

Five Years Back and Five Years Forward: Israel's Strategic Environment in 2011-2015 and Policy Recommendations for 2016-2020

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With December 2015 marking five years since the outbreak of the “Arab Spring,” a current assessment of Israel’s strategic situation must be based on the perspective of this period. What follows are twelve observations regarding recent political and security developments that impact on Israel’s national security and require the formulation of an overarching strategy for foreign policy and security policy for the coming five years.

1. The weakening of key Arab states, to the point of dissolution

The regional upheaval that began in 2011 is far from over, and it appears that it will be many years before the region is once again stable. Many Arab states, suffer from political and economic instability, and in five of these states instability has caused the states to dissolve along ethnic, religious, national, and tribal lines, to the point of civil war. Alongside – and in some cases instead of – the states that existed in 2011 are entities and forces whose identities are not based primarily on the nation and the state. The Middle East has become a complex system of armed and violent identity politics with many actors, and an arena of proxy wars between regional powers. In some instances, the states have also become spheres of direct intervention by global powers. Civil wars are underway in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan,

and Libya, with the wars in the former two countries involving the direct intervention of regional and global powers. It is hard to imagine that these states will be able to function as unified entities in the future. In some, the division may become a permanent, unstable reality, whereas in others, if there is insistence on maintaining previous state borders and identities, weak federal frameworks could come into being. To a great extent, the weakness and disintegration of these states helps explain a number of developments described below.

2. The Islamic State (ISIS), a central force shaping the Middle East

In 2014, the Islamic State burst into public consciousness as a Salafi jihadist group that split off from al-Qaeda and conquered extensive territory in Syria and Iraq. The group harbors the audacious aspiration of destroying the existing regional order and, in the future, the global order as well. Characterized by exceptional brutality, it has set out to establish a new territorial political unit in the form of a caliphate. The state vacuum in Syria enabled ISIS to consolidate its power in Syrian territory, seize control of large parts of Syria and northwestern Iraq, and announce the establishment of the “Islamic State.” Through these actions, ISIS succeeded in challenging regional and international actors and in further complicating the fabric of rivalries in the Middle East and beyond. Jihadist terrorist movements in the Sinai Peninsula, Libya, Nigeria, and Afghanistan have sworn allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State, and have defined themselves as Islamic State provinces.

Over the past year, the Islamic State has proven capable of effectively exploiting the attraction of its ideology in Muslim societies throughout the world, and the organization enjoys a steady flow of volunteers joining the fighting on Syrian and Iraqi soil. Subsequently, the “foreign forces” disperse throughout the world with the capability to establish sleeper cells in their countries of origin. By late 2015, however, the Islamic State appears to have been halted on almost all fronts where it was engaged in combat, and has retreated in Iraq and Syria. At the same time, the organization has proven its ability to adapt, enabling it to use sleeper cells and local groups to carry out terrorist attacks against the countries in the region and the world powers that it perceives have banded together to fight it. Thus far, the Islamic State has

carried out terrorist attacks in Turkey and France and shot down a Russian plane over the Sinai Peninsula.

As a result of the organization's growing visibility and its violent actions around the world, many countries, including the United States, Russia, and European states, have increased their pressure on the Islamic State, causing the group to lose territory and sources of income and suffer systematic injury to its chain of command. Despite the lack of desire on the part of the world powers to send ground forces to contend with the Islamic State, the airstrikes, the new capabilities demonstrated by the Iraqi army in Ramadi, and the pressure created by the Russian-Iranian coalition on the ground in Syria suggest that in the end, the Islamic State will lose its territorial base. However, the organization's ideological attraction and the political reality in Iraq and Syria – in which Sunnis feel excluded from state institutions, economically oppressed, and frustrated – will continue to ensure both a broad base of support for the Islamic State and much potential for the recruitment of new operatives. Moreover, even without a territorial base, the organization will presumably maintain the means to reestablish itself at a later point in time; in other words, in the foreseeable future, the Islamic State stands to remain an important actor both inside and outside the Middle East.

3. The superpowers are once again engaged in military action in the Middle East, but are taking care to avoid “boots on the ground.”

