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# Strategic Survey for Israel 2013-2014

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Shlomo Brom and Anat Kurz, Editors

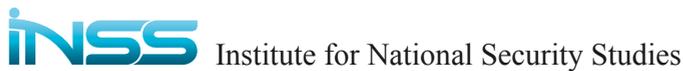




# **Strategic Survey for Israel**

## **2013-2014**

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# Strategic Survey for Israel 2013-2014

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## Preface

The period reviewed in this book, the latest volume in the *Strategic Survey for Israel* series published annually by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), was dominated by the ongoing effects of the so-called “Arab Spring” and the various shockwaves felt in the Middle East over the past three years. Prevailing trends in the Middle East in 2013, which will define much of Israel’s strategic environment for the coming year, reflected the social and political vicissitudes in the internal affairs of the regional states, the response by the neighboring states to these changes, and the shifts in relations and the balance of power between them. Regional developments alternately prompted and reflected the response of international actors to events in the Middle East, as well as the drive by the leading powers to reduce the negative effects on their interests in the region.

When taken as a whole, the thirteen chapters compiled here present a dynamic regional picture that confronts Israel with difficult dilemmas that at the same time contain potential opportunities within them. A key conclusion arising from the various analyses is that Israel would do well to engage proactively with its surroundings and attempt to carve out various means to promote its strategic interests. Conversely, avoiding a decision about the best policy for dealing with these dilemmas will intensify the security and political challenges.

Part I of the volume, “Developments in the Middle East,” assesses the dominant trends evident in the leading Middle East states. The focus here is on individual states, with particular attention to regional and international ramifications for Israel’s security.

The first article, by Emily Landau and Shimon Stein, examines the international community’s engagement with the Iranian nuclear issue. The economic hardship in Iran created by the intensified international sanctions, and the growing recognition among the Iranian population

of the connection between Iran's economic difficulty and international standing on the one hand and the progress toward completion of its nuclear program on the other, paved Hassan Rouhani's way to the presidency. This development sparked hope in Iran as well as among the world powers that the crisis surrounding the nuclear program could be solved diplomatically. An interim agreement was reached in late 2013, stipulating that the program would be suspended while negotiations for a comprehensive agreement were underway. The possibility that these talks, especially the dialogue between Iran and the US, would bolster Iran's influence in the Persian Gulf while leaving it the means to continue its progress toward military nuclear capability aroused severe concern in Israel and in the Persian Gulf states. Therefore, the authors contend, removal of both the sanctions and the military option before an agreement is reached guaranteeing a significant delay in the Iranian nuclear program will impact negatively on the prospects for significantly attenuating the threat posed by the program.

The following chapter, by Shlomo Brom, Benedetta Berti, and Mark Heller, discusses the civil war in Syria, dwelling on the deadlock between the supporters of the Bashar al-Assad regime and the rebel forces. To the authors it appears that the fighting will continue indefinitely, incurring greater regional and international consequences but with no absolute victor. Syria's decline into civil war has undermined its ability to conduct a conventional military struggle against Israel, but the weakening of the central government has enabled armed sub-state organizations to seize control of certain areas. This development bodes ill for Israel, because some of these factions are Salafi-jihadi organizations. The millions of Syrian refugees who have crossed the border into Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon have created severe socioeconomic problems in those countries with the potential for causing political upheaval. The regime and the various rebel forces are supported by their traditional allies, but with the exception of Hizbollah – backed by overt support from Iran – these allies have thus far refrained from direct intervention in the fighting. Fighting by Hizbollah operatives at the side of the regime's army has also aggravated the inter-sectarian tension in Lebanon. Despite Syria's breach of a US red line on the use of chemical weapons by the regime, aversion to military entanglement in Syria led to an international agreement, spearheaded by

Russia and welcomed by the US administration, to dismantle the regime's chemical arsenal. This development highlighted the Syrian context in the struggle between the leading major powers and the assessment that coordination between them will be a necessary condition for talks between the adversarial parties, and even more so for an agreement between them to halt the fighting.

The upheaval in Egypt is the subject of Ephraim Kam's article. His analysis focuses on the dynamic that led to the military coup in the summer of 2013, which put an end to the Muslim Brotherhood regime after a year of its controlling the parliament, the government, and the presidency. Opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood regime stemmed from its failure to form a coalition with other forces among the Egyptian public, President Morsi's attempt to command far reaching power, and the overall failures in government and economic management. It is too early to tell whether the military will retain the political leadership or choose to hold elections, but certainly the Muslim Brotherhood's decision whether to embark on a direct struggle against the army or whether to engage in dialogue with it will determine the stability of the political system in Egypt in the coming years. For its part, Israel benefited from the return of the Egyptian army to center stage. Security coordination with Egypt, in particular the effort to restrain jihadi activity in Sinai, continued even during the Muslim Brotherhood rule. In contrast to the Brotherhood, however, the Egyptian army is not motivated by ideological hostility to Israel. Israel therefore took action to soften the opposition of the US to the army's return to power in Egypt through patently undemocratic means.

Oded Eran's article focuses on the stability of Jordan, a state challenged by socioeconomic hardships and processes that preceded the "Arab Spring" but were exacerbated by the regional developments. They include a demographic challenge, intensified by the wave of Syrian refugees that reached Jordan; the internal political challenge, inspired by the social protest and the call for democracy in the Middle East; and the economic challenge, which has long been linked to the need for the rehabilitation of infrastructure and reduction of unemployment, along with the additional burden created by the flood of refugees from Syria and the halt in the supply of natural gas from Egypt. Another danger to Jordan's stability is

the empowerment of radical Islamic groups in Syria. The dialogue between Jordan and Israel, and in particular, ways in which Israel can help stabilize its eastern neighbor economically, is extremely important, since Jordan's stability is a key element in overall regional stability, particularly Israel's strategic environment.

Gallia Lindenstrauss's article focuses on Turkey's encounter with the regional upheaval, and analyzes related changes in relations between Turkey and its neighbors. Turkey has taken a clear position against the Assad regime, although it has not decided which of the opposition groups to support. An especially difficult dilemma for Turkey is the possibility that the dissolution of Syria will prove to be a stage in the establishment of Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria and will transform the area into a theater of operations for extremist Islamic organizations on Syrian territory. Relations between Turkey and Egypt worsened following the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood regime by the army. Turkey's support for Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq continues to be a bone of contention in relations between Ankara and the central government in Baghdad. On the other hand, the tension between Turkey and Iran has subsided following the interim agreement between the major powers and Tehran on the Iranian nuclear program. In addition to the dilemmas in its foreign relations, the Turkish government is also preoccupied by a strengthened civil society and internal tension, reflected in mass demonstrations against the regime – although it does not appear that the weakening of political Islam in the region will likewise weaken the Justice and Development Party. As part of its effort to calm its home front, Ankara has turned to dialogue with the PKK. The commencement of this dialogue is an important political development, even if to date no breakthrough has been achieved. As to Israel, while economic cooperation between the two countries continues and talks have been renewed under the auspices of the US administration, the tense state of relations still persists, and no significant improvement in bilateral relations is expected in the near future.

The chapter by Zvi Magen examines the challenges that the Middle East poses to Russia's foreign policy and international standing. Russia, which is exhibiting renewed interest in the Middle East, has been impelled to devise policies that take into account the changes in various countries in

the region in order to maintain its existing footholds and foster new ties. During the year under review, its involvement was particularly prominent in the context of the events in Syria, led by Moscow's determined support for the Assad regime, and its activity (in coordination with the US administration) to reach an agreement to dismantle Syria's chemical arsenal. The signing of the interim agreement between Tehran and the world powers on the Iranian nuclear program is perceived by Moscow as an Iranian rejection of Russia's efforts at rapprochement. In response, Russia has redoubled its attempts to draw closer to the Sunni Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia and Jordan. At the same time, Moscow is seeking to tighten its relations with Israel. Over the past year, Israeli and Russian leaders have discussed ways of expanding political and economic cooperation between them. Nevertheless, Russia still lags behind the West with respect to influence in the Middle East, and has therefore not retracted its traditional support for the radical axis, which is intended to serve as a counterweight to Western influence in the region.

The final article in this section is devoted to United States standing and policy in the Middle East. Written by Oded Eran, the essay emphasizes the gap between the image of the US as a declining power distancing itself from the Middle East and its intensive activity in the region. In the course of the year under review, this activity reflected US engagement and the desire to preserve its interests in the region, while thwarting Russian and Chinese efforts to bolster their standing. American activity in the Middle East concentrated on three main arenas: the civil war in Syria, the crisis with Iran, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In coordination with Russia and other international players, and in order to avoid the need to realize its threat of military action against the Assad regime, the administration formulated an agreement to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles. In cooperation with the powers involved in the effort to halt the Iranian nuclear program, the administration helped engineer an interim agreement to delay Iran's progress toward nuclear capability. Under US pressure and sponsorship, Israel and the Palestinians returned to the negotiating table. American policy on the Iranian and Palestinian questions was a focus of dispute between the administration and the Israeli government, and the gap is expected to widen if the effort to promote an agreement to halt Iran's

progress toward nuclear capability fails, and if the talks between Israel and the Palestinians are unsuccessful. A dialogue at the most senior level will reduce the tension expected to deepen between the two countries on these issues, although it cannot completely dispel it.

Part II of the volume, “Israel and the Middle East,” focuses on the Israeli arena and the direct ramifications of the regional trends for Israeli security and policy.

The strategic security challenges facing Israel are analyzed by Udi Dekel, Shlomo Brom, and Yoram Schweitzer on the basis of a multidisciplinary approach with respect to both the challenges and the necessary solutions. The overall balance includes significant positive elements, though somewhat offset by newly developing threats that pose difficult dilemmas for the future. The weakening of state players in the Middle East has eased the conventional military threat to Israel. On the other hand, an asymmetric and multi-faceted threat has developed in the form of the increased power of sub-state jihad entities that undermine the stability of the regional order, while exploiting the broad popular demand for liberal reform and the broadening influence of political Islam in the region. The analysis concludes that given these challenges, the Israeli government should devise a policy that combines first and foremost efforts in the security sphere based on independent capabilities, the right to self defense, deterrence, and defense capability; and in the international sphere, efforts based on strengthened ties with the US and an effort to weaken the delegitimization campaign against Israel, principally through engagement in a concrete political process with the Palestinians. This intricate multidisciplinary approach should help Israel reach understandings with its allies, and allow it to leverage military achievements into political accomplishments.

An article devoted to the political process between Israel and the Palestinians by Udi Dekel, Anat Kurz, and Gilead Sher analyzes the challenges posed to Israel by the round of talks launched in July 2013. The article emphasizes that the balance of power between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the international arena, as it has developed in recent years, is not in Israel’s favor. The Palestinians have devised an alternative strategy of mobilizing international support for the establishment of a Palestinian state outside the framework of understandings with Israel.

Israel, however, has not devised an alternative approach to a negotiated settlement that allows it to promote the idea of political-territorial separation from the Palestinians. The analysis concludes that in order to deal with the security and demographic challenges relating to the conflict arena, the Israeli government should formulate a plan for independent measures aimed at delineating a border and promoting a two-state reality. Such an initiative, if formulated with regional and international coordination, will help Israel present it not as a stumbling block to a negotiated settlement but rather as a supplementary measure aimed at preparing the ground for such a settlement.

The article written by Yehuda Ben Meir and Gilead Sher focuses on Israeli public opinion regarding the question of separation from the Palestinians. The essay first analyzes public opinion in Israel concerning a permanent agreement and the possibility that the negotiations will fail or reach a deadlock. Analysis of public opinion indicates that a large majority of the Israeli public is eager for separation from the Palestinians, and significant public support for an agreement that implements this idea can be expected. At the same time, concrete willingness to take the necessary steps to promote separation is limited, primarily because of suspicion regarding Palestinian intentions. For this reason, an interim agreement is also expected to encounter widespread public opposition. The second part of the article, devoted to the legal context of an agreement with the Palestinians, stresses that from a legal standpoint, an agreement that includes full withdrawal from the West Bank, removal of all the Jewish communities in this area, and transfer of the land to Palestinian sovereignty does not require approval in a referendum, because the existing law only requires that a referendum be held when Israeli sovereign territory is conceded. The article concludes by discussing the chance of obtaining a national consensus for removing Jewish communities from the West Bank and ways of conducting a dialogue that will help reduce both internal opposition to the withdrawal and the potential for an ensuing conflagration in Israel.

The article by Meir Elran and Alex Altshuler focuses on home front defense in Israel. 2013 was a quiet year with respect to external threats to the home front in Israel, but the issue of chemical weapons in Syria

drew attention to the fact that the threat has not been removed. Particularly because there are still unanswered questions about the fate of the chemical weapons in Syria, the complexity of the risks facing the Israeli home front remains a primary issue. In the dynamic and conflict-ridden Middle East, the home front is liable to be subject to a sudden flare-up. Thus, in preparing the home front for an emergency, long term planning is needed that will provide a solution to a broad range of threats from different directions. In tandem, it is essential to assign priorities to the various security threats and solutions, while emphasizing the need for a broad perspective, sound preparation, and consideration of the element of surprise. The policy recommendations in the concluding section of the article speak to the political context in which resources are distributed and inter-ministerial relations regulated.

The article by Shmuel Even and Oded Eran discusses the natural gas revolution and its strategic significance. The presence of large quantities of natural gas in Israel's economic waters, which border the economic waters of Lebanon, Cyprus, Egypt, and the Gaza Strip, offers advantages in the spheres of domestic issues, security, environmental protection, and foreign relations. The discovery of the gas reserves has strengthened Israel's potential for long term energy independence and security, but also requires adequate defense of essential installations at sea. Gas exports are expected to contribute to Israel internationally if they foster cooperation with other countries, even though the gas is the subject of a dispute with Lebanon involving control of the marine areas. According to the cabinet decisions on the matter, the current reserves will provide domestic consumption for 30 years. If gas is not exported, the same amount will last for an additional 15 years. Either way, in the future Israel will have to supply its energy needs by importing gas from other sources. Another conclusion is that consideration should be given to the founding of a national gas authority for the purpose of implementing a comprehensive policy on the use of the various energy sources, including electricity and renewable energy.

The final article, "A Time for Decisions: Toward Agreements and Alternative Plans," written by Amos Yadlin, discusses the strategic significance and policy implications of the challenges and opportunities facing Israel. The analysis stresses the need for decision on the most

urgent national security issues, namely, the Iranian nuclear program, the Palestinian issue, and relations with the Arab world, and highlights the linkage between the issues as well as the policy choices formulated to address them. In 2013 Israel postponed decisions, yet the price of continuing to avoid these decisions is higher than what is entailed by taking and implementing them. This is particularly so given that the balance of power between Israel and its neighbors enables Israel to take certain risks and pursue new opportunities. Above all, proactive policy by Israel must include alternative plans should current diplomatic efforts fail regarding the negotiations between Iran and the world powers and the negotiations with the Palestinians. To enhance the prospects for success of these alternate plans, Israel must coordinate its positions on these issues with the United States. Proactive policy coordinated with the US administration will not only contribute to the bilateral relations between Israel and its principal ally, but will also strengthen Israel's position in the Middle East and in the international arena.

We would like to thank the contributing authors, members of the INSS research staff. Special thanks are also extended to INSS Director of Publications Moshe Grundman and Judith Rosen, the editor of INSS English publications, who as in previous years made a valuable contribution to the publication of this volume.

Shlomo Brom and Anat Kurz  
December 2013



## Part I

### Developments in the Middle East

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# Iran and the International Community, 2013: Is it Decision Time?

Emily B. Landau and Shimon Stein

Over the course of 2012, there was a sense that international efforts to stop Iran had improved significantly: US rhetoric grew more determined; the United States beefed up its military presence in the Gulf with both an additional aircraft carrier and military exercises in the theater; and most important, sanctions on Iran finally became truly biting, especially with the EU decision to implement a full oil embargo on Iran. In the *Strategic Survey for Israel 2012-2013* we asked whether these developments pointed to a new game with Iran, or whether what we saw playing out in the Iranian crisis was still characterized by the familiar (and problematic) pattern that had been established over the past decade. Our conclusion was mixed – we identified elements of both dynamics. While the US and Europe had clearly advanced in the direction of establishing a new game, Iran was stubbornly clinging to the well-known pattern of engagement with the international community, in a “more of the same” mode. Ultimately, the familiar rules of the game proved resilient and Iran resisted any change in the negotiations dynamic, although the signs of harsh sanctions were beginning to take their toll on the Iranian economy.<sup>1</sup>

In 2013, the nuclear crisis was still far from resolved, and Iran has continued to press forward with its nuclear program. Even taking into account the dramatic developments since Rouhani was elected president and the biting effect of economic sanctions that have pushed him to negotiate, our question this year nevertheless remains basically the same: namely, is there a real prospect for resolution of this ongoing crisis in the

coming months. Continued nuclear advances bring Iran's nuclearization ever closer to a fait accompli that the international community will no longer be able to stop.<sup>2</sup> Hence the urgency of the situation, which prompts us to focus our analysis more specifically on the question of whether this year has moved the dynamics toward decision, or whether it is yet another year in which the Iranian nuclear crisis has muddled through and been kicked on to the next year.

In analyzing developments in 2013, we first review Iran's nuclear advances and then move on to analyze the positions of both the United States and Iran after their respective presidential elections. We examine how elections results have fed into the negotiations dynamic, and the sense of urgency in all quarters to resolve the nuclear crisis, including possible implications of the US/international response to the Syrian chemical crisis. We then assess how negotiations have played out from Almaty to Geneva, and the prospect of achieving a negotiated deal down the road. Finally, we consider Israel's position on the Iranian nuclear crisis as it evolved over the course of 2013.

### **Iran's Nuclear Advances**

As in previous years, Iran continued in 2013 to press forward with its nuclear program, making some significant advances. Of particular concern in 2013 were the facility at Arak and the new-generation centrifuges that were installed at the Natanz enrichment facility. The nuclear reactor at Arak could become operational in late 2014, adding a potential plutonium route to nuclear weapons to the already well-established enriched uranium route. Once operational, this reactor cannot be attacked physically without risking significant release of radioactive material that would have devastating implications for the surrounding environment.<sup>3</sup> Concomitantly, approximately 1000 new-generation centrifuges have been installed and readied for testing at Natanz. These centrifuges, which are more durable and spin at speeds 4 to 5 times faster than the current centrifuges, significantly reduce the time needed to enrich 3.5-5 percent enriched uranium directly to the over 90 percent needed for nuclear weapons. These new centrifuges thus render earlier concerns in 2012 that focused the spotlight on the stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium relatively less important.

The ever-growing stockpiles of low and medium-enriched uranium (LEU and MEU) at the Natanz and Fordow enrichment facilities are a continued source of concern. Moreover, Iran continues to deny IAEA inspectors access to the Parchin military facility in order to assess whether Iran conducted tests there related to nuclear weaponization; indications of a clean-up operation at the facility will make it difficult to determine what went on at the site if inspectors are ever allowed access.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, Iran's progress is such that over the course of 2013 reputable sources were reporting that Iran was on the verge of a military capability. A detailed ISIS report from July 2013 indicated that Iran could reach a "critical capability" – which refers to the ability to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a nuclear weapon before being detected by inspectors – by mid-2014. In an updated report from October 2013, based on the findings of the late August IAEA report on Iran, ISIS researchers provided estimated minimal breakout times for four breakout scenarios. In some of the scenarios, the breakout time could be a matter of one to two months. And in a conference call from late October 2013, Olli Heinonen, former IAEA chief of safeguards, noted that the time to produce enough enriched uranium for one nuclear weapon could be reduced even to two weeks. Finally of note is a detailed report in the *Economist* published earlier in 2013 that claimed that Iran might already have passed the point of no return in the nuclear realm.<sup>5</sup>

## **Obama in his Second Term: Still Determined to Stop Iran?**

Following President Obama's reelection in November 2012, there was a rather noticeable decrease in the projected sense of US urgency on the Iranian nuclear front. The more relaxed approach emanating from Washington continued through the first months of 2013. Yet on his first presidential visit to Israel, in March 2013, Obama nevertheless made great effort to reassure Israel that he was as determined as ever to stop Iran from attaining a nuclear weapon, and that all options were on the table. The visit was a positive one, and Obama was warmly received by the Israeli people; at the top political echelons as well, it was reported that the meeting between Obama and Netanyahu was mutually satisfactory.

However, Obama also indicated that he was focused on diplomacy with Iran for the foreseeable future, and underscored that there was still time for negotiations – at least a year before Iran could produce a nuclear weapon.<sup>6</sup>

In the months following his visit to Israel, the President was less vocal on the Iranian issue, but his desire to keep diplomacy on track was clear, despite the fact that a further round of talks – three meetings from late February to early April – ended in failure. After these talks, the next development of note was the presidential election in Iran. Rouhani's June election, with his image of moderation and pragmatism, was entirely in tune with Obama's desire for yet another attempt to negotiate.

An interesting development related to pressure on Iran – widely regarded as essential for providing the P5+1 leverage in the talks – was the chemical weapons episode in Syria in late August-early September 2013. While the pressure of economic sanctions was recognized as having had an effect and being at least partially responsible for Rouhani's keen interest to negotiate, the question of whether “all options remained on the table” – the common euphemism for military force – was less clear in the weeks following the Iranian elections. But when Assad's use of chemical weapons led to over 1400 deaths in Syria, the Obama administration responded by threatening targeted use of military force. Before the President's resolve was put to the test, the Russians came up with a proposal for defusing the crisis: Syria would join the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and dismantle its chemical weapons production capabilities and stockpiles. Following this episode, Obama was asked in an interview with ABC about the implications of this experience for dealing with Iran. His response was: “My view is that if you have both a credible threat of force, combined with a rigorous diplomatic effort, that, in fact, you can...strike a deal.”<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, once negotiations with Iran were restarted in Geneva in mid-October, it was highly unclear to what degree this military threat remained on the table, both for the administration and in Iran's perception. Moreover, when the interim P5+1-Iran deal was secured in late November, the military option receded even further to the background, and some question whether it still exists. When asked, President Obama reiterates consistently that all options are on the table.

## **Rouhani's Election: Implications for the Nuclear File**

The year will perhaps be remembered most for the election of Hassan Rouhani as Iran's new president in June 2013. This striking development has raised some very important questions that remain difficult to answer definitively. The most important of these questions is how Rouhani's election should be understood in the context of Iran's foreign policy goals, especially with regard to the nuclear file. Does the election of Rouhani really indicate a new opportunity for resolving the nuclear crisis, and what would that new opportunity entail? How did the new expectations fostered by the election and Rouhani's speech at the UN General Assembly in September feed into P5+1-Iran negotiations in October, and how are they likely to play out down the line? Is the prospect for a changed US-Iranian bilateral relationship serious, or is it part of Iranian bargaining tactics on the nuclear front?

Specifically in the nuclear realm, the questions boil down to one central concern: whether the P5+1 now face a truly changed approach on the part of Iran, or whether they are simply so hopeful for a changed Iranian approach that they are willing to "fill in the blanks," as it were – namely, to act on the basis of an assumption that the new atmosphere is indicative of a new substantive approach, despite insufficient concrete evidence to back up this hope.

Rouhani's election granted him the status of the new pragmatic and moderate president, which sparked an immediate rise in hopes and expectations from many quarters for significant change in Iran's policies. Compared to the opposing conservative candidates, Rouhani's moderate statements on the need for internal changes in Iran – women's rights, internet access, and dress codes, among others – and improvements in Iran's economy seemed to lend credence to this label. On the foreign policy front, however, there was less evidence of a changed approach, save indications that the new President might be more open to improved ties with the US. On Israel, his statements have remained quite harsh, despite efforts to demonstrate that he has toned down his position. To suggest that Rouhani's rhetoric bespeaks moderation – for example, that Israel was a "sore" or "wound" in the Middle East, rather than as in Ahmadinejad's metaphor a "cancer" – is certainly a stretch. Moreover, he has accused

Israel of being behind the crisis in Syria, and as generally responsible for the instability in the region.

On the nuclear front in particular, Rouhani has not moderated Iran's well known positions. He stated unequivocally that Iran would not suspend uranium enrichment and put the onus of change on the US, noting that the nuclear file could be resolved very quickly if the US were to alter its positions and take a more reasonable approach. As for negotiations, Rouhani made it very clear that his sole focus is sanctions relief, and this goal was behind his expressed desire for a quick deal with the P5+1. The stubborn question that remains unanswered at the close of 2013 is whether Iran has made a decision to back down from its military nuclear aspirations. So far, there is no indication that it has, and therefore what is likely to play out at the negotiations table in the coming months is continued Iranian tactical bargaining – with Iran hoping to get the maximum sanctions relief while paying a minimal price in nuclear concessions.

### **Impact of Regional Developments**

The rapidly unfolding regional events of the past year underscore the highly volatile situation in the Middle East and the difficulty of predicting developments. Only a few months ago, the prevailing assumption was that Syrian President Assad's days were numbered, and the question was not whether he would remain or not, but when he would exit the scene. Similarly, a year ago, in assessing the potential "winners" and "losers" of the "Arab Awakening" that engulfed the region, it seemed that Iran was in the "losers" camp. Recent developments suggest that these predictions and assumptions are best shelved, at least for the time being.

The fact that the situation in Syria looks so different today can be attributed – certainly in part – to the critical role that Iran has played in supporting the Assad regime. Losing Syria as a strategic partner seems not to be an option as far as Iran is concerned, and in June 2013 US Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman pointed out that Iran has "made it clear that it fears losing its closest ally and fellow State sponsor of terrorism and will stop at no cost, borne by both the Syrian and Iranian people, to prop up the Assad regime. Today, Iran is training, arming, funding, aiding and abetting the Assad regime and its atrocious crackdown on its own people."<sup>8</sup>

Presumably Iran, cognizant of what is at stake, would do its utmost together with its Russian ally to reach a political solution to the internal crisis in Syria, which would enable it to preserve its fundamental interests there in the event that Assad leaves the scene. Iran's recent engagement with the US on the nuclear issue could open up new opportunities for Tehran to engage on regional issues, enabling it to gain recognition as a regional player that has an essential role to play in resolving crises (Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria), much to the detriment of its regional rivals – first and foremost, Saudi Arabia.

Paradoxically, the diplomatic events that unfolded in the wake of Assad's decision to use chemical weapons against his civilian population – which resulted in an historic US-Russian agreement (sanctioned by a UNSC resolution) that averted a US military strike with unpredictable consequences for Assad's regime – played into Iran's hands in the sense that the downfall of its strategic partner was no longer imminent. However, the relevant question in the wake of the Syrian chemical crisis and the way it has thus far been diplomatically resolved is what lessons Iran will derive. Specifically, what might Iran infer from President Obama's handling of the Syrian chemical crisis for his handling of the Iranian nuclear crisis, taking into account that the strategic implications of Iran's nuclear ambitions are vastly more significant than those of the Syrian case.<sup>9</sup>

Since the circumstances under which Assad was forced to give up his chemical weapons deterrent are far different from what emerges in the Iranian case, any attempt to gauge the lessons Iran may have learned from the Syrian example are speculative. Furthermore, although doubts have been raised as to Obama's resolve to resort to military means if the diplomatic option hits a dead end, the President continues to repeat the mantra that Iran acquiring nuclear weapons is unacceptable as far as US national interests are concerned, and that all options remain on the table. Hence, Iran should not but assume that staying the current course could still end up in a military strike.

## **Diplomacy in Action: Negotiating with Iran in 2013, from Almaty to Geneva**

In July 2012, a failed round of negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran in Istanbul centered on a proposal that demanded that Iran *stop* enriching to 20 percent, *ship* its entire stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium abroad, and *shut* down the Fordow facility in return for a series of confidence building measures. The proposal, described at the time by the P5+1 as “balanced,” was rejected by the Iranians. Seven months passed before the parties returned to the table in Almaty, Kazakhstan on February 26, 2013. Among the developments that set the stage for the meeting were the Iranian announcement in January that it intended to install advanced centrifuges at its Natanz facility, the new round of US sanctions that went into effect on February 6, and President Obama’s remarks during his February 12, 2013 State of the Union address that the Iranians “must recognize that now is the time for a diplomatic solution, because a coalition stands united in demanding that they meet their obligations.”<sup>10</sup>

Determined to sustain the process, in early 2013, EU High Representative Catherine Ashton presented a “revised offer” on behalf of the P5+1, with the “purpose being to make sure that we’ve had a good and detailed conversation, with the ambition that we see progress by the end of the meeting.”<sup>11</sup> This new and revised offer was actually a watered-down version of the rejected 2012 proposal. According to the new proposal, Iran would halt all 20 percent enrichment activities; transfer only *part* of its stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium to a third country under IAEA custody; *suspend* operations at the Fordow facility (rather than demanding a shutdown of the facility); provide the IAEA with information to address the outstanding allegations of possible military activities; and commit to the Additional Protocol and the subsidiary arrangement to Iran’s safeguard agreement, known as Code 3.1.

In return, the P5+1 were willing to provide Iran fuel assemblies for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR); support IAEA technical cooperation to modernize and maintain the safety of the TRR; review the IAEA technical cooperation projects and recommend to the IAEA Board that some be restarted; and put together a detailed package to provide medical isotopes for cancer patients in Iran. The United States said it was prepared to permit

safety-related inspections and repair in Iran for Iranian commercial aircraft and provide spare parts, and the P5+1 would cooperate in acquiring a light water research reactor to produce medical isotopes; provide sanctions relief on sales of precious metal and petrochemicals; and not impose new proliferation-related sanctions on Iran.<sup>12</sup>

Even though the proposal took into account the failure of the previous round, it was still not enough to accommodate Iran, especially the Iranians' longstanding demand for recognition of its right to enrich uranium and the imperative of lifting all sanctions. At the end of the meeting, all that Ashton could announce was that "the main result" of the meeting was an agreement to have an experts meeting in Istanbul in March. That would give Iran time to examine the content of the proposal. Ashton did not elaborate on the specifics of the proposal other than to say that they included a "confidence building proposal." She added, "This is an opportunity for Iran to take some initial steps that would improve the confidence of the international community in the wholly peaceful nature of their nuclear programme."<sup>13</sup> At the experts meeting in March the P5+1 provided further details on the revised confidence building proposal they had put forward in February in Almaty.

Against the backdrop of these two meetings, the parties convened once again at the political level in Almaty (April 5-6, 2013). Following this meeting, it became clear, in the words of Ashton, that "the positions of the E3+3 and Iran remain far apart on the substance."<sup>14</sup> US Under Secretary of State Sherman described the Iranian counterproposal as "very disappointing," noting that, "According to the counterproposal, Iran would place little or no constraints on the current nuclear activities, while demanding major sanctions to be removed immediately."<sup>15</sup> This round of engagement ended with a meeting between Catherine Ashton and Saeed Jalili, which in terms of the overall process was essentially meaningless.

In sum, the three rounds of talks in the spring of 2013 were a disappointment for several reasons. The talks drove home that while over the course of 2012 the US had put in place elements of a new and more determined approach toward Iran, when it came to the negotiation itself, the result was a "more of the same" approach from Tehran. Moreover, sweetening one's offer without having received anything from the other

side, which is what occurred in Almaty, is a problematic negotiating tactic. In any case, the second round of talks in Almaty in early April ended in deadlock, with no date set for another meeting. The diplomatic process was put on hold until after the Iranian elections in June.

Following Rouhani's election, it was clear that a new round of negotiations would be initiated, but it took until mid-October for the first meeting between Iran and the P5+1 to take place in Geneva. The two days of talks (October 15-16, 2013) were hailed as the most detailed and substantive to date.<sup>16</sup> Western negotiators were struck by the fact that Iran seemed willing to "cut to the chase," i.e., to deal with its nuclear program in a direct and focused manner, even speaking English in order to eliminate the cumbersome translation process and speed up the pace of talks. But these diplomatic statements about the seriousness of the talks should not be understood as indication of actual change in Iran's nuclear approach. Indeed, regarding the ultimately failed Almaty talks, American officials had also noted that they experienced then "the most substantive conversation they ever had" with the Iranians, and that international arms control envoys were able to go through their proposal slide by slide without the Iranians focusing on their counter-proposal.<sup>17</sup>

When focusing not on such atmospherics but rather on the concrete proposals that the Iranians were actually willing to consider, and whether they provided indication that Iran was reversing course as far as its military ambitions, it was not clear what if anything had substantively changed in the negotiations since Rouhani became president. The Iranians were still engaging in tactical bargaining, while continuing to advance their program.

By early November, ahead of the second round of talks in Geneva on November 7-9, 2013, it became clear that what the US, and the P5+1, was actually set on is a two-staged process whereby an initial deal with Iran would be negotiated that would involve some sanctions relief in return for initial Iranian concessions on the nuclear front, in order to gain some breathing space for negotiating a comprehensive deal, or as one US official put it: "to put some time on the clock." The risk in this strategy is that the so-called confidence building measure will not build confidence, but rather will serve as the platform for continued bickering over what was agreed and who is upholding, or not upholding, what. This was the experience

ten years ago with the partial deals that involved Iranian suspension of uranium conversion activities (the 2003-2005 years).<sup>18</sup> At the end of the third round of talks in late November, the negotiations did yield agreement on an interim deal. Though immediately hailed as an “historic agreement,” some problematic loopholes became apparent very soon thereafter. As 2013 drew to a close, the Iranians already began to challenge elements of this understanding that is intended to freeze Iran’s nuclear advances while the parties negotiate a final agreement over the next six months. Days after the deal was announced, Iran’s foreign minister clarified that Iran would continue some construction work at Arak. In early December Iran announced that it was testing its advanced centrifuges.

Another notable aspect of the current talks are hints that in parallel to the nuclear-specific talks, bilateral US-Iranian talks on a broader spectrum of regional issues may also have been initiated. The prospect that these two states are engaged in talks that will relate to their respective spheres of influence in the region, or whereby the US may acquiesce to increased Iranian regional influence in return for nuclear concessions, has begun to raise serious concerns in other regional states. The impact on Saudi Arabia has been especially striking, and signs of an emerging crisis with the US – focused mainly on Saudi anger at the handling of Syria, but including fears regarding bilateral talks with Iran – began to surface.

### **Where Does Israel Stand?**

The first half of 2013 saw a noticeably less pronounced Israeli position on the Iranian nuclear crisis when compared to the situation in 2012, although overall since early 2012 Israel’s profile has been generally higher than in the preceding seven or eight years. Although it is difficult to identify data in the public sphere to support this conclusion, it seems that the more moderate tone in 2013 could have been the product of an understanding that was reached between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Obama on this issue. The warm and almost intimate atmosphere characterizing Obama’s visit to Israel in March 2013 adds credence to the estimate that some degree of trust regarding the Iranian crisis was forged between the two leaders. An additional factor that may have had an impact is that Netanyahu found himself very much alone in his assessment that an Israeli

attack on Iran's nuclear facilities may be inevitable – especially vis-à-vis the chorus of ex-security establishment officials whose collective voice became very outspoken in the Israeli internal debate in the first half of 2012.<sup>19</sup> The lack of both a green light from the US and internal support for his defiant, self-reliant approach no doubt put a damper on Netanyahu's continued forceful rhetoric.

This trend began to veer in the direction of a much higher Israeli profile after the election of Rouhani in June 2013. The message that Netanyahu began to emphasize vehemently was that the international community must not fall prey to the new Iranian smiles, and not assume that they indicate a changed Iranian approach to the nuclear file. Netanyahu called Rouhani a “wolf in sheep's clothing” to emphasize that external behavior should not mask Iran's continued nuclear defiance. He contended that until Iran is willing to address all problematic aspects of its nuclear program – including agreement to stop enriching uranium altogether, ship out its stockpiles of low and medium-enriched uranium, and shut down both the Fordow and Arak nuclear facilities – there should be no lifting of economic sanctions. Netanyahu's warnings reached a clamorous and potentially dangerous peak following the P5+1-Iran agreement on an interim deal, which Netanyahu deemed an “historic mistake,” and relations with Obama once again took a turn for the worse.

An additional notable dimension of Israeli “involvement” in the Iranian question goes to the manner by which Israel is perceived by others in the overall media debate. The picture has at times become dangerously distorted – including on the pages of the *New York Times*<sup>20</sup> – in the sense that stopping Iran in the nuclear realm is often construed as an Israeli, rather than US national security interest. For those who hold this view, the US is confronting Iran on Israel's behalf, rather than in accordance with its own national security and nuclear nonproliferation interests. While it is true that Iran is a very serious Israeli national security concern, this does not mean that the international community is not acting in line with its own interest on this issue. Indeed, it is a common regional, global, and international security concern.

Because over the past two years Israel has placed itself more at the forefront of the Iranian nuclear debate, the situation has perhaps lent

itself to such distortions; but it is important to understand the context in which Israel has been more vocal of late. Israel's situation vis-à-vis the Iranian nuclear crisis is characterized by a basic predicament connected to the fact that it has had no role in the ongoing deliberations with Iran over the past decade. Nevertheless, Israel – as well as other regional states outside the negotiations dynamic – is set to suffer the most in security terms if international negotiators fail to convince Iran to back down from its military nuclear ambitions. Conversely, those with the responsibility for negotiating with Iran are the ones that will suffer least in terms of the direct security implications that would emanate from their failure. This fuels Israeli frustration, and is likely driving some of the sense of urgency coming from the government. Because Israel has no active role in the process, it can only try to convince those that do that failure will be a very grave outcome. But when it does so, this may sound to others as if this is more an Israeli concern and agenda than an American one. In fact, however, the difference is only in the immediacy of the threat, not its gravity, something that Obama clearly acknowledges when he refers to the need to confront Iran as a US national security threat. Moreover, in an interview in early November 2013 Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel indicated that the pressure from Israel was a contributing factor – together with the pressure of sanctions – bringing Iran back to the negotiating table.<sup>21</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While 2012 may have ended with the sense that 2013 could very well be shaping up as the year of decision, events and developments over the course of 2013 indicate that this challenge will be postponed to 2014, even taking into account the new negotiations that began in earnest after Rouhani was elected. The so-called “opportunity” for more productive negotiations with the international community has yet to bear fruit; so far there is unfortunately not much to back up this assessment beyond an image of moderation that the new President enjoys.

Moreover, there are worrying indications that the US is backing away from the greater determination that it displayed in 2012. For the P5+1 to lift the pressure of sanctions before a final deal is reached is tantamount to

weakening their major source of leverage in this very difficult negotiation – leverage that took years to put in place. US determination to both maintain biting sanctions and keep the military threat alive is still crucial for securing a final comprehensive deal with Iran.

