In This Edition

Syria's National Security Concept in the Wake of a Peace Treaty with Israel

Ephraim Kam

*T*he renewal of peace negotiations with Syria focuses attention on the security arrangements which are vital for Israel and on the implications of a peace treaty with Syria vis-a-vis Israel's security. Much less attention is given in Israel to the ramifications of such a peace treaty with regard to Syria's national security problems, though this issue has important implications on Syria's stand in the context of the talks and on its defense policies following the achievement of a peace agreement. This article seeks to address the ramifications of an Israel-Syria peace treaty, if it is achieved, from the standpoint of Syria's post-treaty security concepts and the potential changes that might take place in these perspectives under conditions of peace.

Security Concepts and Changes in Them

The formulation of national security policy is influenced by a series of factors, the principal ones being: perception of the threat created by the enemy; the national resources available to the government; the basic interests and considerations of the country; definition of the national security goals; and assessment of risks versus the likelihood of achieving these goals. The national security concept defines the possible courses of action for achieving national goals, advancing the central security interests, and devising the response to the threats the country faces.

Since these factors are not static, the perception of security needs is also constantly evolving and being

US relations risk being harmed if Israeli weapons technologies are turned against American soldiers during a crisis in that region. Israel must be extremely cautious in all matters involving the sale of weapons and transfer of military technologies to China and must totally avoid transferring such technologies to Taiwan.

The article by Emily Landau and Tamar Maltz surveys the international treaties dealing with control of unconventional weapons — the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty. Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Biological Weapons Convention.

The authors examine the degree to which these treaties have been implemented in the Middle East and assess Israel's stand with regard to each.

Ariel Sobelman's article discusses the implications of cyber-terror and examines the correct approaches for dealing with it. Sobelman enumerates four reasons why efforts at coping with such terror have not succeeded to date. He calls for the formation of an international mechanism which would precisely define the types of threat (criminal, terrorist, and so forth) and specify the kinds of responses needed to deal with each type of threat, with responsibility shared by national and international authorities.

redefined in consonance with changing realities. Ordinarily, the process of change in security perceptions is a slow and gradual one. Occasionally, however, changes take place with relative speed, as a result of developments and events of strategic significance which have ramifications for a country's security issues. Such developments might be wars or intense military actions; peace agreements and rapprochement; long-range global changes; important changes between a country and the superpowers; changes in the regional balance of forces; changes in the regime of the country itself or those neighboring it, which have implications on its security issues; or severe and protracted economic crises.

Syria's Security Perception in the Current Era

Syria's security perception has undergone important changes under the regime of President Hafez el-Assad. These derive from the central developments over the past generations which have affected the country's security problems:

• the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars, which changed the perception of the Israeli threat and assessments of the Israel-Arab balance of power from Syria's viewpoint;

• the Israel-Egypt peace agreement, which left Syria alone in the circle of war against Israel; the Iraq-Iran War, the Gulf War, and the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan — which

totally eliminated the likelihood (which was low in any event) of forging an eastern front against Israel;

• the collapse of the Soviet Union, which left Syria bereft of superpower support, leaving it to cope with a reality in which the United States is the only superpower in the world, let alone the Middle East; and

• the throes of the economic crisis which Syria has been experiencing since the mid-1980s, seriously inhibiting its ability to increase its military strength.

Against the backdrop of these changes, the key elements of Syria's security perception, as they have taken form since the mid-1980s, can be summarized as follows:

• Israel constitutes the main threat to Syria. This is not an existential threat against Syria's independence and sovereignty, but Israel does present a significant threat to key areas of Syrian security: territorial integrity , military functioning, parts of its populace, strategic targets within its territory, and its status and presence in Lebanon. Understandably, the Israeli threat grew substantially in Syria's eyes in the wake of the Six Day War, as Israel's control of the Golan Heights has presented a threat to the Damascus area, reduced Syria's ability to threaten or respond to threats vis-a-vis northern Israel, and accorded an intelligence advantage to Israel. In spite of this, it would appear that Syria believes, at least over the past decade, that the likelihood of Israel initiating a

substantial military confrontation is not high. This assessment is based on the premise that Israel has no interest in an additional war with Syria, since it would not gain any significant advantages from such developments, while the price would be heavy.