While at the end of the twentieth century the world boasted only one superpower, recent years have given rise to a reality of multiple powers, albeit powers with a range of economic and military strengths. The different policies and leaderships of the world powers have resulted in different types of intervention in the Middle East, which depart in character from the Cold War of the last century. Thus, the United States and Russia can find themselves together on one side of the divide against the Islamic State, but on opposing sides on the question of the continuation of the Assad regime. The United States, which began retreating from direct military involvement in Iraq early in the decade, was forced to return to the region to lead a coalition against the Islamic State. Its return, however, lacked a coherent strategy supported by commitment and resources and has therefore achieved only limited success.

The terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015 increased the motivation of European countries to join the military activity in the Middle East, although their limited military capabilities mean that increased activity will not change the balance of power. After a year and a half during which this coalition was able to achieve only a partial Islamic State retreat, Russia returned to the Middle East with more decisive military effort that has included the deployment of Russian air power and special forces in Syria and large scale airstrikes. The Russians too, however, have not dispatched ground forces and are relying primarily on the Syrian army, Shiite militias, Iranian forces, and Hezbollah, which despite the Russian air support have failed to bring about a decisive change in the balance between the fighting forces in Syria. Moreover, the military intervention of the foreign powers in this complex environment, with the large number of actors involved, has resulted in an unstable setting, in which tactical incidents can escalate into unwanted strategic confrontations (for example, another Turkish downing of a Russian plane could lead to a confrontation between Russia and NATO).

This substantial Russian involvement transcends the borders of the region and reflects a global Russian perspective based on its desire to resume its role as a world power, as well as its clash with Europe and the United States on the issues of the Crimean Peninsula, Ukraine, NATO's eastward expansion, and the deployment of missile defense systems in Europe. From an Israeli perspective, the Russian-Iranian-Syrian coalition's role in strengthening the radical anti-Israel axis is problematic. Avoiding friction with Russia and coordinating with Russia regarding Israeli activity in Syria are important aims, but they must not be allowed to overshadow the overall negative trend of strengthening Iran and Hezbollah.

4. Following the JCPOA, Israel stands alone in face of an agreement that is problematic but that buys it time.

After a decade of slow but determined Iranian progress toward the nuclear threshold, enabling it to produce enough fissile material for one nuclear bomb within two months, the Iranian progress was halted (by the interim agreement of November 2013) and pushed back (by a final agreement with the world powers, signed in July 2015) to a point where it will take it one year to produce enough fissile material for a first bomb. The Joint Comprehensive

Plan of Action (JCPOA), the agreement signed between Iran and the P5+1, is extremely problematic, particularly in the long term (10-15 years), when Iran will receive legitimacy for a broad nuclear program enabling it to break out or sneak out toward a bomb within a minimal timeframe. On this basis, however, the agreement buys Israel time to develop clandestine as well as overt thwarting capabilities for the long term.

The agreement also aggravates dangers outside the nuclear realm. The lifting of sanctions on Iran will place at its disposal substantial financial resources that it can utilize to support terrorist activity, subversion, and conventional military buildup. This buildup can be expected to include the acquisition of advanced weapon systems from Russia and China, and the continued development of Iran's own local weapons industry. However, the nuclear agreement also has positive aspects, and Israel would do well to take advantage of them. In addition, the agreement raises concerns among the United States' traditional allies in the region (Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt) that Washington is distancing itself from them and pivoting toward Iran at their expense. This fear has not been realized thus far, but the countries in question will continue to be suspicious toward the US. It will be necessary to follow the increasing number of civilian nuclear programs emerging in Arab countries, which may be a response to the Iranian nuclear program and an attempt to develop an infrastructure capable of facilitating transition to military programs in the future.

5. Israel and the pragmatic Sunni world (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states) share common interests.

Both sides regard a nuclearizing Shiite Iran, which aspires for regional hegemony, and radical Sunni terrorist groups, led by the Islamic State, as significant dangers to their national security and their very existence. The peaceful relations and coordination on security issues with the states with which Israel signed peace treaties have passed the test of the regional upheaval and have grown stronger in light of the multiple mutual interests of the parties involved. Relations with the other Sunni countries in the region are developing via covert channels. Still, the lack of progress in the Palestinian track makes it difficult to transition to more intensive, not to mention open cooperation.

6. Another round of negotiations with the Palestinians regarding a final status agreement has failed. On the ground there is no vacuum, but rather a third intifada of stabbings and car-rammings.