## Notes

- 1 For a dissenting view on the impact of sanctions see Moshe Efrat, “Iran Adapts to Economic Sanctions: Room to Ensure Real Economic Growth by 2014,” *INSS Insight* No. 457, August 22, 2013. Nevertheless, once Rouhani was elected and began talking about a new approach toward the West, the overwhelming perception is that the biting sanctions that were put in place over the course of 2012 had the desired effect as far as pressuring Iran to come to the negotiating table.
- 2 See Ephraim Asculai and Emily B. Landau, “Nearing a Fait Accompli,” *The Diplomat*, April 23, 2013.
- 3 For a good summary of expert opinion on the situation regarding the heavy water reactor at Arak, see Karl Vick, “If Iran Can Get this Reactor Online, Israel May Not be Able to Bomb it,” *TIME*, October 29, 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/10/29/if-iran-can-get-this-reactor-online-it-may-be-invulnerable-to-military-attack/>.
- 4 See Olli Heinonen and Simon Henderson, “Nuclear Talks with Iran: Diplomacy and Diminishing Time,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 23, 2013. On the Parchin site see David Albright and Robert Avagyan, “Update on the Parchin Site,” *ISIS Report*, August 22, 2013.
- 5 See David Albright and Christina Walrond, “Iran’s Critical Capability in 2014: Verifiably Stopping Iran from Increasing the Number and Quality of its Centrifuges,” *ISIS Report*, July 17, 2013, [http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Iran\\_critical\\_capability\\_17July2013.pdf](http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Iran_critical_capability_17July2013.pdf). On the breakout scenarios see Patrick Migliorini et al., “Iran Breakout Estimates, Updated September 2013,” *ISIS Report*, October 24, 2013. For Olli Heinonen conference call see <http://www.thetower.org/olli-heinonen-benjamin-netanyahu-iran-weeks/>; for *Economist* article, see “Breakout Beckons,” June 22, 2013.
- 6 See Howard LaFranchi, “Iran Nuclear Program: Obama Makes Case for Diplomacy Ahead of Trip to Israel,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 15, 2013.
- 7 See full transcript, “President Obama speaks exclusively to George Stephanopoulos on ‘This Week,’” *ABC News*, September 15, 2013, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/09/full-transcript-president-obamas-exclusive-interview-with-george-stephanopoulos/>.
- 8 “Prepared Statement of Wendy Sherman, Under Secretary for Political Affairs,” US Department of State, Senate Hearing 113-48, June 4, 2013. See full

transcript at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-113shrg81875/html/CHRG-113shrg81875.htm>.

- 9 In an attempt to dispel any misunderstanding and inference as to the way he will handle the Iranian crisis, President Obama made the following remark in an interview to ABC following the resolution of the Syrian crisis: “They [Syria] should not draw a lesson that we haven’t struck, to think we won’t strike Iran. On the other hand, what they should draw from this lesson is that there is the potential of resolving these issues diplomatically.” See note 7.
- 10 Remarks by the President in the State of the Union Address, February 12, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/12/remarks-president-state-union-address>.
- 11 See “Remarks by EU HR Ashton before Negotiations between the E3+3 and Iran on the Iranian Nuclear Programme,” February 26, 2013. [http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article\\_13196\\_en.htm](http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_13196_en.htm).
- 12 Arms Control Association, “History of Official Proposals on the Iranian Nuclear Issue,” November 2013, [http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Iran\\_Nuclear\\_Proposals](http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Iran_Nuclear_Proposals). See also the view attributed to Hossein Mousavian (who in this case might reflect the prevailing mood among decision makers in Iran) after the sanctions offer of the P5+1 became known: “to make progress...sanctions relief can not just be about ‘targeted sanctions’ like aircraft parts or easing restrictions on the gold trade...the P5+1 needs to offer a ‘strategic removal of sanctions’ if they want Iran to make strategic concessions.” See Kelsey Davenport, “Better Odds on Iran Negotiations after Almaty?” *Arms Control Now: The Blog of the Arms Control Association*, February 27, 2013, <http://armscontrolnow.org/2013/02/27/better-odds-on-iran-negotiations-after-almaty/>.
- 13 See Statement by EU HR Ashton following E3+3 talks with Iran in Almaty, February 27, 2013, [http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article\\_13203\\_en.htm](http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_13203_en.htm).
- 14 See E3+3 Statement by EU HR Ashton following talks with Iran, April 6, 2013, [http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article\\_13363\\_en.htm](http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_13363_en.htm).
- 15 US Department of State Testimony, Wendy Sherman, May 15, 2013. What Sherman described as a very disappointing response was already a revised Iranian proposal that was a reaction to the already disappointing P5+1 proposal: namely, Iran would freeze centrifuge installation at Fordow; continue talks with the IAEA; continue converting 20 percent enriched uranium hexafluoride to uranium oxide; and suspend enrichment of uranium to 20 percent. In return the P5+1 would lift all sanctions against Iran and recognize Iran’s nuclear rights.
- 16 Michael R. Gordon, “After Talks on Iran’s Nuclear Program, Officials Highlight the Positive,” *New York Times*, October 16, 2013.

- 17 See Laura Rozen, "'Most Substantive' Iran Nuclear Talks to Date, but Narrow Area of Agreement," *The Back Channel*, March 26, 2013.
- 18 See Emily B. Landau, "Beware of Partial Deals," *Jerusalem Report*, November 18, 2013.
- 19 For commentary that attributes major influence to the weight of Israeli President Shimon Peres's opposition to an Israeli attack over the course of 2012, see Ari Shavit, "Why the Israeli President Owes a Moral Debt on Iran," *Haaretz*, October 31, 2013.
- 20 See Jonathan Tepperman, "Israel vs. Iran, Again," *New York Times*, July 26, 2013. Tepperman claims that if Israel were truly determined to stop Iran's nuclear program, it would be acting very differently in a few key respects: with regard to peace negotiations with the Palestinians, and with regard to its own assumed nuclear capability. By not doing so, according to Tepperman, Netanyahu proves that he what he wants is for the rest of the world to take care of his Iran problem for him. Two very problematic assumptions underlie this analysis. First, that Iran is *Israel's* problem, rather than a US national security issue and global non-proliferation concern; and second, that there are measures that the US is not taking with respect to Iran that it could be taking, and that the reason it is not doing so is that Israel is not forthcoming enough on the Palestinian front and regarding its own nuclear capability. Neither assumption has a basis in reality. See also the article regarding *al-Monitor* reporter Laura Rozen, who accused a prominent American Jewish analyst who supports continued sanctions pressure on Iran as delivering Israel's "talking points": Adam Kredo, "Laura Rozen Accuses Jewish Expert of Speaking at Instruction of Israeli Government" *Washington Free Beacon*, November 18, 2013, <http://freebeacon.com/laura-rozen-accuses-jewish-expert-of-speaking-at-instruction-of-israeli-government/>.
- 21 See Jeffrey Goldberg, "Israel Pushed Iran to the Table, Says Hagel," *Bloomberg*, November 4, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-11-04/israel-pushed-iran-to-the-table-says-hagel.html>.

# **Syria: The Civil War with No Winner**

Shlomo Brom, Benedetta Berti, and Mark A. Heller

The popular uprising that broke out in Syria in March 2011 evolved into a civil war with no end in sight. Neither the forces of Bashar al-Assad nor the various rebel factions are capable of defeating the other. Each side enjoys advantages while suffering from disadvantages that reflect the unique sectarian composition of Syrian society. Each is affected by the extent of external aid it has received, as well as by the structure of the regime that has been institutionalized over the years. Against this background, an already protracted struggle continues, giving rise to an unstable standoff.

This article describes and analyzes the principal characteristics of the civil war, and the challenges that it poses both to Syria's neighbors and to international actors. The essay will examine the direct consequences of the war for Israel, as well possible ensuing developments and ramifications.

## **The "Arab Spring": The Syrian Case**

The social and political upheaval in the Middle East in the framework of the "Arab Spring" has assumed different forms, subject to each country's particular features. The wave that swept through the region began in Tunisia and Egypt – two countries with relatively homogeneous societies. The military does not sport a sectarian character in either of these two countries, and even if it pursues its own interests, it functions (more or less) as a national army representing the entire society. Furthermore, in both of these countries, when it became clear to the military leadership that the popular uprising was aimed against the extended ruling family, it chose to withdraw its support from the government leaders – Ben Ali

in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt – in order to avoid a confrontation with broad sectors of society and to maintain its organizational interests.

The nature of Syrian society is completely different. Syrian society is sectarian and divided along religious and community lines. Seventy percent of the population consists of Sunni Arabs; this large Sunni majority is complemented by sizable minority groups, among them Alawite Arabs, Christian Arabs, and Kurds, as well as a small Druze minority. The regime molded by Hafez al-Assad, father of current President Bashar al-Assad, was based on a coalition of the Alawite minority (the sectarian home of the Assad family); Christians; Druze; and the Sunni urban middle class. The regime made it easy for its coalition partners to continue playing a key role in Syrian economic life, and was careful to fill key positions in the military and security forces with Alawites and representatives of the other groups in this coalition.

As in the other countries in the Arab world that experienced upheaval directed against the regime – each with its own special features – there was a close connection between the harsh socioeconomic situation in Syria and the rebellion. A large portion of the population lives in villages and makes its living in agriculture. The uprising was preceded by several consecutive years of drought, which had a severe effect on the rainwater-based agriculture. The inevitable result was an increase in unemployment and poverty, as well as large scale migration from the villages to the city. An annual average of 3.62 percent of the population was estimated to have moved from the villages to the city during those years.<sup>1</sup>

To a large extent this background explains the direction and development of the rebellion against the regime in Syria, in contrast to the rebellions in Egypt and Tunisia. In Syria, protest erupted in the periphery and targeted the center areas. In Egypt, on the other hand, the rebellion broke out in the center – in Cairo and the large cities. As in Syria, the event that set off the uprising in Tunisia occurred in a remote village, but in Tunisia the core of the rebellion rapidly shifted to the capital city of Tunis. It is therefore no surprise that even in the third year of the rebellion in Syria, the Damascus regime still retains its grip on much of the center of the country, while basing itself on the traditional coalition formed by Hafez al-Assad.

The coalition has weathered the sectarian nature of the civil war without dissolving. Even parts of the Sunni middle class located in the cities have continued to support the regime. The army and the security services have also remained loyal to the regime, even though there have been some cases of desertion. This unity of ranks is somewhat surprising, since the Syrian army is based on conscription, meaning that most of the soldiers, in proportion to the population at large, are Sunnis. This achievement by the army is due to the care taken by the regime to form the important army units along religious and sectarian lines, thereby ensuring their loyalty.

The characteristics of the rebellion and the standoff between the various parties have changed over time. The stage of mass civil demonstrations ended relatively quickly, in part because the regime's brutal suppression of the non-violent protest ignited the violent rebellion that followed. The rebels' agenda changed accordingly. The popular protest, shaped by slogans corresponding to the spirit of the "Arab Spring" – democracy, freedom, and human rights – was succeeded by a sectarian civil war of Sunnis against minority groups in the country. For their part, the Kurds adopted their own agenda, which focused on achieving autonomy. To some extent, this development was also the result of a deliberate policy by the regime, which emphasized the sectarian character of the rebellion in order to strengthen the minorities' loyalty to the regime. In any case, the result of this dynamic was a contrast between the nature of the uprising in Syria versus the uprisings that erupted elsewhere. While in other Arab Spring events the struggle focused on the effort of a small clique to maintain its rule against popular opposition, the struggle in Syria pitted entire sectors represented by the regime against the rebelling Sunni majority that threatened to dispossess them. It is a life or death struggle for both sides, and this nature of the confrontation to a large extent explains the determination and cruelty shown in it.

Western intelligence and media erred in their assessment of the Syrian regime's ability to survive. In the first stage of the rebellion, the prevailing assumptions were that the regime's days were numbered. The events of the "Arab Spring" in Tunisia and Egypt suggested that dictatorial Arab regimes were incapable of dealing with the masses once they overcame the barrier of fear. In 2011, then-Ministry of Defense Ehud Barak also predicted that

Assad would fall within a short time.<sup>2</sup> When the entire Syrian defense leadership was wiped out in a suicide attack on July 18, 2012, it appeared that the regime was doomed.<sup>3</sup> This conclusion was proved wrong. Rather ironically, the error was comparable to the dismissal of General Tantawi and the Egyptian defense leadership by President Morsi, which made room at the top for generals who were younger and more dynamic than the old leadership; these new generals eventually toppled the Muslim Brotherhood regime. The elimination of the Syrian veteran defense leadership also put young and more effective generals in their stead, and only strengthened the regime's capabilities.

In analyzing ongoing violent struggles of this type, there is often a tendency to ignore the enormous importance of the ability of the parties to learn and adapt. When the violent rebellion began, the regime was taken by surprise, and its ability to cope with the rebellion was limited. It had an enormous material advantage – a large and well-equipped army – but while at the conceptual level the regime relied on the army's loyalty and capability to ensure its survival, the army was not trained to deal with a broad-based popular rebellion. Rather, it had been trained to fight the IDF in warfare between two regular armies. The regime therefore had to train its forces for a developing and widening confrontation in the very course of the fighting. This training took place in two ways: the loyal units actively involved in the fighting were trained for the required campaign, while at the same time an Alawite militia was established to fight against the rebels alongside the army with its own fighting methods. Iran and Hizbollah provided the Syrian regime with invaluable advice, training, and specialized equipment in both these areas (and in certain places Hizbollah also took an active part in the combat).

The prolonged warfare has also to a large extent influenced the development of the rebel forces. The attempts to unite them under a unified political and military leadership failed; they remained divided between different groups representing various ideological, sectarian, and personal interests. The Free Syrian Army, which represents the secular and liberal elements, is based largely on deserters from the Syrian army. The Islamic Salafi extreme factions include elements close to al-Qaeda, and there are also more moderate Islamic factions. The longer the civil war continued,

the stronger the extreme Islamic groups have become. These groups' effectiveness is a function of high motivation and combat experience; they include experienced foreign volunteers who came to Syria from other jihadist theaters such as Iraq, and are endowed with superior financing and equipment supplied by their supporters in the Persian Gulf states. The heightened strength of these groups also makes them increasingly attractive to volunteers from Syria itself, who are joining their forces.

The division in the ranks of the opposition prevents it from combining forces, which could possibly tip the balance in its favor. In the second half of 2013, a violent struggle even developed, mainly in northern Syria, between the jihadist groups and the Free Syrian Army. This rivalry does not help the rebels combat the regime. On the other hand, this division has certain advantages. The local groups are very familiar with the terrain in their area, and are more flexible than the regime's forces. The rebels are capable of fighting in any region in the country, while the regime must move forces from one place to another, depending on developments in the field. The regime is able to win almost any battle when it concentrates its forces, but its ability to retain its advantage is limited, due to its subsequent need to concentrate its forces in a different battle theater. Furthermore, the division makes the rebel forces more resilient. Even if one rebel group is defeated, it will not end the rebellion.

These features of the two principal sides, combined with the political, financial, and logistical support given them by regional and global players, have created a standoff with surges and recessions by each side, with no decision on the horizon. The regime has managed to keep its control of the center, particularly the road connecting Damascus and Homs with the coastal region, while the rebels hold large areas in the outlying areas. A violent struggle for the important city of Aleppo is underway, with each side controlling part of it. It appears that only a change in the nature and power of the external military involvement can shift the balance of forces between the two fighting sides and create the conditions for victory. When Hizbollah increased its involvement in the combat in a battle in June 2013 for the city of al-Qusayr, near Homs, the regime's forces pushed the rebels out of the city. Hizbollah is estimated to have sent more than a thousand fighters to Syria – a significant portion of its effective combat echelon –

and it was Hizbollah's involvement in the battle of al-Qusayr that likely tipped the balance there, preserved the regime's lines of communications with Lebanon and the Alawite region in northwest Syria, and blunted the widespread sense that regime's ultimate defeat was foreordained.<sup>4</sup> It seemed then that a turning point was reached and the army would proceed to further victories ending in the defeat of the rebellion, but events took a different course. The losses suffered by Hizbollah in this battle and the political pressure it sustained in Lebanon for fighting on the side of Assad's forces caused the Hizbollah leadership to reduce its involvement in the fighting.

The regime's use of chemical weapons, which peaked in the attack on the outskirts of Damascus on August 21, 2013 that caused the deaths of hundreds of civilians, led the American administration to threaten Syria with punitive operations by the US and its allies. Despite doubts about the credibility of the American threat, the Syrian regime and its ally, Russia, were not willing to risk US action, whereby an initially limited attack could develop into a real threat to the regime. As a preventative measure and at Russia's initiative, the Syrian regime and Russia proposed that Syria dismantle its chemical arsenal and join the Chemical Weapons Convention. The US, followed by the UN Security Council, endorsed this initiative. Russia and the US agreed on a rapid chemical weapons disarmament process that would take nine months and conclude in mid-2014. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) began intensive activity on Syrian territory to implement the agreement. The Syrian regime, which demonstrated its willingness to implement the agreement in full, is cooperating with the OPCW inspectors.

Nonetheless, concern exists that the regime will conceal part of its chemical weapons capability, because dismantling its chemical weapons stores deprives it of an important element in its war for survival. At the same time, Damascus's acceptance of the conditions has enabled the regime to become a legitimate partner in an international agreement, and has given regional and global players an interest in the regime's survival, at least until the agreement is fully implemented, for the sake of preventing the chemical arsenal from falling into irresponsible hands. Paradoxically, the chemical weapons, which the regime believed would guarantee its

survival, have become a threat to it, while their destruction has become an insurance policy, at least temporarily.

## **External Involvement in the Syrian Civil War**

“In war,” Napoleon is reputed to have said, “the moral to the material is as three to one.” While Napoleon’s string of impressive victories cemented his reputation as a great general, his ultimate fate should raise some doubts about the universal validity of some of his most quotable maxims, and certainly the adage cited here obscures as much as it enlightens. After all, the material dimensions of power may be judged with some confidence, but moral and other intangible factors are much harder to assess – which is evident in the difficulties observers confront in trying to analyze the course and possible outcome of the Syrian civil war.

Even the material balance is difficult to assess. On the one hand, given the increasingly sectarian nature of the war and the overwhelming Sunni makeup of the country, the opposition has a clear advantage over the Alawi-dominated regime in terms of its pool of recruits. Subject to their ability to mobilize their potential manpower base, rebel forces should therefore be able to field the big battalions that – in another dictum attributed to Napoleon – are said to be favored by God. Nevertheless, the opposition’s material advantage is not unequivocal, since the regime’s arsenal is far superior, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Nor are the moral or intangible relations of forces any clearer. While the opposition, especially the Islamist elements, may have a coherent ideological impulse, the regime has more to lose politically and enjoys the operational advantage of unity of command. More to the point, after more than two years of brutal conflict, both sides are driven by the conviction that defeat would bring terrible and unrelenting retribution.

In other words, there is very little in the pseudo-equation of Napoleon to illuminate the course of the conflict. What can be said with some certainty is that outside intervention – which in places like Bahrain and Libya favored only one party and thereby helped produce relatively swift and decisive outcomes – has also been evident in Syria. But while in Syria, too, the overall balance of third party involvement has generally tended to favor one side – in this case, the regime – the intervention did not have

the same effect on the evolution of the conflict. The support given to the regime blunted the momentum gained by the opposition in the early days of the uprising, and barring some dramatic reversal of American behavior, ensures, if not ultimate victory for the regime, then at least its ability to continue to fight in the foreseeable future.

The regime's material support has come primarily from two of Syria's traditional partners in the so-called "axis of resistance," Iran and Hizbollah. Hamas, the fourth member of this alignment, abandoned its identification with the regime because the increasingly sectarian nature of the conflict made it virtually impossible for Hamas to justify a pro-Assad orientation to its own Sunni constituency, and because the Muslim Brotherhood, following its triumph in Egypt, appeared to offer a more congenial patron. Indeed, though Hamas had benefited from an alignment with the axis of resistance before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, it never contributed much to it apart from a thin veneer of pan-Islamic solidarity. In the first anti-Assad protests in 2011, Hamas was not considered a significant element and did not even merit mention among the "No to Iran, No to Hizbollah" banners carried by demonstrators. Consequently, Hamas's defection made very little difference to the moral or material balance of power. Syrian rebels instinctively understood that in contrast to the instrumental calculation that underlay the connection between Hamas and the regime, Iran and Hizbollah were linked to the regime by factors more profound, namely, ideology and Shiite identity. The commitment of Iran and Hizbollah was evident in the assistance they provided in the ongoing battles – weapons, funding, tactical advice, command-and-control support, and in the case of Hizbollah, direct participation in combat.

Moreover, the axis of resistance was not without extra-regional allies. Of these, the most important was Russia, which continued to transfer armaments to Syria (though not all that the regime requested). More importantly, Russia (and China) consistently defended the regime in international forums and blocked any possible initiatives in the Security Council that might have resulted in the kind of resolution that, loosely interpreted, authorized Western military action in Libya and resulted in the overthrow of Muammar al-Qaddafi. That stance is a reflection of longstanding Russian (and Chinese) hypersensitivity to Western

intervention in support of anti-regime uprisings anywhere. Numerous interpretations have been offered for Russia's behavior, most of them associated with Russia's presumed aspiration to superpower status equal to that of the United States or the West as a whole. At least as persuasive, however, is the Russian conviction that the only real alternative to the authoritarian rulers threatened by uprisings in the Arab world is radical Islamism, whose triumph would have potentially dangerous repercussions in the Russian Caucasus and other Muslim-populated regions elsewhere in Russia or in post-Soviet Central Asian states (as well as in Xinjiang province in northwest China). Thus, for whatever reasons, Russia has given the Syrian regime an international safety net, an asset of considerable moral and political value.<sup>5</sup>

Arrayed against the regime's support network has been a far less coherent alliance of rebel sympathizers, including Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sunnis in Lebanon and Iraq, and – during the Muslim Brotherhood's tenure in office – Egypt. The anti-Assad coalition also included the Great Kuwait Campaign, a group of Salafi clerics and opposition politicians in Kuwait that reportedly contributed millions of dollars to Islamist elements inside Syria.<sup>6</sup> There were even reports that Sudan, which maintains close ties with Iran, was selling Sudanese and Chinese-made arms to Qatar for onward shipment to Syrian rebels.<sup>7</sup> Like the Syrian opposition itself, these actors (with the exception of Sudan) were united in their hostility to Assad, both on sectarian grounds and because of his alignment with Iran, but they were divided in terms of their post-Assad objectives, their methods and means of operation, and the targets of their largesse. Thus, while they provided financial support – for various militias as well as for humanitarian assistance and refugee relief – and some weaponry, their efforts were poorly coordinated, and though they enabled the rebels to continue fighting, they ultimately influenced the balance inside Syria much less than did the regime's patrons. Most noticeable was the relative absence of “boots on the ground.” Apart from reports of the presence of foreign jihadis, especially Iraqi Sunnis operating under the banner of al-Qaeda, there was little direct engagement to balance the physical intervention of Hizbollah.

Even more striking was the absence of any significant American or other Western involvement. The United States and its European partners recognized the Syrian National Council, repeatedly denounced the regime's excesses, demanded that Assad ultimately be replaced as part of any political settlement, and organized opposition support groups like the Friends of Syria. As the civilian casualty count in Syria rose, Western countries also imposed some economic sanctions and declared their willingness to provide non-lethal equipment such as communications gear and medical supplies to the rebels – especially the Free Syrian Army. However, the Obama administration showed no inclination to transfer the kinds of weaponry that might significantly alter the local balance, much less become directly involved itself. And without American leadership, other Western states were unwilling or unable (or both) to match their belligerent rhetoric with belligerent action.

American hesitancy had many sources. The most important was probably a generalized apprehension about being enmeshed in another Middle Eastern quagmire just as the country was extricating itself from protracted involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. To the argument that all that was required was some sort of circumscribed standoff mission such as limited air strikes and/or imposition of a no-fly zone to rectify some of the operational imbalances favoring the regime, the most compelling counterargument was the risk of a slippery slope, that is, that some counteraction by the regime or its supporters (e.g., Iranian attacks on American partners in the Gulf) could easily draw the United States further in than it originally intended to go. Second, the total commitment of the Iran-Hizbollah-Russia alignment to the regime was not matched by equally unequivocal Western enthusiasm for the opposition. As the consequences of the overthrow of authoritarian rulers in other parts of the region began to unfold, initial optimism in the West about the prospects for liberal democracy gave way to growing disenchantment, to the point where many in the West came to share Russia's (and Husni Mubarak's) prognosis of what was likely to follow the ouster of autocratic rulers. In Syria, radical Islamists showed the greatest dedication and military skill in the fight against Assad but also the least devotion to the values upon which Western hostility to Assad was grounded, and their growing prominence

in the opposition camp raised doubts about whether Assad's overthrow would not just prolong the internecine conflict or make a bad situation even worse. So despite recurrent demands by some political figures in the United States, especially Senator John McCain, for a more muscular role, American public opinion was decidedly opposed to any real intervention in the Syrian civil war.

Consequently, until late 2013, the overall balance of foreign involvement in Syria worked in favor of the regime and enabled it to forestall and even overcome whatever initial advantages the opposition may have had. After the Western threat of punitive action against the regime for using chemical weapons failed to materialize and an understanding was reached by the US and Russia on the destruction of the chemical arsenal in Syria, active Western involvement became even less likely than before, and it appears that this balance is unlikely to change. On the other hand, it is possible that a context for punishing the Syrian regime could still be created, and that the American administration could find itself in a situation that would force it to carry out its threat. Even then, however, if a limited punitive strike is launched, it is doubtful whether it would cause any significant change in the balance of forces between the rebels and the regime.

### **Beyond Syria: The Spillover of the Syrian Civil War**

The civil war raging in Syria has had a widespread impact not only due to the extensive involvement of regional actors in the domestic conflict, but also because of the direct effect of the hostilities on security and stability in the neighboring states.

First and foremost, the war has exacted a staggering humanitarian cost, in Syria as well as in the immediate neighborhood. By June 2013 the conflict had claimed more than 100,000 casualties within Syria itself, with more than 5,000 people killed on average every month since July 2012.<sup>8</sup> In its July 2013 estimate, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights asserted that at least 36,000 of the casualties have been civilians, with as many as 8,000 of them children.<sup>9</sup> In addition, in a country of roughly 22 million people, the war has resulted in more than 4 million internally displaced persons as well as approximately 7 million people in need of humanitarian aid to survive.<sup>10</sup>

The humanitarian cost of the conflict has been foisted on Syria's neighbors, led by Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, which have been confronted with a steady influx of refugees. By late summer 2013 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that roughly 1.9 million people had fled Syria, with 38 percent of the refugee population comprising children under the age of 12.<sup>11</sup> In 2013, with the war escalating in brutality and showing no sign of approaching a resolution, the average daily stream of refugees was estimated around 6,000 people, a rate not seen since the Rwandan genocide in the early 1990s.<sup>12</sup> A smaller portion of the refugee population has found temporary shelter in North Africa, Egypt, and northern Iraq, where UN estimates speak of, respectively, approximately 14,000, 106,000, and 150,000 people registered or awaiting registration.<sup>13</sup> In these cases the number of refugees is too low to have any direct impact on the host country. The situation is different, however, when looking at the three principal host countries, Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, where the majority of the refugee population is concentrated.

Turkey, which as of late 2013 hosted roughly half a million refugees, has been the best equipped country, politically and economically, to meet the Syrian crisis and open its borders to refugees. At the beginning of the civil war, Turkey applied an open border policy, granting refugees temporary sanctuary and distinguishing itself for running twenty camps in ten provinces, camps that have been defined as "the best refugee camps ever seen."<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, the situation is far from idyllic, and with no end of the war in sight, Turkey has evinced signs of financial weariness and reduced the number of new refugees accepted on its soil, resulting in a growing number of internally displaced persons waiting on the Syrian side of the border.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the refugee question, which has aroused social tensions in the districts on the border between Syria and Turkey, Turkey has had to cope with a security dilemma following the spread of the fighting to its territory, and the growing ensuing political tension.<sup>16</sup> From time to time there have been cross border shootings, and stray shells have landed in Turkish territory. Turkey's involvement in the conflict on the side of the rebels has caused at least two terror attacks, one in February 2013 and one in May 2013, organized by groups that support the Syrian regime.

The political opposition in Turkey has criticized the ruling Justice and Development Party on the Syrian issue, saying that Turkey is too involved in providing direct aid to the rebels. These criticisms have intensified since the May 2013 car bomb attack in southern Turkey, in which 43 people were killed. Public opinion in Turkey also objects to Turkey being dragged into direct involvement in the Syrian crisis: a survey conducted in June 2013 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States showed that 72 percent of those questioned expressed opposition to direct involvement in Syria, up from 57 percent in 2012.<sup>17</sup> Beyond this, the crumbling of central authority in Syria and the proliferation of armed groups in general and jihadist groups in particular are liable to cause further instability, which creates security problems along the 900 kilometers of the Turkish-Syrian border.

Not surprisingly, the conflict in Syria may also have a longer term impact on Turkey's difficult relations with its Kurdish minority, especially in light of the Kurdish de facto autonomous area emerging in northern Syria. Whereas Turkey has found a satisfactory *modus vivendi* with the Kurdistan Regional Government in Northern Iraq, it is too early to tell whether that model can successfully be replicated with a Syrian Kurdistan, especially given that one of the main Kurdish groups in Syria, the Democratic Union Party, is itself the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is engaged in a prolonged fight with Turkey.

Another country under pressure due to the ongoing Syrian civil war is Jordan, currently home to roughly half a million refugees. Approximately two-thirds of the refugees reside in urban areas, while roughly one third are hosted in camps, the largest of which is the Zaatari camp, believed to accommodate some 130,000 Syrians.<sup>18</sup> But whereas the influx of refugees in Jordan is comparable in size to the number in Turkey, the impact is entirely different. A small country of roughly 6.5 million people that is poor in resources, lacks an adequate water supply, and is already mired in an economic crisis, Jordan has struggled to cope with the Syrian refugee population.<sup>19</sup> The result has been a palpable strain on the country's economy and infrastructure, with shortages in food and the health sector, inadequate and/or unaffordable housing, overcrowded camps, and personal insecurity for the Syrians seeking shelter across the Jordanian border. The

dire economic situation is exacerbated by the fact that the civil war has put an end to the trade with Syria,<sup>20</sup> while the additional volatility in the region has also hindered Jordan's already frail economy.

In addition, with fighters from the anti-Assad opposition – and specifically from the Free Syrian Army – moving in and out of Jordan and sojourning in camps, the country finds itself increasingly dragged into the Syrian civil war.<sup>21</sup> This is not just because of the repeated episodes of stray bullets or mortars landing in Jordan,<sup>22</sup> but also because some of the insecurity and instability has spilled over from Syria into Jordan. The rising number of foreign fighters pouring into Syria to support anti-Assad jihadist groups threatens Jordan, which harbors a long term fear of radical elements attempting to infiltrate and perpetrate terrorist activities. It is therefore not surprising that despite the widespread generosity displayed by Jordan to the Syrian refugee population, some level of resentment has been brewing among ordinary Jordanians.<sup>23</sup> This is especially the case as economic readjustment has led to cuts in subsidies and a rise in prices of commodities and gas.<sup>24</sup>

However, the country that has been most substantially affected by the Syrian civil war is without a doubt Lebanon, which was already home to some 500,000 Syrian residents and now hosts an additional 700,000 refugees, dispersed over 1,000 different municipalities.<sup>25</sup> The influx of refugees into Lebanon has increased steadily; UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos related that between January and July 2013, there was a staggering 200 percent increase in the number of refugees,<sup>26</sup> well in line with the estimate that the total number of registered Syrian refugees will reach one million by the end of the year (and to this number UNHCR adds an estimated 80,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria).<sup>27</sup> The humanitarian situation is precarious, with insufficient affordable housing and with shortages in all basic services, from access to clean water and sanitation to health care.<sup>28</sup> The relations between Syrian refugees and Lebanese citizens have also been complex, characterized by both solidarity but also tension, and at times discrimination.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the humanitarian impact, Lebanon has been directly affected by the conflict in other ways, which in turn are related to both the historical ties between Lebanon and Syria as well as the specific

political and sectarian makeup of the country. First, Lebanon has been repeatedly dragged into the war, with frequent cross-border shootings, and with clashes between the Syrian army and rebel forces on Lebanese soil, especially in the Bekaa Valley.<sup>30</sup> Second, historically the Lebanese and Syrian economies have been tied together, meaning that both the rampant internal economic crisis and the sanctions imposed on Syria have weighed heavily on the Lebanese economy. Third and most important, the civil war has profoundly destabilized Lebanon and exacerbated its preexisting political and sectarian relations, drastically worsening the cleavage between the country's Sunni and Shiite communities, in a conflict that is as highly sectarian and – perhaps even more so – political. The rift between the pro-Assad forces, led by the Shiite parties Hizbollah and Amal and backed, among others, by Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, and the historically anti-Assad March 14 coalition, led by the Sunni Future Movement, is particularly deep. The result is Lebanon's political paralysis: since the fall of the government of Prime Minister Najib Mikati in April 2013, Lebanon has been in a state of political limbo, with Acting Prime Minister Tammam Salam unable to break the political impasse and form a new cabinet, and with the parliament forced to postpone the next round of parliamentary elections.<sup>31</sup>

The political clashes have at times also escalated into full-fledged armed confrontations. In Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city, and in the Bekaa Valley, disagreements between pro- and anti-Assad supporters from the Alawite, Shiite, and Sunni communities have repeatedly arisen and taken a violent form.<sup>32</sup> The situation has escalated since Hizbollah's direct involvement in the Syrian civil war, which in turn has further enhanced the sectarian undertones of the pro- and anti-Assad divide, while also inflaming Salafist groups in Lebanon and their anti-Hizbollah rhetoric. The attacks in May and July 2013 against the Hizbollah stronghold in south Beirut, the Dahiye quarter, seem to confirm this trend, as do the growing number of both Sunni and Shiite Lebanese crossing the border and fighting in Syria.

Were the Syrian regime to collapse, this would have an even bigger effect on Lebanon, likely giving new power and credibility to the political forces behind the March 14 coalition. Hizbollah would be equally affected and would probably lose political capital, power, and popularity once its

Damascus partner is gone, even though it will likely remain the country's dominant military force. In any case, there would be a reshuffling of the Lebanese political cards, together with a likely break of the current impasse and with the creation of new political alliances.

### **Possible Scenarios and Implications for Israel**

The longer the civil war continues, the weaker Syria's ability to conduct a conventional war against Israel will be, which was not very advanced in the first place. On the other hand, the central government has lost control of large areas of the country, and chaos prevails close to the Golan Heights border. Rebel groups, some of whom are Salafi jihadists with an extremist anti-Israel ideology, operate in these areas. It is therefore possible that they will turn their weapons against Israel, or take action against Israel in order to propel it to become involved in the civil war.

The growing use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime is evidence of the lowered threshold for use of these weapons; this could also possibly affect its readiness to use these weapons against Israel, although this threat would be removed if Syria in fact dismantles its chemical arsenal. At the same time, the chaotic situation in Syria has increased the likelihood that advanced weapons could fall into the hands of extreme groups constituting a threat to Israel – Hizbollah or jihadist groups in the ranks of the opposition. If these groups obtain chemical or biological weapons, there could be extremely serious consequences.

While possible that the two sides in Syria could eventually become war weary enough to engage in a dialogue that would lead to an evolutionary change in the country, this is highly unlikely in the coming year: the conflict has become increasingly sectarian and jihadist, and neither side is likely to talk with the other unless it has the upper hand, giving its opponents no choice but to surrender. It will therefore be hard to overcome the obstacles toward a worthwhile international conference along the lines of Geneva II, with the participation of representatives of the regime and the various opposition groups. Even if such a conference takes place, it is unlikely to achieve a solution that is acceptable to all the parties. Nor does it appear at this time that the chemical weapons agreement will generate momentum toward understandings between the US and Russia, which would provide a

basis for serious negotiations between the regime and the opposition forces in Syria.

Rather, there is more solid ground for assuming that the civil war will continue, and that there are few prospects of external intervention tipping the balance in one direction or the other. As a result, one of four other possible scenarios will take place, whose relative likelihood is impossible to assess:

- a. A “Somalia scenario”: the civil war continues without any clear conclusion, and brings Syria to the chaotic status of a failed state.
- b. A “Sykes-Picot end”: Syria breaks up into several mini-states: an Alawite state on the coast stretching from Damascus to the coastal region; a Sunni state in the north, south, and east of the country; and a Kurdish state in northeastern Syria.
- c. The regime is victorious following a war of attrition lasting several years. The probability of the realization of this scenario has increased as a result of Hizbollah’s intervention and the infighting among the rebels.
- d. The rebels are victorious following a war of attrition lasting several years.

Each of these four scenarios has consequences for Israel, not all of which are necessarily threatening and negative. Fulfillment of the Somalia scenario will exacerbate the threats against Israel, especially from uncontrolled groups. On the one hand, Syria as a country will almost entirely lose the ability to conduct war against Israel. On the other hand, the threats from sub-state players will grow, and the likelihood that advanced weapons could fall into their hands will increase. The Sykes-Picot scenario, however, would create a comfortable situation for Israel. While each mini-state would have a central government to which Israel could direct its policy, these countries would be weak and unable to threaten Israel. It is even possible that Israel could have a good relationship with some of them.

Even if the regime is victorious after years of fighting, Syria will remain weak for a long time, and no direct threat against Israel would emerge. Furthermore, this scenario would reduce the likelihood of weapons falling into the hands of uncontrolled groups that regard Israel as an enemy. The restoration of a centralized regime in Syria should therefore be good for Israel. This scenario, however, could have negative consequences for

Israel on a regional scale, because the regime's victory will be perceived as a victory of the Iran-led axis of resistance. The Syrian regime would be even more dependent on Iran and Hizbollah than in the years prior to the civil war. Conversely, a victory by the rebels would create a weak Syrian state under Sunni control, which would not constitute a military or political threat to Israel. Moreover, this scenario would probably weaken the axis of resistance, because the new Syrian regime would be hostile to Iran and Hizbollah, due to their support for the Assad regime. It is possible, however, that Syria would allow anti-Israel terrorist groups to operate from its territory, especially if the new regime is Islamist and includes Salafi elements.

Until now, the Israeli government has adopted a policy of refraining from intervention in events in Syria. This is sound policy, because while Israel has a great deal of power to influence events in Syria, it has no way of controlling the results of any intervention. In a situation in which most of the scenarios have some negative consequences for Israel, non-intervention, including restraint in rhetoric, is therefore best, in order to avoid the appearance of Israeli intervention.