- Syria faces threats from additional countries, primarily Turkey and Iraq. The severity of these threats is far less than the Israeli one and they have never reached a level of comprehensive military confrontation with either country. Nonetheless, these threats have important implications in and of themselves. The Syrians are fearful primarily of limited confrontations with Turkey, conflicts with it over borders and water, and Turkish attempts at subversion. The growing military cooperation between Israel and Turkey is of greater concern to Syria than to any other Arab country; it is seen constituting an additional, albeit limited, military threat. Internal threats to the Syrian regime, perceived as part of the potential threat affecting national security, have been considered low since at least the mid-1980s.

- Syria's strategic goals of the 1940s and 1950s — destruction of the State of Israel or, at least, conquering Israel's northern territory — have been set aside as being impracticable since 1967; they may still be harbored, however, as an aspiration for the distant future, if and when the balance of power vis-a-vis Israel changes significantly in favor of Syria and the Arabs. Syria's

principal strategic goal during the current era has been the return of the Golan Heights to its control. For many years, Syria believed the primary option for achieving this goal was the military one, with the political options serving only as reinforcing and complementary devices. To this end, Syria sought to build an independent military power which would serve as a deterrent against Israel at the first stage, with a good defensive capability if Israel would not be deterred, and which would be a foundation for building an offensive capability at later stages. It would appear that Syria's assessment since the mid-1980s has been that it has achieved an appreciable defense capability but has not amassed power sufficient to enable it to initiate a comprehensive military attack against Israel.

- On the basis of this approach, the main factor which shaped Syria's security concept vis-a-vis Israel was its reading of the strategic-military balance of forces between Israel and the Arab states, particularly Israel's capabilities against Syria. Since 1967, Syria's assessment has been that Israel enjoys a comprehensive strategic-military advantage over Syria and, evidently, over a coalition of relevant Arab forces, as well. In Syria's eyes, Israel's advantage derives primarily from its qualitative technological edge over the Arabs, including its prominent air-power advantage. Based on this appraisal of Israel's cumulative superiority, Syria has, since

the Yom Kippur War, avoided initiating any military action against Israel, maintaining total quiet on the Golan Heights border, even when the political process between the two countries was completely frozen.

- The Syrian presence in Lebanon and, in this context, its military deployment in the Beka'a Valley, are of central importance to Syria's security philosophy. The Syrian deployment in the Beka'a Valley is important not only for the sake of maintaining its position in Lebanon, but also as a crucial component of Syria's defense system — protecting its soft underbelly on the Golan Heights and defending the Damascus area and the country's interior. Beyond the defense aspect, the Syrians believe that Lebanon accords them an attack advantage against Israel, since, on the basis of the buildup process, which the Syrian forces underwent in the 1980s, this deployment broadens the offensive options.

- Arab unity traditionally was perceived as a central component of Syria's security concept. Upon being weakened, Syria sought to make use of the military might of Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq; of the political weight of the Arab world; and of the economic riches of the oil-producing countries and the pressure they could wield, in order to create a cumulative advantage over Israel. Over the past two decades, however, this component collapsed entirely: Egypt and Jordan signed peace agreements with Israel, while a

weakened Iraq became mired in its problems in the Persian Gulf. It is clear to the Syrians that the inability and unwillingness of the Arab states to unify in a military pact against Israel is not merely a temporary condition. Once Egypt, in particular, retreated from the circle of war with Israel, Syria reached the conclusion that it must create a "strategic parity" against Israel in the event it might find itself alone in a military confrontation with Israel. Moreover, since the end of the 1980s, there has been an inclination among most Arab leaderships toward making peace with Israel, rather than engaging in further military confrontations.

• The reliance on the Soviet Union was, for many years, a key component of Syria's security concept — as a source of weapons and military aid, political support, and, primarily, strategic backing in case of military collapse. This backing — which was problematic even during the good years — collapsed entirely when the USSR fell apart. For Syria, loss of superpower support was all the more severe in view of Israel's strategic relations with the US, which are stronger than ever.

By the end of the 1980s, Syria was aware of the fact that its security concept was in shambles: Soviet backing was gone; the chances of receiving assistance from the Arab collective were dimmer than ever and functionally impractical; and the process of expanding its military

strength had been suspended in the mid-1980s, with the onset of unabated economic distress. Thus, Syria's traditional security concept left it without a practicable way of regaining the Golan Heights. As a result, Syria was forced in the early 1990s to shift the emphasis from the military option to the political one and to attempt to strengthen its national security in this manner.

