Taiwan) did not recognize this declaration, and asserted Chinese sovereignty over Mongolia, while the People's Republic of China recognized Mongolia as an independent state.

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Furthermore, in two agreements, signed in 1858 and 1860, China ceded large territories in northeastern Asia to Russia, including the Vladivostok region, which it had controlled since 1689. During the 2004 visit to Beijing by Russian President Putin, China and Russia signed an agreement delineating the borders between China and Russia, which included China's recognition of Russian sovereignty over these territories. In the distant future, in a situation in which China becomes stronger, while its neighbors become weaker, will China seek to reannex these territories? Of particular interest are the consequences of a Chinese resurgence and the expansion of its core interests for changes in the global order. Will past ideas influence future decisions, with China continuing to focus on the core interests near its borders and utilizing its economic power, cultural influence, and, if necessary, military power for this purpose? Or, as part of the change in the global order, will the Chinese superpower spread beyond the extensive region in Asia under its control?

Taiwan and "One China"

The idea of One China and a future unification with Taiwan is a political, military, and economic fundamental principle of Chinese policy. The island of Taiwan, one of the two largest islands in the South China Sea (the other is Hainan), was part of the Chinese Empire under the Qing dynasty starting in 1683, before its transfer to Japanese sovereignty under the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, following China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War. China regards this treaty as one of the low points in China's weakness during the "century of humiliation" at the hands of the foreign powers.

In late 1945, with the end of World War II and Japan's surrender, the island of Taiwan reverted to Chinese sovereignty. The civil war in China began at this time, and ended in October 1949 with the founding of the People's Republic of China by the Communist Party and the flight of the Chinese Nationalists to Taiwan.

In subsequent years, both sides supported the One China principle: after gaining control of the Chinese mainland, the Communists wanted to bring Taiwan back under Chinese sovereignty. The Nationalists built a country on the island with the same name they used when they controlled all of China (the Republic of China), with the aim of regaining control of all of China in the future.

From 1949 to 1971, the United States continued to support Taiwan's membership in the UN as the Republic of China, and gave the island military and political protection. During this entire period, the People's Republic of China insisted that there was only one China, and that two entities representing China could not sit in the UN. On October 25, 1971, after failing for many years to muster a majority, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2758. This resolution deprived Taiwan of UN membership, and stated that the People's Republic of China was the sole representative of China in the UN. Israel, which maintained a One China policy during this entire period, cast a decisive vote in favor of the resolution, together with a majority of the non-aligned countries. The United States voted against. China renewed its full diplomatic relations with the United States on January 1, 1979, only after President Jimmy Carter recognized the One China principle, closed the US embassy in Taipei (Taiwan), and transferred it to Beijing.

China resists any effort by Taiwan, international organizations, and other countries to recognize Taiwan as an independent country. Due to China's burgeoning economic power and its political and economic pressure on various countries, the number of countries that officially recognize Taiwan has gradually fallen to only 15. The Chinese monitor measures and actions by Taiwan around the world designed to express or strengthen symbols of sovereignty, and lodge immediate protests with the relevant foreign ministries. If a country deviates from the tacit Chinese consent to "economic" and "cultural" activities with Taiwan, China does not hesitate to

take countermeasures, and to impose political and economic sanctions, if necessary.

The coronavirus crisis has accelerated Chinese activism, out of concern that the Taiwanese, who have demonstrated impressive capabilities in dealing with the pandemic, will exploit the crisis to gain legitimacy in international institutions, such as the World Health Organization (WHO). The Taiwanese are backed by President Trump, who signed the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act on March 26, 2020, after it passed both houses of Congress by acclamation. The Act calls on the US administration to reinforce its ties with Taiwan, and to encourage other countries to tighten their official relations with it. Beijing fears that this American support will boost the aspirations of Taiwan's leaders to declare Taiwan an independent country, at the expense of their "traditional" adherence to the mainland and the One China idea, which will have the effect of thwarting the idea of unification that China seeks to promote and present as "inevitable."

South China Sea

The South China Sea lies between China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. The region, which contains oil and gas deposits and fishing areas, is the main shipping route between Western Asia and the Middle East via the Strait of Malacca, which connects the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. About one quarter of the world's marine cargo and one half of all global oil traffic pass through this strait.

The Chinese claim ownership and economic rights over most of the South China Sea. Inter alia, they use the "nine-dash line" map, which received its name after being displayed by diplomats of the Republic of China in the 1940s. This map showed nine lines around most of the marine territory parallel to the coasts of the various countries, and these diplomats claimed that these territories belonged to China. The countries in the region oppose the Chinese

claims to sovereignty and economic rights over marine territories in the region. Because of the historic connection, Taiwan supports China's position.
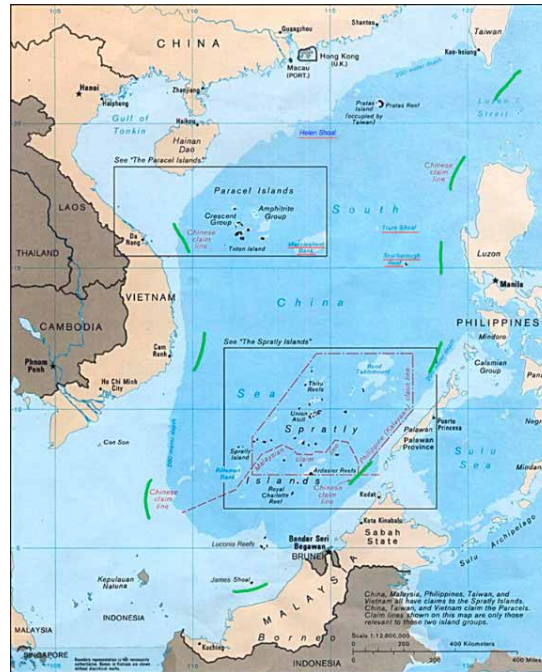
The "Nine-Dash Line" Map in the South China Sea

In recent years, China has taken unilateral action to strengthen its hold in the area. Some of the reefs there have been artificially raised and widened, and military bases have been built on them. During the dispute, China argued that a bilateral solution should be found, and opposed international intervention. A bilateral and regional crisis put China's political power to the test on July 12, 2016. At the request of the Philippines, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague ruled that according to the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), China had no right to sovereignty over the entire South China Sea, and that the Philippines had the legal right to use the economic waters up to 200 miles from its coastline. The PCA ruled that there was no legal basis for China's assertion of historic rights to all of the nine-dash line territory, and that China must recognize the Philippine rights and act in accordance with its obligations as a signatory of UNCLOS. China responded

that it did not recognize the PCA's authority and rulings. A few parties around the world supported the Philippines, and the United States State Department (although the US itself is not a signatory of UNCLOS) declared that this ruling should be recognized and observed. Most of the world's countries, however, preferred to avoid a confrontation with China. Shortly after the ruling, Rodrigo Duterte was elected President of the Philippines, and he has since tightened his country's ties with the Chinese leadership, including five visits to Beijing in three years. China did not compromise, but has offered the Philippines more economic cooperation, including in the oil and gas fields in the disputed area.

China has tightened its grip over the islands in recent years, expanding infrastructure there, including for military use (despite a public promise to US President Obama that it would not introduce weapons into the region). Recently, while the world's attention was concentrated on the coronavirus crisis, China stepped up its military activity in the South China Sea area. For example, Vietnam asserted that one of its fishing vessels had been rammed and sunk by a Chinese vessel.

Hong Kong, Macau—"One Country, Two Systems"

For the Chinese, the history of Hong Kong symbolizes the beginning of the "century of humiliation" in 1842, when the "unequal treaties" were forced on China and the major powers annexed Chinese territories. Britain ruled Hong Kong for 150 years in a leasing agreement forced on the Chinese Empire under the Qing dynasty, following the First Opium War—an agreement that was renewed in the late 19th century. When British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visiting Beijing in 1982, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping emphasized that China could not compromise on Hong Kong's sovereignty, but could accept a compromise on the territory's administrative features after Hong Kong was returned to China. The One

Country, Two Systems principle paved the way for a joint Chinese-British declaration in 1984. Even before the territory was handed over to China, Deng stated publicly that Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong would be absolute and include the entry of Chinese army forces, if necessary. Following the agreement, China enacted the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in 1990, which became effective for 50 years when the territory was handed over to Chinese sovereignty in July 1997.

Portugal held Macau starting in 1557, after receiving a lease on the territory from the Chinese Empire under the Ming dynasty. The territory was returned to China under a similar agreement in 1999.

In 2003, the local regime in Hong Kong attempted to enact a law strengthening the security connection to Beijing, but public protest prevented the legislation. In February 2019, an attempt was made by the local regime to debate a bill that would facilitate the extradition of suspects to China and strengthen Chinese control. The attempt resulted in months of widespread demonstrations, culminating in the postponement of debate about the bill. Nevertheless, despite measures by Beijing that included the use of force, many arrests, and a ban on public gatherings during the coronavirus crisis, the anti-regime demonstrations resumed in even greater force. In May 2020, when Beijing felt that the measures taken were not deterring the demonstrators, the National People's Congress in Beijing enacted a national security law designed to highlight China's opposition to "foreign intervention," which the Chinese claimed was assisting the demonstrators, and to strengthen security control over Hong Kong.

Xinjiang

Located on China's northwestern border, Xinjiang is China's largest province, with an area of 1.66 million square kilometers. The original residents are Uyghurs—Muslims of Turkish origin. The region has experienced hundreds of years of revolts and leadership changes. The

Chinese Empire under the Qing dynasty gained control over part of the province in the 18th century, and it was unified with China in 1884. After the fall of the empire, during the period before the Communist takeover, the Muslims in the province declared independence twice. They revolted against Chinese Nationalist rule in 1933 and declared the First East Turkestan Republic. Another revolt took place late in World War II in Ili, culminating in the founding of the Second East Turkestan Republic.

Following the end of the Chinese civil war and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, the Communists took control of Xinjiang. Since the early 1950s, with the aim of diluting the Muslim majority in the province, many members of the Han ethnic group were transferred there. The Han ethnic group accounts for 92 percent of the inhabitants of China, and all the senior leaders in China belong to it. At the same time, measures were taken to reduce external and religious influences on the population.

In the early 1990s, around seven million Han, eight million Uyghurs, and other minorities, among them approximately one million Kazaks, lived in Xinjiang. In February 1997, extremist Muslims staged severe riots in the city of Yining. Dozens of residents were killed during the suppression of the riots, which took five days; hundreds were arrested and several Muslim leaders were executed. Following the riots, the Chinese leadership concluded that a zero-sum game was involved, that no religious activity should be allowed, and that no extremist leadership should be allowed to emerge. In October 2013, five people were killed and dozens injured when a car exploded in Tiananmen Square, an event attributed by the authorities to a suicide attack by Uyghur terrorists. Since this attack, the regime has oppressed the Muslim minority, including with "reeducation" camps, in line with the belief that severe measures should be used against the Muslims and any other group seeking to undermine Chinese sovereignty or Communist Party rule.

Tibet

Tibet is the second largest province in China, with an area of over 1.2 million square kilometers. It is sparsely populated, with about three million residents. Local rulers, the Mongol Empire, and the Chinese imperial dynasties have vied for control of this isolated mountainous area since the seventh century. In periods in which the Tibetans were strong and the Chinese central government was weak, local control expanded from the capital of Lhasa to areas of Tibetan influence, including the provinces of Sichuan and Qinghai. In the early 20th century, Britain gained control over part of Tibet, and created a quasi-independent state under its protection. Other parts of Tibet were controlled by the Republic of China and local rulers.

In 1949, when the Communists took control of China, Mao Zedong ordered the Chinese army to march into Tibet and unify China, even as the Tibetans attempted to declare and maintain their independence. Following two years of talks and power struggles, the Chinese army invaded Lhasa in October 1951. At the head of the Tibetan leadership was the Dalai Lama, who was 16 years old at the time of the invasion and was saddled with the challenge of dealing with the regime in Beijing. Eight tense years passed, until the Chinese tried to arrest and imprison the Dalai Lama in March 1959. The Tibetans revolted in opposition, and the Dalai Lama escaped on foot to India in a journey lasting two weeks.

Since that time, China has operated extensive control and supervisory agencies in Tibet in order to prevent steps toward independence. The Chinese oppose full cultural autonomy for the Tibetans out of concern that any compromise now granting cultural freedom will enable the Tibetans in the future to demand political freedom in a large territory in western China, including the provinces adjacent to Tibet.

Conclusion

In the perspective of the Chinese leadership, core interests designate—both internally and

to the international community—key areas and issues on which it will not compromise. In recent months, against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic and growing hostility between the two superpowers, the United States has challenged these core interests, mainly with respect to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea region. Will China use force to defend these areas? In recent years, China has invested heavily in expanding and improving its air and naval military power, including the construction of aircraft carriers, and extending the range of its capabilities to possible military activity beyond its borders. At the same time, since the six weeks beginning in February 1979, when China fought Vietnam and suffered a military defeat (followed by the modernization of the Chinese army), it has not been involved in a significant war, beyond individual incidents and military maneuvers in the Taiwan region, the South China Sea, and disputed areas on the border with India. China is not eager to use military force; it prefers to demonstrate its power and achieve its objectives without war by using economic and political means, in line with its traditional strategic concept dating back 2,500 years to the famous book *Art of War* by military strategist Sun Tzu. War involves risk and great uncertainty, while the Chinese concept requires patience and a long-term view for achieving specific purposes. Nevertheless,

crossing red lines on its core interests, with an emphasis on a breach of China's sovereignty, especially major steps in Taiwan leading to a change in the One China policy there, are liable to cause friction that could result in a large-scale military conflict.

Assuming that existing concepts will guide future decisions, China will continue to focus on the core interests close to its borders, and will try to consolidate these interests with the help of its economic power and cultural influence. Will this indeed be the case, or will Chinese power expand as part of a change in the global order, including through the use of military power, beyond the extensive area in Asia under its control? This intriguing question, like many of the questions about China's future policy, remains open to future observation and research.

Dr. Eyal Propper is a senior research fellow and head of the China research program at INSS. He had a long career in the Foreign Service, where he specialized primarily in China and arms control matters, and completed three terms of service in China: as Consul General in Shanghai (2017-2020); Minister and Deputy Ambassador in Beijing (2002-2006); and Press, Academic, and Cultural Officer in Beijing (1992-1995). His book, *Panda or Dragon? Chinese Foreign Policy Management during the Reforms*, is based on his doctoral thesis at the University of Haifa.

The Kamada company uses a singular technology to develop antibodies against Covid-19. Photo: Kamada

The Role of Advanced Technology in the Struggle against Covid-19

Inbar Dolinko and Liran Antebi

The Covid-19 pandemic obligates the world to exercise creativity and initiative in the effort to combat and eradicate the virus. A variety of advanced technologies have played a key role in dealing with the pandemic. Some of these technologies were designed from the outset to treat civilians or address medical problems, while others were converted for the purpose as needed. The great reliance on technological solutions in the struggle highlights the need of the world's countries, Israel among them, to promote research, development, and the use of advanced technologies to deal with challenges. The pandemic also illustrates the challenges and opportunities involved in the development of technologies used by key players. This article seeks to examine what lessons Israel can learn from the local and international events, and what policy should be adopted in this sphere.

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, technology, force buildup, military

Background

The Covid-19 pandemic struck the world in 2020. The virus first appeared in China in late 2019, and quickly spread to almost all of the world's countries. It proved to be highly contagious, infected millions, and caused the death of hundreds of thousands within six months. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) labeled the phenomenon a "pandemic."

Like other countries, Israel has been hit by the virus. Israel began preparing guidelines for preventing the spread of the virus in January, including rules for quarantine of people with symptoms and a ban on entry of tourists from various countries. When the virus surfaced in Israel in late February, the measures for combating it were stepped up. A total lockdown was imposed in March-April 2020 in what ultimately proved to be the first wave of the pandemic, and included the closure of schools, restrictions on activity, confinement to the immediate vicinity of one's home, and cancellation of events or gatherings with multiple participants.

The pandemic has had an unprecedented effect on the public in Israel in both the health and economic aspects, and consequently on national security as well. Many elements have been involved in dealing with the crisis, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, the Prime Minister's Office, the Mossad, the Ministry of Defense, and the IDF. The Ministry of Defense and the IDF provided administrative and logistical support staff, and also helped develop and produce technological solutions to cope with the pandemic. The civilian front contributed greatly to the effort to help develop new technologies and convert existing technologies for the immediate needs.

The use of various technologies in order to deal with the national (and international) crisis shows that they are essential for national security, not only in the "hard" and military sense of national security, but also in the "softer" aspects of national resilience, economics, and health. This article examines the challenges facing the promotion of technology and the means available to Israel for harnessing technology in building state power in general, and in dealing with a crisis in particular. With the Covid-19 pandemic as a test case, the article considers innovative or dual-use technologies tapped around the world to deal with the crisis, and examines how the IDF and other elements in Israel can use off-the-shelf technologies and employ them for dealing with civilian emergencies when necessary. In addition, it explores how, and in which areas, Israel should prepare to ensure that the technological tools suitable for dealing with a civilian crisis are readily available.

Technologies at the Forefront of the Struggle against Covid-19

State, commercial, and amateur entities have used a wide variety of technologies in the framework of the struggle against Covid-19. Some of these technologies were designed from the beginning for treatment of civilians or medical problems, while others were converted from various areas or developed in real time as needed, specifically for this purpose. An analysis of the use of technology in the crisis and the challenges that arose can help suggest the best policy for improving the handling of future crises. Table 1 shows a breakdown of various technologies and their respective uses against Covid-19.