On top of the threats already posed by the situation in Syria, Israel must prepare for additional threats liable to develop under the future scenarios. Measures to address the growing threat to day-to-day security have required strengthening the defense line in the Golan Heights. The possibility that advanced weapons could fall into the hands of factions hostile to Israel also requires preparation and alertness. Israel has set clear red lines for the Syrian regime concerning the transfer of advanced weapons to Hizbollah. A number of air attacks, which were conducted in Syria and attributed to Israel, were likely in response to the breach of these red lines. It is necessary, however, to continue developing lines of action for the possibility that advanced weapons, including chemical weapons, could fall into the hands of Sunni rebel groups with an extreme anti-Israel ideology. Israel must be prepared for limited and temporary military involvement within Syria in response to the development of such situations. The US and other Western parties are also worried about these scenarios, and a dialogue on these matters with these parties is necessary. Efforts should also be made to formulate plans for joint action.

At the same time, the various scenarios also create opportunities for Israel. Syria's military weakness enables Israel to regard the prospect of a full scale war with Syria as extremely remote, at least in the coming years. Israel can use its resources to carry out necessary reforms in the IDF, taking national budget considerations into account. Israel can also exploit the situation to build a bridge and a basis for dialogue with some of the new players in the Syrian theater, including among the rebels, for example with the Kurds in Syria, who have no significant hostility to Israel.

Furthermore, the situation in Syria creates a basis for closer cooperation between Israel and Middle East countries, including Turkey (with all the difficulties in restoring normal relations with the Erdogan government), other countries bordering Syria, and the Persian Gulf countries. Israel can help Jordan cope with the weighty consequences of the Syrian civil war, thereby adding another aspect to its strategic relationship with Jordan.

## Notes

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  - 11 51.4 percent of the refugee population is under the age of 18. See <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.
  - 12 *Humanitarian Bulletin Syria*, No. 5.
  - 13 See *Humanitarian Bulletin Syria*, No. 6 and <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=103> (registered/awaiting registration numbers are of course necessarily an approximation, as they do not include unregistered refugees.)
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# The Upheaval in Egypt

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In the more than two generations since the Free Officers Revolution in Egypt in 1952, the Egyptian regime has been relatively stable. This stability rested on the combination of a strong leader, the army's support for the regime in exchange for significant benefits, and suppression of the opposition, which was perceived as dangerous to the regime. Several elements in this general picture of stability posed a threat to the regime: economic distress created perpetual potential for unrest, which indeed erupted for short periods from time to time, and the Islamic opposition occasionally constituted a danger to the regime, as in the murder of President Sadat and the wave of terrorist attacks carried out by its radical wing, mainly in the 1990s. The regime, however, was able to cope with these threats and maintain its control. The overthrow of the Mubarak regime ended this period of stability, and ushered in a period of uncertainty in Egypt.

## **The Fall of the Muslim Brotherhood Regime**

For decades the Muslim Brotherhood dreamed and prepared for the moment when it would rise to power in Egypt. The downfall of the Mubarak regime and the ensuing political vacuum provided the Brotherhood with the opportunity it had been waiting for, even though it had not instigated the revolution. In March 2012, the Brotherhood's position appeared better than ever. The movement received more votes than any other party in free elections, and the liberal and secular groups, as well as the young people who spearheaded the revolution in early 2011, were relegated to the sidelines. The second largest party in the Egyptian parliament, the

Salafis, was likewise an Islamist group. Thus the Brotherhood effectively controlled the parliament and the government, and above all, the presidency. In cooperation with the younger level of the military command, the new president, Mohamed Morsi, quickly deposed the veteran army command from the Mubarak period. The new military leadership, headed by Defense Minister Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, was expected to continue its cooperation with the president, in part because it owed its position to him. In foreign policy, the Western governments, headed by the US administration, accepted the Brotherhood's regime as legitimate, and even wooed it in the hopes of achieving cooperation.

At the peak of the regime's power, however, its weakness also surfaced, and the situation began to go awry, partly due to mistakes by the regime's leaders and partly due to the complex reality before it. While the Brotherhood controlled the parliament, government, and presidency, the military, the legal system, and the young people who carried out the revolution remained powerful forces in their own right. Morsi was elected president with 51.7 percent of the votes, in other words, with a small majority, and in practice his power was limited. Indeed, he attempted to grab more power than his opponents from among the military command, his political rivals, and the public were willing to accept. In late 2012, he ousted the attorney general, mandated his own immunity from lawsuits, and denied the option of dismissing the ruling assembly by a court order. He appointed a committee aligned with the Brotherhood to draw up a new constitution; the result was a draft constitution that included clauses enhancing the role of religion in public affairs, which did not represent the national consensus. Morsi appointed Brotherhood members to key public positions and to jobs in the media, and gave them control of important government ministries. He dismissed a large number of the provincial governors, and appointed Brotherhood members in their stead. Human rights activists and media figures who criticized the authorities were arrested, and freedom of expression was restricted. From their position of strength, the leaders did not think that the army might unite with the liberal camp to remove the Brotherhood from power. When that happened, the Brotherhood was helpless to prevent it.

Furthermore, Morsi unwisely failed to form a coalition with political factions other than the Brotherhood to promote national reconciliation. He initially examined the possibility of cooperation in the government with other factions, and promised to appoint presidential assistants and deputies from outside the Brotherhood. He quickly abandoned these attempts, however, and relied on a narrow circle of cronies. He also failed to win over the army and security forces, even though the army's current command consists of his appointees. Morsi thereby gave many people the impression that he was trying to amass dictatorial powers for himself, and perhaps aspiring as well to establish a *sharia* state under his centralized presidential regime. Doubt also grew whether he was committed to govern as the president of all Egyptians, as he had promised, and to build a new political order that would satisfy the aspirations of a majority of the public.<sup>1</sup>

During its year in power, the Brotherhood refrained from pursuing radically different policies, especially in foreign affairs. Cognizant of the constraints of the situation and perhaps also attempting to consolidate power before moving in a radical direction, the Brotherhood's policy in many ways reflected continuity more than change. The regime maintained proper relations with the US administration for the purpose of continuing to receive aid and, contrary to Iranian expectations, refrained from restoring diplomatic relations with Iran. There was no crisis in relations with Israel. Prominent Brotherhood figures expressed a basically hostile and negative attitude toward Israel and Morsi avoided any contact whatsoever with Israeli leaders, but ties and coordination between the two militaries continued, mainly with respect to the situation in Sinai. The Brotherhood government mediated between Israel and Hamas during Operation Pillar of Defense, and also appointed a new ambassador to Israel. In internal affairs, beyond replacing the old army command, Morsi did not attempt to encroach on the Egyptian army's interests or status. He neither limited the army's freedom of action in defense matters nor interfered with its economic empire, and he allowed it to maintain its connections with the US and Israel.

More important, however, was the deteriorating economic and political situation in Egypt under the Brotherhood regime. During the Mubarak era, provision of education, health, and welfare services in poor areas gave

the Brotherhood the reputation of an organization sensitive to the people's needs and won it much public sympathy. When it gained power, however, it learned that providing services in a country with a population of 80 million was a completely different matter. The economic situation went from bad to worse, to a large extent because the regime demonstrated its lack of understanding and inability to manage a large and complex country like Egypt. Prices of basic goods rose, with food prices jumping 50 percent since 2010. The inexperienced government did not know how to provide basic services: transportation services declined and garbage accumulated in the streets. Unemployment rose, especially among young people, and there were fuel shortages. Strikes spread and were repressed by force. Furthermore, law and order disintegrated and crime abounded, until it became dangerous to move around in certain areas. Tourism shriveled, the flight of capital grew, and the external debt increased.<sup>2</sup> Growth was a low 2 percent in 2012, while direct foreign investment in Egypt shrank as a result of political and economic uncertainty. Most of the Persian Gulf countries, with the exception of Qatar, granted Egypt no substantial aid because they opposed the Brotherhood. The inexperience of Morsi and his officials in managing a country and their failure to enlist other factions in their administration made finding a way out of their dire straits even more difficult.

Consequently, an increasing number of Egyptians found it hard to believe in the government's ability to manage the country and fulfill its promises. Many began to believe that the Brotherhood had hijacked the revolution to promote its views, and that its regime was no better than the Mubarak regime. In addition, even if the Brotherhood regime did not plan to Islamize Egypt yet, many people believed that it intended to do so. The Brotherhood acquired many enemies: the liberals and the left, the legal system, businessmen, the Coptic minority, the "man on the street," and eventually also the army. The Brotherhood's failure was due in part to the fact that they relied on the power of their numbers and tried to impose their beliefs on the masses, instead of developing a social dialogue to win over the hearts and minds. Indeed, the key role played by the army in overthrowing the Brotherhood regime was complemented by that of the people at large: the masses, who played an important role in the revolution

that overthrew the Mubarak regime but were shunted aside in the following two years, returned to center stage.

The beginning of the end could be seen in November 2012, after Morsi tried to put himself above legal supervision. His opponents realized that if they did not take a stand, the Brotherhood would continue to take over the governing system. From that point on, opposition to the regime increased. The regime's failures drew the army close to the liberal groups from the Mubarak era, and restored power to the masses in the streets. Millions of people began to take part in demonstrations against the Brotherhood regime in December, and 22 million people signed a petition prepared by the Tamarod youth movement calling for Morsi's resignation and new presidential elections. For its part, the Brotherhood regime was too weak to cope with its opponents, especially when they were united against it, and had no allies. The measures employed by the regime to defend its rule were hesitant and inadequate. The final blow to the regime was administered in late June 2013 by the military command, which deposed Morsi, arrested the Brotherhood's leaders and many of its supporters, closed the Islamic TV stations and the Cairo branch of al-Jazeera, and seized power for itself.

### **The Army is In, the Brotherhood is Out**

The act of ousting the Brotherhood leadership restored the army to center stage, while the masses in the street, after being ignored by the Brotherhood, also recovered their influence on political developments. Immediately after the coup, the military command outlined a roadmap for a transitional period, in which a temporary government would operate under an acting president. The roadmap includes a set of stages based on a new constitution in place of the constitution drafted by the Brotherhood regime – and subsequently shelved. Approval of the new constitution will lead to new presidential and parliamentary elections. The committee for approving the constitution, headed by former Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Secretary of the Arab League Amr Moussa, included representatives of all political forces in Egypt other than the Brotherhood. A majority of the ministers in the temporary government are technocrats with no political affiliation, but the government also includes several veterans of the Mubarak regime. Preparation of the constitution was

completed in November 2013, and a referendum on it is scheduled to be held in January 2014, followed several weeks later by parliamentary and presidential elections. The constitution augmented the army's authority, in part by giving military courts the authority to try civilians and granting the army the right to veto the president's appointment of a minister of defense.

Implementing the roadmap is no simple matter. In the months following the coup, the temporary government accomplished little and made limited improvement in providing basic services. The Brotherhood regime was replaced by a loose coalition of the army, liberal groups, and veterans of the Mubarak regime with no common goals or interests beyond reducing the power of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic organizations. As a result, the government has no firm concept of how to implement the roadmap. The government talks about national reconciliation – with the exclusion of the Brotherhood – but does not make it clear how this will be achieved. As of now, the army's increased power, the force employed against the Brotherhood, the emergency regulations, and the closing of the Islamic TV stations are incompatible with progress toward more democracy. The liberal groups too feel uncomfortable with these developments, their desire to constrict the influence of the Islamic organizations notwithstanding.<sup>3</sup> By the end of 2013, even civilian groups that opposed the Muslim Brotherhood regime were criticizing the military government, and doubts were raised as to whether the alliance between the army and the liberal groups would last.

The main problem currently facing the army and the temporary government is how to deal with the Brotherhood. The army intervened in the political sphere to remove the Brotherhood from power, not necessarily to halt the Islamizing process in itself or to strengthen the liberal groups<sup>4</sup> but because it believed it had a duty to arrest the downward spiral in Egypt and no one else could do it. Its intervention, however, required the army to use force against the Brotherhood and other Islamic factions, which included shooting, arrests, large scale operations in Sinai, and other emergency measures. The army thereby made itself the most important and powerful factor in Egypt and a party in the internal struggle that seeks to repress the Islamic organizations and in practice supports the liberal groups.

This situation gives rise to several questions. What does the military leadership intend to do? Does it plan to continue as the dominant factor

in Egypt in the long term, or abandon politics and return the army to its barracks as soon as possible? Will it seek to use its power to influence the character of the regime, and if so, what regime will it favor? Will the army revive the political repression of the Mubarak regime, or will it encourage democracy? Will the liberal groups and young people want to continue cooperating with the army against the Brotherhood?

As yet there are no clear answers to these questions, and it is also possible that the army itself has not decided how to act. Nonetheless, several assumptions can be offered. First, Minister of Defense el-Sisi claims that the army does not seek to rule Egypt directly. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the army will not abandon its key role until stability has been achieved in the country and a viable leadership emerges. This process is liable to take a long time. Second, after the unsuccessful experiment of the Brotherhood's year in power, the army will probably not allow it to rule the country. The hard line taken by the army in suppressing the Brotherhood's leadership and operatives, at the cost of many fatalities and much international criticism, could indicate that the army will remain adamant in the future about preventing the Brotherhood from assuming a leading role, fearing that its rule would disrupt stability and lead to a renewed downward spiral. At the same time, given the Brotherhood's substantial power and influence, the army is likely to conclude that in order both to avoid exacerbating the situation and to deal successfully with the severe problems afflicting the country, it is essential to reach a compromise with the Brotherhood and with the liberal camp that will make it possible to include both of them in the government.

The Brotherhood's situation is difficult, which complicates efforts to achieve reconciliation. After its monumental rise to power, it was overthrown by force and is now considered a failure, with a majority of the people positioned against it. Held responsible for the decline in Egypt's situation, the Brotherhood has been supplanted by the army, which is determined to prevent its return to power. With many of its leaders and activists arrested, the Brotherhood's ability to act and rely on millions of supporters has been damaged. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states support the military leadership. In this situation, the Brotherhood has no clear strategy, and is vacillating between several problematic courses of action.

On the one hand, the Brotherhood still has substantial potential force. It is the best organized political force, and enjoys a broad popular base that gives it the ability to bring hundreds of thousands of supporters to the street. Furthermore, the members' religious beliefs, their feelings that they are the victims and possess the truth, and the knowledge that the power given them by a majority of the people was taken away by illegitimate means make it difficult for them to compromise. For these reasons, they rejected several offers, including from the army, to join the post-Morsi government. Their answer was that accepting the reconciliation initiative was contingent on a restoration of legitimacy and constitutionality – i.e., on restoring Morsi to the presidency and recognition of the constitution drafted during his rule. On the other hand, if they decide on a civil uprising and the use of force, the people are liable to hold them responsible for the worsening situation, which could potentially deteriorate into civil war. If that happens, they will have to go back to underground operations, and will lose their ability to operate in the very political theater that earned them major achievements.

In late September 2013 the Emergency State Security Court in Cairo banned all political and social activity by the Brotherhood. The court also banned activity of the institutions linked to the movement, ordered the closure of all movement branches, and froze all of the Brotherhood assets until the government establishes an independent committee to manage the funds and pending a final independent ruling on the Brotherhood's status. At the same time, the government decided to delay implementation of the court ruling until the legal processes in the matter have been concluded, although it later revoked the Brotherhood's status as a registered non-governmental organization. The course of action followed by the government and the legal system indicates that the government is in no hurry to implement the decree; it is making a clear threat to make the Brotherhood illegal and to disband the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party. In late December 2013, following a deadly terrorist attack in Mansoura in which 14 security personnel were killed, the government declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization.

Against the background of these constraints, a dispute apparently exists in the Brotherhood whether to engage in dialogue with the army

about inclusion in the government, or to reject the possibility as long as its conditions are not met. It has thus far turned down the army's proposals and mediation efforts by Western entities and has not joined the government, while it is clear that the army cannot accede to its principal demands. The Brotherhood also refused to take part in the committee for drawing up a constitution in order to protest the legitimacy of the new constitution, although the al-Nur Salafi party decided to participate in order to influence the role of religion in national life. Nevertheless, although the Brotherhood's leaders have openly called for a general uprising against the army and the temporary government, in practice they have until now confined themselves to limited civil disobedience and sporadic use of force, refraining from widespread violence against the army and the government out of concern that they would lose what remains of their achievements. The question is what its long term policy will be, and whether it will be able to acknowledge its mistakes and learn lessons from its failure. The main concern is that the Brotherhood will conclude that while the democratic process brought it to power, this process was not sufficiently strong to protect it against opponents, including even liberal groups that acted contrary to democratic rules. If so, it follows that there is no point in further participation in democratic processes; it is better to seek alliances with other Islamic factions and then, if necessary, resort to force.<sup>5</sup>

The escalation in Sinai is one indication of this possibility. Even during Mubarak's term in office, Egyptian security forces did not exercise adequate control there, and the situation has deteriorated since he was deposed. After Morsi was overthrown, an atmosphere of chaos and rebellion prevailed, mainly in northeastern Sinai, which borders the Gaza Strip and Israel, and also in central Sinai in the proximity of the Suez Canal. Hundreds of disciplined organized terrorists belong to militant groups operating in Sinai, including armed Bedouins linked to Salafi jihad militias, smugglers, armed groups linked to organizations in the Gaza Strip, and Muslim fighters who infiltrated from Iraq and Yemen, some of whom are connected to al-Qaeda. The Bedouins do not necessarily support the Brotherhood, but they have become more religiously extreme in recent years, and are trying to exploit the army's focus on internal affairs to promote their interests in Sinai. After Morsi was deposed, these groups announced the establishment of a "war

council” for use of force against the new government and the security forces. Armed Bedouin squads have attacked Egyptian army positions and patrols and police stations, and have kidnapped administration personnel. The IDF estimates that 300 attacks were conducted against Egyptian forces in Sinai in July-August 2013. In the most deadly of these attacks, 25 policemen were murdered while on vacation.

For the first time in three years, the Egyptian army has launched a major campaign to strengthen its control of Sinai. Since mid-August 2013, following the escalation there, the army has conducted a broad offensive in Sinai, especially in the northeastern section, to uproot the terrorist strongholds and in coordination with Israel strengthen its own forces in Sinai. The army has also showed more determination in blocking the tunnels on the border of the Gaza Strip, and has limited the number of Gazans allowed to cross over into Sinai, out of concern that Hamas is sending weapons and fighters to Egypt to help the Brotherhood. The army’s goal is to establish a buffer zone separating Sinai from the Gaza Strip.<sup>6</sup>

### **Where the Egyptian Regime is Headed**

The Egyptian political system has now reached a watershed. The severe upheaval of the past three years, which included the use of violence, has exposed strong forces: the army, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic organizations, groups of young people who began the revolution, and liberal factions – all of which are struggling to shape Egypt’s future character. Some of these factions, however, have not yet decided how to conduct this struggle.

The army has become the most significant element, because it believed that it had a duty, even if force was required, to stop Egypt’s downward spiral created by the Brotherhood regime during its one-year rule. The army, however, has not yet determined whether, and for how long, it will remain on center stage as the ruler of Egypt. Minister of Defense el-Sisi is Egypt’s strongman at this stage, and some are comparing him to Nasser in the 1950s. He has hinted that he will run in the elections for president. If el-Sisi establishes his position as Egypt’s ruler, it will strengthen the army’s stature as the principal power in the country – not just the power behind the throne.

The ineptitude and mistakes of the Brotherhood, which failed to take advantage of the historic opportunity that fell into its hand to rule Egypt, led to its downfall. It must now decide whether to take part in the political process, in which case it can probably exert influence while not being the leading factor, or whether to conduct a violent struggle at great risk to itself and the country.

Other groups, especially young people who began the revolution that ended the Mubarak regime and contributed to the overthrow of Morsi, along with groups in the liberal camp, which have never headed the regime, also seek to influence the shaping of a free and democratic regime.

The internal struggle currently taking place likewise involves severe socioeconomic problems that have existed in Egypt for generations and have been aggravated by the rising violence of the past two years, undermined law and order, and the increased uncertainty that has prevailed in Egypt since the Mubarak regime was overthrown. While the economic situation improved somewhat in the final months of 2013, it is still difficult. Any regime that emerges in Egypt will have to deal with the same problems that contributed to the downfall of the Mubarak regime.

The Brotherhood appears to hold the key to future developments in Egypt. Its choice between confrontation and participation in the political process will determine whether Egypt follows the path of political reform or that of increasing violence and instability. This decision will also affect the army's stance: whether to remain in a position of leadership or to move behind the scenes.

The Brotherhood might decide on a violent struggle in order to destabilize the current regime, or at least to force the regime to accept its demands. Several levels of violence are possible under this scenario: civil disobedience with a low level of violence; sporadic terrorist attacks in limited areas, such as those prevalent in Sinai; continued urban guerilla fighting on a growing scale and encouragement of a popular uprising against the government; and a civil war in the style of Algeria in the 1990s and Syria today. It is clear that this decision will require the army command to use force to remain the dominant governing party until it quells the uprising.

This is the worst and most dangerous scenario for the Brotherhood. The army could severely undercut it, and the Brotherhood is liable to lose the sympathy of supporters if it is perceived as responsible for the escalation. It is also liable to be unsuccessful in achieving its objectives. If the Brotherhood and its supporters embark on a campaign of violence, this will reflect its belief that a majority of Egyptians want it in power and that it fell victim to a conspiracy by its opponents, who deprived it of its ruling position. If such a decision is taken, the Brotherhood is more likely to choose a limited struggle, which is actually already taking place, than an all-out civil war, as it stands to lose much more in a civil war. Indeed, until now, the Islamic factions in Egypt have not been inclined to engage in large scale violent confrontation, and the example of Syria does not invite imitation. The structure of Egyptian society also tends to discourage civil war. The period immediately following the removal of Morsi suggested that the Brotherhood leadership might at least support a possible limited struggle. Months later, the Muslim Brotherhood still shows no inclination to join in the political process, and is subject to repression by the army. Its classification as a terrorist organization makes it an enemy of the regime, forces it to continue its conflict with the army, and does not allow it to take part in the political process. In several respects, these measures are also putting Egypt back where it was during Mubarak's rule. Internal security measures were stepped up in the second half of 2013, and in November, the president signed a law limiting the freedom to protest and giving the police and the security forces the authority to disperse demonstrations by force, if necessary.

Alternatively, the Brotherhood might agree to take part in the political process. From its standpoint, this scenario is also difficult, because it requires acceptance of its loss of power after having been in the government. The distrust between the Brotherhood and the army will not help them achieve such a settlement.<sup>7</sup> This scenario is liable to require the army and the liberal camp to make substantive concessions to the Brotherhood, regarding both government participation and the constitution. Such a scenario is not impossible, however, if it is perceived as the sole alternative to violent escalation on a major scale. The fact is that the al-Nur Salafi party has

decided to take part in the committee on drafting a constitution, and some Brotherhood members also favor participation in the political process.

Whether Egypt becomes involved in a violent struggle at some level, or whether a political process develops with the Brotherhood's participation, the internal struggle and instability in the country will probably continue for a long time, perhaps years, during which more twists and turns are possible. Over these years the army will likely continue to be the leading and most important element in the government, which will try to maintain stability in Egypt under the leadership of a military figure, for example Minister of Defense el-Sisi – like the three military figures who led Egypt during the 60 years before 2011. A military regime, however, will also face severe problems. It will have to find a solution to the same problems that led to the downfall of the Mubarak regime and the end of Morsi's rule. It will have to deal with the Brotherhood's power base, and certainly with those turning to violence. Those who are currently siding with the army – the liberal groups and the masses in the streets – also have interests that differ from those of the army. They wanted the army to get rid of Morsi and the Brotherhood, but they want an open political system, not a return to the Mubarak regime's oppression. Widespread use of force by the army will make it a target for criticism.

Does the experience of the past three years indicate that Egypt is making progress toward democracy? The presidential and parliamentary elections in 2011 and 2012 reflected, at least in part, the people's free will. Events in 2012-2013 showed, however, that in several respects, Egypt, like other Arab countries, still lacks important elements of a full democratic process. The main political forces in Egypt – the Brotherhood, the army, and most of the liberal groups – are not democratic in the Western sense of the term. The democratic process was very important to the Brotherhood for the purpose of gaining power through victory in the elections, which it achieved primarily through its organizational capability and strong motivation. After gaining power, however, it had insufficient regard for key democratic values: the subordination of religious law to the constitution, full equality for women and religious minorities, rights for other minorities, and freedom of religion and thought. By its nature, the army will likely not attribute enough significance to democratic values. Even the liberal

groups, however, accepted the army's use of force against the Brotherhood and a halt in the democratic process when it served their interests.<sup>8</sup>

This shortcoming illustrates a more general phenomenon. Democracy was not introduced in Egypt over time in a bottom-up process, with free elections being an important but not the sole value. When other essential values are lacking or defective, the result is a rapid and partial democratic process that is liable to lead to instability, an absence of checks and balances, a government in which the winner uses anti-democratic means, and repression of the opposition. These significant drawbacks are even more pronounced in Arab countries in which no real democratic tradition exists, political Islam bears important weight, and tribal and ethnic loyalties play a significant role. For these reasons, when pressed by the American administration to open the political system, Mubarak repeatedly stated that the US did not understand the Arab world, and that Egyptian and Arab society was not yet ready for democracy. This does not mean that a democratic regime cannot develop in Egypt, but a more reasonable assumption is that this will happen gradually, if at all, over a long period of time, when a national consensus on shaping key values is achieved.

## **Regional Consequences**

Egypt is currently undergoing systemic change, with the final result uncertain. It is fairly clear that the concentration of power in the hands of the Muslim Brotherhood has at this stage dissipated, following the army's intervention and pressure from the masses, and the movement will likely not succeed in returning to power in Egypt. It is unclear, however, whether this will lead to the Brotherhood's inclusion in the political process together with other groups, or to an outbreak of violence, whether on a major or limited scale. It is also unclear how long the army will continue to play the key role in the political system – probably at least until the internal upheaval settles down, a process that will likely take considerable time.

The blow suffered by the Brotherhood stands to have substantive consequences beyond Egypt's borders. The Muslim Brotherhood is considered the parent movement of the Islamic organizations in the Arab world. Its failure in an important country like Egypt is likely to affect Islamic organizations in other Arab countries, such as Tunisia and Jordan,

where they are struggling against the current or previous regimes and against liberal groups. The Brotherhood's failure to govern successfully in Egypt and unite organizations and communities outside the circle of supporters behind them, and the rapidity with which it was ousted from power, can serve as an example and encourage groups combating jihad organizations in the Arab world, proving that it is possible to deflect the onset of political Islam as the next dominant political force.

The coup in Egypt has also had a negative impact on Hamas, whose relations with Syria, Iran, and Hizbollah have experienced a downturn over the past year. Even when the Brotherhood was in power, friction and tension between Hamas and the Egyptian government emerged, primarily concerning security and economic issues involving the border between the Gaza Strip and Sinai. These disagreements, however, paled next to the fact that the Brotherhood was the parent movement and ideological prop for Hamas, and provided basic sympathy and support from the Egyptian government. As security problems in Sinai grew and Egyptian control there loosened following the coup against Morsi, the Egyptian army increased its pressure on Hamas. The army embarked on a large scale campaign to close the smuggling and trading tunnels on the border of the Gaza Strip, and intensified its supervision of the movement of Gazan residents into Egypt as part of its efforts to strengthen its control of Sinai. The army regards Hamas as a questionable and even hostile factor from a security standpoint, due to its ties with the Brotherhood and jihad groups, and threatened to use force against the Gaza Strip if Hamas does not rein in its activity in Sinai.

Iran is also among those harmed by the coup in Egypt. The Brotherhood regime did not fulfill expectations by complying with calls in Egypt to renew diplomatic relations between the two countries, particularly following an exchange of unofficial visits between the two presidents. Yet the Brotherhood's downfall thwarted Iran's hopes on other levels as well: a regional Islamic awakening, a Shiite-Sunni rapprochement, a strengthening of the Islamic element in the Arab world at the expense of the nationalist element, and a weakening of the axis of moderate countries, especially the connection between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, Morsi's fall from power had positive aspects for Iran: Iran objected

to Morsi's outspoken criticism of Assad, and the crisis in relations between the military regime in Egypt and Hamas may well push Hamas back into the arms of Iran. Overall, however, the coup in Egypt tends to work against Iran's interests. The Egyptian leadership has made it clear that an improvement in its relations with Iran requires measures that take the security of Egypt and the Arab countries into account, and this has not yet occurred.

The change emerging in Egypt's relations with the major powers should be added to this picture. Since early 2011, Egypt's relations with the American administration have been tense, following what Egypt perceived as intervention in Egypt's internal affairs, once the Obama administration urged Mubarak to give up power, even before he was overthrown. It continued after the administration expressed dismay at the army's deposing of Morsi, claiming that the army had overthrown a democratically elected regime. This tension reached a peak after the administration suspended some of its military aid to Egypt, including the supply of F-16 warplanes, Apache helicopters, air defense systems, and anti-tank missiles. For its part, Egypt complained that American policy was ignoring the fact that even if the Morsi administration was democratically elected, it had behaved undemocratically, and that millions of Egyptians had demanded its ouster.

Russia was quick to take advantage of the crisis in US-Egypt relations, following its own 40-year rift in military relations with Egypt. In November 2013, Russia's Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense jointly visited Egypt for talks with their Egyptian counterparts. In their discussions, the parties agreed to hold joint maneuvers in anti-terrorism warfare and anti-piracy measures, enhance cooperation between their air forces and navies, and expand their economic cooperation. Even more important, according to open sources, Russia offered Egypt a major arms deal worth \$2-4 billion that would include MiG-29 warplanes, combat helicopters, air defense systems, and anti-tank missiles, as well as an upgrading of the obsolete weapon systems supplied to Egypt by the Soviet Union over 40 years ago.

Egypt's rapprochement with Russia clearly resulted from Cairo's wish to stress its dissatisfaction with the US administration's intervention in internal Egyptian affairs, principally the suspension of some US military aid. In this way, Egypt sought to show that it was not in the administration's

pocket, and that it had alternatives to its ties with the US, including in the supply of weapons. In this respect, the Russian ministers' visit to Egypt constituted an important change in relations between Egypt and Russia. So far the joint maneuvers in anti-terrorism warfare are not a breakthrough, and the large scale weapons transaction is apparently a Russian offer that Egypt has yet to accept. Furthermore, Egypt has had close ties with the US since 1980 and needs American aid, for which has no alternative; it will therefore be in no hurry to burn its bridges. If the American administration does not repair the breach between the two countries, however, Egypt's rapprochement with Russia is liable to acquire additional momentum, including in the military sphere.

### **Ramifications for Israel**

The Brotherhood government made no significant changes in Egypt's relations with Israel, and no material worsening in relations took place. The Brotherhood's basic attitude toward Israel was hostile, however, and some of its leaders denied Israel's right to exist and regarded it as an enemy. Relations were cut back to a minimum that was consistent with Egypt's interests, mainly military coordination. The coup in Egypt did not put sympathizers with Israel in power, but it removed from office people who objected to relations with Israel for ideological reasons. The army recognizes that tightening cooperation and coordination with Israel benefits Egypt, and a broader view of the two countries' common interests, principally in the security sphere, began to prevail. The result was that Israel tried to help Egypt strengthen its control of Sinai, in part through an expanded Egyptian military presence in Sinai beyond what was stipulated in the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. Israel has reportedly been assisting Egyptian military operations in Sinai against jihad strongholds. In another area, Israel is trying to promote understanding of the Egyptian viewpoint in Washington in order to avoid disruption of the new Egyptian regime's relations with the US. All in all, there is no doubt that Israel is one of the main beneficiaries of the regime change in Egypt.

## Notes

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- 6 Ehud Yaari, "Deterioration in the Sinai," *Policy Analysis*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 11, 2013; Jeremy Sharp, *Egypt in Crisis: Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, September 12, 2013; interview with IDF Southern Front Commander Sami Turgeman, *Israel HaYom*, September 4, 2013.
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# Jordan: Relative Stability in the Eye of the Storm

Oded Eran

The turmoil that has gripped the Middle East since late 2010 has not bypassed Jordan entirely, but the Hashemite Kingdom has thus far succeeded in managing the socio-political challenges emerging from the volatile environment. Some of these challenges originated before the wave of uprisings, but were aggravated by the political upheavals in the region. Other challenges were spawned by regional developments over which Jordan had no control. Whatever the source of the challenges, however, Jordan will be forced to contend with them in the coming years. Failure to do so could seriously undermine the stability of the regime, with far reaching consequences in the region.

For Jordan to be able to cope successfully with the problems it faces today, it will need both a stable leadership that conducts itself wisely in the face of domestic pressures in the kingdom, and generous assistance from supporting states, including Israel. This cannot be an isolated event; it must continue over time. Yet this support is far from guaranteed, and even today, Jordan is hard pressed to mobilize it.

## **The Demographic Challenge**

Since its establishment as an independent state, Jordan has absorbed waves of immigration that were large both in absolute terms and relative to the size of its population. The waves of immigration following the wars with Israel in 1948 and 1967 created a Palestinian majority in a kingdom led by a Hashemite minority with tribal origins in the Arabian Peninsula. The

third wave of immigration took place in 1990-91 and included mainly Jordanian-Palestinians who were deported from the Gulf states due to King Hussein's verbal support for Saddam Hussein, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. A fourth wave flooded Jordan in 2003 when nearly half a million people fled Iraq for Jordan. These refugees were not granted citizenship, and therefore at this stage their residency in Jordan has economic significance only and no domestic political implications. Finally, in the past three years, nearly 1 million refugees from Syria have found safe haven in Jordan, and it is difficult to estimate the domestic political consequences of their continued presence in the country. In contrast to the Iraqi refugee community, which came to Jordan with some money, nearly the entire Syrian population arrived destitute, without any financial resources whatsoever.

The working assumption about the future of these two groups must be that neither can be expected to return to their country of origin soon. The chaos in Iraq and in Syria is not expected to end in the coming years, and refugees will likely continue to flow from Syria to Jordan. If these refugees remain in Jordan for many years, the question will arise regarding political and citizenship rights. Any change in the status of the refugees from Iraq and Syria would lead to a change in the domestic balance of power in Jordan, with the Palestinians likely losing their majority status in the country. This is all currently hypothetical, but Jordan's history shows that few of the refugees that immigrated to the country have ever found their way home.

### **The Domestic Political Challenge**

The demand for greater democracy that ignited the uprisings in the Arab world in December 2010, and prior to that in Iran in 2009, was also sounded in Jordan, although more quietly and modestly than in Egypt and Syria. The main political force in Jordan behind this demand is the local version of the Muslim Brotherhood. Although it has not challenged the institution of the monarchy, the Muslim Brotherhood has sought to limit the king's powers and turn Jordan into a constitutional monarchy. Due to a combination of several factors, King Abdullah II has succeeded in overcoming most of the Muslim Brotherhood's demands while making

minimal concessions regarding his basic powers. However, this success may be temporary, with the demand to limit the king's powers intensifying and coming not only from the Muslim Brotherhood, but from the younger generation of the educated middle class, which would seek a government that is more open and less alienated from its constituents.

For now, however, the few concessions that were made, reflected in the new constitution, have managed to calm the situation and temper the demands. The measured use of force (without firearms) by domestic security forces while suppressing the demonstrations reduced the impact of the clashes, rather than spurring the public to attend violent demonstrations. The Muslim Brotherhood erred in its assessment that boycotting the elections would disrupt the political process. It was left without representation in the parliament and without claims that could stir up public opinion and motivate people to take to the streets en masse. The military coup in Egypt, which removed the Muslim Brotherhood from power in July 2013, weakened the movement further in the Gaza Strip and in Jordan. The horrific scenes in Syria during the civil war and the thousands of Syrian refugees wandering the streets of Jordanian cities in search of work have likewise tempered the enthusiasm of those citizens of Jordan who not long before were prepared to participate in demonstrations against the regime.

There were others in Jordan who, along with members of the Muslim Brotherhood, demonstrated against the regime at the start of the "Arab Spring." These were primarily tribal elements, particularly in the poverty stricken southern towns, which are traditionally more loyal to the royal house. These individuals were driven by the desire to improve their economic situation. In light of the relative calm in these areas in the past year, the regime, as is its wont, has presumably found ways to channel money to these centers of protest and assuage the anger. Although the Jordanian regime is unlikely to be endangered by this sector in particular, if the economic situation in the south worsens significantly, it could ignite serious unrest in other areas. Hence there is a need for the regime to be especially careful, including with the traditionally loyal branch of the population.

## **The Economic Challenge**

Even a country with an economy more advanced and stable than Jordan's would have a hard time dealing with the problems created by the sudden, mass immigration of nearly 1 million impoverished refugees in a period of less than three years. As shown in International Monetary Fund reports, however, the Jordanian economy has coped with this challenge with considerable success. An IMF official stated that immigration to Jordan, along with the crisis created by the halting of the supply of natural gas from Egypt, has leveled much pressure on the Jordanian economy. Immigration has caused difficulties in the job market, in the provision of services, and in housing. Nonetheless, the official pointed to slow but stable economic growth, success in preventing inflation, and a reduction in the external current account deficit.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, IMF experts have noted Jordan's ongoing need for monetary grants from outsiders in order to reduce the macroeconomic pressures in the kingdom and thereby improve its ability to cope with immigration from Syria and with the lack of an immediate and available replacement for the supply of gas from Egypt. The IMF itself has provided loans to Jordan in the amount of \$2.06 billion, and by late 2013 had released about half of this amount, following the positive reports from the IMF missions that visited the kingdom.

The report by the Central Bank of Jordan published in September 2013 shows that there is a trend toward improvement.<sup>2</sup> The bank's foreign currency reserves have increased to almost \$11 billion, which is equivalent to six months of imports. In absolute terms, Jordan's national debt, internal debt, and external debt have increased slightly, although according to data from July 2013 the ratio between the debt and the gross national product decreased from 75.5 percent in late 2012 to 73.5 percent in 2013. The report also stated that Net Direct Investments – a critical measure of the international business community's confidence in the economic stability of a country – have increased. The fact that Jordan has succeeded in raising funds by issuing bonds is also proof of the positive assessment among the international financial markets.

At the same time, the IMF report prepared for the conference of donor states indicated some dangers.<sup>3</sup> One stems from the possibility of an exacerbation of Syria's internal crisis, which would lead to additional

waves of refugees flooding Jordan. Continued difficulty in supplying gas to Jordan also appears to be a significant risk. The disruptions in regular supply have caused considerable losses to the Jordanian electric company, which are expected to reach some 2 percent of Jordan's Gross Domestic Product in 2014.

The IMF's recommendations include economic reforms that if not carried out judiciously and do not sufficiently protect society's disadvantaged could, as happened in the past, cause unrest among the populace, even those known for their traditional support of the regime. They could also serve as the catalyst to violent demonstrations that will have a broad impact, given the developments in the region and those in Jordan in the past three years.

