Strategic ASSESSMENT

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Hassan Rouhani: Iran's New Hope for Change / David Menashri

Hassan Rouhani's sweeping victory in Iran's June 14 presidential election marks an important, refreshing change in Iranian politics. It reflects a desire for change in Iran regarding domestic policy and foreign policy, and the new president is well aware of the people's high expectations. Focusing on internal Iranian dynamics, this article addresses three principal questions: to what extent is there potential for real change in Iran's policy; what factors underlie the drive for change in Iran; and what are the prospects for a significant shift in relations with the West, particularly regarding the Iranian nuclear program, which continues to follow the program's tight schedule and stride consistently toward the critical threshold.

Thin Red Lines: The Syrian and Iranian Contexts / Yoel Guzansky

The purpose of drawing a red line is to signal to the enemy a limit beyond which its actions will have consequences. At the same time, a clear red line constrains the side drawing the line, because it allows the enemy to test its credibility and willingness to act. The strategy of drawing a vague red line, which allows flexibility in choosing the timing, force, and nature of the response, can also achieve a significant deterrent effect. This essay examines several red lines drawn by Israel and the United States in the context of the civil war in Syria and the Iranian nuclear program as well as red lines that were not drawn, in order to study the advantages and disadvantages in using this method to demarcate respective strategic interests.

The Deadlocked Syrian Crisis: The Fable of the Ants and the Elephant / Eyal Zisser

The first two years of the Syrian revolution generated momentum that ran entirely against the regime. In recent months, however, it appears that the rebels have encountered a glass ceiling that resists a breakthrough. This is no surprise, given the rebels' inherent weakness and failure to achieve unity, as well as the fatigue and exhaustion in their ranks and the

emerging change in Syrian popular sentiment, which is again coming to regard the regime as the only guarantee of renewed stability and security in the country. As a result of all these factors, experts are increasingly coming to believe that the regime will succeed in surviving the revolution against it, and that Bashar al-Assad will have little difficulty reestablishing his rule throughout the country.

Hizbollah in Syria: Losing the Balance between "National Resistance" and Sectarian Interests? / Benedetta Berti and Yoram Schweitzer

The article analyzes Hizbollah's growing involvement in the Syrian conflict and explores both the organization's current strategy as well as its organizational interests in supporting the Assad regime. In addition, the research focuses on assessing the potential organizational, domestic, and regional impact of Hizbollah's role in Syria, looking at how recent organizational choices may backfire in the short and medium terms. Overall, the challenge posed to Hizbollah by the Syrian civil war represents one of the most significant ideological, political, and military threats faced by the organization since its creation in the early 1980s.

Russian-Turkish Relations: Contemporary Dilemmas of Past Empires / Zvi Magen and Gallia Lindenstrauss

This article examines relations between Russia and Turkey, focusing on three principal areas of potential conflict between them: the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and the Mediterranean Sea. In the Middle East theater, Russia fears that the upheaval in the Arab world, especially in Syria, will reduce its influence. In the Caucasus, Russia is anxious about rising Western influence, including from Turkey. Given the developments in Syria and the discoveries of natural gas, Russia is reinforcing its naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea, which also creates potential for conflict. However, the extensive economic relations between Russia and Turkey constitute an important mitigating element. The article also considers how Russian-Turkish relations impact on the countries' respective policies toward Israel.

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Twenty Years since the Oslo Accords: Lessons for Israel /
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September 13, 1993 marks twenty years since the signing of the Oslo Accords. The agreement encouraged great expectations in Israel and around the world that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians would end and that a "new Middle East" would be established, with peace between Israel and the Arab states. However, the interim agreement was not completed, there was no permanent settlement, and the Oslo process collapsed in the face of the al-Aqsa intifada. This article analyzes Israel's conduct in the Oslo process under the Rabin and Peres governments from a strategic-administrative perspective, suggests several key shortcomings on Israel's part, and proposes relevant lessons for the future.

Twenty Years since Oslo: The Balance Sheet / Shlomo Brom

The twentieth anniversary of the Olso process is an appropriate time to take stock of the achievements and failures of the process. The basic premises of the article are that Israel's goal is to avoid becoming a bi-national state and that Israel had a Palestinian partner that was willing to reach a settlement on the basis of a two-state solution. Although the Oslo process did not succeed in achieving its main purpose, there were partial achievements that helped advance the goal. Moreover, there was no real alternative to a process involving interim agreements. Many errors were made during implementation of the process, and it is possible that had they been avoided, the results would have been different.

Hassan Rouhani:
Iran's New Hope for Change

David Menashri

Dr. Hassan Rouhani's surprising sweeping victory in Iran's June 14 presidential election marks an important, refreshing change in Iranian politics. His public statements during the campaign and since his election reflect different positions from those sounded regularly during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tenure, not only in tone but also in content, and not only on internal matters but also in reference to the West, with promises of greater transparency regarding the nuclear project and even a critical assessment of the way Iran has conducted its negotiations with the West over its nuclear program.

But the structure of the revolutionary regime, its power mechanisms (constitutional and governmental, civilian and military), the election process that doesn't actually allow free elections, and the strong ties between the new president and the regime, including the security establishment, have for many only emphasized the continuity of the system rather than the opportunity for change with the election of the new president. Some did not even wait for the election results to be announced before averring that no real change is to be expected, certainly not on the issue of particular interest to the world outside Iran – the nuclear program.

This essay, focusing on Iran's internal dynamics, attempts to answer three main questions:

1. To what extent is there potential for real change in Iran's policy given the conditions that led to the election of the current president, the scope and sources of his support, his personality and world view,

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and his abilities to confront the conservative forces at the helm of other governing mechanisms, headed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is supported by the Revolutionary Guards, the security establishment, the regime's institutions, and the religious structure?

2. Which elements encourage change in Iran's policy? In this context, the essay examines long term factors (the struggle for social justice and civil liberty) and the more immediate issues (President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's economic policy and the growing, cumulative effects of the sanctions, especially in the year preceding the election) that paved the way for political change and encourage the prospects for change.

3. Even assuming that Hassan Rouhani will in fact work to promote a process of change, what is the probability that this will also entail a significant shift in relations with the West, particularly regarding the Iranian nuclear program, which is striding consistently on a tight schedule toward the critical threshold?

Harbinger of Change?

The presidential election results generated a host of commentaries on the new president's very ability to formulate policies different from those of his predecessor and his capacity to set and promote a fresh agenda.

On the one hand are the skeptics who view the election as harboring no possibility for real change, and certainly as no reason for optimism. Even if Rouhani was the most moderate of the candidates who ultimately ran, and even if the support he garnered was impressive, it is unreasonable to expect him to be able to steer Iran in new directions and effect a real change in the revolutionary policy. The skeptics have well-founded grounds to back up their assertion.

Constitutionally and in terms of the control of the loci of power in Iran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the true leader of the nation. In a way, the president only implements policy pre-approved by Khamenei. Since his ascent to the post of Supreme Leader in 1989, Khamenei has taken control of all the power centers (the courts, the Majlis [parliament], and the executive branch of government), tightened his grip on the security establishment (the military, the Revolutionary Guards, the Basij, and more) and the revolutionary funds (*baniads*), which have become tremendously powerful economic forces, and consolidated

his power over the network of mosques and Juma'h imams around the country. Furthermore, he has built a regime replete with control mechanisms, ousted his opponents from positions of power (the heads of the Green Movement, Mir-Hussein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, are still under house arrest, and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was not allowed to run for president), and has tightened his relationships with the important ayatollahs in the holy cities. This is in addition to the almost unlimited authority granted to him by the constitution and the fact that his status as Supreme Leader is not limited by a specific number of years.

By contrast, the Iranian president's authority is limited. He cannot stray far from the agenda mandated to him by the Supreme Leader, overseen by the Majlis, and backed by the Revolutionary Guards. Presidents who tried to breach these obstacles and steer their own course were deposed (e.g., the first president of Iran, Abolhassan Banisadr, in 1981), restrained and threatened by the Revolutionary Guards (e.g., Mohammad Khatami in 1999), or designated by the regime as being close to "a deviant current" and neutralized (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during his second term). Overall, Iranian presidents have no independent power base, and this is also true of Rouhani. With a history like this and the revolution hanging in the balance, why – the skeptics ask – would anyone be deluded into thinking that Rouhani will somehow acquire the freedom to steer the revolution in a new direction?

Moreover, Rouhani is part of the revolutionary camp, a member of the establishment since its inception, and although his status has declined in recent years, he has filled many positions in the regime, including some sensitive posts in the security services. He was a member of the Majlis from its opening in 1980 until 2000, serving two terms as deputy speaker of the house, and he served in other important parliamentary capacities, such as chairman of the Security Committee and chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. He was chairman of the National Security Council from 1989 until 2005 (under Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami) and currently serves on the council as Khamenei's personal representative. Since 1991, he has been a member of the Expediency Council, the prestigious committee that defines the regime's interests, and was head of the council's Center for Strategic Studies; as part of this job, he also headed the team negotiating the nuclear program with the European Union. In addition, since 1999 he has been a member of the Assembly of Experts (supposed to determine who will be the next Supreme Leader).[1]

With this record, Rouhani cannot be considered a non-establishment outsider. The very fact that his candidacy was approved by the Guardian Council (which approved only eight of 686 candidates, of whom only six actually ended up running) is a testament to the establishment's recognition of his revolutionary credentials and beliefs.

Moreover, it is hard to portray Rouhani as a moderate even by the yardstick of Iranian politics. A long list of extremist statements made over the years (and there are many, though there are others as well) can easily be retrieved to support the skeptics' assessment. For example, during the student riots of 1999 in support of the reforms initiated by President Khatami (the largest demonstrations since the start of the revolution until then), Rouhani called on the public to support the armed forces to suppress the student protests in any way possible. He called the students "opportunistic," "evil people," "mercenaries of foreign powers," and "thugs" who had broken a taboo by attacking the Supreme Leader.[2] He did not speak in support of students during the Greens' protests in 2009, and in 2011 he spoke out against the protests of Iranian youth in favor of the Arab Spring.[3] The skeptics have stressed that since Rouhani's election the tone may have become less strident, but the contents have hardly changed. Moreover, estimates of impending reform were also bandied about when Khatami was elected in 1997, but despite the lofty rhetoric and the familiar smile pasted on his face, he failed to generate a breakthrough. The reformist groups that supported him were suppressed in 1999, without Khatami being able to lift a finger to protect them, no meaningful change was made in the Iranian attitude to the West, and the nuclear program only gained momentum.

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It is hard to argue with these claims. Each is grounded in fact and together may pose a question as to the new president's ability to generate the hoped-for change.

At the same time, however, it seems that these contentions stress only one side of the issue, i.e., the glass half empty. They minimize (if they even relate to) developments in Iran in recent years that encourage change; they ignore the identity of the elements that supported Rouhani in the campaign that culminated

with his election; and they deny the more pragmatic calls he and his supporters made during the election campaign and the optimistic atmosphere that was manifest on the eve of the election and played a part in enlisting the impressive support earned by Rouhani as someone heralding possible change.

True, the extent to which Rouhani wants to take Iran in the directions he has signaled since the campaign and supported by his voters, or the extent to which he will be allowed to do so, remains unclear. It is also unclear in which areas and to what extent the new president will want or be able to act to realize his campaign promises (to promote the economy, increase freedoms, allay tensions with the West, and ease the friction over the nuclear issue, not to mention adjusting Iran's policy on Syria or support for Hizbollah). But it is clear that there is at least a chance for a new beginning and potential for change, much more so than in the past.

It is also true that one can hardly call Rouhani a moderate or a reformist. In the context of Iranian politics, it would perhaps be most accurate to describe him as a centrist. Likewise, Rouhani is indeed part and parcel of the revolution; he has been part of the revolutionary establishment and has served in a host of sensitive positions. But in these positions (for example, as head of the Iranian nuclear program talks between 2003 and 2005) he has demonstrated a measure of pragmatism and even prompted (albeit neither voluntarily nor enthusiastically) the suspension of the program. In an article in *Time Magazine* (May 6, 2006) he stated: "A nuclear weaponized Iran destabilizes the region, prompts a regional arms race, and wastes the scarce resources in the region. And taking account of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and its policy of ensuring a strategic edge for Israel, an Iranian bomb will accord Iran no security dividends. There are also some Islamic and developmental reasons why Iran as an Islamic and developing state must not develop and use weapons of mass destruction."[4] His complex role in the Iran-Contra affair also reflects his ability to maneuver in different directions.

The assertion that the presidency is so enfeebled as to make it virtually irrelevant who is the president also ignores the Iranian experience. The first president, Abolhassan Banisadr, clashed with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and was deposed in 1981 (he has lived in exile ever since); the second president, Mohammad-Ali Rajai, was assassinated soon after his election in 1981; the third, Ali Khamenei, continued to maintain good relations with the system and ascended to his current position as

Supreme Leader; the fourth, Rafsanjani, wasn't even allowed to run in the last campaign; the fifth, Khatami, is considered the head of the reformist camp and supported Karroubi and Mousavi – two presidential candidates in 2009 who have been under house arrest ever since; and Ahmadinejad, who lost favor long before he concluded his second term in office, was denounced as a key figure in the "deviant current." All the presidents, with the exception of Ahmadinejad (and Rajai, assassinated soon after taking office), were more pragmatic during their terms in office than they had been prior to assuming the presidency (and in Khamenei's case, also after). The president is close to all the major centers of power (especially the Supreme Leader) and is not without influence. Iranian presidents have had many differences of opinion with the Supreme Leader. As heads of the executive branch of government, they are supposed to resolve problems. Authority is often accompanied by responsibility, which usually yields a more pragmatic approach.

Beyond the new president's background (the most moderate candidate of the six who ran in the election), one is struck by the wide ranging support for his candidacy: 50.71 percent of the ballots (in other words, 18.6 million votes, three times as many as earned by the relatively moderate conservative candidate, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who came in second with 16.56 percent of the ballots). Despite the calls for boycotting the election, the rate of voter participation was high (72.7 percent, with a total of 36.7 million voters). Moreover, the camp supporting Rouhani that brought him to the presidency consisted of those disappointed with the reality under the Islamic regime; the younger supporters of reforms; minorities; and residents of the peripheral areas. The socio-demographic map of Rouhani's power centers indicates support across Iran, with particularly impressive rates of support in Iran's periphery and in regions with large ethnic minorities (especially Sunnis): Rouhani won 73.3 percent of the votes in Baluchestan, 70.8 percent in Kurdistan, and 67.1 percent in Azerbaijan West (compared to only 39 percent in the city of Qom).[5]

The leaders who supported Rouhani's candidacy and the enthusiasm that engulfed those demanding change have combined to turn him into the symbol and hope for change. Those who paved his way to the presidency will also want to influence the direction of his policy and are pushing for change, perhaps more so than Rouhani himself. Two previous presidents, representing the pragmatic camp (Rafsanjani) and

the reformist camp (Khatami), worked tirelessly to promote his candidacy and support him. These all symbolize the direction his supporters expect him to take. He will have a hard time ignoring them.

No less important is the scope of support Rouhani won, and the circles that gave that support suggest that the reformist camp, which many had hurried to eulogize after the suppression of the 2009 protests, is alive and kicking. The enthusiasm that swept citizens just before the elections, the high voter turnout, and what seems at the moment to be internal cohesion in the pragmatic camp are also auspicious signs.

However, Rouhani was not elected in order to abolish the revolution, rather to save it from itself. He comes to the presidency aware of the expectations, enjoying a high rate of support and willing to embark on the journey toward a new horizon despite all the difficulties. To be sure, his friend Khatami also started out in a similar fashion when he was elected in 1997 and failed to meet those expectation, but the fact that Khatami failed doesn't necessarily mean that Rouhani will. Sixteen years have passed, reality has changed, and many of the radicals of the past are now heads of the reformist camp. Moreover, it is hard to believe that Rouhani, or even Khamenei, will be able to ignore the clear message delivered by the public, "An entire generation demands change."

The Iranian Ideal: Social Justice and Political Justice

The hope for change is not rooted in the identity of specific leaders or camps, and not even in Iran's lively civil society. It is rooted mainly in the nation's social, economic, and political reality, and the regional and international situation, which have encouraged growing sectors of society to support change. This reality is partly the result of an extended historical development and partly the product of the revolutionary policy since 1979, the failed policies of the outgoing president, and the international pressure manifested primarily in harsh sanctions (especially since 2012) that have left their mark on different sectors of the population.

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The root of the public's growing unhappiness lies in the start of the Islamic Revolution, if not long beforehand. Iran is a nation with a long

tradition of popular involvement in politics. It is the only nation in the Middle East (and one of the only nations in the world) that experienced two major revolutions in the twentieth century – the constitutional revolution in 1906 and the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the country has also had two other national popular opposition movements. Generally speaking, these movements reflected a dual agenda: the struggle for social justice and the struggle for political justice. In short, theirs has been a struggle for bread and liberty – welfare and freedom. This was also what motivated the masses of Iranians who thronged to Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, as well as those who participated in the public protests of 1999 and 2009 (and to a large extent, also those who participated in the 2011 protests in Tahrir Square in Cairo and the Arab Spring in general). The public that rallied to Khomeini's side in 1979 was not primarily motivated by the desire for an Islamic republic (the revolution included Communists, liberal intellectuals, and a range of leftist and centrist movements), rather by the promise of a better future for their children. In terms of the goals of the revolutionaries, it was not really an Islamic Revolution, rather a revolution that ended up generating an Islamic regime.

It is now 34 years later. The ideal of social justice has not been realized, nor has the level of freedom grown. If during the Shah's era it was a crime to speak out against the head of the state, today it is a sin. The ideal of social justice remains no more than an empty slogan. The wave of protests that broke out following the 2009 presidential election was a demonstration of that frustration. The call of "Where is my vote?" was heard loud and clear, alongside the no less insistent shout of "Where is my oil money?"

If during the first years after the revolution the leaders of the regime attributed the economic distress to the Shah's policies, the oppression of imperialism, the revolutionary situation, the long war with Iraq, and the pressure from the West, it was gradually recognized that the nation's problems were also the result of unwise revolutionary policies, homegrown corruption, and missteps on the part of the regime. Such accusations were made during the recent election campaign and during televised debates, and even the elected president didn't hesitate to accuse Ahmadinejad of failed management of the country's resources.[6]

The roots of the protest and the election results are not unrelated to the effect of the revolutions in the Arab countries over the past two

and a half years. These too were manifestations of the desire for change and for social and political justice. While these movements assumed different shapes and none has yet to produce the hope-for results, there is a new regional reality of widespread public awakening, a phenomenon that until now was unique to Iran but is now sweeping the entire region. Despite the differences and the distance, these movements are sending the Iranian regime some unpleasant signals, be they the votes that indicate that the revolution has yet to yield the fruit that was promised in 1979 or hints of a potential new wave of rioting (along the lines of 1999, 2009, or even 1979). There is also criticism of the nation's resources being channeled to foreign elements (such as Hizbollah and Hamas) at the expense of the interests of Iran and the Iranian people.

But most of all, the source of the anger is in the worsening economic situation. The sanctions imposed on Iran particularly since 2006 by the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States − both collectively and individually − have made themselves felt; their cumulative effect has hurt large sectors of Iran, especially the middle class. The election results indicate growing anger in large pockets of Iranian society, especially over two sets of issues, socioeconomic (unemployment, inflation, devaluation of the currency, and more) and political (the lack of freedom, women's rights, and human rights in general). As a result, the disappointment has grown not only with Ahmadinejad's policies but also with the policies of the regime, including those of the Supreme Leader.

Ahmadinejad's eight years in office did in fact add to society's hardships, especially those of the younger generation. The man who in 2005 promised to place the oil dividends on the people's dinner table in fact created a larger burden. The economic sanctions have damaged the economy badly, especially since the middle of 2012, and undoubtedly gave the frustration expressed at the ballots a tailwind. The official inflation rate (about 30 percent) and unemployment (estimated at about 15 percent) have hurt many in Iran, especially among the younger generation. Iran's exclusion from the global electronic banking system SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) in March 2012 made a difficult situation worse. Another blow was dealt in July 2012, when the EU banned the import, purchase, and transport of Iranian oil. As a result, oil production dropped by about half, to approximately 1 million barrels per day. In addition, the rial lost value. At the end of 2011, the exchange rate on the free market was about 15,000 per American dollar; at the start

of 2012, it had dropped to 16,950, and by April 2013 it hit a low of 36,500.[7] (After Rouhani's election, the rial regained some ground, and by mid-July the exchange rate stood at 32,600.)

Naturally, the main expectation is that Iran's new president will tackle the economic ills. Rouhani is well aware of this and has already tried to lower expectations. After the election, he presented a much more gloomy assessment of the economy's condition: he noted that inflation stood at 42 percent (some 10 percent higher than official estimates), that only 14,000 new jobs had been created annually since 2005, and that for the first time since the Iran-Iraq War there was negative economic growth in two consecutive years. These figures reflect a sad state of affairs, but no less than that attest to Rouhani's desire to cool the enthusiasm: easing the economic distress, he has hurried to underscore, is not a short term project. Another expectation of Rouhani is that he will promote civil liberties, but this too is not so simple. The struggle for freedom was more prominent in 2009, but it is a priority among the president's camp of supporters now as well. Here too there are high expectations of the new president.

