Shifting Tectonic Plates:
Basic Assumptions on the Peace Process Revisited

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In the early 1990s, Israel adopted a new policy whose immediate and practical objective was to achieve normal relations with the Arab world. This turning point was prompted by a host of factors, and the nation's leaders weighed various considerations. This article focuses on two of these factors: first, the US's rising status as a hegemon in the Middle East, and second, the assessment that the military balance of power increasingly favored Israel. These two factors became basic assumptions in the calculations that helped Israel assume the risks of the peace process. The article examines whether these assumptions are still valid, whether strategic turning points require that they be revisited, and what the implications are for Israeli policy.

Assumption 1: The US is the Dominant Element in the Middle East

In 1991, a new regional order took shape.[1] The United States led a coalition to war against Iraq, which resulted in Iraq's defeat and demonstrated the US's political and military effectiveness in the region. After the war, the United States left significant forces deployed in the Gulf. Concomitantly, the Soviet Union collapsed. The new Russia sought ties to the US and international financial institutions, and this too had implications for the Middle East: first, the rejectionist states lost their political patron, and second, Russia withdrew most of its military advisors and assets from the region. In the decades prior to its collapse, the USSR rebuilt the Arab militaries after every war, but its reluctance

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to continue doing so without receiving payment in full complicated any Arab resolve to go to war. The 1991 Gulf War also helped two American principal clients, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, strengthen their status as leaders of the Arab world. The rejectionist states, headed by Iraq, Syria, and Libya, grew increasingly isolated and gradually went bankrupt.

In the 1990s, the United States continued to demonstrate its regional power: it sponsored the UN inspectors, enforced no-fly zones in Iraq, and undertook various operations such as Desert Fox. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, American influence was stepped up yet again: the United States conquered Afghanistan and Iraq, and established a permanent political and military hold there. In late 2003, Iran and Syria were marked as the next targets, and the threat to them was imminent: the United States surrounded Iran from Afghanistan, Central Asia, Iraq, and the Gulf, and Syria too sensed the Americans encroaching. The United States' proven military effectiveness coupled with its willingness to exert force deterred Libya, which even in the absence of a direct threat "volunteered" to abandon its nuclear program.

"In the global balance, the United States, particularly after the crisis in the Gulf, remained the only superpower…an entity seeking to form 'a new world order'…. The realization that now there remained no other practical alternative to a political move to solve the conflict with Israel became more and more widespread…. This is the essence of the new state of affairs."

Brig. Gen. Uri Saguy, 1991

The next test of hegemony took place in Lebanon. In 2005, in a move commonly attributed to Syria, former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri was assassinated. Departing from the past, the American-French response was sufficiently weighted and backed by an implied though reliable military threat. As a result, the Syrian military withdrew from Lebanon after almost twenty years of occupation. It seemed that the pro-Western March 14 coalition was marking a strategic turning point in Lebanon.

The cumulative effect of these events and trends was that the United States became a regional hegemon in the Middle East on the political and military levels. At the height of the process, American units were operating in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Saudi

Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Kyrghystan, and Azerbaijan, and the US navy was operating in the Arabian Sea and in the Mediterranean. The United States maintained the capability for massive and immediate military intervention throughout the Middle East, and the reliability of the American threat was at its peak. It was clear that the United States had both the ability and the willingness to prevent significant harm to its allies' interests as well as to its own.

Assumption 2: A Military Window of Opportunity

In 1988, the Iran-Iraq War ended and Israel's threat reference became "the Eastern front" – a coalition of a number of militaries headed by the Syrian military and Iraqi expeditionary forces. Israel assumed that in the event of war, the Arabs would attempt to confront the IDF symmetrically and capture territory by force. Thus the said war scenario was an attack by Syrian divisions that would traverse dozens of kilometers (from their bases deep in Syrian territory) and Iraqi forces that would cross hundreds of kilometers of exposed desert. Numerically the threat was great, but its nature played to the heart of IDF effectiveness.