Another significant statistic in the report by the Central Bank of Jordan is the unemployment figure of 14 percent, up from 13.1 percent in the previous year. These are official figures, and the actual unemployment figures are likely higher. Furthermore, the greater the number of "cheap" Syrian workers who enter the expanding "gray" job market, the more the official figures will deteriorate. Within a short time, foreign workers, such as the Egyptians, will be pushed out of the labor market, and they will be followed by the Jordanian workers themselves. Even today, the unemployment rate among those with a university education, 20.6 percent, is considerably higher than the national average. This stands to only get worse.

The oil-producing Arab states have played an important role in reducing the pressures on the Jordanian economy, as have grants, donations, and loans on favorable terms from other sources, such as the European Union and the United States. Indeed, the sum total of the grants in the first seven months of 2013 rose by 20 percent over the same period in 2012 and came to nearly \$5 billion.<sup>4</sup>

## **Challenges and Outside Risks**

In addition to the challenges posed by the immigration to Jordan and the halt in the supply of natural gas from Egypt to Jordan, the Hashemite Kingdom faces other risks that stem from geopolitical changes underway in the Middle East. The internal struggle in Syria has attracted thousands of activists from extremist Islamic organizations to join in the battles against

the regime of Bashar al-Assad. At this stage they are completely engrossed in this struggle, but once it ends they will presumably not be in a hurry to leave Syria, especially since the central government in Damascus, no matter what its character, will be too enervated to attempt to remove them. They will turn Syria into a field for deployment for operations in geographically close arenas. The internal struggle in Syria is already spilling over into Lebanon, and is liable to expand to Jordan as well. Presumably among the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have reached Jordan are hostile and subversive elements that would be active in the future against the Hashemite regime.

Furthermore, failure of the current round of talks between Israel and the Palestinians and their conclusion without a settlement, even partial, could increase the friction in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. In the past, heightened tension between Israel and the Palestinians has cooled bilateral relations between Jordan and Israel. Paradoxically, a comprehensive agreement between Israel and the Palestinians that includes understandings on two core issues, Jerusalem and the return of Palestinian refugees, would encounter internal Palestinian criticism and therefore would not necessarily make the situation easier for the regime in Amman.

Tension in the Persian Gulf between Sunnis and Shiites in the Arabian Peninsula, whether as a result of the failure of the Iranian nuclear program negotiations between Iran and the major powers, or as a result of gross violations of the agreement already reached, could cause the cessation or the postponement of financial aid to Jordan, and therefore exacerbate the economic situation.

## **The Israeli-Jordanian Relationship**

The familiar pattern of Israel-Jordan bilateral relations over the past decades – even before there was a signed peace agreement – did not change in 2013, and it will likely not change in the coming years. On the one hand, the Jordanian regime continues to criticize Israel publicly for its policy toward the Palestinians, the settlements in the West Bank, and especially the construction plans in Jerusalem connected to the Temple Mount, such as the Mughrabi Gate and the ascent to the Temple Mount for Jews wishing to pray at the site.

On the other hand, the two governments continue to maintain an important dialogue on security issues. The Jordanian distress on issues of infrastructure, especially water and energy, increases Israel's importance in finding stable solutions for these problems. Indeed, an important dialogue on these topics is underway between the relevant authorities with the goal of helping Jordan overcome these problems. The opening of the route to the port of Haifa for the transport of Jordanian exports to Europe and the United States as a substitute for the paralyzed Syrian ports is an important Israeli contribution to Jordan's economic stability. The various discussions between Israel and Jordan on increasing cooperation between the two countries have great strategic importance from Israel's point of view. Implementation of the various programs will create a new regional infrastructure map and a map of combined interests that will contribute a great deal toward increasing regional stability.

Israel's willingness to promote these moves, even if it means absorbing some of the costs involved in their implementation, is highly important. It is essential that the government of Israel and/or the cabinet hold an in-depth, comprehensive strategic discussion on the various facets of relations with Jordan, as well as relations with other potential partners in the region.

Such a discussion is necessary in any case in light of Jordan's membership in the UN Security Council for two years, starting in 2014. As one of the main bodies in the international system, the Security Council will deal in the coming years with basic issues of Israel's security and strategic position, including Israel's relations with its neighbors, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Iranian nuclear issue. On each of these issues, it can be expected that Jordan will not endorse Israel's positions in the Security Council, and thus increased friction between the two countries is likely. Therefore, it would be desirable for the two to create a mechanism for dialogue in order to address the various issues with the goal of minimizing the damage to the bilateral relations. Both Israel and Jordan will need vast reserves of tolerance, patience, and the ability to look beyond the next two years when Jordan's term in the Security Council ends.

## Notes

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# Turkey: Looking Beyond the Current Challenges

Gallia Lindenstrauss

Turkey's efforts of recent years to enhance its influence in the Middle East have been stymied by the upheavals in the Arab world. The lack of regional stability has affected Turkey's relations with the neighboring countries in the region and complicated its regional situation, both with regard to maintenance of its current standing, and even more so with regard to the expansion of its influence. The events in the Middle East have even impacted on Turkey's domestic problems. While it is a mistake to make a direct connection between the "Arab Awakening" and the domestic tension in Turkey, it would nevertheless appear that the indirect influences of the protest that began in the Arab world in late 2010 have not bypassed Turkey.

In an article published in the *International Spectator* in June 2013, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu argued that, "If you adopt a position based on principles that are compatible with the flow of history, then your position will not disappoint you. We believe that the flow of history is on the side of the masses that have demanded their rights in the Middle East; the flow of history is oriented in that direction."<sup>1</sup> The Foreign Minister also remarked that if at a certain point there is what appears to be a negative development, in the long term perspective, this will prove to be only a temporary obstacle. He added that what has taken place in the Arab world should have happened in the 1990s, and even though at that time the major powers preferred to preserve the status quo, history is now assuming its natural course. He emphasized that while leaders are temporary, nations are eternal, and that therefore Turkey supports the will of the people and

the leaders chosen by them. Furthermore, he, like Turkey's president, underscores the moral ("virtuous") aspect of Turkish foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> These comments reflect Turkey's at least rhetorical position on the awakening in the Arab world. And indeed, aside from the case of Bahrain (and Libya, in the early stages), Turkey has in fact stood with the forces of change. Conversely, when counter-trends emerged, Turkey hastened to criticize them, and was one of their most prominent critics.

Turkish public opinion remains in support of this principle of siding with the masses – even though it is criticized from time to time at home and abroad, not only by those who argue that Turkey must be guided by *realpolitik*, but also because critics claim that the attitude of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan toward the will of the people is simplistic, with an over-emphasis on formal elections and under-emphasis on conduct according to liberal principles.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, if the prism is in fact long term, criticism of deterioration in Turkey's relations with one of the countries in the region is perceived as marginal and even petty, because what matters is the overall course of history. At the same time, among shapers of foreign policy, an increasingly positive attitude can be seen toward the principle of "precious loneliness."<sup>4</sup> This approach was evident, *inter alia*, when at a press conference on August 21, 2013, Foreign Minister Davutoglu stated that Turkey would rather stand alone than be wrong.

## **Turkey and the Turmoil in the Middle East**

The developments in the Middle East have sparked tension in Turkey's relations with a number of players in the region, including Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and the central government in Iraq, as well as Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The conservative Sunni states are likewise uncomfortable with Turkey's unequivocal opposition to the military coup in Egypt. In contrast, the actors in the region with which Turkey has retained good relations are Hamas, Qatar, and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq – in other words, none of the regional powers.

Turkish hopes for the imminent demise of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria have been dashed. Yet along with its unambiguous opposition to Assad's continued rule, Turkey has a serious dilemma concerning which opposition elements in Syria to support. It appears, for example,

that Turkey is playing a double game in its relations with the Kurds in northern Syria. On the one hand, it supports what presents as an additional dimension to weaken the Assad regime. On the other hand, it displays an ambivalent position regarding the possibility that an autonomous region will be established in northern Syria similar to what exists in northern Iraq. The talks that were held between official Turkish representatives and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is considered the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), were quite noteworthy: it is doubtful that such contacts would have taken place in the past, and they certainly would not have been publicized.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the Kurds are accusing Turkey of de facto support for Jabhat al-Nusra, which is identified with al-Qaeda and is fighting against them.

Turkey, however, is clearly unenthusiastic about supporting Jabhat al-Nusra, as it fears that terrorism by extremist Islamic elements will later be turned against its territory and its citizens.<sup>6</sup> Events such as the May 2013 terrorist attack in the Turkish city of Reyhanli, in which more than fifty Turks were killed and which the Turks attributed to supporters of the Assad regime, have aggravated these fears. But it is not only events within Turkey, but also those outside the country that have given rise to concern. For example, a car bombing near the Turkish embassy in Somalia in July 2013, for which al-Shabab (which is linked to al-Qaeda) took credit, caused the deaths of six Turkish citizens. In addition, in 2012 and 2013 a number of Turkish citizens were kidnapped in Lebanon (by Shiite elements),<sup>7</sup> after which Turkey warned its citizens not to travel to Lebanon. These kidnappings were apparently part of the reason that most of the Turkish contingent from the UNIFIL peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon was withdrawn in August 2013.

Decision makers in Turkey had mixed feelings about the September 2013 Russian-brokered agreement on the issue of Syria's chemical arsenal. While Turkey welcomed the idea of disarming Syria of its chemical weapons, leaders expressed their concern that the agreement would not lead to a cessation of violence in Syria and that on the contrary, it could even prompt Assad to feel that he is immune from outside intervention.<sup>8</sup> In August, Turkey made it clear that it would be prepared to be part of an action against Syria by an international coalition, even without UN

Security Council approval.<sup>9</sup> Turkey has recently emphasized its criticism of the structure of the Security Council and the veto power of the permanent members, preventing the Council from being a leading actor on the issue. Spokesmen expressed disappointment with the fact that there would be no action in Syria by a US-led coalition, similar to NATO action in Kosovo. Yet in spite of Turkey's disappointment that military action in Syria no longer appears to be a viable option (at least as long as the Syrian chemical weapons agreement is deemed effective), coalition action against Syria, had it occurred, would have implied a few latent risks for Ankara. Public opinion polls in Turkey show consistently that the public is opposed to Turkish military action in Syria.<sup>10</sup> Thus, if intervention of this type did take place and encountered difficulties, it would arouse public resentment.

In addition, the Turkish military seems to have weakened in recent years, with its former top leaders and commanders currently under arrest or indictment, and might not have performed well in a military operation in Syria. The threat emanating from the situation in Syria has again highlighted the problematic reality that Turkey lacks the ability to defend itself from a missile attack. NATO members responded relatively rapidly to the Turkish need for anti-missile defense and placed Patriot batteries on the border with Syria. However, the Turks are apparently giving increasing thought to the importance of acquiring independent missile defense capacity. Indeed, on September 26, 2013 China's CPMIEC won a Turkish tender for purchase of long range defense systems. Senior NATO officials were highly critical of Turkey's willingness to advance such a contract with a Chinese company.<sup>11</sup>

Another dilemma facing Turkey is the large wave of refugees streaming into the country as a result of the ongoing civil war in Syria. An estimated 600,000 Syrian refugees are in Turkey, 200,000 of whom are in refugee camps.<sup>12</sup> It is doubtful that the refugees taken in since the events in Syria began will ever return to their homes, and thus the challenge of absorbing them has become far more of a long term problem than the Turkish authorities envisioned when the wave of refugees started. In this context, the increasing tension within Turkey between the Sunni majority and the Alevis<sup>13</sup> is also noteworthy, and in the eyes of this minority, the Turkish position toward Syria clearly reflects a Sunni foreign policy.

Along with the negative developments in Syria, there is also bitter disappointment with the events in Egypt. Erdogan was one of the first to oppose the Egyptian army's ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood in July 2013. He referred to it as a military coup and strongly criticized Western hypocrisy in standing aside as the military ousted an elected government from power. On the practical level, the ambassadors of the two countries were recalled for consultations and joint naval maneuvers were canceled. Egypt sharply criticized the Turkish demand to convene the Security Council following the violent events in the country. Comments by Erdogan comparing the chairman of Egypt's Supreme Military Council, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, to Assad<sup>14</sup> also contributed to a sharper tone between the two countries. Erdogan's harsh approach to the events in Egypt appears in part to have resulted from the painful memories of the military coups in Turkey over the years and the suffering they inflicted on Islamic elements, among others, in Turkey.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, and although the Egyptians have not yet returned their ambassador to Turkey, in September 2013 the Turks chose to return their ambassador to Egypt – only for him to be expelled in late November 2013. Still, presumably in light of the growing trade between Turkey and Egypt,<sup>16</sup> Egyptian security forces are reportedly guarding some of the Turkish convoys traversing Egypt to transport goods to elsewhere on the African continent.<sup>17</sup> Turkey also paid a price for its strong opposition to the el-Sisi government in its relations with some of the Gulf states, and in particular, Saudi Arabia.<sup>18</sup> Thus, for example, many have drawn a connection between the freeze on investment in a \$12 billion Turkish power station by TAQA, the Abu Dhabi National Energy Company, and resentment of Turkish policy.<sup>19</sup>

In Iraq, the tension between the Turkish government and the central government in Baghdad is still an issue both governments have to reckon with. Indeed, this tension has become more pronounced since the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, partly because of Turkish accusations that Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is promoting a pro-Shiite sectarian policy and because of Iraqi charges that Turkey is supporting the Kurds in northern Iraq in a manner that encourages their separatist intentions. For his part, al-Maliki stated in June 2013 that the Gezi Park protests that broke out in Turkey were a result of Ankara's intervention in other

countries – i.e., implicit criticism of Turkish policy toward Syria and Iraq.<sup>20</sup> The fact that energy deals related to oil and gas are in advanced stages of negotiations between Turkey and the KRG without the approval of the central government in Baghdad<sup>21</sup> contributes to al-Maliki's increased fears of a Kurdish declaration of independence. The serious deterioration in the health of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who is of Kurdish origin and is considered a unifying force in Iraq, has also enhanced al-Maliki's concerns. The United States has for some time pressured Turkey to improve its relations with the Iraqi central government, and indeed in October-November 2013, there were mutual visits of the Iraqi and Turkish Foreign Ministers in an effort to turn a new page in the relations.

Since August 2013 there has also been an attempt to ease the tensions with Iran. The timing of the most recent attempt to reduce the tension is connected not only to the election of Hassan Rouhani as president of Iran,<sup>22</sup> but also to the rapid deterioration in Turkish-Egyptian relations and to the tension in Turkey's relations with other countries in the region. Turkey welcomed the signing of the interim agreement between Iran and P5+1 on the nuclear issue. In addition to reduced fears from the negative repercussions that a Israeli/US military strike may have had, Turkey also hopes that the easing of the sanctions on Iran will bring about an increase in the volume of bilateral trade.<sup>23</sup> Speaking about the possibility of direct negotiations between the United States and Iran, Turkish President Abdullah Gul stated that "if the nuclear dispute were to be resolved we should be the one who is happiest" because the two other options – a military strike against Iran or a nuclear Iran – are bad options from Turkey's point of view.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the two countries are hard pressed to overcome the significant dispute over the fate of the Assad regime. Thus after his trip to Iran for Rouhani's inauguration ceremony, Davutoglu stated he hopes for a change in Iran's position on Syria.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Gezi Park Events**

The demonstrations that began in Istanbul's Gezi Park over the intention to uproot the park's trees to reconstruct an Ottoman building and turn it into a shopping center, developed in May 2013 into a widespread protest against the government. Because of what was widely perceived as brutal

suppression of non-violent protest, the demonstrations in Istanbul expanded and spread to many other areas of the country. Large numbers of young people were caught up in the demonstrations, and for some of them, this was their first political experience.<sup>26</sup>

Some have asked whether the events in Gezi Park can be attributed to the disturbances that swept through the Middle East in recent years. Some claim that a comparison between the events in Turkey and Tahrir Square in Egypt is misplaced; while the Arab uprisings were against dictatorial regimes, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) was elected in 2011 by some 50 percent of those who voted in what were indisputably free elections. Some have attempted to compare the events in Turkey with the Occupy Wall Street movement, but here too the comparison is problematic, since the protests in Turkey did not stem from resentment over economic issues.<sup>27</sup> Others have compared the events to the anti-Putin demonstrations and emphasized that the Turkish uprising was a protest against Erdogan's authoritarian tendencies. However, in contrast to the situation in Russia, there is no disputing that Erdogan received broad support in the various elections in Turkey. Another comparison has been made between what occurred in Turkey and the widespread demonstrations in Brazil, but in that case too, resentment about economic issues was much more significant than in the case of the Turkish protests.

While it cannot be argued that the events in Gezi Park did not affect Erdogan's standing, it is still difficult to see whether, and from where, a political force will emerge that is strong enough to challenge his position. From time to time, the argument is made that only the Gulen movement, a civil society movement – also known as the Hizmet (service) movement – established by Fethullah Gulen, a religious preacher, can challenge Erdogan at this time.<sup>28</sup> It is evident, however, that this movement's main efforts are directed at pushing a slow process of reform and in working within the apparatus of the AKP, and not in founding a new party. There is also a latent rivalry between Erdogan and President Gul, who presents a more moderate line than Erdogan and seems to be more compatible with the direction of the Gulen movement.<sup>29</sup> It appears that Erdogan's intention to change the governmental system in Turkey to a presidential democracy<sup>30</sup> has been interrupted, but even before the Gezi Park riots, doubts arose as

to his ability to institute this reform. Erdogan can still run for president of Turkey in 2014 even without these reforms, but the question is whether he will be satisfied with the position, which is mainly ceremonial. If he chooses not to run for the presidency, the main obstacle that will stop him from participating in the parliamentary elections with the goal of serving a fourth term as prime minister is the AKP constitution. While there will be a certain amount of damage to his image if the party constitution is changed in order to allow him to run for prime minister, the damage will be limited and containable.

The protests in Gezi Park, and even more their suppression, cast a shadow over what has been called the “Turkish model.” This vague term, which is also used in different fashions, generally refers to the convergence between modernity, democracy, and Islam in Turkey. However, even prior to the protests there were doubts as to the relevance of this model beyond the borders of Turkey, for two reasons. One reason is that Erdogan’s authoritarian behavior began before the riots (and in fact was one of their causes). Two, Turkey’s unique situation – a result of the revolution carried out by Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the republic, as well as its institutional ties with the West over the years (a member of NATO and a country interested in joining the European Union) – has in any case limited other countries’ potential to emulate the Turkish model. Nevertheless, the Gezi Park events can be seen as an illustration of the growing strength of civil society in Turkey and the positive impact that some of the reforms passed by the AKP in its more than ten years of rule have had on achieving greater openness in Turkish society.<sup>31</sup> The weakening of political Islam in the Arab world – reflected, *inter alia*, in the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt and the weakening of Hamas – whether it turns out to be temporary or ongoing, also affects the AKP. However, over the years the AKP has actually emphasized the fact that it is not an Islamist party, and is closer to conservative democratic parties. Therefore, the erosion in the standing of political Islam will have more of an effect on Turkey’s foreign relations than on the domestic arena.

Istanbul’s loss of the competition to host the 2020 Olympics to Tokyo in September 2013 was presented by supporters and opponents of the AKP, justifiably or not, as related to the party’s performance (even though

Turkey competed five times previously for the right to host the Olympics, and it was never as close to being awarded the games as it was this time). Opponents of the AKP breathed a sigh of relief when it became clear that Turkey would not be hosting the Olympics. For Erdogan, this was a failure, as he wished to develop a number of grandiose projects prior to the centennial celebrations of the Turkish Republic in 2023 and to connect at least some of these projects to preparations for the Olympics. Supporters of the AKP have even blamed the Gezi Park demonstrators for Turkey's loss of the Olympics.<sup>32</sup>

In August 2013, during the Gezi Park protests, a verdict was handed down in the Ergenekon trial, in which various figures were charged with attempting to organize to overthrow the government headed by the Justice and Development Party. The verdicts symbolized the end of the process of the weakening of the military as an important political player in Turkey. Particularly notable in this regard was the fact that Ilker Basbug, who served as chief of staff of the Turkish army from 2008 to 2010, was sentenced to life in prison. The harsh sentences, along with doubts about whether the defendants received a fair trial, were seen by critics as evidence of a witch hunt in Turkey. However, many people agreed with Erdogan's criticism of the army's intervention in the Turkish political system over the years. Thus, for example, EU officials welcomed the fact that in July 2013, Article 35 of the armed forces law in Turkey was changed to emphasize that the role of the military is only to defend Turkey from external threats.

Another important development was the decision in late 2012 to renew the peace talks with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. One of the motivations behind the peace process with the Kurds was the hope of mobilizing representatives of the Kurdish parliament to vote in favor of constitutional reforms that would authorize the change in the system of government in Turkey to a presidential democracy. Since the hope for far reaching change in the system of government has in fact been shelved, there was concern whether the disappearance of this motive will be destructive to the process. Of course, there are deeper motivations for dealing with the Kurdish issue, and the argument that Erdogan's governments have been bolder than previous Turkish governments in their efforts to contend with this challenge is still valid. The very fact that direct contacts were

held with the PKK leader, as well as the open admission that the talks were underway, departed significantly from what had taken place in the past, and therefore broke a taboo. However, there has not been significant progress in the process. The withdrawal of PKK fighters from Turkey and their move to Iraq without their being disarmed and the organization's declaration in September 2013 that it was suspending the withdrawal of its fighters from Turkey gave rise to serious doubts about the chances for its success.<sup>33</sup> On September 30, Erdogan announced a series of reforms and, in an effort to breathe a bit of life into the peace process with the Kurds, also presented several reforms connected to the Kurdish minority. These included allowing private schools to teach Kurdish, restoring original Kurdish names to Kurdish villages, and proposing a number of possibilities regarding the high electoral threshold required in the Turkish parliamentary elections, which prevents the Kurdish parties from entering parliament. Another notable development in this respect occurred when Erdogan gave a speech in November 2013 in Diyarbakir alongside the president of the KRG, Masoud Barzani, and got his public support for the peace process within Turkey. In his speech, Erdogan for the first time publicly used the word "Kurdistan" while referring to Northern Iraq. To those who later criticized him for using this word, he replied, "A big state cannot be built with fear. Those who are afraid of words, of concepts, of taboos...cannot build a big state."<sup>34</sup>

## **Turkey-Israel Relations**

A dramatic development in relations took place on March 22, 2013, during the visit by US President Barack Obama to Israel, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologized in a phone call to Erdogan for the loss of life during the *Mavi Marmara* incident. The conversation took place after almost three years of direct and indirect contacts between the two countries about the event.<sup>35</sup> The Turks presented the apology as success for Turkish diplomacy and an achievement for Erdogan.<sup>36</sup> Israeli (and American) expectations that after the apology the other agreements on compensation and a return to normalization would be reached quickly have not materialized. Despite several rounds of talks that were deemed positive meetings by both parties,<sup>37</sup> and although it appeared that at least

outwardly the primary unresolved issue was the amount of compensation, in fact, the necessary agreements were not reached.<sup>38</sup> In July 2013, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc claimed that the main dispute between the two countries stemmed from Turkey's demand that Israel take responsibility for the events and under this rubric make payments to the families of the casualties, while Israel wishes to pay *ex gratia*.<sup>39</sup> It can be argued that on this issue it was apparently Turkey that retreated, at least partially, from previous understandings: in talks over the past few years, there was discussion of setting up a humanitarian fund to which Israel would transfer money and which would allocate the funds as it saw fit for the families of the casualties; the idea of such a fund is arguably closer to *ex gratia* payment.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, it has become clear that the families of the casualties are not prepared to drop their lawsuits against IDF soldiers, and that a treaty between Turkey and Israel, to be approved by the Turkish parliament, will apparently be necessary in order to overcome the problem of these lawsuits.

While Israeli opponents of an apology have from the outset claimed that there was no chance of improved relations between Israel and Turkey, the Gezi Park riots perhaps also aggravated the situation, as a thaw in relations with Israel is low on the list of priorities of the Erdogan government. Nevertheless, there has been a positive development in that for the first time since the *Mavi Marmara* incident, the most senior diplomat in Israel's embassy in Ankara was invited to a reception held by the Turkish President.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, a number of remarks by Turkish officials have caused concern in Israel: Erdogan's comment about the involvement of the "interest rate lobby" in the Gezi Park riots (which it was difficult not to interpret as an anti-Semitic remark); an explicit statement by Deputy Prime Minister Besir Atalay about the Jewish diaspora being behind the riots (which was later denied);<sup>42</sup> and a comment by Erdogan to the effect that Israel was behind the ouster of Mohamed Morsi in Egypt.<sup>43</sup> In addition, David Ignatius's claim in the *Washington Post* that Turkey blew the cover of Iranians spying on behalf of Israel and gave their names to the Iranian authorities,<sup>44</sup> allegedly in 2012, caused uproar both in Israel and in Turkey. While many in Turkey accused Israel of leaking the story, after a

denial by the Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson Erdogan stated that his government should trust Israel's statements on the matter.<sup>45</sup>

Some officials in Turkey believe there is a significant chance that in order to be able to export some of its natural gas, Israel will agree to cooperate with Turkish energy companies and build an underwater pipeline to Turkey. An official of the Turkish energy company Turcas has stated that if tension between Israel and Turkey resurfaces, his company would even bear all the costs of construction of the pipeline from the Leviathan gas field.<sup>46</sup> It is also evident that Turkey was prepared to move closer to Israel in the hope that this would encourage US military action in Syria. However, Israel's hesitation on the question of whether and where to export the gas, as well as the lack of American desire to intervene militarily in Syria, has not helped improve relations.

While in the past the restarting of diplomatic negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians might have mitigated the tension somewhat between Israel and Turkey, which at least on the declarative level has revolved mainly around this issue in recent years, there was no rapprochement evident when the talks were restarted under the auspices of the US administration in July 2013. Not only is Turkey far from influencing the political process (which in any case has little chance of success); its attempt to take advantage of its good relations with Hamas in order to advance reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas also failed, and in general Turkey today shows more interest in what occurs in Gaza than what occurs in the West Bank. Moreover, in spite of the importance of steps toward normalization between Israel and Turkey, Turkey will likely hesitate in the foreseeable future to cooperate openly with Israel. On the other hand, regarding tactical cooperation, such as exchange of information on jihadist terrorists in Syria, the apology has given the two countries room for flexibility.

## **Looking Ahead**

Although Russia and the United States have reached agreement on the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, Turkey will likely continue to call for Assad's ouster. While it will adhere to rhetoric that emphasizes morality, it will also at times show pragmatism, in light of the fact that the Turks do not want to act independently in Syria, nor are they able to do so.

While anti-Western feelings are nothing new in Turkey – Turkish officials frequently emphasize Western hypocrisy, in connection with events in Syria and Egypt, for example – there is concern that these feelings will spiral out of control and have a negative impact on Turkish decision making, even when it is relatively clear that Turkish interests match those of the West,<sup>47</sup> e.g., the weakening of the relationship between Syria and Iran. As for Egypt, it would appear that the clearer the picture regarding the stability of the el-Sisi government, the more willing the Turks will be to attempt to cooperate with it, even in a limited fashion. This is due to the traditional importance of Egypt in the Arab world and the fact that Turkey also has significant economic interests in the African continent in general and Egypt in particular.

Turkey's entry into an election year, both for local elections (March 2014) and for the first time, direct elections for the president (scheduled to be held in August 2014), does not bode well for its relations with Israel. Moreover, from Turkey's perspective, relations with Israel are not the highest priority. The US administration, which is working to promote a diplomatic process between Israel and the Palestinians, is also exerting less pressure on Turkey to make progress in its negotiations with Israel. If there are dramatic developments in the political process between Israel and the Palestinians, Turkey will probably somewhat soften its stance toward Israel. However, Turkey overall feels disconnected from the process, and taken with the mutual suspicions between the Turkish government and the government of Israel, a significant improvement in relations does not appear imminent. However, because of energy issues, Turkey has an interest in attempting to foster limited cooperation with Israel, even more so because its ability to be in direct conflict with Israel has been reduced due to the tension in its relations with many of its neighbors.

The assessment that the future holds many advantages for Turkey in the Middle East, in spite of the pitfalls along the way, reflects the influence of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in setting the path of Turkish foreign policy. This basic optimism is part of the general vision of pushing Turkey to center stage, both in the region and internationally. Much has been written on Turkey's failure to recognize the limitations of its power and on the losses it has already suffered and the consequent failures that can yet

be expected.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, since this is a long term perspective, there is difficulty in challenging this optimism – all the more so because it connects well with nostalgia for the imperial past, which speaks to the heart of some of the Turkish population.

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# **Russia in the Middle East: The Drive to Enhance Influence**

Zvi Magen

The evolving Middle East poses a complex set of challenges for all the local and international actors in the region. Russia, whose involvement in the area is both growing and gathering momentum, finds itself having to adjust political solutions to the emerging challenges in order to take advantage of the opportunities to shape a regional order that advances its foreign policy goals. The effects of Russian involvement in the Middle Eastern dynamic were quite prominent in 2013, mostly in the context of the Syrian civil war, and in particular in the efforts to formulate an international agreement to disarm the Bashar al-Assad regime of its chemical weapons. Following the renewed dialogue between Iran and the Western powers, which concluded with the signing of an interim agreement designed to delay Iran's progress toward the attainment of military nuclear capability – a development perceived by Russia as an Iranian rejection of Russia's overtures – Russia commenced efforts at rapprochement with Sunni countries in the Middle East, while exploiting their fears of an Iranian-American reconciliation.

For the foreseeable future, Russia can be expected to continue its efforts to expand its influence in the region. As in the case of the Syrian civil war, this activity will have significance for the regional and international balances of power.

## **Russia and the Middle East**

The stark changes that have recently occurred in Russia's international standing are the result of its efforts to regain its former superpower status,

i.e., to position itself as an important global player and to broaden its influence over the international agenda. It appears that after two decades of hesitation and fluctuation, Russia's national goals have been defined as the drive to rebuild its empire, while preserving its status as a separate civilization that seeks equal standing to the West, and above all to the United States. In order to achieve these goals while competing for influence on the Middle East and global agendas, Russia has developed a political strategy based on a concept of a multi-polar international system, in which it will act assertively to take advantage of the means of influence at its disposal. The Russian leadership regards this policy as a way to ensure Russia's future, given the challenges facing it in both the internal and external theaters, and Russia can take pride in that it has scored some accomplishments in the international theater in recent years, especially in the Middle East.

Russia attributes great geopolitical importance to the Middle East as a place where regional and global interests converge. Since the beginning of the "Arab Spring," the region has become a key focus of friction among the major powers, with escalating rivalry between Russia and the West. Intersecting international political, economic, and security processes in the Middle East can potentially threaten Russian strategic interests. Before the recent shockwaves in the region, Russia was able to consolidate its regional standing, in part by cooperating with the anti-Western radical axis, otherwise known as the "axis of evil." At the same time, however, Russia has taken measures to establish itself as a responsible international element seeking to promote solutions to regional crises and capable of conducting a dialogue with all the relevant parties. Russia has enjoyed positive relations with most countries in the region, particularly in North Africa, and has succeeded in advancing impressive arms deals (which vanished in the wake of the upheaval), and has managed to position itself as an influential international element positively involved in most of the regional crises.

Russia's primary strategic assets in the Middle East were lost or damaged following the sociopolitical changes in the region in recent years. From Russia's perspective, the accelerating process of Islamization underway in the Middle East threatens to spread to Russia itself; the Sunni Islamic axis is growing stronger with Western backing, and new regional players have appeared, Turkey among them, who are acting contrary to Russian

interests.<sup>1</sup> Iran, Syria, and the Shiite axis are Russia's last remaining strongholds in the Middle East.

Given this process, which threatens to push it out of the region, Russia has formulated political solutions designed to help it preserve its strongholds and reinforce its standing. Russia has taken measures toward rapprochement with countries in the region that have not been among its traditional supporters, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq. There are also signs that Russia is reassessing its relations with Turkey, and calls have been sounded to avoid a confrontation with Ankara, particularly given the possibility of a political agreement in Syria in the framework of Geneva II or in some other format, although it is premature to regard this as a definite trend. At the same time, Russia is taking steps to maintain its influence in Syria and vis-à-vis Iran.

### **Russia and the Civil War in Syria**

The Russian leadership is disturbed by the possibility that the fall of the Assad regime, followed by the disintegration of the anti-Western Shiite axis led by Iran, will create a contiguity of regimes under exclusive Western influence, without any Russian foothold at all between North Africa and China. Russia has therefore selected Syria as a key theater of conflict to challenge the West. Russia has a range of strategic assets in Syria, of which the port of Tartus is only one. Russia has an intelligence presence in Syria and defense systems against NATO. Syria continues to be a significant customer for Russian defense industries, and is also an essential link in the pro-Iranian axis, which constitutes an obstacle to US influence in the Middle East – and which Russia therefore is eager to support.

The method selected by Russia to manage the crisis combines direct aid to the Syrian regime with diplomacy. Russia, together with China, vetoed proposed Security Council resolutions condemning the Assad regime for the massacre of civilians. At the same time, Russia used the situation in Syria as a lever to pressure the West into changing its policy in other essential theaters where Western pressure has been exerted against Russian interests, in the form of activity in areas of the former Soviet Union, political subversion in Russia and the former Soviet Union, and deployment of military systems with strategic significance near Russia's

borders, as well as plans to station anti-missile missile systems in Eastern Europe.

Russia's method has proven itself, at least in prolonging the survival of the Assad regime and the radical axis in the Middle East. As a result of this policy, however, Russia has been trapped between the region's two rival camps – the Shiite camp and the Sunni camp. Each of these rival camps supports a different side in the global conflict: the Sunnis are aligned with the West, while the Shiites side with Russia and China. In order to improve its standing in this theater, and also in order to avoid Western military involvement, Russia has made strenuous efforts to reach understandings with all the actors involved – the rebels in Syria, the Sunni countries in the Middle East, and the West. As far as Moscow is concerned, the best solution to the crisis in Syria is one that establishes Russian influence in this country and maintains the regime there (not necessarily one personally led by Assad), and consequently the survival of the radical axis. It appears that the Russian effort to promote a settlement has yielded the desired results, at least to some extent.

In early May 2013 the US and Russia agreed on convening an international conference, which became known as Geneva II, for the purpose of bringing together representatives of the Syrian regime with forces from the opposition, and promoting a compromise on the formation of a temporary government, with elections in the following stage. From a Russian perspective, this meeting is designed to prepare the ground for an end to the civil war on terms that would protect its interests in Syria. The conference did not take place, in part due to a dispute between Moscow and Washington about who would participate: in contrast to the US, Russia wants Assad to participate (although it regards the possibility of replacing him at a later stage through elections as acceptable), along with the other parties that are influencing the crisis in Syria, including Iran.

At the same time, the crisis that ensued following the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons made it possible for Russian diplomacy to affect the situation in Syria. In order to avoid an American punitive attack in Syria, Russia proposed a plan to dismantle Damascus's stockpile of chemical weapons. The major powers signed the agreement in September 2013, with Russia scoring a significant achievement, both in the context

of the crisis in Syria and with respect to its standing in the Middle East, relative to that of the US. Not only was an American attack avoided, but the Assad regime obtained something of an insurance policy against Western intervention, at least until the chemical weapons disarmament program is concluded. At a later stage, Russia will try to leave its mark on the Geneva II conference, where the parties in Syria will try to formulate an agreement ending the bloodbath in the country.

These achievements, however, do not guarantee Russia's standing in the Middle East. Russia must continue to face three main points of confrontation between the major powers, and the crisis in Syria is only one of them. The other two are the crisis concerning the Iranian nuclear program and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

## **Russia and Iran**

Iran is Russia's main ally in the Middle East. Despite the tensions that have emerged between the two countries in recent years as a result of Russian participation in the imposition of sanctions on Iran and Russia's failure to supply the promised weaponry to Iran (S-300 missiles), the crisis in Syria has created the conditions for tighter cooperation between them. Russia has become an essential partner of the pro-Iranian camp in the Middle East, particularly through its intervention in the Syrian crisis.

Russia regarded the election of Hassan Rouhani as president of Iran as an opportunity to take the lead in international dialogue with Iran on the nuclear question. Russia calculated that Iran would have to make concessions to the West on this issue, due to the severe economic consequences of the sanctions. In order to safeguard Moscow's influence on the process, Russian President Vladimir Putin planned to visit Iran immediately after Rouhani entered office. This visit, however, did not take place, and the regime in Iran chose to invest its diplomatic efforts in a dialogue with the West, highlighted by Rouhani's "charm offensive" in the United States in September 2013, including his address at the UN General Assembly. It appears that Russia missed its chance to lead the first round of dialogue with the new Iranian regime, although as a member of the P5+1 it can influence the continuation of the process over the coming months,

in the comprehensive agreement on Iran's nuclear program that has yet to be formulated.

Now that Iran and the major powers signed an agreement aimed at delaying Iran's nuclear program and renewing negotiations toward the formulation of a final agreement within six months, Russia is in an inferior position. The dialogue between Tehran and the US administration also appears to jeopardize the anti-Western radical axis backed by Russia. This turnaround in Iranian policy, however, has aroused anxiety among some of the regional players, and their frustration is reflected in their tentative overtures toward Russia. Senior Russian administration officials visited Cairo and drafted a large scale weapons transaction. Saudi Arabia, until recently also one of Russia's adversaries, has commenced serious negotiations with Moscow. Saudi Intelligence director general Prince Bandar bin Sultan visited Moscow and discussed a possible agreement on a weapons transaction. It was likewise reported that the Iraq and Jordan were making an effort to tighten commercial ties with Russia. Jordan was also considering the possibility of purchasing a Russian nuclear reactor.<sup>2</sup>

Following the attempts at a renewed rapprochement between Moscow and Tehran, Putin addressed the Israeli nuclear question by saying that Syria's chemical weapons were intended as an answer to the Israeli nuclear program, and that Israel would have to give up its nuclear weapons, as Syria had conceded its chemical weapons.<sup>3</sup> A similar interpretation can be made of a report that the Kremlin has decided to renew the sale of S-300 missiles to Iran.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, there are still no signs that Russia plans to translate Putin's statements into real pressure on Israel. In fact, the opposite is true.

## **Russia and Israel**

Russia regards Israel as a regional power with the ability to influence most developments in the Middle East. Over the years, the Russians have therefore consistently acted to promote cooperation with Israel in a broad range of areas and to define a sphere of common interests. The fact that Israel is a strategic partner of the US was always clear to Russia, but given Moscow's "multi-directional" foreign policy, it was commonly assumed

in Moscow that Israel could, for its part, adopt a similar attitude in its selection of partners.