Social justice and political justice have always been two sides of the same coin in the struggle for the soul of the new Iran. To use a rough generalization, one may say that the conservatives have usually preferred giving priority to the socioeconomic side, saying that freedom has no value when one's stomach is empty (an approach expressed most clearly by Khamenei). The reformists have usually preferred the political side, saying a full stomach has no value when there is no freedom (an approach expressed especially by Khatami). It seems that now too the conservatives will want the president to focus on the economy, while the reformists attribute no less importance to the expansion of civil liberties. Each of the tasks is difficult, and both together are formidable. In the meantime, Rouhani is flying both standards but cooling enthusiasm at every turn, especially on the socioeconomic issues.

Since the start of the revolution, Iran's policy has shown impressive pragmatism. In fact, almost every time there was a clash between revolutionary ideology and national interests as perceived by the regime (in other words, the regime's interests), interests outweighed dogma, both in domestic and in foreign policy. Indeed, power is often accompanied by a sense of responsibility, and Iran's presidents – with the notable exception of Ahmadinejad – were more moderate during

their terms in office than before. Nonetheless, conceding ideology was never voluntary; it was always the result of constraints. In this sense, it is clear that Iran is prone to pressure, responds to pressure, and is willing to make significant ideological concessions in favor of existential interests. The elections results also prove that Iran is currently feeling a great deal of pressure. The question of how this will be translated into its nuclear policy depends not only on Iran but also on the cohesion and determination of the West.

Will the Hoped-for Change Stop the Centrifuges?

An analysis of the background of the political change stresses the imperative of the president's attention to domestic problems, presents an incentive to discuss in a more principled, transparent fashion Iran's relationship with the West, and may even encourage a renewed discussion of Iran's nuclear policy. Indeed, the world will likely not wait for Iran to solve its domestic issues while the centrifuges continue to spin. Domestic reality and the nuclear program are also two sides of the same coin. The question is how to synchronize two different clocks: the clock measuring domestic change and the clock measuring the nuclear progress.

The deep residue of hatred and distrust in Iran's relations with the United States cannot be erased in an instant. The revolution that turned the United States into the Great Satan and the hatred that became a fundamental revolutionary myth will have a hard time changing its tune. No less important, when it comes to the nuclear issue, there is a widespread consensus in the country (Iran has the right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes). Retreating from the nuclear program is, in and of itself, a bitter pill for Iran to swallow; if it is considered capitulation to the West, it will be even more difficult to accept.

However, Iran's leaders are also aware that easing the domestic distress is linked to mitigating tensions with the world at large. Indeed, in the recent election foreign affairs figured prominently during the campaign, more so than in any election since 1979. In the election propaganda and the televised debate, some of the candidates criticized Iran's rabid anti-Western stance; even Ali Akbar Velayati, who served as foreign minister for 16 years (1981-1997) and has since served as Khamenei's advisor on international matters, complained about the isolation Iran imposed on itself and went so far as to protest publicly

how negotiations with the West on the nuclear program were handled (a subject until now considered taboo). Clearly, then, these issues are on the agenda and there are differences of opinion on them, albeit along a limited spectrum.[8]

The candidate Mohsen Rezai (formerly commander of the Revolutionary Guards) did not hesitate to declare that Iran has been more hurt by misguided management than by the difficulties imposed by the United States.[9] Hassan Rouhani took this a step further: "It's nice," he said, "that Iran's centrifuges spin, but only on condition that the country moves forward. A situation in which the centrifuges move and the country is asleep is unacceptable... If one industrial plant in Natanz [one of the centers of the nuclear program] is in operation but 100 other factories are shut down or operate at only 20 percent capacity for various reasons, such as the sanctions or the lack of raw materials or spare parts, this is also unacceptable."[10] Ali Akbar Velayati expressed his criticism of fellow candidate Saeed Jalili's handling of the negotiations even as late as in early 2013: "You want to take three steps and you expect the other side to take 100 steps, this means that you don't want to make progress...You have been in charge of the nuclear issue, we have not made a step forward, and the [sanctions] pressure has been exerted on the people."[11] These differences in approach were not merely staged for the televised debate. Larger differences are apparent within the revolutionary leadership. The question is how to translate them into policy changes and/or how to convince the Supreme Leader.

There is an objective difficulty stemming from the basic interest of each of the sides. If Iran is willing to make concessions, it stems largely from the pressure applied to it, and Iran's main concern is to remove or at least ease the sanctions. The West's interest is, theoretically, diametrically opposed: why should Iran's strongest incentive for a compromise be nullified?

> Should Iran decide to change its current policy on relations with the United States or on the nuclear program, it would be an historic decision of almost unprecedented proportions.

Should Iran decide to change its current policy on relations with the United States or on the nuclear program, it would be an historic decision of almost unprecedented proportions. If one seeks a similar example of that scale, one may look to Ayatollah Khomeini's decision on July 20, 1988 to approve a ceasefire with Iraq after eight years of war. Khomeini then made an emotional

address to the people, saying he was ready to drink "the poisoned chalice" (i.e., sign a treaty with Saddam Hussein), only because it was "in the best interests of the revolution and the regime."[12] Khamenei lacks the religious authority, political clout, and personal charisma of Khomeini, but that does not mean he is incapable of making such a change – it only means that it will much harder for him to do so. Khomeini had close advisors (especially Rafsanjani) who persuaded him that the alternative was worse. Rouhani is supposed to be the current man for this job. To what extent he will want or be able to do it, or under what circumstances Khamenei will deign to listen to him, also depends on the circumstances Iran will have to face.

What about Israel? Many important matters influenced by Iran and its policies are on Israel's agenda, including the nuclear issue, Hizbollah, Hamas, radical Islam, and the situation in Syria. At this stage, it is hard to believe Rouhani can or wants to deviate significantly from the extremist anti-Israel position. The need to show revolutionary loyalty while adopting pragmatic stances on domestic and foreign issues does not place Israel high on Iran's priorities. Far from it. All that Israel can hope for now is that Israel will be less central to the Iranian discourse and that the process of domestic reforms – especially possible changes in relations with the West – will concurrently promote Israel's interests.

> It is hard to believe Rouhani can or wants to deviate significantly from the extremist anti-Israel position. Yet instead of providing reasons for the impossibility of change in Iran, Israel would do well to take a long, patient look at the new reality in Iran and the ways Israel can secure its own interests.

On the eve of the election, Israeli sources vehemently denied the possibility of political change in Iran. These sources were likewise cited in the media after the elections results came in, regardless of what had actually happened in Iran, reflecting profound skepticism of any chance for real change.

Yet instead of focusing on the hindrances to change in Iran, it would be better to look at the glass half full. Instead of providing reasons for the impossibility of change in Iran, Israel would do well to take a long, patient look at the new reality in Iran and the ways Israel can secure its own interests. Much hangs in the balance and much can be done, given a frank dialogue with friendly nations and their

inclusion in Israel's assessments and concerns about the challenges Iran continues to pose.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the challenge the election presents is much more critical and concrete from Israel's point of view. The very election of a president who seems to herald a possible change for the better is liable to encourage more considerate treatment of Iran on the part of the international community even before any real change has taken place. There is a serious concern that the easing of the same sanctions that to an extent contributed towards Iran's process of change will turn the clock back while the centrifuges continue to spin on.

Conclusion

The presidential election in Iran was the equivalent of a political earthquake containing a possibility for change in Iran's priorities and domestic politics with possible ramifications for its politics toward the region and beyond. At stake are the interests of the Iranian people, who seek to improve their lot; and the interests of the free world, which wants to see Iran become a positive element in the region (with implications for Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Hamas) and among the international community in general, and wants to suspend the Iranian military nuclear program.

Even those who feel that Iran's presidential election results have at least the potential for generating policy change and that the election of Rouhani opens a new page in the history of the Islamic Revolution cannot ignore the difficulties inherent in translating this potential into a change in the nation's nuclear policy, especially in the limited time remaining until Iran reaches its nuclear goals. In Iran there is an expectation that the process of the election (which was much more above-board than the 2009 election) and the election of a president so different from his predecessor will contribute to a release of the tension and allow Iran to extricate itself from the pressures it is experiencing. In the West, which views with concern the progress of Iran's nuclear program, there are concerns that loosening the pressure is a recipe for nuclear progress. A great deal of goodwill and more than a pinch of trust, along with extraordinary diplomatic artistry, are needed to find a way out of this maze. The election of Rouhani provides diplomacy with a renewed chance. It remains to be seen how both sides will act to use this potential to produce actual and meaningful change.

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Thin Red Lines:
The Syrian and Iranian Contexts

Yoel Guzansky

Deterrence literature analyzes red lines extensively, casting them as a tripwire used by a nation trying to deter an enemy by defining a prohibited act and the retaliation that can be expected. It thereby tries to raise the cost of carrying out the prohibited act in order to convince the enemy not to engage in it by threatening, explicitly or implicitly, the use of force. A public or tacit declaration of a red line is usually a defensive measure meant to prevent the enemy from taking a step it has planned – an attempt to define the rules of the game – and thereby prevent undesirable escalation. This type of communication, part of the strategy of deterrence, is used to signal the enemy that its deterrence is ineffective, elicit information about its intentions, and even – as this essay will attempt to demonstrate – try to establish international legitimacy for various actions, not necessarily military. The deterrence literature generally uses the term *casus belli*, and for the most part does not distinguish between this term and red lines.[1] The element of deterrence is embedded in the choice the enemy has of whether, how, and when to cross the line, and in the commitment of the state whether, when, and how to realize the threat.

Although "red line" has become a common term in recent years, the discourse is replete with fundamental misunderstandings. At the most basic level, a red line refers to a scenario the enemy wants to enact or step it might take that the defending side views as a game changer. The red line therefore invites some type of action in order to prevent the change in the status quo. A red line may present differently according to three important dimensions: the response required of the deterred side, the

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expression or exposure given to the threat, and its target audience.[2] A positive outcome occurs if the other side's obedience is attained within a reasonable amount of time.

There are several ways to draw a red line: warning the enemy through back channels to reconsider its intentions; declaring a red line publicly, either with or without mentioning a possible response; engaging in threatening military maneuvers; and finally, resorting to military action. In the absence of direct channels of communication between the sides, it is sometimes necessary to draw red lines using various acts, including military, designed to persuade the enemy to take some step or another. The side issuing the threat must, when the time comes, have the resolve to realize the threat despite its costs and force the enemy to believe it will be prepared to pay it, even at the cost of harm to itself. Indeed, when a nation declares a red line, it deliberately constrains its own freedom to maneuver, especially if the declaration is accompanied by talk of punitive measures. The threat will carry most credibility if it entails a risk assumed by the threatening side to take action liable to cause damage also to it. The more costly these signals are and the more they limit the threatening nation's freedom to act, the greater the credibility they have. But it is precisely these costly threats that suffer a credibility problem if, in the view of the enemy, the threatening nation isn't willing to fight for them. Many failures of deterrence stem from the inherent tension between decision makers' desire to retain room to maneuver by leaving the threat as vague as possible, and the need to transmit a clear message endowing the threat with credibility.

This essay examines several red lines drawn by Israel and the United States in the context of the civil war in Syria and the Iranian nuclear program, as well as red lines that were not drawn, in order to study the advantages and disadvantages in using this method to demarcate respective strategic interests. It does not preclude the use of the tool, but rather seeks to understand the reason and manner for using it and the potential attendant costs in the contexts under discussion.

The Syrian-Lebanese Arena

Israel views the transfer of certain weapons to Hizbollah as an upset to the balance of power, and therefore, since the end of the previous decade, has defined this act as a red line. Israel's senior political and military echelon has warned that Israel would not accept the transfer of what

the country considers threatening weapons from Syria to Hizbollah, including chemical weapons, advanced anti-aircraft missiles, shore-to-sea missiles, and certain types of surface-to-surface missiles and rockets. The moment these particular weapons were shipped to Hizbollah, despite the Israeli warnings not to do so, Syria knowingly crossed the Israeli red line. Until January 2013, Israel did not take any action on these shipments, apparently reasoning that the chances for escalation vis-à-vis Syria and Hizbollah were high.

The common explanation for the attacks on Syria attributed to Israel in January 2013[3] and again in May and July 2013[4] cites Israel's reasoning that the chances for escalation in the northern sector were low if Israel reacted to crossed red lines. Before the military operation in Syria attributed to it, and in an attempt to make communication between the sides as credible as possible, Israel held military maneuvers and tried – apparently in vain – to transmit warnings to Syria through a third party.[5] After the attacks, Syria and Hizbollah postponed their response, both because of Israel's deterrence in general and because of a new set of priorities that sought to avoid an immediate military confrontation. In addition, Israel chose not to assume responsibility for the attacks, allowing the attacked side significant deniability. Similarly, the targets were not Syrian assets but rather Iranian and/or Russian weapons on their way to Lebanon, making it easier for the Syrians to contain the damage. Finally, the attack did not occur on either Iranian or Lebanese soil, exempting both of them – the weapons supplier and the weapons client – from an immediate response.[6]

After the attacks attributed to Israel, both sides tried to formulate new rules for the arena. Syria and Hizbollah heightened their threats, stating that further attacks would result in an immediate and harsh response in the Golan Heights.[7] This declaration was accompanied by firing on Israeli positions in the Golan, with the Syrian regime assuming responsibility for the shelling: "Any violation of Syrian sovereignty will result in an immediate response."[8] By contrast, Israel's threatening messages were inconsistent: one message was that if Syria attacks Israel or tries to strike Israel through its proxies, Israel will retaliate to the point that Assad will risk forfeiting his regime.[9] At the same time, high level officials have said that Assad's regime is preferable if the alternative is an extremist Islamist one.[10]

The resumption of weapon shipments will shift the dilemma back to Israel: continue or suspend attacking the shipments, factoring in the

cost it would have to pay in the case of escalation. Assuming that relative freedom of action is a constant is illusory, because relative freedom of action is a consumable asset. In practice, there is cumulative pressure exerted on the leadership on the rival side to respond, even if this contradicts a cold cost-benefit analysis; this pressure might generate a large scale response followed by undesirable escalation. After the attacks, Israel chose, unlike previous experiences, not to respond to the Syrian shelling,[11] and took pains to note that its actions should not be viewed as interference in Syria's civil war,[12] in an apparent attempt to lessen Syria's motivation to respond to the attacks on its soil. In addition, because the United States granted significant legitimacy to Israel's action, this presumably had an effect on the assessment of the deterred side − i.e., Syria − given the American-Israeli coordination on the issue.[13]

America's red line in the Syrian arena was drawn in relation to the use of chemical weapons in the country's civil war. Already in August 2012, President Obama stated that mass transfer or use of chemical weapons would constitute the crossing of a red line[14] and would change his thinking on the issue. In March 2013, Obama somewhat reduced the extent of America's commitment to its red line when he said that should it emerge that chemical weapons were in fact used in Syria, this would be considered a game changer for the United States.[15] It seems that the President tried to lessen the American commitment while at the same time trying to deter the Assad regime from using this type of weapon. The administration's freedom of action was not curtailed given the ambiguous nature of the proof of what was underway in Syria. But even after evidence began accumulating about the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime,[16] the administration sought to blur the issue and its commitment.[17] One of the assertions made by the administration stated that American intelligence could not provide a definitive answer as to whether chemical weapons were in fact used.[18] It was only on June 13, 2013 that the administration finally determined that Assad's regime had in fact used chemical weapons and said it planned to send weapons to Syrian rebels, though without direct involvement.[19]

Did the lack of an immediate American response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria empower the Syrian regime to continue and maybe even extend their use? Perhaps. What is clear is that the lack of political willingness on the part of the United States to act generated a deliberate attempt to downplay the gravity of what occurred. It is

certainly conceivable that downplaying the horror of the events and the lack of an immediate response to the use of chemical weapons increased the doubts that Israel and other American allies in the region have about America's commitment to its allies and the red lines America has drawn in the context of the Iranian nuclear program. Even if the United States eventually decides to intervene more actively in the Syrian civil war out of humanitarian reasons, or in order to retain its influence in the region, it is still quite conceivable that in the future both enemies and allies will view America's credibility with greater skepticism.

The Iranian Arena

One can point to several red lines that Israel (at times with American backing) has drawn in the past decade that have been crossed by Iran without generating an Israeli military response.[20] In 2003, the red line was mastering the technology of uranium enrichment: "We believe that within a year Iran will reach the point of no return and then no form of pressure will help," said then-Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz.[21] When Iran attained that ability, the red line was redrawn as the start of uranium enrichment in practice. After Iran began enriching uranium, the new red line curtailed enrichment to a limited number of centrifuges. Later, then-Defense Minister Ehud Barak spoke of Iran's entering a "zone of immunity" (in practice, the start of operations at the underground facility in Fordow) as a red line.[22] Afterwards, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defined the red line as the amassing of a specific amount of fissile material enriched to a low level, in the amount of enriched uranium Iran would need to make a bomb.

When Israel drew these lines, it did so without presenting specific punitive measures, and Iran crossed, or circumvented, them without exacting any response from Israel or the United States, both of which responded by repeating that "all options are on the table."[23] One may therefore well ask if from the outset these red lines were meant just to arouse the international community, especially the United States, to take a firmer stand against Iran. Either way, the pattern is clear: every time Iran crossed a red line, Israel drew a new one (closer to the bomb). Israel's warnings grew more and more stern without having any effect, causing damage to its credibility and erosion to its deterrence in this context, even if Israel, through its actions, contributed to the sense of urgency on the

part of the international community in confronting the Iranian nuclear issue.

Prime Minister Netanyahu claims that Iran has not crossed the red line he drew regarding its nuclear project at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2012.[24] And in fact, Iran has not yet crossed Israel's red line with the processing of some of the uranium into fuel rods for the Tehran nuclear research reactor.[25] This, however, may be only a temporary positive development, because the process is partly reversible, and within just a few weeks it is possible to render the uranium usable for military purposes. It may be that the Iranian decision to divert some enriched uranium to the research reactor is evidence of an Iranian desire to act cautiously in light of the red line drawn. But this is not necessarily proof of the success of the strategy; rather, it may be proof of Iran's success in circumventing it, making Israel's red line artificial, ineffective, and quite possibly even counterproductive.[26]

An example of partial success in transmitting messages of deterrence was evident when Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz in response to tightening the sanctions against it, and the United States drew a clear red line on the issue. As a result of explicit threats issued by senior Iranians to block the strait, the Bahrain-based US 5th Fleet's spokeswoman warned that any disruption "will not be tolerated" and that the US Navy is "always ready to counter malevolent actions to ensure freedom of navigation."[27] In January 2012, it was reported that the Obama administration secretly transmitted a direct message in this vein to Supreme Leader Khamenei, stating that any disruption to international shipping in the strait would constitute a crossing of a red line and would generate a harsh American response.[28] And indeed, the decisive American threat apparently succeeded in deterring Iran from closing the strait to Western shipping.

On the nuclear issue, the Americans have so far avoided drawing a clear red line, but rather provided vague assertions to the effect that "a nuclear Iran is a red line," adding that this is not a challenge that can be contained.[29] In using the phrase "a nuclear Iran," the US President was likely referring to a nuclear weapons breakout (or weaponization).[30] But one of the problems with drawing such a vague red line is that the target nation (i.e., Iran) is liable not to identify the red line and may cross it inadvertently, unless it is given a clearer message through back channels. It may be that in the view of the US administration, drawing a vague

red line will safeguard it from possible future embarrassment and the need to make tough decisions. A further potential difficulty is that the Americans have drawn their red lines based on their outlook, strategy, and capabilities, which are not necessarily congruent with Israel's outlook, strategy, and capabilities.[31] This is liable to make it difficult for Israel to attack Iran before Iran crosses the American red line.

The Limitations of Red Lines

The red lines drawn by the United States and Israel in the Iranian context have defined the conduct that the two nations want to prevent but not the nature of the retaliation Iran can expect if the lines are crossed, thus retaining a certain measure of freedom to maneuver. In September 2012, in his speech to the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Netanyahu declared that "red lines don't lead to war; red lines prevent war…Faced with a clear red line, Iran will back down."[32] Indeed, drawing red lines may reduce uncertainties and errors in reasoning and thereby prevent escalation. According to this approach, and because of possible failures of rationality on the other side, an act of deterrence must be as open and clear as possible and include clarifications about the deterring side's capabilities and the cost the deterred side will have to pay for crossing a prohibited line.

However, the problem with drawing red lines is that the message the enemy receives may be that the defending side has no commitment to values excluded from the red line, and that the defending side is, in effect, accepting the status quo. In the Iranian context, Iran may refrain from crossing the red line in terms of enrichment but take steps that are no less threatening, such as making progress with plutonium or the delivery system, or enhancing its enrichment capabilities beneath the Israeli red line. This suggests that there is an advantage in leaving the red line somewhat, though not completely vague, because very precisely defined parameters known to both sides might simply stimulate the motivation to outmaneuver them. A detailed red line also shifts the control of how the crisis will be played out into the Iranians' hand: they are the ones who will decide when the crisis goes into high gear and the circumstances that will

> The red lines drawn by the United States and Israel in the Iranian context have defined the conduct that the two nations want to prevent, but not the nature of the retaliation Iran can expect if the lines are crossed.

lead there. The declaration of a red line accompanied by the particulars of retaliation is also liable to draw international criticism: a nation seeking deterrence risks portraying itself as bellicose, beating the drums of war. It can therefore be justifiably contended that it is not always wise to be clear and public about one's demands and the retaliation to be expected should those demands not be met, certainly if it is possible to transmit the precise demands through back channels – both to maintain the dignity of the enemy and, just as importantly, to retain one's own prestige in case one doesn't realize one's threats.