In the early 1990s, the IDF started arming itself with new generations of sensors and precision armaments. These gave it the capability of operating deep in enemy territory and provided an effective response to the scenario of Syrian and Iraqi convoys moving along desert roads. A Syrian-Iraqi attack also required overcoming natural and constructed obstacles, but the sensors and precision firepower could allow striking the engineering equipment while advancing towards the obstacles, thereby frustrating the attack, and then precision fire could destroy the mass of armored vehicles.

These developments spawned a new defense doctrine: it was possible to halt an attack with precision firepower, without the need for mobile ground forces, maneuvers into enemy territory, and extensive deployment in one's home territory. Precision firepower requires relatively small forces, so it was therefore possible to maintain it primarily on the basis of the regular military while reducing the number of reservists. Israel's longstanding principles of warfare, such as thrusting the battlefield onto enemy territory and relying on the reserves, began to appear obsolete.

After the 1991 war, the Iraqi threat was removed and the probability of Syria mobilizing a war coalition decreased. As early as the 1980s, Syria was interested in achieving a strategic balance with Israel, but recognized that such a balance was not within its reach. In the mid 1990s an impoverished Syria estimated that it did not have a viable military option and hence it was pointless to invest in military buildup. The result was the neglect of the Syrian military and its deteriorating capability. On the other side stood the IDF, which at the end of the 1980s was at the height of its strength in terms of size, means, training, morale, and sense of capability.

The PLO, which supported Iraq in 1991, was severed from its sources of financing in the Gulf and was politically weakened. From its exile in Tunis, it did not even have significant terrorist capabilities. Palestinian and Shiite organizations in Lebanon did maintain guerilla and rocket capabilities, but these were limited. The first intifada was also declining, and in the early 1990s the non-state threat represented no more than a "serious nuisance."[2]

Former head of Military Intelligence Brig. Gen. (ret.) Uri Saguy wrote, "All Arab leaders…are convinced that Israel's military might can, now and in the foreseeable future, defeat any regional coalition formed against it."[3] Overall, Israel's characteristic situation assessment of the 1990s did not identify significant threats, what suggested a window of opportunity for taking risks.[4]

American Hegemony and Israeli Military Superiority: The Safety Net for the Political Process

In 1992, Israeli policy underwent a thorough shift: the desire for comprehensive peace was no longer just an abstraction, rather a concrete policy for immediate implementation. The sources for this shift can be found in a wide array of factors, some domestic, some US-related, and some stemming from processes within the Arab world. It is also possible to find signs of a shift in the 1987 London agreement and in the 1991 Madrid Conference.[5]

However, the willingness to incur the risks of a peace process rested on two basic assumptions.[6] First, the United States had become the dominant power in the Middle East and its political and military standing created the strategic context in which it was easier for Israel

to assume these risks. The implicit assumption was that the US would be able to block any threat to critical American interests and those of its allies. Second, the regional balance of power favored Israel, and this tendency would grow as the technological gap widened further. Thus, even should Israel make an error in the process and some risk were to materialize, Israel would be able to exert enough force to remove the threat and largely restore the situation to its previous state. The assumption was that military superiority allowed Israel to advance even on ground that was not entirely solid, because the cost it would pay for mistakes and the realization of threats would not be beyond the tolerable.

Revisiting Assumption 1: Has America's Hegemony Waned?

With the transition to the nation-building stage in Afghanistan and Iraq, American military and political effectiveness decreased. The fatigue and lack of popularity of both wars among the American public, particularly Iraq, eroded the domestic political power of President Bush, and obstacles emerged to long term commitments on the Iraqi issue and to the use of force in additional theaters.