Since the failure of the negotiations mediated by Secretary of State John Kerry, Israel and the Palestinians have been completely disconnected from one another. The Palestinian strategies of military confrontation, led by Hamas in Gaza, and political struggle in the international arena have failed to yield the Palestinians any concrete progress toward their national goals. Israel, which has adhered to the status quo and hoped to manage the conflict with low costs, has discovered that it is actually being managed by the conflict and has found itself facing an intifada waged on a low flame that differs from those that preceded it. The current uprising is not one of organized terrorism, but rather of isolated initiatives motivated by a sense of despair, frustration with the leadership, and vengeance, which together create a receptive foundation for incitement. These individuals are willing to embark on killing sprees using knives and vehicles. Thus far, this intifada has shown almost no escalation to use of firearms or mass suicide attacks, but it also shows no sign of letting up. As a result, in managing the conflict Israel is paying an increasingly high price in human lives, damage to tourism and the economy, and the ongoing erosion of the country's image around the world. Hamas is trying to exploit this fragile situation by initiating suicide attacks. It has thus far been unsuccessful, primarily due to Israel's ability, with the assistance of the security services of the Palestinian Authority, to dismantle Hamas's terrorist infrastructure in the West Bank.

7. Additional deterioration in Israel's international standing, especially in Europe and the United States

Israel's political and moral standing around the world has been steadily eroded by a number of factors, including the personal and ideological confrontation between the Obama-led administration and the government of Prime Minister Netanyahu; the blaming of Israel for the failure of the peace process; disagreements on the issue of the settlements; the clash in Gaza (which resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties); and the perception of Israel as the stronger and less just party. The Europeans'

decision to limit research grants to institutions within the Green Line and the EU recommendation to mark Israeli products manufactured beyond the Green Line are initial manifestations of a problem that, if not effectively addressed, could cause Israel to descend to the status of a pariah state. The transformation of the discourse of boycott into a legitimate discourse in the international arena is another aspect of the same problem. Although BDS has had only limited success thus far, the danger of the boycott's expansion from the non-government organizational world to the heart of the institutionalized West, and its spread to international institutions, should set off a warning light in Jerusalem.

8. Internal developments in Israel are threatening its resilience and have a negative impact on its international standing.

Israel is currently witnessing increasing internal division and factionalism that could eat away at national solidarity and resilience. Causes of this dynamic include articulations of extremism from the right and left wings, Jewish terrorism, displays of racism that are sometimes violent (as in the “price tag” campaign and the murders of Palestinian teenager Mohammed Abu Khdeir and the Dawabsheh family in Duma), controversial legislative efforts, and leftist elements joining the incitement campaign against the Israel. These factors likewise have a detrimental effect on Israel's international standing, as at least in the West, Israel's image as a Western democratic country that respects civil rights and represents fundamental values of Judeo-Christian civilization is the basis of support for Israel.

9. The changes in the energy market are primarily positive developments for Israel that weaken its enemies and their ability to fund military buildup, terrorism, and instruments of political leverage.

The drop in the price of oil has mixed implications for Israel. As an importer of oil, Israel benefits from the drop in prices. This development also represents a contribution to the world economy, freeing it from the burden of high energy prices, and in this way also represents an indirect contribution to the Israeli economy by stimulating the markets. Israel's main enemy, Iran, is weakened, and in turn, its ability to support subversion, terrorism, and the building of a

military force declines. Now, the Arab “oil weapon” cannot be used against Israel and its allies. At the same time, however, the price of oil could drop so low as to threaten the economic and financial stability of countries in the region and some major economic and industrial centers. Within all of this, the threat to the stability of Saudi Arabia and the deepening poverty and economic stagnation in the Middle East are problematic offshoots of the drop in oil prices. From Israel’s perspective, the production of Israeli gas in the Mediterranean helps strengthen its strategic standing and energy independence. At the same time, Israel’s ability to use the export of gas to countries in the Middle East as a tool for pursuing its strategic goals is not a foregone conclusion, due both to internal constraints and to the saturation of the world gas market.

10. The threat to Israel is increasingly diverse and multidimensional.

If the source of the military threat once lay in the capabilities of rival state conventional armies, the threat today is hybrid, based primarily on a combination of multidimensional terrorism and guerilla warfare using the tools of regular armies. In addition, Israel also faces soft threats such as cyber, media, and legal warfare aimed at the delegitimization and boycott of the state. Along with these new threats, the traditional military threats have not disappeared and, like Iran, hybrid terrorist groups are arming themselves with precision long range advanced weaponry that in various scenarios may be used against Israel. The IDF must take action to provide effective solutions for these complex integrated threats.