Both in the Syrian and Iranian contexts, the extensive use of red lines, along with the different audiences and targets threatened, has lessened their effectiveness. At times, the enemy is liable to understand the declaration of a red line as an attempt to mollify certain audiences, domestic or foreign, rather than as a deterrent message aimed at it. In addition, the attacks attributed to Israel on Syrian soil are evidence of the failure of the deterrence regime or, alternately, evidence that every level of deterrence comes with an expiration date. The seemingly vacillating American red line in Syria is in fact liable to signal the Iranians that the United States is not committed to the red line it declared for Iran, no matter how broad or vague. The failure to follow through with a red line can earn the player a reputation for not being willing to stand behind its threats, which could affect not only the results of the current incident but also the results of future interactions on this and similar arenas. It is thus quite conceivable that better cementing of America's reputation in a relatively limited event would help it avoid having to realize its threats in some future (and larger) crisis with Iran.

Both in the Syrian and Iranian contexts, the United States has avoided drawing clear red lines because it has not wanted to commit itself to a particular course of action, as failing to realize a red line comes at a price – sometimes an even costlier price than the cost of realizing it. When a red line is drawn, the question is: is one prepared to pay the price of defending it, or is one wagering that the other side will be deterred, in which case one has gotten what one wants at low cost. Furthermore, would it not be appropriate alongside the sticks also to

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dangle some carrots? Would it not be appropriate to present not only the negative ramifications coming to the enemy should it cross the red line but also the positive results it will generate should it refrain from crossing it? The fundamental question is the deterring side's ability and willingness to realize its threat. The credibility of the deterring message is also derived from the deterred side's assessment of the deterring side's willingness to act on its threats and bear the cost of realizing them (and its certainty that the benefit will outweigh the cost). It is a truism that red lines that include the possible use of military force are nothing more than a deterrent move. But in the Iranian context Israel's red lines, and perhaps those of the United States as well, have also served as a negotiating tool and were certainly not meant for Iranian ears alone. When a small nation draws a red line, its purpose is at times not only to deter the enemy but also to mobilize the international community. If this is the Israeli strategy, it has succeeded to a considerable degree.

The purpose of drawing a red line is to signal to the enemy the limit beyond which its actions will have consequences, but this constrains the side drawing the line because it allows the enemy to test one's credibility and willingness to act. On the tactical/operational level, the declaration of a clear red line and the consequences that crossing it will have is also liable to damage the element of surprise, which is often critical to success of a military operation. If the red line is too vague it is not credible; if it is too sharp, it may be more credible but the cost of not realizing it is high. It is therefore necessary to define the purpose of using a red line and ask the following questions: Is it appropriate to define a red line at all? Who, exactly, is the red line's target audience(s)? How exactly should the red line be formulated? When is it liable to be put to the test? Is one prepared to pay the cost of either realizing it or not realizing it? The effectiveness of red lines – whose very nature precludes flexibility in an environment subject to rapid change – is doubtful. It would be unwise to grant the enemy the ability to determine when to act and when not to act. The strategy of a blurred red line, which allows for flexibility in selecting the time, force, and nature of the response, can also achieve a significant measure of deterrence.

> Both in the Syrian and Iranian contexts, the extensive use of red lines, along with the different audiences and targets threatened, has lessened their effectiveness.

Notes

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The Deadlocked Syrian Crisis
The Fable of the Ants and the Elephant

Eyal Zisser

In August 1941, a few weeks after Operation Barbarossa was launched, when it appeared that Nazi Germany's victory was essentially only a matter of time, a German officer, Colonel Berndt von Kleist, wrote in his diary, "The German Army in fighting Russia is like an elephant attacking a host of ants. The elephant will kill thousands, perhaps even millions, of ants, but in the end their numbers will overcome him, and he will be eaten to the bone."[1]

A Situation Assessment

The fire in Syria has been raging for over two years. A limited local peasant protest that began in the rural and peripheral areas – a class protest based on socio-economic distress – spread, struck deep roots, and became a broad popular uprising that eventually evolved into a bloody civil war. With the passage of time, the struggle in Syria assumed a sectarian character, and then a religious character, involving jihad by Islamic groups within Syria and volunteers streaming into the country from all over the Arab and Muslim world, opposing the heretical Alawite government, the ally of Shiite Iran and Hizbollah.[2]

A look at the map of Syria following more than two years of war between the regime and its opponents shows the following picture. First, the regime has lost control of the areas bordering Turkey and Iraq, and has partly lost control of the areas bordering Jordan and Lebanon; these areas have largely fallen to the rebels. Looking to the north, the

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border areas have been seized by Kurdish movements seeking to achieve Kurdish autonomy. Second, the regime is losing its grip on the al-Jazira area in eastern Syria, including its grain, and no less importantly, its oil and gas fields and water reservoirs. The rebels control parts of the territory, especially the area around al-Raqqa, which was the first city to fall completely into rebel hands. Third, Aleppo, Syria's economic capital and the second largest city in the country, has partly fallen to the rebels, together with the surrounding rural areas as well as the rural areas of nearby Idlib. Even the road connecting northern and southern Syria has been contested and is partly controlled by the rebels. Finally, the fight for Syria's capital city, Damascus, is raging, as the regime has not managed to dislodge the rebels from the rural areas surrounding the city. The Golan and Hauran regions are also mostly under rebel control.

As of now, however, all the erstwhile educated assessments and predictions that the fall of the Syrian regime was only a matter of time – a few days, as was the case in Tunisia, a few weeks, as in Egypt, or at most several months, as in Libya – have been rebuffed. The Syrian regime is still on its feet, alive and kicking, and even returning blow for blow. It has managed to maintain its cohesion and unity, based on its supporting pillars: the army, the security forces, the governmental institutions, and the Baath Party. These elements continue their support of the regime, despite the severe blows they have suffered and the wave of desertions from their ranks. More importantly, the regime still relies on and benefits from the support of important sections of Syrian society – mainly a coalition of minorities comprising the Alawites, along with Druze, Christians, and even some Sunnis from the middle and upper classes in the large cities. Some Sunnis from the rural areas and the periphery, areas that are currently in the center of the fighting, have for the most part remained loyal to the regime. In addition, the Syrian regime is benefiting from the support of powerful forces in the regional and international arenas, headed by Russia and Iran. Bashar al-Assad has managed to survive the numerous eulogies said for him, to the point where many observers are

> Bashar al-Assad has managed to survive the numerous eulogies said for him, to the point where many observers are once again mentioning the possibility that he may yet emerge triumphant in his bloody struggle against his opponents.

once again mentioning the possibility that he may yet emerge triumphant in his bloody struggle against his opponents.[3]

The conquest of the al-Raqqa district capital in northeastern Syria (about 550 km northeast of Damascus) in early March 2013 – the first city to fall completely to the rebels – was therefore not, as many wishfully thought at the time, a watershed in the rebellion against the Syrian regime, indicating that the regime's days were numbered.[4] In retrospect, it turned out that the conquest of al-Raqqa was a high tide from which the revolution ebbed. Indeed, the Syrian regime, reinforced by Hizbollah fighters coming to its aid, succeeded in the following months in repelling the rebel offensives around Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs, and has even recaptured villages and towns around these cities – cities that constitute three strategically important centers in which the battle for Syria will be decided. One such town is Qusayr, south of Homs, located on the route connecting Lebanon and Syria, which Hizbollah fighters have restored this year to Assad's control.[5]

The insurrectionists' success in reaching the outskirts of Damascus and Aleppo, concomitant with Bashar al-Assad's success in surviving the challenge posed to him, even in regaining the initiative in the fighting from time to time, are in effect two faces of the war currently underway in Syria. These two sides of the coin reflect the special character of the Syrian revolution in comparison with the other Arab uprisings. This revolution, which involves a popular uprising by broad sections of the population against the Syrian Baath regime, can be regarded as a war of the "rebel ants," with their inherent weaknesses and disadvantages but also their strong points, against the "elephant," whose great strength often becomes his own nemesis.

Many are hoping that the war in Syria will end, like previous "wars of ants," with a victory of the "rebel ants" over the "elephant." At the moment, however, the war in Syria is one of prolonged attrition and stalemate, in which it is the Syrian regime that enjoys a built-in advantage over its opponents. The "rebel ants" rely on broad-based social support among the Sunni population in the periphery and rural areas, which offer a massive reserve of determined soldiers hungry for a change, and especially for victory and vengeance against the regime. Their activity, however, is still a struggle of groups, or even armed gangs, operating in most cases in their own neighborhoods, without internal cohesion or unity; they therefore lack effective political and military leadership

capable of leading them to victory. The rebels' activity has a cumulative effect, albeit slow and gradual. Like "ants," or perhaps like a "plague of locusts," they cover every corner in Syria, while the regime's reach is too short to corner them and contain their activity. Since the rebels lack the ability to unite their forces in order to deal their enemy a decisive blow, however, they can only wait and hope that the regime will fall by itself from continuous hemorrhaging, or as a result of the cumulative effect of their bites and stings. Yet in recent months it is the rebel side that appears exhausted and in despair at its chances of overthrowing the Syrian regime, which has taken the initiative and has a good chance of emerging victorious from the conflict.

The "War of the Ants" in Syria

Like its counterparts in the other Arab countries, the Syrian revolution was a spontaneous popular outbreak anchored in a local context. Thus the insurrectionists in Syria may have derived their inspiration from the Arab uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen, but the uniqueness of the revolution in Syria nevertheless was, and remains, its character of a socioeconomic protest for change by poor and hungry peasants in the Sunni community in rural areas and the periphery.[6]

The insurrectionists in Syria may have derived their inspiration from the Arab uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen, but the uniqueness of the revolution in Syria was, and remains, its character of a socioeconomic protest by poor and hungry peasants in the Sunni community in rural areas and the periphery.

This protest, which was initially expressed in mass demonstrations, mostly on Fridays and weekends, quickly changed direction, and began to assume a violent character. This was due to a large extent to the iron fist used by the regime against its opponents as a result of its decision to adopt a violent solution to the crisis by suppressing the protests through brute force, even at the cost of dozens, hundreds, and even thousands of fatalities. Following the regime's repressive measures, the mass demonstrations against it ended, and the demonstrators disappeared from the districts villages and town squares. Their place was taken by armed groups, usually from the villagers in the areas of rebellion and protest. They mobilized to protect their villages against the chaos and anarchy prevailing in the country, or even in order to wreak vengeance on the army and security forces for the

injuries to their relatives and friends. Soldiers and officers from rural and outlying areas who deserted from the army began to join them, followed by volunteers streaming into Syria from across the border. These armed groups began to attack police stations and army and security forces military bases, and later also infrastructure targets and transportation routes located near their homes. They eventually took control of the rural and outlying areas.[7]

The popular uprising led by armed groups all over Syria, with Arab and Western backing, did not, however, succeed in overthrowing the Syrian regime. The rebels severely damaged the Damascus regime's organization, succeeded in paralyzing daily life throughout the country, and even gained control of large stretches of Syrian territory. The regime's brutal response caused a chain reaction that eventually led to a bloody war and stalemate. By May 2013 the number of fatalities exceeded 100,000; of the 4.5 million refugees forced to abandon their homes, over one million fled to other countries. The damage to the country's economic infrastructure is estimated at nearly $100 billion – more than double Syria's annual GDP.[8]

The Syrian regime's survival is due first and foremost to the rebels' failure. The rebels in Syria and their supporters outside the country have failed to join forces and achieve political and military unity among the political entities and armed groups operating against the regime, be it at home on the battlefield or outside of Syria in hotel corridors in Arab and Western capitals. In any case, the effort to form a political or military leadership failed – there was neither a political leadership nor government in exile, nor a military command to coordinate military activity against the regime and offer a governmental alternative. The political and military institutions that have operated with Western and Arab aid and under pressure from these sources include the Syrian National Council, led by Burhan Ghalioun, followed by Abdulbaset Sieda and George Sabra; and later also the National Coalition, led by Ahmad Mouath al-Khatib and newly elected Ahmad al-Jarba, as well as the temporary government led by Ghassan Hito. There is also the Free Syrian Army, commanded by Riad al-Asaad, followed by the Supreme Military Council, commanded by Salim Idris. All of these wield only a slight influence on events inside Syria.[9]

The latter political and military elements lack both cohesion and legitimacy among the armed groups fighting inside Syria against the

regime, and in any case exert no effective control. At best, they serve as an umbrella whose purpose is to channel arms and money to the rebels, but do not provide them with effective command and operational leadership. At the same time, these groups are likely to prove important in the future as a representative body for Arab and Western countries seeking to create an alternative to the Syrian regime, and perhaps also as a body likely to play a role in picking up the pieces and filling the vacuum in Syria if and when Bashar al-Assad's regime eventually falls. As of now, however, the rebels have failed in their efforts to unite their forces and establish a unified and effective military and political or governmental bloc that would enable them to present an alternative to the Syrian regime, if only a partial one, even in the areas where they have taken control.

Second, the insurrectionists did not take advantage of the broad popular support that they enjoyed in the areas where the uprising started – the rural and outlying areas and poor neighborhoods of the large cities. They also failed in their efforts to extend these bases of support to the Syrian public at large in a way that would enable them to accumulate power as a counterweight to the regime's power, or even enable them to defeat it. Their failure in enlisting support for their cause is most conspicuous among the minorities, who account for 40 percent of the country's population. Most of these minorities, especially the Alawites, Druze, and Christians, have continued to support the regime. Even more critically, the rebels failed to recruit support among the Sunni majority living in the large cities, who have remained passive spectators in the revolution, even when it reached Aleppo and Damascus.

Third, the transition in the revolution to an armed and violent struggle, especially when combined with terrorist attacks aimed in some cases against the civilian population (such as the bombing of the al-Imam mosque in Damascus in February 2013, in which Sheikh Mohammed Said al-Buti was murdered),[10] plays into the regime's hands by deterring many among the silent majority in the country from taking part in the protest against the regime, due to its violent character. It may even cause those who initially supported the protest to change sides and support the regime, which appears to be the only element still capable of restoring stability to Syria and ensuring the personal safety of its citizens.

Fourth, the radical Islamic character of a large part of the rebel forces repels many Syrians, even those who supported the Syrian revolution when it first started. In many regions in which the rebels have gained

control, they have instituted Islamic law, or at least have given daily life an Islamic hue. Moreover, they are persecuting religious minorities, especially the Christians, but also the Druze, Shiites, and Alawites. In fact, some rebel groups have no commitment or affinity to Syria or its territory. They portray themselves as advocates of a pan-Islamic agenda aimed at carving out an Islamic state in the Arab east. This also puts off many Syrians – even those who formerly were strongly opposed to the Syrian regime.[11]

All the opposition groups currently fighting in Syria can be loosely distributed among three main camps. The first consists of radical Islamic Salafi organizations. The most prominent of these is the Front of Defense for the People of Greater Syria (Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl ash-Sham), the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, numbering about 10,000 men. Another fighting group in this category is the Syrian Islamic Front, a coalition of several armed Islamic groups, including Ahrar al-Sham (Free Men of al-Sham), which operates throughout Syria; the al-Haqq Brigades (Brigades of Truth) in Hama; and Jaysh al-Tawhid (Select Army), which operates in Deir ez-Zor. Each of these groups has several thousand soldiers.[12]

All the groups in this category are usually perceived as organized and well-equipped, and much more disciplined than other armed groups operating in Syria. Estimated at several thousand, they benefit from a steady stream of volunteers from throughout the Arab and Muslim world. These groups have succeeded in gaining control of territory in the vicinity of Aleppo, Idlib, and Daraa, and they, especially the Front of Defense, also lead the suicide terrorist attacks against the regime and its supporters.

The second camp comprises groups belonging to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood or those identifying themselves as moderate Islamic movements. Usually perceived as disciplined and organized groups, they have succeeded in gaining control of various areas in northern and southern Syria. These groups have combined forces in the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front, which numbers thousands of soldiers and receives Saudi Arabian support. In contrast to the Front of Defense and the Syrian Islamic Front, the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front regards itself as linked to the opposition institutions, headed by the National Coalition.[13]

The last camp includes groups affiliated, sometimes loosely, with the Free Syrian Army, and in effect is under its umbrella. These groups comprise primarily soldiers and officers who deserted from Assad's

army, or groups that crystallized close to their homes in rural villages and towns all over Syria. They have no significant or clear Islamic identity. All the groups belonging to the Free Syrian Army together number about or slightly more than 50,000 men.[14]

Each of the groups operating in Syria bears a strong local character. While these local elements at times prefer to assume an Islamic cover or other camouflage in order to obtain weapons and money, this does not necessarily indicate any affiliation or commitment or even organizational membership in the Islamic factions – neither the more extreme faction, nor that of the Muslim Brotherhood. A certain degree of coordination, usually limited, has nevertheless been achieved in a number of regions. For example, in the battle for al-Raqqa, the various groups coordinated and cooperated with each other, resulting in the fall of the city to the rebels. Joint military councils have also been set up in Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Daraa, and are trying to coordinate the operations.[15] These coordinating structures, however, are weak, and do not constitute an effective military command. In any case, these structures have no significance beyond the region in which they operate. As the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, the Front of Defense is a much more organized, coordinated, and orderly group, but in the final analysis, it is no more than one piece of a much broader and larger Syrian puzzle.

> Bashar al-Assad has come to the conclusion that victory will eventually come if he remains in office through the crisis, or more precisely, in his palace in Damascus. His strategy aims at holding on at all costs until his enemies tire and give up: the last man standing on the battlefield will be the winner.

Paradoxically, the rebels' weakness also constitutes a source of strength. The fact that the armed opposition consists of groups operating separately, each with its own agenda, rather than an army or an organized militia, makes it difficult for the Syrian regime to overcome them. Indeed, the regular Syrian army faces no real enemy with an order of battle, command and control sites, camps, and logistics centers, all of which would constitute military targets that could be identified and attacked. Instead, there are armed gangs that surface for a specific purpose and immediately disappear, rapidly dissolving into the rural areas from which they came.

On the other hand, like Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah before them in the 2006 Second Lebanon War, Bashar al-Assad has come to the conclusion that victory will eventually come if he remains in office

through the crisis, or more precisely, in his palace in Damascus. His strategy aims at holding on at all costs until his enemies tire and give up: the last man standing on the battlefield will be the winner. The regime's strategy therefore focuses on the defense of Damascus and Aleppo – the backbone of Syria – with all available forces and at any price, and consequently also the areas of Homs and Hama, which lie astride the routes connecting Aleppo to Damascus, and the routes connecting these cities to the coast, the Alawite heartland and the regime's home territory, as well as the ports – Tartus, Baniyas, and Latakia, sources of aid and supplies that are essential to the regime. In addition, the regime is also trying to retain control of the border areas, above all the areas bordering Lebanon and Jordan (hence the importance of Daraa to the regime), and also, albeit to a lesser extent because of their distance from Damascus, the areas bordering Turkey and Iraq.

Conclusion

The success of the revolutions in various Arab countries led many to predict the same ending in Syria. Commentators foresaw that Bashar al-Assad would be unable to survive the uprising against his regime, with his downfall being an inevitable historical necessity and merely a question of time. Assad, however, has demonstrated personal fortitude and endurance, and his regime has managed to retain its cohesion and unity, and especially the support it receives from part of Syrian society.

The rebels' activity has had a cumulative effect, however slow and gradual it may be. Like ants, or perhaps a plague of locusts, they cover every corner in Syria, while the regime's reach is too short to restrain their actions. The regime, however, hopes that like a plague of locusts that vanishes with the same unexplained suddenness with which it appeared, the rebel ants will also vanish, or at least will become weary when they discover that their efforts were in vain and the regime is still standing. The regime also hopes that the exhausted population will stop supporting the rebels, or disavow them because of their radical character and the insecurity and terrorism that they have wrought throughout Syria. Finally, the regime hopes that the Arab and Western countries backing the rebels will discontinue their support when they come to the conclusion that the rebels are incapable of overthrowing the Syrian regime.

The first two years of the Syrian revolution generated momentum that ran entirely against the regime. In recent months, however, it appears that the rebels have encountered a glass ceiling that resists a breakthrough. This is no surprise, given the rebels' inherent weakness and failure to achieve unity, as well as the fatigue and exhaustion in their ranks and the emerging change in Syrian popular sentiment, which is again coming to regard the regime as the only guarantee of renewed stability and security in the country. As a result of all these factors, experts are increasingly coming to believe that the regime will succeed in surviving the revolution against it, that the elephant will eventually overcome the ants, and that Bashar al-Assad will then have little or no difficulty reestablishing his rule throughout the country.

As far as Israel is concerned, it is still hard to determine whether it is better for Assad to remain in power as the devil it knows, who is careful to maintain calm along the joint border. If he falls, his place is liable to be taken by radical Islamic groups that will bring terrorism and chaos to Israel's northern border. It might, however, be in Israel's best interest to regard Assad's fall from power as a development likely to deal a severe blow to the radical axis of evil comprising Assad, Hizbollah, and Iran. In any case, Israel is unable to influence the course of events in Syria; and since the emerging trend of events in the country is liable to make Assad victorious more quickly than Jerusalem expects, Israel may find itself facing a different Assad than the one it has known – a self-confident ruler more dependent on Iran and Hizbollah than in the past, and above all, free of the constraints that forced him to exercise restraint in the Lebanese and Jordanian theaters and against Israel.