While the United States did strengthen its forces in Iraq temporarily (the surge) and saw an improvement in the security situation, in November 2008 it signed the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Iraq, which determined the withdrawal from Iraqi territory: from the cities to the bases in the open areas by the summer of 2009, and totally by the end of 2011. SOFA places more emphasis on dates than on the fulfillment of qualitative criteria, and the ticking clock might make it difficult for the United States to meet its goals. In February 2009, President Obama declared his intention to withdraw most of the fighting force as early as August 2010.

By contrast, Iran is pursuing an effective program of acquiring influence in Iraq.[7] Conditions are convenient, as 60 percent of Iraqis are Shiite and their numbers were reflected in the parliamentary election results: the Islamic-Shiite party, the United Iraqi Alliance, won 128 of the 275 seats. Party leaders include clerics who in the past were exiled to Iran – some identified with the Badr Brigade, an Iraqi-Shiite militia that fought alongside Iran in the Iraq-Iran War, many of whose men were integrated into the official Iraqi security services. Thus Iran's

influence in Iraq is growing, in part because of the appointment of allies to key positions in the regime, thanks to kickbacks to senior personnel and investments of billions of dollars in the Iraqi economy.[8]

Armed Shiite militias operating in Iraq such as Jaysh al-Mehdi benefit from the assistance of the Quds forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Hizbollah. In April 2008, General David Petraeus testified that Iran was training armed forces similar to Hizbollah that would have the capability of operating against Iraq's central government. Similarly, a report by the American Defense Department of September 2008 assessed that the most significant threat to the stability of Iraq was emanating from these organizations, which are largely responsible for the weakening of the US in Mesopotamia.

After the American withdrawal from Iraq, Iran's influence is likely to assume one of two forms. If Iraq manages to maintain a strong central government, Iran may exert political and economic influence over the government together with an ability to threaten its stability (similar to Hizbollah's threat to the Lebanese government). Should Iraq's central government weaken and the ethnic communities manage their affairs independently of one another, Tehran may strengthen its influence over the Shiite south. To be sure, Iraq's Shiite Arabs and the Iranians are not identical; Iraqi Shiites themselves are not a uniform community. However, Iran might acquire religious, economic, security, and political influence in Shiite areas in Iraq. In either case, Iran may become the foreign element whose influence on Iraq is the most pronounced.

"No aspect of the Iraq quagmire can be resolved without Iranian involvement. Washington has a better chance of modifying Iran's influence in Iraq – and Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon – than of immediately halting it."
Samantha Power, *Time*, 2008

Another American-Iranian test of strength occurred in Lebanon. In May 2008, the Lebanese government decided to dismantle the communications network linked to Iran and Syria established by Hizbollah, and take some additional steps against the organization. Hizbollah reacted with force and determination, and the crisis – a military coup in practice – ended not only with the abrogation of these decisions by the Lebanese government, but also with assurances on a change in the balance of power within the state:

Hizbollah gained veto power over government decisions, ensured that Shiite representation in the parliament would increase, and guaranteed a strengthened Hizbollah foothold in the Lebanese military. However, what is most disturbing is what is missing from the story: effective American influence. The United States and France (and even Egypt and Saudi Arabia) were powerless to influence these developments. Certainly their influence was overshadowed by that of Syria and Iran, which once again witnessed that their determination to act against a hesitant West paid off.

An additional American mistake is apparent in the Palestinian context. In 2006, American pressure brought Israel to agree to Hamas' participation in the Palestinian Authority elections. To the surprise of the United States and Israel, Hamas won the elections and ultimately took control of Gaza. Hamas is a Sunni organization with a Palestinian agenda and is not an Iranian proxy. Nonetheless, Iran finances and arms the group, supplies it with political support, and is in fact the power with the most influence over Hamas. Indeed, President Husni Mubarak of Egypt claimed that after the Hamas takeover of Gaza, Egypt had a de factor border with Iran.[9] Iran also threatens other Egyptian interests; e.g., it cooperates militarily with Sudan, Egypt's southern neighbor.