Indeed, in tandem with its close relations with other Middle East actors, including the members of the Shiite axis, Russia, together with the US, the European Union, and the UN, has played a role in the Quartet forum to promote the political process in the Middle East. Russia is a partner to the effort to promote the process in the belief that its role will yield important achievements in the international sphere. For that reason, a renewal of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue under US auspices, while excluding Russia from the process, was perceived by Moscow as underhanded behavior.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the US taking the lead in dialogue with Iran, this development was also the background for Putin's demand at the September 19 Valdai Forum, the reputed international conference in Russia, that Israel concede its nuclear capability. This is not a completely new position: Russia has consistently opposed Israel at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), but on this occasion Putin expressed it quite bluntly. This may indicate Russia's willingness to damage somewhat its positive relations with Israel that have developed over two decades, and to forego its image as a balanced mediator, in favor of upgrading its standing with Iran on the one hand, and obtaining an advantage over the US in the competition between them on the other.

At the same time, Russia is evidently making efforts to tighten relations with other countries in the Middle East, including Israel. In November 2013, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Moscow for the second time (the first was in May 2013). The main topic on the Netanyahu and Putin agenda was the Iranian nuclear program. Possibilities of extending political and economic cooperation were likewise discussed. As far as is known, the leaders also dealt with the issue of Israel's nuclear capability and bilateral strategic cooperation. Putin promised that he would attempt to table plans for a conference on a weapons of mass destruction free zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East, and as such would not raise objections to nonconventional weapons in Israel. Moreover, Putin declared that alongside support for the Iranian position in a final agreement on Iran's nuclear activity, he would demand that Israel's security interests be guaranteed.

This far reaching declaration has major significance for Russia's relations both with Iran and with the West.<sup>6</sup>

## **Global Significance**

Bilateral relations between Russia and the US have recently grown colder, given the Middle East and global crises. Russia's image as a country that behaves according to different norms than those accepted in Western democracies and conducts an impetuous foreign policy has taken root in the West and the US. As a result of an increase in Russia's challenging activity in the international theater, it is once again posing a concrete challenge to the West. On the other hand, Russia also harbors complaints against the West, relating to the NATO presence along Russia's border and in the Russian sphere of interest in the former Soviet Union – "NATO's eastern expansion"; the dispute over the US plan to deploy an anti-ballistic missile system in the Czech Republic and Poland and renewal of the talks on a strategic arms limitation treaty;<sup>7</sup> Russia's perception that American deployment in Asia and the Pacific Ocean is aimed against it; and the accusation of Western subversive activity in the countries of the former Soviet Union (the color revolutions) and in Russia proper (protest activity).

At the same time, Russia is increasingly coming to believe that the US is losing its standing as the international leader, especially in the Middle East. This perception, based on the assessment of President Obama as weak, among other issues, is regarded in Moscow as a window of opportunity to promote Russian goals in the international system at US expense (the political asylum that Russia granted to Edward Snowden, who leaked US National Security Council documents, was a provocative act in this vein). Moscow also took vigorous action to thwart Western initiatives aimed at coopting countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union into European economic frameworks. This resulted in mass confrontations in Ukraine between the public, which wanted closer economic relations with the West, and the government, which elected to maintain its connection with Russia.

Still, Russia lacks the necessary tools – both economic and military – to make it a superpower. However assertive its policy, and however intelligent its diplomacy, these are no substitutes for what it lacks. For

this reason, it cannot be ruled out that the current crisis between the major powers is temporary. Relations could recover, because Russia, like the US, has no real interest in escalation and a total break.

## Conclusion

Russia has an achievement to its credit in the solution of the chemical weapons crisis in Syria. It appears that Russia's image in the Middle East improved following the role it played in searching for a non-military solution to the crisis, given the perceived weakness of the US. In the overall regional Middle Eastern picture, however, Russia's position is still inferior to that of the West. It is therefore difficult to state definitively whether Russia will succeed in completely halting the developments and shocks created in the Middle East by the "Arab Spring," which appear to have significant negative potential for Russia. As of now, Russia has persisted in its support for the radical camp in the expectation that an agreement achieved in the framework of the Geneva II conference – if it takes place – will fortify Russia's stronghold in Syria, and thereby its standing as a key influential factor elsewhere in the Middle East. There is no doubt that Russia's policy with respect to other developments in the Middle East will be significant for Israel's regional interests in general, and its relations with Russia in particular.

## Notes

- 1 Turkey is promoting its economic, cultural, religious, and pan-Turkish influence among the mostly Turkish-speaking new Muslim countries in the former Soviet Union. With cooperation from NATO, it has also succeeded in establishing its standing in two key Caucasian countries – Georgia and Azerbaijan – thereby creating what Russia regards as a threat to its national security, and of course in Syria, where Turkey is playing an active role against the regime.
- 2 Radio Golos Rossii, October 23, 2013.
- 3 Asaf Ronel, "In the Poker Game with Obama on Syria, Putin Playing the Israel Card," *Haaretz*, September 20, 2013.
- 4 "Russian Source: Russia Confirms Sale of Advanced Anti-Aircraft Missiles to Iran," AP, *Haaretz*, September 11, 2013.
- 5 Zvi Magen, "Israel and Russian Foreign Policy," *INSS Insight* No. 132, September 22, 2013.

Zvi Magen

- 6 Eli Bardenstein, "Putin Promised Netanyahu: I Will Prevent WMDFZ Conference," *Maariv*, December 20, 2013.
- 7 Emily B. Landau, "Red Light, Green Light: Establishing US Levers of Pressure on Iran," *INSS Insight* No. 119, July 13, 2009.

# United States Involvement in the Middle East: Image vs. Reality

Oded Eran

The gap between the image of the United States as perceived by its traditional allies in the Middle East versus the actual US presence and activity in the region widened over the past year. Indeed, the image of a major power in the process of disengaging from the region is in contrast to the concrete US activity in the Middle East of 2013, especially diplomatic activity. Yet perhaps because of this very image – among other reasons – the US in late 2013 is confronted by a lack of trust from all its important and traditional allies in the region.

The image itself is not entirely groundless. As a result of the tremendous toll in human lives and the enormous financial costs of the military campaigns waged by the US in Afghanistan and Iraq, with no political return or positive results, the US is now reluctant to use military force in circumstances that formerly would have drawn an early and decisive military response. The tenuous and risk-laden results of a military option in both Syria and Iran further detract from the willingness to resort to this option, and the consequent search for political solutions has helped create an image of a major power with military capability that is reluctant to use it. In addition, American political options regarding the key issues of concern to the regional actors and the international community are few. Regarding the “Arab Spring,” the Iranian nuclear program, and the political process between Israel and the Palestinians, the US is perceived as indecisive and inconsistent. The prediction that American dependence on external energy sources will end by 2020 also reinforces the idea that the US is distancing

itself from the Middle East. Local actors assume that for the foreseeable future, the US will focus on maintaining its positions in the Pacific region, and on an effort to limit Chinese advances in the region.

This image, however, does not necessarily reflect the varied aspects of the American presence in the region or correspond to the intensity of American political activism on regional issues, where it remains a key international player.

## **The “Arab Spring” Upheavals**

The outbreak of the civil uprisings throughout the Arab world has generated critical tension between America’s basic values, especially regarding democracy, and interests that have guided American policy over decades of activity in the Middle East. Events in all the main theaters of the civil uprisings have required the US to fashion a response that takes each of these poles into account.

Already at the outset of the civil uprising in Egypt in January 2011, American policy was criticized, particularly by conservative monarchical regimes in the Arab world, for ostensibly assisting the rapid overthrow of Mubarak and thereby facilitating the subsequent rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the eyes of the Gulf rulers, US acceptance of Mubarak’s ouster constituted the abandonment of an ally, and sparked the concern that in similar circumstances, they would not be able to rely on the US to maintain their regimes. It is doubtful whether the erstwhile trust these rulers had in the US as reliable support in a time of crisis, be it a result of internal instability or external danger, can be restored.

The brief rule of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Morsi presidency (from June 30, 2012 until July 3, 2013) featured formally proper relations between Cairo and Washington. Perhaps for this reason the US administration responded sharply to the military coup that ended the Muslim Brotherhood’s tenure. The administration escalated its response in early October 2013 by delaying the transfer of \$260 million and arms shipments to Egypt that had previously been approved (F-16 warplanes and spare parts for M1A1 tanks).

At the same time, the administration refrained from defining the overthrow of President Morsi as a military coup – a definition whose

practical consequences would have been a total suspension of aid. The administration will now have to wait and weigh its policy in accordance with the process in Egypt designed to institute constitutional changes, scheduled for approval by referendum in January 2014; the administration will then await the results of the parliamentary and presidential elections. Any delay in the timetable will only add to the palpable tension between Washington and Cairo. With the American dilemma between values and interests in the background, at this stage the administration has limited its reaction to public criticism of the use of force by the Egyptian security forces toward those demonstrating against the regime and its restrictions on freedom of assembly. The most difficult test, however, will come if the constitutional approval process and parliamentary and presidential elections are delayed, or if there is evidence of significant tampering with the results. One result of this tension is the rapprochement between Russia and Egypt, and the willingness of the two parties to discuss weapons transactions. Note that from the military and financial standpoints, the acquisition of Russian arms by the Egyptian army is not feasible. The fact that Egypt is willing to publicly flaunt such a possibility, however, is a strong indication of the state of Egypt's relations with the US.

Neither Israel nor the Gulf states have concealed their satisfaction at the July 2013 coup in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood regime was careful to avoid causing deterioration in Israel-Egypt relations, primarily because it realized that if these relations worsened, it could harm its chances of receiving American financial and military aid. At the same time, it is clear that Israel would prefer the ability to conduct a dialogue, even a sporadic one, with the military leadership in Cairo – which was not possible during the year that the Muslim Brotherhood was in power.

Since the Soviet presence in Egypt ended in 1972, and later following the 1979 peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, a delicate but stable triangle has existed between Cairo, Washington, and Jerusalem. The ability to communicate in the framework of this triangle prevented escalation in the wake of tense developments between Israel and its neighbors, especially in the Palestinian arena and in Lebanon. For this reason, Israel will likely continue to use its influence behind the scenes in Washington to temper the American response to any delays in the democratization process in Egypt.

From Israel's perspective, a regime that relies on the military's supremacy in the Egyptian political system is preferable to a regime of political parties, in which Islam would play a leading role.

During 2013, the events in Syria posed problems that were no less complex for the US administration, and this will presumably continue for the foreseeable future. The use of chemical weapons against a civilian population by the Damascus regime presented President Obama with a troublesome dilemma. Many in the US and elsewhere called on him to use force to stop the slaughter, which had already cost the lives of some 100,000 people before the chemical weapons were used. President Obama explored every possible way of avoiding the military option for the sake of at least limiting the use of chemical weapons. The failure of the opposition to the Assad regime to organize under a moderate (i.e., not extreme Islamic) leadership and the Assad regime's success to prevent further occupation of more Syrian territory by the various opposition groups made the US and other countries less eager to use military force. Such military intervention might have caused the regime's collapse, but would also have aggravated the chaos in Syria and greatly increased the number of victims caused by the fighting – without any viable alternative government. As with the overthrow of President Mubarak, Saudi Arabia expressed dissatisfaction with American behavior regarding Syria, yet the US hesitation to use military force is understandable.

While the American administration found a political solution to the urgent issue of Syria's use of chemical weapons – which was negotiated in coordination with Russia – regional problems created by the prolonged civil war in Syria will continue to engage the attention of the US and other international and regional parties, with no clear solution at hand. The presence of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries (especially Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey), the entrenchment of extremist Islamic organizations that have penetrated Syria in recent years, and the possibility that the conflict will spread beyond Syria's borders are the most significant of these regional problems

As of late 2013, it appears that other countries in the Arab world, especially in the Gulf states, have succeeded in containing the waves of popular protest within their borders. If the civilian protest resumes, the US

will be unable to ignore the effect on regional stability and the ramifications for its ability to protect its interests and those of its allies, particularly in matters pertaining to the security of energy sources. Even if the United States attains energy independence, energy prices are still significantly affected by the amount of oil flowing from the Gulf region to the global economy, as well as by major events therein. A rise in oil prices caused by regional tension would affect the US economy, even if the US itself is not directly involved in events in the Persian Gulf.

### **The Iranian Nuclear Issue**

Most of the criticism directed against Washington, particularly by official sources in Saudi Arabia, concerns US policy on Iran. The escalating Sunni-Shiite conflict in the region, along with the belief among Persian Gulf states that the Iranian regime poses a real threat to the Sunni monarchial regimes, has intensified the anxiety in the Gulf. The readiness of the US to conduct negotiations on both the chemical weapons in Syria and the Iranian nuclear program is perceived as weakness and an early warning that these regimes cannot rely on help from the US if confronted by domestic trouble or external danger.

The Israeli view of US policy differs from that of the Persian Gulf monarchies, and is clearly unrelated to anxiety about the survival of the regime. It involves the fear that failure to stop Iran will mean increased nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and create an existential threat to Israel. The fact that both Israel and Saudi Arabia view with alarm the progress of the Iranian nuclear project and what is perceived as American developing weakness, has given rise to many far reaching interpretations concerning relations between them. In fact, Israel and Saudi Arabia, along with the Saudis' junior allies in the region, will likely continue their respective dialogues with the US on the Iranian issue. Even though Saudi Arabia has no viable alternative to its reliance on the US for all its security problems, and the US can continue the present course of political activity in the region for the foreseeable future, it appears that the US does listen to the criticism coming from the region, and tries to calibrate its military presence there accordingly, in the belief that this will also prove useful in its negotiations with Iran.

The Iranian file will continue to capture center stage in Israel-US relations in 2014, and the dispute between Jerusalem and Washington will intensify if the negotiations with Iran are prolonged, and if the emerging solution deviates from Israeli positions on the problem (and if a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict proves elusive). The efforts by Israel and the US to moderate their rhetoric on the issue have not succeeded in concealing the personal differences of opinion between the US President and the Israeli Prime Minister, and they stand to re-emerge in full force over the coming year. An agreement acceptable to both Iran and Israel is very unlikely, and thus what will be perceived in Israel as the eagerness of the US to reach an agreement with Iran will almost inevitably lead to friction with Israel. To the consideration of the Iranian issue in the context of Israel-US relations, one must add the overall relations between the US administration and Congress, the Congressional election campaign in late 2014, events in the Arab world, and the political process between Israel and the Palestinians.

A state of ongoing negotiations with Iran, even with no realistic prospects of an agreement, will influence the dialogue between Washington and Jerusalem. If Iran does not deviate from the agreed activity allowed by the interim agreement signed with it in November 2013, Israel may become accustomed to this situation. Even if the interim agreement does not explicitly provide for this, the situation is liable to continue until the end of President Obama's term, with the negotiations alternatively stopping and resuming while Iran does not significantly deviate from the restrictions it accepted. Israel could find itself in a situation in which it must accept the state of affairs forced on it, to a large extent due to the international community's acquiescence to a situation of non-agreement, since it prefers a freeze of Iranian activity at the current level to the use of stronger measures against Iran. Where Israel-US relations are concerned, this means an open wound that complicates constructive relations.

### **The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

The US effort to broker a political settlement between Israel and the Palestinians will continue in 2014. As the situation appeared in late 2013, the parties are far from the goal established together with the American

administration for the negotiations, namely a comprehensive permanent agreement. It is doubtful whether the American attempt to generate progress through a solution to the issue of security in order to enable agreement on borders will succeed. In the first half of 2014, the administration will have to choose between the following alternatives in its further handling of the Israel-Palestinian issue: abandonment of the process; pursuit of a US proposal for a comprehensive solution; endorsement of a US proposal for a comprehensive solution by the UN Security Council; and an attempt to move the two sides to a discussion of partial solutions, leading to a comprehensive solution according to an agreed timetable.

In the absence of any desire or ability to impose a solution on the two sides, the US does not have much room to maneuver. It can try to manage the conflict, as opposed to attempt to solve it, in order to prevent a violent outbreak, through improvement to the standard of living in the territories, including in the Gaza Strip (through boosting employment, improving the supply of water and electricity, and allowing more freedom of movement) and restraints on Israeli construction in the territories, at least east of the security barrier. Special agreements, such as the proposed water agreement signed in early December 2013 between Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority, are likely to reduce the possibility of violence and advance a comprehensive solution, if the internal political circumstances on the Israeli and Palestinian sides permit this.

The fact that President Obama has put Secretary of State John Kerry in charge of dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while reducing his own involvement, will help minimize but will not completely prevent friction between Israel and the US on this issue if none of the American alternatives for action produce results. The US will face a demand from its partners in the Quartet, especially the European Union, to adopt measures, even if symbolic, to express dissatisfaction with what is described as Israel's recalcitrance or foot-dragging on the way to a solution to the conflict.

In the absence of a partial or complete political solution, both Israel and the US will be confronted with a renewal of Palestinian activity aimed at the accession of Palestine as a full member in the UN and its various institutions. While Israel will continue to oppose such a measure, the assumption that in the absence of progress in the political process or

without a series of unilateral Israeli measures indicating an intention to advance toward separation from the Palestinians the US can be expected to veto a Security Council resolution to accept Palestine as a UN member will be put to the test. Israel is less able to influence the administration's considerations on this issue through Congress than the Iranian issue. Israel therefore must consider whether to use its lever of influence in Congress to exert pressure on the administration to veto the admission of Palestine as a UN member state.

## **Conclusion**

The metaphor of a straw man used by statesmen and analysts to depict the United States in the region does not correspond to the level of American activity on various issues in the Middle East. Although the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the 2008-2011 recession have had an attenuating effect, they were not the sole reasons for American reluctance to use military force in the various crises in the region. Even precise and casualty-free American military action in Syria would only have limited the extent of the killing and destruction, while not promoting a full political solution to the crisis. Military action in Iran, whether by the US and/or another party, would set back the Iranian nuclear program, but it cannot eliminate the ability and will of a determined Iranian regime that is ready to pay the price of success in attaining nuclear military capability.

In the fairly recent past, it was possible to use military power in various conflicts, isolate the consequences, and limit the resulting political, economic, and military shockwaves. Even today, the use of military force in Africa, for example, does not necessarily have much impact beyond the limited area in which force is used. In Syria and Iran, however, many contend that it will be necessary to use a force far in excess of the few hundred soldiers deployed by France in Mali. The number of regional and international players that will be involved in any military action and its results will greatly outnumber those involved in military action in Africa, and will dictate more complex considerations. Nonetheless, the possibility of use of military force by the US cannot be ruled out. It is possible to argue that Russia's last minute intervention before the American threat to use its military in response to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons

proves the effectiveness of military deterrence. Either complete failure of the talks in Iran or serious miscalculations by the Iranian regime may prompt an American military response, even if not of the dimensions expected by several countries in the region. Such an American response would rebuild the American image in the Middle East that has deteriorated in recent years.

In the coming years, the US will continue to face more active competitors from outside the region, mainly China and Russia. It is likely that the decision taken by Beijing to expand and intensify its activity in China's periphery has been extended to the Middle East, with China searching for a potential field for political activity, in addition to its ramified economic activity. China's negotiations with Turkey on the supply of an air defense system indicate an effort to undermine the near-monopoly of the US in the supply of armaments to countries in the region. Russia, which is negotiating arms deals with a number of countries in the region, is also liable to utilize its success in 2013 to reassume a role as a significant player in the Middle East. For both China and Russia, only partial and limited successes are possible, and there is insufficient evidence for sweeping and erroneous conclusions about an end to the American era in the Middle East. These successes do indicate, however, changes in the decades-long perception of their ally by the region's traditional friends of the US.

In 2014, the US will have to take a series of difficult decisions about its relations with Egypt, its confrontation with the Iranian nuclear issue, and the continuation of its effort to achieve a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Each of these three issues can potentially generate friction between Israel and the US, and in the absence of progress, even partial, in the political process with the Palestinians and the negotiations with Iran, the potential friction will almost certainly materialize into actual friction. The resulting damage can be minimized through dialogue at the most senior level, but it cannot be completely avoided.



## Part II

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# Israel's Current Strategic Security Challenges

Udi Dekel, Shlomo Brom, and Yoram Schweitzer

Israel's strategic balance comprises both significant positive elements and developing new threats that signal difficult challenges ahead. Regional trends of recent years indicate a weakening of the state actor, and consequently, a decline in the traditional military threat. On the other hand, a hybrid, asymmetric, and multi-faceted threat from extremist Islamic jihadi elements has emerged. Riding a wave of change and the dissolution of social and political structures – even though this wave was initiated and at the beginning led by young liberals – and a rise in the influence of Islamic movements, the radical Islamist groups have declared war against the old order and stability in the Middle East. They have bolstered their influence using their ability to subvert governance processes and upset daily life in the region, even though they lack the ability to construct new functional frameworks that can satisfy public needs.

This article presents a balance of Israel's strategic security situation, and suggests that the current balance is generally positive. It maps the security challenges and considers how Israel can best deal with the challenges before it, while arresting negative trends and taking advantage of opportunities to stabilize and enhance the positive aspects of the balance. The analysis features a multidisciplinary approach, examining the interface between the various challenges through an integrated look at political, diplomatic, social, economic, humanitarian, military, legal, and media-related dimensions.

## **A Current Positive Balance**

The positive aspects on Israel's security balance sheet are headed by the weakened conventional threat on the northern and northeastern fronts, following the attrition of the Syrian military due to the protracted civil war, and Israel's maintenance of a credible deterrent against Hizbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. These join the disappearance of the threat from the Iraqi army in the preceding decade. The international determination to dismantle the Assad regime's chemical arsenal has created an opportunity to deprive the Syrian army of its primary nonconventional capabilities. The economic crisis in Iran caused by the sanctions has had a negative impact on the Iran-led radical axis in the Middle East – leading to the interim agreement reached in Geneva in November 2013 between Tehran and the P5+1 – with implications too early to determine. Hizbollah's standing in Lebanon has been undermined given its support of the Assad regime and its active involvement in the Syrian civil war. For its part, Hamas, weakened in the wake of the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt, has also distanced itself from the radical camp through its refusal to support the Assad regime. However, the radical axis continues to struggle to preserve the main elements of its power and influence in the region.

Against the background of the tumult in the Middle East, Israel has managed to keep its distance from the focal points of the regional events and conflicts, positioning itself as an island of stability at a time when many of the regional actors are faced with threatening internal and external challenges. At the same time, Israel has maintained its effective deterrent in the area, in part by initiating, without fanfare, judicious and measured low signature operational actions against the transfer of strategic weapons – air defense weapons and long range precision missiles and rockets – from Syria to Lebanon and from Sudan to Hamas and jihadi groups in the Gaza Strip.

The renewed takeover of the political system by the Egyptian military and the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from power have halted – at least for now – the strengthening of political Islam in Egypt and, from a broader perspective, in the entire Middle East. Here too the potential inherent risks for Israel have been curbed. For its part, Israel was careful

to maintain its special relations with the Egyptian military even during the one-year rule by the Muslim Brotherhood, and it continues to help boost the military's effectiveness in dealing with the smuggling of weapons to the Gaza Strip through Sinai and in combating jihad terrorist infrastructure in Sinai.

In the third year of its bloody civil war, Syria continues to implode, despite some improvement in the ability of the regime to combat the rebels. In effect, control is divided between the Assad forces and the many uncoordinated opposition groups. The crisis in Syria has created an acute humanitarian problem for Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, following the flood of refugees into these states. The influx of this Syrian refugee population brings with it a particular risk for escalation in Lebanon, where there is real potential for the upset of internal stability.

In Jordan, governmental stability has been maintained and the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood has been checked. Jordan has managed to contain, albeit with increasing difficulty, the socioeconomic challenges created by the wave of refugees from Syria, but its stamina will be limited without external aid. The peaceful relations between Jordan and Israel have been preserved. The civil war in Syria and its threatening regional consequences, combined with the prevalent feeling in Jordan that the US will not stand by it in times of crisis (in view of the precedents in Egypt and Syria – the American failure to use force, and the embrace of an agreement on chemical weapons that harms the secular opposition – and the agreement reached with Iran) have underscored to both Jordan and Israel how essential their bilateral ties are.

Another ray of light, at least for the moment, is the renewal of the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, following more than four years of impasse. The negotiations, if they do not end in a crisis blamed on Israel, can enhance Israel's international and regional standing, at least in the sense of easing pressures and preparing the ground for future cooperation with moderate Arab countries – even if it takes place through covert channels. In particular, it points to an opportunity that, if properly exploited, will help promote a substantial change in relations between Israel and the Palestinians, even if a permanent agreement is not achieved.

Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, is in deep trouble, following a series of strategic gambits that proved mistaken. These include distancing itself from the radical axis; siding with the Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt, a natural choice given Hamas's close affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood camp; and its rejection of reconciliation and unity in the Palestinian ranks. The fall of the Muslim Brotherhood regime deprived Hamas of support and political backing, while the economic and political stagnation in the Gaza Strip has cost it domestic support. Due to the organization's political weakness and helplessness in the regional theater, especially in view of the renewed dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Hamas will find it difficult to recover its standing in the regional and national arenas. In the event of renewed Fatah-led reconciliation efforts in the Palestinian arena, Hamas will find itself in a position of relative inferiority.

### **Alarming Signs for the Future**

*The Iranian nuclear program:* The preliminary agreement signed by the P5+1 and Iran outlines a path toward a permanent settlement with Iran under the assumption, underscored by US President Barack Obama, that only a diplomatic and economic agreement can persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program. The preliminary agreement does not eliminate the capabilities in uranium enrichment and weapon systems that Iran has already attained; at best, it freezes the current situation and slightly rolls back existing capabilities. At the same time, the Iranians have long since realized that the world measures the progress of its nuclear program according to breakout time, i.e., the length of time required to obtain enough enriched uranium for a nuclear bomb. They have therefore decided to deny international agencies the ability to point to a smoking gun by building their capabilities "laterally," meaning that they deepen and expand the nuclear program's infrastructure and redundancy mainly by raising the number and quality of centrifuges, increasing the number and defense of sites connected to the project, and developing a parallel plutonium track at the Arak reactor. Iran succeeded thereby in shortening the time it needs to break out to a bomb to a few months. The preliminary agreement allows Iran to retain these capabilities and to position itself as

a nuclear threshold state. Iran has chosen, at least for now, the path of rapprochement in order to achieve a substantive easing of the economic sanctions and calm internal protests. The path to a permanent agreement that will remove the Iranian nuclear threat for the foreseeable future and meet Israel's security interest is long and rocky, and it is far from certain that such an agreement can be achieved.

*The rise of non-state actors:* Non-state actors have assumed greater prominence in the region in tandem with the weakening of the state actors. These non-state elements are becoming stronger militarily, which enables them to inflict security and political harm. Their diverse capabilities to disrupt political processes, upset civilian daily routines, and damage infrastructures have earned them the title of spoilers. Countries where the central government has become weak are hard pressed to contain the activity of aggressive and extremist non-state actors.

The dangers arising from developments in Syria are particularly acute. The ongoing civil war there threatens to make Syria a regional model of a failed and dysfunctional state of the Afghanistan/Somalia type, with the prospect of disintegration and loss of national identity; an additional danger is a spillover of the conflict to Lebanon. Syria has become a base of activity for global jihad activity against the Assad regime and its supporters, particularly Hizbollah and Iranian Republican Guards, which are fighting alongside the regime. The primary jihadi groups active in this theater are Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), aided by various Salafi jihadi groups attacking Hizbollah and Iranian targets on Lebanese soil. Moreover, the spread of the events to Syria's neighbors is threatening to cause parallel disintegration processes, the creation of sectarian enclaves, border changes, and new alliances. A further threat is from the fierce fighting in Sinai between global jihad groups, led by Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdas, and Egyptian government and security forces. These jihadi elements are active against government targets in Egypt itself, and they may receive further support from Muslim Brotherhood supporters frustrated by the toppling of the Morsi government.

Global jihad groups operating in Syria and Lebanon were so far generally not active against Israel (except for isolated rocket fire in August 2013), but several attacks against Israel were launched from Sinai, including rocket

fire aimed at Eilat. Overall, the control by non-state forces, particularly global jihad elements, of areas along Israel's borders where there is no effective state control creates a growing security challenge for Israel and threatens to disrupt daily life – not only in the border areas, but also deeper within the country – and to drag Israel into cross-border conflicts. In particularly serious scenarios, Israel could be forced to conduct operations to remove the threat in populated areas beyond its borders, while being constrained by its responsibility for the local population and the need to limit any collateral damage to a minimum. One possible consequence is damage to relations with Arab governments, including those that have signed peace treaties with Israel. Furthermore, it is difficult when fighting against non-state forces to locate the enemy's strategic centers, achieve a clear and decisive victory that ends the conflict, and introduce stabilization mechanisms to ensure prolonged quiet.

*Relations with the Palestinians:* In tandem with the negotiations with the Palestinians to reach an agreement, it is necessary to prepare for a crisis should it emerge that the gaps between the parties are too wide to be bridged, which leads to a halt in the political process that in turn may lead to renewed conflict in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. An accompanying danger is a decline in the ability of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to enforce law and order, manage its economy, and govern effectively. Political irrelevance and a loss of governance on the part of the PA will leave Israel with no partner for a political process, and without a partner for security coordination and economic cooperation in the Palestinian arena – on top of the defense and economic burdens that are liable to ensue.

*Ostensible United States weakness:* Israel's deterrence – both its range and effect – is liable to be affected by the prevailing perception of US weakness in the Middle East. As a result of its years of exhausting campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US has become averse to military intervention, preferring to “lead from behind.” President Obama's policy is to avoid using force whenever possible, as reflected in the administration's policy vis-à-vis Iran and the chemical weapons incident in Syria. These cases reinforce the regional belief that when push comes to shove, the US will not stand by its allies in the area as readily as in the past, and that as with Syria, the American military option against Iran lacks credibility.

*Delegitimization:* Another source of concern for Israel is the delegitimization efforts leveled against it in international and regional forums, particularly given the lack of political progress in the Israeli-Palestinian arena and in view of continued Israeli construction in the West Bank settlements. The renewal of the talks between Israel and the Palestinians under US sponsorship is not enough to counter this trend if there are no concrete signs of a breakthrough toward a settlement that can be implemented. There is also a growing impression that the international community, especially Western countries that are aware that their influence on Middle East developments is limited, is seizing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a key issue whose resolution will ostensibly enable resolution of other problems in the region. While this argument is highly tenuous, Israel must take into account the political and diplomatic difficulties it will face if the negotiations with the Palestinians fail, especially if a violent conflict ensues. This is compounded by international opposition to the use of force and Israel's negative image as a country that employs disproportionate force.

## **The Strategic Security Goals**

The threats and opportunities facing Israel define its political and security goals and its preferred areas of focus, in its attempt to arrest negative trends and cultivate positive developments.

*The Iranian challenge:* A primary goal for Israel is for Iran to be impelled to reach a permanent agreement with the major powers that will ensure that a breakout to nuclear capability requires a long time. This entails combining negotiations with political measures, economic pressure, and financial incentives, and demonstrating a credible military option – not only by Israel, but also on the part of the US. Israel should focus on an attempt to influence the content of the agreement between the US/the international community and Iran, and on reining in Iran's ability to deceive the West. At the same time, Israel must continue to demand, especially from the US, continuation of the sanctions regime with no letup as long as Iran has not implemented the preliminary agreement, and as long as Iran places obstacles to achievement of a permanent settlement. Israel must also make sure that its military option is ready if it is needed.

*The radical axis in the Middle East:* Another goal is to undermine and work toward the dissolution of the radical axis. A change of regime in Damascus will serve this purpose and remove Iran and Hizbollah from their positions of influence in Syria, although it may present new risks. Israel's ability to promote this far reaching goal is limited, owing to disagreements between the major powers, especially the US and Russia, over what action should be taken in order to stabilize Syria, and due to concern that Syria will disintegrate into enclaves and cantons – for which the West will be held responsible – and become a stronghold of al-Qaeda and other Islamic jihadi organizations. Israel must decide whether achieving this objective is worthwhile from its perspective, even at the risk of the development of a failed and divided state that serves as an operational base for jihadi groups on its northern border. At the same time, it is critical to help implement the international agreement on the dismantlement of Syria's chemical arsenal. If the Assad regime survives, Israel must continue to consider military operations against strategic weapons in Syria in order to prevent their transfer to Hizbollah in Lebanon or their falling into the hands of jihadi elements in Syria itself. In any case, a prolonged period of instability can be expected in Syria, which will present challenges to Israel's ongoing security, particularly in the area of the border between Israel and Syria, but also along Israel's border with Jordan and Lebanon, due to a possible spread of the crisis to Jordan and Lebanon that would generate internal shocks.

*Securing the borders:* An important need has arisen to improve security along the borders with Syria, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, Sinai, and even Jordan, in order to prevent infiltration, terrorism against Israel, and weapons smuggling into the PA and the Gaza Strip. In order to secure the borders, better border defense systems and enhanced deterrence, including by means of covert operations, are necessary in a continuous integrative framework between the systems.<sup>1</sup> In this context, it is essential to preserve security coordination with the Egyptian and Jordanian militaries, and to foster direct communications between Israeli security agencies and their counterparts in Arab countries, even in Lebanon, for the purpose of avoiding uncontrolled escalation following terrorist attacks by global jihad groups, Hizbollah, and other extremist elements. The strengthening of global jihad

groups, including al-Qaeda, and their consolidation near Israel's borders require the development of offensive and defensive intelligence and operational capabilities; the establishment of broad regional coordination, including coordination with local groups and forces; and multidisciplinary levers of influence in order to blunt the ability of hostile groups to cause damage.

*The Israeli-Palestinian political process:* In addition to the direct advantages derived from progress in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, progress in the political process will improve Israel's chances of promoting normalization and deepening its security cooperation with its neighbors in the region. Israel can accomplish this by moving forward on three parallel axes: negotiations toward a permanent settlement, transitional arrangements based on the principle that "what is agreed on will be implemented" before a permanent agreement is achieved, given the difficulties in bridging the gaps on the core issues; and independent measures, whether coordinated or not, to shape a two-state reality. The essence of the three axes is to design a supportive environment for the political process, while consolidating a stable and responsible Palestinian government that functions effectively and fosters economic growth. Progress on the three axes is conditional on security calm and stability, based on the persistent operational activity by the IDF and the security services that is essential for destroying the terrorist infrastructure, combined with ongoing improvement in the Palestinian economy and living conditions of the population and close cooperation with the Palestinian security agencies.

*Restraining Hamas:* Another goal linked to the Palestinian arena, and as such, to Israel's relations with its neighbors, especially Egypt, is limiting the potential damage that Hamas can cause. Israel can exploit Hamas's weakness to reach understandings on the basis of security quiet in exchange for economic development and benefits in the border crossings with the Gaza Strip. In this context, Israel should emphasize that Hamas is the authority in the Gaza Strip, and as such is responsible for preventing terrorist activity against Israel by other organizations operating there. If Hamas continues to weaken and opposition to it increases among the Gaza population, there might be an opportunity for the formation of a coalition with Egypt and moderate Arab states in order to increase the pressure on

Hamas and force it to choose between loss of power and acceptance of prolonged calm, including cooperation and reconciliation with the PA. In order to moderate the anticipated security threat from the logistical and operational connection between jihadi operatives in the Gaza Strip and Sinai, Israel, in coordination with Egypt, must demand that Hamas be accountable for terrorist activity by global jihad groups originating in the Gaza Strip, even if it is carried out from Sinai.

*Policy coordination and cooperation:* Israel, Arab states, and the West are contending with non-state actors in dynamic theaters of activity across a number of continents, and it is therefore difficult to focus the conflict on a well defined enemy territory. One of the formulas to improve the ability to confront these groups is closer political and defense cooperation (intelligence, military, humanitarian, diplomatic, communications, economic, and so on) between Israel and Western countries, particularly the US, and between Israel and the pragmatic Arab countries. New cooperative relationships should be established, and existing coordination with Middle East countries – Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf emirates, as well as with Turkey – should be strengthened, for the purpose of joint action to prevent cross-border weapons smuggling and infiltration by terrorist operatives. Coordination will facilitate prevention of hostile activity at the planning and organization phases, not only at the operational phases. Beyond security cooperation, joint economic projects and ventures in new markets in the region can be promoted, including water and energy projects, as a basis for political and strategic understandings.

The possibility of improved relations with Arab states is necessarily tied to the changes in the social pyramid in the Middle East. Young people from the middle class who are pushing for change have a growing influence on the political agenda, the balance of power between the various groups in society, and the conduct of the ruling elite. It is easier for the new social forces to defy conventions and existing frameworks, but they have difficulty in forming effective political organizations and political alliances and redesigning state structures and mechanisms to meet the needs of the general public. In order to promote security and stability in the region, an attempt should be made to enlist the various active civilian groups through a dialogue on matters pertaining to the design of effective government,

economic growth, and security. The social networks are likely to be of assistance in having this dialogue and gauging and understanding the public moods in Arab countries. A direct approach through these networks to shapers of public opinion and known figures on the social networks may help build trust and provide grounds for a relationship, which has the potential to yield long term positive consequences.

Israel is dependent on American security and political assistance, and relations with the US constitute an important element in Israel's regional deterrent image. Israel should therefore continue to strive for cooperation with the various arms of the American defense establishment by taking the global and Middle East interests of the US into account, though without impinging on its own freedom of action in all matters pertaining to its right of self defense.

### **Selective Use of Hard Power Integrated with Other Means**

Ehud Barak, in his position as Minister of Defense, defined several fundamental principles for a broad solution to Israel's defense challenges, including:<sup>2</sup> insisting on the right to self defense, meaning that Israel bears sole responsibility for making decisions about its security and destiny, and enhancing its self defense capability. Indeed, the attainment of these political and security goals should drive all of Israel's endeavors. Israel's concept for exercising force, however, is still limited and focuses more on obtaining military results – victory, decision, and deterrence – and less on political, economic, and infrastructure results and on processes that serve the interests of Israel in the regional and international arenas.

One essential element for effective pursuit of the goals defined by the government is legitimacy, both domestic, i.e., from civil society, and international. In order to obtain legitimacy, it is important to recognize that force is no more than one of the available means of attaining political and security goals. Indeed, shaping the results of the conflict does not depend exclusively on which force wins on the battlefield, and particularly when more difficult challenges are involved, it is hard to achieve a clear cut military decision. As such, legitimacy and proportionality in the use of military force, construction of the Israeli narrative, and international recognition of that narrative are essential. A military option should therefore

be chosen only after all the non-military efforts have been exhausted: political, legal, economic, and humanitarian, along with strong strategic messages and media efforts.