Notes

1   See Alan Clark, *Operation Barbarossa, The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-1945* (Tel Aviv: IDF Publishing House, 1972), p. 49.
2   For general background on the Syrian revolution, see Fouad Ajami, *The Syrian Rebellion* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2012); David W. Lesch, *The Fall of the House of Assad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).
3   For the reasons and dimensions of support for the Syrian regime, see for example Eyal Zisser, "Can Assad's Syria Survive Revolution?" *Middle East Quarterly* 20 (spring 2013): 13-21.
4   For example, see "Does the Fall of al-Raqqa Constitute a Turning Point in the Syrian Revolution?" Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (Doha,

Qatar), Policy paper, March 24, 2013, http://english.dohainstitute.org/
release/80f489f5-ab59-4cdd-9a6e-8a2b74b35d41.

5   For the achievements of the Syrian regime in regaining control of various
areas of the country during May, see *Haaretz*, May 19-20, 2013.

6   For more about the socioeconomic background of the protest in Syria, see
Eyal Zisser, "The Renewal of the 'Struggle for Syria': The Rise and Fall of the
Baath Party," *Sharqiyya* (fall 2011): 21-29. See also *EIU (Economist Intelligence
Unit), Syria – Country Report*, April 2011.

7   For information about how the rebellion broke out, see the *Syria
Comment* blog by Prof. Joshua Landis of Oklahoma University, http://
www.joshualandis.com/blog, and the *Syrian Revolution Digest* blog
by Syrian expatriate intellectual Ammar Abdulhamid, http://www.
syrianrevolutiondigest.com.

8   For example, see the "BBC Guide to the Syrian Opposition," http://www.
bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15798218. See also Stephen Star, "The
West's Dilemma: Who Is the Official Opposition in Syria?" *The Globe and
Mail*, April 10, 2013.

9   See *Haaretz*, May 20, 2013. See also Keith Proctor, "Inside Syria's Siege
Economy," *CNN*, May 8, 2013. For estimates of the numbers of fatalities and
refugees, see *Reuters*, May 14, 2013.

10   See the reports of the assassination of religious figure al-Buti in *SANA*
(Syrian Arab News Agency, Damascus), February 21, 2013; and *Reuters*,
March 21 and 22, 2013. See also "Islamic State Declared in Syria," *Syria
Comment*, March 14, 2013.

11   For example, al-Qaeda in Iraq sponsored the al-Nusra Front in Syria, which
aids al-Sham, thereby exposing the affiliation of the Front operating in Syria
with the parent organization to which it belongs. The leaders of the al-Nusra
Front quickly disavowed the bear hug of their comrades in Iraq, but did not
deny their allegiance to the al-Qaeda organization and its leader, Ayman al-
Zawahiri, See Aron Lund, "Major Salafi Faction Criticizes Jabhat – Nosra,"
May 4, 2013.

12   See al-Hayat, "Ba al-Nusra," November 11, 25, 2012. See also Aaron Lund,
"Holy Warriors, A Field Guide to Syria's Jihadi Groups," *Argument,* October
15, 2012.

13   See Aron Lund, "Struggling to Adapt, the Muslim Brotherhood in a New
Syria," Carnegie Papers (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, May
2013).

14   For example, see the Free Syrian Army website, http:/syrianarmyfree.com.
See also a discussion of the question of whether the Free Syrian Army really
exists on Syrian territory, in Koert Debeuf, Aron Lund, "The Free Syrian
Army Does Exist," *Syria Comment*, March 23, 2013.

15   See Matthew Barber, "The Raqqa Story: Rebel Structure, Planning, and
Possible War Crimes," *Syria Comment*, April 3, 2013.

Hizbollah in Syria:
Losing the Balance between "National Resistance" and Sectarian Interests?

Benedetta Berti and Yoram Schweitzer

Over thirty months ago Hizbollah greeted the beginning of the so-called Arab Awakening – the massive wave of social and political mobilizations that forcefully shook up the status quo in the Middle East and North Africa region – with a mix of hope and enthusiasm. Today, in an ironic twist of fate, the initial celebrations have gradually turned sour as the Lebanese Shiite Party of God finds itself directly affected by the arrival of the "spring," much like its longtime ally and patron, the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad. The past year has been characterized by Hizbollah's incremental involvement in the Syrian civil war and by the group's shift from offering cautious political backing and military advice to investing substantial political as well as military capital in directly supporting Assad's war against his domestic opposition. Currently, having become a warring party in the ongoing internal war, Hizbollah risks its domestic as well as its regional legitimacy and popularity, while also potentially jeopardizing its pivotal role within Lebanon.

This article analyzes Hizbollah's position with respect to the ongoing Syrian conflict, highlighting the organization's interests and describing the gradual evolution in the organizational narrative as well as in its actual involvement in Syria. The article focuses on understanding the domestic as well as the regional impact of Hizbollah's current strategy in Syria, assessing how the recent organizational choices may backfire in the short and medium terms. Overall, the challenge posed to Hizbollah by the Syrian civil war represents one of the most significant ideological,

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political, and military threats faced by the organization since its creation in the early 1980s, and perhaps the most significant challenge to the group's narrative and reputation since the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000.

Hizbollah's Strategy on Syria: Interests, Ideology, and Operations

Hizbollah initially welcomed the Arab Awakening, expressing its solidarity and support for the protesters and their demands and identifying the revolutions as "of the poor, the free, the freedom seekers and the rejecters of humiliation and disgrace...It is the revolution... against...the regime's policy in the Arab-Israeli struggle."[1] The support was especially strong in the cases of Egypt and Bahrain, due to Hizbollah's openly hostile relations with both the Mubarak regime and the al-Khalifa monarchy.

Hizbollah's enthusiastic support for the "Arab street" and the revolutions, however, soon proved to be selective and highly influenced by the group's organizational interests. Politics and a tinge of sectarianism, rather than shared values or ideology, seemed to dictate Hizbollah's approach to the regional unrest. Indeed, when the protests spread to Syria, Hizbollah immediately sided with the government and against the opposition, downplaying the rebels' strength and questioning their motivation.[2]

This approach was informed by the long and strategic cooperation between the Syrian regime and the Lebanese Shiite organization: since the end of the Lebanese civil war, Syria's political and military role in Lebanon has represented a force multiplier for Hizbollah, with Damascus looking after Hizbollah's interests while making sure the group's military apparatus was left unchallenged domestically. Following the end of Syria's tutelage of Lebanon in 2005, the relationship between the Assad regime and Hizbollah did not dissolve. On the contrary, Hizbollah continued to support Syrian interests within Lebanon in its de facto role as the political leader of the March 8 forces, the pro-Syrian political alliance between Hizbollah, the second main Shiite party – Amal, and the (Christian) Free Patriotic Movement of General Michel Aoun. In addition, over the past decades Syria has served as the connecting link between Hizbollah and Iran, offering both a secure route to transfer weapons and logistical assistance to the organization, as well as a solid link in the tripartite alliance. And since Bashar al-Assad rose to power

in 2000, the strong personal relations with Hizbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah have deepened even further.

For all these reasons, Hizbollah's direct political, military, and geo-strategic interest from the beginning of the conflict in Syria was to assist in preserving the status quo. Yet despite Hizbollah's consistent interest in supporting Assad since anti-regime political demonstrations first broke out in the spring of 2011, the group's narrative and degree of involvement in Syria have evolved dramatically over the past year.

At the outset of the anti-Assad protests, Hizbollah focused simultaneously on keeping itself at the margins of the conflict by downplaying any direct involvement, while tempering open support for the regime with conciliatory statements with respect to the "need to reform." Secretary General Nasrallah emphasized on multiple occasions that "a majority of the Syrian people believe in the regime and support Bashar al-Assad."[3] He explained, "The difference between the Arab uprisings and Syria...is that President Assad is convinced that reforms are necessary, unlike Bahrain and other Arab countries," and urged "all Syrians to preserve their country as well as the ruling regime, a regime of resistance, and to give their leaders a chance to cooperate with all Syria's communities in order to implement the necessary reforms."[4]

Hizbollah invested in casting its support for Assad as part of its resistance agenda, rejecting accusations of applying a double standard with respect to the Arab revolutions, while stressing its consistency in standing firm against foreign interests in the region. Accordingly, the organization stressed that the Assad regime, the only government seriously opposing US-Israeli interests in the region, merited Hizbollah support.[5] Hizbollah emphasized the negative impact of foreign powers on the conflict by asserting that "America, the West, Israel, and some regional sides want to destroy Syria only because they want to get rid of the main supporter of the resistance in Lebanon and Palestine. They want to take revenge against the Syrian state, against the people, the leadership, and the army, which supported the resistance in Lebanon and the resistance in Palestine."[6]

As the conflict in Syria escalated into a full-fledged civil war, Hizbollah found itself gradually downplaying its more accommodating narrative regarding the need to reform and compromise, while emphasizing the importance of supporting Assad and highlighting the negative role of foreign interests and their desire to destroy "Syria as a state, as a people,

as a society and as an army."[7] The tones have escalated sharply, with Nasrallah stating in a speech on April 30, 2013 that "Syria has friends that will not allow it to fall into the hands of the United States, Israel, or *takfiri* groups," referring to a radical branch of Salafism.[8]

This statement is significant, whether it reveals Nasrallah's authentic view of the conflict or his sophisticated rhetoric intended to justify his controversial policy on Syria. First, the statement clarifies Hizbollah's narrative of the Syrian front as an extension of its national resistance campaign against American and Israeli interests. According to Hizbollah, such foreign players do not only aim to topple the regime and remove Syria from the axis of resistance, but also want to turn the country into a failed state. In this context, Nasrallah tied the Syrian events to the Palestinian cause as well, stating: "Apart from the target, what is taking place now in Syria and is going on is very dangerous, challenging, threatening and harmful to Syria itself and to the Palestinian cause as we used to say in the first days. Today what is being weaved to the Palestinian cause in the stage of Palestinian exhaustion, obscurity and unknown future, in the stage of Israeli arrogance and in the stage of the return of the Americans forcefully to the region [sic]."[9] A few weeks later, Nasrallah made this link even more explicit by stating: "Syria is the backbone of the resistance, and support for the resistance and the resistance cannot sit idly by while its back is being broken....If Syria falls then Palestine is lost and the resistance in Palestine is lost, Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem will be lost."[10]

But although Nasrallah's statement underscored the links Hizbollah sees between Syria, its national resistance, and the Palestinian issue, in recent weeks the organization appears to have adopted an increasingly confrontational and even sectarian tone. In a speech delivered on May 25, 2013, Nasrallah stated that he had attempted mediation between the Assad regime and the opposition, but that this endeavor failed due to the anti-Assad forces' refusal to find a peaceful solution for Syria.[11] By blaming the continuation of the conflict entirely on the opposition and by accusing its activists of extremism, Hizbollah has marked even more clearly the fault lines between the pro and anti-Assad forces, in Syria as well as within Lebanon. In addition Nasrallah has repeatedly referred to jihadists portions of the opposition as *takfiris,* an extremely charged word that clarifies the organization's belligerence toward such groups.

At the same time, sectarian themes have gradually assumed more prominence, for example with Nasrallah emphasizing the importance of Hizbollah's role in protecting Shiite shrines (first and foremost the Sayyidah Zaynab Shrine in Damascus) as well as border towns in the al-Qusayr area.[12] Hizbollah, however, is extremely sensitive to this issue and has openly stated on many occasions that it is not acting based on a sectarian agenda, specifying that "they accused us of sectarianism. This is nonsense....We fought in Bosnia and lost martyrs, in defense of whom? In defense of Muslim Sunnis in Bosnia. There are no Shia in Bosnia. All the hardships that we endured and will continue to endure are for the sake of Palestine. Nobody can accuse us of sectarianism."[13]

Finally, Hizbollah's increasingly confrontational strategy not only escalated the rhetoric with respect to the opposition, but it also resulted in the organization openly admitting involvement in the war and military support for Assad, a claim it had denied until its May 25, 2013 speech (and even in this speech, Nasrallah stated that Hizbollah's active involvement had only started the previous month). Nasrallah has also been careful to stipulate that the struggle by Lebanese for Syria (and in Syria) should not be exported to Lebanon, with the Hizbollah leader emphasizing his intention to avoid military clashes within Lebanon.

When Hizbollah openly acknowledged its active involvement in the Syrian conflict, the group confirmed what the international community already knew: that Hizbollah had not limited itself to offering moral, political, and limited military support to the Assad regime; but that the group had also began to send its fighters in masses to fight side-by-side with the Syrian army.

> Nasrallah has been careful to stipulate that the struggle by Lebanese for Syria (and in Syria) should not be exported to Lebanon, emphasizing his intention to avoid military clashes within Lebanon.

Although over the past eighteen months there have been recurring reports of Hizbollah militants killed in Syria,[14] it appears that the organization's involvement in the war has increased exponentially over the past six months, with the group backing the Syrian army and supporting it in both defensive and offensive missions.[15] A particularly important example of this pattern of increasing involvement is the role Hizbollah has reportedly played in the fighting in the area around al-Qusayr. This border town in western Syria is the key to holding the Homs province, as well as to securing a safe corridor between Syria and Lebanon and

establishing a link between the Syrian capital and the Alawite areas in the northwestern coastal areas of the country. Hizbollah's support for the regime in taking al-Qusayr from the rebel forces is the culmination of the group's increased involvement in the conflict and confirmation that Hizbollah, from secondary actor, has now become a strategic ally for the Syrian regime.

Hizbollah in Syria: Domestic, Regional, and International Impact

Hizbollah's growing military and political role in Syria has been accompanied by a clear narrative that portrays the battle for Damascus as associated with the group's resistance in Lebanon as well as with the Palestinian cause. However, Hizbollah's self-portrait as a the champion of Arab interests trying to prevent American and Israeli agents from toppling Assad and destroying Syria has failed to win the hearts and minds of the majority of the Middle East. In fact, throughout the region Hizbollah has been repeatedly accused of harboring a double standard in its support for the Arab Awakening and of placing narrow parochial interests above the call to resist injustice.

Within Lebanon, the group has seen a decline in its reputation and legitimacy, especially within the Sunni community. This trend is not new, as the political and sectarian divide between the Shiite and the Sunni communities dates back at the very least to the post-2005 assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafıq Hariri and the subsequent Syrian withdrawal. Still, the Syrian crisis has exacerbated existing divisions: for example, a recent poll showed that only 5 percent of the Lebanese Sunni community declared support for Hizbollah, against 94 percent of the Lebanese Shiites. The poll also showed a growing disaffection toward Hizbollah from the Christian community, with only approximately one third of Lebanese Christians openly siding with Nasrallah's group.[16]

Walid Jumblatt, a seasoned politician and the leader of the Druze community and the (Druze) Progressive Socialist Party, expressed this sense of frustration with Hizbollah's staunch support for Assad, stating, "I felt sad when I heard that Sayyed Hasan – who was the Arab and Islamic hero in 2006 – insists on belittling himself this way…defending a regime that will not last."[17] Jumblatt had also previously stated that "anyone who defends Palestinians…cannot stand against the Syrian people."[18]

This statement briefly summarizes the serious legitimacy challenge, in Lebanon and regionally, that fighting in Syria poses to Hizbollah.

The organization built its reputation and support as a non-sectarian movement focused on external resistance and on protecting Lebanese and Arab rights. Following the Israeli unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, and after the self-proclaimed "divine victory" against Israel in 2006, Hizbollah's regional and domestic reputation soared. This trend, however, has been reversed in recent years, first in May 2008, when the organization turned its weapons inward against other Lebanese groups, and later with the accusations launched by the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) of direct involvement in orchestrating and executing the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri. Syria is another nail in the coffin of Hizbollah's reputation as the national resistance, as it strengthens the perception of the group acting on a self-serving, parochial, and sectarian basis and of being more interested in its strategic partnership with Tehran and Damascus than its role and status in Beirut. Similarly, Hizbollah's claims to be fighting on behalf of the Palestinians are challenged by the Syrian regime's multiple attacks against Palestinian refugees in Syria, as well as Hamas' public distancing from Assad and his war.

Hizbollah's political foes – the March 14 forces led by Saad Hariri and the Future Movement – have relied on these apparent contradictions to build a case against Hizbollah in Lebanon. Already in August 2011 Saad Hariri stated: "Is there in history any resistance movement that supported an oppressive ruler against oppressed people or supported despotic regimes against peoples demanding freedom?...It is shameful that Hizbollah views the Syrian uprising from the perspective of the Iranian interest, not the will of the Arab peoples."[19] More recently, in April 2013, the March 14 General Secretariat declared that Hizbollah's role in Syria "will not only threaten Lebanon and its national unity, but the entire region and even the world," adding that "Hizbullah bombarded Qusayr, Nahriyeh, Burhaniyeh and Saqarji...from its positions in al-Qasr and Hawsh al-Sayyed Ali. They bombed civilians and killed many women and children.... If we have to, we will target civilians just like they do. Our civilians are not less valuable than theirs. Hizbullah is killing arbitrarily in Syria."[20] These same

> Syria is another nail in the coffin of Hizbollah's reputation as the national resistance, as it strengthens the perception of the organization acting on a self-serving, parochial, and sectarian basis and of being more interested in its strategic partnership with Tehran and Damascus than its role and status in Beirut.

arguments are echoed across the Middle East, and especially in countries that have openly taken a stand in support of the anti-Assad opposition, like the Gulf countries.

While so far the Shiite community within Lebanon continues to back Hizbollah and its involvement in Syria, in the future such support may begin to quiver as sectarian relations within Lebanon collapse under the pressure of Hizbollah's role in Syria, and as more Hizbollah militants die in fighting Assad's war. So far the organization's involvement in Syria has been used by anti-Hizbollah leaders within the Shiite community to criticize the group. For example, historic friend-turned-foe Subbhi al-Tufayli stated in February 2013: "Hizbollah should not be defending the criminal regime that kills its own people and that has never fired a shot in defense of the Palestinians...those Hizbollah fighters who are killing children and terrorizing people and destroying houses in Syria will go to hell."[21] While overall such criticism does not alter the fact that Hizbollah can still count on the support of the Lebanese Shiite community and its Christian allies, led by General Michel Aoun, the organization's behavior in Syria has clearly inflamed its critics.

Not surprisingly, Hizbollah's increased participation in the Syrian civil war has worsened its already rocky relations with the Syrian opposition. Even in the early days of the demonstrations, protesters repeatedly burned Hizbollah flags and openly called for the Lebanese-Shiite organization to back off.[22] More recently, the level of animosity has escalated, with Hizbollah militants treated as enemy combatants by the Syrian opposition and with the chief of staff of the Free Syrian Army, General Salim Idriss, declaring: "Hizbollah fighters are invading Syrian territory. And when they continue to do that and the Lebanese authorities don't take any action to stop them coming to Syria, I think we are allowed to fight Hizbollah fighters inside [Lebanese] territory."[23] In an ironic twist, Hizbollah is labeled as a "foreign occupier" and threatened that its presence in Syrian territory will be met by local "resistance." In the Salafist circles, in Syria and abroad, Hizbollah is also depicted as an enemy of the Syrian revolution, with the group referred to as the "party of the devil" and a "terrorist organization."[24]

Hizbollah's involvement has also drawn similar regional criticism, with Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag rhetorically asking, "How could a party that calls itself the party of God wage war to kill innocent men, women and children ... it should change its name to

the party of Satan,"[25] and with the Gulf Cooperation Council labeling Hizbollah as a terrorist organization and taking steps to target the group's financial assets.[26] Influential Sunni Muslim cleric Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi also made militant and sectarian remarks against Hizbollah, calling it the "Party of Satan" and stating: "The leader of the party of the Satan comes to fight the Sunnis…Now we know what the Iranians want… They want continued massacres to kill Sunnis." In addition, Qaradawi openly called for Sunnis to join the jihad against Assad.[27]

More generally, the level of regional support for Hizbollah has been negatively affected by its involvement in the Syrian civil war. For example, popular support for Hizbollah between 2010 and 2012 fell by 10 percent in Egypt and by a staggering 26 percent in Jordan.[28] Naturally this negative perception extends to other strong supporters of the Assad regime, including both Russia and Iran. At the same time, the rising regional criticism around Hizbollah's role in Syria is further strengthened by the growing sectarian tones of the civil war. In this sense, the rising internal tensions within Lebanon can be interpreted as a reflection of a larger, and worrisome, regional trend.

Internationally, the combined pressure of Hizbollah's involvement in Syria, the STL indictment, and the recent Bulgarian accusations of direct involvement in the July 2012 Burgas terrorist attack have had a broad impact and led the European Union to alter its neutral stance with respect to Hizbollah. On July 22, 2013 the European Union decided to send a strong political signal against Hizbollah's growing regional and international activism by designating Hizbollah's military wing as a terrorist organization. Labeling Hizbollah as a terrorist organization helps weaken the group's political legitimacy and international standing, both of which are highly valued by the Lebanese Shiite organization. Nonetheless, from a practical standpoint the EU's new categorization of Hizbollah's military wing does not constitute a huge hurdle for the organization.

> The repercussions of Hizbollah's current involvement in Syria go beyond affecting the group's reputation and legitimacy, as they also threaten the group's political position within Lebanon.

But the repercussions of Hizbollah's current involvement in Syria go beyond affecting the group's reputation and legitimacy, as they also threaten the group's political position within Lebanon.