The Egyptian-Iranian fault line was revealed in full during Operation Cast Lead, when for the second time in two and a half years Israel and the Sunni states found themselves on the same strategic side of military action against the Iranian crescent. What is no less surprising is that the Iranian attempt to undermine Egypt – America's closest Arab ally – was not met with an effective American response.

> Israel's decreased ability to remove the new threats quickly and the heavy toll involved in terms of attrition and diplomatic entanglements has made the notion that Israel can take risks difficult to sustain.

However, the most telling lack of American effectiveness with regard to Iran is over the nuclear issue. This is shaped by three factors: the difficulty in building a wide coalition supporting sanctions (even though the Arab world, Russia, and China share the concern about a nuclear Iran); the lack of a credible American threat of immediate military actions, even without a supportive coalition; and Iranian resolve versus Western hesitancy. The Iranian leadership

regards nuclearization as a strategic interest of the highest order, and Iran is willing to pay a steep price to achieve it. Iran does not view the West, reluctant to pay the price of a confrontation, as a factor capable of derailing it from its course. Indeed, recent expressions in the West have implied the necessity of learning to live with a nuclear Iran, which is reflected in reports about American intentions to offer its allies a "nuclear umbrella." Without an immediate change in policy, Iran is likely to attain nuclear capabilities, or at least attain reliable nuclear opacity in the near future.

The significance of a nuclear Iran is far-reaching. It is unclear whether it is possible to maintain a lasting deterrence balance along the lines of the MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) of the Cold War. There is concern over knowledge and materiel that might leak into the hands of non-state entities and the start of a multilateral nuclear arms race. Furthermore, there is concern that the Iranian regime or the regime of other nations that might consequently acquire nuclear capabilities will collapse, and that the nuclear capabilities will fall into unanticipated hands.

However, the most practical implication of a nuclear Iran is a change in the rules of the regional and global game, in particular shifting the boundaries of Iran's influence and its freedom of action, if it harms American interests or those of its allies. For example, if a nuclear Iran takes control of territories it claims in the Straits of Hormuz, the United States will find it difficult to shape a response. Credible nuclear opacity is enough to complicate the Untied States acting against Iran the way it acted against Iraq in the 1990s or against Serbia.

Iran may hint as to the existence of a nuclear umbrella to its allies. The credibility of such an umbrella is not high, but doubt is enough in order to impinge on freedom of action against Syria, Hizbollah, Hamas, or future pro-Iranian satellites. Iran's self-confidence will grow and it may provoke the United States or Israel, push limits, and in a series of escalating tests challenge their willingness to go to the nuclear threshold. Likewise, the Arabs and Turkey may seek to forge a closer relationship with Iran, which would afford it greater political influence. When American and Iranian interests clash, third party states may side specifically with an Iran that joins nuclear capability with determination

to use force and an ability to threaten the moderate regimes (and the radical ones too, should they change) with a host of different threats.

Iran threatens other critical interests of the United States as well, with its involvement in Afghanistan, a military presence in a number of states in the Horn of Africa, support for Shiite rebels in Yemen, a greedy eye on Bahrain (with its Shiite majority), and even a foothold in Venezuela and other Latin American countries as well as along the drug smuggling routes through Mexico to the United States. The United States is not responding effectively to these moves either.

Granted, Iran is a regional power, but with a GDP comparable to that of the state of Maryland it is clearly not a peer competitor to the only superpower in the world. Furthermore, despite the cooperation between Iran and China and Russia, including on issues of nuclear programs, weapons, and Central Asia, they do not fall into the same strategic camp. However, the loci of friction between a nuclearizing Iran and its proxies on the one hand, and the United States and its allies on the other, are clearly apparent, and it is incumbent on us to connect the dots and draw a coherent, dynamic and developing picture. Indeed, we are witnessing the Iranians eroding America's regional dominance. A Shiite crescent with territorial continuity has started to form from Tehran through Karbala and Damascus and ending in Bint Jbail. Iran's influence is liable to reach Gaza, the northeastern and southwestern shores of the Arabian Peninsula, Bab al-Mandeb, and Central Asia. One of the fundamentals of the Iranian strategy is building the capability to threaten Arab regimes via satellites operating within the various Arab countries, while preserving the ability to deny its own involvement.