A strategy to build legitimacy demands comprehension of the special challenges and the possible consequences of actions, definition of the strategic problem, and formulation of the intelligence-operational technique that constitutes the optimal solution to counter the enemy's operation. The military forces should be trained and prepared for short, targeted military missions to achieve a clear decision in engagements at the tactical level, while avoiding situations in which such a decision is impossible. Cumulative tactical decisions affect the enemy's ability and desire to initiate a renewed conflict, and the extent to which the population can be recruited to support it.

In order to best utilize military force, control of the conflict's intensity and stages of escalation is necessary, while striving to keep the campaign short, reduce damage to the home front, and return to daily routine quickly. The scope of military action also depends on political and humanitarian measures that are taken in parallel to the military operations. Collateral damage should be limited, and friction with the civilian population in enemy territory should be minimized.

Because Israel confronts non-state actors and global jihad groups and has limited capability to influence their agendas, it is important to enhance the elements of deterrence against them and to weaken these players with a series of covert surprise actions that affect their capabilities and organizational capacity. This corresponds to the concept of a continuous low level campaign between the larger operations that aims at disruption and interruption of the buildup of forces and prevents the equipment of recalcitrant elements with weapons that alter the balance of power and are liable to affect Israel's military supremacy and relative advantages, while minimizing undesirable consequences of these operations and avoiding uncontrolled escalation to a high intensity conflict. In order to consolidate prolonged security quiet while strengthening deterrence, an important instrument is a stable security regime based on arrangements or understandings with the enemy that are concluded following the use of force.

## **Implications for Military Force Buildup**

Given the consistent decline in the percentage of the GDP and the state budget allocated to the defense budget, the Brodet Commission framework, which advocated a multi-year security establishment budget to support multi-year planning and criteria for growth of the defense budget, should be implemented. Limited resources, constraints, and growing uncertainty require the government to set clear priorities for defense expenditure through an assessment of the contribution of the different security-military solutions to challenges designated as important.

Specifically, Israel should focus on the following areas: (1) maintaining the IDF's offensive force and its ability to achieve quickly the targets set by the political leadership in the event of a decline in security and escalation, particularly vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, and its ability to adjust quickly and deal with asymmetric threats from additional theaters; (2) reinforcing the elements of Israel's home front defense by continued development of warning and missile interception systems, unmanned rockets, and aerial vehicles; cyber capabilities; and strengthened border defense through the construction of sophisticated barriers with astute intelligence and observation capabilities covering the other side of the border; (3) maintaining the IDF's ability to shift its effort between fronts on short notice, while relying on the air force's flexibility and intelligence capabilities; (4) consolidating deterrence through construction of long range operational capabilities that can strike at the enemy's force and infrastructure deep within enemy territory, while maintaining surprise and a low signature; (5) strengthening operational intelligence, especially data collection and processing, which, combined with attack capabilities and precision firepower, will make it possible to take full advantage of the IDF's operational capabilities; (6) stepping up use of unmanned tools (airborne as well as land systems), which make it possible to penetrate enemy territory and launch precision strikes against enemy targets, while reducing harm to IDF forces; and (7) developing less deadly weapons that reduce collateral damage and injury in general and in particular to uninvolved civilians, especially in scenarios of civilian disobedience.

The defense aid and Israel's strategic cooperation with the US constitute a central element in the buildup of the IDF and the maintenance of its

qualitative edge against a range of military and asymmetric challenges. It is critical for Israel to carefully adhere to its understandings with the US administration and continue to develop cooperation with the US armed forces and joint military capabilities.

## **Conclusion**

Israel's defense anchors are based on: (1) preserving and strengthening its peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, while striving to reach a settlement with the Palestinians, which will open opportunities for regional security arrangements and agreements and understandings with Arab countries; (2) Israel's deterrence, which rests on its unique offensive and defensive military capabilities, flexibility, and rapid adjustment to new situations, together with the readiness and determination to use force – openly or clandestinely – when necessary; (3) Israel's qualitative and technological advantages in both the civilian and military spheres; and (4) the resilience of Israel's civilian society, combined with reinforcement of Israel's strategic and home front defense, preservation of the operational continuity of systems, economic growth, and daily life.

In order to deal with the security challenges facing Israel, the Israeli government should formulate a policy that combines simultaneous efforts in three spheres. In the security sphere, Israel should continue to rely on its independent core capabilities and its right to self defense by consolidating its deterrence, reinforcing its defensive capabilities, and conducting missions against immediate concrete threats. In the international sphere, Israel should deepen its special relationship with the US, Israel's principal ally in diplomacy, security, and economics. At the same time, efforts must be made to neutralize the delegitimization pressures, in part through a genuine effort to make progress toward a settlement with the Palestinians while avoiding new facts on the ground as long as a serious political process is underway. In addition, Israel should support efforts by the international community to reach a settlement with Tehran that will leave Iran sufficiently removed from a nuclear bomb, and should conduct an open dialogue with the international community on a variety of topics of common interest, as well as topics in dispute. Finally, in the regional sphere, in view of the events and processes in the Middle East, an opportunity exists to promote

partnerships with Arab countries and with societies, groups, and sectors playing a critical role in reshaping the Middle East. Israel has unique advantages in technology, water, and even energy, through which it can expand its relationships in the region. In many cases progress toward arrangements with the Palestinians is a precondition for that to happen.

The nature of the challenges developing in Israel's strategic environment, together with the accepted rules of the game in the international sphere, require Israel to adopt a multidisciplinary approach that combines political, diplomatic, military, social, economic, humanitarian, legal, and media-conscious dimensions. Situation assessments should be conducted while taking into account sources of power and centers of influence, including those that are not military and reflect cultural, value, and normative ideas and aspirations. If military force becomes essential, its full effectiveness will require addressing the legitimacy aspect before, during, and after the force is used.

Integrated multidisciplinary thinking, even if it is not simple to formulate or implement, will help Israel promote dialogue and understandings with its allies and neighbors, leverage its military achievements to yield political gains, and establish acceptable rules of the game and stable security regimes in its environment.

## Notes

- 1 This refers to covert military and intelligence operations, usually with a low signature, carried out between rounds of conflict that escalate into larger scale military conflicts.
- 2 Ehud Barak in his position as Minister of Defense in a speech to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on March 19, 2012, State of Israel, Ministry of Defense.



# The Political Process: Plan A, Plan B, and What Lies Between Them

Udi Dekel, Anat Kurz, and Gilead Sher

In late July 2013, after nearly a five-year freeze, a new chapter was opened in the Israeli-Palestinian political process. Under the sponsorship of the US administration, the latest round of talks between Israel and the PLO was launched in Washington. The two sides returned to the negotiating table skeptical regarding the chances of formulating a permanent agreement, and with the idea that should the talks fail, they would be able to place the blame on the other side. And while both sides were pessimistic as to the outcome of the negotiations, the Palestinian delegation radiated confidence, reflecting their understanding of the advantages of the alternative strategy developed by the Palestinian Authority – enlistment of international support for the establishment of a Palestinian state even without an agreement with Israel. Israel, however, did not formulate an alternative concept to a negotiated settlement that would allow it to promote the idea of political-territorial separation from the Palestinians.

In order to maintain the political initiative, and especially to cope with the security, demographic, and international challenges entailed by the conflict, the Israeli government will need to formulate its own alternative plan. While attempting to reach an agreement with the Palestinians, if only a partial or gradual one, Israel must also plan independent steps with the objective of delineating a border and promoting a regional reality of two states for two peoples. An independent Israeli initiative toward separation, with the goal of accomplishing such separation through regional and international coordination, might – by itself – prod the PA into taking

more flexible positions around the negotiating table, if only to prevent Israel from setting the framework for such a separation independently. Coordination with the US administration will help Israel position an independent alternative plan on the international scene not as an obstacle to a future negotiated agreement, but as a complementary move aiming to lay the groundwork for such an agreement.

### **Here We Go Again**

Since taking office in February 2013 as a member of President Barack Obama's second term cabinet, Secretary of State John Kerry has been hard at work in attempts to jumpstart the Israeli-Palestinian political process. Kerry was motivated by a sense of mission, driven by the assessment that given the widening gap between the parties, this might be the last chance to arrive at an agreement based on the idea of a two-state solution. A central difficulty that Kerry faced in attempting to create an atmosphere conducive to dialogue was formulation of terms of reference for the renewal of talks. The guiding principles that were established were: working toward a permanent settlement based on the principle of two states for two peoples, which would mean the end of the conflict and the end of any claims one party may have against the other, to be reached within nine months of talks; and tackling all core issues: borders – including Israeli settlements on the West Bank and certain Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem; security arrangements; Palestinian refugees; and allocation of water resources to Israel and the Palestinian state. It was also decided that the negotiations would be held in secret and be accompanied by an American facilitator who would occasionally participate in meetings, verify progress, and raise bridging proposals.

To launch any talks, Kerry had to bypass obstacles preventing renewal of the process in the form of preconditions issued by Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The refusal of both sides to meet demands presented as conditions for talks has blocked the way to the negotiating table since early 2009, when the negotiations conducted in the Annapolis framework came to an end. The Palestinians demanded that the reference line for territorial discussion be the June 4, 1967 borders (ceasefire lines that were never recognized as a border), and that construction in West Bank settlements

and East Jerusalem come to a complete halt. Israel demanded recognition as a Jewish state; this would allow the framework for a settlement based on the principle of “two states for two peoples.” In addressing Israeli demands, the administration clarified that from its perspective the borders of the Palestinian state do not need to overlap completely with the 1967 lines, but should take into account the changes that have occurred on the ground over the years, meaning: the creation of Israeli settlement blocs in the West Bank. Thus Kerry skirted the settlement issue, at least in its most basic context, and abstained from insisting that Israel immediately freeze construction in the settlements. Moreover, the letter of guarantees to the Israeli government stated that in the view of the US administration, Israel is a Jewish state. To the Palestinians, the administration emphasized its position that the borders of the independent Palestinian state would be based on the 1967 lines, with necessary adjustments.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Kerry worked to strengthen the Palestinian economy through a generous initiative for investments in infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> The Secretary of State further emphasized the importance of the regional environment. US General (ret.) John Allen was instructed to devise a formula for regional security in the Middle East that would take into account the security needs of Israel and the Palestinians,<sup>3</sup> and Kerry conveyed the US expectation to representatives of the Arab League that they would support the return of the Palestinians to the negotiating table and the political process itself, through – among other ideas – some flexibility regarding certain articles of the Arab Peace Initiative.<sup>4</sup>

Israel accepted a Palestinian demand communicated through Kerry, and committed to the gradual release of Palestinian prisoners convicted of the murder of Israelis before the Oslo era. Israel also promised to significantly slow down building in settlements in the West Bank for as long as talks were underway.<sup>5</sup> For its part, the Palestinian Authority committed not to leave the negotiating table during the months allocated for the talks, and to freeze any unilateral moves in the international arena to promote the establishment of a Palestinian state without negotiations with Israel, and not to challenge Israel in international institutions. Both sides committed to discuss all issues at the core of the conflict, although there was no agreement regarding the order in which these issues would be tackled.

Although over the 20 years since the signing of the Oslo agreements a number of approaches to negotiations have been tried, and although the terms of reference for the current talks were agreed upon in advance, during the first several months of the talks the parties focused on issues of procedure rather than fundamental matters.<sup>6</sup> In order to ensure uninterrupted and relevant talks, the leaders as well as the negotiators themselves were to decide whether to discuss all the core issues at once, or to proceed to understandings in a gradual manner, issue by issue; whether to take a top-down approach to the process, in other words, guided by understandings between the leaders and senior levels of decision makers on both sides, or to take a bottom-up approach based on understandings that are to be formed in issue-based work teams; or whether to combine both approaches – with the discussion taking place in small teams assisted by experts who are part of the full delegations.

### **Beyond Procedural Aspects**

It is widely assumed that a well-managed process increases the chances of talks yielding results, while a poorly managed process tends to allow the sides to slip out of the negotiating room and avoid decisions. Therefore, understandings reached on questions of procedure directly impact on the outcome of the negotiations. Specifically, if the American mediator is careful to run a stable, continuous, clear, and binding process, with close tracking of progress and regular reports from the two sides, the ability of the parties to avoid the difficult issues should automatically be reduced. However, this alone cannot ensure progress in the desired direction, particularly due to three characteristics of the process that have intensified over the years. One, gaps in basic positions have deepened through the many failed attempts to create a breakthrough toward a settlement. Two, there is serious erosion in mutual trust between the two peoples and between their leaders, and serious doubts exist regarding their readiness to promote and fully implement an agreement that by its nature would be an historic compromise. Three is the lack of broad legitimacy within both Palestinian and Israeli society for the expected results of negotiations, should they succeed; in both, the moderate forces that would support an historic compromise have been significantly weakened. Consequently,

each of the two sides has returned to the negotiating table while harboring doubts as to the ability of the other side to be a serious partner in a political process.

The lack of optimism that accompanied the renewed talks was reflected in the lack of interest in the process registered on both the Israeli and Palestinian scenes: the public response was not characterized by enthusiasm for a possible breakthrough. At the same time, there was no sweeping criticism, apparently given the prevalent skepticism that tangible progress toward a compromise, which would exact ideological and territorial costs and entail security risks, was forthcoming.<sup>7</sup>

Why then have the sides chosen to return to the negotiating table? Both parties were “pushed into” the process out of a desire to avoid paying the price of refusing the American demand to renew the talks – from Israel’s perspective a diplomatic price, and from the PA’s perspective a diplomatic and economic one, as far as the American economic aid is concerned<sup>8</sup> – and due to the US commitments conveyed to both parties in order to convince them to renew the talks. This dynamic, which underlies this round of negotiations, means that lack of progress in the talks or their total failure will result in each side attempting to avoid responsibility for the failure – especially in the eyes of the US administration – and seeking to place the blame on the other side. However, this contingency portends a potential serious problem for the Israeli leadership, not only because of the tension that will emerge with the Obama administration, but also, and especially, because the balance of power between Israel and the PA on the international scene is not in Israel’s favor.

The Palestinians came to the talks’ opening ceremony with the assessment that time is on the side of Palestinian interests (though only in terms of the two-state solution – which Palestinian opposition elements, led by Hamas, persistently oppose<sup>9</sup>). The source of this feeling is the growing international criticism of Israel’s retaining control of the West Bank during a prolonged political freeze, interrupted from time to time by a failed attempt to promote an agreement. Against this background, the Palestinians are conducting a well-orchestrated campaign to isolate and delegitimize Israel, negate any political support it enjoys, and gather support for Palestinian independence as declared by the international community. Significant

achievements in this campaign have already been registered, including the General Assembly's acceptance of Palestine as a nonmember observer state in the UN (November 2012),<sup>10</sup> and the European Union decision to freeze financing for Israeli projects that involve institutions operating in the West Bank (July 2013).<sup>11</sup> This decision by the EU, announced while Kerry was working hard at formulating understandings that would return Israel and the Palestinians to the negotiating table, was a significant milestone in casting the settlement project as a symbol of Israel's responsibility for the political freeze.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, even without any fundamental change in the official Palestinian position and with no tangible Palestinian overtures toward Israel, the US administration has over the years moved consistently closer to the Palestinian positions on various issues. With time, the United States retreated from its initial opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state. The Obama administration even adopted the 1967 lines as the basis for a territorial partition – though taking into consideration demographic developments since 1967 in the disputed territories. The administration's disapproval of the settlement project in the territories is not a new development, but during Obama's first term this disapproval was translated into an explicit demand to freeze construction in settlements in the West Bank, if only for a limited period of time, to make it easier for the Palestinians to return to negotiations.<sup>13</sup> The United States also moved closer to the Palestinian position regarding security arrangements necessary in order to ensure the stability of an agreement, mainly the Palestinian rejection of a permanent Israeli military presence in the sovereign territory of the Palestinian state.

Palestinian confidence regarding the ability to progress toward independence under conditions likely to be acceptable to the Palestinian public was also based on the impression that changes in the Israeli position on several issues over time have shown implicit and explicit flexibility – all the more so as even right wing governments brought about some of these changes. These include: (1) Israeli willingness for territorial exchanges on a 1:1 basis, apparently attesting to Israeli readiness to accept the 1967 lines as the reference line; (2) the unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2005, including the evacuation of Israeli settlements

in the area and the additional withdrawal from four settlements in the northern West Bank, even in the absence of absolute, guaranteed, long term security quiet; (3) Olmert's offer to Abu Mazen in late 2008, more far reaching than any previous official Israeli offer; (4) Benjamin Netanyahu's declaration in his "Bar Ilan speech" in June 2009 that Israel would agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state – though demilitarized, and subject to Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, a unified Jerusalem, and the non-return of refugees to Israel. This declaration was accompanied by a demand for a long term Israeli military presence in the Jordan Valley, though Israel does not demand sovereignty over the territory.

What then is the fundamental Palestinian interest in progressing toward an agreement, especially in the relatively short term allocated by the US administration for the newest round of talks? In the immediate time frame, it does not appear that the PA is rushing to take responsibility for providing the daily needs of the Palestinian population, a responsibility that would result directly from independence and sovereignty. In principle, it does not appear that the PA would be ready to proceed to a permanent peace with Israel in the framework of an agreement granting it sovereignty over less than the entire territory of the West Bank (approximately 95 percent of West Bank territory has been offered to them in the past<sup>14</sup>), and requiring other fundamental compromises likely to arouse broad Palestinian and Arab opposition. Moreover, for ideological and electoral reasons the PA has not made a concentrated effort to explain to the Palestinian public why such concessions are vital for achieving independence, and has instead clung to the principle of "all or nothing" regarding agreements and their implementation.<sup>15</sup>

Rather, the Palestinians have formulated a political alternative in the form of progress toward international recognition of independence, without an agreement based on negotiations and compromise with Israel. And indeed, diplomatic activity conducted in this framework has achieved not insignificant results. It even appears that in the eyes of a growing share of Palestinian political elements, international diplomacy – launched as Plan B – has assumed the characteristics of Plan A, notwithstanding that close coordination with Israel will be necessary for a Palestinian state to achieve full sovereignty and sustainable security and economic infrastructures.

Moreover, the Palestinians boast of an additional alternative to an historic compromise resulting from negotiations with Israel: the gradual creation of one state, reflecting the political-territorial reality in the conflict arena. If peace talks fail and international recognition of Palestinian independence is delayed, public and political discourse in this matter will presumably broaden – not only in the Palestinian arena but in the international arena as well.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, the government of Israel has no articulated and declared alternative to negotiated progress toward political and territorial separation as a basis for a two-state solution. In other words, as opposed to the Palestinians, Israel has not formulated an alternative concept and has not devised an alternate plan in case of failure of the current round of talks and/or the entire political process. Furthermore, in contravention of rhetoric endorsing the idea of “two states for two peoples,” actions and operative decisions, especially those related to continued construction in the settlements, attest to a preference for the current state of affairs – presumably based on the assumption that the status quo, where Israel controls most of the territory without limitations on freedom of action, is the best situation for Israel. The current relative security quiet in the West Bank, which is also the result of routine security cooperation between Israeli forces and the Palestinian security apparatuses, allows the government to avoid a determined search for a way to advance the idea of political-territorial separation. Accordingly, the moment of decision regarding a temporary or permanent construction freeze in the settlements, the future of settlements and outposts in the West Bank, and the transfer of part of Area C to PA control is postponed.

The abstention from taking steps toward separation reflects an assessment that at this time it is not possible to reach a fundamental permanent or interim agreement that would meet Israeli demands and that the Palestinians could implement. This would not only be due to the institutional split in the Palestinian arena and the fact that the Gaza Strip is under Hamas control. In order to ensure that the Palestinian state would not be a hothouse for radical Islamic elements and that it would not be susceptible to Iranian influence, tough and comprehensive security arrangements are required. It is doubtful that the PA would accept or be able to function in accordance

with these arrangements, given the PA's stance and the positions of the Palestinian public itself. Thus while most of the Israeli public supports the two-state principle, it will not be simple to bridge between Israel's specific positions regarding compromise on core issues and the positions of the Palestinian public.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the vast majority of the Israeli public will likely expect an agreement to include security terms that have little chance of acceptance by the PA.

Joining these assessments, which focus on the Israeli-Palestinian arena, is the concern regarding the security threats caused by the volatility in the Middle East, including: Iranian progress toward nuclear capabilities; the rise of the voice of political Islam in the Arab street, the fear that the regional wave of upheavals will also reach Jordan, and the possibility that in Jordan, as in the Sinai Peninsula and in Syria, a stronghold of radical Islamic forces will be created. These factors and trends, individually and together, significantly constrain Israel's room to negotiate, and are expected to make progress in the political process difficult to achieve.

The political and practical relevance of the alternative Palestinian strategy will likely grow stronger if the negotiations continue without real progress, or if they fail completely, especially if blame is placed on Israel. Already at the outset of the new round of talks, tension arose between Israel and the PA and the US administration due to new permits that were issued for construction in the West Bank – timed close to the first stage of Israel's release of Palestinian prisoners.<sup>18</sup> The prisoner release, carried out despite public protest in Israel, will help Israel argue that it is not responsible for the freeze in talks, should such a freeze develop. However, it is doubtful whether this argument will spare Israel any criticism, especially in light of the continued construction in the West Bank, and it is quite doubtful whether this will deter the PA from renewed acceleration of its international diplomatic campaign. However, Israel's long term national interest – the assurance of its future as the democratic nation state of the Jewish people in secure borders – demands that the government retain the political initiative. This means the preparation of a credible, responsible, and executable political alternative that consists mainly of cautious and gradual progress toward separation from the Palestinians and the shaping of the state's borders.

## **Plan B: Alternate and Complementary**

Achievement of Israel's long term national objectives requires a territorial division that splits the territory between Jordan and the Mediterranean into two nation states. In other words, Israel must separate from the West Bank Palestinians and set borders that ensure a democratic state with a Jewish majority, while creating a reality of two states for two peoples – whether through negotiations or independently.

On the path to a long term political settlement, partial, interim, and transitional agreements will be necessary, along with coordinated independent actions by the parties – all of which should be linked to any permanent agreement. This will allow improvement in relations between the two leaderships, and no less important, these steps may help build trust between the two societies and expand the public support for the two leaderships vital to the achievement of legitimacy for a permanent settlement. The proposed formula for progress is separate implementation of each step, which will contribute gradually to the shaping of a reality of two states, and the execution of every agreed issue without waiting for simultaneous agreement on all the core issues and the formulation of a comprehensive settlement.

In parallel, Israel must prepare a clear and coherent alternative to an agreement achieved through negotiations, in case the current and/or future rounds of talks do not yield an agreement securing its national interests. This alternative must be prepared so that Israel does not remain hostage to the conflict. Moreover, a gradual alternative presented by the government of Israel would weaken the weight of the Palestinian unilateral campaign in the international arena, while simultaneously delaying any action toward an internationally coerced settlement.

According to this alternative, Israel's independent steps would be taken at a point in time decided upon by the government, after exhausting to the greatest extent possible the negotiations process and after suitably preparing for the independent moves. The independent initiative would in the long term serve the political process toward an agreement, and would assist Israel in escaping a dead end or failure in the talks. In any scenario, Israel will require advance strategic and practical planning, civil and defense planning, and planning for intra-Israel dialogue to prepare both the

public and the national infrastructure for the process of separation from the Palestinians, which would necessarily require the evacuation of settlements. It is therefore proposed that Israel begin to implement independent steps in a gradual, controlled, and astute manner, while examining the effect of each step before moving on to the next one. So, for example, a gradual evacuation of outposts can be followed by the evacuation of isolated communities, measures that would assist in preparing Israeli public opinion for an independent delineation of borders.

The independent alternative for separation into two nation states would be based on voluntary Israeli concession of territories outside of the large settlement blocs, as they will be defined, while maintaining these major blocs as part and parcel of the State of Israel. The deployment line would serve as a temporary border, while the Palestinians are urged to negotiate with Israel on the route of a permanent border on the basis of agreed-upon land swaps. In the event that negotiations are not renewed, the temporary border will become permanent. As long as there is no agreement, the IDF will remain in areas defined according to security needs, such as the Jordan Valley, and Israel would retain control of the outer borders and surrounding areas of the territories to be evacuated by Israelis who would be resettled within the state's temporary borders.

With the experience of the disengagement from Gaza and northern Samaria in 2005 in mind,<sup>19</sup> preparations must be made for the day that residents of settlements outside the large blocs are called upon to return to the borders of the State of Israel.<sup>20</sup> In order to avoid an internal conflagration, the government must seriously consider how to change the discourse with the settlers regarding the reality that will be created when there are two nation states in the area. This is necessary in order to expand public support for the two-state solution, to formulate the evacuation as a unifying step and not as a repudiation of an important sector that for decades has seen the settlement of Judea and Samaria as a national mission, and to justify enforcement and evacuation by force, should such be necessary. Preparation for absorbing this population should include a voluntary evacuation law, compensation and absorption plans for residents of settlements outside the large blocs, and extensive domestic discourse during the process of the physical evacuation and afterward. In this context, as preparation for

demarcation of the permanent border, creative territorial ideas should be encouraged that may be able to reduce the number of Israelis living beyond the State of Israel's final border who would need to be evacuated. An option should also be considered whereby Israeli settlements would remain within the borders of a Palestinian state, should one be established, as autonomous Israeli territorial enclaves, as well as even the possibility of granting Palestinian citizenship to Israeli residents, as long as this would be under terms of a final and end-of-conflict agreement.<sup>21</sup>

A complementary economic plan mainly involving an expansion of the Paris agreement through tangible benefits to the Palestinians would be vital in order to build trust in an independent Israeli alternative. Israeli investment along with significant international investment is necessary to improve infrastructure in the West Bank – including in Area C – and the Gaza Strip, in areas including: transportation, sewage treatment, electricity supply, exploitation of natural gas in the continental shelf off of Gaza, a water accord between Israel and the PA, and the establishment of a Palestinian national water carrier system. Israel should grant priority to the PA regarding supply of agricultural produce and labor in Israel. At the same time, it is vital to prod the Palestinians to improve their independent ability to collect taxes, instead of relying on Israeli tax collection.<sup>22</sup> There must also be consideration of the socioeconomic processes underway in Palestinian society, with a focus on enhancing the trend of middle class growth and expansion of the circle of intellectuals to increase the variety of options open to them.

The founding of independent economic projects, and a solidification of physical capabilities, would help improve the Palestinian public mood, which is expected to have positive effects in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. Nevertheless, each gradual step of progress would almost certainly be accompanied by deep Palestinian suspicion of temporary agreements that might provide Israel legitimacy and opportunity to establish additional residential-territorial facts on the ground. The task of persuasion in this context would be complex and difficult.<sup>23</sup> However, it is possible that Israeli steps toward separation would bring the PA to realize that cooperation with the process on its part, and perhaps even its contribution of viable ideas toward the resolution of fundamental issues of conflict, could help

it present the Israeli redeployment as a result of its own policy. It is also possible that such an approach would reinforce Fatah's position among its traditional supporters on the domestic scene against opposition forces led by Hamas.

Hamas, the right wing element in Palestinian politics whose positions emerge at the negotiating table only indirectly, remains a key factor. It is essentially the elephant in the room. The very existence of a parallel authority in the Gaza Strip headed by Hamas calls into question the ability to implement understandings reached between Israel and the PLO – should such be reached. Hamas is also likely to realize its potential as “spoiler,” should Israel take unilateral steps toward separation in the West Bank. The weakened state of Hamas due to the military blow inflicted by Israel in November 2012, especially on the backdrop of increased tension between the organization and the Egyptian government following the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood government, has lowered motivation within the organization to take on Israel directly. This is especially so as long as there is no progress in negotiations, and as long as no interest has been created for it to challenge Israel's military deterrent effect. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that any Israeli unilateral action toward separation in the West Bank would change Hamas's balance sheet of considerations. The economic hardship in the Gaza Strip, despite the regular transfer of civilian goods to the region with the coordination of Israel and Egypt, will then add fuel to the fire of political protest. In order to limit the possibility of an attempt by Hamas to ignite a military conflict, which would demonstrate the ominous consequences of a retreat and thus make it difficult to realize the intention of withdrawing from the West Bank, Israel must make sure to continue the ongoing alleviation of its policy of isolation against the Gaza Strip, and thus create among the Gaza population and leadership alike an interest in maintaining calm. Security quiet in the Gaza Strip is a clear Israeli interest. The context of a political process alongside an independent political territorial initiative in the West Bank only makes this interest clearer.

Coordination of the plan with the US administration will encourage Palestinian recognition of Israeli determination to progress toward a two-state reality – if not by mutual agreement, then independently. Progress

toward such a reality as a response to the political dead end is a strategy that does not contradict the American interest in removing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the top of its Middle East agenda. For this reason, and especially for reasons directly connected with relations between Israel and the United States, Israeli diplomacy must build on such coordination.

## **A Look Ahead**

The wave of political-military upheavals in the Middle East, which perhaps has not yet peaked, has intensified the challenges confronting Israel as it comes to negotiate a permanent agreement with the Palestinians. In Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon centralized state control has weakened, and radical Islamic strongholds have formed in border areas. Alongside these developments, which threaten to spread to Jordan – and should Israel leave the West Bank, to this area as well – Iran continues in its race to achieve military nuclear capability. These developments have augmented the constant concern in Israel regarding security threats inherent in redeployment in the West Bank, and in the loss of military assets as a result of the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The US administration has taken upon itself to create an inter-Arab environment that would support Israeli-Palestinian progress toward an agreement, and perhaps even provide Israel with security guarantees. This will not be an easy task, especially if renewed talks are characterized by a constant search by the parties for an exit strategy while pointing a finger at the other side. In addition, in order to fully exhaust the round of renewed talks, which it initiated, the administration must assist the parties should they encounter – as they certainly will – a lack of agreement on procedural and fundamental issues. This must be done, furthermore, while attempting to maintain an image as a fair and unbiased mediator. If this is not enough, in the background there is a growing intra-American debate regarding the role played by the United States in the Middle East, which holds significant potential for military involvement, and which has consequences for the power struggle among superpowers. It is possible that this role, which brought the administration to the threshold of involvement in the Syrian civil war, will distract the administration's attention from its efforts to

bring peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and make progress toward an agreement more difficult.

Moreover, Secretary of State Kerry embarked on the path leading to renewed negotiations with the assumption that the principles of an agreement are known, as detailed in the parameters proposed by former President Clinton, in proposals that Israel has placed in the past on the negotiating table (Ehud Barak at Camp David in 2000; Ehud Olmert during the Annapolis talks in 2008), and in the Arab Peace Initiative. However, as talks continue, it will presumably be evident, as in the past, that the devil is in the details, and that placing these details on the agenda does not close gaps, but rather highlights and expands them. A strategy of transitional agreements on the way to a permanent agreement to be formed by the American mediator would help avoid a repetition of the familiar dynamic of the collapse of talks and the shutdown of the political process for another prolonged freeze.

The complexity of the core issues and their political, diplomatic, and psychological sensitivity is relevant not only to the gaps in positions between Israel and the Palestinians, but also to the domestic arenas. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will have difficulty placing a map on the negotiating table to serve as the basis for continued talks without this step shaking up his coalition and arousing broad public protest. For his part, PA President Mahmoud Abbas arrived at negotiations with severe concerns of widespread domestic protest that might be led by opposition elements – inspired in part by the popular uprisings in Arab countries – as a response to willingness to compromise. It is doubtful whether either leadership will be able to muster the political power necessary to together arrive at a breakthrough in negotiations.

Nevertheless, the regional threats actually highlight for Israel the necessity of separation from the Palestinians. Israel's path to a safe and acceptable strategic environment is long and winding, and there are many factors beyond its control in the greater regional framework. In this context, one should not discount the possibility of dialogue between Israel and the heads of leading Arab League countries regarding willingness in principle to renew the multilateral format, with the recognition of the Arab Peace Initiative as the basis for a regional political process. The main

advantage of such an approach is in its chances of bringing about improved management of the conflict at the first phase, parallel to bilateral talks, and in the second phase, to be a basis for negotiations with the Palestinians for a permanent agreement along with dialogue with additional Middle East countries with stable central governments.

A change in the political-territorial reality in the conflict arena is the goal; a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians is the means to achieve this goal. The path to this objective is paved with difficulties and obstacles, but these must not deter the government of Israel from its pursuit of fortification of the state's Jewish democratic character along with solidification of its regional and international status. In order to progress toward the objective, initiative must return to Israel's hands through efforts at separating from the Palestinians, whether through negotiations – as it is now doing – or in independent fashion. Preparation on a national level for the day that residents of the settlements will be called upon to return to the borders of the State of Israel, as they will be defined, requires a comprehensive alternative plan, in other words, Plan B.

Gradual independent, steps toward a political-territorial separation that Israel would undertake unilaterally following a political freeze would certainly encounter Palestinian opposition, as well as protest from Arab and European countries. However, it can be assumed that the criticism would die down with time, if the moves are executed in coordination with the US administration, communicate a clear message of intent to reduce the relative weight of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, and include repeated calls for the Palestinian Authority to join the process.

## Notes

- 1 Assaf Gibor, "Senior Fatah Officials: Return to Negotiations Only on the Basis of the '67 Borders," *Maariv NRG*, July 18, 2013; Ariel Kehana, "Netanyahu Counters: There Will be No Peace Agreement Based on the '67 Borders," *Maariv NRG*, July 18, 2013; Barak Ravid, "Peace Talks: The Americans Presented the Sides with Guarantees to Enable Resumption of Negotiations," *Haaretz*, July 30, 2013.
- 2 "Kerry Pushes \$4 billion West Bank Development Plan," [www.cnn.com/2013/05/26/world/meast/west-bank-investment](http://www.cnn.com/2013/05/26/world/meast/west-bank-investment).

- 3 David Ignatius, "John Kerry Goes on a Persistent Quest for Middle East Peace," [http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2013/07/john\\_kerry\\_goes\\_on\\_a\\_captain\\_a.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2013/07/john_kerry_goes_on_a_captain_a.html).
- 4 "Arab League Backs Kerry's Israeli-Palestinian Plan," *BBC News*, July 17, 2013, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23346255](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23346255); Herb Keinon, "Kerry Pushes Israel to Consider Arab League Peace Plan," *Jerusalem Post*, July 17, 2013, <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Kerry-pushes-Israel-to-consider-Arab-League-peace-plan-in-Amman-320157>.
- 5 Barak Ravid, "Behind the Scenes of the Contact to Renew Negotiations: Kerry Pressured, Abu Mazen Relented," *Haaretz*, June 25, 2013.
- 6 Appointed as heads of the delegations were veteran personalities of the peace process, who took part in previous negotiations. The Palestinian delegation was headed by Saeb Erekat, who has guided the process since the talks before the Oslo agreement. Opposite him was Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who served as head of the negotiating team during the Annapolis process (2007-8), during Ehud Olmert's term as prime minister, and the attorney Yitzhak Molcho, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's representative in secret talks between Israel and the PA conducted in the years since Annapolis. Former US ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk was appointed as mediator.
- 7 Udi Dekel and Orit Perlov, "The Great Divide: The Political Process and Palestinian Discourse on the Social Networks," *INSS Insight No. 453*, August 11, 2013; regarding the Israeli arena, it can be assumed that seeds of opposition to renewal of the political process were calmed on the backdrop of Netanyahu's commitment that an agreed-upon accord, should one be reached, would be put to a referendum. See Barak Ravid, "Netanyahu: Any Political Agreement Reached will be Brought to the People for a Decision," *Haaretz*, June 30, 2013.
- 8 Daniel Kurtzer and Gilead Sher, "Kerry's Next Move in the Middle East," *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 2013.
- 9 Regarding Hamas opposition to renewal of the peace process, see "Haniyeh: Palestinians will not Recognize Israel," *Ma'an News Agency*, June 26, 2013; Asman al-Ghoul, "Hamas Warns Abu Mazen on Peace Talks with Israel," *al-Monitor Palestine Pulse*, July 26, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/07/hamas-abbas-israel-kerry-peace-talks.html#>; Ehud Yaari, "Hamas in Crisis: Isolation and Internal Strife," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 30, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hamas-in-crisis-isolation-and-internal-strife>.
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- 11 “On June 30 European Commission adopted a Notice containing guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards. These guidelines set out the territorial limitations under which the Commission will award EU support to Israeli entities,” in Statement by the Delegation of the European Union to the State of Israel on the European Commission Notice (16/07/2013), [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/israel/press\\_corner/all\\_news/news/2013/20131607](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/israel/press_corner/all_news/news/2013/20131607); Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 Onwards (2013/C 205/05), *Official Journal of the European Union*, C205, vol. 56, July 19, 2013, <http://unipsal.un.org/UNIPSAL.NSF/O/88584262AOAOE3E485257BAD00414464>. See also “Palestine Joins Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe,” *Wafa*, July 4, 2013, [englihs.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22758](http://englihs.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=22758).
- 12 It seemed that the European Union decision prodded Israel’s government to respond positively to the efforts of the Secretary of State to revive the peace process. See, for example, Barak Ravid, “European Sanctions Made Netanyahu Bend; the US Threats Made Abbas Concede,” *Haaretz*, July 21, 2013; Shlomo Brom, “Resumption of Negotiations with the Palestinians: Illusion or Reality?” *INSS Insight* No. 450, July 24, 2013.
- 13 See Daniel Kurtzer, “Behind the Settlements,” *American Interest*, March/April 2010, [www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=781](http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=781).
- 14 See “Olmert Proposes that Israel Annex 7% of the West Bank; Palestinians will Receive 5.5% in Return,” *Haaretz*, August 12, 2008; Nahum Barnea and Shimon Shiffer, “Interview with Ehud Olmert,” *Yediot Ahronot*, September 28, 2009.
- 15 Statements reflecting a readiness to concede on traditional positions were directed over the years mainly to a non-Palestinian audience, although it is difficult to imagine that their significance was lost on the Palestinian audience itself. See, for example, the statement of Mahmoud Abbas at a meeting with Israelis against the backdrop of the latest round of talks: Barak Ravid, “Peace Agreement Will Mean the End of the Conflict; We Will not Demand Haifa and Acre,” *Haaretz*, August 22, 2013. It was also reported that Abbas expressed recognition of the fact that the Palestinian state would be demilitarized.
- 16 “Why is there Talk of a ‘One-State Solution’ for Israelis and Palestinians?” *The Economist*, March 20, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2013/03/economist-explains-one-state-solution-israel-palestine>; Yolande Knell, “Reconsidering the Two-State Solution,” *BBC News Middle East*, March 21, 2013, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21850739](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21850739); Ghada al-Karmi, “A One State Solution: Pros and Cons,” *al-Monitor*, June 16, 2013.