Diagnosis

In the effort to harness technology for the detection and diagnosis of the disease, companies and private parties developed and trained artificial intelligence applications for identifying the virus. Terenz reported rapid training of an artificial intelligence application for detecting Covid-19 in chest X-rays, and said it had succeeded in detecting 98.14 percent of cases. In addition, an effort was made to diagnose patients by analyzing voice samples using artificial intelligence, but the trial was not proven effective. Nevertheless, it demonstrates

Table 1. Technologies in the struggle against Covid-19

Technology / Use	Artificial Intelligence	Robotics and Drones	Smartphone Location and Surveillance	Personalized Applications	Medical Technological Innovation
Diagnosis	✓				✓
Forecasting	✓				
Medical Research	✓				
Monitoring and Surveillance	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Treatment and Disinfection		✓		✓	✓
Management	✓			✓	

the move toward technological diagnosis without taking biological samples.

Another example is a Covid-19 breathalyzer test designed to replace the swab test with a simple test that can detect the disease in one minute. The same is true of the "artificial nose" designed to diagnose the disease in 30 seconds, based on odor molecules. These developments are products of the Directorate of Defense Research & Development (DDR&D) (MAFAT) in the Ministry of Defense. During the pandemic this unit converted radar in use on Israel's borders to radar used to take people's temperature, pulse, and respiratory rate from a distance of three meters.

Forecasting

A prominent case of early detection of the coronavirus through artificial intelligence is an algorithm developed by the Canadian company BlueDot. The company, which uses artificial intelligence to predict and track infectious diseases for the Canadian government, succeeded in detecting the outbreak of Covid-19 and issuing an alert about it a week before the announcement by the WHO.[1] Traditional epidemiology tries to trace the source of the outbreak by tracking where and when people came in contact with the virus. Artificial intelligence systems like that of BlueDot, on the other hand, create a model for the spread of

the disease in the population through statistical analyses of various reports and news items, thereby making it possible to predict where outbreaks will occur, areas they will reach, and how fast they will spread.

Research

The realization that the knowledge and ability to deal with the pandemic are not located in one place led to the creation of "Challenges"— competitions organized by state or commercial agencies, or even private persons, aimed at finding solutions for a specific problem. One example is CORD-19, an open dataset that enables various parties to conduct research about the virus, how it spreads, and how to detect it, thereby possibly helping to eradicate the pandemic.

Monitoring and Surveillance

On March 17, 2020, the Israeli government approved emergency regulations permitting the Israel Police and the Israel Security Agency (General Security Service/Shin Bet) to use technological means and information from cellular phone companies for surveillance of Covid-19 carriers and those who came in contact with them. These regulations allow the security and law enforcement agencies to spy on civilians. According to the regulations, the ISA is authorized to receive, collect, and

process technological information about the location of patients and people who have been in close contact with them, and to disclose this information to the Ministry of Health. The ISA conducts this technological surveillance through cellular telephone location, with the location data used to warn the public and oversee compliance with quarantine rules. The Israel Police are also allowed to ask the cellular companies for information about patients and their location in order to warn the public and enforce quarantine. At the same time, special regulations have been approved enabling the ISA to use advanced technology reserved for anti-terrorism warfare in order to track anyone who was in contact with someone suspected of testing positive for Covid-19. In this case, use was made of any technological information other than the content of a call, such as subscriber contacts in calls or correspondence.

Israel is not the only country using technology for monitoring and surveillance. In South Korea, the government used an app called a "self health check," designed to monitor the situation of tourists in the country and South Koreans returning from abroad. In various Chinese provinces and cities, apps were inserted into the popular WeChat application[2] requiring daily documentation of temperature and the state of health of users in quarantine.

Other countries have also sought to use cellular and smartphone technologies in an attempt to supervise and deal with the pandemic. Thailand, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore are only some of the countries that have used these technologies, from creating a "virtual fence"—a system that issues an alert when a person leaves the area in which s/he is allowed to stay—to an obligation to send a message with a person's location in order to prove that a person in quarantine is at home. In England, cellular data were used to analyze people's location data anonymously in order to assess compliance with the social distancing regulations. In the United States, the administration consulted with Google,

Facebook, and other companies about the possibilities for mapping the spread of the pandemic and identifying the movement patterns of people in the area.

Beyond the use of cellular and smartphone technologies, certain locales also used drones to monitor the population and its indexes, and in order to enforce the lockdown, such as in France and California, for example. The most prominent example was in China, where drones were used for surveillance of the population, to detect instances of forbidden assembly and prevent the gatherings, and to enforce a general lockdown. In Spain, drones were used to help enforce a lockdown, for example by addressing people by public loudspeaker.

Treatment and Disinfection

Various technological tools were used in the effort to reduce contact and in turn, the likelihood of infection, including medical and nursing robotics. A robot in use in Israel makes it possible for a human doctor to examine a patient remotely while connected medical devices, such as a stethoscope, thermometer, pulse oximeter, and so on relay results to the doctor. This is very similar to a robot used in ordinary times that enables doctors to circulate in a ward and conduct tests or communicate with patients or the medical staff when necessary when the doctor is not on site, or even at home. In Israel, a number of companies are developing robot assistants of this sort, for example, Temi, whose founders and owners are also the founders and owners of Roboteam, a company that manufactures military robots and has contracts with the IDF and the United States military. Another use of robots, which was present mainly in China, was for disinfection purposes. The robots used primarily special lighting or various pulses that have proved effective in destroying the virus, and in disinfecting surfaces or entire rooms.

Furthermore, Israel has used drones, ordinarily used for agricultural spraying, to spray disinfectants above municipal areas. In other

countries, drones have been used for delivery of medical material and for tests. An effort to conduct tests quickly in hospitals using drones was also begun in Israel in June 2020. Efforts by drug companies to expedite development of a vaccine and drugs using artificial intelligence applications have been reported, albeit with no success proven in clinical trials.

The health system is doing its best to use online means for treatment of Covid-19 patients and other patients during the pandemic. Remote patient management apps can potentially help patients in home hospitalization and those suffering from other diseases who have been told not to go to medical facilities in order to reduce their exposure to additional risk. At the same time, the leading Israeli HMOs (Clalit, Maccabi, and Meuhedet) offer online services to many patients—requests from doctors through their websites, consultation with family doctors and pediatricians, and more. With some of the consulting physicians, a medical test using an app is offered. Maccabi has also launched an application to chat with a doctor, based on medical artificial intelligence.

In addition, various technologies are used to attempt to solve problems created by bottlenecks in the health system. For example, the IDF Intelligence Corps technology unit (unit 81) has been developing a way of converting manual ventilating devices into automated ventilating devices, in part for use in ambulances, in order to avoid exposing the driver to patients.

Another example from abroad is the production and distribution of valves constituting part of a CPAP hood system at a cost of $1 using 3D printers. This activity, performed by a group of Italian volunteers, has helped relieve the severe shortage in hospitals in Italy.

Management
In combating the pandemic, the phrase "knowledge is power" is more appropriate than ever. The ability to manage on the basis of knowledge can help reduce infection

to a significant extent and create suitable responses on short notice. Inter alia, it is necessary to manage the large quantity of information resulting from the epidemiological investigations in order to clarify the verified timetables and contacts of patients with other people, so that the chain of infection can be broken. It is also necessary to assist management within the medical system itself. A number of ad hoc developments were created for this purpose, for example, development of a cobweb system in cooperation with DDR&D. This system reads each patient's monitors in each hospital, and facilitates decisions based on information from the hospitals' databases, while prioritizing tasks for the medical staff. Unit 81 helped create an application designed to help the medical system in Israel keep track of information.

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Conclusions and Recommendations for Israel
The use of technologies in the framework of the struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic sheds light on the challenges and the opportunities in this field. The lessons that can be learned from the examples described here can help design a policy that will sharpen the ability to harness new and existing technologies for national needs in a future crisis.

Infrastructure and Policy for Storing and Sharing Data
Collecting and analyzing existing data from government and public agencies for the purpose of improving decision making proved difficult. Infrastructure and suitable tools for sharing data and a clear policy in this matter are lacking. One prominent example in this

context concerns the data possessed by the health system. The absence of a platform for transferring and sharing data between hospitals hampered the utilization of valuable medical data. Together with, and despite, the great importance of maintaining medical confidentiality, a comprehensive database of hospital patients is also important. A database of this kind can assist in creating a more accurate picture for decision makers and in researching the disease in order to better understand it and find effective treatment methods by using artificial intelligence to analyze the data. In addition to medical difficulties, the absence of a policy on collecting and sharing data has hampered an accurate assessment of the unemployment rate in Israel and efficient disbursement of grants. A proper data policy should therefore be formulated, and a national infrastructure system for storing and sharing data among government agencies should be created, with proper security measures and the use of tools for preserving the confidentiality of the information and privacy.

> Although there are a number of government agencies dealing with technology, the absence of a single agency responsible for guiding the process of essential technology research and development, and defining the goals and the means for achieving them while adapting them to the nature of the crisis, stands out.

Balance between Efficiency and Social Implications

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the tension between the wish to safeguard people's health and safeguard their rights, such as protection of information, privacy, and confidentiality of information. The question was brought to the fore by public criticism of the use of tools for location and surveillance of people, which was perceived as a disproportionate violation of individual rights and raised concern about its misuse after the crisis wanes. The importance of privacy, including the confidentiality of relevant information, is critical, in order to facilitate safe use of confidential and essential data while improving decision making using artificial intelligence-based technologies. The moral consequences of using technology and how it affects society should therefore be considered and weighed against its effectiveness. Mechanisms should be created for balancing between these opposing considerations. Artificial intelligence technology, for example, can now be used to facilitate sharing of certain information while making private information anonymous, thereby both maintaining privacy and generating general value from the information.

The Need for a National Technology Agency and the Reliance on the IDF

Although there are a number of government agencies dealing with technology, the absence of a single agency responsible for guiding the process of essential technology research and development, and defining the goals and the means for achieving them while adapting them to the nature of the crisis, stands out. An ad hoc solution was found by setting up the national technology center for the struggle against Covid-19, led by DDR&D head Brig. Gen. (res.) Dr. Daniel Gold. While ordinarily responsible for research and development in defense, and primarily military technology, in the current emergency DDR&D became a body searching for a technological response to various immediate needs that are mostly civilian and primarily medical. Gold was responsible for coordinating the efforts to combat the virus with across-the-board cooperation between government ministries, hospitals, the Israel Innovation Authority, the IDF, the defense industries, startups, and researchers from academic institutions and research institutes. This is not the only case in which agencies from the defense establishment have had to intervene in the crisis. Parties from both the Home Front Command and combat units have

been enlisted for various actions from time to time, such as managing Covid-19 hotels, aiding the police in enforcement of the civilian lockdown, and helping to distribute food to people in various cities. In emergencies in Israel, the IDF is the first organization tapped, due to its extensive human resources, highly developed organizational capabilities, and other resources. In the technological context, its readiness for dealing with such situations should also be assessed from time to time, with an emphasis on its suitability or ability to convert its technologies to civilian use, providing that its operational fitness is not affected. This requires a slightly different view of technological questions in the framework of traditional force buildup processes.

Maintaining and Strengthening the Technological Ecosystem in Israel

The technological ecosystem in Israel, which includes the army, industry, and academic institutions, assists in various spheres in the context of the pandemic. Each element of the ecosystem has acted separately, with different parts cooperating with each other on occasion. Together with the national technology center, commercial concerns seeking to utilize their technological capabilities for the immediate needs through private initiatives and by joining with public bodies also played a part. These important initiatives illustrate the quality of the Israeli technological community. The connection between these concerns, and their ability to work together to solve problems within short time periods should be reinforced through bottom-up processes in the framework of initiatives guided by the relevant state agencies. At the same time, the effort to solve various problems using specific technological means has been criticized from time to time, given that the results of the some of the technological developments were inadequate because content personnel from the sector itself (epidemiology, in this case) were not involved in the development and trials. Particularly in a

crisis, it is important to make sure that all the relevant parties are involved in the work, and to expand the circles to include people who are not necessarily part of the technological-defense milieu.

No Magic Solution

The use of technology in combating the Covid-19 pandemic shows that such technology has the potential to make a significant contribution to state security in both the "hard" and military sense of the concept and in the "softer" sense, while taking into account the influence of the non-military national-civilian entities. Strengthening the technological capabilities in the various bodies subordinate to the decision makers is essential for preserving and consolidating Israel's national power and resilience. The use of various technologies in a crisis, however, such as artificial intelligence, has proven that they are no magic solution. Prolonged processes of study and adaptation of technologies for the individual crisis are imperative, including consultation with experts from the relevant fields, in order to deal with the situation more effectively. In order to launch this process from the outset, however, strong technological infrastructure is necessary, with information sharing and off-the-shelf technologies that can be adapted for use in a civilian crisis. There is a need to devise and apply a policy in the area for this purpose, while considering the problem of using military technologies in a civilian crisis, including devoting thought to this question as part of the force buildup processes.

Inbar Dolinko is an M.A. student in the School of Political Science, Government, and International Relations at Tel Aviv University, and a research assistant in the Advanced Technologies research program at INSS.

Dr. Liran Antebi, a research fellow at INSS, heads the Advanced Technologies research program at INSS. She is a lecturer at Ben Gurion University, and consults on advanced technologies.

Notes

1   The company warned consumers about the outbreak on December 31, 2019, while the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the WHO began to report the matter only on January 6, 2020.
2   The application facilitates sending messages and video clips, and payment via mobile phone.

Prime Minister Netanyahu reveals documents from Iran's secret atomic archive, April 30, 2018. Photo: GPO

First an Inch, then a Mile: Opportunities and Risks in the Public Disclosure of Israeli Intelligence

Ofek Riemer

Propelled by changes in the information environment, the nature of war, and social norms and values, recent years have seen increasing public exposure of the Israeli intelligence community. The disclosure of intelligence has been shown to have strategic value, including in creating deterrence and international legitimacy, as well as domestic value, in contributing to democratic values such as transparency and oversight of the government. However, such exposure also carries risks—not only to sources, but also of adverse effects in the form of weakened deterrence, escalation, potential criticism and ridicule, and the politicization of intelligence. This article analyzes the opportunities and risks inherent in increased disclosure of intelligence information by the state, and suggests possible ways for Israel to balance between concealment and exposure, including with checks and balances between intelligence units and agencies; models to assess both the damage to sources and the benefits of exposure; guidelines for working with the media; and enhanced public access to information and assessments.

Keywords: intelligence, deterrence, cognition, public diplomacy, Israel, Iran, Hezbollah, Gaza

Introduction

Between June 25 and mid-July 2020, a series of explosions occurred in the vicinity of sensitive installations throughout Iran. On July 5, the *New York Times* quoted a senior intelligence source in the Middle East, who attributed responsibility for one of the explosions—the sabotage of the centrifuge manufacturing facility at the Natanz nuclear site—to Israel. As a result of the article, former defense minister Avigdor Liberman accused a senior Israeli intelligence official of the disclosure, which, in his view, is a flagrant violation of Israel's traditional policy of ambiguity.

Secrecy has always gone hand in hand with intelligence work, and has even come to define it. The secrecy that shrouds the intelligence community and its output is necessary in order to protect the sources and work patterns that help uncover information about the opponent.

This episode reignited the public discussion of the cost-benefit balance in disclosing intelligence, and the dilemma between the need for silence surrounding intelligence work, and intelligence secrets in particular, and the security, diplomatic, and political goals that can be achieved through information sharing. This debate gained new momentum in the Israeli public in recent years, in view of the increasing trend of disclosure. On one side, there are those who want to warn against the "stripping down" of the Israeli intelligence community, which carries a risk to valuable intelligence assets and, according to the proponents of this argument, is derived from irrelevant considerations such as building up political capital among internal public opinion, or public relations for intelligence organizations. In contrast, some argue the political-security benefit of exposing secret intelligence data, and contend that achieving high-quality intelligence is not a goal in and of itself, but rather a tool that is subject to policy considerations. This position

was reflected by a senior political official, who responded to the criticism of the improper use of intelligence information, stating, "We do not have intelligence that has a state, but a state that has intelligence."

This article focuses on state disclosures of intelligence, i.e., the public disclosure of up-to-date intelligence information on opponents or allies in the international sphere, by and with the approval of government and intelligence and security agencies. The divulgence of information on the activity of Israel's own military and intelligence agencies, or about their capabilities, is therefore outside the purview of this paper, as are statements or leaks to the press that have not been approved by the authorized entities. As such, the article will analyze the opportunities in the state's disclosure of intelligence vs. the risks inherent in this practice, and will suggest possible ways to balance between concealment and exposure in Israel's foreign and defense policy.

Benefits in Public Intelligence Disclosure

Secrecy has always gone hand in hand with intelligence work, and has even come to define it. The secrecy that shrouds the intelligence community and its output is necessary in order to protect the sources and work patterns that help uncover information about the opponent.

In Israel, intelligence secrecy is even more important. Given that Israel is surrounded by enemies and is constantly under security threat, its security concept dictates that secrecy serves more than protection of the sources that provide early warning. Rather, secrecy also serves the principle of surprise that is essential for successful preventive attacks against emerging threats, as well as the principle of ambiguity that helps reduce the risk of a counter-response and military escalation. As such, decision makers and people in the Israeli defense establishment and intelligence community are used to working under a cloak of secrecy, and generally avoid revealing state secrets. Moreover, the secrecy

surrounding their work and their occupation with issues involving state security in general provides them with a monopoly on information and knowledge and, as a direct result, much influence on decision making. Therefore, the Israeli intelligence community traditionally views exposure as damaging to its work, and in general maintains its distance from the media and denies it information. Due to "the sanctity of security" and the internalization that defense considerations overcome democratic considerations, the shroud of secrecy surrounding Israel's foreign and defense policy has won broad understanding and legitimacy among the public—which even considers itself "a partner to the secret." All this has led sociologists and political scientists to define Israel as a "secretive state" that maintains a "culture of secrecy."

However, recent years have seen an increasing emergence of the Israeli intelligence community into the public sphere. Operations, capabilities, and even intelligence information are reported frequently. Junior and senior members of the intelligence community, whether in active service or retired, appear in the media more than ever before (even if their faces are blurred) in order to share their experiences and praise their units' capabilities.