President Obama's policy towards Iran is not fully clear. The administration has declared the need for dialogue alongside the need to stop Iran from going nuclear, but the declarations have yet to be translated into practical policies. The first period of the Obama presidency points to attempts to conduct foreign policy based on dialogue. Attempts at dialogue provide Iran with precious time, and Iran is skilled at exploiting time while advancing its own nuclear interests. In Washington, there are also voices calling for waiting until after the Iranian elections, which is problematic for two reasons: first, it supplies Iran with additional months to advance its program, and second, the idea indicates a measure of confusion between the representational

figure of the president and the real decision makers behind the scenes of the Iranian establishment. Therefore, it remains highly uncertain whether White House policy will be effective in stopping Iran.

Revisiting Assumption 2: Can Political Errors Still be Corrected Militarily?

The peace process represents a legitimate and to a great extent essential strategic move, but the complement to the risks of the peace process should have been the strengthening of the IDF. Israel's military power was what created the context and motivation of leaders like President Sadat to abandon the path of war in the first place, and therefore Israel's weakened military power might undermine the strategic basis of peace.

However, Israel's leadership believed that the peace process represented a substitute for military power (what used to be called "peace is security"), and did not understand that military power was the foundation of peace. Israel sought to cash in on the peace dividend several decades too early. The defense budget was slashed, and according to certain parameters the IDF lost up to one-third of its size. The IDF also experienced an erosion of values: the commanders came of age on the basis of the slogan, "There is no military solution," whereas the military – any military anywhere – must think primarily in terms of military solutions. The military commanders are supposed to be "noble horses" (in Moshe Dayan's expression), always galloping into battle, with the politicians in charge of restraining them. The message that pronounced an end to the age of war caused the sharpness, aggressiveness, and sense of urgency that had characterized the IDF until the early 1990s to yield to a kind of gray mediocrity and lethargy. The inevitable result emerged in the Second Lebanon War.

The Second Lebanon War had implications beyond its immediate circumstances. It aroused a sense of competence among Israel's neighbors, and that brought war back into the range of viable options. Syria, for example, once again began to invest enormous amounts of money into its military and train it intensively after some fifteen years of neglect. The Second Lebanon War demonstrated that the non-state threat was more than just a case of a "serious nuisance," and had become a strategic threat of the first order. If in the past there were two types of major threats, the symmetrical military threat and terrorist

activity, today there are more varied types of threats. Terrorism in the West Bank, Hamas in Gaza, Hizbollah – a non-state entity with state capabilities, Syria – a state adopting a guerilla paradigm, and distant Iran all require a more varied approach to constructing forces and forging new operational approaches. However, the IDF is not large enough, and the current force structure is not adequate for the full spectrum of new threats and the combination of multiple threats at any one time. So, for example, the air force and navy are structured primarily for missions in nearby arenas. An air force supposed to wage an extended, massive, and distant campaign requires the capabilities akin to those of the US Strategic Air Command that operated until 1992. The navy too needs to beef up its capabilities to undertake a massive and extended attack against dozens of targets deep in enemy territory 5,000 km away from its own ports.

However, the most significant lesson of 2006 is the change in the Arab war concept. Particularly noteworthy was the transition from a military strategy of the direct approach (i.e., an attempt to capture territory and defeat the IDF in battle, an approach that characterized the thinking of the regular Arab armed forces in previous decades) to a strategy of indirect approach, which attempts to exhaust and weaken Israel by means of extended wars and periods of instability between them. The symmetrical and direct military encounter has been replaced by the asymmetrical response, which seeks to offset the IDF's tactical and technological advantages and render them less relevant. The source of the asymmetry is the non-state enemy, but its success has led states such as Syria to likewise adopt components of military asymmetry. Indeed, we are witnessing the creation of hybrid threats: the non-state enemy acquiring state-like strategic military capabilities in terms of quality and quantity, and thus the confrontation has climbed from the level of low intensity terrorist attacks to one of high intensity strategic firepower. By contrast, the state enemy is trying to adopt and adjust to non-state military attributes.