- 17 The results of a public opinion survey conducted among the Palestinian public in the West Bank revealed that 42 percent of respondents thought that the most important objective is the ending of the Israeli occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Thirty-four percent of respondents held that the primary objective should be the right of return for 1948 refugees to their cities and towns; 10 percent answered that the main objective should be the building of a democratic political system. See “Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 48, PSR – Survey Research Unit, Press Release,” June 17, 2013, <http://www.popsr.org/survey/polls/2013/p48epressrelease.html>. The findings of the Peace Index, which examines public opinion in Israel, published July 28, 2013, showed that 77 percent of respondents expressed opposition to the right of return, 62.5 percent expressed opposition to a retreat to the 1967 borders with land swaps, 58 percent expressed opposition to evacuation of settlements (there was no question regarding the future of Ariel, Maale Adumim, and the large settlement blocs), and 50 percent opposed transfer of the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem to Palestinian control along with a special agreement about the city’s holy sites. See “The Peace Index, Survey Release,” <http://peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=254>.
- 18 According to the Secretary of State, Mahmoud Abbas knew that the Israeli government intended to permit limited further building in East Jerusalem and the West Bank in areas that according to Netanyahu would not harm a peace accord. See Michel Wilner, “Kerry: Netanyahu Told Me, Abbas more Settlements were Coming,” *Jerusalem Post*, August 13, 2013.
- 19 Report of the State Investigatory Commission [headed by Vice President of the Supreme Court A. Matza] on the Topic of the Treatment by the Authorized Authorities of Evacuees from Gush Katif and Northern Shomron, [http://elyon1.court.gov.il/heb/hitnatkut/doc/final\\_report.pdf](http://elyon1.court.gov.il/heb/hitnatkut/doc/final_report.pdf).
- 20 Approximately 100,000 people live in settlements in the West Bank outside of the large settlement blocs.
- 21 See Gidon Biger and Gilead Sher, “Jewish Enclaves in a Palestinian State,” *INSS Insight* No. 416, April 8, 2013.
- 22 In this framework, it is appropriate to promote the Steinitz-Fayyad agreement. See “Steinitz and Fayyad Signed Agreements on Trade between Israel and the PA,” *The Marker*, July 31, 2012.
- 23 A sign of readiness to consider a multi-stage process, if not for solutions to the core issues then at least for implementation of understandings, can be seen in the words of Mahmoud Abbas that he would be willing to accept implementation “of the [entire] agreement in stages.” See Ravid, “Peace Agreement will Mean the End of the Conflict.”



# Israeli Public Opinion and Separation from the Palestinians

Yehuda Ben Meir and Gilead Sher

The purpose of this article is to examine the attitude of civil society in Israel to the political process with the Palestinians, with particular attention to implementation of an agreement between the Israeli government and the Palestinians should one be reached in the framework of the talks that began under American auspices in late July 2013. The article first analyzes public opinion in Israel on matters pertaining to a permanent agreement between Israel and the Palestinians and the alternatives available to Israel if the negotiations fail or reach an impasse. The second part of the article assesses the legal-constitutional basis for implementing an agreement or any other alternative endorsed by the Israeli government, and considers the prospects for shaping a national consensus in these contexts.

## **Public Opinion**

Public opinion in Israel on the Palestinian issue and the future of Judea and Samaria is extremely complex. For 46 years since the Six Day War, and especially in the 40 years since the Yom Kippur War, and even more so in the past 20 years since Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords, a powerful and divisive national debate has been underway in Israeli society over the future of the territories. The dispute in public opinion encompasses emotional, pragmatic, national, historical, religious, and security concerns. The heart of the dispute, the issue of the Israeli settlements in the territories, highlights the three main splits across Israeli society: national (Jewish-

Arab), religious, and political. Any material discussion of this subject must therefore take the complexity of public opinion into account.

Furthermore, the exact wording of any question in a public opinion survey aimed at assessing trends in public opinion is very important. Similar questions that are formulated in different terms are likely to paint different pictures and lead to correspondingly different conclusions. In addition, it is possible for similar questions presented to those questioned to produce apparently contradictory results that seem illogical to someone not well versed in public opinion surveys. These contradictory results testify to the complexity of the public's attitude toward national security issues in general, and the conflict with the Palestinians in particular, and hence the importance of relying on a broad range of formulations and approaches. Only by weighing the different answers and examining the variety of results for all data can a comprehensive and representative picture of Israeli public opinion be obtained.

Notwithstanding the formidable challenge, therefore, a thorough understanding of public opinion is essential for a constructive assessment of the implications for decisions by the Israeli government, including its positions on negotiations. The nation's leaders and governments can influence, shape, and sometimes even completely change public opinion – but up to a point. In the absence of public support, it will be very difficult for any government to adopt a policy and implement far reaching decisions. The policy and decisions of every Israeli government on key issues of national security are to a great extent subject to the pressure of public opinion. A government in Israel cannot ignore the public's views, certainly not when at stake is a permanent agreement with the Palestinians, which is viewed by many in Israel as an existential issue.

There have certainly been cases in Israel's history in which strong leadership and a dramatic course of events have caused a turnaround in public opinion. Menachem Begin's decision to withdraw completely from the Sinai Peninsula, including Sharm el-Sheikh, and Yitzhak Rabin's decision to recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people are two examples of this. Both of these cases involved a highly esteemed, albeit controversial, leader, whose policy was a courageous response to formative events – the dramatic visit to

Jerusalem by Anwar Sadat in the first case, and Yasir Arafat's letter to Rabin recognizing Israel's right to live in peace and security and rejecting terrorism in the second case. These cases proved that the saying "in politics, never say never," is also true of public opinion, and strengthened the belief in the potential effect of strong political leadership on public opinion and its ability to change public opinion. At the same time, such cases are few and far between.

Over the past 28 years, the Institute for National Security Studies has engaged in a project of monitoring public opinion in Israel among adult Jewish Israelis on all national security issues, particularly those pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The most recent publication of the National Security and Public Opinion Project, issued in early 2013, includes an in-depth analysis of public opinion trends on this key issue.<sup>1</sup>

An analysis of the results clearly indicates that most of the Israeli public wants to separate from the Palestinians in one form or another. A decisive majority of the public supports both the establishment of a Palestinian state and a solution of "two states for two peoples." In the survey conducted in 2012, 59 percent of the Jewish public supported the establishment of a Palestinian state, and 69 percent supported a solution of "two states for two peoples" – two positions that clearly reflect a desire for separation.<sup>2</sup> Since 2000, except for two years, 50 percent or more of the Jewish public has expressed consistent support for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Since 2006, when a question about the attitude toward a solution of two states for two peoples was included in the survey, more than 60 percent of the Jewish public supported this idea. Another finding that reinforces this picture is the public's clear aversion to a halt in negotiations with the Palestinians. Even though the percentage of those who believe that a peace agreement can be reached with the Palestinians has declined since the second intifada, and less than a third of the respondents feel that it is possible to reach such an agreement,<sup>3</sup> most of the public opposes halting the process.<sup>4</sup> These figures indicate that despite pessimism regarding the process, the public does not want to cut the rope. It can therefore be concluded that the public ultimately realizes the need to arrive at some solution in the direction of separation from the Palestinians.

The desire for separation is also reflected in the attitude toward the Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria. The Jewish public distinguishes between the large settlement blocs that are physically close to pre-1967 Israel and the small isolated settlements located in the heart of densely populated Arab communities in the West Bank. Support for removal of all the Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria as part of a permanent agreement is minimal – only 14 percent. Half of the public, however (about 49 percent), is willing to remove “the small and isolated settlements” as part of a permanent agreement (together with those who support removal of all the settlements, there is a majority of over 60 percent in support of removing small and isolated settlements).<sup>5</sup>

A significant indication of the Jewish public’s desire for separation from the Palestinians is the clear and unequivocal weight of demographic considerations, in contrast to geographic considerations. In studies conducted in the framework of the INSS project, interviewees were asked to rate four political values in order of their importance: a country with a Jewish majority, Greater Israel, democracy, and a state of peace. With time, the “Jewish majority” value has become the public’s most important value, becoming the dominant value over the past decade. In recent years, two thirds or more of the public defined a “Jewish majority” as “extremely important” or “second most important.” The proportion of respondents who selected a “Jewish majority” as “extremely important” or “second most important” reached 65 percent in 2004 and 70 percent in 2006, and remained at that level until 2012.<sup>6</sup> The support for a “Jewish majority” is undoubtedly the most important value for most sections of the population. This value was the most important in 2012 for 58 percent of ultra-Orthodox Jews, 60 percent of the religiously observant population, 63 percent of the traditional religious population, 50 percent of the traditional non-religious population, and 36 percent of the non-religious population. Similarly, a “Jewish majority” is the first or second most important value among 84 percent of the ultra-Orthodox sector, 85 percent of the religiously observant population, 84 percent of the traditional religious population, 74 percent of the traditional non-religious population, and 53 percent of the non-religious public.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, support for “Greater Israel,” which implies not separating from the Palestinians, is the lowest of the four values. Only 10 percent of the population chose “Greater Israel” as the most important value, and it was the first or second most important value for 29 percent of the Jewish population.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, the proportion of those selecting this value as the most important or second most important has not exceeded one third.<sup>9</sup> This group has a profound commitment to the idea of the entire Land of Israel, and is willing to wage a determined struggle to realize it – characteristics that are likely to give it weight and influence beyond its numerical proportions. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the public as a whole, support for a Jewish majority – which many regard as linked to the need for separation from the Palestinians – is more than double the percentage of support for Greater Israel.

Where negotiations with the Palestinians are concerned, it is important to keep in mind that the people’s leaders are conducting the talks, not the people themselves. Governments, not people, sign agreements. Israel, however, is a democracy, in which the government rules with the consent of its citizens. Any Israeli government will therefore sign an agreement only if it believes that it will eventually win the support of a majority of the public. The question is what negotiations outcome has a chance of winning the support of a majority of the people in Israel.

In order to answer this question, respondents were asked, “If the Israeli government approves a permanent agreement with the Palestinians based on two states for two peoples, and the agreement is brought to a referendum for a decision, how will you vote?” The result was clear cut and absolute – 51 percent answered that they would vote in favor, 27 percent said they would vote against, and 22 percent said they were undecided or did not know.<sup>10</sup> The result showing a ratio of 2 to 1 in favor is no surprise, because 69 percent of the respondents supported the principle of two states for two peoples. It is possible that not presenting particulars of the agreement, other than “two states for two peoples,” explains the high proportion of undecided.

In order to better understand where the public stands with respect to a detailed permanent agreement, the respondents were asked the following question: “If the Israeli government approves a permanent agreement with

the Palestinians whereby a Palestinian state will occupy 93 percent of the West Bank and the entire Gaza Strip and all of the Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem; Israel will be recognized as the nation state of the Jewish people, will retain the settlement blocs, including the Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem and the Old City, and will maintain a military presence along the Jordan River; the Palestinians will renounce all claims and will declare the end of the conflict, and the refugees would return only to the Palestinian state; the Temple Mount will be under ‘God’s sovereignty,’ and the agreement is brought to a referendum, how will you vote?” This kind of agreement reflects the general framework of the Clinton parameters, and to a greater extent what former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert proposed to the Palestinians. It contains parts acceptable to the Israeli public, and also parts that the public will find very difficult to accept. The result, though as expected was not as clear cut as in the general question, was still decisive: 46 percent said they would vote in favor, 34 percent said they would vote against, and 20 percent said they were undecided or did not know.<sup>11</sup> In comparison with the general question, the differences are not dramatic at all – the percentage in favor fell by 5 percent, while the percentage opposed rose by 7 percent (the percentage of undecided fell 2 percent). Great caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions on the basis of hypothetical questions, but it can still be concluded from the data with a large degree of confidence that if an Israeli government brings such an agreement to a referendum, it would win a majority (the figures relate to the Jewish population; it is reasonable to assume that support among Arab Israeli citizens would be even higher).

The picture presented so far indicates strong support among civil society in Israel for the idea of separation from the Palestinians. It therefore follows that any agreement reflecting this motif is likely to win a great deal of support. However, public opinion is extremely complex and includes more than a few contradictions, and there is data that challenges the public commitment to this end goal. When the overall agreement is broken down into separate elements, the support for each individual element is quite low. Since 2007, a majority of the Jewish public has opposed the slogan “land for peace,” and in 2012, 56 percent opposed the idea of land for peace, compared with only 30 percent that supported it.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the opposition

to “giving up territories” or “returning territories” is rooted deep within Israeli popular opinion.

With respect to different areas in Judea and Samaria, the respondents were asked over the years whether Israel should give up each of the specified territories in the framework of a permanent agreement ending the conflict with the Palestinians, or whether it should continue holding it, even at the cost of failing to achieve a permanent agreement. There was little readiness to return most of the areas. In 2012, 20 percent were willing to return the Etzion bloc, 22 percent the Jordan Valley, 34 percent western Samaria, and 36 percent Hebron. Only for the isolated settlements on the mountain ridge of eastern Samaria was there a clear majority in favor of returning them – 58 percent, a figure that probably reflects at least in part a desire for separation. An intriguing finding, which also hints at the desire for separation, is the relatively high support for returning the Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem – 47 percent.<sup>13</sup>

The Jewish public apparently does want separation from the Palestinians, but its willingness to take the necessary steps to bring it about is limited, as a result of the great suspicion among the Israeli public concerning the true objective of the Arabs. The respondents were asked what was the “ultimate aspiration of the Arabs.” The picture, as it has emerged in recent years, is fairly stable. Only a minority (one third in 2012) believed that the Arabs’ ambition was limited to the return of all the territories occupied in the Six Day War. A large majority of the Jewish public (two thirds in 2012) believed that their objective was to conquer Israel. Forty-five percent of the Jewish public expressed the belief that the Arabs’ objective was not only to conquer Israel, but also to destroy a large portion of the Jewish population in Israel.<sup>14</sup> It appears that fear of an Arab commitment to destroy Israel “in stages” is still rooted in Israeli consciousness.

In the absence of a permanent agreement (a possibility that is much discussed in Israeli public discourse), one possible result of the negotiations is an interim agreement, in which a Palestinian state would be established within temporary borders. Another possibility – whether as a result of negotiations or without them – is a unilateral Israeli measure. It can be assumed that public opinion toward these alternatives will be determined by the substance and scope of the arrangement, and according to the degree

of security that it offers Israeli citizens. Various interim arrangements can be envisioned that could win public support. According to the public opinion survey data, however, an interim settlement or unilateral measure involving the removal of Jewish settlements is likely to encounter major opposition in public opinion. There is some willingness to accept removal of certain settlements as part of a permanent agreement – only 37 percent of the respondents in 2012 answered, “Settlements should never be removed under any circumstances.”<sup>15</sup> When the same question is asked in the context of “a partial agreement,” 54 percent responded that settlements should never be removed, and 53 percent gave the same answer in the context of “Israel’s unilateral relocation of Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Feasibility of Implementing an Agreement: The Legal Aspect**

In early 1999, the Knesset enacted a law for the first time requiring a referendum in any contingency involving a political-territorial agreement under which Israeli law, jurisdiction, and administration will not apply to territory in which they applied when the said agreement was reached.<sup>17</sup> The impetus for the law was the issue of the Golan Heights; it was designed to ensure that any agreement with Syria that ceded part of the Golan Heights would be subject to popular decision in a referendum. The law itself was short – four sections – and was mostly of a declaratory nature. The mechanism for conducting a referendum and all the issues involved in holding one were not spelled out. In this form, the law could not be implemented at all.

In 2010, during the term of the previous Knesset, the law was amended and greatly expanded. It essentially became a new and extremely detailed law that discusses at length the mechanism for conducting a referendum, and provides clear answers to almost all the issues connected to when a referendum is actually to be carried out.<sup>18</sup> The 2010 amendment was related mainly to the Palestinian question, and was designed to ensure that any concession in Jerusalem would necessitate a decision by the people.

The discussion on a referendum returned to the headlines in the summer of 2013, following the renewal of talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

The media debate created the impression that many questions about a referendum remained open, such as the wording of the question, how the voting would be conducted, eligibility for participation, and what majority would be required to approve the proposal. This impression, however, was completely groundless; all the questions raised have clear and unequivocal answers in the law.

The law stipulates that the government will not ratify an agreement that requires ratification, and will not sign an agreement that does not require approval, whereby the State of Israel's laws, jurisdiction, and administration will not apply to territory in which the State of Israel's law, jurisdiction, and administration currently apply, until the agreement is approved by a Knesset majority of 61 members, i.e., that 61 Knesset members support it, and it is approved in a referendum. This also applies to an agreement containing a future commitment, including a commitment contingent on conditions, and it likewise applies to any government decision in the matter that does not involve an agreement. Implementation of such a decision is contingent on Knesset approval and a referendum, as if an agreement were involved. The only exception to this is if the agreement or government decision was approved by a majority of 80 Knesset members.

The law also determines a detailed mechanism for carrying out a referendum. The question to be put in the referendum is worded precisely in Section 7 of the law: "Are you for or against the agreement between the State of Israel and (the names of the parties) that was approved by the Knesset on (date of Knesset approval)?" If a government decision is involved, rather than an agreement, the question will be worded as follows: "Are you for or against government decision number (number of the decision) approved by the Knesset on (date of Knesset approval)?" The only data missing in the wording of the question is the date of Knesset approval and the name of the party or parties with which the agreement was contracted or the number of the government decision. These details are entirely objective, and it is hard to imagine a dispute arising over their wording. Nevertheless, the lawmakers left nothing open to question. Section 7(B) of the law stipulates that the chairman of the Central Elections Committee, a judge serving on the Supreme Court, is the only person who will "fill out the missing particulars in the question." The law also

stipulates that “the voting slips in the referendum will bear the words ‘for’ or ‘against’” (section 7(C)).

In addition, the law sets forth clear rules for participation in a referendum and the majority required for approval of an agreement or government decision. Section 6 of the law states, “Any person who would be eligible to participate in the Knesset elections, were they to take place on the date of the referendum, is eligible to participate in the referendum.” Section 3 of the law states that the agreement or decision approved by the Knesset also requires approval in a referendum, “by a majority of the valid ballots cast by participants in the referendum.” In order to leave no room for doubt, the law states explicitly, “If the number of votes in favor is greater than the number of votes against, the agreement is approved in the referendum, or the decision is approved in the referendum, whichever applies” (section 7(D)). Finally, the law states that the referendum will take place in the same way the Knesset elections are held, the Central Elections Committee will be responsible for holding the elections, and the provisions of the Knesset Elections Law, including the media campaigning, will apply to the referendum, with the necessary modifications (sections 9 and 10).

Once the law was enacted, the question of its validity arose. Some asserted that the law contradicted the Basic Law: The Knesset, because under the latter, the Knesset is the elected body of the State of Israel, and has the sole right to approve or not approve political agreements and government measures. A previous Supreme Court ruling established the principle that a basic law (which has the characteristics of a constitution) takes precedence over an ordinary law, and in the event of a contradiction between a basic law and an ordinary law, the usual rules for precedence of laws will not apply, and the basic law will take precedence. Some parties on the right expressed concern that parties on the left would file a petition to the Supreme Court against the law concerning a referendum, leading to its annulment. When the new government was formed in March 2013, the Bayit HaYehudi (Jewish Home) Party demanded that holding a referendum when concession of Israeli sovereign territory is involved be enacted in a basic law, protecting it from the challenge in the Supreme Court (if two basic laws contradict each other, the usual rules, namely that a specific law – and the Referendum Law is a specific law – will take precedence over a

general law, and that a later law takes precedence over an earlier law, will apply). On July 29, 2013, the government submitted to the Knesset a Basic Law: Referendum bill. Like other basic laws, this law is a framework law whose purpose is to protect an ordinary law specifying the circumstances and mechanism for a referendum – the Administration of Rule and Justice Law (Revoking of Incidence of Law, Jurisdiction, and Administration) 1999 – against a challenge in the Supreme Court.

The basic law is a short law with five sections. It stipulates that a referendum will be held in the event that the government decides to ratify an agreement or sign an agreement, or makes a decision other than through an agreement, under which the law, jurisdiction, and administration of the State of Israel will no longer apply to any territory where it now does apply, including a future commitment or conditional commitment, and the agreement or decision has been approved by the Knesset, as required under the Referendum Law (section 1). Anyone eligible to participate in the Knesset elections, were they to take place on the referendum date, is also eligible to participate in the referendum (section 2). The legal provisions concerning Knesset elections will apply to the holding of a referendum, with the necessary changes (section 3). Emergency regulations cannot change or temporarily invalidate this basic law (section 4). This basic law cannot be changed other than by another basic law passed by a majority of Knesset members (section 5). The bill was approved in its first reading on July 31, 2013, the last day of the Knesset session, and was sent to committee to prepare it for its second and third readings. It can be assumed that the proposed basic law will be passed in the first months of 2014.

The main problem, which may well become an important issue in Israeli public discourse in 2014, is that these laws apply only to a case in which a ceding of Israeli sovereign territory is proposed, i.e., the entire territory of the State of Israel on June 5, 1967, the entire territory of united Jerusalem (all 126 square km), and the entire area of the Golan Heights. An agreement that includes withdrawal from all of Judea and Samaria, the removal of all the Jewish settlements in the region (about 350,000 people), and the transfer of the entire territory to Palestinian sovereignty does not require a referendum. Such an agreement is not on the agenda, but this means that constitutionally, any agreement in Judea and Samaria, including an

interim agreement or a unilateral withdrawal, however limited or broad in scope, does not require approval in a referendum or approval by a Knesset majority of 61; an ordinary Knesset majority (even a majority of one in the absence of the majority of the entire Knesset) is sufficient.

With the renewal of the negotiations with the Palestinians, parties on the right (HaBayit HaYehudi, Yisrael Beteinu, and the right wing of the Likud) have renewed their demand that any agreement in Judea and Samaria involving the ceding of territory, not to mention the removal of Jewish settlements, be brought to the people for approval in a referendum. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has spoken on various occasions in favor of this idea. The problem is that it is very difficult to put such a commitment into legislation. The advantage of the existing legislation is that Israeli sovereign territory is clearly defined – “territory to which the law, jurisdiction, and administration of the State of Israel apply” – and is therefore not subject to dispute. Where the territories of Judea and Samaria are concerned, however, it is very difficult to define what exactly requires approval in a referendum. It is difficult to imagine a situation in which every removal of an unauthorized outpost, demolition of a house, or removal of a group of houses in a given settlement, or a change in IDF deployment on the West Bank, even if it involves the transfer of territory from Area B or C to the Palestinian Authority, will require a referendum.

The right, however, is not making such a far reaching demand. They want every agreement or interim agreement or unilateral measure involving a significant withdrawal from Judea and Samaria, not to mention a substantial removal of settlements, to be contingent on approval by an absolute Knesset majority and in a referendum. The problem is that it is very difficult to define “significant withdrawal” in legal and legislative terms. It is possible that instead of legislation, the right will settle for an explicit and public commitment from the prime minister, although the rule “whoever can forbid can also permit” would apply in this case, not to mention the fact that such a commitment is likely to be subject to a number of different interpretations. This subject is therefore expected to arise in the framework of the committee discussions on the basic law in preparation for its second and third readings. In any case, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which the government would be able to carry out a massive

removal of Jewish settlements as part of separation from the Palestinians without support for it from a decision by the people in one form or another. Carrying out a large scale measure in this direction is liable to cause a deep personal, psychological, social, and national crisis among Israel's Jewish population.

The question is, therefore, whether it is possible to create a mechanism for intra-society dialogue, because even if it does not prevent the rift, it will at least temper its severity. The attempts to deal with the challenge of internal dialogue in order to minimize the trauma expected to accompany separation from the Palestinians have hitherto come mainly from civil society and the third sector, and have been initiated by the government only in a few cases.

### **The Path to National Consensus**

The rift and alienation between the government headed by Ariel Sharon and the Israelis living in Judea and Samaria during the 18 months preceding the removal of the Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria in the summer of 2005 sharpened the differences in political position between both those who were evacuated and those who supported the disengagement. Those removed from their homes regarded the measure as an act of destruction and expulsion, while those who supported the measure regarded it as a proper strategic decision by a responsible government. The absence of constructive dialogue before the removal of the Jewish settlements also had severe long term consequences. Former Vice President of the Supreme Court retired Judge Eliyahu Matza, who headed the commission that investigated the measures taken before the disengagement, emphasized conclusions concerning "the way preparations should be made for different possible scenarios that Israel is likely to deal with in the future, including removal of a large group of citizens due to an event making this necessary for any reason whatsoever."<sup>19</sup> Thus a discussion in Israel's internal arena in the context of possible future independent steps that will be accompanied by the removal of Jewish settlements from the territories is most appropriate.

In 2000, when Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on a permanent agreement were underway, representatives of Prime Minister Barak were

in ongoing contact with leaders of the Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria. Tours and meetings with the Jews living there yielded insights that found their way to the staff work of the peace administration, and even to the negotiating table. Nothing leaked, and relationships of trust were created.

Professor Robert Mnookin, head of the negotiations program at Harvard Law School, has also recognized the need to create an internal consensus in Israeli society. In 2002, he initiated a dialogue in Israel under his direction between residents and non-residents of the settlements. Mnookin held several rounds of talks, which began before Ariel Sharon's speech in Herzliya announcing his intention to remove Jewish settlements, and ended shortly before the disengagement itself. During the dialogue, the participants tried to reach an understanding concerning the terms for achieving broad legitimacy for the removal. At the end of the talks, it appeared that initial agreement had been attained whereby in any future removal of Jewish settlements through a unilateral decision by Israel, the condition for implementing the removal would be the support of a majority in a referendum. After the disengagement, several leaders of the evacuated Jewish settlements admitted that the insights achieved in these meetings had deeply affected them, and as a result, they in turn convinced settlement residents to refrain from violent opposition to the removal, as indeed happened.

Since any plan for "two states for two peoples" – negotiated or unilateral – is likely to require the removal of Jewish settlements, the government should prepare for the possibility that the residents of these settlements will be called to return to whatever Israeli borders are drawn. In order to prevent an internal conflagration, the government should seriously consider changing the discourse with members of the Jewish settlement community, in order to broaden public support for a two-state solution, to present the removal as such that it is not perceived as a disavowal of the Jewish population in Judea and Samaria and disregard of their feelings, and perhaps also to justify their removal by force if necessary – in the hope that the dialogue, and the mutual understanding achieved during it, will make it less probable that the situation will escalate to such a contingency.

## Notes

- 1 Yehuda Ben Meir and Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, *The Voice of the People: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2012*, Memorandum No. 126 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2013).
- 2 Ibid, pp. 78-79.
- 3 Ibid, p. 72.
- 4 Ibid, p. 76, figure 14.
- 5 Ibid, pp. 85-86, and table 19.
- 6 Ibid, pp. 47-49. See also figures 4 and 6.
- 7 Ibid, pp. 46-50. See also figure 7.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid, p. 90.
- 11 Ibid, pp. 90-91.
- 12 Ibid, pp. 81-82. See figure 18.
- 13 Ibid, pp. 83-85. See figure 2.
- 14 Ibid, pp. 73-74. See figure 13.
- 15 Ibid, pp. 86-87.
- 16 Ibid. Note that there are studies and public opinion surveys conducted in 2013 that generally confirm this portrayal of public opinion in Israel, together with its complexity, as presented above, relying on the data analyzed at INSS. For example, in a survey conducted by Dialog – The Institute for Intercultural Meetings, the respondents, who were part of a representative sample of the Israeli public, were asked whether they would support or oppose in a referendum an agreement reached by the Netanyahu government with the Palestinians. Fifty-five percent of the respondents answered that they would support a referendum, and 25 percent said they would oppose it; 20 percent answered that they did not know – a support ratio of over 2 to 1. See Jonathan Lis, “55% of Israelis Say They’re Inclined to Vote for Peace Deal,” *Haaretz*, July 24, 2013. The wording of the question in the Dialog survey differed from the question asked in the INSS survey, but the percentages of the responses were fairly similar. A survey conducted by Ariel University in June 2013 found that only 13 percent of the population supported a large scale removal of settlements (a figure that is very similar to the data from the INSS survey), while on the other hand only 24 percent opposed any removal whatsoever (a number that is low, but not far from the INSS figures). See Yochai Ofer, “Israeli Public’s Support for Jewish Settlements in Judea and Samaria Weakening,” *Makor Rishon*, June 12, 2013. In a survey conducted by the Rafi Smith Institute in May 2013, two thirds of the respondents (67 percent) supported a “two-state solution,” compared with one third (33 percent) who opposed it –

percentages that are virtually identical to those from the INSS 2012 survey. At the same time, only 8 percent supported a two-state solution on the basis of the pre-Six Day War ceasefire lines. See Tovah Lazaroff, "Poll: 72% of Jewish Israelis View Jerusalem as Divided," *Jerusalem Post*, June 5, 2013.

- 17 Book of Laws 1999 No. 1703, dated February 9, 1999, p. 86.
- 18 Book of Laws 2011 No. 2263, dated November 28, 2010, p. 58.
- 19 Final Report of the State Commission on Treatment of those Removed from Gush Katif and Northern Samaria by the Responsible Authorities," [http://elyon1.court.gov.il/heb/hitnatkut/doc/final\\_report](http://elyon1.court.gov.il/heb/hitnatkut/doc/final_report).

# **The Civilian Front in Israel: A Framework for Future Preparedness**

Meir Elran and Alex Altshuler

The only episode in 2013 that came close to being an acute threat to the Israeli civilian front involved the tension between Washington and Damascus concerning the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Today, even if the fate of the chemical arsenal in Syria remains unclear, the episode highlighted one important lesson about the complexity and volatility of the risks facing the Israeli home front: in the conflict ridden and frequently changing Middle East, the home front can suddenly find itself facing an unanticipated conflagration in unforeseen circumstances from an unexpected direction. While for many years Israel perceived itself as challenged by a military threat from non-state or semi-state entities led by Hizbollah and Hamas, the challenge is now proving to be more diverse and points to possible surprising future directions. The firm lesson that emerges, therefore, though not entirely new, prompts the requisite action items. In other words, as it undertakes preparedness for an emergency, the home front must be ready to provide an immediate and appropriate response to a broad range of threats from different directions. This means that it must attend to the surprise factor that is often associated with disaster and crisis events.

All in all, 2013 was a quiet year for external threats to the home front. Following Operation Pillar of Defense (November 14-21, 2012), relative quiet prevailed in and from the Gaza Strip, thereby highlighting the power of effective deterrence. On the northern front, Hizbollah too has been careful to exercise restraint against Israel since the Second Lebanon War

in the summer of 2006. Furthermore, the turbulent regional environment resulting from the upheaval in leading countries, including those bordering Israel, has weakened Israel's enemies and afflicted Syria, Hamas, and Hizbollah with severe problems. The result is that the possibility of deliberate confrontation with Israel is now more remote, at least for the foreseeable future. This combination of clear Israeli deterrence and severe internal problems among its enemies grants a breathing space for the home front in Israel.

This respite of sorts brings with it both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, Israel has time to prepare in proper, orderly fashion for future threats to the home front. Time is a crucial asset, particularly when the different home front response organs use it well in meticulous planning. On the other hand, given the situation in Israel, prolonged security calm is liable to create the illusion of long term stability and an absence of urgency and necessity to effect readiness on the civilian home front. This article examines the degree to which Israel is dealing correctly with this dilemma.

### **New Developments in Threats to the Home Front**

The past year was not the best for military buildup among Israel's immediate enemies. Syria is mired in a bloody civil war, with its army fully preoccupied by the conflict. Hizbollah is also heavily involved in the Syrian crisis, including militarily, and Hamas for its part is not privy to its regular sources of military supplies. In the absence of adequate available data, it is assumed that the quantitative reinforcement of Israel's enemies with high trajectory weapon systems has been less than impressive in the past year. Still, the stockpiles of weapons accumulated in previous years are extensive, and make a long offensive campaign against the Israeli home front eminently possible. In this context, the head of the IDF Home Front Command stated that if a war breaks out with Hizbollah, the central region "will come under a massive missile barrage. Hizbollah has at its disposal about 5,000 warheads, weighing between 300 and 800 kilograms each. In my estimation, the first days will be extremely difficult. I am preparing for a scenario in which more than a thousand missiles and rockets a day are fired at the civilian rear."<sup>1</sup> The capabilities of Hamas and the very large

arsenal of short range rockets in the hands of the two organizations, and possibly the Syrian potential threat, can be added to this threat assessment.

Against this background, several developments in the enemy's capabilities are liable to have negative consequences for the future defense of the Israeli home front. The first is procurement of precision weapon systems. Until now, the Hamas and Hizbollah military buildups concentrated on statistical weapon systems, as they were more available, less costly, and easier to operate. At the same time, Hizbollah apparently has already obtained a small quantity of precision missiles, and there are increasingly frequent reports of its acquisition of such weapons. It was recently reported, for example, that Iran was planning to supply Hizbollah with advanced GPS-guided missiles – the Fateh 110 missile (to use its Iranian name),<sup>2</sup> also called M-600. According to unconfirmed reports, these missiles (or a less developed version of them) already reached Lebanon from Syria in 2010. Israel has made it clear more than once that it would take action to thwart the transfer of “game changing” weapons to the Lebanese organization, and in this context has attacked targets in Syria.

Apparently semi-state organizations are not satisfied with statistical systems, and are striving to supplement them with more advanced systems. This might pose a serious challenge for Israel, if in addition to statistical systems, which are designed primarily to frighten the population and disrupt its daily life, the enemy possesses systems capable of precise strikes against critical civilian and military infrastructure installations, such as military bases, airports, seaports, the electric grid, and other such sites. This new development might require a different, more comprehensive passive defense approach, and might challenge the newly constructed active defense system, whose order of battle is currently limited. If the active defense system is insufficient for enemy barrages, the IDF would be forced to set difficult priorities for protecting the different targets. The dilemma would necessitate choosing between protection of the civilian population, critical civilian installations, or military bases, quite a sensitive issue in Israel.

The second development concerns the cyber dimension. Until now, cyber warfare was conceived in Israel as a separate challenge from the home front. It now appears that it should be perceived as another increasingly

important element in the array of threats against the home front, requiring an appropriate integrated response, along with the more traditional and familiar threats. Indeed, together with the precision weapon systems mentioned above, it represents a future major threat to the critical military or civilian infrastructure installations, which depend directly or indirectly on IT systems.<sup>3</sup> As of now, the offensive cyber warfare capabilities of Israel's immediate adversaries are apparently limited. Still, they are under development, as was indicated by the report that numerous cyber attacks were launched against government internet sites during Operation Pillar of Defense.<sup>4</sup> The presumably enhanced capabilities of hostile countries like Syria, and especially Iran, whose operational cyber offensive capabilities are developing rapidly, should be considered more seriously.<sup>5</sup> In any case, Israel is systematically preparing itself for this growing threat, even though the national effort in this field is conducted through separate and parallel channels, external to those engaged with the home front cycle. Possible integration of all defensive cyber activities aimed at countering, foiling, and especially protecting the relevant systems should be considered, through creation of a joint entity responsible for all threats against the home front.<sup>6</sup>

Third is the chemical dimension, which was in the headlines following the Syrian regime's August 21, 2013 chemical attack against the rebels and the ensuing agreement whereby Syria would dismantle its chemical arsenal.<sup>7</sup> Several points might be in order here. One, the chemical threat has been perceived in Israel as relevant and serious particularly since the Iraqi missile attacks in 1991. In 2010, it was decided to redistribute gas masks and protective kits to the public, but the measure was inadequately budgeted and left 40 percent of the public unprotected.<sup>8</sup> The defense establishment has recently suggested ending this project altogether, based on the apparent change in the threat picture following Syria's commitment to dismantle its chemical arsenal. Two, beyond the Syrian context, there is disagreement regarding the likelihood of chemical weapons being used against Israel. Some assert that such a weapon, which was used by Egypt in the war in Yemen and by Iraq against the Kurds, has never been used against an enemy capable of an appropriate response, and that its use against Israel is therefore highly unlikely. There are those who are more cautious and suggest that the potential threat must be heeded<sup>9</sup> and prepared

for. For example, the recent annual national drill (Turning Point 7/Bold Home Front 1) was based on a nonconventional scenario,<sup>10</sup> as are local civilian drills that drill responses to chemical attacks.<sup>11</sup> Three, it can be assumed that the chemical threat will continue to pose some kind of threat for the civilian front in Israel and may become even stronger, especially if it finds its way to non-state terrorist organizations. Future developments will require a reassessment of the chemical threat's potential. If the threat is perceived to continue, and if it is decided to preserve the passive defense capabilities, it will be important to close the present gap and supply the entire population with the adequate defense means.<sup>12</sup>

Despite their current weakness, Israel's adversaries still possess sufficient military capabilities to challenge the Israeli civilian home front and create difficult situations. Special attention must be paid to the combination of the huge stockpile of rockets and missiles, with the future expected improvement in their precision and in cyber capabilities. Together, these will enable the enemy to wage a rather long campaign deep within Israel, including against population centers (Tel Aviv and the outskirts of Jerusalem were already targeted in Operation Pillar of Defense), and to severely damage civilian and military critical infrastructures. Such enhanced capabilities require Israel to take advantage of the breathing space provided by the regional developments in order to create an orderly, comprehensive, and flexible deployment that will provide a solid comprehensive response to the range of relevant threats, taking into consideration also less expected scenarios.

## **Constructing the Home Front**

In many ways, the past year was not much different from the six years before it since the Second Lebanon War, which was a turning point in home front deployment. The main directions have continued without conceptual or practical breakthroughs. The routine was reflected in the many emergency drills that were conducted in the various sectors, most notably the annual drill, in which there were no significant innovations. At the same time, the deployment of Iron Dome batteries in various regions against emerging threats was highlighted repeatedly, to make them a symbol of the active defense and a focus of public relations vis-à-vis both Israeli citizens (you are protected) and the enemy (you can't beat us).

Behind the scenes, however, tempers flared among the partners involved in the civilian front establishment. Most of the contention focused on the issue of authority and responsibility for managing the civilian front, and on the organizational-political question: who will make the decisions in this complex and sensitive theater, and what tools will be at his disposal? Particularly since the failure on the Israeli home front in 2006, several attempts were made to reorganize the home front structure in a way that would best coordinate the action among its various components. None of those produced an integrated and accepted solution, and this lack of resolution continues to ruffle the system and generate bad blood between the different organizations.