To be sure, in many cases, there is strategic value in disclosing intelligence capabilities and information. The advantages of disclosure include:

Thwarting and disrupting adversarial activity: Adversaries operating under a shroud of secrecy are particularly sensitive to the exposure of intelligence information about them, be they countries like Iran as it strives to attain military nuclear capability, or violent non-state actors such as Hezbollah in Lebanon or Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, which are working to undermine the sovereign or dominant power in their operational sphere—the State of Lebanon and Hamas, respectively—and therefore need to hide from that power. The public disclosure of intelligence

information can serve as a powerful weapon, able to extract a price from such adversaries, whether in uncovering an operational secret (a project, unit, or site); negating the element of surprise in a given action, and thereby disrupting it; or embarrassing the adversary in its domestic public opinion. In the era of the campaign between wars (CBW), which relates to the weakening of the adversary and disruption of its operations below the threshold of war, disclosing intelligence may sometimes achieve an effect similar to dropping a bomb. A prominent example of this is the campaign that Israel is waging against Hezbollah's attempts to manufacture precision-guided missiles in Lebanon, which relies to a great extent on the disclosure of facilities tied to this project. The disclosure essentially "consumes" those facilities and makes it necessary for Hezbollah to move them to an alternative site, thereby causing interruptions and delays in the project.

Signaling determination and maintaining deterrence: The judicious disclosure of intelligence can signal to an adversary about the disclosing party's determination; it serves as a preliminary step before force is used, with the aim of deterring the adversary from taking belligerent action. For instance, in April 2019, shortly before Memorial Day and Independence Day celebrations and the Eurovision song contest in Tel Aviv, the IDF Spokesman distributed a picture of senior Islamic Jihad commander Bahaa Abu al-Atta, and pinned responsibility for rocket fire toward Israel on him. He thereby warned Abu al-Atta that continued rocket fire at a time that was sensitive for Israel could cost him his life—which is what actually happened later that year, in November. In addition, exposing concealed secrets infuses in the adversary a sense of penetration—the understanding that it is exposed to foreign intelligence espionage. This acknowledgment calls for close investigation, which can in turn crack the trust between those who are party to the secret, damage morale, and dampen the excitement in taking strong belligerent

actions such as war, in view of the recognition of intelligence inferiority. The press briefing held at the IDF Northern Command in July 2010 is a clear example of this logic, when in an unprecedented briefing, an aerial photograph of the village of al-Khiam in southern Lebanon was shown. The Hezbollah deployment was marked on the photograph, including weapons caches, command posts, and underground bunkers. A few months later, in March 2011, the *Washington Post* published a map of southern Lebanon with similar labels, based on intelligence that was obtained by the IDF. Then-GOC Northern Command—and later IDF Chief of Staff—Gadi Eisenkot testified that in his view, the goal of publicly using intelligence, is "to empower our image in the eyes of the enemy, and to terrify it."[1] Therefore, disclosure can contribute to deterrence, whether on a pinpoint basis, or in a more prolonged and cumulative sense.

Legitimizing Israeli policy and delegitimizing the adversary in international public opinion: Disclosing intelligence information, particularly if it is done with the proper timing and context, can affect the adversary's image and tilt international decision making—for example, in April 2018, with the exposure of materials brought by the Mossad from the Iranian nuclear archive just prior to US President Trump's decision to withdraw from the nuclear agreement. Similarly, at the UN General Assembly in September 2018, Prime Minister Netanyahu revealed the "secret atomic warehouse" in the outskirts of Tehran, and called on the Chairman of the International Atomic Energy Agency to send inspectors to the site. This also happens from time to time with the exposure of Hezbollah activity in southern Lebanon in advance of UN Security Council discussions dealing with extending or expanding the UNIFIL mandate. Israel is clearly not the only country trying to influence global public opinion and blacken its adversaries in the international sphere by disclosing intelligence. This past May, in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, a report written by the Five Eyes intelligence group (comprising the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) was leaked to the Australian media blaming China for covering up and destroying evidence of the spread of the disease.

The public's right to know: In contrast with other benefits, which generally feature the partial disclosure of secret information at a time chosen to serve a defined political-security purpose, the broad, methodical, and periodical public disclosure of intelligence information and assessments may be beneficial for democracy. Through exposure to security information, the public, the media, and Knesset can supervise and influence government policy. However, broad intelligence disclosure is no small matter. American intelligence researcher Harry H. Ransom discussed the dilemma, noting that "While secrecy is inconsistent with democratic accountability, disclosure is incompatible with effective intelligence operations." However, in tandem, legislators, political scientists, and social activists are proposing solutions to reconcile the tension between the values, including replacing the worldview that asks, as a working guideline, what can be exposed, with a worldview that asks what must be classified. There is also the effort to instill a norm of government or parliamentary investigations that deal only after the fact with security and intelligence episodes, thereby protecting covert work in real time, but also instilling in operatives an awareness of supervision and responsibility. In Israel, key messages from the annual intelligence reviews are sometimes exposed, but only after senior intelligence officials review them and choose in advance what information and assessments to share with defense correspondents and commentators, who in the end control the message that is sent to the general public. This practice, which has evolved in recent years, is different from the common practice in Western countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where the government or the intelligence agencies themselves publish

written intelligence assessments, sometimes accompanied by public announcements, in a comprehensive manner that includes discussion of the entire range of threats.

Risks in Public Intelligence Disclosure

Alongside the benefits of disclosing intelligence, after years of Israeli policy making frequent public use of secrets, inherent risks and costs of such a policy are evident.

Incurring a cumulative risk to sources and methods: This means not only risking the burning of sources that have helped uncover the specific information that was disclosed, but also cumulative damage to reputation and the ability to recruit future sources in view of the concern that disclosure will put them in mortal danger.

Removing ambiguity and risking a response: Most of the recent disclosures have been made through Israeli media or public announcement on the part of senior Israeli officials. This is as opposed to anonymous leaks to foreign media— Arab or Western—that were common until not long ago in cases where Israel wanted to signal a particular threat or put matters in the proper perspective in the international discourse, while limiting the risk to sources. Thus, the disclosures attributed to Israel place it clearly as the party challenging its adversary in a way that limits deniability and invites counteraction.

Reputation management as an imperative: If a party that tends to disclose information remains silent in a particular case, its silence may be interpreted by the adversary as evidence of a weak point or intelligence blindness. Alternatively, it may be interpreted as restraint due to the ramifications of disclosing the issue in a case where it may embarrass that party or put it in conflict with other core interests. As such, a kind of commitment to the continued disclosure of intelligence information is created.

In contrast, continued disclosure may harm deterrence, if the disclosure itself does not incur a cost for the adversary or lead to diplomatic or military action. Thus, relying solely on disclosure may be interpreted as restraint on the part of the disclosing party from taking steps with greater potential risk, and as a signal to the adversary of a de facto "immunity area."

Instead of achieving the expected political, security, or political effect, *disclosure may achieve the opposite effect*. For instance, disclosure may actually be construed as less threatening, or fear-inducing than maintaining secrecy and ambiguity, and it may also decrease the adversary's level of uncertainty. Domestically, it may lead to criticism of carelessness, negligence, or lack of ethics. Consider, for example, the exposure of the Mossad's role in purchasing medical equipment for the struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic, and particularly bringing in testing kits, which later turned out to be incompatible with the medical task. The exposure led to a wave of criticism and ridicule at the expense of the organization on television programs and social media, and in the end to some extent caused harm to the organization's image (and not only in Israel).

Politicization: The changing norm in relation to intelligence secrecy, and the transition to systematic disclosure, may subsequently lead to political considerations interfering in intelligence work, and to repeated public manipulation of intelligence information and assessments, with the aim of influencing public opinion in Israel. Thus, the political echelon may demand more intelligence information that will support a policy it wishes to advance, and senior intelligence officials may produce more "satisfying" information and designate it for disclosure the more their success is measured publicly. Over time, the politicization of intelligence may erode the reliability and prestige that give intelligence organizations in Israel the tremendous influence they have over policymaking. The case in which Prime Minister Netanyahu disclosed additional nuclear sites in Iran during a press conference about a week before the second round of elections in

2019 proves how narrow the line is between public use of intelligence information for diplomatic and security needs and its use for political purposes. While a source in the Prime Minister's Office argued that the disclosure was made at the recommendation of professional echelons, the opposition condemned the "profiteering from state security" to benefit the election campaign. Former senior intelligence officials also believe that most of the intelligence disclosures of recent years—including the disclosure mentioned above—do not serve the national interest, but rather the personal political interests of senior politicians and intelligence officers.[2] In this context, the experience of the United States and the United Kingdom prior to the military invasion of Iraq in 2003 is instructive. The uncompromising effort of the political echelon to convince domestic and international audiences of the need for a military campaign against Saddam Hussein's regime with the false claim that it was developing nonconventional weapons led to destruction of intelligence work and the routine publication of partial and unfounded information, in a way that seriously damaged public trust in American and British intelligence.

Occasionally, as shown by the list of potential risks, offering an inch may actually lead to giving a mile and increasing exposure to a different kind of risk.

Policy Recommendations

The change in attitude toward intelligence among Israel's top political-security echelons is inevitable. The transition to increased exposure and disclosure reflects the deep changes in the global information and communications environment, which features information overload and a tendency toward greater exposure as a condition for increasing influence; in the nature of conflicts, which carry serious asymmetry that generally acts to benefit the weaker side and is in any case of limited purpose

to the stronger side; and in the political and societal values in Israel.

However, even if the state authorities believe that intelligence disclosure serves the national interest, and that while baring a little they conceal much more, it appears that the opposite is the case. Occasionally, as shown by the list of potential risks, offering an inch may actually lead to giving a mile and increasing exposure to a different kind of risk. Accordingly, certain practices may minimize the potential damage from increased disclosure and ensure a balanced policy:

a. *Maintaining checks and balances* within the military and the intelligence agencies, and between them. In this context, those in charge of the military and intelligence campaigns of deterrence, disruption, and influence on cognition, who recommend information, capabilities, and operations for disclosure, must be different from those entrusted with developing and protecting sources and assessing the risks due to exposure. If the same unit is entrusted with sources and information protection on the one hand, and with influence and psychological operations on the other, it may create a tendency toward the operational side whereby that unit is measured, and which gives it its prestige and relevance.

b. *Ensuring debate before disclosure*, in order to allow for a variety of voices and considerations to be heard, map out all damaging scenarios that may develop in the context of the concrete disclosure, and thereby avoid a boomerang effect. Moreover, within the organizations themselves, standard operating procedures can be created such as having all people relevant to the process—including source development personnel, information security personnel, analysts, and spokespeople—sign their dis/approval of the disclosure on an official document that will give them the opportunity to present reservations and make conditions regarding the volume of

information to be released, the platform, and the timing.

c. *Developing models for assessing damage to sources and methods,* both on a short term pinpoint basis around concrete disclosures, and in the long term to assess cumulative damage. In the absence of a complete picture of the pieces of information held by the adversary's counterintelligence agencies, the ability to assess specific or cumulative damage to sources and methods as a result of an intelligence disclosure is very limited.[3] In other words, when Israel publicly releases intelligence information, it does not know with sufficient certainty whether the disclosure completes the puzzle for the adversary's counterintelligence and helps it block leaks that provide it with vital information. This difficulty must be addressed by constantly strengthening the understanding of the adversary's counterintelligence efforts and its leading assessments regarding Israel's intelligence assets and modus operandi. Accordingly, cover stories for intelligence disclosures can be created and fraudulent information planted with the aim of strengthening misleading beliefs and distracting the adversary from the real information channels. Furthermore, creative tests and measures to assess the cumulative damage to sources must be developed, with the correlation between intelligence disclosures and damage to intelligence assets found.

d. *Developing models to measure the success of intelligence disclosure in achieving abstract goals,* such as deterrence, disruption, and legitimacy. In order for the decisions between concealment and secrecy on the one hand and exposure and design of adversary cognition on the other to be balanced, they must be based as much as possible on empirical data. In this context, measures based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of discourse and texts must be built to help

assess the effect of disclosure on abstract terms such as deterrence and legitimization. For instance, compartmentalization is one of the expressions of disrupting the adversary's activity, which is achieved by disclosing intelligence. Disclosure as evidence of an information leak in the organization can lead to damage to trust between the organization's members and to the creation of compartmentalization between units and operatives. While raising the walls within the organization lowers the risk of information leaks, it also disrupts and confuses the organization's routine and emergency behavior and thereby impairs its efficiency. A measure for assessing compartmentalization among adversaries, which also correlates between disclosure and compartmentalization, can help in decision making regarding intelligence disclosure.

e. *Directing operations and developing sources that are initially intended for disclosure.*

f. *Training senior officers and managers in intelligence agencies in how to act vis-à-vis the media.* Since the public use of intelligence is currently considered part of the toolbox for managing political-security campaigns, content to encourage familiarity with the world of open communication can be integrated into training programs, including the opportunities in relations with the media and the use of various media outlets, alongside the costs and risks inherent in them.

g. *Encouraging the government and intelligence agencies to present their assessments in a broad and periodical manner for the good of the public.* Reports such as these must be as comprehensive and well-founded as possible, and must ask—as a working guideline—what information must be classified and protected, rather than what information can be disclosed. This is similar to the censorship model in existence since the Shnitzer case in the Supreme Court

(1988), when it was determined that freedom of expression is subordinate to state security only where there is "proximate certainty of material damage to state security." Thus, the public discourse will be as knowledge-based and objective as possible, and not subject to manipulation on the part of parties with other interests.

Conclusion

In the age of information and social media, when information campaigns and contests over narratives are intensifying, and while the concept of truth is challenged by phenomena such as fake news, the publication of high-quality reliable information concerning foreign and defense matters on the part of state authorities can have great benefit, both in advancing political interests and in strengthening the foundations of democracy. This is even more the case when talking about a country like Israel that struggles every day

on a number of fronts for its security and the justness of its path. However, there must be a policy that balances between disclosure on the one hand, and concealment and protection of intelligence assets on the other, since when it comes to intelligence matters, it is best to bare a little and conceal even more.

Ofek Riemer is a doctoral student in international relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in the research studies program at the Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations. His doctoral thesis deals with the public disclosure of intelligence information for strategic purposes.

Notes

1   Interview between the author and Lt. Gen. (ret.) Gadi Eisenkot, June 4, 2020.
2   The author's interviews with former senior officials in the intelligence and defense communities.
3   The author's interviews with former senior officials in the intelligence and defense community.

Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi (r) in Bnei Brak. Photo: IDF Spokesperson's Unit

IDF Involvement in the Coronavirus Crisis: A Slippery Slope?

Roundtable moderated by Kobi Michael

In the midst of the second wave of the coronavirus crisis and following discussions on IDF involvement in the crisis management, a group of experts on the civil-military dimensions of the pandemic convened to discuss the implications and possible consequences of the IDF's increasing involvement in the second wave of the crisis. The roundtable revolved around a number of fundamental questions, including the very importance of debating the issue; the potential effect of the IDF's involvement on its social standing and on civil-military relations; the implications regarding the weakness of civil institutions; and the possible implications of expanding the military's involvement for Israeli democracy. Participants were Brig. Gen. (ret.) Dr. Meir Elran, Prof. Stuart Cohen, Prof. Amichai Cohen, Prof. Yoram Peri, Dr. Carmit Padan, Dr. Asaf Malchi, and Dr. Idit Shafran Gittleman.

The Importance of Public Debate of the Issue

The participants were asked to explain why the public debate of the issue of military involvement in the coronavirus crisis is important, and what, in their understanding, is permitted and what is prohibited, taking into account the lessons learned from the IDF's involvement in the first wave of the coronavirus crisis.

The participants pointed to the weakness of the civil system that "was exposed during the coronavirus crisis" (Elran) and the problematic, negative consequences that may result, due to the broad involvement of the IDF in a crisis that is civilian by nature.

Participants were united on the absence of concern of a military coup or the takeover of government institutions by the army. It is clear that this is not the issue under discussion. Rather, there seems to be a broad consensus regarding the very importance of the issue due to the special fabric of civil-military relations in Israel and the social status and influence of the IDF. The participants pointed to the weakness of the civil system that "was exposed during the coronavirus crisis" (Elran) and the problematic, negative consequences that may result, due to the broad involvement of the IDF in a crisis that is civilian by nature. Some participants pointed to a significant danger to Israeli democracy. For example, Meir Elran expressed concern about going "round and round, without getting to the point and without striking the iron while it's hot." The most significant question in his view is "to what extent the broadening involvement of the military in the coronavirus crisis threatens Israeli democracy."

The weakness of the civilian system as opposed to the strength of the IDF when it comes to logistical, operational, and organizational capabilities enables the justification to the public of the use of the military. However by deploying the military the disparities in capabilities vis-à-vis the civilian system are perpetuated, as the civilian system is forced to lean on the capabilities of the military and does not develop an adequate response to its inherent and fundamental weaknesses. The success of the military in the first wave and the positive resonance this earned—primarily from the ultra-Orthodox and Arab populations, which are removed, if not alienated, from the military and from the military service experience—shaped the public attitude that sees the positive sides and the social benefit in deploying the military. However, this can establish a reality in which deploying the military for missions that are essentially civilian becomes the acceptable norm.

A legal dimension compounds the asymmetry between military and civilian capabilities, whose implications only intensify during an extreme crisis such as during the pandemic. To Amichai Cohen, Israeli law is relatively deficient when it comes to regulating military activities, when compared to the existing situation regarding the regulation of civil entities. The essence of the legislation is to limit the executive branch—the political echelon—vis-à-vis the executing entity. Legislation enables the executing entity to tell the political echelon, every time the latter exceeds the boundaries set by legislation: "'Excuse me, you have to operate in this way; that is what the legislative authority permits you'...True, we have relatively few written rules that dictate how the military is supposed to act or that define the limitations of its role, and what we do have is very opaque and open to interpretation. However, this dearth of regulation is not accidental."