Influence of Peace with Israel on Syria's Security Concept

The starting point for the continuation of this analysis is the assumption that a peace treaty between Israel and Syria

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will be signed in the foreseeable future. Within the framework of such an agreement, Israel will withdraw to the international border, with some adjustments to it. There will be agreement over security arrangements, which will satisfy Israel, and normalization of relations on the Israel-Egypt model. Similarly, a peace agreement will be signed between Israel and Lebanon, with the latter

undertaking (with Syrian backing) to assure peace along the border between the two countries.

The question which will be examined below is: How will such a peace affect Syria's security concept? It should first be stated that there are not yet any concrete facts on which to base the answer to this question, especially as the Syrians have not expressed themselves in this regard — probably because they themselves have not yet formulated the answer. Examination of the issue will, therefore, be made via logical analysis of the contributing factors as they are probably viewed by the Syrians. Use can also be made of the Egyptian model, which is over two decades old, in spite of the differences between the security concepts of Egypt and Syria.

Syria's security concept is expected to undergo comprehensive and substantial changes in the wake of a peace agreement with Israel. The main change will take place in the context of Israel-Syria relations and the consequent ramifications for Syria's security concept. Clearly, a peace agreement will also have impact on ancillary components of this concept. First, Syria will have to redefine its position in the Arab world. For the past two generations, Syria has positioned itself at the forefront of the uncompromising struggle against Israel, ultimately failing to exploit this struggle to unify the Arab world around it. Syria's special role as the standard bearer of the struggle against

Israel has already been reduced, and it is expected to diminish even more upon signing a peace treaty with Israel. This situation will not only obligate Syria to reformulate its strategic goals vis-a-vis Israel, but also to redefine its own uniqueness within the Arab world. It is doubtful whether the Syrians have an answer to this fundamental question as yet. In any event, their decisions in its regard will have important ramifications for the development of the county's new national security concept.

Second, a significant change will take place in Syria's relations with the United States. It is hard to imagine that the Syrians will become allies of the US in the region, developing a special relationship like that between Egypt and the US. There is no doubt, however, but that there will be a significant improvement in the political relations between them, and Syria will receive considerable American economic assistance, along with arms. This change might contribute to establishing Syria's position in the region as a country connected to the West and modifying Syria's perceptions of the level of external threats directed toward it.

Third, peace with Israel may have an impact on Syria's security relations with three central countries in the region:
- Closer relations with the US can contribute to improvement of Syria's relations with Turkey. Even if such an improvement takes place, however, it

will not significantly reduce the Syrian perception of the limited threat Turkey poses toward it, along with the concerns it has from the growing closeness between Turkey and Israel, by virtue of the fact that the elements which form the foundation of the relationships will not have changed in substance.
- Peace with Israel will affect Syria's relations with Iran. Since the Islamic revolution, Iran has been the closest country in the region to Syria. Its contributions to Syria's national security have been limited, however, focusing primarily, instead, on jointly creating pressure on Israel via Lebanon. In addition, it has cooperated with Syria on a limited basis in the areas of military industry and intelligence gathering. Conclusion of Syria's military conflict with Israel, the expected closer relations with the US, and the changes which will take place in Lebanon, including changes in the status of Hizballah, will, in combination, harm the relations between Syria and Iran. There is no reason to assume that a total suspension of relations will take place, but their shared interests will be reduced substantially (albeit not entirely), and disagreements probably will develop as to the attitude toward Israel and the US and with regard to the Lebanon issue -- at least as long as no real change takes place in the character of the Iranian regime and its policies.
- The precarious relations between

Syria and Iraq derive largely from the great enmity, which prevails between the two regimes and is not appreciably affected by attitudes toward Israel. It appears, therefore, that peace with Israel will not necessarily cause any change in their relations; at least not while Saddam Hussein continues to be in power. The change which might take place would occur in Iraqi policy in the longer term: It is expected that Iraq's motives — especially post-Saddam — to continue its campaign against Israel will be diminished once Syria exits the cycle of confrontation with Israel and all the countries bordering Israel have peace agreements with it. This might even contribute to creating dialogue between Syria and Iraq. A similar process may well take place in Iran, as long as its internal changes continue to evolve. If such a process develops, it may have the effect of further reinforcing Syria's willingness to conclude its conflicts with Israel.