The new war paradigm is implemented via three principles. First, the main form of battle on the part of Syria, Hizbollah, and Hamas is the attack on the Israeli civilian rear with disappearing and highly redundant rocket and missile forces that are hard to trace and destroy completely. Second, the enemy tries to avoid symmetrical engagements

in large battles that would provide the IDF with an opportunity to attain a military decision. Third, the enemy tends to hide within its own civilian population and use it as a human shield. In this way, complex wars are created primarily involving the civilians on both sides; it is difficult to achieve a military decision in such wars using a strong, rapid, and elegant move. These are wars in which direct threat is difficult to remove (i.e., find and completely annihilate the disappearing and highly redundant sources of the enemy's firepower). They involve no aerial or armored battles, and even the sensors and precision fire meant to provide a solution to a 1973-like scenario have a hard time operating effectively. Thus the war is longer, which often results in attrition and diplomatic and international public opinion entanglements.

The common wisdom that in the age of missiles territory is of no significance has proven problematic. One possible response to the rocket threat is taking control of enemy launching areas, which requires an ever-deeper maneuver as the rocket range increases. A second though indirect response to the new Arab war paradigm is to create an opposite asymmetrical threat, achieved through deep maneuvers towards the enemy's strategic centers of gravity. Thus, the change in the Arab war paradigm decreases the defensive importance of territory, but at the same time increases its offensive importance. The new strategic balance is between Arab firepower and Israel's maneuvering and territory-conquering capabilities. Thus, Israel once again comes to rely on a large maneuvering force, and the principle of waging the battle on enemy territory returns. Since the new fire capabilities of the Arabs are liable to disrupt the mobilization of the reserves, the need for a large regular military benefiting from redundancy becomes acute.

The combination of Israel's decreased ability to remove the new threats quickly and the heavy toll involved in terms of attrition and diplomatic entanglements has made the notion that Israel can take risks – and should the threats materialize, it could simply return to the previous military state – difficult to sustain. Thus, for example, the unilateral withdrawals from southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip generated ever-growing threats that even erupt from time to time. The latent risk of unilateral withdrawals has materialized, yet Israel has not succeeded in returning the military situation to its previous state; at the end state of the 2006 and 2008-9 campaigns, Israel accepted the

continued growth of the threats. By contrast, in Operation Defensive Shield (2002), and particularly in the ongoing activity that continued after the operation, Israel restored the situation in the West Bank to its previous state (militarily, though not politically), and it was clear that regaining operational and intelligence control over the territory allowed for the removal of the threat.

For its part Operation Cast Lead had some positive implications: the restoring of Israeli self-confidence and its ability to project strength. Moreover, the campaign was an important step in confronting the new war paradigm of the Arabs. What allows this paradigm to exist is the fact that the enemies placed on Israel the burden of responsibility for the security of their own civilians, a responsibility Israel accepted – and therefore acted with significant restraint. Yet assuming responsibility for its own civilians and also for enemy civilians, thereby absolving the enemy of that responsibility, created an impossible situation for Israel. In Operation Cast Lead, Israel operated more freely than in the past – though within the rules of international law – against enemy combatants wherever they were to be found, even among civilians. Some call this the "Dahiya doctrine," a reference to the attack on the Dahiya quarter of Beirut in the Second Lebanon War, which contributed to deterring Hizbollah and to undermining the enemy's paradigm.