When it comes to military affairs, the legislative authority rarely limits the relationship between the executive echelon and the military. This is not a situation that is unique to the State of Israel, and can be justified in operational contexts, as action that necessitates a minimum of political intervention allows the military to protect state security. A civilian context, however, is entirely different. Amichai Cohen explains: "When the power of politicians in the

executive branch is limited by laws, naturally power moves to a place where it is less limited. As soon as politicians learn that it is possible to use the army in the absence of clear rules and a supervisory system, then naturally there is a fear that politicians will tend to use this channel." This is a manifestation of sorts of the principle of connected vessels.

The political echelon's preference for recourse to the military has implications for the ability to use the army, which is based on a mandatory conscription model, within a divided society. This also has budgetary implications, namely where funds are allocated, and more importantly, where funds are not allocated. It is more convenient for politicians to allocate funds to places where they enjoy relative control. Thus the concern is that if the political echelon learns that it is easier and more convenient to use the military to handle civil crises, "then why fund the healthcare system and its related items, where there is a lot of supervision, regulation, and laws, as well as oversight by the judiciary and the civil service commission" (Amichai Cohen). In the long run, overuse of the military will lead to the continued neglect of civilian systems. The fact that the well-funded Ministry of Health—which is not just another marginal government ministry—must use the military to install and run a technological data system constitutes no less than the bankruptcy of the public system, "which has been privatized and dissolved as part of a neo-liberal economic policy since the 1980s" (Malchi).

It is important to differentiate between the involvement of the military in the first wave and what we are now seeing in the second wave of the pandemic. Involvement during the first wave was successful and occurred with little or no friction between soldiers and civilians, when the army's role was limited to provision of aid to the civilian population, and did not involve enforcing restrictions or a lockdown. At the height of the first wave, the authorities decided to set up an intelligence research center led by IDF intelligence officers. The center has grown

since the first wave and has become a national intelligence center, charged with collecting, analyzing, and distributing information, including to the general public. Some of the analysis and recommendations from the center give the impression of criticism of the civilian echelon, and in practice the center has put the military, or at least army officers, in public conflict with the political echelon. With the expansion of the second wave, the operations of the intelligence center have broadened, and it has received license to access civilian bank accounts. Even if military officers have a reputation for responsibility and observance of rules pertaining to the use of the sensitive information, unlimited access to almost any information of this kind raises discomfort, to say the least.

The fear of friction between soldiers and civilians has increased, with the second lockdown more prolonged and problematic than the first, and marked by greater tension and levels of friction beyond the ultra-Orthodox and Arab sectors, for example with business owners protesting the closure of their businesses.

One of the most noteworthy insights raised during the roundtable concerned the degree of involvement of the IDF in the crisis. Participants agreed on the need to make use of the military's logistical and operational capabilities. However, there was also agreement regarding restrictions that should be placed on the military's involvement. "Yes, to assistance at various levels, no to overall or localized responsibility for managing the campaign" (Elran). Deploying soldiers, especially armed soldiers, alongside police officers at a civilian demonstration in front of the Knesset or in order to enforce a lockdown is problematic, and should be avoided at any price, due to the risk of friction between soldiers and civilians.

The fear of friction between soldiers and civilians has increased, with the second

lockdown more prolonged and problematic than the first, and marked by greater tension and levels of friction beyond the ultra-Orthodox and Arab sectors, for example with business owners protesting the closure of their businesses (such as the violent clash between business owners and municipal inspectors and police on September 30, 2020). The temptation to broaden the IDF's involvement in the second wave of the coronavirus crisis because of the threat to human life on the one hand, and the marked asymmetry between the IDF's capabilities and the weakness and laxity of the civil system on the other, may prove to be a slippery slope that could endanger Israeli democracy.

> The more the IDF finds itself occupied with the coronavirus crisis, the more it will have to divert significant resources in that direction, and its ability to focus on military challenges will be reduced.

The military leadership is determined to succeed in its mission and fully understands the price of failure to the social standing of the IDF, and the damage this could have on public trust in the military. Coinciding with the roundtable, *Haaretz* journalist Amos Harel published an article that stated that Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi's term would be judged by the way the IDF handles the coronavirus crisis. Two days later the *Yediot Ahronot* magazine published a comprehensive investigative piece that severely criticized the performance of the Home Front Command and the IDF during the second wave of the coronavirus crisis.

Given that public trust is one of the most significant assets of the IDF as a people's army, one can assume that in any event in which IDF commanders assess that the army will encounter difficulties in executing their mission, they are likely to request further powers and resources to improve the chances of success in executing their mission. Furthermore, the more the responsibility placed on the military grows,

the more IDF commanders become stakeholders in the crisis management, and in the view of Asaf Malchi, inevitably, gain power and political influence in the broadest sense of the term. This situation can potentially spark tensions between the political and military echelons due to disagreement over the management of the crisis. Tensions may spill over into the wider system of civil-military relations in Israel and damage the standing of the military.

Alongside the efforts by the Minister of Defense to broaden the involvement of the IDF and the scope of aid it provides, and alongside the efforts of IDF commanders to succeed in their mission and to preserve the IDF's standing, in light of the emerging failure of the Alon Command to break the coronavirus chain of infection, these issues clearly influence civil-military relations and military-political relations in Israel, and make the public debate on the issue most important. As a first step to lower the potential for conflict between soldiers and civilians, the possibility of reinforcing the Police with Border Police should be examined, as they are far more skilled than IDF soldiers in policing missions and constitute an inseparable part of the police force, and at the same time deploying IDF soldiers on aid missions for the civilian population.

Moreover, the more the IDF finds itself occupied with the coronavirus crisis, the more it will have to divert significant resources in that direction, and its ability to focus on military challenges will be reduced. Furthermore, the danger of soldiers being exposed to the virus will increase, leading to growth in the number of soldiers infected or having to quarantine.

In contrast to the broad agreement between the participants on the potential negative impact of military involvement in the crisis on Israeli democracy, and even endangering it, Stuart Cohen believes that IDF involvement in the coronavirus crisis should be the subject of a public debate for the same reasons that "everything the IDF does is a subject for public debate in the State of Israel. I do not

see anything extraordinary at the theoretical level." In his view, what is important in this instance is what is left opaque in terms of the scope of involvement and its nature. "Military involvement in coronavirus issues is not unique to Israel. There are a lot of militaries around the world that are involved." The question that should be subject to public debate is what level of involvement there should be.

There is an obvious difference between logistical assistance provided by the military, which is certainly legitimate and necessary, and the military's assumption of responsibility. The boundary must be the spillover to friction with the civilian population, which invites a new, problematic stage. In the view of Stuart Cohen that transition depends on several factors, primary among them the political echelon, even if the military is not passive. One should not expect the military echelon to refuse to carry out the orders of the political echelon, even in the event that it identifies a problem that could harm the standing of the army and public trust, although "the army can certainly drag its feet."

Stuart Cohen's impression is that in view of the lessons of the first wave, the military is not eager to cross the threshold and be overly involved; the military has good cause to slow the pace and operate cautiously, for two main reasons: the first, the health risks to soldiers and the reduction in manpower available to the military's fighting force. The second is connected to the reputation of the military as it views itself, and in the eyes of the public. What will happen if the military fails in its mission? In the current political reality, there will be no shortage of entities wishing to "inflate the failure so far as to even harm the IDF." The IDF could "become a football on the political field." Therefore, contrary to the opinion of Meir Elran, Cohen said, "I do not identify any danger of military rule, be it even temporary, as a result of the military's involvement."

A similar position was presented by Carmit Padan, who stressed that she does not fear a

deterioration to military rule. In her estimation, such a situation will not arise in Israel in the current context. "The presence of the IDF in the public sphere, and all the more so of the Home Front Command, is perceived as positive by many sectors of the population." It increases the confidence of civilians, in the sense of "we have someone to rely on amid the bedlam of the administrative failure of the political echelon and the helplessness of the civilian systems." In her estimation, during the second wave, the trend is to deepen the IDF's involvement in other crucial fields (the Alon Command, the Ella Unit for contact tracing, a field hospital). Sometimes it appears that the civilian population expects political and professional echelons "to call in the IDF again in order to obstruct the ego wars between the various government ministries, the wars between the politicians…It is expected to take the reins and manage the campaign as a national savior." The involvement in the first wave was extensive but cautious, primarily to avoid creating friction between soldiers and civilians. However, in context of Stuart Cohen's emphasis on the two factors of the equation, consider the comment by the Deputy Chief of Staff back during the first wave: "As important as it is that we take responsibility, we, the IDF, cannot release the civilian bodies from their responsibilities."

Boundaries between the Civilian and Military Spaces

To Amichai Cohen, the debate requires a re-examination of three basic concepts of boundaries, namely, concerning the limits of civil-military friction; military assistance vs. management; and the contract between the IDF and civil society. Existing assumptions regarding these boundaries are not sufficient, as it is difficult to draw clear boundaries and to determine where the boundaries lie. Thus, for example, with regard to the boundary between assistance and management, "Is the management of a quarantine hotel by the military, management or assistance?" Does

the very fact of managing the quarantine hotel breach the boundary between the military and civilians? Events have a dynamic of their own. "Slowly but surely one progresses along the axis and every time the military is given more authority or is integrated into another event, the question is asked: Where do I lay the border?" (Amichai Cohen).

> **Although the military today does not fulfill civilian missions in the way it did in the founding years of the State of Israel, the phenomenon of the military's functional expansion still exists.**

This deliberation connects to a fundamental problem in the Israeli context, namely, the separation between the military and civilian spaces. In the view of Amichai Cohen, "this is connected to [Israel's] history, of a military that is very involved in civilian life. We also talk of the IDF as the people's army. Yet there is also the reserve army. These distinctions are difficult for us, and they expose problems in Israeli democracy." The coronavirus crisis amplifies the existing lack of clarity with regard to the "essence of the social contract between the IDF and Israeli society; we do not really know and have not clarified for ourselves what the role of the IDF is." Although the military today does not fulfill civilian missions in the way it did in the founding years of the State of Israel, the phenomenon of the military's functional expansion still exists. Thus for example, it is difficult to speak in terms of friction limit with Israeli society in a reality in which the Home Front Command, which is part of the military, "is built entirely on the perception of concern for the civilian population while being engaged in intensive friction with it, via local authorities or directly, in times of crisis." The coronavirus crisis has raised the importance of a formal debate on the role of the military in civilian life.

However, Amichai Cohen's analysis, suggests Kobi Michael, leads to the conclusion that the history of the IDF's functional expansion since its establishment has blurred the boundaries between the military and society and contributed to their penetrability, in the familiar typology of Robin Luckham and Moshe Lissak. Despite the changes over the years in the nature of this functional expansion, the coronavirus crisis represents a transformation of this phenomenon, which perpetuates the reality of blurred boundaries between society and the military.

The coronavirus is a civilian crisis just as home front needs in times of war and the fight against terror are civilian crises (Amichai Cohen). Therefore, the debate should focus on the nature and the types of civilian crises and how they are handled. We should ask ourselves as a society, "Where do we want the military, and what roles should it have in civilian crises?" What is required in fact is a re-examination of the issues of boundaries between the military and civilian spheres and between the military and society.

In Asaf Malchi's opinion, almost all of what was discussed above can be examined through the prism of the IDF's involvement in the coronavirus crisis in the ultra-Orthodox community. This is a microcosm in which some of the phenomena diagnosed so far are reflected, for example, in the phenomenon of fragmentation of the IDF and the division of roles between the 98th Division and the Home Front Command, and the issue of boundaries between policing and enforcement roles and civilian assistance to the ultra-Orthodox population. The military itself has refrained from entering places where it is uncomfortable operating, places where it knows that it may lose the trust granted to it, especially when it comes to populations that from the outset are distant from or ambivalent toward the military. Indeed, the experience of the first wave shows that not only was trust in the military not harmed, but in fact it increased, at least in the ultra-Orthodox sector.

In the second wave, politics have played a far more significant role. Therefore, once the ultra-Orthodox public does not want to accept

dictates from the political echelon, it projects this refusal on the military as well. In such a situation, there is an increased risk of friction between the IDF and ultra-Orthodox civilians, and "it is not at all certain that the credit the military earned in the spring will stand in its favor come autumn. I am very concerned about this situation, which can translate into civil disobedience" (Malchi). Such a development can put the military in impossible situations and lead to the collapse of ultra-Orthodox local authorities that did not manage to handle the crisis during the first wave and will probably not manage to cope with the weight of the second wave, when the local population is already not cooperating with the army in the way it did in the first wave.

The Risk of Damage to the IDF's Standing

As a result of the failure of the civilian system, will a situation arise that will lead the IDF to take on additional roles, even if it is not eager to do so? What consequences can this have?

The question concerns the criticism regarding the IDF's performance in breaking the chain of infection. According to Idit Shafran Gittleman, this raises a question about the price the army may pay for civilian failure. Will the IDF's lack of success in dealing with the pandemic lead to a crisis of confidence between society and the military, and between the political echelon and the military? Beyond that, what will be the impact on public morale?

Damage to public trust in the military could lead to mutual recriminations between the military echelon and the political echelon and to tensions between the IDF and society, something that could undermine Israeli national solidarity and cohesion. "I believe that we are marching toward a huge failure" (Shafran Gittleman). Even if the military provides explanations with regard to the difficulties in the operations of the Alon Command, "in this case the truth does not matter. What matters is how the public perceives reality." Politicization of management

of the crisis may evolve, dealing a severe blow to public trust if the public adopts the narrative that it is the army that is responsible for breaking the chain of infection.

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The IDF cannot remain indifferent to such a development. Therefore, will the IDF's fear of damage to its public standing, as a result of operations perceived as unsuccessful, lead the IDF to demand more powers in order to succeed? If so, what are the implications? In the view of Amichai Cohen, "It is difficult to see the IDF as one entity, especially as in an event that contains both a lot of money and a lot of powers there are different trends." The IDF is indeed a hierarchical organization, "but even in a hierarchical organization there are different forces." For some time, we have identified a phenomenon of an unraveling of the IDF's unified hierarchical framework. "The danger is that the coronavirus crisis could intensify this unraveling, as there will be IDF units and specific persons that will have much to gain from involvement in a civilian crisis," or much to lose. There are two possible dangers here. One is internal, inside the military, i.e., a possible process of internal fragmentation in the military. The second is politicization. These two dangers are intertwined and affect each other. Organizational fragmentation may lead to and strengthen the

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politicization of the organization, and vice versa. The more there are differing positions within the military regarding its involvement in the crisis, the more the danger increases of politicians being involved. These processes may damage the organizational cohesion of the military and its operational capabilities.

Carmit Padan added another element in her reference to fragmentation within the ranks of the military and to a possible crisis of trust between the tactical levels and the more senior levels, a crisis that could threaten the sense of cohesion within the military. She points to the potential for a crisis of trust between the ranks as a result of failure in civilian missions, with soldiers feeling that they are not receiving sufficient support. In her opinion, "The IDF is a creation of Israeli society, and since it 'dwells among its people' it is familiar with the tendency and the ease with which decision makers, the professional echelons, or even politicians make the IDF their punching bag." However, we are nonetheless witness to a growing trend of deepening involvement by the IDF in the second wave of the coronavirus crisis.

The pandemic is an extreme event that puts social resilience to the test. "In the second wave the IDF has entered the heart of the civilian system in order to assist in the fight against the coronavirus. Extreme events always provide the opportunity to examine the performance of the civil system and the relationship between the military echelon and the civil and political echelons, and focus on the relationship between the military and society." This is how Israel finds itself in a crisis reality that requires societal and national introspection. Even though the status of the IDF is not yet threatened, at least not at this point in time—in fact the opposite is true—we must be careful to avoid a situation where the civilian systems "lose their grip on this battle and its management, and sling mud at the IDF" (Padan). In any event, Carmit Padan claims that extreme events "should be seen as an opportunity to pause and reflect on the performance of civil systems in general, and

on the relationship between civilian systems and the military. The use of the army must not lead to neglect of civilian systems—the opposite is true."

Impact of IDF Involvement on its Relations with the Political Echelon

What effect does the IDF's involvement in the crisis have on military-political relations? The issue is of increasing importance given the situation in which the military understands the failure of the political echelon, and in order to carry out its role successfully perhaps will not be able to avoid addressing the situation, reflecting this failure in one way or another, even if behind closed doors in the Cabinet. How will this in turn affect relations between the ranks at the level of trust between them? Will it remain only at the level of the coronavirus crisis, or will it impact on other areas as well?

Yoram Peri believes, "We are in a battle, and the first question is how we should handle that battle. If a proposal were raised suggesting that the best way would be to give all the resources to the army, I would agree. We will have to examine the consequences later." What is important is to emphasize the wider context. We are not talking here only about the issue of the military versus the civilian system. "We are in fact at a crisis point that has been a feature of Israeli society for many years, and in particular in recent years. We are talking about a deep conflict between the politicians and the professionals." The conflict expresses itself in all systems: legal, diplomatic, academic, and others. Because Israeli society is "hyper-politicized," the professional echelons should be prioritized over political echelons that are devoid of any professional approach.

The same is true in the context of dealing with the pandemic, where "each debate over a partial lockdown or a full lockdown is a political debate." Thus, in the conflict between the professionals, in this case military officers, and the politicians, "I will fully support strengthening the standing of the military. I would give them greater weight in setting policy, and I would

follow them. When the crisis is over, we can settle accounts as to who succeeded and who didn't, and why." It is clear that there are disadvantages to the military receiving more power than it ought to have. By its involvement in the handling of the pandemic it weakens civil society. If the IDF succeeds, this will weaken the cultivation of civilian leadership routes to the political peak. "We will continue to look for generals to go into government" (Peri).

Meir Elran clarifies that in the encounter between the political and military echelons it is important to address two basic facts. First, the military is not a monolithic entity; there are various groups and interests. Second, there are three levels that should be addressed in this debate. One is the current Defense Minister who has placed his hopes on the successful management of the coronavirus crisis and wishes to use the IDF for this purpose, and in this sense is a full participant in the political game. The second level is the Chief of Staff, and the third level is the Home Front Command. "The Home Front Command is not at the forefront of the IDF. It is not an important element within the IDF; it is not treated as significant and the Home Front Command's commanders come and go with their sights set on their next position." Therefore, the current challenge faced by the IDF and the Home Front Command is completely different from what we have seen in the past.