Hizbollah's stance with respect to Syria has created a rift with recent political allies, like the Druze community, while souring the already tense political relations with the March 14 forces. Overall, this has led to a rise in inter-sectarian tensions within Lebanon, resulting in repeated armed clashes between pro and anti-Assad supporters, mostly localized in the historically troubled areas around the northeast border city of Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city. The rising number of clashes has been fueled by the growing polarization of Lebanese society and by the growing influence and strength of Sunni Salafist organizations, which have been urging their followers to support the Syrian opposition as broadly as possible while adopting an antagonist approach with respect to Hizbollah. So far open clashes in Lebanon between Sunni supporters of the anti-Assad forces and Hizbollah have been limited, but more recent episodes – including the May 2013 rocket attack against the al-Dahiya suburb, Hizbollah's stronghold in southern Beirut – indicate that inter-sectarian relations within Lebanon have hit a new low.

Hizbollah calculates that its involvement in Syria will not lead to a broader internal civil war in Lebanon, a scenario that would deeply threaten its position in the country and likely weaken it. However, the domestic climate in Lebanon is exceptionally tense, especially given the current state of political paralysis following the fall of the government of PM Najib Mikati, which did not survive the growing domestic tensions exacerbated by the Syrian civil war. Lebanon's next parliamentary elections are unlikely to take place as scheduled in the summer of 2013, thus leaving the country in a state of political limbo and weakness. In this context, Hizbollah's open declaration of war in Syria may truly complicate the group's standing in Lebanon.

Hizbollah in Syria: Looking Ahead

By supporting Assad so visibly, actively, and extensively, Hizbollah has taken a huge risk. So far the organization may have concluded that the prize is worth the fight, given that Hizbollah's military contribution is proving crucial to Assad, offering a lifeline to the exhausted Syrian army. Informed by the belief that losing Syria will jeopardize the organization's political, military, and regional position, Hizbollah has decided to put everything on the line.

From Israel's vantage, Hizbollah's current strategy on Syria places the group in a difficult predicament, and overall, in a weaker position. This

is the case because of its political decline within Lebanon and regionally, but also because of its substantial military involvement in the civil war. Furthermore, in the longer term, Hizbollah's decision to support Assad and become directly involved in the conflict may prove to be a strategic blunder for the group. This assessment was expressed in a recent speech by the IDF chief of staff, referring to "flames" that have seized the edge of Nasrallah's robe that could potentially threaten his position in Lebanon and beyond.

Even if Assad and his allies were to prevail in Syria (still an unlikely scenario), Hizbollah may yet find itself in a weaker position, after having alienated a large part of its regional and domestic constituency. This will be the case especially if the organization will begin suffering substantial casualties among its ranks, which could in turn jeopardize part of the support from the Lebanese Shiite community. In this scenario, Hizbollah would manage to preserve its strategic partnership with Iran and Syria, but would still be politically weaker and have a dire need to regroup after its military losses in Syria. As a result, the organization would not be in an immediate position to initiate a confrontation with Israel.

If Assad and his regime were to implode, Hizbollah's status in both Syria and Lebanon would be even more at risk: a regime change would empower the anti-Syrian opposition and weaken both Hizbollah's as well as Iran's position in the Middle East. In both cases, Hizbollah would come out of the war in a more uncertain and weaker position, even though the organization's military force in Lebanon and its alliance with Lebanese-Shiite community and with Iran would likely be enough to stop its implosion. In addition Hizbollah may in the future have a taste of its own medicine and suffer retaliatory violent attacks from the Salafist groups in both Syria as well as Lebanon. Here too in this scenario Nasrallah's organization would need to retreat and regroup before considering opening a new military front by attacking Israel.

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Yet Israel would be ill-advised to interpret Hizbollah's current weakness as an opportunity to become directly involved in the conflict in Syria or to target its longstanding adversary in Lebanon directly. Indeed, despite its numerous problems, Hizbollah remains a significant foe

with formidable military power and would still be capable of engaging in a relatively protracted and extremely damaging war against Israel. Moreover, perceived Israeli aggression against Syria, or even more so, directly against Hizbollah in Lebanon, would likely contribute to improve the level of support for the organization and unite the country as a reaction to the common threat. As such, Israel should be mindful of this predicament and avoid being dragged into the Syrian civil war or into a war in Lebanon.

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Russian-Turkish Relations: Contemporary Dilemmas of Past Empires

Zvi Magen and Gallia Lindenstrauss

Introduction

Russian-Turkish relations have a long and charged historic dimension, and competition between Turkey and Russia still exists today, as reflected in geopolitical, economic, and even ideological aspects. In the current reality created by the upheaval in the Arab world, there is a struggle underway for influence in reshaping the regional order in the Middle East. Russia and Turkey find themselves involved in this process and in competition with one another to enhance their ability to influence regional developments. At the same time, since the establishment of the Turkish republic, Turkey has traditionally shied away from direct confrontation with Russia, and the question arises whether this dynamic will prevail in future relations between the two countries as well.

The fact that Turkey is perceived as the local representative of NATO and the West in the Middle East affects its relations with Russia and the prospects for tightening these relations. At the same time, Turkey is an independent regional player with its own agenda. Especially in the context of the civil war in Syria, both Russia and Turkey have differing interests and agendas, and they therefore find themselves on opposite sides of the regional fence. Friction between the two countries, however, is not confined to the Middle East, and extends likewise to the Central Asia and Caucasus areas of the former Soviet Union, and the developing conflict in the Mediterranean Sea.[1] In addition, the article will look into

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how the tension between Russia and Turkey affects these countries' complex relations with Israel, as Israel's involvement in the three areas under discussion makes Israel an important factor that affects Moscow and Ankara's strategic calculations.

Russian-Turkish Relations: Background

Competitive relations between Turkey and Russia are not a new phenomenon. The two countries were at war with each other on many occasions between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, and the tenor of their relations fluctuated over the twentieth century. Hostility between the Czarist and Ottoman empires gave way to cooperation between the new countries that succeeded these empires, followed in turn by Turkey's accession to NATO in 1952, which put the Turkey and Russia on opposite sides in the Cold War. The 1990s featured increasing Turkish intervention in the countries of the former Soviet Union, especially in the Caucasus, where Turkey and Russia supported different sides in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh: Russia supported Armenia, while Turkey supported Azerbaijan. In addition, Turkey supported Georgia, which is in conflict with Russia. Russia has also cooperated with Iran against Turkish interests in what has been called the "Great Game" in Central Asia.

At the same time, economic relations between Russia and Turkey have flourished, overshadowing the political friction. Russia is Turkey's most important trading partner, overtaking Germany in 2008. Most of this trade ($24 billion out of $32 billion)[2] consists of Russian energy exports to Turkey, making Turkey the second largest export market for Russian energy resources. In the reverse direction, Russia is Turkey's third largest export market. The two countries are seeking to increase the volume of trade between them to $100 billion by 2015.[3] As part of this trend, Turkey has also become a leading destination for Russian tourists (3.5 million Russians out of an annual total of 31 million tourists visiting Turkey), and there have been significant private business investments across both countries.[4] The two countries also initially shared an understanding concerning the construction of energy transit routes through Turkish territory. In early 2000, however, Turkey opted for cooperation with the West in the Nabucco project, which was designed to transport energy resources from the Caspian seashore to Europe through Turkish territory, thereby bypassing both Russia and Iran. Russia's retaliation for this choice came in the South Stream Project, which transports gas to Europe

through the Black Sea (in addition to building a pipeline to China on Russian territory from the Caspian Sea and another pipeline to Europe through the Baltic Sea – the Nord Stream).[5]

Like Russia, Turkey is pursuing a policy adapted to the developing multi-polar global system. For example, since April 2013 Turkey has been a "dialogue partner" of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (in which the prominent partners are Russia and China).[6] The zero problems policy steered by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has facilitated further development of Turkish-Russian commercial ties, while the issues in dispute keep a low profile. To be sure, Turkey's concomitant efforts to regain its dominant status in areas historically under its control (including the Middle East) have posed a challenge to Russian strategic interests. Yet even here, sufficient spheres for cooperation between Russia and Turkey exist, including economic ties and Turkish assistance to Russia in rehabilitating its standing in the Muslim world. And while relations worsened with the outbreak of the Arab Spring, which put the two countries on opposing sides, particularly in Syria, the two sides have channels for dialogue and are trying to maintain at least the impression of proper relations between them, while keeping the dispute between them under control. The high level visits to Turkey, by Russian President Vladimir Putin (in December 2012) and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (in April 2013), in addition to a series of reciprocal working visits during the year, reflect these attempts to calm the situation. And in keeping with Turkey's traditional policy of trying to avoid a direct conflict with Russia,[7] current events in Syria indicate that Turkey has yielded to Russian pressure to a considerable extent.[8]

The Former Soviet Union

One of the three main areas of friction between Russia and Turkey is the southern part of the former Soviet Union. From Russia's perspective, this region is not only rich in energy resources; it is also strategically important, due to its position at the intersection between Russia and the Middle East, which makes it Russia's "soft underbelly." This region is in fact a theater of Russian confrontation with a number of parties: the West; radical Islam, which constitutes a threat to Russia's territorial integrity; and China – and while at the moment China is a partner of Russia in the international arena, a renewal of the rivalry between them is only a question of time. As Russia struggles to achieve its proper place

as an equal partner in the international arena in the framework of the multi-polar world that it champions, it feels that its primary challenge right now comes from the West. As part of that conflict with the West, Russia is acting to strengthen its grip in the former Soviet Union in order to prevent the countries in the region from joining NATO, which wants to expand eastward (NATO has actually done this in Eastern Europe, and even in certain countries of the former Soviet Union). Russia's 2008 war against Georgia, for example, was part of this policy of using force to prevent other countries that were part of the Soviet Union from crossing over to the Western camp.

This competition for control of the region, known as the "New Great Game," is conducted mainly through economic levers. Russia believes that its main problem in the region is the US effort to gain access to the area's energy resources. For its part, China is promoting an economic route from its territory to Europe through Central Asia and Turkey, referred to as the New Silk Road. At the same time, the US is trying to launch a route in the opposite direction southward, toward India, while bypassing Russia, China, and Iran. Russia is trying to thwart these plans, which are attempts to bypass its territory in the construction of trade routes, including the building of energy transport pipelines from the Caspian Sea area, both eastward and westward.

In recent years Turkey has become one of the key regional players in this theater. As a country that once controlled large parts of these countries, and given its ethnic, cultural, and religious affinity to their populations, Turkey has been active in this region since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, while promoting a pan-Turkish agenda. Turkey has invested considerable resources in the construction of cultural and economic infrastructures in these countries, and the Turkish Gulen movement has even established many educational institutions in the region.[9] At the same time, Turkey is also actively expanding its economic involvement.

While Russia could tolerate these measures, political intervention in the region is a red line, which if crossed is liable to cause an open conflict. Russia interprets all of Turkey's actions in the region as supported by the West, with Turkey helping to promote NATO's goals in this critical region, in part by hindering efforts by Russia, as well as by China and Iran. And while Russia is relatively willing to accept competition in Central Asia, the situation is far more acute in the Caucasus. Russia and Turkey are on a collision course there, with Turkey in effect becoming a strategic partner

of Azerbaijan and Georgia, which together create a political axis and lately also a security one (the three countries have even conducted joint military maneuvers).[10] For all intents and purposes, this cooperation cuts Russia off from the Middle East. Russia, which seeks a suitable answer to this challenge, is operating its own joint axis with Armenia and Iran, and is backing Armenia in its struggle in Azerbaijan for control of Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia is even threatening military action against Azerbaijan and Georgia, and has substantiated these messages with military exercises in the Caucasus and the Black Sea. Yet despite Russian fears, it appears that Turkey has in effect accepted Russian dominance in the region, and is unwilling to enter into a direct conflict with Russia, as in the Russian-Georgian war, when Turkey delayed the passage of American ships bearing aid to Georgia through the Turkish Straits.[11] Turkey also supports Russia's position in principle that the Black Sea should remain without any American or NATO presence, except for Turkey.[12]

The Middle East

Since the shift in Turkish policy and its greater emphasis on the Middle East, Russian-Turkish disagreements over this region have intensified. Russia, which has invested heavily in an ongoing effort to position itself in the region as a power equivalent in influence to the US, finds itself on a collision course with Turkey, which is claiming regional leadership for itself, both in its own right and as a NATO member. The ongoing complex disturbances in the Arab world have created a new situation in both the Middle East and the international situation in general. Consequently, powers with interests in the region, including Russia, must take action to renew their influence there, and to adapt their policy to the new challenges in order to shape the future regional order.

In the years preceding the upheaval in the Arab world, Russia successfully fostered close relations with the radical anti-Western axis, along with promoting its security and economic goals. In tandem, Russia consolidated its regional status as a mediator in regional crises. However, most of these assets have been undermined by the turbulence in the Arab world. Specific negative consequences for Russia include the heightened position of political Islam, which threatens to spill over into Russia itself; the strengthened Sunni axis, which, backed by the West, is taking action against the radical axis; and growing competition over shaping the regional order and attaining hegemonic status in the region. Russia's new

goals include preserving its presence in the region, which it regards as an essential element in its global objectives, and cultivating its interest in the process of shaping the future regional order in order to ensure its status and that of its supporters.

Following an initial period of confusion and searching for solutions in the effort to offset the damage caused by the regional upheaval and rehabilitate the standing it had painstakingly achieved, Russia settled on its current policy, which poses many challenges to its regional and global rivals. Following a general reassessment based on the negative lessons learned from the revolutionary events in North Africa, Russia chose its current policy of continuing and even increasing its support for the radical axis in the Middle East. Its principal measure in this context is support for the Assad regime in its struggle for survival, which involves shielding the battlefield area from outside intervention while supplying direct support for the regime. This strategy has so far proved successful in buying time for both the regime and Russia. In tandem, however, Russia has invested much effort to achieve a dialogue with the other players in Syria and the region, with the clear aim of laying the groundwork for remaining in Syria should Assad fall and the radical axis weaken. Russian efforts involving Egypt, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf countries can also be cited in this context.

For its part, Turkey has challenged these Russian interests by its efforts to achieve leadership in the region and in the Muslim world. Its activities to this end include direct aid to the Syrian rebels and, as the most significant available power in the region (Turkey has the second largest army in NATO), readiness to intervene militarily in Syria – which has thus far been deflected in part by Russian opposition.[13] It has also labored to play a key role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by serving as an important intermediary in the region. Even before the upheaval in the Arab world, Turkish policy had neo-Ottoman aspects, and Turkey is continuing in this direction, which is frequently troubling to Turkey's neighbors and even its allies. This is also the main background for the emerging new conflict between Turkey and Russia. Indeed, following a period of restraint and an effort to present an image of proper relations, Russian-Turkish relations have deteriorated, especially since October 2012, when Turkey forced the landing of a Syrian plane flying from Moscow with 35 passengers, including Russian civilians. Turkey asserted that the plane contained banned weapons,[14] and the incident slightly

delayed President Putin's visit to Turkey. Yet although the two countries hold opposing positions, the events in Syria have had a mutually negative effect: on Russia, because it is on the verge of losing an ally, and on Turkey, because instability in Syria has a negative domestic effect.[15]

With respect to Iran, there is ostensibly more agreement between the two countries. Neither has any interest in Iran achieving nuclear weapons capability, but they both strongly oppose any American or Israeli attack on Iran, claiming that negotiations alone can achieve a real change in Iranian policy.[16] At the same time, despite this agreement on the goal and the means, only Russia is a P5+1 member. Given the significant economic ties between Turkey and Iran, exclusion from this forum is difficult for Turkey, and the Turkish foreign minister has called to expand the forum to include both Turkey and Saudi Arabia (P5+3).[17]

The Mediterranean Theater

Another theater of conflict where friction has intensified is the Mediterranean Sea region. Turkey's interests in the eastern basin of this sea are naturally among its most significant, due to its accessibility to the Middle East countries. Russia's significant interest is relations with additional countries in the region, such as Greece and Cyprus, and its competition with the West, with an emphasis on NATO countries and fleets, especially the US 6th Fleet.

Russian interest in naval activity in the region has increased recently with its assistance to Assad's government, in part by safeguarding Syria's coastline against foreign intervention,[18] especially given its concern about possible action by the Turkish fleet. Another influential consideration concerns the natural gas reserves discovered in the eastern Mediterranean basin. Russia has a major interest in being involved in the gas issue in order to maintain its current monopoly on the supply of natural gas to Europe. For its part, Turkey is an interested party because it needs access to additional energy resources, both as a consumer and as a route for energy transportation, and in order to prevent the Republic of Cyprus from benefiting from gas production as long as the Cypriot issue remains unresolved and the rights of Turkish Cypriots are in question. Turkey also wishes to find an answer to Russia's emerging cooperation with Israel, Cyprus, and Greece.

Russia's naval presence in the Mediterranean is currently restricted to the Syrian port of Tartus, whose future is unclear. Russia would certainly

be interested in extending its naval presence in the region to additional bases. Options such as Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Malta, for example, are under examination. In recent years, Russia has maintained a naval presence in the region by dispatching flotillas and individual ships on a rotational basis. The Russian fleet also recently began to conduct major exercises in the eastern Mediterranean basin,[19] and this year Russia announced a decision to station a permanent flotilla in the Mediterranean. The permanent presence of the Russian fleet in a sensitive war zone constitutes a crude statement, indicating deterrent intentions towards the parties capable of jeopardizing Russian interests.[20] Most of this activity is clearly directed at Turkey, the main party challenging Russian activity in this sphere. Russia is also challenging Turkey by conducting naval maneuvers near the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts. Threatening Russian messages were sent to Turkey more than once in these contexts.

Implications for Israel

As depicted above, Russia and Turkey are acting, each in its own way, to bolster their standing and enhance their ability to shape the future regional order in the Middle East. At the same time, both countries have complex relations with Israel. In the current situation, Israel's potential significance in any possible regional scenario is clear to both countries, and they are accordingly interested in developing cooperative relations with Israel or, alternatively, pushing Israel out of the regional game to the greatest extent possible. In addition, Israel constitutes an active party in the other spheres discussed, with implications for Russian-Turkish relations and the countries' respective policies.

The Former Soviet Union: Israel is active in a number of Central Asian and Caucasian countries in a variety of areas, not infrequently in competition with other external players, headed by Russia and Turkey. Russia has mixed feelings on this matter (for example, Russia is clearly pressuring Israel to halt its cooperation with Georgia), but it is much more hostile to Turkish and Islamic activity in the countries in this region. In particular, the question of closer relations between Israel and Azerbaijan is attracting attention from both Russia and Turkey: Russia supports Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, while Turkey's relations with Israel have been in crisis in recent years, with Turkey seeking to punish Israel for the *Mavi Marmara* incident, and to pressure Azerbaijan to cool its relations with Israel.

The Middle East: Given its challenges in the Middle East and the Muslim world, Russia regards Israel as a desirable alternative partner, as cooperation with Israel contributes to Russia's efforts to escape its isolation in the Middle East caused by the negative consequences of the Arab Spring. Meantime, relations between Turkey and Israel are still tense, despite interfacing interests, including the future of Syria.

The Eastern Mediterranean Basin: Relations between the three actors in this sphere are even more complicated. The tension between Russian and Turkish fleets off the Syrian coast play a role, as does the conflict over the gas fields in this area and Russia's traditional pro-Cyprus policy. Over the past year, Russia focused on forming a political axis with a number of countries in the region, such as Greece and Cyprus and possibly other Balkan countries, aimed in part against Turkey; Russia regards Israel as a suitable partner in this framework. Beyond this, Russia has an interest in cooperating with Israel in gas production. This development naturally presents Turkey with a difficult dilemma. Turkey, which is interested in eastern Mediterranean gas as both a consumer and as a route for gas exports, will try to pressure both Israel and the Republic of Cyprus in this context. Turkey will try to exploit Cyprus's economic difficulties to convince the US and the EU to increase their pressure on the Greek Cypriots to work toward a solution of the Cypriot dispute. If progress toward resolution of the Cyprus issue occurs, this could not only eliminate the dependence of Greece and Cyprus on Russian support, but also threaten the Russian monopoly on gas exports to Europe. Israel is important in this context, because if Israel cooperates with the Greek Cypriots in the construction of joint facilities for liquefying natural gas (LNG), this will in effect bypass Turkey, and will also have a negative impact on the chances of achieving a resolution of the Cypriot question.

Thus, each of the three theaters has potential for Israeli cooperation with Russia or Turkey. At the same time, it is difficult to find issues where the three countries have sufficient common interests to act jointly. Furthermore, given the importance that Israel attaches to its relations with the US, there are limitations on its ability to improve its relations with Russia. As an ally of the US, Turkey is ostensibly a more comfortable partner for Israel, but Turkey's efforts to be a more independent player in the international theater, particularly its ambition to exert more influence in the Middle East, also limit Israel's ability to develop relations with it.

Notes

1   Events in the Balkan countries can also be regarded as an additional area of potential friction, but due to space limitations, we have chosen to focus on theaters that are more relevant to Israel.

2   Dimitar Bechev, "Putin's Visit Rekindles the Russia-Turkey Affair," *CNN World,* December 4, 2012.

3   Stephen J. Flanagan, "The Turkey-Russia-Iran Nexus: Eurasian Power Dynamics," *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2013): 167.

4   Dmitri Trenin, "From Damascus to Kabul: Any Common Ground between Turkey and Russia?" *Insight Turkey* 15, no. 1 (2013): 41.