11. A new source of power and information: the social networks

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, and other networks have become the largest community in the Middle East. Today, more than 90 million Arabs, representing approximately 35 percent of the overall population of the Arab Middle East, use social networks. Users of these networks are active 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In a world in which knowledge is power, the social networks have broken the monopoly on knowledge and have become the world’s largest information platform, making knowledge accessible to all seekers, free of charge. The architecture of the internet

and the ability to open new pages contributes to the inability of the ruling, intellectual, and security elite to control the content and knowledge available to the public. Moreover, the social networks are the only democratic and egalitarian platforms in the Middle East through which it is possible to see and hear the hopes and desires of the young generation, women, and minorities, who constitute the majority of the population of the region. However, despite their accounting for the majority of the population, their voice is otherwise not heard and has no political representation. The social networks are the only place with no geographical boundaries, and as a result ideas can no longer be censored or buried. The war against the Islamic State, the operation in Gaza, and the recent wave of terrorist stabbings and vehicle attacks highlight the fact that while it is possible to kill terrorists and destroy political infrastructures, no one thus far has been able to “kill” the internet and the social networks. For this reason, sieges, walls, and fences are also unable to stop the flow of ideas virally emerging from behind the closed borders. The web has eclipsed the radio and the mosque in terms of its ability to motivate groups of people to engage in activity and to band together. It is the ultimate tool for indoctrinating large populations and today constitutes the most influential force in shaping public opinion in the Middle East and elsewhere.

12. Israel is militarily strong, has witnessed a decline in the direct military threat it faces, and is able to avoid large scale conflicts and wars.

Despite the nearby civil wars, the regional instability, the deployment of terrorist groups on its borders, and clashes in Gaza approximately every two years, Israel has successfully avoided being drawn into a large scale war. Its refraining from attacking Iran, its policy of non-intervention in Syria, its stable peace with Egypt and Jordan, and the deterring image of its military capabilities have enabled continued economic growth and strategic stability. In the meantime, the conventional threat posed by the regular armies of the neighboring countries has all but vanished. Israel now must focus on generating effective solutions for dealing with the hybrid semi-state groups that possess advanced terrorist and guerilla capabilities, most notably the use of rockets and missiles. Israel remains the strongest

and most technologically advanced army in the Middle East and possesses extremely high quality offensive and defensive capabilities. The Israeli public continues to hold high expectations of the IDF, requiring it all the while to increase its substantial qualitative edge over its potential rivals with defensive and offensive capabilities on a number of geographic fronts, on the home front, and vis-à-vis a variety of threats. The change in the map of threats also implies that the primary campaign is the “campaign between wars,” whose importance has increased relative to preparation for a future war with attributes that are still unknown.

Looking Ahead

With these observations in mind, the Israeli political and military leadership must formulate an updated strategy for the next five years. Both in the international arena, which is undergoing drastic changes, and in the region itself, which is fraught with uncertainty and problematic developments, it is ostensibly logical to pursue a policy that strives to freeze processes and decisions until a clearer overall understanding of the state of affairs is achieved. This has been Israel’s policy since the outset of the Arab Spring, when the Israeli government strategically chose the status quo and viewed itself as a “villa in the jungle” that could and should disengage from its surroundings. After five years of regional upheaval, with unstable outgrowths that will persist for many years to come, the primary contours of the change can be identified, and a comprehensive, multidimensional, and proactive policy can be formulated, which will contend more effectively with the up-to-date threats facing Israel and identify and leverage the opportunities created by ensuing developments. What follows are twelve recommendations, including one final statement regarding the overall policy that Israel would do well to adopt under the current circumstances.

1. The Iranian nuclear threat may no longer be on the immediate agenda, but it nonetheless constitutes a potential future existential threat to Israel.

Israel must prevent the nuclear arming of the extremist Iranian regime that calls for the destruction of Israel. The extended timeout, during which Iran’s nuclear program has been frozen to a point that takes it one year to produce

a bomb, provides Israel with ample room to plan five, and perhaps even ten years into the future. Israel must have a plan that will enable it to contend with the different possible scenarios, including violation of the agreement, its annulment, or an overt or clandestine Iranian breakout toward a bomb. Israel must make preparations to ensure that it makes the best possible use of the “JCPOA timeout” by building new and reinforced capabilities for dealing with Iran and all dimensions of its activity.