The military will find it difficult to fulfill the Defense Minister's demands to broaden its involvement in the crisis, primarily "as the civilian systems have really gone bankrupt" (Elran). However, greater involvement of the military in the second wave presents a danger greater than that we saw in the first wave. The lockdown may be far longer and the means of enforcement far tougher, something that would lead to complex dilemmas for the military and expose it to much harsher criticism. This would affect its relations with the political echelon and Israeli society.

"Between the position that there is no danger of a slippery slope and the fear of harm to Israel's

democracy there is a continuum of possibilities, and this continuum presents intellectual and institutional challenges" (Michael). He claims that what characterizes the present reality is securitization of the discourse—the tendency to conceive of the civilian crisis in security terms. This is neither insignificant nor coincidental. It is aimed at shaping perceptions and providing an infrastructure of legitimization for more significant use of radical means and broader deployment of the military, and expansion of its powers.

Greater perforation of the boundaries between the civilian and military spaces, together with the securitization of the discourse, could lead to the entrenchment of a reality whereby civil crises in Israel are managed by the military. This is a serious challenge to Israeli society.

Kobi Michael argues that even if the military commanders are not motivated to take military control of the event, the public should be concerned about the weakness of the civilian systems versus the capabilities of the military, the motivation of the military echelon to succeed, and its growing involvement. This disparity may lead to greater perforation of the boundaries between the civilian and military spaces. This penetrability together with the securitization of the discourse could lead to the entrenchment of a reality whereby civil crises in Israel are managed by the military. This is a serious challenge to Israeli society.

Regarding the securitization of the discourse, Yoram Peri stresses that the phenomenon is a tool created by politicians through the political echelon's control of the means of cultural production, such as the media. Thus, the root of the problem is not in the military, but rather in the wider context of the ground rules of Israeli democracy. Therefore, "what needs to be done is not to reshape the ground rules of the relationship between the military and society, but to reshape the ground rules of

Israeli democracy. The fundamental definition of Israeli democracy must be reconceived—what is permissible and what is prohibited in the framework of Israeli democracy." In Israel today, there is an evident weakness in civilian oversight regarding the management of crises via the military. "I do not think that this is a positive situation, but I am not concerned that the military will take upon itself more powers and intervene more in setting policy" (Peri).

Stuart Cohen: "We are facing a need to reshape the unwritten contract between the IDF and Israeli society."

Idit Shafran Gittleman observes that the Home Front Command is currently under fire. She argues that the military has an ego, and as soon as criticism of its performance during the pandemic emerges a situation will be created wherein it "will be forced to express a position that is either political or perceived as political." In her opinion there is no concern that the military will take over the country, but there is a concern that it will take on broad powers. In conversations with military sources, she has heard statements such as, "True, we will ask for more powers, what's wrong with that?" In her understanding, this is an expression of the fact that elements in the military do not understand the essence of the campaign that it finds itself in.

Asaf Malchi proposes that we look at the operations arena at the municipal level, where mutual relations between the military and local authorities point to potential for "positive shockwaves." In his understanding, events in this arena provide an interesting and different angle from the perspective of mutual relations, division of roles, and the interface between the political and military echelons. In turn, Kobi Michael wonders if it is possible that the connection between the military and the municipal level can be interpreted as a challenge by the political echelon, a kind of defiance and expression of the military's lack of trust in it,

and intensify the failure of the political echelon in the eyes of the public.

Asaf Malchi believes that this is a possible development in the face of "the failure of the political echelon and the professional-bureaucratic system in the Ministry of Health and other ministries." However, he asserts, it is the local authorities that are on the front lines, and they are required to provide an immediate response for residents and civilians. The events that occurred in April 2020 in Bnei Brak illustrated the quality of the integration of forces and the coordination between the military, via the Home Front Command, and the local authorities: "It is true that the political echelon is weakened or placed in a negative light, but the move, at least in the first wave, led to a strengthening of trust in the military among various populations."

Conclusion and Principal Insights

"Following the discussion, I am definitely beginning to reconsider the position I presented at the outset," said Stuart Cohen, suggesting a new way of thinking. "This rethinking is expressed in the fact that due to the crisis and the acute nature of the second wave, we are facing a need to reshape the unwritten contract between the IDF and Israeli society." The difficulty in drafting an updated contract is that both the military and society are highly pragmatic. There is a need for new and tighter connections between groups in Israeli society and groups within the military—referring to Peri's partnership model (1983), except that Peri's partnership model dealt with a partnership between politicians and military officers, while Cohen suggests a model of partnership between civilian groups and groups in the military.

Stuart Cohen summarized by saying that "all of us, including the Arab minority within us, will need to reshape the relationship between the military and society. Thus the debate that began with the management of the coronavirus crisis and a question on the extent of IDF involvement opened a window to a much larger and more

crucial story, and I thank the forum for pushing me to think in these terms."

Principal Insights

a. The coronavirus crisis raises problems connected to the very nature of Israeli democracy, and this should be the focus of the debate, as all else is derived from it.

b. The coronavirus crisis reflects an ongoing fragile reality in all that is related to the phenomenon of the functional expansion of the military on the one hand, and the functional, institutional, and professional weakness of the civilian establishment on the other hand.

c. This crisis places the issue of the permeable boundaries between the civilian and military spheres clearly on the agenda, due to the asymmetry between the capabilities of the military establishment and those of the civilian establishment.

d. The coronavirus crisis and the broadening involvement of the military in the second wave may encourage processes of politicization of the military. This has the potential to overburden the relations between the political and military echelons and increase distrust between them, which could also affect the relations between the military and society.

e. A possible failure of the military to deal with the challenge presents potential for erosion in the public standing of the military, which would harm what is perceived by the military as a critical asset. This could lead the military, if it becomes a scapegoat, to take steps—either by demanding more authority and responsibility, or by defending itself by taking a critical position against the political echelon—that will intensify tensions in the military-society-political triangle in Israel.

f. Against the backdrop of the coronavirus, the weaknesses of Israeli society have been exposed and may challenge the norms between the military and Israeli society.

g. This debate has implications for many other areas such as budgets and allocations of resources, with the apparent preference for deepening the involvement of the IDF in the crisis liable to translate subsequently into budgetary preference for the defense establishment over the weakened civilian systems.

h. The volatile political sphere has had significant influence on the role of the IDF in the national sphere in the spirit of the "well-known statement of the 20th French poet Charles Péguy that everything begins in mysticism (ideology) and ends in politics" (Stuart Cohen).

i. The importance of this debate is not limited to the deployment of the IDF in the civilian sphere during the current crisis. It is relevant to the question of the capability of civilian and military systems to draw lessons and implement them—before the next crisis.

j. The weakness of civilian systems is a result of a longstanding policy that has undermined public systems in vital fields of health, education, and welfare. This is a central part of the failure of the public system in dealing with a multi-level crisis. The military, on the other hand, is still perceived as an institution that is capable of providing public services. If it succeeds, its standing as a state institution will grow. The problem is that overreliance on the military as a civil factor, without significant strengthening of public systems, will establish a norm and will severely damage the balance required by Israeli society and its ability to deal with crises. When society and the political echelon prefer to place their hopes in the military, the wider public interest is harmed in the long term.

Dr. Kobi Michael is a senior research fellow at INSS and an editor of *Strategic Assessment*.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (l) and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki sign a Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship, July 9, 2018. Photo: Eritrea Ministry of Information

From Conflict Management to Multidimensional Conflict Resolution

Amira Schiff

"Conflict Resolution is a vibrant field of enquiry. This is the first thing to understand. One can hardly imagine the current world of policy without it."

Bercovitch et al., 2009, p. 2

The literature review below presents the leading conceptualizations and approaches in the field of conflict resolution.[1] The starting point of this discussion is the understanding that the field of conflict resolution is shaped by the shifting structure of global politics and the changes that have occurred in conflicts in the international arena since the emergence of the discipline in the late 1940s. These changes have significantly influenced how researchers in the field think about conflict resolution processes. Developments have posed new challenges and shaped paradigmatic changes in the field since its inception, from a paradigm of conflict management to that of conflict resolution, which

is post-rational, multidimensional, and diverse in terms of its approaches and the strategies it proffers. The trend of ongoing development of change and expansion processes in the field continues today, amidst the widespread challenges that the international system has witnessed over the past two decades in a system of world disorder (Zartman, 2019).

The review is divided into two main sections: the first explains what constitutes the essence of the field of conflict resolution. It presents the two main paradigms underlying the various approaches in the field and their basic assumptions. Four main research clusters in the field are presented in the second section.

What is Conflict Resolution?

Conflict resolution is a general approach that offers parties to the conflict, or third parties, tools that enable constructive management of a conflict or its resolution (Kriesberg & Neu, 2018). Researchers in the field see the phenomenon of conflict, from the level of the individual to the level of the state and the international system, as a generic social phenomenon.

Conflict occurs when two or more actors (individual or collective) perceive their goals as incompatible, and each side invests efforts to achieve its goals (Kriesberg & Neu, 2018). Each conflict is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that contains three main components: the subject of the conflict; the attitudes and perceptions of the parties to the conflict; and the behavior of the parties to the conflict. These components are present in every conflict and at every social level, and over time interact dynamically with each other (Mitchell, 2014).

The field of conflict resolution is both analytical and normative: it includes analysis and understanding of the respective interests of the parties to the conflict and their mutual perspectives, while studying the right way to transition from violent conflict or potentially violent conflict to a constructive relationship, and even resolution of the conflict.

Conflict resolution researchers who study international conflicts focus on inter-state conflicts and intra-state conflicts occurring within the borders of a country that have a regional or global impact. This impact may also derive from the involvement of external actors—nation states, global or regional international governmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-state actors, and various transnational actors whose activities cross borders—who serve as mediators that provide assistance to the actors involved in the conflict (Ramsbotham et al., 2016).

The Conceptual Paradigms

East-West relations during the Cold War, the changing nature of the international system after the Cold War, and the need to deal with different and often violent types of conflicts in the international arena have generated changes in thinking about conflict resolution processes. The multidimensionality of conflicts has prompted the need to develop integrated, effective, and relevant strategies for managing and resolving conflicts by tapping knowledge from various fields: economics, peace studies, international relations, political science, law, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and mathematics.

There is no grand theory in the conflict resolution field. The various approaches and strategies span a wide range that includes approaches and theories of conflict management, conflict resolution, conflict prevention, and conflict transformation. Some refer and apply to different stages in the life cycle of conflicts, some lend particular importance to diverse forms of intervention by third parties in formal and informal processes of conflict management or resolution, and some provide the parties themselves with tools to improve their capabilities to manage and resolve conflicts.

The wide range of theories and approaches in the field can be divided into two paradigms: conflict management and conflict resolution. The two paradigms differ in their view of the sources of international conflicts, the actors in the international system, and their mode of operation, and diverge regarding the meaning of the term "peace." While the conflict management paradigm is rooted in the realist approach, the origins of the conflict resolution paradigm are rooted in the liberal approach (Schiff, 2019).

The conflict management paradigm dominated for the first three decades of research in the field, and was influenced principally by the bipolar structure of global politics during the Cold War. The theories in this paradigm

rested on the assumptions about the supremacy of power politics, anarchy as the natural state of the system, and the effect of the security dilemma on the conduct of the actors.

The approaches that developed herein are rational, interest-based, one-dimensional, and focused at the state level. They are characterized by a minimalist approach to the mitigation of conflicts, aiming at reaching a state of "negative peace" marked by the absence of direct violence between the parties, as well as an attempt to control violence, minimize conflict damage, make conflict less destructive and more constructive, and direct the parties toward cooperation based on their mutual interests (Maoz et al., 2004). Key principles in the conflict management discourse are the preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, non-interference in states' internal affairs (in intra-state conflicts and humanitarian crises), and the supremacy of national interests (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009).

A conflict, if it is managed in a constructive manner that is acceptable to all parties, may succeed in promoting important values. Therefore, the issue is not to prevent the very phenomenon of conflicts, but to prevent violent manifestations of conflicts and destructive consequences.

The roots of the conflict resolution paradigm can be found in approaches that developed during the first decades of the field and in parallel with conflict management approaches. Researchers proposed perspectives and tools for dealing with international conflicts that reflected universal values rooted in the liberal approach, such as individual liberties and belief in the ability to change political reality through the individual, and through state and international institutions (Schiff, 2019). The approaches that developed from the conflict resolution paradigm are maximalist, and deal with long term processes toward fulfillment of basic human needs that motivate the parties in

the conflict and the responses that aim at the complete removal of the roots of the conflict (Maoz et al., 2004). In this context, a wide range of liberal approaches to conflict resolution has developed that include rational and post-rational conflict resolution approaches, conflict transformation approaches, and peacebuilding. These approaches have expanded greatly over the past three decades with the proliferation of violent intra-state conflicts and the increase in the number of failed states, along with the widening range of conflict issues and actors that are party to conflicts or are third party mediators.

The current prevailing paradigm is a multidimensional conflict resolution paradigm that includes normative and practical dimensions. It combines new approaches with traditional first-generation conflict management approaches, and is divided into four main research clusters (see below). This paradigm offers tools designated for implementation at different stages of conflicts, and strategies to create multidimensional and two-way processes, from the leadership to the people (top-down) and from the people to the leadership (bottom-up). These consider a variety of actors who are a party to conflicts or engage as third parties to issues and norms—not only in systemic or strategic terms, but also at the normative level, which links civil society to the state level and to regional and international levels. Emphasis today is on processes that provide human security alongside state security, the division of roles between the state and the individual in global politics, and the aspiration to achieve goals according to the context of each conflict (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009).

Main Insights

Alongside the variety of approaches and divergent theories in the field are also certain shared basic insights. First, conflicts at all social levels, including the international level, are a phenomenon that is not necessarily negative. A conflict, if it is managed in a constructive manner

that is acceptable to all parties, may succeed in promoting important values. Therefore, the issue is not to prevent the very phenomenon of conflicts, but to prevent violent manifestations of conflicts and destructive consequences (Kriesberg & Neu, 2018).

A second insight concerns the distinction between conflict resolution and conflict management, and the dialectic between these two concepts (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2010). Conflict resolution is a process in which the parties to a conflict or a third party work to reach a fundamental resolution to the issues in dispute by addressing the basic needs that are at the root of the conflict and motivate the parties. This is in contrast to conflicts where efforts to reach a resolution fail repeatedly, and which must be managed constructively by controlling violence and promoting the interests of each of the parties to the conflict in a way that allows them to live with it (Maoz et al., 2004). The hope is that conflict management will be a preliminary step and will influence the transition to conflict resolution in the future (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2010).

A third insight is that conflict derives from the parties' perceptions of the relations between them, which can be changed through a third party or by the parties to the conflict themselves (Kriesberg & Neu, 2018). Many times, the parties perceive their relations as containing only conflicting interests. This situation is described in the field as "pure conflict," which means that if one party gains, the other party loses—yet in practice this is almost always not the case. In most cases, the dynamics of the conflict prevent the parties from also seeing common or complementary interests. Therefore, the key to conflict resolution lies in the ability to change the perceptions of the parties and bring them to the realization that relations between them consist of both conflict and interdependence, enabling cooperation that will lead to a win-win solution that benefits both sides.

Researchers see international conflict as a dynamic phenomenon that progresses in

several stages, though not necessarily in linear fashion: emergence, escalation, de-escalation and settlement, and sustaining peace (Kriesberg & Neu, 2018). Different strategies have been suggested for each of the stages. Selecting the right strategy is a necessary (although insufficient) condition for an effective outcome.

Research Clusters in the Multidimensional Conflict Resolution Paradigm

The multidimensional conflict resolution paradigm is currently divided into four main research clusters:

a. Rational conflict management approaches (traditional approaches)
b. Rational conflict resolution approaches—based on interests and problem-solving processes
c. Post-rational approaches
d. International intervention through preventive diplomacy and humanitarian intervention

Some of the strategies proposed in the field, such as those designed to prevent and manage conflicts, will be satisfied with conflict management and its maintenance, while others designed to resolve or transform conflicts will work to eliminate the sources of the conflict (Schiff, 2019).

Rational Conflict Management Approaches (Traditional Approaches)

Rational conflict management approaches refer to a wide range of influence strategies and tactics that rely on the rational actor assumption, and can be implemented by the actors involved in a conflict with or without third-party assistance. The goal is to prevent, limit, or control the spectrum of violence without resorting to extensive military use of force, and to create an environment that allows for interaction to promote cooperation that will enable conditions for a future resolution, while maximizing the benefits or interests of each of the parties, though without resolving the conflict (Bar-

Siman-Tov, 2010). The strategies are unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral, and primarily address the processes of de-escalation and negotiation within the framework of traditional diplomacy through negotiation and mediation, coercion and deterrence, and coercive diplomacy with a combination of threats and incentives—with parties to a conflict or a third party employing hard power, soft power, and smart power.

The bargaining negotiation paradigm, which dominated the field for the first three decades, emphasized the competitive nature of negotiation. It was influenced by the development of the realist paradigm during the Cold War period, which emphasized the competitive nature of state relations in an anarchic environment, and by game theory which served as the foundation for many studies (Hopmann, 2001). Alongside the understanding that the parties are in a conflictual situation of "mixed motivations" (Schelling, 1960), there was an emphasis on each state's efforts to advance its own interests, as well as the need for each of the parties to bargain competitively so that its adversary gains the impression that it cannot be taken advantage of easily (Hopmann, 2001).

Based on the rationality assumption, researchers focused on formulating prescriptions, with a top-down logic (focusing on the leadership and decision makers) intended to increase benefit in the give-and-take dynamic around the negotiating table, producing a compromise agreement. Prominent in these studies were the classic works of scholars such as political economist Thomas Schelling (1960; 1966), who developed the art of deterrence as part of a bargaining strategy in negotiation that also allows for changes in perception from a zero-sum game to a non-zero-sum game that includes possibilities for cooperation; the works of the mathematician Anatol Rapoport (1960; 1966); the work of the economist Kenneth Boulding (1962); and the work of political scientist Fred Charles Iklé (1964), which includes theory and examples from the world of diplomacy, with the aim of

helping to formulate a policy for state conduct in the nuclear age (Kriesberg, 2007).