5   Ahmet O. Evin, "Energy and Turkey's Neighborhood," in Ronald H. Linden et al, eds., *Turkey and its Neighbors: Foreign Relations in Transition* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2012), p. 103.

6   "Turkey First NATO State with Shanghai Cooperation Organization Ties," *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 29, 2013.

7   Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey Fears Russia too Much to Intervene in Syria," *The Atlantic,* May 6, 2013.

8   American unwillingness to intervene militarily in the conflict has also contributed to this stance.

9   "Ambassadors Back Gulen Schools in Asia," *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 29, 2000.

10 "Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia to Hold Joint Military Exercises," *TRT English*, February 7, 2013.

11 Bechev, "Putin's Visit Rekindles the Russia-Turkey Affair."

12 Ronald H. Linden, "Turkey and its Black Sea Neighbors," in *Turkey and its Neighbors,* p. 69.

13 Cagaptay, "Turkey Fears Russia Too Much to Intervene in Syria."

14 "Turkey Grounds Syrian Plane Suspected of Carrying Weapons Destined for Assad Troops," *Haaretz*, October 10, 2012.

15 Gokhan Bacik, "Turkey and Russia in the Arab Spring: Straining Old Rifts Further?" *GMF On Turkey*, August 16, 2012.

16 Trenin, "From Damascus to Kabul," pp. 45-46.

17 "Turkey's Ties with Qatar, Saudi Arabia Unlikely to be Limited to Syrian Crisis," *Today's Zaman*, February 10, 2013.

18 "Report: Russia Sends Warships to Syrian Coasts," *Ynet*, May 17, 2013, http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4380834,00.html.

19 Zvi Magen, "The Russian Fleet in the Mediterranean: Exercise or Military Operation?" *INSS Insight* No. 399, January 29, 2013.

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Twenty Years since the Oslo Accords: Lessons for Israel

Shmuel Even

Introduction

The Oslo Accords are a series of agreements signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority ("the Palestinians") in the 1990s. The most prominent among them is the "Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements" (the "Oslo Accords" or "Oslo I Accords"), which was signed in Washington on September 13, 1993.[1] This agreement shaped the entire subsequent process, with additional agreements signed in its wake, including the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (the "Oslo II Accords"), which was signed on September 28, 1995.[2]

The Oslo Accords aroused much hope in Israel that the Palestinian Authority would become a stable demilitarized entity that would maintain peaceful relations with Israel. This development would ensure Israel's existence as a Jewish democratic state, and the region could usher in the era of a new Middle East.[3] At the same time, then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and then-Foreign Minister Shimon Peres dismissed the possibility that the Oslo Accords would lead to an independent Palestinian state, the division of Jerusalem, and Israel's relinquishing of control over the Jordan Valley as part of a permanent settlement – as was demanded by the Palestinians. The opposition in Israel, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, and senior officials in Military Intelligence did not share the expectations of Rabin and Peres, and warned that these hopes were not grounded in reality.[4] Intelligence assessments held that the Palestinians were determined in a permanent agreement to establish an independent state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and would not consent to any

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concession in an interim agreement that would endanger this outcome. Rabin and Peres dismissed these assessments, claiming that Intelligence had a prior record of failed assessments regarding war and peace.[5]

The Oslo process was halted with the Taba summit in January 2001. In point of fact, the Oslo process did not lead to a permanent settlement. It led to a crisis of expectations and to the blood-soaked al-Aqsa intifada, launched by the Palestinians, and it left Israel's strategic situation in a worse position than it was before the process began. In Israel's eyes the Oslo Accords are technically still in effect from a legal and political viewpoint, but they have been implemented only partially, and the Palestinians are working to achieve recognition of an independent state, though not by means of negotiations with Israel. For its part, Israel withdrew unilaterally from the Gaza Strip, which since 2007 has been ruled by Hamas, an organization that is not a partner to the agreements. Since 2001 the political process between Israel and the Palestinians has continued intermittently, and various attempts to advance it – to date, unsuccessful – have been made.[6]

This article presents an analysis of Israel's conduct during the Oslo process under the Rabin and Peres governments (January 1993-June 1996)[7] from a strategic-administrative perspective, and draws conclusions that can serve as lessons for the future. The article does not offer a full explanation as to why the process failed, and it does not assign responsibility for the result between the Palestinians and Israel. From an Israeli point of view, even if the Palestinians are deemed largely responsible for the failure, or if from the beginning there was too large a gap between the positions to allow for successful negotiations, the question is how Israel became involved in the process, and how it managed its role while the process was underway. While numerous books have been written about Oslo by those involved in the process, there is no report by any government official on questions such as how Israel's objectives in the process were defined, what strategy it used to achieve them, what the decision making processes were, whether the Oslo Accords were a calculated risk or a gamble, how risks were managed in the process, how Israel contended with crises, how it attempted to contain the damage, and related issues. This article is designed to provoke some thought about these questions.

Israel's Engagement in the Oslo Process: Key Issues

Covert Negotiating Tracks

The Oslo process began with the establishment of a covert track in Oslo in January 1993.[8] Then-Deputy Prime Minister Yossi Beilin stated: "I knew that if I told Peres about this, he would be required to update Rabin, and I feared that Rabin would demand that the process be stopped before it began."[9] During the negotiations, Beilin was in Oslo, assisted by Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundak, and he did not report to his superiors until he had the draft of an agreement in hand.[10] Although they were senior academics imbued with a mission, the Oslo team was not experienced in negotiating and lacked a professional mechanism. This was in contrast to the official negotiating team, which as a continuation of the Madrid Peace Conference of November 1991 was at work at that time in Washington under Elyakim Rubinstein, with the support of governmental planning institutions and intelligence. In addition, it appears that the Oslo team's understanding of the projected outcome of the process did not match that of Prime Minister Rabin, as will be clarified below. Nevertheless, in May 1993, Rabin recognized the Oslo track as an official covert negotiating track. The team in Oslo was reinforced by a number of establishment figures, headed by Foreign Ministry director general Uri Savir. In effect, this signaled the completed transfer of operational control of negotiations with the Palestinians from the Prime Minister's Office to the Foreign Ministry until the end of the Oslo process.

In advance of the negotiations on the permanent status agreement, once again there was a covert negotiating track with a similar makeup (Beilin, Hirschfeld, and Pundak). On October 31, 1995, before official negotiations began, the team formulated the "Abu Mazen-Beilin understandings" on the principles for a permanent settlement, even though Prime Minister Rabin had presented a completely different position to the Knesset on October 5, 1995. Rabin was murdered before these understandings were presented to him. In 2000, US President Clinton attempted to adopt these understandings as a basis for negotiations on a permanent settlement at the Camp David summit, but Prime Minister Barak refused.[11]

In general, it seems that these covert tracks weakened the official negotiations by helping the Palestinians and elements outside of Israel identify loopholes, internal disputes, and room for flexibility in Israel's positions, and they apparently convinced the Palestinians that they could receive more by circumventing the official negotiations. It appears

that Rabin was aware of this risk, but that after deliberating, he decided to pursue the Oslo track nonetheless.[12]

Time Pressure

The idea that time was working against Israel took hold under the Rabin government, in contrast to the approach taken by the previous Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, who was in no hurry. The Palestinian approach during the entire process exemplified *sabr* ("patience," in Arabic) and *sumud* (steadfastness), especially about the Palestinians' "right" to the land.

The decision to pursue the Oslo negotiating track reflected Rabin's sense of time pressure. During the election campaign the Prime Minister had promised that he would reach an agreement with the Palestinians within six to nine months from the date he became prime minister, which occurred in July 1992. In May-June 1993, after failing to fulfill his promise to the electorate and becoming "fed up with the Washington track,"[13] he adopted the understandings reached in Oslo. Ultimately this shortcut proved to be a dead end.[14] Along with a sense of political time pressure, Rabin, much like most of Israel's leaders who followed, sensed he was pressed for time due to two principal strategic reasons:

a. Pressure because of the "demographic hourglass": as Rabin emphasized in the Knesset on October 5, 1995, the rapid growth rate of the Palestinian population was perceived as a threat to Israel's future as a democratic Jewish state.[15]

b. Pressure lest the historic window of opportunity opened at the Madrid Conference in 1991, which involved massive domestic, regional, and international pressure on Israel's leaders to make progress, close. In addition, an agreement with the Palestinians was considered the key to progress in the political process with Arab countries, and indeed, in October 1994 a peace treaty was signed between Israel and Jordan. There was also the burden of security control and the moral burden of control over the Palestinian population, and the fear of an outbreak of violence among the Palestinians if the diplomatic window of opportunity were to close.

The Palestinian Negotiators

Prime Minister Rabin's decision to adopt understandings reached through the covert track in Oslo obligated him to recognize the PLO and consider

it the negotiating partner, rather than the representatives of residents of the territories with whom Israel had held negotiations in Washington. This had far reaching strategic consequences. While the PLO had worked behind the scenes in negotiations in Washington with representatives of the territories, Israel's recognition of the PLO as "the representative of the Palestinian people"[16] expanded the number of Palestinians represented in the negotiations from some 2.2 million residents of the territories to all the Palestinians in the world, at that time more than 5.5 million. It also expanded the framework for negotiations, from "issues of 1967" to "issues of 1948." The negotiations expanded from issues of withdrawal from the territories captured in June 1967 and the status of the Palestinian Authority, which were the main concern of residents of the territories and the international community, to issues concerning the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, starting with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. These issues were primarily the PLO's broad interpretation of the "right of return" on the basis of UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948 (an issue of interest to the Palestinian refugees in the diaspora); the Palestinians' unwillingness to view the permanent agreement as an end to the conflict, and the Palestinians' lack of recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. This led to fears in Israel that the PLO had not abandoned the dream of "Greater Palestine" and was thus no different from Hamas.

Israel's recognition of the PLO led to US recognition of the organization, with both countries thereby strengthening the organization when it was at its weakest. In the early 1990s, the PLO was perceived as a terrorist organization that supported Saddam Hussein in the 1991 Gulf War and was beset by a financial crisis that threatened its existence. It appears that Israel failed to leverage this strategic advantage into obtaining a better agreement. At that time, Israel was able to be patient, and could have continued discussions with representatives of residents of the territories through the official channel in Washington and strengthened the leaders in the territories, whose status had improved after the first intifada. In choosing the PLO, it should have obtained a much better agreement than was obtained in Oslo, and it should have reached an early agreement with the PLO on the "issues of 1948" before discussing the "issues of 1967," or not signed any agreement at all.

An Inferior Negotiating Strategy

The Israeli negotiating strategy that led to the Oslo Accords was based on a "from beginning to end" mindset. In other words, the idea was to advance in negotiations step by step toward an unknown future with the expectation that these steps would create a new situation that would lead to a better future. Rabin adopted this strategy on the assumption, which proved erroneous, that it left Israel in control of the process and its results.[17] The Palestinian strategy, in contrast, was based on a "from end to beginning" mindset, that is, marking the ultimate goals of the process and refraining from making any agreement that could interfere with their achievement. Consequently, the Palestinians agreed in Oslo to compromise on the interim phase (which was interpreted as a major success by the Israeli negotiators), but on condition that all subjects remain open until the discussion on the final stage, which began in 1996. Thus, for example, the Palestinians "compromised" on leaving East Jerusalem under Israeli control in the interim phase, but adhered consistently to their position that East Jerusalem be transferred to them in the final stage.

In the Oslo II agreement Israel continued to pursue a "beginning to end" strategy. Although the accord was detailed down to the number of pistols the Palestinian police could have in each Palestinian town, Israel refrained from agreeing from the outset as to the exact geographical boundaries of the IDF's redeployment at the end of the interim period, and agreed only to the time element of three phases for withdrawal, and reserved this difficult dispute for the future. These two strategies converged under the Barak government (1991-2001), as even in a "beginning to end" strategy, decisions on a permanent agreement must ultimately be made. At that point, all the issues rose to the fore, and in full force.

Multi-stage architecture: The "beginning to end" mindset was reflected in the phased architecture of the negotiations. The idea was adopted by the architects of Oslo on the basis of the model of Palestinian autonomy in the 1978 Camp David Accords with Egypt, whereby the negotiations would be conducted in the first stage for an interim agreement, and in the second stage, for a permanent agreement. With the Oslo Accords, it was decided to have a preliminary stage of negotiations for the interim agreement, decided largely in the Cairo Agreement of May 1994, which allowed the PLO's entry into the Gaza Strip and Jericho and the formation

of the Palestinian Authority. The date that the Cairo Agreement was signed was designated the beginning of the five-year interim period; at the end of this period the permanent agreement was supposed to take effect. In practice, the negotiations were divided into additional sub-stages, so the parties were conducting negotiations almost continuously for eight years.

A lack of symmetry: The principles of the agreement had a conspicuous lack of symmetry in what the parties exchanged in the sub-stages, even before the discussion on the permanent status agreement. While Israel agreed as early as the sub-stages to gradually and permanently withdraw from the territories (its main asset in the negotiations on the final stage), the Palestinians were not required to cede anything or make any permanent agreement on the substantive issues[18] before the negotiations on a permanent settlement. Thus, the Israeli strategy eroded a number of future bargaining chips and left the Palestinians with all their options open.

The "settlement paradox": There was an internal contradiction in the Oslo Accords between Israel's agreement to withdraw the IDF in phases from a significant part of the territories in the interim stage and its insistence on leaving all the settlements in place. As a result, implementation of the Oslo Accords led to the settlements' being encircled by hostile Palestinian areas (for example, Netzarim in the Gaza Strip) and to attacks on Israelis on the roads and within settlements. This impeded implementation of the Oslo II Accords. The root of this problem was a logical fallacy in copying the idea of stages from the autonomy model of the 1978 Camp David Accords. Camp David dealt with administrative autonomy for the population, and not with Palestinian control over the land and security.

Arafat's limited ability to keep the agreement: This was an additional risk that was not taken into account in advance and did not receive sufficient attention, at least until 1996. Arafat, as a revolutionary leader, did not know how to establish and run a self-government authority, and he found it difficult to clash with opposition organizations over disarming them, which was necessary not only for Israel's security, but also for the security of the Palestinian Authority, as became apparent in 2007 with the Hamas takeover in Gaza.

Great Expectations and Major Unresolved Disputes

The signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993 was made possible by the parties' agreement to postpone the negotiations on the major issues in dispute to the final stage, and by the wording of the agreement in a way that allowed each party to see in it what it wished. The Oslo Accords ostensibly created reconciliation; in fact, they left the major disputes between Israel and the Palestinians on several issues in place until the final stage.

Territory: Article I of the Oslo Accords states that the interim agreement will lead to a permanent settlement based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. However, the two sides interpreted this differently. To the Palestinians, the agreement meant that Israel would return to the 1967 borders. Prime Minister Rabin, however, declared in the Knesset in October 1995, "We will not return to the lines of June 4, 1967," and "we will establish blocs of settlements – if only there were others like this, like Gush Katif, in Judea and Samaria as well." On the issue of the Jordan Valley, Rabin stated that "the security border for protecting the State of Israel will be located in the Jordan Valley, in the most expansive sense of this term."[19] Rabin believed that Israel would withdraw from only 50-70 percent of the total area of the West Bank.[20] Ultimately, during negotiations on the permanent agreement in 2000-1, the Barak government accepted the Clinton proposal on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the Gaza Strip territory and 94 percent of the West Bank and an additional 3 percent (of the total West Bank area) in a land swap with territory from within the Green Line.[21] The Palestinians did not agree. The Palestinians subsequently deferred an offer by Prime Minister Olmert to Abu Mazen in August 2008, that included what they understood as an Israeli withdrawal from 93.2 percent from the West Bank and an additional 5.3 percent of land from within the Green Line.[22]

In retrospect, it is not possible to determine whether a permanent agreement could have been obtained in 1993 under these conditions or even under conditions more favorable to Israel. Nevertheless, it seems that with hindsight, Rabin would not have chosen the Oslo track[23] and a strategy that significantly hurt Israel's prospects of obtaining a better agreement, since the assets that were left for Barak fır negotiations were fewer than those available to Rabin.

A Palestinian state: Arafat determined that there would be a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, starting in May 1999 (the planned end of

the Oslo process). In contrast, Peres stated emphatically in November 1993 that there would be no Palestinian state,[24] and Rabin declared in the Knesset in October 1995, "We want this to be an entity that is less than a state and that will independently manage the lives of the Palestinians under its authority."[25] Yair Hirschfeld recounts that with the start of the unofficial covert negotiations in Oslo in January 1993, he realized that the agreement would lead to two states, but that this is not how Foreign Minister Peres and Prime Minister Rabin understood it. According to Hirschfeld, it took Peres another four years to realize this.[26] Ron Pundak has noted that until 1998, Peres thought that there would be tripartite control of the West Bank – by Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians.[27] This issue reveals the large gap between the way the architects of Oslo understood the agreement and the understanding of the leaders who were supposed to implement it. The position of Israel's leaders then, namely, that it was possible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians without establishing an independent Palestinian state, is puzzling (particularly to senior Intelligence officials), particularly because the Oslo Accords were based on transferring land to Palestinian control (which was different from the original idea of autonomy). Had Israel agreed in Rabin's time to the principle of an independent Palestinian state under the permanent agreement, perhaps it might have received more substantive concessions in return. Later, once the Palestinians were in control of a large portion of the area and the population of the territories, the establishment of a Palestinian state was no longer a bargaining chip for Israel, rather a self-understood component of any future permanent agreement.

Jerusalem: Arafat declared that East Jerusalem would be the capital of an independent Palestine and that the Palestinians would not cede one inch of its territory.[28] Prime Minister Rabin stressed that "Jerusalem, complete and united, is not negotiable."[29] This contravened his commitment at Oslo to discuss the status of the city in the permanent agreement. In discussion under Barak on a permanent agreement, the Israeli team agreed to divide the sovereignty over Jerusalem between the two states, along with establishment of a special regime over the Holy Basin. This was rejected by the Palestinians.[30]

The "right of return": In the negotiations in Washington in 1993, this issue was considered a loose end that could be resolved in the multilateral negotiations,[31] perhaps with a token number of Palestinians who would return to Israel in the framework of family reunification and agreed-on

financial compensation. Yet for the PLO, which faithfully represented the Palestinians of the diaspora as well as the territories, the "right of return" was a key issue. The gap between the positions was revealed in the negotiations for a permanent settlement in 2000, when the Palestinians rejected the compromise proposed by President Clinton, in which Israel would concede the issue of sovereignty over the Temple Mount and the Palestinians would concede the "right of return."[32]

PLO failure to recognize Israel as a Jewish state: In the Oslo process Israel recognized the PLO as per its self-definition, namely, "the representative of the Palestinian people," while the PLO did not recognize Israel as a Jewish democratic state, as per its self-definition. Israel merely accepted the PLO's recognition of Israel's "right to exist in peace and security."[33] This position was made clearer when in 2009 Abu Mazen refused Prime Minister Netanyahu's demand to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. This position was apparently intended to protect what the PLO deemed were the interests of Palestinians who were Israeli citizens but nonetheless part of the Palestinian people and the principle of the "right of return."

It is not clear how Israel expected to succeed in bridging the deep gaps between the positions in the final stage, given that in the interim stage, it was transferring to Palestinian control a significant portion of the territories, which were supposed to be its main bargaining chip in the negotiations for a permanent settlement. Moreover, Israel's efforts to close the gaps were not reciprocated. The Palestinians clung to their positions even when Israel's leaders met them halfway and retreated from fundamental positions while crossing ostensible red lines (table 1). The main tradeoff agreed to by the Palestinians in discussions on the permanent settlement was a land swap (2-3 percent of Judea and Samaria)[34] at a ratio of 1:1, which would allow Israel to leave settlement blocs and Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem in place. Thus while Israel withdrew from many positions – a dynamic common to many negotiations – there was no reciprocal dynamic by the Palestinians.

Negotiations and Implementation of Agreements despite Terrorism

Violence proved to be part of the Palestinian strategy and was intended to exert pressure on Israel. After the Oslo Accords, Arafat refrained from disarming opposition elements, which carried out terrorist attacks in Israel.[35] On October 7, 2000, in an interview with CNN, Nabil Shaath explained the Palestinian position: "The choice is not between

Table 1. Changes in Israel's position on permanent agreement issues, approaching the Palestinian position

Issue	Prime Minister Shamir (1991)	Prime Minister Rabin (1992-1995)	Prime Minister Barak (1999-2001)	Prime Minister Olmert (2006-2009)	PLO heads Arafat (1993) and Abu Mazen (2009)
Negotiating partner	Representatives of residents of Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip	PLO (Arafat)	PLO (Arafat)	PLO (Abu Mazen)	Israel
Status of Palestinian entity	Administrative council (without a parliament)	Self-government ("less than a state")	Independent state	Independent state	Independent state
Percentage of Palestinian territory in Judea and Samaria	All territories under Israeli control, with Palestinian self-government	50-70 percent	94 + 3 percent (including swapped land from within the Green Line)	93.2 + 5.3 percent (including swapped land from within the Green Line)	100 percent (including swapped land)
Jordan Valley	Under Israeli control, with Palestinian self-government	Under full Israeli security control	Under Palestinian sovereignty, after a prolonged period of Israeli security control	Under Palestinian sovereignty	Under Palestinian sovereignty
Gaza Strip	Under Israeli control, with Palestinian self-government	Gush Katif in Israeli hands	Under Palestinian sovereignty	Under Palestinian sovereignty	Under Palestinian sovereignty
Jerusalem	United under Israeli sovereignty	United under Israeli sovereignty	Divided between the two states; special regime over the Holy Basin	Divided between the two states, with Temple Mount under international sovereignty	Capital of two states, with Temple Mount under Palestinian sovereignty
"Right of return" to Israeli territory	No right of return to Israel and the territories	Return to Palestinian territory only	Limited number, according to Israeli considerations	Less than 20,000 refugees	"Right of return" for all refugees and their descendants

negotiations and combat: you can have negotiations and fighting at the same time . . . the Palestinian people fight with weapons, with jihad, with an intifada, and with suicide actions . . . and it is destined always to fight and negotiate at the same time."[36] In addition, the Palestinians continued to preach hostility in schools and the media, which reduced the Israeli public's trust in them.