2. Israel must initiate parallel agreements with the United States that will enable the two allies to remain coordinated on the Iranian issue.

Israel was not party to the nuclear agreement, and therefore should reach understandings and agreements with the United States on several relevant critical issues. It is important to agree on a common response to violations of the nuclear agreement; the improvement of intelligence coverage vis-à-vis Iran; the manner of contending with the non-nuclear aspects of Iranian activity in the region, such as terrorism and subversion; an enhanced security package to Israel; and retention of its qualitative advantage. It is also important to establish a strategic review forum that will meet regularly to discuss developments regarding Iranian activity and coordinate activity vis-à-vis Iran. Such a review committee would enable the countries to contend with the continuation of malevolent Iranian activity in the region and find a way to deal with the Iranian nuclear program, even after the lifting of many of the restrictions in 10-15 years. At the same time, it should be able to assess whether a process of internal reform is underway in Iran and whether there has been a positive change in its conduct.

3. The major strategy for weakening Iran lies in Syria.

Syria is Iran’s corridor to the Arab world and the channel through which it strengthens and maintains contact with Hezbollah and Palestinian extremist groups. The weakening and ousting of the Assad regime is a clear Israeli interest, as only this can level a severe blow to Iran and Hezbollah. Israel must determine how to support efforts that will end with the Assad regime not playing a dominant role in Syria, while at the same time refraining from strengthening extremist Sunni factions and, most prominently, the Islamic

State. From Israel's perspective, these two negative forces can be dealt with sequentially, with a continuous reexamination of their correct prioritization. To achieve these goals, Israel must develop more creative and active tools through cooperative efforts with strong global allies such as the United States and Europe, as well as with Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which are also interested in ejecting Iran from Syria and replacing the Assad regime.

4. Israel must prepare itself militarily and politically for the possibility that Syria will not resume functioning as a unitary state and that the civil war will continue for many years.

Israel must ensure that the forces of the radical axis are weakened as much as possible in the future Syria and are removed from the Golan Heights to the greatest extent possible. If Syria is divided, the Syrian elements with which Israel can cooperate include the more moderate Sunni organizations and the states supporting them, such as Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, Jordan, and Turkey. Israel must continuously assess whether the Saudis and the Turks are truly supporting moderate Sunni elements or whether they are repeating the mistakes of the past by supporting radical elements that will later join the Islamic State or al-Qaeda. In any event, Israel must try to design an updated security plan for the Golan Heights, whether as an extension of the already existing separation of forces agreement, or under different rules of operation and deterrence vis-à-vis the forces that will establish themselves in the Syrian Golan Heights.

5. Israel must prepare itself for a full scale military conflict with Hezbollah.

The JCPOA has frozen the Iranian nuclear threat for a number of years, and the armies currently on Israel's borders are either at peace with Israel or enervated by exhausting civil wars. Israel's primary military threat at the present time is posed by Hezbollah. This organization continues its buildup with offensive and defensive weaponry produced by Iran, Russia, and Syria. The range of the rockets and missiles at its disposal cover the full territory of Israel, and their precision and lethality continue to increase. Hezbollah is even developing an offensive capability to seize control of some Israeli territory. Israel must make sure that it possesses effective offensive and

defensive responses that are both deterring and decisive against Hezbollah. In the event of such a conflict, Israel must relate to Hezbollah and Lebanon together, as a single state entity attacking Israel, and must strike at targets of national infrastructure in Lebanon as part of an overall campaign.

6. Israel must embark upon self-initiated, independent measures in the Palestinian arena.

Israel must present a comprehensive initiative aimed at moving forward toward its desired solution. Israel has four possible tracks, which should all be pursued in parallel to one another, or one after another in the event that the previous one fails: a) direct negotiations with the Palestinians with the aim of reaching a final status agreement; b) a regional settlement in cooperation with the moderate Arab states; and c) a series of interim arrangements with progress on issues that can be implemented in parallel. If none of these approaches are successful, Israel must take the fourth path of independent steps toward the proactive shaping of its future borders. The plan must include a suitable security plan and ensure international support, which will be garnered after Israel presents moderate positions regarding the framework for a two-state solution through bilateral and multilateral channels. These are all necessary conditions for a successful independent effort.