The bargaining paradigm also influenced studies that dealt with negotiations conducted with the mediation of third parties—three-way bargaining aimed at balancing the positions of the conflict parties, employing the carrot and stick method, and helping the parties reach an arrangement that would basically maintain the status quo (Iklé, 1964; Young, 1967). These were influenced by international norms such as territorial integrity, non-intervention, and self-determination.

The reality of the Cold War and the need for conflict management led to the development of the idea of combining negative sanctions (e.g., economic, diplomatic, military) with positive sanctions (various incentives that encourage change of undesirable behavior, and seen as helping to create the foundation for peace and long-term cooperation) (George, 1996; Art & Cronin, 2007), to increase the possibility of peaceful conflict management. Others have highlighted the difficulty in implementing unilateral strategies of deterrence and coercive diplomacy in conflicts involving non-state actors—especially non-state actors that are split among themselves—that are determined to achieve their goals (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2005). Alongside these were confidence-building strategies such as Graduated Reciprocation in Tension Reduction (GRIT), formulated by the psychologist Charles Osgood (1962), and Tit for Tat (TFT), formulated by the political scientist Robert Axelrod (1984).

Rational Conflict Resolution Approaches—Interest-Based and Problem-Solving Processes

Approaches that appeared in the early years, based on problem-solving processes and on collaborative efforts to enable the potential realization of the mutual interests of the parties and increase mutual benefits (Walton & McKersie, 1965; Rapoport, 1966; Burton, 1969), have increased significantly in scope and

impact. With the expansion of liberal thinking in recent decades, they have influenced the prevailing negotiation paradigm of problem solving (Hopmann, 2001).

A conflict may derive from an objective situation of conflicting interests, but it can also derive from the parties' different perceptions regarding the subjects of conflict, which imprison the parties in a state of hostility and adherence to threat perceptions. In these two situations it is possible through negotiation as a collaborative process, in the spirit of the problem-solving paradigm, to lead a creative problem-solving process that includes identifying the roots of the problem, providing a response to the needs of the parties, searching for a common denominator, or creating and drafting an agreement that reflects mutual benefit, contrary to the zero-sum game perception (Schiff, 2019). There are two main approaches within the problem-solving negotiation paradigm. The first is the rational and interest-based; the second is the identity approach (discussed below). The approach of Roger Fisher and his colleagues to negotiations (Fisher et al., 1991) is perhaps the most prominent among the interest-based rational approaches. The theory aims to develop the capabilities of a third party and the parties to a conflict, in order to conduct a negotiation process based on common interests that build mutual trust and conclude in an agreement that will lead to optimal results in terms of providing a response to the parties' needs, and will last over time.

The process school of thought of negotiation has played a key role in the development of the problem-solving paradigm. Contrary to the bargaining paradigm, which focused on give-and-take relationships around the negotiating table, the process school of thought sees negotiation as a long process with complex dynamics that commences even before the parties meet at the negotiating table and ends long after an agreement is signed, and is influenced by many different aspects that must be considered (Zartman & Berman, 1982;

Druckman, 1986). The discussion of ripeness, which deals with the appropriate conditions required for the successful inauguration of negotiations, has played a central role in the development of this school of thought. Over the past decade the discourse has also dealt with the necessary conditions for concluding negotiations with agreement (Zartman, 2000; 2012).

Changes in the international system after the end of the Cold War and the spread of inter-communal conflicts with their unique characteristics, as well as the diversity in the types of third parties or peacemakers, required a different approach than in the past to the phenomenon of mediation. The reference is to third-party intervention—from official actors and unofficial actors—that does not make use of military force to help the parties reach agreement to manage or resolve their conflict. There is no single formula for action that can instruct a mediator seeking to mediate in an international conflict. The challenge facing researchers as well as potential mediators is first, to recognize the difference in the phenomenon of mediation from the perspective of the third parties that are involved in terms of their power; to recognize their capabilities, advantages, and limitations, based on the understanding of the context in which the conflict and the mediation take place, sometimes with the involvement of several third parties, which requires coordination, and then to use the most effective range of tools in any given conflict situation (Zartman, 1995; Touval & Zartman, 2001; Aall, 2007; Bercovitch, 2009; Vuković, 2015; 2019).

In the past, in studies that were part of the bargaining paradigm, the objective measure for assessing the success of mediation was the achievement of an agreement at the conclusion of negotiations—be it a ceasefire, or a full or partial agreement—which spelled short-term success (Iklé, 1964). However, given the way peace processes have played out in the last three decades, the trend has begun to change,

and researchers believe that a broader objective criterion for the success of mediation should be considered, and that a distinction is required between the short and long terms, alongside the use of tools and concepts from the world of preventive diplomacy and humanitarian intervention. It is important to examine objective indexes of the success of mediation processes in the long term, whether a mediated agreement is in fact actually implemented, what the mediator's role was in ensuring and guaranteeing the implementation of the agreement, whether the parties are abiding by the agreement, and more (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009).

Post-Rational Approaches

This cluster includes three main approaches: the identity approach, the intercultural approach to negotiation, and the transformative approach for peacebuilding.

The Identity Approach

The identity approach includes a wide range of concepts and theories that are based on social psychological theory and understandings and form the foundation for the social psychology school and its prominence in the field of conflict resolution in the last three decades.

The approach that developed under the influence of the liberal school out of John Burton's work (Burton, 1969) in the 1960s represented the most striking change, when compared to the rational conflict management approaches. The approach grew out of the disappointment from the limitations inherent in traditional approaches to conflict management, especially with regard to identity-based conflicts. The identity approach scholars contend that the root causes of conflicts, and in particular identity-based conflicts, are to be found in the non-fulfillment of basic needs and collective fears of the groups involved in the conflict. Thus, emphasizing the inter-societal nature of conflicts, scholars contend that as long as the parties to the conflict do not acknowledge

these needs and fears, do not clarify them, and do not address them to the satisfaction of all, the obstacles to the resolution of the conflict will remain. Therefore, researchers from the identity approach focus on the importance of addressing shared human needs and collective fears in inter-societal peace processes through dialogues in unofficial diplomacy tracks, and on the importance of creating mutual trust and changing attitudes toward others, through psychological processes, transformational dialogues, and reconciliation processes of long-term changes aimed at reaching a stable peace.

Identity approach researchers focus in their work on the subjective perceptions of the parties to identity conflicts, and on exploring misunderstandings and misconceptions of the conflict by members of an ethnic identity group who are central actors in an identity conflict (Kelman, 1998). Burton (1969), whose pioneering work was also one of the first attempts to connect between conflict resolution theory and practice, and his successors in the identity approach Edward Azar (Azar et al., 1978) and Herbert Kelman (1991) developed techniques that focused on mitigating the subjective and relationship component in identity conflicts, through a transformation processes conducted in the framework of "interactive problem-solving" workshops (Fisher, 2005). In the processes that take place in these workshops, which are based on the assumptions of the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), a dialogue takes place between representatives of elites from the parties to the conflict, facilitated by academics from the field. The participants do not hold official positions, rather are private individuals who are close to decision makers in their group.

A distinction was made between "Track I," which refers to formal diplomacy, and "Track II," which refers to informal diplomacy (Davidson & Montville, 1981) and contributes to the removal of psychological barriers to agreements in the first track. Research has further focused on studying the effects between the two levels

(Fisher, 2005). Further concepts developed: "multi-track diplomacy" (Diamond & McDonald, 1996), "Track 1.5 diplomacy" (Nan, 2005), and "Track III" or people-to-people diplomacy.

The Intercultural Approach to Diplomacy
The 1980s and 1990s saw an expansion of research with regard to cultural diversity as a source of obstacles to conflict management and resolution, leading to the development of the intercultural school (Hall & Hall, 1983; Cohen, 1996; Avruch, 1998). It focuses on studying the impact of intercultural differences between parties to conflicts on negotiation processes and their outcomes. Researchers argue that since different cultures attach different meanings to events in reality, an understanding of the adversary's culture and its impact on the ability to reach an agreement is required. The assumption is that in the absence of common beliefs and norms, the parties to the conflict will define the situation differently and will interpret signals sent from the other party and its negotiation strategy in negotiations in different ways. These become an obstacle or disruption to the process of resolving the conflict. In this approach, importance is attached to cultural understanding and intercultural diversity, and therefore a third party, the mediator, and the parties themselves must take these factors into account when preparing for negotiations or when in negotiations. Among the dimensions that create cultural diversity and require cultural understanding are norms of communication style, the cultural values of individualism versus collectivism, egalitarianism versus hierarchy, and more.

The Transformative Approach and Peacebuilding
Studies conducted by Burton and Azar were the foundation for the development of the conflict transformation approach and peacebuilding (which was also based on knowledge from the field of peace studies). Researchers such as the sociologist Johan Galtung (1996; 1967) and John

Paul Lederach (1997) developed frameworks that address human needs and structural sources of violence from a transformative perspective that transforms conflicts in processes of mutual influence between the various levels of society, while emphasizing the role of civil society and a civilian peace discourse in the process of peacebuilding. Galtung coined the term "positive peace," which refers to the creation of change in relationships and is conducted as part of a long-term and in-depth proactive process.

Since the 1990s, work by Galtung and by Lederach on peacebuilding has also led to work on reconciliation processes. These processes focus on a multi-dimensional psychological process, intended to help former rivals establish a stable and lasting peace following the signing of a peace agreement (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2002; Kriesberg, 2002).

In recent decades, the focus on peacebuilding processes based on a liberal peace perception has expanded and deepened, with the liberal perception seen as central to the resolution of conflicts and peacebuilding processes. However, despite the good intentions of mediators in peace processes in civil wars and the investment of significant resources, peace processes in violent intra-state conflicts have not succeeded in bringing about lasting peace. Most of the civil wars that took place after 2003 were found to be a recurring phenomenon (Westendorf, 2015). This insight has led to the expansion of research into the factors that contribute to the success and stability of peace agreements (sustaining peace) in intra-state conflicts. Special emphasis is placed on mechanisms that may enable security and stability, the construction of functioning and legitimate government institutions that will provide the state the capabilities to implement the agreement, and third-party intervention in the peace process and at the implementation phase of the agreement (Walter, 2002; DeRouen et al., 2010). The literature also deals with mechanisms capable of addressing issues

that arise during the implementation phase, such as international oversight and arbitration mechanisms and reconciliation processes. The literature further studies the role of civil society in negotiations and at the implementation phase of the agreement (Pouligny et al., 2007; O'Reilly et al., 2015).

> Some studies require the allocation of a more significant role to civilians in peacebuilding processes. Others argue that too rapid or too strong a push for democratization and reconciliation may create greater polarization and intra-state competition, rather than the cooperation required for a functioning state.

Studies conducted over the past decade point to considerable difficulty coordinating the multitude of agencies involved in state-building processes—among themselves and between themselves and the local population and the local authorities—and emphasize the need to devote intellectual time and practical effort to improving coordination. Some require the allocation of a more significant role to civilians in peacebuilding processes. Others argue that too rapid or too strong a push for democratization and reconciliation may create greater polarization and intra-state competition, rather than the cooperation required for a functioning state (Hampson & Mendeloff, 2007; Crocker et al., 2018).

International Intervention Approach— Preventive Diplomacy and Humanitarian Intervention

The traditional approaches to conflict management focused on conflicts at the state level while adhering to the principle of sovereignty, and have struggled to address the expanding and challenging phenomenon of the civil wars—the "new wars" (Kaldor, 2006)—that has grown since the end of the 20th century. These have included massacres of innocent civilians in the territories of sovereign states

committed either by the state or sponsored by the state; chaos created within the boundaries of the states where fighting took place; and mass displacement and regional and global dangers inherent in conflicts spilling beyond the borders of the state where they arise. These challenges demanded new theoretical and practical thinking and led to the development of a discourse on human security, which focused on an effective response to prevent violence and cease violent conflict. The international community's failures to deal with conflicts in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Somalia in the 1990s amplified the recognition that preventing and ending civil wars and creating the conditions for long-term peace requires a multidimensional, comprehensive, and proactive approach (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009).

Preventive diplomacy is the intervention of a third party by diplomatic means or through the threat of the use of force to prevent escalation of a conflict (Ackerman, 2003; Lund, 2009) (or conflict prevention). *Humanitarian intervention* is a collective intervention using scaled measures such as diplomatic and humanitarian and even the use of force, in order to stop widespread and critical harm to the civilian population (Bellamy, 2012; 2013). Both of these approaches evolved as third-party intervention strategies. The innovation in the concept of preventive diplomacy is in the use by various actors, including the parties to the conflict, of diplomatic tools of conflict management and resolution, as part of an international early warning system against the escalation and prevention of conflicts.

The discourse of international intervention, which may also include the use of military force to protect an innocent civilian population, has created tension between the civil population's right to protection and the principle of maintaining state sovereignty and the state's right to non-interference in its internal affairs. This is the background to the emergence of the concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) as a normative legal framework for intervention,

Two paradigms: Conflict management vs. multidimensional conflict resolution

	Conflict management paradigm	**Multidimensional conflict resolution paradigm**
Period	Dominant in the field from the 1950s to the late 1970s	Dominant in the field from the 1980s to the present day
Political context	Cold War	Era of the "new wars"
Theoretical context	Based on the realist rational approach. (This period also saw the appearance of liberal approaches that served as a basis of the conflict resolution paradigm familiar today)	Post-rational theoretical period, dominance of liberal approaches combined with realist approaches
Approach	One dimensional: focused on the state level, rationality, and interests	Multi-dimensional: emphasis on response to needs, human security alongside state security, liberal values, multiple actors, and central importance to civil society
Includes	Conflict management strategies	Conflict prevention strategies Conflict management strategies Conflict resolution strategies Conflict transformation strategies
Negotiations paradigm	Bargaining paradigm	Problem-solving paradigm
Main concepts	• Negative peace • De-escalation of conflicts • Game theory • Tit for Tat (TFT) • Graduated Reciprocation in Tension Reduction (GRIT) • Peacemaking or mediation in the framework of bargaining paradigm for negotiations • Peacekeeping in the framework of the realist perspective	• Positive peace • Peacemaking in the framework of problem solving paradigm for negotiations • Peacekeeping • Peacebuilding • The identity approach • Interest-based approach • Reconciliation • Interactive conflict resolution • The inter-cultural approach to negotiations But also: • De-escalation of conflicts • Games theory • Tit-for Tat (TFT) • Graduated Reciprocation in Tension Reduction (GRIT)

Source: Schiff (2019), p. 76.

including the use of force for humanitarian reasons (for more on R2P, see Bellamy, 2013). Today, the principle of humanitarian intervention is evolving in theory and in practice in the shadow of the international community's military intervention to stop combat, as in the case of Libya in 2011 and in contrast to the lack of decisive intervention to halt the harm to the civilian population, such as in the civil war in Syria (Bellamy, 2012; 2013).

Legal, normative, political, and operational challenges make it difficult to implement R2P uniformly. While there have been some successes, the application of the principle is still stumbling and has failed to prevent or stop bloody civil wars. The selectivity in the

implementation of R2P, such as in the war in Syria, suggests that the attempt to implement it is limited by power struggles between states. Moreover, it appears that lack of response has become the new normal in an international system that is characterized by normative chaos. In the context of R2P, the claim has been made that in the face of an international system characterized as a system of global disorder, there is a need for a greater effort than in the past to build stable states with legitimate regimes, capable of realizing the state's responsibility to protect its citizens (Zartman, 2019).

Conclusion

The review presents four main clusters of research in the field of conflict resolution, and the diverse range of approaches included in them. Mitigating international conflicts, in the effort to manage or resolve them, requires the combined use of various levels of different strategies from the approaches in the field. A prerequisite for correct handling of conflict, whether by a third party or the conflict parties themselves, is an understanding and analysis of the characteristics of the conflict, while adapting and channeling optimal methods to the conflict theater.

Dr. Amira Schiff is a faculty member in the Program for Conflict Resolution, Management and Negotiation at Bar-Ilan University. She specializes in peace processes in international conflicts. Her book *Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution* (Open University Press) is due out in autumn, 2021.

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Note

1   Space constraints prohibit the mention of all relevant research sources in the current review. For a more extensive review of the literature on conflict resolution, see A. Schiff (2019), *Conflict Resolution in the International Arena.* Raananna: The Open University Press.
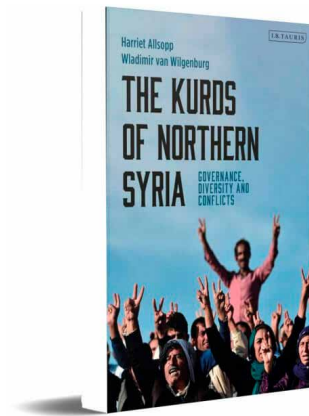
The Rise and Fall of the Kurdish Project in Northern Syria

The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflicts
by Harriet Allsopp and Wladimir van Wilgenburg
I. B. Tauris, 2019
264 pages (Kindle edition)

Gallia Lindenstrauss

The book by researcher Harriet Allsopp and journalist Wladimir van Wilgenburg about the Kurds in northern Syria is essential reading for anyone interested in the fate of this minority during Syria's civil war. The Kurds in Syria are a relatively small group compared to the Kurdish minority in Turkey, in Iran, and in Iraq (estimates at the outbreak of the Syrian civil war were that they numbered some two million people). Their percentage of the total population of Syria was small (around 10 percent, similar to the proportion of Kurds in Iran, but significantly lower than the proportion of Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, where they comprise around a fifth of the population). For these and other reasons, and certainly in comparison to the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, the Kurds in Syria have received scant research interest. Allsopp and van Wilgenburg's book helps to fill in the gaps in its discussion of the Kurdish minority over the years since Syria's establishment. However, its more important contribution is the bulk of the book, which relates to the period after the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and the different configurations of the autonomous Kurdish entities in northern Syria that developed during the war—from three cantons to a federal entity in the majority of the territory of northern Syria. In this respect, the book follows the rising power of the Kurds in Syria, the peak, and the beginning of the decline.