Public Opinion
An important element in the ability to reach and implement an agreement is broad domestic support, and this was not obtained during the Oslo process, which was conducted in secret and took Israeli citizens by surprise. However, it was not just that public opinion was not well prepared for the signing of the accords; even after the agreement was signed, the country's leaders were not able to enlist public confidence in the move. Public legitimacy for the interim agreement (Oslo II) was even lower.[37] The outline of the permanent settlement approved by the Barak government did not have sufficient support in the Knesset, and did not reach a vote. In both cases, Israel's leaders apparently overly expected that the dynamic would do the job, as happened with the peace treaty with Egypt.

Assessment
The concise story of the design and management of the Oslo process is as follows: Israel acted, inter alia, out of a sense that time was pressing, which led it to adopt points of agreement that were formulated by the Israeli team with Arafat's representatives in covert negotiations in Oslo. In designing the Oslo Accords and during the process under Rabin, Israel adopted a strategy based on progress "from the beginning to the end." This is how it ensued that Israel withdrew in stages from territories in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip as early as the interim period without receiving anything substantive in return, and that by the time of the deliberations on the permanent agreement Israel had few remaining bargaining chips. Although the Barak government displayed a great deal of flexibility – far beyond what was envisioned by Rabin and Peres when the Oslo Accords were signed – the gaps between the positions were not bridged, the desired permanent settlement was not obtained, and the Palestinians launched the al-Aqsa intifada.

This article has not discussed all the reasons that the Oslo process failed, but it appears that the design and implementation of the agreement played a large part. It appears that one of the main reasons for the failure was the large gaps in the positions of the two sides, which were apparently concealed in the Oslo Accords and exploded in the negotiations on a permanent status agreement. If this was the case, then not only did the Oslo Accords not bring peace between Israel and the Palestinians closer; they apparently pushed it farther away by raising expectations that were dashed within seven years. The bigger problem is not the shortcomings of the Oslo Accords, but the decisions to implement them over the years while ignoring the gaps between the positions of the parties, which became clearer before and during the negotiations on a permanent status agreement. It seems that already when the wide gaps emerged and the implementation of the "Gaza and Jericho first" agreement had not yet proven itself, it would have been better for Israel to refrain from signing and implementing the Oslo II Accords, which dealt with an Israeli withdrawal from the heart of the territories of Judea and Samaria, until clear understandings were obtained on the continuation and end of the process. Table 2 summarizes Israel's conduct in the Oslo process negotiations, in contrast to that of the Palestinians.

Twenty years after the accords, it is clear that the process is irreversible. Since then, territories have been handed over, some of Israel's bargaining chips have been eroded, the Palestinians have become divided, the Middle East has changed beyond recognition, and the internal instability in some of the states has increased the uncertainty even in the short term. However, at least in the present geo-political reality, it would appear that the most reasonable model for a possible agreement in the future with the Palestinians (in the West Bank) is not far from what was agreed to by the Barak government.

> Not only did the Oslo Accords not bring peace between Israel and the Palestinians closer; they apparently pushed it farther away by raising expectations that were dashed within seven years.

Lessons for Israel

In the realm of strategy, Israel should adopt "end to beginning" thinking (think before you act). It should set realistic goals for the conclusion of the negotiations, even if they are broad, in order to allow room to maneuver during the negotiations. After the "from beginning to end" strategy had

Table 2. Israeli and Palestinian engagement in the Oslo process
under the Rabin and Peres governments

Issue	Israel	Palestinians
Clarity of objectives and goals in the negotiations	Low; large gap between positions of designers of Oslo and the leadership regarding the goals of the accords	High
Negotiating strategy	To advance in the negotiations in stages ("from beginning to end" mindset)	Final goals defined from the outset and striving to meet them ("from end to beginning" mindset)
Dimension of time	Acting from a sense that time is pressing, pressure for short term achievements	Patience, long term view, steadfastness. There was no pressure to seize an historic opportunity in 2000.
Sensitivity to international pressure	High	Low
Professionalism in negotiations	Low	High
Control of negotiating channels	Little; covert channels established	Great
Achievement of objectives in relation to initial expectations of leaders	Negligible	Partial

already been implemented in the Oslo process, and not successfully, it was much less possible to use a "from end to beginning" strategy, but it would appear that this was still the preferred strategy. In this context, it is better to prefer a permanent settlement implemented in stages (such as the peace agreement with Egypt) than an agreement with negotiations in stages, such as in the Oslo Accords.

If Israel nonetheless strives for an interim agreement, such as the establishment of a Palestinian state within provisional borders, it is better for most of the disputes concerning the permanent agreement to be resolved already in the negotiations on the interim agreement. This would include disputes concerning issues from 1948 and security issues, such as the ban on heavy weapons in the Palestinian state, disarmament of opposition elements, aerial rights for the air force, the presence of

intelligence bases in Judea and Samaria, and so on. As few substantive issues as possible should be left to the final stage, among them: final demarcation of the border and arrangements for control of the Holy Basin in Jerusalem.

If the working assumption is that no permanent settlement will be reached in the coming years and Israel is interested in leaving open the possibility of a two-state solution, it would be better to leave the status quo as it is: not to undertake a unilateral withdrawal due to the high risks it entails,[38] but also not to undertake irreversible changes beyond the separation fence. For the purposes of Israel's policy in practice and on the future declarative level as well, Israel can plot a minimum border for Judea and Samaria in the final stage (e.g., a separation fence) without actually carrying out a unilateral withdrawal. The issue of the Jordan Valley would remain open. This policy would clarify to Israel's citizens, to the Palestinians, and to the international community the scope of the discussion on the permanent borders from Israel's point of view, and would define Israel's policy on the settlements. For example, expansion of settlements in Judea and Samaria would occur west of the separation fence, with security and routine life in the settlements outside the fence assured until their future is determined in the final agreement, if and when it is achieved. The absence of such a policy caused a building freeze for ten months (from November 2009 through September 2010) even in communities inside the separation fence.

In the realm of negotiations management and implementation of agreements, it is better to sign only an unambiguous agreement that is clear to both parties and that can be implemented, or not to sign any agreement at all. If large gaps are revealed at the stage of implementation of the agreement, it is better to freeze it, since attempting to implement a bad agreement is a greater error than signing it. In addition:

> It is better to sign only an unambiguous agreement that is clear to both parties and that can be implemented, or not to sign any agreement at all.

a. Israel should not conduct political negotiations when there is violence, terrorism, or incitement, unless convinced that the Palestinians are doing everything in their power to prevent it. In the meantime, it must insist on implementation of all Palestinian security commitments (including confiscation of weapons from the

opposition) and on a cessation of incitement in the Palestinian media and schools.

b. Although Israel is not bound by the positions that were presented in contacts that did not lead to agreements, it would be better for Israel to guard against the erosion of positions in various contacts with the United States, the European Union, and others, even during discussions on hypothetical proposals. Any agreement on Israeli withdrawal could become the opening position in future negotiations.

c. Negotiations should be conducted only by skilled and highly experienced negotiating teams (including businesspeople, who are experienced in negotiations by nature of their profession). There should be a professional negotiation administration, one authority for all channels of negotiations, and a supervisory body. Multiple parallel negotiating channels should be discouraged, and in particular, channels concealed from the prime minister should not be allowed. However, secret contacts by the prime minister can be used to achieve a breakthrough.

d. Agreements that generate great expectations on both sides when there is insufficient certainty of achieving them should be avoided, since there is a heavy price to pay for a crisis of expectations. Similarly, Israel must take into account in advance the risks of implementing the agreement, manage these risks, and examine ways of reducing them. At the same time, the agreement should stipulate what Israel's rights will be in the event that the Palestinians do not keep their security commitments. Israel should not advance to the next stage as long as the previous stage has not been fully implemented.

e. Any significant decision on the permanent agreement, in the Knesset or a national referendum, should be decided by a majority of over 60 percent.

Notes

1   Oslo I Accord, Knesset website, http://www.knesset.gov.il/process/asp/event.asp?id=37.
2   Oslo II Accord, Knesset website, http://www.knesset.gov.il/process/asp/event_frame.asp?id=42.
3   Prime Minister Rabin stated: "There is a chance that we will have good neighborly relations, an end to the bereavement that has visited our homes, an end to wars. I call upon all members of the house to give us an opportunity to get the most out of this great chance. Members of the

Knesset, let the sun rise" (Knesset minutes of September 21, 1993). Foreign Minister Peres: "We will bring all our children a new Middle East"; Minister Yossi Sarid: "The Middle East in another year will be completely new"; Minister Aloni: "I feel as I did on November 29, 1947. . .We knew that we were heading toward great days"; Deputy Foreign Minister Beilin: "We can reach a comprehensive peace agreement in the Middle East within a number of months, not years." Source: Wikiquotes, in Hebrew, http://he.wikiquote. org/wiki/%D7%94%D7%A1%D7%9B%D7%9E%D7%99_%D7%90%D7 %95%D7%A1%D7%9C%D7%95.

4   Major General (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, who served as head of the Research Division in Military Intelligence, stated: "There was a sense of serious frustration because it was immediately clear that some of what was written in the agreement would not take place in the reality of the Middle East, and we passed this assessment on to the Defense Minister (Rabin) immediately." E. Berkovitch, "Interview with Amidror," *Yediot Ahronot*, April 24, 1998.

5   Peres, for example, stated: "If Intelligence had been alerted to our discussions in Oslo, we would still not have an agreement today," *Yediot Ahronot*, January 17, 1995.

6   For example the Roadmap of June 2002; the Annapolis process, launched in November 2007; Olmert's proposal to Abu Mazen in November 2008; and renewal of the contacts under US auspices in July 2013, now underway.

7   Events from a later period that are mentioned are intended to demonstrate results of the Oslo Accords in relation to the expectations of Rabin and Peres and to offer a comprehensive perspective on the political process.

8   During the Oslo process, negotiations were carried out on a number of channels that were not always coordinated. One was the official channel, the second was the covert channel, and the third was the hidden channel, that is, a channel whose establishment and content even Prime Minister Rabin did not know about in real time.

9   Yossi Beilin, *Touching Peace* (Tel Aviv: Miskal, 1997).

10 Website of Yossi Beilin, abstract of *Touching Peace*, http://www.beilin.org.il/ item.asp?id=64.

11 Yossi Beilin, "Beilin-Abu Mazen with Full Responsibility," *Haaretz*, November 2001, on the website of Yossi Beilin, http://www.beilin.org.il/ item.asp?id=129.

12 Rabin decided to adopt the Oslo channel in May 1993, but on June 8, he changed his mind and described the contacts as a danger to the peace process. On June 10, he changed his mind again, and gave his blessing to the channel. Eyal Ben, "Arafat Asset for Israel," *Ynet*, September 12, 2003, http:// www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-2753716,00.html.

13 Uri Savir, from an online abstract of his book, *The Process* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1998), http://simania.co.il/bookdetails.php?item_id=975.

14 There are those who believe that the agreement was doomed to failure from the outset and those who believe that the process went wrong because

Israel's leaders later made errors along the way. Ron Pundak, "From Oslo to Taba: The Process That Went Wrong," Publication No. 89, Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, October 2001.

15 The strategic time pressure because of the "demographic threat" also appears in the reasons given by the Sharon government for the disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and the reasons given by the Olmert government to justify the convergence plan in the West Bank in 2007. Sharon's approach was shaped in part by his meeting in 2004 with Professor Arnon Soffer, the "prophet of doom of demography." See Nir Hasson, "This is How Demography Becomes a Pain in the Rear," *Haaretz*, June 20, 2013.

16 Letter by Rabin to Arafat, as part of the exchange of letters between the two leaders on September 9, 1993, through the Norwegian foreign minister, in advance of the signing of Oslo I. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/israel-plo%20recognition%20-%20exchange%20of%20letters%20betwe.aspx.

17 Rabin to the Knesset: "All the issues related to the permanent agreement are reserved for negotiation, which will commence two years after the date stipulated in the agreement, reserving the freedom for the government of Israel to define its positions as to the nature of the permanent agreement. In other words, the Declaration of Principles leaves all the options open in this area." See the minutes of the 13th Knesset, September 21, 1993.

18 Such as the status of the Palestinian entity (state), Jerusalem, the "right of return," the settlements, the permanent borders, permanent security arrangements, air traffic rights, control of border crossings, foreign relations, economic, water, and environmental relations, and an end to the conflict.

19 Announcement by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in the Knesset plenum, on approval of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, October 5, 1995, http://www.knesset.gov.il/rabin/heb/Rab_RabinSpeech6.htm.

20 Comments by Rabin in internal discussions, according to Eitan Haber, who was head of the Prime Minister's Office under Rabin. See Akiva Eldar, "Rabin's Settlement, Sharon's Doctrine," *Haaretz*, November 4, 2005. These numbers match Rabin's description of the "map of the permanent settlement" in his announcement to the Knesset on October 5, 1995.

21 Ari Shavit, "The Day Peace Died," *Haaretz*, September 14, 2001. In the article, Shlomo Ben Ami describes, on the basis of his diaries, the negotiations for a permanent settlement during Prime Minister Barak's tenure, http://www.7th-day.co.il/mehumot/hayom.htm.

22 "Summary of Olmert's 'Package' Offer to Abu Mazen," *al-Jazeera*, is based on information by Saeb Erakat, head of the Palestinian negotiation team, on September 9, 2008, http://transparency.aljazeera.net/files/4736.pdf.

23 Eitan Haber said that he was certain Rabin would not have been prepared to hear of territorial concessions of 94-96 percent of the West Bank, as proposed in the Clinton parameters and brought by Ehud Barak for

government approval in late 2000. Eldar, "Rabin's Settlement, Sharon's Doctrine."

24 Comments by Peres in the Knesset to MK Moshe Katsav, November 17, 1993. "Are you deaf? I say to you: There will be no Palestinian state," Wikiquotes, in Hebrew, http:// he.wikiquote.org/wiki.

25 See note 19.

26 Lecture by Yair Hirschfeld, "The Oslo Process between Israel and the Palestinians," Academic Channel, University of Haifa, recorded on August 9, 2010, http://actv.haifa.ac.il/programs/Item.aspx?it=1954.

27 Ariella Ringel Hoffman, "Peres' Political Blindness Led to a Miss in Oslo Process," *Yediot Ahronot*, July 12, 2013.

28 S. Gabai, "The Palestinians Will Not Give Up One Inch of Jerusalem," *Maariv*, September 2, 1993.

29 Minutes of the 13th Knesset of September 21, 1993 on the government's announcement regarding the Declaration of Principles on the interim agreement of self-government and the exchange of letters with the PLO.

30 See note 21.

31 In the multilateral negotiations, for the purposes of balance, Israel claimed rights for "Jewish refugees" from Arab countries. This claim is not relevant in direct negotiations with the PLO.

32 Knesset Research and Information Center, "The 'Clinton Parameters' and the Saudi Initiative for a Solution to the Israeli-Arab Conflict," September 11, 2002, Knesset website, http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m00398.pdf.

33 Arafat's recognition of Israel did not originate with the Oslo Accords. In his speech to the United Nations in December 1988, Arafat invited the people of Israel to make peace, and called for a resolution to the conflict on the basis of resolutions 242 and 338. In a press conference afterwards, he added that it was the right of all the parties to the conflict, including the state of Palestine and Israel, to live in peace and security, and he announced an end to terrorist activity.

34 See note 21.

35 September 1996 saw the incident with the opening of the Western Wall tunnel, and Palestinian security forces opened fire on IDF soldiers. In March 1997, Arafat gave a green light to opposition groups to carry out terrorist attacks. On September 29, 2000, the Palestinians launched the al-Aqsa intifada.

36 The full text of the Barak government's white paper on violation of the agreements by the Palestinian Authority/PLO, http://israelvisit.co.il/BehindTheNews/Hebrew/WhitePaper.htm.

37 The agreement was approved in the Knesset, with 61 in favor, 50 against, 8 abstentions, and 1 absence. Oslo II was approved with 61 in favor and 59 against (according to the Knesset website). In other words, the agreement was approved thanks to the votes of Arab MKs (who supported the PLO),

that is, without a Jewish majority, and also with the support of Alex Goldfarb and Gonen Segev, who were elected to the Knesset on the Tzomet Party list and teamed up with the Rabin government.

38 The risks of a unilateral withdrawal include, first, uncertainty regarding the reality that will be in the West Bank after the withdrawal, including the possibility of a Hamas takeover or security chaos, which could allow the entry of additional hostile elements or the stationing of foreign forces that will not act in accordance with Israel's interests. Second, unlike in the Gaza Strip, Israel will not withdraw to the 1967 lines, and therefore, will not receive Palestinian, Arab, or international recognition. Third, the unilateral move exacted a heavy price domestically. Fourth, this would impinge on Israel's bargaining power and cause a decline in Israel's deterrent capability. See Shmuel Even, "Israel's Strategy of Unilateral Withdrawal," *Strategic Assessment* 12, no. 1 (2009): 29-45.

Twenty Years since Oslo: The Balance Sheet

Shlomo Brom

Although September 13, 2013 will mark twenty years since Israel and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles, which officially launched the Oslo process, the parties have not yet succeeded in realizing the declared goal of the process, "to put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict . . . and achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement and historic reconciliation through the agreed political process."[1] Moreover, these twenty years have been marked by numerous crises and casualties, and perhaps therefore it comes as no surprise that the various components of the process have been criticized severely and Israeli and Palestinian public opinion perceive the process as an abject failure.

The purpose of this article is to take stock of the achievements and failures of the Oslo process, focusing on the Israeli dimension, in order to learn lessons that can be implemented in the next stages of the Israeli-Palestinian political process.[2] As the scope of the material is very broad, this analysis will concentrate on principal issues. There are two main conclusions. One, it was apparently impossible to break the deadlock in relations between Israel and the Palestinians except in a gradual process such as the Oslo model, in which the core issues were not addressed from the outset. Two, the overall Oslo balance sheet is mixed; the results could have been different had Israel avoided several errors, including: the attempts to reach an agreement in meetings between leaders before sufficient progress was made by the negotiators of the two sides; the unrealistic, exaggerated opening positions in the negotiating groups; interruption of the momentum of the negotiations; the failure to take advantage of their success; and the creation of a situation that was excessively conducive to actions that would torpedo continuation of the

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negotiations, such as the expansion of settlements by Israel and violence by the Palestinians.

Parameters

The initial question in an attempt to assess a complex political process on a topic as controversial as the Oslo process is, what are the criteria for examining the process? The criteria cannot be dissociated from what is necessarily a political definition of Israel's national goals, that is, its national vision. From the perspective of proponents of a Greater Israel, the main national goal is full Israeli sovereignty over all parts of the historical land of Israel.[3] From their point of view, the Oslo process was flawed from its inception because it set for itself a goal that by its very nature is flawed and contradicts Israel's main national goal. After all, it was clear to those who initiated the process that it would not be possible to reach a final status agreement without dividing the territory of the historical land of Israel between Israel and the Palestinians.

The following analysis is based on a definition of Israel's national vision as the drive to secure the existence of Israel as the democratic nation state of the Jewish people. This formula seems to match the approach of those who designed the Oslo process.

This definition's three main elements – existence, Jewish nation state, and democracy – imply the need to reach a permanent settlement with the Palestinians that will end the conflict based on the principle of two states for two peoples. Indeed, it is very difficult, if at all possible by any acceptable plan, to ensure the existence of a solid Jewish majority in the State of Israel, which is the criterion for Israel's being the democratic nation state of the Jewish people, without the creation of two states for two peoples. However, it is also impossible to guarantee Israel's existence without ensuring that the ultimate situation created at the end of the process is safe for Israel, allowing it to contend successfully with security threats.

Based on these premises, the main criteria for examining the Oslo process are: the extent to which the process has succeeded in advancing a two-state solution; the extent to which Israel's security was maintained during the process; and the extent to which the process was effective and correct. In other words, irrespective of whether the process has ended successfully or has failed to achieve its goals, it is worth examining the reasons for its success or failure and then considering whether it would

have been possible to pursue it more effectively, and what correct moves and what errors were made in the process.

Ensuring Israel's Identity through the Two-State Solution

There is no question that Israel is still far from achieving its national objective as defined above. The Oslo process did not succeed in ending the status quo: Israel retains control of the West Bank, and the settlement enterprise continues to expand. This means that Israel is skidding toward a reality of a bi-national state that is not truly democratic because there is a large population of Palestinians who do not enjoy civil rights.