7. Following the lessons of Operation Protective Edge, Israel must prepare the IDF for another round of fighting in the Gaza Strip.

Israel cannot allow itself another round of hostilities that lasts 50 days and that ends in a strategic draw with its weakest enemy. Israel, which did not conclude the last confrontation in a manner that prevented Hamas from engaging in subsequent buildup, must make sure it possesses the operative tools necessary to conclude a confrontation with the group more quickly and with a better outcome than in the past. Most importantly, Israel must find a way to prevent Hamas from engaging in military buildup following the next round of fighting, in order to prevent another round shortly thereafter. At the same time, Israel must engage in non-military activities to prevent a confrontation or, at the very least, delay it. This must be done through Israeli

contributions toward a better economic and political reality in the Gaza Strip, which will make it more difficult for Hamas to violate the ceasefire.

8. Israel must prepare for struggles, clashes, and warfare in non-kinetic dimensions.

Cyberspace, lawfare, the battle of wits and opinions on the social networks, and BDS require that new efforts be made and new organisation be created for the use of “soft power.” Soft power is a dimension of power whose influence in the twenty-first century is no less essential than the IDF’s traditional use of kinetic power. The Goldstein Report, the charges against Israelis in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the labeling of products, BDS, and the incitement on the social networks draw attention to a clear weak point in Israeli national security. It is important to analyze the attributes of the “soft battlefield” and adapt the traditional principles of warfare accordingly, but also to design and enhance fresh principles derived from the new dimensions, capabilities, and character of this warfare. It is also important to define the organizations that will operate against these threats and determine whether any specific new bodies should be created. Suitable strategies must be formulated, balances in the allocation of resources must be adjusted, and specially adapted activity must ensure a combination of “soft power” and traditional “hard power.”

9. Israel must deepen its alliance with the pragmatic Arab states.

Readiness to deal with mutual threats opens a window to cooperative efforts between Israel and Arab states. Current common interests constitute an unprecedented basis for the development of meaningful relations with the Sunni bloc that will serve Israel both in the short and long terms. The ability to work together to thwart Iranian subversion and Iran’s aspirations to acquire a nuclear bomb and achieve regional hegemony, and Israeli assistance in fighting the Islamic State, are important to both sides. However, forging such relations is dependent on progress on the Palestinian track.

10. Israel must improve relations with its allies, first and foremost the United States and Europe.

Relatively simple Israeli measures could change the atmosphere vis-à-vis the countries of the West. A building freeze in the isolated settlements located

outside the settlement blocs, measures to stimulate the Palestinian economy, and in particular, a political initiative along the lines described above could go a long way in creating a dramatic change in the relations between Israel and its allies. Once the world is convinced that Israel is serious and sincere in its approach to the peace process and the two-state solution, Israel will benefit from political and economic dividends.

11. The State of Israel must renew and reestablish its moral superiority.

The State of Israel must operate from a strong moral position, which can be achieved by activity reflecting a sincere desire for peace, ceasing its rule over another people, and ensuring the continued role of enlightened democratic principles in the country.

12. The Overall Strategy

Israel has the ability to maneuver and seek opportunities to improve its political, security, and strategic status as a result of the stormy developments in the Middle East in recent years. Particularly salient are the timeout regarding the Iranian nuclear program, the threat posed by ISIS, and the broad understanding, in the world and the Middle East alike, that the Palestinian issue is not the major cause of problems in the region. These factors open a window to potential alliances with pragmatic elements in the Arab world and facilitate the formulation of an overall comprehensive and proactive strategy. This strategy is based squarely on moderation and flexibility in the Palestinian arena for the sake of strengthening Israel's relations with the pragmatic Sunni states and improving Israel's relations with Europe and the United States. Better coordination and cooperation with the United States will facilitate measures to prepare effective responses vis-à-vis an Iran that may achieve military nuclear capability in the long term and vis-à-vis the short-term threats already posed by Hezbollah and the Islamic State. The combination of strong and advanced military power, diplomatic and political wisdom, and international legitimacy will result in Israel's significant strengthening, which will enable the country both to contend effectively with the future threat scenarios and to establish sustainable peace arrangements with its neighbors.