The first two chapters discuss Kurdish identity and the emergence of the Kurdish political parties. The following two chapters discuss the management style of the Syrian branch of the Kurdish underground (PYD), which became dominant in northern Syria, and identity changes during this period—first and foremost, the strengthening of Kurdish identity. The fifth chapter discusses the involvement of international actors, and the final chapter discusses the feasibility and prospects of continued Kurdish self-rule in northern Syria.

The writers' main argument is that the question of political representation of the Kurds became a "battlefield" in its own right and made it more difficult for them to function. Another important argument is that the Kurds remained trapped between the interests and actions of regional and international actors with contradictory objectives (Kindle edition, location 5658-5673). The Kurdish issue is critical for Turkey, due to internal considerations, and since the Assad regime, Russia, and Iran were assisted in the past by the Kurds in operating against Turkey, they can play the Kurdish card against Ankara again in the future.

Most of the research activity (which included interviews and surveys among the population—at times even while risking the lives of the researchers themselves)—took place between April and August 2016, thus enabling a kind of "freeze-frame shot" of the climactic moments of the Kurdish project in northern Syria. Even though close scrutiny of the project of expanding the autonomous representation of the group, which suffered discrimination and suppression over the years of Syria's existence,

can naturally arouse empathy, the book's writers do not refrain from presenting criticism. Thus the book is far from an idealization of the Kurdish autonomous entities—though this was fairly common in the Western press, as well as in Israeli media—and includes a detached and at times quite detailed account of what occurred in northern Syria from a political standpoint over the years of the Syrian civil war until 2018.

> While the fact that the Kurdish fighters were the leading ground force in the fighting against the Islamic State brought them admiration and assistance from the West, after ISIS was territorially defeated and following pressure from Turkey, they were in effect abandoned by their allies and left at the mercy of the regime.

Given their relatively small demographic weight, from the outset it was not likely that the Kurds in Syria would come close to the level of autonomy of the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq. In part due to ideological considerations of striving for "democratic autonomy," based on the ideas of Kurdish underground (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan, the representational framework in northern Syria was built such that it is not interested in advancing only the Kurdish population, but rather has a more general agenda, such as advancing gender equality (Kindle edition, location 3239). Over the years of the war, the arrival of displaced people from other parts of Syria, as well as the departure of some of the Kurdish population, further reduced the chances of implementing Kurdish autonomy in the limited ethnic sense (Kindle edition, location 5597).

The book examines the extent of the cooperation between the Kurds and the Assad regime. It is clear that without limited tactical cooperation with the regime, the Kurds would not have achieved what they did with the federal entity in northern Syria (Kindle edition, location 598; 4742). Furthermore, it is not clear what

other possibilities there were for the Kurds in Syria, as there was a broad lack of desire among opposition groups in Syria to allow for political representation for the Kurds as a group in the design of Syria's future, making cooperation with them more difficult. The issue of Kurdish cooperation with the West is also discussed. On the one hand, in order to continue to be relevant for the international coalition that fought against the Islamic State, the Kurds had to expand their territorial control. On the other hand, the more they expanded territorially, the relative weight of the Kurdish population was lower, and resentment among the Kurds increased over issues such as mandatory conscription.

The book delves into the issue of internal disagreements and divisions among the Syrian Kurds. The rifts stemmed in part from the dependence on the competing Kurdish movements outside of Syria and their extensive influence on Kurdish conduct inside Syria—first and foremost the split between supporters of the PKK and supporters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq (Kindle edition, location 5547). In the past, internal divisions among the Kurds led to difficulties in advancing the objective of achieving Kurdish self-determination, and it is not surprising that they were also a source of weakness and of problems among the Kurdish entities in northern Syria. Thus, while the PYD's rule was significant, it was also challenged, including by political parties among the Syrian Kurds that were connected to the KDP.

Turkey too limited the Kurds' ability to carry out extensive autonomous rule over time in northern Syria. The dominance of the PYD in northern Syria, in contrast with the limited influence of the KDP, and in particular that of then-President of the Kurdish region in northern Iraq Masoud Barzani (who was in many respects an ally of Turkey during this period), led to Ankara's concerns regarding the realization of the Kurdish project in all of northern Syria. In order to stop the Kurds, Turkey carried out

three military operations starting in August 2016, in which it first acted to block the Kurdish advancement, and then sought to conquer areas that were already in the hands of the Kurds.

In the long term, it is hard to see how the Kurds can avoid the fate of returning to the status of a disadvantaged minority within Syria. The Kurds would like a solution of a federal framework for the entire country (Kindle edition, location 1996). Assad's opposition to such a framework as a solution to the civil war, along with considerable resistance to this among opposition groups in Syria, makes it difficult to imagine a scenario in which the Kurds can maintain their autonomous status in Syria over time, especially from the moment Assad decides to retake the territories in northern Syria. While the fact that the Kurdish fighters were the leading ground force in the fighting against the Islamic State brought them admiration and assistance from the West, after ISIS was territorially defeated and following pressure from Turkey, they were in effect abandoned by their allies and left at the mercy of the regime.

Not surprisingly, the book does not make reference to aspects related to Israel, since traditionally most of Israel's connections have been with the Kurds in Iraq, especially with the KDP. Over the course of the Syrian civil war, there were occasional reports of limited humanitarian aid that Israel provided to the Kurds in northern Syria. In October 2019, against the backdrop of the beginning of Operation Peace Spring, a Turkish military operation in northeastern Syria, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke publicly in a way that departed from Israel's prior policy regarding the Kurds in Syria. In his Twitter account, Netanyahu condemned the Turkish attack, warned that ethnic cleansing could occur, and also said that Israel is ready to provide humanitarian aid to "the gallant Kurdish people." However, this unusual statement should also be understood within the context of the rhetorical clashes between Netanyahu and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, against the backdrop of the deterioration in relations between Turkey and Israel, and presumably there will not be significant Israeli involvement in northern Syria in the foreseeable future.

Dr. Gallia Lindenstrauss is a senior research fellow at INSS, specializing in Turkey and ethnic conflicts.
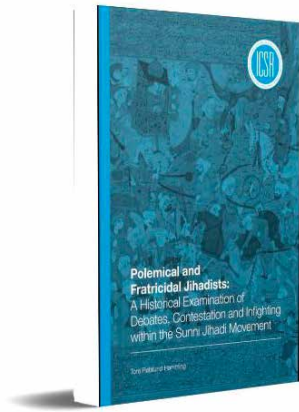
Debates, Disputes, and Divides in the Salafi-Jihadi Movement

Polemical and Fratricidal Jihadists: A Historical Examination of Debates, Contestation and Infighting within the Sunni Jihadi Movement
by Tore Refslund Hamming
ICSR King's College London, August 2019
64 pages

Aviad Mendelboim and Yoram Schweitzer

This monograph about polemics and infighting among the ranks of jihadists comprises a collection of articles based on primary sources written by Tore Hamming, a prominent researcher of the Salafi jihadi ideological movement. Assisting him were a team of researchers at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR).

The monograph gives a chronological account of the development of differences of opinion among religious leaders, opinion shapers, and senior activists in the Salafi jihadi movement. It begins with a description and analysis of the ideological approaches that were common in the 1960s in Egypt, moves to the internal struggles among jihadists in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and presents an array of other dilemmas on various issues. These include the questions facing senior Sunni members in view of Bin Laden's declaration that the war should be focused on the United States, and in particular his decision to attack the US on its own soil on September 11, 2001.

The purpose of this monograph as defined by Hamming is "to foster a better understanding of the contemporary struggle between al-Qaida and the Islamic State," in the broad historical context of past divides (p. 5). It does not go into today's bitter disputes between the two organizations, but rather presents and analyzes the deep disagreements that emerged among senior members of the Salafi-jihadi movement in the past, some of which are still current. These disagreements give readers conceptual access to the rift today between al-Qaeda and Islamic State supporters; the background and contextual discussion enables readers to understand the roots of these rifts.

The author explains that Salafi-Jihadi ideology is commonly perceived as sharing established, coherent, and united goals on issues such as restoring the glory of Islam and establishing the caliphate, and sharing a definition of the primary enemy—"the Jewish-Crusader alliance." However, the movement is in fact locked in internal struggles over the order of priorities, the urgency of its aims, and the correct religious way to achieve them. According to the author, the disputes among senior Salafi jihadists are driven by personal and strategic factors as well as theological principles, and these have shaped the theological and conceptual development of the movement over the years.

The monograph opens with a description of the disputes that emerged in Egypt in the 1960s around the legitimacy of using force against rulers, when jihad is permitted, and who has the obligation of performing jihad. It describes the dispute over strategy and principle in the ranks of al-Qaeda around the September 11 attacks; the criticism of the organization some four years later for the cruelty of the rebellious proxy in Iraq and its leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi toward Shiite Muslims; and criticism of senior ideologue

Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who is close to Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the organization's current leader, for the excessive violence used by al-Qaeda in Iraq.

In addition, the monograph stresses that the disputes were not only ideological, but also personal, and illustrates this by examining the tension among the al-Qaeda leadership and its rivals in other groups with the return of Bin Laden from Sudan to Afghanistan. During those years, Bin Laden's ambitions to make his organization the main driving force behind an international struggle to establish the caliphate became a bone of contention and sparked opposition. His opponents included Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, which hosted him in Afghanistan—Mullah Omar took over the country by force the year of Bin Laden's return to the country and offered protection to him and his followers—and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, a senior ideological figure in the Salafi-jihadi movement in Afghanistan. Another example concerns the liquidation of senior members of al-Shabaab, a result of personal struggles and the drive by key figures to seize the leadership.

Criticism of the monograph concerns the disputes and conflicts that the author chose to omit, or alternatively, to mention. For example, a central issue in the doctrine of the Islamic State is the *tamkin* principle, which holds that the establishment of an Islamic caliphate with a territorial basis is overwhelming proof that Islam is the true religion and Muslims are the chosen people. While al-Qaeda sees this principle as very important but not an immediate imperative in the absence of the right circumstances and conditions, the Islamic State sees *tamkin*—that is, the link between territory and the ability to implement the correct Islamic way of life, based on *sharia*—as a concrete, achievable goal. The Islamic State began working to implement this objective as soon as it was established.

The withdrawal from civilian society, the isolation, and the assumption of the way of life of a sect in the spirit of Islam was already present in Egypt in the 1960s, in the Takfir al-Hijra group

of Shukri Mustafa. However, the caliphate—or the intermediate stage in the form of an emirate, as a timeless vision in the doctrine of Abdullah Azzam—became the focus of a dispute that is not mentioned in this monograph within the network of alliances of global al-Qaeda, between its branch in Yemen and the senior leadership and Bin Laden. The Islamic State's interpretation of the *tamkin* issue as an existing, valid, and even expanding caliphate became a magnet for thousands of volunteers and was in total contravention of al-Qaeda's orderly plan for implementing the vision. Al-Qaeda, apart from the fact that it saw the declaration of the caliphate as a move made without the consent of the religious leaders, saw it as a disastrous step that would arouse global anger against the movement, and it became a touchstone in the venomous discourse between the parties.

> **The Islamic State's interpretation of the *tamkin* issue as an existing, valid, and even expanding caliphate became a magnet for thousands of volunteers and was in total contravention of al-Qaeda's orderly plan for implementing the vision.**

In addition, one of the core issues that distinguishes al-Qaeda from the Islamic State is the question of *takfir*—declaring that someone, Muslim or not, is an apostate and may therefore be killed, in effect condemning him to death. Although this issue is discussed at length in this monograph, by means of test cases from the dispute among training camps in Afghanistan and in the review of the Algerian struggle, the argument that emerged in the ranks of the Islamic State is not discussed. This argument even created two camps, supporting different approaches to *takfir*—the Hazimi and the Benali. The former is identified with Ahmad al-Hazimi, a preacher who wrote a book called *Ignorance is no Excuse in Islam* and attracted supporters in the fighting in Syria and Iraq; the second is identified with a senior *sharia* figure from the Islamic State, Turki Benali. While the first camp

supported and encouraged the *takfir* declaration for anyone who did not join the Islamic State or live according to its religious doctrine, the second camp feared the consequences of a "chain *takfir*"—widespread license to kill that would spiral out of control and become an impediment to the establishment of the Islamic State when it faced complex military and morale-building challenges.

Apart from the main purpose—to give readers an understanding of the existing rift and gaps between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State—the monograph provides an understanding of other disputes, such as the ties between the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and the nature of their relationship, now at a crossroads in view of the peace agreement being implemented between the United States and the Taliban. In the agreement, the United States requires, as a condition for its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the removal of al-Qaeda and a ban on any activity in the country by the organization or its allies.

The monograph describes in detail the set of considerations behind the alliance between the Taliban and al-Qaeda over the years, its dynamic, and the motives of both sides, which shaped this complicated relationship. The relationship rested on similar world views combined with particular interests, and mutual recognition of the benefits and disadvantages for each of them. The drawbacks included the decision by Bin Laden to pursue an ambitious independent policy, driven by his pretensions to lead the Sunni jihad movement with a prominent media presence, which was extremely bothersome to his Taliban hosts. The Taliban at that time were under great financial pressure, and they agreed to help Bin Laden by providing refuge after he was expelled from Sudan, because of the financial resources he brought with him. Bin Laden's autonomous decision to carry out the attack of September 11 from within Afghanistan, without consulting Mullah Omar, led to the Taliban's loss of control of the country.

Against the background of the dispute between Bin Laden and the Taliban, an argument emerged within the organization between Bin Laden and a senior ideologue who supported the claims of the Taliban, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, who authored the book *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, which formulated the Islamic "strategy of a thousand cuts." According to this strategy, the principles of jihad, which are binding on every Muslim and whereby he must overcome religious hurdles before starting to perform this duty, are void. His thesis is that this personal-individual obligation to perform jihad applies to every Muslim wherever he may be (with no need to move to a religious battlefield), with every means at his disposal. This doctrine was the spur to the "inspirational attacks" that flooded Europe in recent years, in which individuals and groups decided to initiate terror attacks inspired by the Salafi-jihadi movement where they lived and using any means available—firearms, explosives, knives, and vehicles.

In addition to refuting the common opinion that the global jihadi movement is united and coherent, the author, by examining various disputes in the movement over the years, points to the various causes of disagreement. These causes are arrayed along a continuum that includes the ideological-territorial development proposed by Sayyid Qutb against the global approach of al-Qaeda and how to manage the struggle; disputes over the most suitable military doctrine for achieving these objectives; and struggles that ultimately arose from competition for resources, funding, manpower, and territory, including power struggles and leadership ambitions.

In addition, the author distinguishes between the nature of the disputes that existed before and after the September 11 attacks. Before the attacks, the jihadi arena was characterized by a large number of organizations and training camps, each of which was governed by some religious indoctrination alongside military training. Therefore, the disputes at that time

arose from competition for reputation and resources, but also from ideological and strategic definitions of jihad; these were bound up with an inter-generational struggle, in which the younger, more aggressive generation pushed aside the older generation of jihadis who had fought in Afghanistan (1979-1989). After the attack in the United States it was clear that al-Qaeda had imposed an ideological alliance between the belligerent younger members and the older jihadis, exploiting the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban and the foreign invasions of Muslim countries. The disagreements that the organization struggled with until the conflict with Islamic State, which was unusual in its scope, could be managed and settled by means of uncompromising extremism on the one hand, and pragmatism with rapid switches between universal strategic principles on the other.

Tore Hamming is very careful to use an accurate and original transcription of every concept or document translated from Arabic; he does not skirt the challenge to add to knowledge about the Salafi-jihadi movement, and refutes erroneous and unfounded conceptions. This monograph serves his purpose of educating the public, mainly thanks to the exposure of the theoretical depths and shades of the Sunni jihadi movement. In this important collection, Hamming illustrates the relevance of the movement, based on original writings, and thus contributes information and expands the knowledge of his readers.

Further importance of this monograph lies in the fact that can it add to the knowledge both of those who are familiar with the Salafi-jihadi organizations from studies they have read or conducted, and even more so of those who receive their information through the media or from politicians, whose knowledge of the subject is limited. Thus this monograph provides important additional knowledge essential for anyone involved in the process of decision making on contemporary issues relating to the struggles with the Salafi-jihadi movement worldwide, in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, but also for the general public, who follow the movement's activities and wish to form an opinion that is based on facts.

Aviad Mendelboim is a research assistant in the Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict program at INSS.

Yoram Schweitzer is a senior research fellow and head of the Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict program at INSS.

Response to Changes in the Strategic Environment

From Star Wars to Iron Dome: The Controversy over Israel's Missile Defense
by Uzi Rubin
Effi Melzer Publishing, 2019
319 pages [in Hebrew]

Meir Elran

Uzi Rubin's new book is based on his doctoral dissertation, entitled "The Degree of Flexibility of the Defense Establishment in Israel in Comprehending the Changes in Its Strategic Environment: Active Defense as a Test Case." This academic title is more illustrative of the core issues discussed than the actual title given to this important book, which focuses on the less-than-adequate flexibility that Rubin discerns within the IDF's strategic planning processes. This is enlightening because Rubin, a former senior figure at the Ministry of Defense (MOD), possesses intimate familiarity with the IDF's deliberations pertaining to force buildup and the translation of the changing multidimensional threats against Israel into practical critical responses.

The book includes a literature review and two main chapters. The first surveys the history of the controversy within Israel over missile defense, from the Lavi fighter jet program, to Israel's joining the United States Star Wars

defense initiative, through the Iraqi missile attacks during the First Gulf War, and up to the development of the Arrow, David's Sling, and Iron Dome active defense systems. The second chapter discusses the book's central issue: Did the IDF respond adequately to the missile and rocket threat confronting Israel? The book also contains two informative appendices—one addressing the invention of missile boats by the Israeli Navy, and the second addressing the invention of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) by the IDF's Intelligence Directorate and Air Force.