However, this response by itself is insufficient, and ignores the possibility that constraints may make it very difficult to achieve the objective completely, or at least, may prolong the process with the end still not in sight. Consequently, the question is whether there are interim goals that, if achieved, would bring Israel closer to its desired objectives, and to what extent have these interim goals been achieved. An answer to these questions is far more complex.

First of all, the Oslo process led, albeit in circuitous fashion, to the unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip. It is unlikely that Israel would have reached that point without Oslo. The disengagement from Gaza was the first important step in ensuring separation between Israel and the Palestinian political entity. Similarly, the security barrier, another result of the Oslo process, created a partial separation from the West Bank and helped foster the idea in the Israeli consciousness on separating physically from the Palestinians, although it is also possible to argue that the barrier enables Israelis to suppress any thinking about the Palestinians and thus serves the status quo. Second, as a result of the Oslo process, broad support developed among the Israeli and Palestinian public for the two-state solution,[4] and there is a solid majority among the public that supports it. In other words, Israeli public opinion does not constitute a real obstacle to implementation of the solution. Third, the nucleus of a Palestinian territorial political entity has been established in the Palestinian territories in the form of the Palestinian Authority, and the process of building a Palestinian state and its institutions has begun, including a security apparatus that maintains close cooperation with Israel's security services. Fourth, during the process, many subjects long considered taboo that constitute serious obstacles to the ability to implement the two-state solution were challenged − for example,

"Jerusalem united forever"[5] – and this significantly narrowed major gaps between the two sides.

To understand the importance of these achievements, the Israeli-Palestinian political situation on the eve of the Oslo process must be examined. For the fifteen years before Yitzhak Rabin's victory in the 1992 elections, the ideology of a Greater Israel was dominant in Israel.[6] Yitzhak Shamir, who preceded Rabin as prime minister, agreed to join the Madrid process and hold negotiations with Arab states, but his intention was to buy time in order to realize the vision of a Greater Israel. The bilateral negotiating channels with Syria and Jordan that were part of the Madrid process were fruitless, and the negotiations were not serious. Shamir did not agree to engage in negotiations with the Palestinians, and therefore the Jordanian delegation included representatives who were Palestinian and who ostensibly represented the local Palestinians in the territories. In practice, they were appointed by the PLO because no Palestinian was prepared to be a member of a negotiating delegation without PLO approval and direction. Maintaining the status quo in the territories and continuing the settlement project were Israel's real goals, and Israel ignored the danger of becoming a non-democratic, bi-national state. Notwithstanding the difficulty in altering this situation, the negotiations that led to an agreement on a Declaration of Principles and the start of the Oslo process changed this reality.

Ensuring Israel's Security

Security risks were taken during the Oslo process, as indeed, there is no way to promote political and other agreements with the Arab parties without taking security risks. Even the simple decision to allow Palestinian laborers to work in Israel means taking a certain security risk. The question is whether the risks were proportional and whether appropriate steps were taken to minimize the risks.

The first concrete security risk stemmed from the willingness to give the Palestinian Authority security powers in part of the territory, and thereby allow them to establish security forces on a limited scale with limited weaponry. A second risk emerged from the agreement to allow Palestinians from PLO-affiliated organizations who in the past were involved in terrorist activity into the territories.

There is a widespread claim that the process itself spurred various Palestinian elements to embrace violence and motivated them to resist

the Israeli occupation through armed protest, as occurred in the second intifada. The argument is that with fewer expectations, the Palestinians would not have responded as they did. In other words, if Prime Minister Barak had not gone to Camp David, there would have been no second intifada. When a connection between Palestinian violence and the Palestinian process is posited, a positive correlation is at times found and can be explained as follows: terrorist organizations sought to thwart the political process through terror attacks; at the same time, the outbreak of the second intifada was also connected to frustration stemming from the failure of the Camp David summit. The question is whether similar Palestinian violence would have erupted even without the Oslo process. Although hypothetical situations are beyond definitive analysis, a possible answer to this question emerges from an historical analysis of Israeli control over the West Bank, which has been marked by waves of violent outbursts. A typical example is the first intifada, which broke out because of cumulative frustration in the absence of a political process. While it began as an unarmed popular uprising, it deteriorated soon after and escalated to the use of weapons.

Overall, there is a degree of predictable cyclicality: at first, the Palestinians resort to a violent protest against the occupation, then Israel's security forces succeed in overcoming and eliminating the terror cells, then the Palestinians realize that they will not succeed in achieving their goal through violence, and then they seek another way, a popular uprising or a political path, but this too fails. In the meantime, years pass, and a new generation of young people who have not experienced firsthand the price of using violence comes of age, they return to violence, and so on. Thus the assumption that if there were no political process to raise the expectations of the Palestinians they would accept the occupation and avoid violence appears unfounded. Indeed, Rabin's victory in the 1992 elections was apparently achieved to a large extent by virtue of the spontaneous wave of Palestinian popular terror during the period preceding the elections.

As for the direct security risks that stemmed from arming the Palestinians and from the entry of former terrorists into the territories, it is doubtful whether these factors played a major role, other than psychological, in the security price Israel paid during the Oslo process. There were quite a number of weapons in the Palestinian territories even before Oslo. Most of the Israeli fatalities were from suicide bombings

using improvised explosive devices that had no connection to Palestinian Authority weapons. The terrorist leaders and the various "engineers" were almost all home grown. The Palestinian security apparatus itself was not a real problem for Israel's security forces, even if individuals from this apparatus participated in terrorist activity, nor were the "elderly" terrorists who returned from Tunis to the territories.

The interim agreement and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority did in fact constrain the freedom of action of Israeli security forces in Area A, where under the agreements security responsibility was in Palestinian hands. The assumption was that security cooperation with the Palestinian Authority security apparatus would compensate. However, this assumption turned out to be justified only part of the time. When it became clear that the Palestinians were not fulfilling their commitments, the agreement did not prevent the IDF and security forces from regaining freedom of action, e.g., in Operation Defensive Shield and subsequent operations. One of the main considerations guiding security risks is the need to avoid a situation in which they become irreversible. The security arrangements in the interim agreement took this consideration into account, and in retrospect, they were justified. Palestinian security forces were not a significant obstacle to Israel's ability to restore its freedom of action in the realm of security. The stable security situation created after the second intifada and the contribution of the Annapolis process, with almost no terrorist attacks and close cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian security apparatuses, gradually allows a return to the original terms of the agreement, including Israel's relinquishing full freedom of action.

> The basic format of the Oslo process, namely, interim agreements followed by negotiations on a permanent settlement, was a function of significant political constraints in Israel, and it was not possible to launch an alternative negotiating process with the Palestinians to stop Israel from becoming a bi-national state. However, this does not mean that failure was inevitable.

However, a complete discussion of the security ramifications of the Oslo process must include Israel's contribution to the creation of security problems, including the 1994 massacre by Baruch Goldstein at the Cave of the Patriarchs and Israel's responses to the killings, whereby the Palestinians in Hebron were the ones to suffer negative consequences, and other provocative

Israeli actions. During this period, there was a recurrent pattern: if there appeared a chance to stabilize the security situation, Israel took actions that heated up the atmosphere. One example is the targeted killing of Yihye Ayyash of Hamas, known as "the engineer," in January 1996 in the Gaza Strip: the decision by Prime Minister Peres to kill him was made after Arafat came to the conclusion that he could not continue to tolerate terrorist elements and try to co-opt them, and that he must take serious action against them. During this period the Palestinian security personnel were cooperating with their Israeli counterparts, and Arafat also exerted heavy political pressure on Hamas leaders, which led them to decide to desist from terrorism. The killing of Ayyash prompted a murderous wave of suicide bombings and had serious consequences for Israeli politics. A second example occurred several months later, in September 1996. After the cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority successfully created security stability, the Western Wall tunnels were opened at the direction of Prime Minister Netanyahu. This led to the outbreak of clashes between the two sides, escalating the tension already existing between them because of Israel's failure to keep the commitments it made in the interim agreement[7] and its failure to restart the negotiations between the two sides. In a third example, Prime Minister Sharon approved the targeted killing of senior Fatah figure Ra'ad Carmi in Tulkarm in January 2002. This killing was carried out after Arafat reached the conclusion, in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, that continuing the violent intifada was harming the Palestinian cause given the perceived similarity between al-Qaeda and the Palestinians. He took serious actions to stop the attacks and stabilize the security situation, with considerable success. In the weeks immediately before Carmi was killed, the number of attacks declined gradually to nearly zero. Carmi's killing put an end to this process and led to a renewal of the cycle of violence, culminating with "Black March" 2002, in which 135 Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks.[8]

Israel paid the higher security price in the second intifada. Comprehensive research is still necessary, with all materials (including previously classified) placed at the disposal of researchers who will attempt to determine the reasons for the outbreak of the intifada and why it was so long and bloody. This research will need, first, to discuss the controversial question whether the Palestinian leadership (Arafat) planned the intifada, or whether it was a popular outburst, with Arafat

erring in his decision to jump on the bandwagon. A second key question is whether Israel contributed to the development of the second intifada, its extent, and its violent character by responding with disproportionate force when it began. The two questions are linked, because if the second intifada was not planned, it is possible that it could have been controlled and stopped at an early stage, before much Palestinian blood was shed and much motivation for revenge created, the same way that the escalation surrounding the opening of the Western Wall tunnel in 1996 was contained.

While conspiracy enthusiasts of various kinds might conclude that there is a consistent Israeli policy to prevent security stability and quiet, this is manifestly incorrect. The cases cited above are more indicative of problems in decision making and judgment than deliberate intent. Decisions such as the targeted killings of Ayyash and Carmi were not the result of a conscious policy to prevent calm, rather, the lure of the operational opportunity and disregard for the possible consequences of such operations.

The Negotiating Process Itself

The major criticism of the Oslo process is that it was based on interim agreements, without agreement on its final objectives. The two sides agreed to postpone the negotiations on the sensitive topics of the permanent status agreement − borders, Jerusalem, and refugees − and make do with interim agreements on Palestinian autonomy. The assumption was that this would be a confidence building process that would facilitate the subsequent discussion of permanent status issues. In practice, the interim agreements gave an opportunity to those on both sides who opposed the agreement to thwart the negotiations through the use of violence. It also created the motivation for both sides to obtain assets in any way possible that would enable them to entrench their positions. Thus, for example, the process created a strong motivation among many in Israel to expand the settlements, and what was supposed to be a confidence building process became a confidence destroying process. Overall, Israel had the upper hand because of the asymmetry of power in Israel's favor. For these reasons, critics claim that it would have been better to deal with the core issues of the permanent status agreement early in the negotiations.

This criticism is valid only if the proposed alternative was a viable option; a second question is whether the Oslo process was preferable to the status quo, with the absence of effective negotiations on a settlement with the Palestinians. An answer to the latter question has already been given, namely, that continuation of the status quo on the eve of the Oslo process would have been a poor choice. The answer to the first question also appears to be negative. The option of effective negotiations on the core issues of a permanent status agreement was not realistic. The futile discussions in the Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian negotiating groups that were part of the Madrid process and the prolonged contacts, through various channels, between Israel and the PLO made it clear that neither side was sufficiently ready for negotiations on a permanent settlement and for the price it would have to pay on sensitive issues. This argument is especially true for the Israeli side, including both the public and the decision makers from the entire political spectrum, for whom "two states for two people" and "Palestinian state" were not part of their political lexicon. Even at the height of the process, when effective negotiations were underway and agreements were signed, neither Prime Minister Rabin nor Foreign Minister Peres adopted this terminology. It was only in 1999, when preparations began for negotiations on a permanent status agreement and it was no longer possible to ignore the fact that it would ultimately lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state, that this expression began to recur frequently even by Israeli government officials.

It is no wonder, then, that the two sides clung to the precedent that gave legitimacy to the incremental process: the Camp David Accords signed by Prime Minister Begin and President Sadat. This agreement stated that the parties would hold negotiations on Palestinian autonomy. To both sides, this seemed to be a convenient first stage before entering into negotiations on a permanent settlement. In addition, the precedent of the peace treaty with Egypt illustrated the importance of interim agreements as confidence building measures that later made successful negotiations on a peace treaty possible. The separation of forces agreement in the Sinai, signed during the first Rabin government, laid the foundation for the signing of the peace treaty with Egypt five years later.

Based on these conclusions, the next question is whether the outcome was inevitable, i.e., whether the confidence destruction process and the security costs were unavoidable, or whether they stemmed from Israeli errors that could have been avoided and that, along with errors made by

the Palestinians – such as failure to take decisive action against terrorism at various stages – caused the collapse of the Oslo process. A partial answer was provided in the security analysis above; Israel's security behavior also contributed to the deterioration.

As to the negotiations themselves, first for the interim agreements and later for the permanent settlement, there are several key issues: the relationship between the work by the negotiating teams and the meetings between leaders; how external events were addressed; publicized negotiations vs. covert talks; formulation of opening positions and red lines; how momentum could have been maintained; and how developments on the ground that would harm the chances to reach an agreement could have been prevented.

Complex negotiations such as those between Israel and the Palestinians are exhausting and time consuming, and thus cannot be conducted between busy leaders. Leaders must intervene in the negotiations either when there is an impasse or a particular problem must be resolved, or at the end of the negotiations, when the negotiating teams have reached agreement on most of the issues and intervention by leaders is necessary to overcome the few remaining obstacles. Too often, Israeli leaders are under the mistaken impression that they can finalize the issues with the other party by themselves. However, meetings between leaders are dramatic and formative events. If they are not prepared correctly and present the leaders with too many open questions, the result is generally failure, with wide ranging consequences. A typical example of this is Barak's experience at Camp David.

Of the various kinds of external events, two are particularly important: the use of violence by elements wishing to torpedo the negotiations, and political developments that create a sense of urgency. The use of violence always challenges the continuation of the negotiations. Adapting a remark by Ben Gurion from the time of World War II, Rabin coined the sentence, "We will fight terrorism as if there were no negotiations, and we will conduct negotiations as if there were no terrorism." The idea was that those who initiated terrorism should not be rewarded with canceled negotiations. But Rabin himself did not observe this prescript, and in many cases negotiations were suspended because of terror attacks – not always because the Palestinians did not cooperate in fighting terrorism, but because of the fear of public opinion. Another major lesson of the Oslo process was that an attempt should be made to ignore external

events that create a (frequently artificial) sense of urgency. Thus, for example, Barak went to Camp David under conditions of lack of ripeness only because President Clinton's term in office was drawing to a close. Too often, the result is misguided management of the negotiations and creation of conditions that lead to failure.

When negotiations are conducted overly publicly, it is apparent that the parties involved are not interested in successful negotiations and are instead inviting failure. First, mutual trust must be built that will lead to basic understandings in covert discussions. The public aspects of the negotiations are very important because the parties must obtain support from public opinion, but this does not need to harm the effectiveness of the negotiations. Conducting the negotiations in the mass media hurts mutual trust, and part of the impasse in recent years can be attributed to this.

In many cases, when entering negotiations, Israel approached negotiations as if they were transactions in a Middle East bazaar: two parties engage in discussion with offers that are far from their actual positions, and therefore, they have room to compromise. This assumption is both patronizing to the negotiating partner and incorrect, and it caused many mistakes in the course of the negotiations. The Palestinians did not enter the talks with the assumption that they had much room for maneuver. On the contrary, they entered negotiations believing that they had made most of the concessions in 1988 and in the start of the Oslo process, when the PLO adopted the two-state solution[9] and recognized the 1967 borders in the Declaration of Principles. The result was a clear asymmetry between the two sides.

Barak, however, went to Camp David with opening positions that he knew were very far from any solution the Palestinians could accept, for example, his opening positions on territory and Jerusalem. The Israeli side sought to annex a large area of the West Bank, over 13.3 percent, without any territorial compensation for the Palestinians, and under a long term lease continue to control the Jordan Valley, another approximately 10 percent of the territory, or in total, 23.3 percent.[10] As to Jerusalem, the opening position was a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty. The result was a rapid Israeli withdrawal from unreasonable positions. This situation created a dilemma for the Palestinians: should they stop, or press for further Israeli flexibility? They were therefore motivated to continue the negotiations and not arrive at an understanding that would stop

Barak's retreat from his positions. If Barak had arrived at the negotiations with opening positions that were nearer to his red lines, there would have been a fierce struggle over every small change in positions, and both sides would have had very strong motivation to reach understandings. One can argue, of course, that the distance between the respective red lines made it impossible to reach an agreement, but this propels us back to the idea that the meeting between leaders should take place only when the gap between the two sides has been greatly narrowed. In addition, there is the question of how red lines are defined. They are generally not absolute, and when they are drawn, both what is desirable and what is attainable must be addressed. The red lines also become clear during the negotiations between the negotiating teams and before the meeting between the leaders.

Another consistent mistake was to ignore the importance of maintaining the momentum of the negotiations. In many cases, after success at a particular stage of the process, the momentum was stopped, and Israel did not continue the negotiations – for example, after the interim agreements were signed with the PLO, when the government of Israel turned its attention to the negotiations with Syria. Even when Barak became prime minister, he preferred initially to engage in negotiations with Syria; Olmert adopted the same policy. The loss of momentum served the opponents of the agreement on both sides, and made it easier for them to work against it. It also contravened the main idea of the Declaration of Principles, that five years after the signing of the interim agreement, the parties would sign a permanent status agreement that would resolve the core issues. This required that negotiations on the permanent status agreement be launched as early as possible, yet the real negotiations began only during Prime Minister Barak's term, after the five-year period had elapsed and after the attempt to reach a settlement with Syria had failed. A process in which momentum leading to progress was maintained and was also visible had a better chance of fulfilling its original purpose as a confidence building process.

One of the main reasons for the wide gap between the sides, which prevented renewal or progress in negotiations, was the continuation and acceleration of the settlement project. One of the major weaknesses of the Oslo process was that the interim agreement created a convenient situation for expanding the settlements, in particular, by dividing the land into areas A, B, and C. Area C, under full Israeli civil and security

control, covers 60 percent of the territory of the West Bank. This definition created an illusion, exploited by supporters of the settlement project, that this territory belongs to Israel, which has carte blanche there. This view is also currently reflected in proposals by the political right to annex Area C to Israel. It is clear that there is no chance of reaching an agreement with the Palestinians in which they would establish their state on only 40 percent of the territory of the West Bank. Those who initiated the Oslo process should have understood that these arrangements would have a negative impact on the chances of reaching a final agreement, and they should have avoided the temptation to preserve what appeared to be maximum freedom of action for Israel. In practice, the freedom of action that was maintained was the freedom to expand the settlement project and place additional obstacles in the way of an agreement.

Conclusion

The contentions of this article are based on the political definition of Israel's goals in its process with the Palestinians as defined at the outset of the article, and on the assumption that the Palestinians had a basic willingness to reach an agreement, if it met their essential needs. This willingness was expressed as early as 1988 in the decision by the PLO to accept the two-state solution, and in 1992 by the willingness to enter into the Oslo process. The basic format of the Oslo process, namely, interim agreements followed by negotiations on a permanent settlement, was a function of significant political constraints in Israel, and it was not possible to launch an alternative negotiating process with the Palestinians to stop Israel from becoming a bi-national state. However, this does not mean that failure was inevitable. Both sides made quite a few errors in conducting the process, and it may be that had they avoided them, the outcome might have been different.

Notes

1   Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, September 13, 1993, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/Guide/Pages/Declaration%20of%20Principles.aspx.
2   The analysis of the balance sheet is largely based on the writer's personal experience in the negotiations with the Palestinians, both as part of the Israeli negotiating delegation between 1994 and 1998 and through unofficial channels in the following years.

3 This objective is difficult to translate operationally because it is not clear what were the borders of the historical land of Israel. The borders were different in various periods of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel. This article addresses the commonly accepted political definition among proponents of this approach, which is the territories of the British mandate over Palestine between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, since even those proponents have mostly agreed to relinquish the territories in Transjordan.

4 Though in recent years there has been a decline in support for the two-state solution, in a joint survey conducted by the Truman Institute at Hebrew University and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah, it was found that 56 percent of the Israeli public supports the two-state solution and 40 percent oppose it. At one of the peaks, in March 2010, support reached 71 percent. See http://www.huji.ac.il/dovrut/seker.pdf.

5 Those who coined this slogan have not clarified for themselves what the historical Jerusalem is that Israel must keep united, and have ascribed the sanctity of Jerusalem to an arbitrary area defined by Israeli bureaucrats immediately after the Six Day War.

6 Directly, for thirteen years during Likud governments that supported this ideology, and also indirectly in the two years in which Shimon Peres was prime minister in the national unity government, by virtue of the Likud's veto power over political decisions.

7 Israel suspended the negotiations on the arrangements in Hebron and did not want to fulfill the three additional stages of redeployment to which it had committed in the agreement.

8 Raviv Drucker, "Behind the Scenes of the Second Intifada: Sharon's Associates and Defense Establishment Heads Speak," February 11, 2013, http://pelephoneportal.invokemobile.com/nana/iarticle.aspx?ServiceID=126&ArticleID=957761.

9 At the nineteenth meeting of the Palestine National Council, held in 1988, the PLO decided to declare a Palestinian state on the basis of the UN partition plan, and thus it accepted the principle of the two-state solution.

10 Gilead Sher, *Just Beyond Reach: The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations 1999-2002* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 2001), p. 203; interview with Shaul Arieli, who headed the negotiating administration in the Prime Minister's Office for talks with the Palestinians during the Barak government.

Strategic ASSESSMENT