Effect of Peace on the Israeli Component in Syria's Security Concept

It is fair to assume that the severity of the Israeli threat will gradually diminish in Syria's eyes, following the signing of a peace agreement with Israel. In general, a country's threat perception derives from a combination of two assessments: of the other side's intentions and of its ability to implement these intentions. A change is expected to take place in Syria's

perception of both Israel's intentions and capabilities. There is reason to assume that, following the signing of a peace agreement, the Syrians will gradually reach the conclusion that the likelihood of Israel taking military action — whether broad or limited — against them will be very small. A number of reasons will contribute to this assessment: the very fact of Israel signing a peace agreement with Syria and its willingness to pay a heavy price for it; the price it would pay for abrogating such an agreement; direct contact with Israel and its leadership; and the American involvement in maintaining the peace agreement. At the same time, it appears that Israel's perceived ability to actualize a military threat will decline. From the Syrians' viewpoint, Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the mutual security arrangements will reduce its ability to harm them, at least during the period following the signing of the agreement.

There is no doubt, at the same time, but that the Israeli threat will continue to occupy a prominent place in the Syrian security concept for many years, even under conditions of peace. This will be a more general threat, on a lower level, and will not necessarily be translated into a concrete concern over Israeli military actions. It can be assumed that Israel will continue to be perceived as having significant military strength, overwhelming technological superiority, nuclear capability, and possibly even as not

having reduced its ambitions to take over Arab lands. Moreover, with the opening of borders between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon (and the possible consequent opening of the gates to additional Arab countries), a fear might develop in Syria — as it did in Egypt — of an economic and cultural threat from Israel. This includes the fear that Israel may penetrate the Syrian and Lebanese markets and take control of them, along with a concern over the introduction of Western-

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democratic spirit into the Syrian arena.

The continuing Syrian perception of Israel as a threat, albeit at a lower level, will be reinforced by the expected increase in the Israeli armed forces' power following the signing of a peace agreement. Israel does not hide its intentions to request and receive very substantial military assistance from the US for the sake of increasing its military strength in order to offset the loss of the strategic assets represented by the Golan Heights. This additional military might, even if seen by Israel as imperative for ensuring the peace, will be perceived by Syria as

further evidence of Israel's intent to continue being an ongoing threat against it, even in an era of peace.

This gives rise to the fact that Israel will continue to be perceived as an adversary by Syria, at least in the near future. Israel will not be officially characterized as an enemy, once a peace treaty is signed. However, Syrian leaders among themselves, and non-governmental groups in public, will continue to regard and define Israel in this way. While the assessment of likelihood of war will be even lower during the peace era, in Syria's eyes, it will not entirely disappear. The risk that Syria might sign a peace agreement in order to prepare for war under its cover, with Israel off the Golan Heights, is low. It is more reasonable to assume that, upon achieving its goal of having the Golan Heights returned to its control, Syria will not aspire to take additional territories west of the Green Line. It may be assumed, however, that Syria's strategic planning will take into account various war scenarios vis-a-vis Israel; e.g., unintended deterioration in relations, the outbreak of serious and ongoing violence between Israel and the Palestinians, and response to a possible Israeli initiative.

These possible trends, in terms of Syria's security concept, would be expected to lead it to the conclusion that it must continue improving its military capability, increasing this power even during an era of peace with Israel. Under conditions of

Israel's continuing military superiority, and certainly the increased strength of the IDF, it should not be expected that Syria will reduce its military strength beyond what is required by the security arrangements defined by the peace treaty. Quite the contrary: it is reasonable to assume that Syria will, in the coming years, seek to improve the quality of its army substantially. Maintaining its military capability will be necessary for additional reasons: advancing its regional status and protecting its interests in Lebanon. Meanwhile, two elements of Syria's traditional security concept should not be expected to be restored in the foreseeable future: assistance from other Arab countries to improve its military capability or revival of superpower support from Russia. Under such circumstances, Syria will be forced to rely on its own resources for increasing its military capability.

This aspiration will bring Syria, probably not long after signing a peace treaty, to seek US assistance; not only economic aid — as is already clear — but also military aid. It must be clear to Syria that the US will not fill the void in its defense structure left by the USSR in terms of military reinforcement during periods of distress. It is fair to assume, however, that Syria will view the Egyptian precedent as a possible basis for receiving substantial supplies of advanced weaponry in place of or as a complement to its Russian armaments (the quality of which it has never cared for). At the same time,

Syria will seek to strengthen its ties with the US, in order both to diminish the potential threat from Israel and to weaken American support for Israel.