The book poses its basic question at two levels of discussion. The first deals with the adaptive capacities of Israel's defense establishment to revolutionary changes in Israel's strategic environment. The second analyzes this question through test cases relating to the IDF's opposition to the development and deployment of active defense systems against the high-trajectory weapons threat.

In Rubin's well-founded and research-based opinion, the key to deciphering this critical matter lies in the organizational-bureaucratic domain, which often creates an unacceptable level of "passionate conflicts" concerning the development of major defense projects, including in Israel. As the author concludes, "A new project, regardless of its importance, is always the enemy of existing projects." Hence, for Rubin, the main question is: "How capable are the IDF and the entire defense establishment in foreseeing the changes in the security environment, in defining what needs to be done, and in implementing it in time?" These questions are discussed thoroughly in the book, mainly in the context of building the three-tier active missile defense system against high-trajectory weapons in light of the IDF's difficulty to understand, accept, and adopt (against its will) the needed operational response for the defense of the civilian front in Israel.

Rubin proposes two seemingly conflicting answers to these questions. On the one hand, from the process prism, the IDF "failed to discern in time the changes in the strategic

environment, represented by the appearance of missiles and rockets in the region; failed to define in time the new responses needed in the realm of force buildup; and demonstrated inadequate capacities in implementing these changes." On the other hand, in operational terms of actual outcomes, the opposite result was achieved: "The civil defense establishment realized the regional change in time, rapidly defined the needed change in force buildup, and immediately implemented this change whenever it was technologically possible."

The author seeks to bridge this ostensible contradiction by using models of concurrent conservative and innovative approaches in government organizations. His conclusion is that "in the instance of the active defense systems, the innovative civilian echelons prevailed over the rigid and conservative military echelons, enabling the civilian and technology defense establishment to exhibit remarkable adaptive capacity."

To validate this conclusion, the author provides a clear and in-depth review of the history of the development of the missile threat and of the formation of Israel's sophisticated active defense system since the early 1960s. Based on this analysis, he offers several important insights. First, there was a long delay between the appearance of ballistic missiles in the region—which Rubin calls "a revolutionary environmental change"—and Israel's recognition that they indeed constitute a real threat that requires an adequate defensive response. Even after the launch of terror rockets, the IDF adhered to its conservative approach that rejected the defensive method and exclusively adhered to the offensive response to high-trajectory threats. On the other hand, the Ministry of Defense advocated a defensive approach and initiated active defense projects, despite IDF opposition.

Second, the defense establishment launched five missile defense projects since 1988 (Arrow, Nautilus, David's Sling, Arrow 3, and Iron Dome). All except the Nautilus (high-energy

laser) project were successfully developed and deployed. None was an IDF initiative, unlike many other main weapon systems. In fact, the IDF waged a fierce campaign against the launch of the Arrow and Iron Dome. The IDF ended its opposition to these two projects once it became clear that they would not significantly affect its military budget. The US financial assistance to these projects made the difference.

> The author's conclusion is that "in the instance of the active defense systems, the innovative civilian echelons prevailed over the rigid and conservative military echelons, enabling the civilian and technology defense establishment to exhibit remarkable adaptive capacity."

Third, the IDF, like other militaries, usually takes a conservative approach toward new technologies that can affect the architecture of war and require substantial changes in force buildup and deployment. This reflects its principled opposition to the very role of defense (even active defense), and it represents the instinctive opposition of hierarchical organizations to ideas from the outside.

In contrast to the IDF, presented in the book as a "hierarchical organization" with "inherent conservativism" and strong motivation to oppose the intervention of the political echelon in matters that are perceived to be within its purview, Rubin presents the "innovation from below" as exercised by the MOD's Directorate of Defense Research & Development and the defense industries. Rubin proposes that in this rivalry the civilian "entrepreneurship" triumphed over the IDF's "conservativism."

Rubin's book is interesting, highly relevant, and important for understanding the paradoxes inherent in the challenges Israel faces in responding to current-generation threats, which focus on high-trajectory weapon systems and their ramifications for the civilian front. The picture portrayed in this book reflects the IDF's difficulty in adapting

to the evolving strategic reality. At issue is a polar shift from confrontations between states and large standing military formations to hybrid, multidimensional engagements, in which the civilian front (on both sides) is the principal target. Consequently, the mission of defending the civilian fabric (population, critical infrastructure, and society at large) needs to become paramount. This requires an entirely different allocation of attention, resources, and preparations. There is a need to add advanced practical military and civilian defense capacities to the dimensions of deterrence and offense, which traditionally have been viewed in Israel as the key components of the military response to threats. It also applies the construction of robust civilian resilience for the purposes of bouncing back and removing the consequences of the attack, as is expected to take place in a future major confrontation.

> **Rubin's book is interesting, highly relevant, and important for understanding the paradoxes inherent in the challenges Israel faces in responding to current-generation threats, which focus on high-trajectory weapon systems and their ramifications for the civilian front.**

Rubin correctly points to the technological and operational success of the rocket and missile defense systems and gives due credit to the civilian defense establishment. However, the problem is more than techno-operational, and incurs broad and profound consequences for the core of Israel's national security. One can understand from Rubin's book that the IDF as well as the political echelon—even after adopting the defensive components and

integrating the three-tier active defense systems as part of the IDF's force buildup—have still not fully internalized the evolving security reality and have failed to translate the challenging threats against the civilian center into a full, firm, and adequate conceptual and practical response.

At issue here is the transition from a confrontation between states to hybrid confrontations with sub-state adversaries that rely on striking the civilian front, primarily with high-trajectory weapon systems. The Israeli response to this type of threat needs to integrate, in a balanced manner, the military's offensive force buildup with a strengthening of the civilian front. This should entail an updated balance between the offensive and the defensive components, including active (and passive) defense systems. In this respect, Rubin's basic diagnosis remains valid: the IDF is still struggling with the current strategic reality that continues to challenge its conceptual conservativism and its organizational rigidity.

Uzi Rubin's main contribution in this book is to provide a warning signal, which is particularly needed now as the IDF seeks to promote a new five-year buildup plan designed primarily to provide a systemic military response to the current strategic threats.

> Brig. Gen. (ret.) Dr. Meir Elran is a senior research fellow at INSS, where he heads the Homeland Security research program. During his IDF service, he served in the Military Intelligence Directorate. Dr. Elran is the founder and head of the MA program in national security in the department of public policy at Sapir Academic College and teaches at the University of Chicago's Committee on International Relations.

Reading between the Lines

Transformation Under Fire: Revolutionizing How America Fights
by Douglas A. Macgregor, translated into Hebrew by Baruch Korot
Hebrew edition: Modan and the Ministry of Defense, 2007
372 pages

Or Barak

Colonel (ret.) Dr. Douglas Macgregor is one of the most prominent voices that for years have been calling for radical change in the United States armed forces in general, and in the ground forces in particular. Macgregor dedicated his intellectual life to the paradigmatic crisis that has beset the US military and how to overcome it, disseminating his doctrine in this book, which was first published in English in 2003 and translated into Hebrew four years later. IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi's directive to his officers from the rank of lieutenant colonel up to read *Transformation under Fire* has prompted discussion among researchers that has illuminated a broad spectrum of themes.

In the book, which is divided into ten chapters and an appendix, the author insists on the need for fundamental structural changes in modern armies in order to make them more efficient. The vision of this former armored corps officer includes the creation of multi-branch tactical units[1] that would integrate forces and command based on state-of-the-art technological systems. According to Macgregor, this structure will maximize the ground forces' ability to work with the air and naval forces. Joint command of all of the forces and use of digital technologies will establish the most effective channel of communication.

As correct and important as his ideas may be regarding structural contexts of force buildup and analysis of "the global trends that influence the United States' strategic and operational environment, [which] correspond with the questions that Huntington understood as central when it comes to the relevance of military organizations" (Gross, 2020), it is doubtful whether these are the most relevant messages that Macgregor sought to convey.

This assumption relies first and foremost on two explicit warnings that Gross issued, whereby "the considerable time that has passed since the writing of this book" must be taken into account. As such, the Israeli reader must examine critically whether the challenges Macgregor describes as facing the US military early in the previous decade are similar to those facing the IDF in 2020 (Gross, 2020). Moreover, Macgregor himself holds more up-to-date perspectives and presents them in his book *Margin of Victory* (Macgregor, 2016), in which he provides five historical examples that connect forward-looking force buildup with victories on the battlefield. This strengthens the argument that if the intention were to apply Macgregor's military doctrine to the IDF and its commanders, decidedly more recent literature could have been suggested. Moreover, it shows that the tactical and strategic conclusions formulated in this book two decades ago are not necessarily its most important message, and certainly not the only one.

Rather, what is important here is to shine the spotlight on Macgregor's worldview, which highlights a timeless perspective that does not lose its relevance even when challenged by technological developments, as effective as they may be. This worldview validates the assertion

that the impetus for change must include the need to understand the changes and the ability to discard fundamental assumptions as a basis for implementing any change.

The vision of this former armored corps officer includes the creation of multi-branch tactical units that would integrate forces and command based on state-of-the-art technological systems.

The fact that the writer chooses to open each chapter with a quotation is no coincidence. Aside from what these excerpts drawn from various fields contribute to the structure of the book, they form a booklet of interdisciplinary analysis that corresponds well with Macgregor's central motif. The essence of this motif is purposeful change that requires implementation of the principles of innovation as a central component of victory. Macgregor adopts meaningful insights from different realms because in his opinion they can make the military arena more effective.

The book begins with a quotation from the founder of the internet portal LYCOS, Bob Davis: "We have been implementing technology over the past few years almost without regard for the changes that it demands of our organizations.… Empower your employees. Change the process. Make a contribution to organizational effectiveness." This statement illustrates the notion Macgregor seeks to establish in the introductory chapter, which focuses on the fact that military power is no longer based on mass enlistment of manpower and puts forward an up-to-date thesis regarding precision attacks using networked intelligence capabilities that provide a rapid flow and distribution of intelligence.

Chapter 2 opens with a quotation from the philosopher Peter Drucker, the father of modern management theory: "We have tried to substitute mass for purpose. We have tried to regain military potency of defense by making it gigantic, unwieldy, complex. It never works." In other words, changes occur all the time. The faster we identify them and adapt to them, the greater our chance of winning. For example, Macgregor considers weapons of nuclear destruction as something tangible (and not unthinkable), highlights the difference between the old notion of streamlining mass force and the concept of using more limited resources, and states that small and lethal teams are needed, and not mass armies that were intended for territorial victory and conquest.

The third chapter, in which Macgregor relates to potential global threats, opens with the words of the chair of the Harvard University Advanced Leadership Initiative, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, whose explicit goal is to develop new leadership power that is suited to global changes by means of strategies of innovation and leadership for change. In her words, "Nativism limits choices. It closes people's minds to new ideas that come from outside their own group." This approach echoes Macgregor's statements that "rather than trying to forecast the future, we should try to shape it." Macgregor explicitly emphasizes that attempts to breathe new life into comatose concepts "are not a starting point for creative thinking…solutions to the past will only cause us to relive the past."

The fourth chapter opens with a quotation from Admiral Edward [sic] Giambastiani, commander of the United States Joint Forces Command: "While some aspects of transformation involve new systems and high technology, I view the challenge of transformation as principally intellectual." The quotation matches Macgregor's statements in the chapter, which deals with effects-based thinking.[2] This thinking changes the way we see the enemy, ourselves, and the actions to be included and emphasized in planning and carrying out operations, hence leading to the conclusion that "simply put, effects-based thinking is another way to plan backward from victory." The original basic assumption that Macgregor demonstrates requires an inter-branch force to understand the end goal (victory) while progressing toward it. He believes that

"achieving effects that will bring about victory" is what J. F. C. Fuller refers to as "elasticity of mind" (Fuller, 2000, p. 399).

The fifth chapter, which discusses perspectives and architectures for inter-branch warfare conducted by expeditionary forces, opens with a quotation from Lt. Gen. James Gavin from 1947: "We professional soldiers are traditionally laggard in facing and adopting changes." Macgregor undoubtedly could have found a quotation more recent than that of Gavin, who died a decade before the book was written. But similar to Macgregor's conceptual themes, the selected quotation also expresses a timeless message. Macgregor opens the chapter with, "The dominant feature of our time is information technology (IT), the most important feature of which is the leverage that it gives human intelligence in observing, understanding, and adapting to developments in *real time*." In other words, Macgregor suggests that his readers not be surprised by the fact that "the nature of command and control in land warfare changes every time the technology changes…[because] If we are going to reach any degree of joint C4ISR interoperability, we must embrace and understand this new way of thinking. If we do not, we will never realize the potential that lies within IT."

The sixth chapter discusses preparations for global inter-branch warfare of expeditionary forces. Macgregor opens this chapter with another quotation from Gavin: "Organizations designed to fight the last war better, will not win the next!" Like Macgregor and like Kochavi, here Gavin focuses on "victory" itself, conveying the message that unconventional creative thinking, which can overturn basic assumptions if necessary, contains the stuff that victory is made of.

The seventh chapter opens with a quotation from the historian Donald Kagan: "In 1940, the British Fleet could do nothing.…The only thing that could be counted on to deter any German leader who was not insane was the certainty of the presence on the western front, soon after

the outbreak of war, of an army large enough… an army of such a size as the British ultimately put into the field, too late to deter war but just in time to avoid defeat." This idea is echoed by Macgregor, who explicitly states that "contrary to the images of success in action projected onto Hollywood's silver screen, victory in combat is not accidental. It is also not the function of sudden inspiration or dumb luck."

The writer opens the eighth chapter with a message from British psychologist Norman Dixon: "It is indeed ironic that one of the most conservative of professions should be called upon to engage in activities that require the very obverse of conservative mental traits. It is rather like expecting the Pope to run an efficient birth control clinic." This message supports Macgregor's assertion: "If we ask the right questions, the right answers will emerge." The metaphor used by Macgregor later in the chapter, that "it makes no sense to enter mules into the Kentucky Derby when racehorses are needed to win," also echoes the message that opens the chapter, that the emphasis here is not on one particular change or another but rather on the ability to execute one change or another.

The ninth chapter opens with a quotation from Jim Collins: "First, get capable, motivated people on the team—the rule of 'First Who, Then What'.…If a company begins with the right people, it will be better prepared to execute a different strategy when the world changes. And if it has the right people—those with a wired-in drive for excellence—the problem of how to motivate them largely goes away." The explicit "operating instructions" emerging from this quotation are very similar, both on the conceptual level and on the applied level, to the instructions Macgregor specifies, whose essence is the basic belief in human potential and in the value of excellence. He states this directly later in the chapter: "I argue that the cultural legacy of bigger is better, inspired by Henry Ford's assembly line, is the wrong foundation for

combat and institutional strategy for a military organization in the information age."

A message from Donald Rumsfeld, the youngest US Secretary of Defense (in the 1970s) and the oldest Secretary of Defense (in the 2000s), opens the tenth chapter. "Preparing for the future will require us to think differently and develop the kinds of forces and capabilities. . . . An ability to adapt will be critical in a world where surprise and uncertainty are the defining characteristics of our new security environment." This idea mirrors Macgregor's vision, which also sees fit to demonstrate his ideas by citing the Israeli case: "Having succeeded brilliantly in 1967 against virtually all of the surrounding Arab armies, the IDF rested comfortably on its laurels." Yet in the same breath he also notes, "There is little doubt that the IDF would have incurred fewer losses and avoided the initial reverses had it extended its thinking and its development beyond 1967."

"If you are like this doll," Macgregor would say, "I don't need you in my unit. *I need soldiers who can think for themselves.*"

Macgregor's conceptual sub-text regarding the conservative nature of the majority of military commanders and his assertion that "the conservative military mind meticulously plans, trains, and rehearses to eliminate as much risk as possible" warns of a situation in which the army prefers "conservative technology," even at the cost of "less advanced technology." In this sense, his words match the statements of Brig. Gen. (ret.) Shimon Naveh, who established and directed the Operational Theory Research Institute, and who, like Macgregor, was seen as a groundbreaking and controversial writer in the field of the art of war. The writer even quotes Naveh, who referred to Tukhachevskii's approach to military technology and force buildup, which "stemmed from a systemic approach aimed at linking to the advanced operational maneuver, any relevant technology or tactical element that could be utilized in its application."

The writer's own character is reflected in the particular figures he chose to quote at the opening of each chapter. The picture that emerges is clearly of someone who sanctifies independent thinking as a supreme value. This approach is expressed in his famous statement to his soldiers in every opening talk with them: "If you are like this doll," Macgregor begins, "I don't need you in my unit. *I need soldiers who can think for themselves*" (Speiser, 2019).

Transformation Under Fire is not a book about military strategy, even though it discusses strategic issues. To a great extent, it can be seen as a work of military philosophy that focuses on the concept of transformation (Speiser, 2019). This statement joins Macgregor's own repeated assertion that the most important quality for commanders is independent thinking (Speiser, 2019). This summarizing statement, which encapsulates a collection of immortal messages distilled from the book, "emphasizes the indispensability of teaching commanders *how to think* rather than *what to think*," and this, Macgregor believes, is the key.

Thus in deciding to recommend this particular book, Chief of Staff Kochavi likely sought to single out those commanders who would identify the intellectual distinctions that require the reader to seek out the insights inherent in the lines themselves. He evidently aspires to direct his commanders toward groundbreaking thinking with the hope they will not focus on tactics, which, as important as these may be, will not by themselves lead to the next victory.

Dr. Or Barak is a research associate at the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa and author of *The Israel Prize: Politics behind Glory* (2018). In recent years she has studied the topic of victory and its related aspects.

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Notes

1   Units based on information and time and not on masses, in line with the new systemic inter-branch doctrine regarding maneuver and firepower operations.

2   Effect-Based Operations (EBO) is a process aimed at achieving a strategic result through implementation that integrates all military and non-military capabilities on the tactical, systemic, and strategic levels.

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