

Diversifying Strategic Reliance: Broadening the Base of Israel's Sources of Strategic Support

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The Rationale for Strategic Diversification

Since the end of the 1967 War, Israel has been almost entirely dependent on the US as its source of strategic support. This is a highly precarious position for any independent nation -- particularly one living in such inhospitable geo-political conditions as Israel does. While the unusually intimate relationship between Washington and Jerusalem has proved highly advantageous in numerous ways, Israeli leaders should not lose sight of one of the most basic tenets of international relations. This is the fact that the international system still functions essentially in an anarchic, self-help fashion, in which states pursue their own egoistic national interests without coordinating them with, or subordinating them to the interests of other states. Accordingly, the durability of alliances should be considered limited, and contingent solely on a mutual perception of concordant national interests.

The essence of this anarchy was succinctly articulated by Lord Salisbury's observation that in the international system 'the only bond of union that endures [among nations] is the absence of all clashing interests'. Should any contradictory interest arise, there is nothing to sustain such a union, and all mutual obligations between the previously united parties will be of little worth.

Israel should therefore be mindful not only of the fate of such erstwhile US allies as South Vietnam, who were abandoned when the cost of continued support was perceived to be exorbitant, but also of its

own experience with "strategic patrons" in the past. In this regard, France's retraction of support for Israel in the wake of the 1967 war is a particularly pertinent illustration of the transience of inter-state *amiti* -- however cordial relations may initially be. Likewise, the unpleasant episode of severely strained US-Israeli relations during Washington's "reassessment" of its Middle East policy during the Kissinger era should not be forgotten; this too constitutes a sobering, albeit perhaps less extreme, reminder of the potential fickleness of alliances between sovereign states.

There is, of course, much that binds the US and Israel together -- politically, militarily and in terms of shared social values. Nonetheless, both political prudence and past experience suggest that the Israeli leadership should not disregard the prospect that the congruence of US-Israeli interests may not continue indefinitely. A possible divergence of interests may of course arise because of substantive policy disagreements between the two countries on a wide range of issues -- from the proliferation of technology and weapons to relations with the Islamic world. However dissension may also stem from factors largely *unconnected* to Israeli policy itself. Such factors might include: (a) changes in the American domestic power structure and in the relative influence of various pro- and anti-Israeli power centers and/or pressure groups; (b) a reordering of national priorities due to new global realities (such as China's growing challenge to US primacy, or a possible rise in the

importance of Central Asia as an alternative to the Middle East as a major source of energy); or (c) a possible resurgence of isolationist sentiment and preoccupation with domestic issues, fueled by problems of burgeoning ethnic diversity that challenge the prevailing definition of American national identity. These and other developments could all lead to a potential re-channeling of US effort and interest in new directions, which marginalizes, or at least significantly diminishes, the importance of the ME on the US strategic agenda. Accordingly, Israel should not discount the possibility that changing domestic and international conditions may induce a re-definition of Washington's allegiances within the region, and the emergence of more sympathetic US stance towards Arab positions.

There are, however, more "mundane," but perhaps more immediate, grounds for pursuing the concept of diversification of strategic reliance, arising from a possible need to *augment* rather than *replace* US strategic support. Even if the present level of US support continues unabated at its present nominal rate, it may well prove inadequate for Israel's future defense requirements. Such a situation may arise because of (a) inflationary erosion of the real value of the US aid package; (b) the spiraling costs of new advanced weapons systems, over and above the rate of general inflationary rises; (c) real increases in defense requirements (both operational and intelligence) to contend with new emerging threats, ranging from non-conventional ballistic missiles to low-

intensity warfare and terrorism, which the US may be unwilling or unable to shoulder.

Planning for Strategic Diversification

There are thus several substantive reasons why Israel should earnestly consider a scenario in which US strategic support is seriously reduced -- either in absolute terms or relative to new emerging needs -- and set about designing ways to cope with it. Such contingency planning would be appropriate whether the dominant focus is placed on the need to *augment* or to *substitute* -- wholly or partially -- the current sources of strategic resources. In exploring alternatives to deal with such an eventuality, it seems almost self-evident that an indispensable precondition is the identification of states likely to be candidates for participation in prospective strategic partnerships with Israel. In its initial stages, this process would involve singling out states that (a) face common or similar threats (either in terms of the nature of the threat or the nature of the adversary); (b) appear to have common (or at least non-conflicting) interests with Israel; (c) may benefit from exploiting common opportunities.

Subsequently, possible joint strategies should be mapped out, involving utilization of the respective comparative advantages of the participating parties such as: technological expertise, geo-strategic location, financial ability, competitively priced human resources, and so on. The strategies would be aimed at contending with possible threats and/

or realizing opportunities and interests common to both sides. To make these strategies operational, the mapping process would involve several stages, including (i) defining the diplomatic conditions and initiatives (whether overt or covert) required to make such collaborative strategies politically feasible; (ii) designating fields of collaboration (such as cooperative logistics and ordnance activities, joint maneuvers, joint manufacture and development of weapon systems) and *the financing of all these from sources independent of the US budget*; (iii) specifying the extent, the depth and the objectives of collaboration in the selected areas -- both short and long term.