In view of all these factors, Syria can be expected to serve as a partner to Egypt's efforts to "return Israel to its natural dimensions." This may, for example, find expression in Syria actively joining Egypt in its efforts to reduce Israel's technological advantage and imposing controls on its nuclear capabilities, claiming that there is no justification for those capabilities in the aftermath of the achievement of peace between Israel and its neighbors.

Finally, there is the Lebanon issue. Syria has very substantial interests in Lebanon and seeks to avoid having its position there reduced as the result of a peace treaty. Moreover, Syria's interest in maintaining its presence in Lebanon may become stronger under circumstances of peace for two reasons. First, diminishing the direct Israeli threat against the Damascus area once the IDF leaves the Golan Heights may at the same time strengthen the fear of an Israeli military threat via Lebanon. More importantly, peace between Israel and Lebanon will obligate the Syrians to tighten their controls on Lebanon in order to fend off economic and political penetration by Israel, which would weaken Syria's position in Lebanon. In view of all this, Lebanon will continue to be a vital link in Syria's security concept for many years.

Implications for Israel

The main conclusion which arises from all of the above is that, even under circumstances of peace, Israel's military advantage will be perceived by the Syrians as a considerable threat — albeit of a lower level and in less concrete terms than today — to which there must be recourse. In shaping their security concept in the future, the Syrians will examine Israel's security moves, particularly the plans to increase its military power. Accordingly, in planning the military buildup following a peace agreement, and without compromising its vital needs, it is important that Israel would take into account not only its own security requirements, but also the manner in which Syria is likely to respond to increased Israeli military strength. It must be assumed that Syria will see no alternative to embarking on its own process of strengthening itself militarily to the best of its ability, and it must be taken into account that this process will reduce the advantages which might accrue to Israel in the framework of a peace agreement. Looking at this comprehensively, it must be assumed that the plans for strengthening the Israeli armed forces in the wake of a peace agreement will engender a new arms race in the region which would include not only Syria, but also Egypt and possibly additional countries.

A peace treaty will raise the issue of the supply of advanced American armaments to Syria. There is no doubt

but that Syria will, for its part, strive to obtain such weaponry. It must be taken into account that there are those in the US government and defense establishments who will view such action positively, seeing this as strengthening Syria's ties to the US and the West and preventing Syria from seeking alternative suppliers such as Russia, China, or the European countries. The American government is also apt to regard tying Syria to itself via arms supplies and dependence on it as additional guarantees that Syria will abide by the peace treaty, thus contributing to regional stability.

If this indeed happens, it must be assumed that, following the signing of a peace agreement, it will be difficult for Israel to oppose, publicly or privately, the supply of arms to Syria — as was the case following the peace with Egypt. In the wake of a peace treaty, there will not be an adequate foundation for Israel's claim that Syria should not be armed, since it will no longer be possible to characterize Syria as an enemy country; especially not

against the expected backdrop of broad American military assistance to Israel. Nonetheless, it is difficult to imagine that Syria will receive quantities comparable to what Egypt has received. At the time, supplying arms to Egypt was important to the Americans in that it awarded Egypt with a quid pro quo for disconnecting itself from the USSR, while Syria has never detached itself from the Moscow, and has no option today to receive Russian backing. In addition, Egypt did not suffer from a negative image in the US Congress, as Syria does. Furthermore, arming Syria is not only harmful to Israel's interests, but also to those of Jordan and Turkey. Hence, it must be taken into account that the American government will be interested in and willing to provide arms, even advanced ones, to Syria, but in a measured and controlled manner.

The significance of all these factors is that it is incumbent upon Israel to reach an agreement with the US government at the present stage, prior

to the formalization and signing of a peace treaty, while Israel still has a greater influence in the matter. It must be borne in mind, however, that achieving such an understanding also has an obverse side: The US government might demand of Israel that it delimit its own programs of military growth in order to reduce the risk of a renewed arms race in the region.

A final caution: Israel has no interest in perpetuating its perception as an enemy in Syrian eyes, since this would obligate Syria to take security measures which are undesirable to Israel, and because this perception will harm the prospects for normalization of relations between the two countries. It is important, therefore, that Israel, beyond its vital needs, act to reduce Syria's perceptions of it as a threat by taking direct actions and initiating confidence-building measures. In this context, there is room to examine the possibility of establishing a regional defense system in such a way to reduce mutual threat perceptions.