However, in weighing the range of new threats – from the distant Iran, through a disappearing and decentralized enemy armed with rockets generating a strategic effect, to terrorism in all its forms, to conventional armed forces, some of which are equipped with Western weapons – it seems that the IDF's capability of removing threats quickly is inferior to what it was in the early 1990s. It is doubtful whether it is still possible to claim that military superiority allows Israel to correct every strategic error at a tolerable price, or whether we can always turn back the military wheel.

Revisiting Security Arrangements

Over the years Israel formulated an approach to security arrangements appended to political agreements, and their core is the prevention of surprises. Therefore, Israel strives to disengage the forces by defining demilitarized and sparsely militarized zones, inviting multi-national supervision, and using other mechanisms intended to give early

warning about the enemy preparations for waging war. This approach was perhaps appropriate for the challenges of the past, but its relevance to the present is questionable.

The war paradigm of some of Israel's enemies has changed from a direct approach of conquering territory to attrition by means of rocket fire from the depth of enemy territory towards the Israeli home front coupled with a low signature but fire-saturated ground defense. In this new reality, placing distance between the armed forces does nothing to protect Israel from a surprise attack, rather creates even more convenient terms for realizing the enemy's war outline. Separating the forces provides the enemy's firepower sources with an additional layer of protection, and makes it more difficult to take control of the launching areas or undertake a strategic maneuver deep into enemy territory. Demilitarization and thinning out of troops are also less effective in the context of guerilla and anti-tank means, which have become a core component of ground battles. Ironically, what Israel needs today in order to maintain strategic balance and ensure peace is not the separation of forces but actually convenient corridors of approach to neighboring territories. One must not dismiss the idea of early warning, but as the probability of invasion decreases it is necessary for the sake of operational convenience rather than for existential reasons such as in 1973. Moreover, when Israel's enemies favored a symmetrical war paradigm, complex preparations were required for starting a war, such as moving thousands of tanks and logistics from home bases to the front lines. However, in the current paradigm, it is possible to begin firing rockets even after only minimal preparations.

Another lesson linked to security arrangements has emerged from the unilateral withdrawals. Both in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon, chaotic non-state spaces emerged, and therefore it is difficult to arrive at satisfactory security arrangements there. This must serve as a red light before any additional unilateral withdrawal. These lessons correlate with the lessons the Americans have learned in Iraq and Afghanistan (as well as Pakistan): not every population in every area tends to organize itself on the basis of state rationale, even when given the opportunity to do so. Sometimes, the natural state of organization is based on religious, ethnic, tribal, or family rationale, while the avoidance of the state system naturally creates unstable situations. Furthermore,

the seventeen years that have passed have provided critical perspective with regard to relying on foreign forces for security arrangements. For example, the very partial success of UNIFIL in enforcing UN Security Council Resolution 1701, of the Europeans and Egyptians in preventing arms smuggling through the Philadelphi axis, and of the Palestinian Authority in preventing terrorism is not an encouraging model for the future.

The Implications for Israeli Policy

The tectonic plates of strategic reality are in constant motion. Ironically, Israel's natural partners in blocking Tehran are Cairo and Riyadh, and at times it seems as if Jerusalem's point of view is closer to theirs than to Washington's.[10] Meanwhile, Iran is eroding America's hegemony in the Middle East and establishing proxies undermining the status quo. If Iran attains nuclear capability, the movement of the tectonic plates is liable to prompt a strategic earthquake.

The question now at Israel's doorstep is the effect of these changes on its policies. It is possible to point to two alternative approaches: one contends that Israel must hurry and arrive at a peace settlement before Iran goes nuclear. According to this approach, Israel must strive to shape the regional political reality; whereby normalizing relations with the Palestinians and the Syrians should strengthen the moderate camp and disrupt Iranian plans. Military power and territory are but two pieces of the puzzle and, under certain circumstances, the strategic value of a political arrangement could be higher than the military factor.

A second approach holds that stable and lasting peace agreements require an enabling strategic environment as a precondition. Based on this approach, if there are already strategic balances in place it is then possible to arrive at a formal settlement, but if the strategic environment is unstable then the formal settlement on its own will be hard put to stabilize it; the settlement may not survive the blows of strategic instability.