Among the prospective candidate states for such collaborative ventures would be several important non-Islamic countries in Asia. Japan and South Korea, for example, face potential missile threats from North Korea, which also supplies adversaries of Israel, such as Iran and Syria, with ballistic weaponry and know-how. Technological and financial collaboration between the three countries would appear to be no more than a logical imperative dictated by enlightened self-interest. India, too, has to contend with rivals possessing ballistic armaments -- Pakistan and China -- with whom it has been involved in military confrontations along their common borders. There seems, therefore, to be a sound rationale for Indo-Israeli cooperation. Pakistan, sliding into Islamic fundamentalism, has long been antagonistic toward Israel, while China is supplying military hardware and know-

how to some of Israel's most implacable foes. In the future, joint Indo-Israeli naval cooperation may well assume vital importance, particularly because modern satellite surveillance techniques, and the dominant Arab presence along most of the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean make this an increasingly problematic theater for Israel -- especially in terms of maintaining deterrent retaliatory capabilities outside its ever-shrinking, post-Oslo, territorial confines.

It is within the context of these broader parameters that growing Israeli rapprochement with secular Turkey should be construed. The Ankara administration is embroiled in disputes with Syria and Iraq over water, territory and terrorism, and is threatened domestically by the specter of Muslim theocracy. Against this background, the multi-faceted Turco-Israeli collaboration (including weapons upgrading, hardware purchase, joint production and training, and intelligence sharing) should serve as an instructive illustration of how convergent interests can be harnessed in pursuit of mutual strategic advantage -- despite vehement criticism in the Muslim world.

Setting an Agenda: Pitfalls and Payoffs

The preceding discussion, although cursory, is sufficient for a preliminary delineation of spheres of activity that *prima facie* appear most amenable to fertile cooperation. These include the development of means to enhance power projection -- particularly in terms of air and

naval forces; ballistic missile defense systems (BMD) including exploration of the boost phase intercept (BPI) technologies; cooperation in contending with nuclear, chemical and biological (NBC) threats from non-state actors; and development of effective second-strike capabilities (particularly sea- and submarine-borne) which are essential for any credible no-first-use policy.

However, for all the compelling logic in favor of Israel taking vigorous measures to rid itself of its precarious dependency on a single source of strategic support, such a policy is not devoid of possible costs. For while containing several elements of intriguing potential, it is also likely to encounter daunting obstacles, bearing on the feasibility of both the general principle of diversifying Israeli strategic reliance, and that of its implementation in case-specific contexts.

Consequently, judicious consideration of the pros and cons is called for. The areas in which such countervailing evaluations may arise are diverse, and in the concise format of this review, an elaborate analysis of so wide and so weighty a topic is clearly infeasible. It is however possible to propose an initial agenda for more detailed and

thorough investigation in the future. Among the questions that merit serious discussion on such an agenda are:

(a) The effects on US-Israel Relations

* Would broader-based access to strategic resources induce a loss of intimacy with the US, which is still Israel's most important strategic asset? If so, how should these two conflicting prospects be weighed against each other? Alternatively, could greater diversification of strategic reliance serve to *reduce* tensions between Jerusalem and Washington -- by reducing the perceived burden on the US and making Israel's security less of a perceived liability, thereby actually contributing to improved American-Israeli relations?

* Would greater degrees of freedom in strategic reliance make Israel more or less susceptible to US (and international) pressure than at present? Would the US feel more or less inclined to withdraw strategic support for Israel, given the possibility that the latter had other sources to draw on?

(b) Israel's International Posture

* How would closer Israeli military relations with new strategic partners affect

the country's standing in international forums such as the UN? Would closer strategic ties with countries like India, Turkey, South Korea and Japan influence their official positions on the Israel-Arab conflict?

* Would prospective strategic partners expect Israel to project an image of more assertive resolve vis-a-vis the Arabs, which is likely to run counter to the conciliatory policy endorsed by the US? Could perceived Israeli "timidity" be construed as weakness and hence detract from the country's perceived worth as a reliable ally?

(c) Sino-Israeli Relations

* How is Israel to foster closer Indo-Israeli collaboration without damaging Sino-Israeli ties?

* Is it possible that in the future, Washington might actively encourage closer Indo-Israeli relations to counterbalance an increasingly potent China, which could conceivably challenge the status of the US as the leading world power? Should Israel allow itself to be drawn along this path?

(d) Implications for Possible Contravention/Circumvention of the ABM and other Arms Limitation Treaties

* Would a strategic consortium of non-signatories to the ABM treaty open up opportunities for circumventing the prohibitions on development in fields such as BMD systems, BPI and space laser technologies, and satellite-interceptor communications?

* Would such a move be viewed with

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favor or disfavor by various US power centers?

* Could fruits of BMD developments, made autonomously by non-signatories to the ABM Treaty, be used by the US without it being considered a breach of the treaty? If so, what would be the ramifications for countries such as China and the CIS? Would even the *unsolicited* acquisition of BMD know-how, willingly made available to the US by a non-signatory third party,

violate its ABM Treaty undertaking "not to develop, test or deploy ABM systems..."?

These are all topics that significantly affect not only Israel and the future conduct of its affairs in the field of national security and foreign policy, but also the future of many important issues in the international system as a whole. Thus, the concept of strategic diversification has ramifications

that are liable to be far-reaching and complex both on the national and international levels. Accordingly, careful and judicious deliberation is called for in assessing the wisdom and/or necessity of such diversification. Serious debate on the implications of its implementation, together with an evaluation of possible payoffs and potential pitfalls should commence without delay. ■

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