According to this second approach, shifts of the tectonic plates – i.e., the proliferation of Iranian state and non-state satellites in the region, and the possibility of Iran's attaining nuclear weapons – are not the result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and therefore an Arab-Israeli settlement will be hard pressed to prevent them. The causes and

motivations for these processes are clearly much deeper and wider than the Arab-Israeli conflict. In addition, one of Iran's major programs is the creation of satellites within Arab states and development of capabilities threatening the regimes from within. Therefore, the second approach holds that without stopping Iran, even a settlement of one kind or another with Syria or the Palestinians will struggle to stop these trends over time, and the settlements (and regimes) will find it difficult to withstand the tests of time.

Yet whether we choose the first or the second approach, it seems that peace is another layer built on the foundation of military superiority, and a political settlement is not a substitute for military power. Military power is specifically meant to serve a situation in which the political arrangement collapses, and therefore it is a methodological and logical error to claim that the political settlement guarantees itself. The other side of the "peace is security" coin is that we have no military response should peace collapse, and we must take that into consideration as well. On the contrary, loss of territory requires compensation in the form of a large and immediately available force; the new firepower capabilities of Israel's neighbors – liable to disrupt the process of mobilizing the reserves and to harm the military rear – require the strengthening of the regular force and expanding military dispersion and redundancy. In certain senses, Israel's security deficit – i.e., the gap between the threats and the ability to remove them quickly at a tolerable cost – is one of the worst we have ever experienced. Therefore, Israel must significantly enlarge its defense budget and develop a host of new capabilities and approaches.

The changed reality must also teach us not to base a long term strategy on a certain confluence of circumstances existing at the time of an assessment (including the circumstances described in this article) that may not last into the future. Stability cannot be learned from a slice of any one given situation, but is rather an ongoing, dynamic process. It is necessary to maintain the strategic balance continuously over time and under changing circumstances.

Notes

1 President George H. W. Bush to Congress, September 11, 1990: "A new world order can emerge."

2 Uri Saguy, *Lights in the Mist* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1998), p. 174.

3 Ibid., p. 293.
4 See, for example, Ibid., pp. 191, 208, 280, 292-95.
5 In his situation assessment for 1991, then-Intelligence head Brig. Gen. Uri Saguy wrote, "There was no one challenging the idea that in the global balance, the United States, particularly after the crisis in the Gulf, remained the only superpower, with all other nations knocking at its doors, an entity seeking to form 'a new world order'… In the Middle East, the defeat of Iraq, in the past the central pillar of the total Arab military body, was a crushing blow to the Arab philosophy that had supported a solution by force… and thereby opened the possibility of some Eastern front…As a result, the realization that now there remained no other practical alternative to a political move to solve the conflict with Israel became more and more widespread, taking root even in Syria. It seems to me that this is the essence of the new state of affairs." Ibid., pp. 153-54.
6 See, for example, Ibid., pp. 144, 147-48, 153-54, 191-92.
7 For sources and extensive reading, see for example Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and "Other Means,"* Combating Terrorism Center, West Point, October 13, 2008.
8 "No aspect of the Iraq quagmire can be resolved without Iranian involvement. Washington has a better chance of modifying Iran's influence in Iraq--and Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon--than of immediately halting it," Samantha Power, *Time*, January 17, 2008.
9 Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *Haaretz*, June 29, 2008.
10 This is reflected, for example, in the Baker-Hamilton Report and its echoes of the thinking of the early 1990s, whereby the regional friction fault line is the Arab-Israeli one, which mostly emanates from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the promotion of US interests in the region requires payments in Israeli currency. Yet today, the fault line is with Iran. Seventeen years of the peace process have made moderate Arabs weary of the Palestinians, and the regional interest in containing Iran is mutual and its promotion requires no payment in Israeli currency.