Accordingly, to date no comprehensive and effective solution has been found satisfactory. The dispersed and decentralized system has remained mostly without acceptable leadership, direction, or guidance, not to mention the absence of continuous systematic coordination. Every governmental, military, municipal, semi-national, and volunteer agency and party has continued operating mainly according to its own understanding and needs, despite some minor rectifications. Tactical and technical improvements have indeed been introduced over the years into the system, but they have neither changed the overall picture, nor provided a suitable answer to the question of who determines the priorities and the programs for promoting preparedness on the home front before a crisis, and who manages the scene during and after an event.<sup>13</sup>

Minister of Home Front Defense Gilad Erdan, who assumed his position in March 2013 as the third head of the ministry since its establishment in 2011, appears determined to attend to this problematic situation and create a new setting that will meet the challenge of defining responsibility at the ministerial level and addressing ensuing bureaucratic consequences at the lower levels.<sup>14</sup> However, it is not yet clear what the new picture will look like, and whether changes instituted by Erdan will generate a new process, gain momentum, and alter the situation to encourage a greater degree of coordination between the parties, and eventually lead to the effective and proper operation of the entire system.

Several concrete questions are at issue. What is the standing and authority of the Ministry of Home Front Defense vis-à-vis the other ministries,

especially the Ministry of Defense, the Home Front Command, and the Ministry of Public Security, which is in charge of the Israel Police, which in this context also has defined authority under the law? In practical terms: to whom is the Home Front Command, the largest and most important agency in the civil defense system, subordinate, to whom does it report, and what character will it assume in the event of a future change in the system? How will the future organizational structure, which is designed to properly reconcile the military solutions for the home front with the civilian responses, be constructed? This assumes that it is possible, even theoretically, to draw a line separating these two spheres in the Israeli context.

The answers to these questions lie, of course, mostly in the political sphere. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who for some time now has been more closely involved with making decisions concerning the home front, primarily as an arbitrator, and who is trying to push forward a compromise formula in this critical matter, will be the one to make the difference, if he so chooses. Such a compromise may create a formula that grants, at least on paper, more visible authority to the Home Front Ministry, which until now has been no more than a marginal unit in the Ministry of Defense. Such an arrangement should include several essential elements, to ensure: (a) clarity in principle and in practice for the system, instead of the existing obstructive vagueness, in all matters pertaining to authority and responsibility, including budgetary allocations and their ramifications; (b) legislative legitimacy for the future arrangement, to expedite the Home Front Law, which has been stalled for several years; (c) maintenance of the operational capabilities of the Home Front Command, which has made some significant conceptual and practical strides in recent years; (d) clear and binding frameworks for coordination and cooperation between the various entities dealing with home front defense; and (e) clear organizational frameworks for enhancing the local authorities as a basic component, primarily in managing the scene in an emergency.

Only an arrangement that will establish and ensure this substantive clarity will be able to meet the future needs. Otherwise, the system will remain stalled where it is now, meaning that despite the incremental improvements instituted in recent years, however important, the system

will be limited in its overall capacity to accomplish the strategic leap necessary to provide the comprehensive solution needed for the threats to the home front.

In order to demonstrate that emergency systems can be advanced and improved, even in the tangled Israeli political and bureaucratic situation, consider the following short description of the change over the past two years of the firefighting system, whose severe shortcomings have been known for some time, but which were tragically exposed in the Carmel forest fire in December 2010.

Cabinet Resolution No. 2699, dated January 9, 2011, which followed the December 8, 2010 State Comptroller's Report on the deployment of firefighting and rescue services for emergencies, stipulated, inter alia, that a national firefighting apparatus should be created under the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Security. This decision paved the way for enactment of the National Firefighting and Rescue Authority Law 2012, which defined and specified a far reaching structural change in the firefighting apparatus: a decentralized system of municipal services (firefighters union and firefighting departments in the local authorities) became a nation-wide state authority with a centralized management and control mechanism. The new law established a transition period, at the end of which the nation-wide authority would replace the firefighter unions in the local authorities. This indeed occurred on February 8, 2013, as planned. In 2012, an agreement was signed between the firefighters union and the Ministry of Finance settling all issues pertaining to wages and labor relations arising from the transfer of firefighters to the status of civil servants under the Ministry of Public Security.

The changes that took place in the firefighting apparatus were driven by the need to promote a mechanism whose main purpose is to provide a structural connection between responsibility and authority at the local, district, and national levels.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the structural change, the state also invested hundreds of millions of shekels in infrastructure, where the gaps were particularly wide, and in substantial replenishment of the equipment and materials supplied to the firefighters.

The changes in the firefighting domain may constitute a rather good – however atypical – example for both home front preparedness and

implementation of reforms in the public sector in Israel. In this case, putting through the reforms featured several elements critical for success: sustained personal involvement of the senior leadership, headed by the prime minister; a budget supplement that included wage and labor welfare issues; and determined organizational and professional leadership. As such, a reformed apparatus was created with substantially improved operational and organizational effectiveness.

An entirely different issue that must be addressed in the context of advancing the Israeli home front involves development of the new apparatus for active defense. Once the Iron Dome system won public praise and military recognition, substantial acceleration in the construction of the three tier anti-missile system was quite expected. While the operational effort to develop the long range Arrow 3 is continuing,<sup>16</sup> some delay in the development of the Magic Wand medium range system has been evident (some doubt its necessity, given the scope of the further development in Iron Dome's capabilities).<sup>17</sup> It is still unclear how much Israel will invest from its budget in future procurement of the Iron Dome system,<sup>18</sup> now that the sixth battery has already been put into operation, and the seventh and eighth (out of the 13 batteries listed in the long range plan) are scheduled to become operational not before 2014.

Apparently, Israel clearly prefers that most of the budget investment in procurement of Iron Dome come from US sources, as has been the case up until now. Some unconfirmed reports suggest that the system's Tamir missiles will be manufactured in the US, which will accelerate the pace of their production and serve as a platform for marketing the entire system to customers in the United States and elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> In any case, the current Iron Dome order of battle must be doubled; otherwise, under a scenario of a full scale conflict, Israel will be unable to avoid problematic prioritization to defend military bases and critical infrastructure facilities over the protection of the civilian population – contrary to public expectation, based on promises made by the politicians.

The last major question is the issue of enhancement of social resilience. Much has been said on this subject, both in Israel and around the world, but not many are indeed looking in depth into its practical implications. Discussion has begun in Israel over the past year (to a large extent in

the wake of the example of the IDF, which devotes serious theoretical and practical efforts to the defense of the military rear) about system-wide “operational continuity.” This is a necessary concept in the field of emergency management, worded differently but close to the paradigm of resilience. Both aim in the same direction – improving the capabilities of any system – local, community, civilian, economic, military, social, and national – to cope successfully with a severe crisis with preplanned and structured incorporation of the following elements: containment of the consequences of the crisis; a flexible and adjustable response to an unexpected challenge according to its scope and magnitude; recognition that a temporary functional decline is unavoidable as a result of the disturbance; coping and adaptation; and an expeditious bouncing back, to facilitate a rapid return to the original designated functioning, and possibly even an advance to an improved systemic performance.<sup>20</sup>

Engagement in the area of resilience began in Israel in the 1980s in the northern communities facing Palestinian terrorism from Lebanon.<sup>21</sup> Rather slow progress has been made since then in studying the subject and in the commitment to address it. It appears that recognition that social resilience is not a static and given situation but must be enhanced early on through systemic and focused efforts has not yet taken root among decision makers in Israel. The limited activity in this key social strategy has been irregular and unsustainable – in effect, too little, too late. The past year represented a low point in this essential area. While leaders continue talking about promotion of national and community resilience as a lever for successful handling of the challenges of the various types of terrorism against the home front, they should be expected to get to the root of the challenge, and translate this understanding into appropriate plans and practical measures for ensuring resilience and operational continuity on the home front during and after a crisis.

## **Conclusion**

Two phenomena characterize the current situation on the home front. On the one hand, Israel is experiencing a period of relative calm on both of its main confrontation fronts: the Gaza Strip under Hamas, and southern Lebanon under Hizbollah. This relative stability is an appropriate time

to make the necessary amendments and advance preparations for future crises, which are bound to occur in unexpected circumstances, places, and times. At the same time, prolonged calm naturally produces complacency. From this perspective, the US-Syrian episode beginning in late August 2013 could have acted as a catalyst for further progress in preparedness – but it did not.

On the other hand, a serious controversy is taking place, partially behind the scenes, on the future setup of the governmental control over the home front. This could be an important opportunity for a constructive shake-up of the home front machinery. This prospect appears to be necessary, as it seems that the positive effects of the Second Lebanon War, namely, the important improvements mainly at the technical-tactical and operational level, were not sufficient to generate the necessary qualitative strategic leap forward. The organizational frameworks devised so far – the founding of the National Emergency Authority (NEA) in 2007 and the establishment of the Ministry of Home Front Defense in 2011 – have not produced the necessary transformation. Some even argue that they have added to the confusion within the system, and have therefore caused more damage than good. They have mainly created yet another mechanism on top of the already existing ones, without helping to clarify the question of authority and responsibility, which is the most critical issue in the labyrinthine structure of the home front.

## Notes

- 1 Amos Harel, “Israel’s Enemies have Put the Entire Civilian Population on the Frontline,” *Haaretz*, March 29, 2013.
- 2 Amir Rapaport, “Attack on the Way to a War,” *Israel Defense*, August 15, 2013.
- 3 The conceptual outline in this question was extensively reviewed in articles published in recent years in periodicals published by the Institute for National Security Studies. For example, see Lior Tabansky, “Critical Infrastructure Protection against Cyber Threats,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2011); and Daniel Cohen and Aviv Rotbart, “The Proliferation of Weapons in Cyberspace,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 5, no. 1 (2013).
- 4 Moti Basuk, “A Cyber War: 44 Million Attempts to Disrupt the Governmental Websites were Hold Back,” *The Marker*, November 22, 2013.
- 5 Gabi Siboni and Sami Kronenfeld, “Iran and Cyberspace Warfare,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 4, no. 3 (2013), pp. 68-69.

- 6 See the position paper by Gabi Siboni, head of the Military and Strategic Affairs Program and Cyber Warfare Program at INSS, on a national organizational solution for cyber, <http://inss.org.il.w99.moonsite.co.il/index.aspx?id=4351&eventid=94>.
- 7 Yiftah Shapir, "Chemical Assad? On the Chemical Warfare Attack in Syria," *INSS Insight* No. 458, August 25, 2013.
- 8 As of May 2013, 4.6 million kits were distributed, of which three million were in threatened areas and to institutions and critical enterprises. It was reported that in a crisis, the Even Pina (Cornerstone) system for distributing the remaining inventory within eight days could be activated, but the shortage of 2.5 million kits could not be made up. See Yoav Zitun, "Home Front Report: High Likelihood of Chemical Terror," *Ynet*, May 16, 2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4380579,00.html>.
- 9 An internal report by the Ministry of Home Front Defense defined the chemical threat as very likely, the risk from it as medium, and the level of preparedness with respect to distribution of kits as low. See Zitun, "Home Front Report."
- 10 Press release by IDF spokesman, May 25, 2013, <http://www.idf.il/1153-19038-HE/Dover.aspx>.
- 11 See the graph that presents drills at hospitals by charting the scenarios according to years, from Gaby Neuman (Head of Hospital Preparedness for Emergency Scenarios Branch, Home Front Command), hospital preparation cycle for emergency situations, [www.old.health.gov.il/emergency/mamarim/22](http://www.old.health.gov.il/emergency/mamarim/22).
- 12 Evidence that the subject is troubling those engaging in this work can be found in the idea, attributed to the Ministry of Home Front Defense and the National Security Council, of levying a NIS 1.3 billion tax to finance the supply of civil defense kits to all citizens. See Moti Basuk, "The Government Considers: Funding the Gas Masks through Increase of National Insurance Contributions," *The Marker*, August 7, 2013.
- 13 Knesset Research and Information Center, Authority of the Ministry of Home Front Defense, report: Oriana Almasi, October 2012, <http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m03117.pdf>.
- 14 Amir Oren, "What Scares the Home Front Command," *Haaretz*, April 20, 2013; Amos Harel, "Police Responsibility for the Home Front – A Recipe for a Failure," *Haaretz*, June 21, 2013.
- 15 For example, seven district reporting centers were set up within the National Firefighting Authority. These centers assemble data from the various stations, and transfer them to a national control center. See *HaBitachon*, July-August 2013. On the other hand, the IDF decided to concentrate firefighting capabilities on its bases independently of the civilian firefighting agencies; see *BaMahane*, June 2013. This is another reflection of the importance attributed by the IDF to what is called

“operational continuity” during an emergency and an attack on the military rear. Such separation also expands the firefighting capabilities of the civilian apparatus in an emergency.

- 16 The pace of progress in the Arrow 3 program is more rapid than previous estimates. If there is no further delay, the system could be operational during 2015. Gili Cohen, “The Senior IDF Official: Israel Accelerates the Development of ‘Arrow 3’ – Prepares for a Nuclear Threat,” *Haaretz*, June 3, 2013, in an article on a lecture by a senior officer in the Ministry of Defense Homa administration (responsible for development of the missile interception system) at a conference sponsored by the Institute for National Security Studies.
- 17 Operational deployment of the system is now projected only in 2015. See Gili Cohen, “The First Pictures of ‘Magic Wand’ in Action,” *Haaretz*, November 27, 2012.
- 18 Yiftah Shapir, “Lessons from the Iron Dome,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 5, no. 1 (2013). For the dispute about the system’s effectiveness, see Yiftah Shapir, “How Many Rockets Did Iron Dome Shoot Down?” *INSS Insight* No. 444, March 21, 2013.
- 19 Arie Egozi, “Will the Tamir Missiles be Produced in USA?” *Israel Defense*, October 14, 2012.
- 20 There is rich scientific literature about the metaphor of resilience. See especially F. H. Norris, S. P. Stevens, B. Pfefferbaum, K. F. Wyche, and R. L. Pfefferbaum, “Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41 (2008): 127-50; and Committee on Increasing National Resilience to Hazards and Disasters; Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, “Disaster Resilience: A National Imperative,” National Academies, 2012.
- 21 The Mashabim (resources) center in Kiryat Shmona, headed by Prof. Mooli Lahad, was a pioneer on this subject. See <http://www.icspc.org>.



# The Natural Gas Revolution in Israel

Shmuel Even and Oded Eran

Israel is in the second decade of a natural gas revolution, thanks to natural gas found in large quantities in Israel's economic waters in the Mediterranean Sea. The use of natural gas is an important contribution to environmental quality and brings with it significant economic advantages. At the same time, the gas revolution brings with it several complex dilemmas, for example, how to divide the benefits from the gas reserves between this generation and the next; this division relates to the amount of local consumption and gas export in the current generation and the balance left for the next generation. The gas discoveries have strengthened Israel's energy security, but have presented a new security challenge, namely, the defense of vital gas installations located far offshore. In the realm of foreign affairs, gas export may make a political contribution, but gas is the source of strife with Lebanon over control of economic waters, and a similar conflict might arise with other neighbors.

## The Natural Gas Revolution

The Israeli natural gas revolution developed in three waves. The first wave began in 1999-2000 with the discovery of natural gas in commercial quantities in the gas fields Noa and Mari B opposite the Ashkelon coast (the "Tethys Sea" reserves). Regular gas delivery began in 2004, and in recent years those reserves have been depleted. The second wave began in 2009 with discovery of gas in the first drilling in the Tamar field, in the sea opposite Haifa. The gas flow from this field began in 2013. The Tamar field enabled the continued supply of Israeli gas to the economy, and will continue to be

a central supplier for the economy's needs in the coming years. The third wave began in 2010 with discovery of gas in drillings in the Leviathan, Tanin, Shimshon, and Qarish fields, among others. With these discoveries Israel became a potential gas exporter. For export, suitable infrastructure must be constructed – pipelines or gas liquefaction installations.

According to the assessment carried out by the Inter-Ministerial Committee to Examine the Government's Policy Regarding Natural Gas in Israel (known as the Zemach Committee) in 2012,<sup>1</sup> the quantity of gas in Israel's economic waters that can be extracted at varying levels of certainty stands at 1,480 billion cubic meter (BCM). This figure includes:

- a. Reserves: fields at the highest level of production certainty. Natural gas reserves in these fields are classified by three levels: Confirmed (P1), Expected (P2), and Prospective (P3); reserves in Israel are found mainly in the Tamar field, and are estimated at 280 BCM at level P2.
- b. Contingent resources: fields with a lower probability of production, which is contingent on various conditions, including technical and economic feasibility and an accepted development plan. Here too there are three levels: low estimate of quantities (C1), best estimate (C2), and high estimate (C3). The Zemach Committee characterized holdings such as Leviathan, Dalit, and Tanin as contingent resources. According to the committee's estimate, these resources include 520 BCM at level C2. In other words, the total of reserves and contingent resources reaches approximately 800 BCM.
- c. Prospective resources: fields with the lowest production prospects, most of which are in a pre-drilling stage, and thus offer estimates alone. The total quantity of extractable gas in these fields is estimated at 680 BCM. The quantity of reserves and contingent resources in these fields can be updated based on future drillings.

The natural gas revolution was made possible thanks to large investments from the Israeli business sector, institutional investors, and foreign investors who purchased units of partnership. Another factor was the development of relatively advanced technologies that enable deep water drilling. Drilling of Tamar 1, for example, was carried out at a depth of 4.5 thousand meters below sea level.

Following the gas discoveries, the Knesset passed the Natural Gas Sector Law 2002, and over the years, developments and experience prompted amendments to the stipulated regulations. At the same time, main natural gas delivery lines were laid in the country. The government-owned corporation Israel Natural Gas Lines (INGL) was licensed to construct and operate the delivery system, but is not permitted to be involved in other portions of the industry. The delivery rate is uniform for all consumers, and the consumer bears the cost of connection to the delivery system. Until now, gas has mainly replaced coal, oil, and diesel at power stations and industrial plants, including: Israel Chemicals, Dead Sea Works, Neshar Cement Enterprises, Bazan Oil Refineries, Haifa Chemicals, America Israel Paper Works, and Delek Desalination. In 2011, power stations accounted for 82 percent of total gas consumption in Israel, and industry consumed 18 percent.<sup>2</sup> There are also future plans to use natural gas for transportation and as a replacement for cooking gas. Table 1 charts the growth of natural gas supply in Israel over the past decade.

**Table 1: Natural Gas Supply in Israel**

Year	BCM
2004	1.2
2005	1.6
2006	2.3
2007	2.7
2008	3.8
2009	4.2
2010	5.3
2011	5.0
2012	2.6
2013 (forecast)	7.8
2014 (forecast)	8.6

**Source:** Natural Gas Authority presentation, May 2013

In addition to the natural gas discoveries, efforts are underway to discover and extract oil on Israeli land and in Israeli waters. Oil was the original and preferred target of Israeli energy prospectors, but until now

they have found only gas. The chances of oil discoveries of large quantities in Israel are estimated to be higher than in the past, due in part to improved drilling technologies and large investments in the sector. A discovery of large oil reserves in Israel could lead to a major step forward in Israel's energy economy and to full Israeli energy dependence for a prolonged period, but the oil sector is beyond the scope of this article.

### **The Advantages of Natural Gas**

*Environmental quality and health:* Natural gas is created by bacteria from organic material, and is composed nearly entirely of methane. The source of a significant portion of organic material in the region is ancient sediment from the Nile River washed into the Mediterranean Sea. Natural gas burns relatively cleanly in comparison with other fuels such as oil, diesel, and coal, and it emits fewer pollutant gases and greenhouse gases. Power stations that operate on gas can be constructed anywhere, as opposed to coal power stations, which must be constructed on the coast – an already crowded area that is expensive and vital for tourism and recreation.

*Economic advantages:* Natural gas is the least expensive energy product in the Israeli economy. According to the Natural Gas Authority (in May 2013), the price of diesel per energy unit is 3.5 times higher than that of natural gas, the price of oil is 2.25 times higher, and the price of liquefied petroleum gas is three times higher. The use of natural gas in 2004-2012 saved the economy 22 billion shekels – 17 billion in electricity production costs, and 5 billion in savings in industry.<sup>3</sup> In addition, a power station operated by gas is substantially less expensive to build than a coal power station, and requires a smaller area. The contribution of the gas sector to the Israeli GDP growth, estimated by the OECD, will be 1 percent in 2013 and 0.7 percent in 2014.

Natural gas also supplies direct income to the state treasury as a result of royalties and taxes (corporate tax) paid by gas suppliers. In 2010 Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz established the Committee to Examine the Policy on Oil and Gas Resources in Israel (known as the Sheshinsky Committee). The committee examined how to distribute the profits of natural gas among the state and suppliers, with the state's share determined by fees, taxation, and royalties on oil and natural gas. In the end, after examining

the arrangements in other countries, the committee recommended raising the state's share of oil and gas production profits by a significant amount. The committee's recommendations were anchored in the Petroleum Profits Taxation Law, 2011. Finally, production of Israeli gas contributes to the reinforcement of the energy sector in Israel, affording employment, research and development infrastructure, academic tracks, and so on.

*Reduction of Israel's dependence on foreign energy:* Over the next decade, natural gas will become Israel's main source of energy, and the overall increase in the demand for energy for electricity production, industry, and to a certain extent transportation,<sup>4</sup> will be supplied by natural gas. According to the Natural Gas Authority, the natural gas systems must be treated as critical economic infrastructures, with care taken to provide backup and redundancies. In other words, the country cannot be satisfied with matching supply to demand, but must make sure there exists surplus supply and diversification, both with respect to suppliers and with respect to supply systems for the economy.

While important for many countries in the world, the reduction of energy dependency is particularly beneficial for the State of Israel, as it is still isolated in the Middle East, and the supply lanes to it are narrow and limited. Israel also may risk energy shortages due to events in the world like instability that may affect large oil producers such as Saudi Arabia. Along with other countries, Israel suffered from the oil shortage following the Iranian revolution, which led to soaring prices and supply problems throughout the world.

The main lesson learned regarding the development of gas systems and independence of external suppliers can be seen in the series of risks that were realized in the case of gas imports from Egypt following the start of the turmoil in January 2011. In February 2001 the Israel Electric Company decided to purchase 1.7 billion cubic meters a year for 10-15 years until the total cessation of gas supply from Egypt. However, the ensuing situation illustrated that Israel relied on an unstable source, and all potential risks were realized, including: security risk – the failure of Egypt to protect the pipeline from terror; economic risk – irregularity of supply and Egyptian unwillingness to stand by the contract price; and geopolitical risk, represented by the lack of internal stability and the opposition among

various groups in Egypt to the sale of gas to Israel. The political benefits that Israel expected from the purchase of Egyptian gas were never realized; Egypt did not see export to Israel as a significant asset (except those Egyptians closely associated with the export business who benefited from the deal),<sup>5</sup> and sometimes viewed it as a political liability.

In contrast, the decision to purchase Israeli gas has proven itself, despite the doubts in Israel in the early 2000s regarding the quantity of gas along Israel's coast. The use of Israeli gas provided incentive for gas prospectors to search for and develop new fields within Israel's territorial waters. Without this utilization of Israeli gas, it is quite doubtful whether they would have discovered the Tamar and Leviathan fields.

### **Limitations of Natural Gas**

*Transport and storage:* In contrast to oil and coal, it is difficult to store and transport natural gas in containers. The most effective way to market gas is through the laying of a gas pipeline infrastructure. This demands a major investment, which grows in proportion to the distance to the consumer. In the absence of a suitable infrastructure, the gas must be liquefied and transported in special tankers, which entails relatively high costs. The decision to use exhausted gas reservoirs to store gas from other fields is a correct strategic decision.

*Security:* In contrast to the vulnerable pipeline from Egypt, and to coal and oil supplied by ship from great distances, the Israeli gas is supplied through short and safe lines to the economy. Nevertheless, gas installations represent a new challenge in the field of defense of vital installations far offshore.

*The "Dutch Disease":* The use of Israeli gas may indeed save billions of dollars in foreign currency expenses in the ongoing balance of payments and replace the need to purchase dollars for importing oil, and thus in the future foreign currency income will be increased due to gas export. However, Israel currently suffers from the opposite problem – a surplus of foreign currency in the local market which causes an appreciation of the shekel, thanks to the impressive level of export of the technology industries and to American aid. Loans taken by the Israel Electric Company abroad converted to shekels in the local market also increase the supply of foreign

currency. The impact of the shekel's appreciation is a blow to production in the economy: the exporters receive less shekel revenue while their expenses are not reduced, and the manufacturers who supply the local market have problems dealing with lower prices on imports. As a result, the manufacturers' profits will drop, the quantity of workers dropped by industry will increase, and tax revenues will drop. In order to deal with this problem, the Bank of Israel decided on a policy of proactive purchasing of foreign currency in the local market, \$3.5 billion in 2014, with the objective of offsetting the foreign currency impact stemming from the gas discoveries. It was also decided to set up a foreign investment fund where some of the state's foreign currency profits can accrue.

*Gas supply monopoly:* Following the fall of the Egyptian supply channel, the Israeli economy is dependent on the Israeli gas suppliers, led by the owners of the Tamar and Leviathan fields. Subsequently, Antitrust Authority head David Gilo declared the Tamar gas field a monopoly as of the middle of 2013. Gilo's announcement said, "This means that the prohibitions and provisions applying to monopolies by law apply also to every partner in Tamar in its activities in other gas fields such as Leviathan or Shimshon."<sup>6</sup> As a rule, Israel's antitrust law forbids a monopoly or its owners from abusing its position in a manner that might reduce competition or harm the public, for example through exaggerated pricing, predatory pricing, and discrimination among customers.

## **Gas Export and the Intergenerational Dilemma**

Gas export must address the issue of the revenues of gas prospectors, whose interest is to export the maximum amount of gas as quickly as possible in order to see the return on their large investments and produce maximum profit in time frames that are considered standard in the business world. In light of the existing discoveries, it is clear that if gas export is not permitted on a large scale, there will be no reason for further investment in the search for and development of new fields that cannot yield sizable profits in the foreseeable future.

A second and far more complex issue relates to the distribution of the benefits of gas (income, cheap energy, clean air, and energy security) between this generation and the next (the residents of Israel in another

25-35 years). Gas benefits can be distributed as follows: keep all the gas in the sea floor for local consumption only, so that future generations can use it for their needs; or use the gas to provide for all current local needs and export the remainder until the fields are exhausted. The income the state receives from gas exports will then be invested in a fund or in projects that will benefit future generations. In other words, even the second approach does not ignore the next generation. From an economic perspective, the dilemma is contingent on two main variables that work in opposite directions. One variable is the price of gas in the future – the more gas prices, based on forecasts, are expected to rise in the future, the better it is to leave gas in the ground. The second variable is the return on capital accruing from sale of gas in the present – the higher the projected return, based on forecasts, the more desirable it is to export the gas and invest the profits in a fund or other projects, whose cumulative contribution to the economy will be larger.

These two issues were at the core of the debate in the Zemach Committee, which presented its recommendations in August 2012. Regarding export, the committee determined that “consumers in the Israeli economy should have precedence for the purchase of natural gas from the fields under Israeli control.” In order to ensure this, the committee decided that “fields will be obligated to supply a certain quantity of natural gas to the local economy; every producing field will be required to be connected to the local economy at a time and scale to be determined.” The committee further recommended that “specific terms shall be set for fields under joint control of Israel and its neighbors in the framework of individual arrangements.” Also regarding export, the committee decided that “owners of holdings will be required to receive advance approval for the sale of gas not intended for the Israeli economy; acquisition of an export license will be mandatory; the quantity of gas permitted for export from each field shall be determined in terms of maximum daily production permitted for export, as per the license (two restrictions shall apply to owners of holdings: a restriction on daily production, and a restriction on total quantity of export).” Moreover, the committee recommended that export of Israeli natural gas be permitted “only from an export installation (ocean-based or land-based) and territory under Israeli control,” and that

“an inter-ministerial committee headed by the director general of the Prime Minister’s Office shall examine ways of removing obstacles in the natural gas industry, and of promoting the capability of export within short time frames.” In addition, it was recommended that “the Foreign Ministry should act for the promotion of an array of diplomatic intergovernmental agreements for future cooperation in the natural gas industry.”<sup>77</sup>

Regarding the intergenerational dilemma, the Zemach Committee concluded that while the total of potential reserves might reach 1480 BCM, some reserves are estimated at an insufficient probability, and therefore only 950 BCM would be used as an estimate for policy recommendations (table 2). The committee recommended that in five years another assessment should be made to update the export quota in light of discoveries and development of fields.

**Table 2: Zemach Committee Estimate of Potential Reserves for Policy Formulation**

Natural Gas Reserves	BCM
Estimation of quantity of gas considered available at a high probability (reserves and contingent resources) in fields that have been drilled.	800
Additional resources that are highly likely to be discovered (over 90 percent) out of 80 BCM classified as prospective resources, pre-drilling, at varying probabilities of realization.	150
<b>Total reserves for policy recommendations</b>	<b>950</b>

**Source:** Zemach Committee Report, August 2012

The Zemach Committee concluded that the total quantity of gas in the Mediterranean Sea should be extracted and divided between local use and export over the next 25 years, such that local gas demand will be met by a total of 500 BCM, and the rest – 450 BCM – will be directed to export (table 3). The arguments for this time frame were as follows: “A conservative quantitative estimate points to a time frame of between 15-20 years as economically reasonable for preferring to keep natural gas for future local supply over export.”<sup>78</sup> This time frame is in line with common practice in the world of energy regarding standard time frames as far as entry into investments from the point the decision is taken. The supply

will be in accordance with the requirements of the Israeli economy and the development of demand in the local market, including the meeting of maximum hourly demand required for this economy (especially at peak demand). “The assurance of local supply for a period of time significantly longer than 25 years is expected to lead to harming the profitability of the search for and development of fields. In addition, employing a long term economic view, it will not be profitable, among other reasons, due to significant loss of direct income to the state.”<sup>9</sup>

**Table 3: Demand Scenario for Natural Gas in Israel**

Year	BCM
2015	9.7
2020	13.3
2025	16.6
2030	20.6
2035	23.4
2040	27.1

**Source:** Zemach Committee Report, August 2012

According to the scenario of the Zemach Committee, from a total of 501 BCM that will serve the economy between the years 2013-2040, 336 BCM will be used for electricity production, 111 BCM will be used for industry, 40 BCM for transportation, and 14 BCM will be used for methanol production.

Various objections to the Zemach Committee conclusions arose, especially regarding the considerations and method of calculation by which the Zemach Committee chose to present the scale of export. It was claimed that the committee did not take into account all of the benefits of local gas use to the economy, and that it based itself on lower-than-expected demand forecasts, among other reasons because it did not relate appropriately to the expected demand of the transportation<sup>10</sup> and industry<sup>11</sup> sectors. Some argued that the committee’s estimates are inflated because they relate to reports of potential supply and not proven reserves, and that the supply did not take into account extreme scenarios of technical failures and the collapse of wells. It was also argued that the formulas used produce results

that can be adjusted by changing the discount interest rate. Opponents have called not to export gas, or to significantly increase the amount of gas to be kept for the economy's needs, e.g., up to 600 BCM.<sup>12</sup>

On June 23, 2013, the government decided to a large degree to endorse the calls to increase the quantity of gas to be used for the local economy and to reduce the export quota (table 4). It decided that Israel will keep approximately 540 BCM (57 percent) of its potential gas reserves for local use, in other words an addition of 90 BCM over the recommendations of the Zemach Committee, or an additional 3 to 4 years of consumption for the Israeli economy (in terms of the demand forecast for 2040). According to both approaches, the era of Israeli gas is expected to end in less than 30 years, meaning in a generation's time. Furthermore, the government decided to obligate the Tamar partnership to connect the field to the Ashkelon coast through an additional pipeline by the end of 2016, and to install compressors in the existing pipeline to Ashdod in order to increase its capacity. The government also decided that export of gas to Jordan and the Palestinian Authority should be subtracted from the export quota. The government permitted the export of 20 BCM from the Tamar field immediately, even before the Leviathan field is connected to the coast.

In the wake of the government decision, a number of Knesset members opposed to the export of gas petitioned the Supreme Court to transfer the decision on the matter to the Knesset. In late October 2013, the Supreme Court rejected the petitions and maintained the government decisions, first and foremost the proportion between local use and export of 60:40.

**Table 4: Gas Export Decided by the Government of Israel (compared to Zemach Committee Recommendations)**

	Government Decision June 2013		Zemach Committee Recommendations August 2012	
	BCM	%	BCM	%
Quantity for use in Israeli economy	540	56.8%	450	47.4%
Balance for export	410	43.2%	500	52.6%
Total potential reserves for setting of policy	950	100%	950	100%

Beyond the legal significance regarding the relationship between the executive branch and the legislative branch, the decision will expedite the organization of the company's ownership rights to the Leviathan field in preparation for gas production, with the hope that it will begin in 2018. Reduction of the dimension of uncertainty regarding Israel's conduct on the issue of export is likely to appeal to potential external investors such as the Australian company Woodside. The decision is also likely to ease progress in contacts with potential local consumers such as Jordan, Egypt, and the Palestinians. The issue of natural gas represents a central factor in the plan designed by US Secretary of State John Kerry for the improvement of the Palestinian economy. The swap agreement between Israel and the Palestinians (the purchase of gas from the field opposite Gaza in return for the sale of Israeli gas to PA territories in the West Bank) may hold significance in any future diplomatic agreement.

The question of gas export to Turkey, both as a consumer and as a distribution channel, is a sensitive diplomatic issue. The tension between Israel and Turkey has still not dissipated despite Prime Minister Netanyahu's apology to the Turkish Prime Minister in the presence of the US President. Both Israel's government and the private sector, including Israeli and foreign companies, will need to find solid guarantees prior to turning to Turkey regarding gas exports.

The potential partnership with Greece and Cyprus on infrastructure and transport is important mainly because they are members of the EU who also are a presence in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Other potential export markets such as India and China hold diplomatic significance, but it is relatively small in light of the tremendous energy consumption of these countries and the fact that the quantities of Israeli export would be the smallest in the world gas industry.

Besides keeping reserves in the ground, another tool to solve the intergenerational dilemma is the establishment of a fund that will accrue profits for future generations. Such a fund is to be set up by the Bank of Israel, which will manage it through an investment committee. According to plans, it will invest its assets abroad, mainly in stocks, starting in 2017. The assessment is that by 2040 the fund may accrue assets totaling 300 billion shekels. Current profits from the fund, such as interest, will be used

for the state budget. The investment abroad will ensure that the fund is removed from the risks of the Israeli economy and that the principal can be tapped only in emergency situations. Another consideration in favor of foreign investment is to help avoid the “Dutch Disease.” Opponents of the fund abroad argue that already today Israel suffers from severe problems, and thus it is better to leave the money in Israel and invest it in funds that specialize in the advancement of critical long term infrastructures, education, closure of socioeconomic gaps, and so on.<sup>31</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Although Israeli natural gas is a strategic and economic asset of great importance, its percentage of Israel’s GDP is expected to be small, and it does not lend Israel significant status in the global energy industry. That said, the export of the gas is necessary, whether for the financing and development of existing gas fields, for future gas and oil prospecting (not yet discovered in the sea), or to signal to Israeli and foreign investors that their investment in Israel is generally worthwhile.

According to the government decision regarding the scale of gas exports and the assumptions of the Zemach Committee (potential reserves for policy formulation and future local consumption), the gas will be sufficient for at most 30 years of local consumption. In other words, based on these assumptions, the age of Israeli gas production will end by 2045, when the economy’s dependence on natural gas will be on a scale of 30 BCM per year of consumption. Theoretically, if annual consumption is restricted to this quantity and there is no gas export at all, then the gas fields will last another 15 years, until 2060. One way or the other, Israel will need to supply its energy needs in the future through gas imports or through other energy sources that will be found or developed by then.

The intergenerational dilemma is indeed prominent in the issue of natural gas, but it is only a small issue in the broader context of similar dilemmas. For example, the dilemma also exists regarding the national debt, i.e., how much debt is this generation bequeathing to future generations; the issue of pension payments, in other words, what scale of social burden will this generation present when it grows old; and so forth. Therefore, the discussion of this dilemma must occur in a broader context, and not

focus solely on the natural gas industry, as this generation will bequeath to future generations related elements, namely, real estate, infrastructure, environmental quality, and so on.

The gas industry is rich in advantages, but also suffers from more than a few risks, which must be managed through redundancies of delivery and transport infrastructure, the continued existence of dual systems for alternate fuels at power stations, development of a storage reservoir, and defense of the various installations from physical and cyber attacks.

The natural gas industry is only part of the Israeli energy market, and thus the establishment of a national energy authority should be considered. Such an authority would be responsible for the implementation of a comprehensive national policy for use of the various sources of energy, electricity production, development and use of renewable energy sources, and so on.

The anticipated export of gas to Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, countries in Europe (directly, or through Cyprus and Turkey), and other countries in the world holds considerable diplomatic value, but it should not be expected that it will impact fundamentally on the foreign relations of the consumers with Israel. On the other hand, Israel will need to be especially sensitive to European consumers, who have alternate gas import options.

The disputes with Lebanon regarding sovereign territory and territorial waters are a fundamental point of friction that may lead to military conflicts. Nevertheless, proper management of the dispute can lead to cooperation in the area of production from potential joint gas fields, to joint transport of extracted gas, thus turning the risk into an opportunity.

## Notes

- 1 Report of the Committee to Examine the Government's Policy Regarding Natural Gas in Israel ("Zemach Committee"), August 2012. An Executive Summary of the report, including a map, is available in English at <http://energy.gov.il/English/Subjects/Natural%20Gas/Documents/pa3161ed-B-REV%20main%20recommendations%20Tzemach%20report.pdf>. An additional map is available in the full report at [energy.gov.il/Subjects/NG/Documents/NGReportSep12.pdf](http://energy.gov.il/Subjects/NG/Documents/NGReportSep12.pdf), p. 39.
- 2 Natural Gas Authority presentation, May 2013.

- 3 Energy and Water Ministry, Natural Gas Authority, presentation of May 2013. For purposes of the calculation the following assumptions were made: investment of approximately 3 billion shekels in conversion of power stations to gas; and in a situation without natural gas, there would be a need to build two additional coal power stations, Station D in 2009, and Station E in 2012.
- 4 The transportation sector consumes approximately half of the refined oil products in Israel, approximately 20 percent of national energy consumption. Presentation of the Transportation Ministry, Idan Aboudi, "Petroleum Alternatives for Transportation – Multi-Fuel Vehicles," Ministry of Energy and Water website.
- 5 Dudu Lefkin, "All of Maiman's Men," *Maariv NRG*, February 6, 2001, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/archive/ART/113/077.html/>.
- 6 Amiram Barkat, "Antitrust Head Declares Tamar a Monopoly," *Globes*, November 13, 2012.
- 7 Zemach Committee Report, pp. 4-5.
- 8 Zemach Committee Report, p. 10.
- 9 Zemach Committee Report, pp. 10-11.
- 10 According to the Zemach Committee Report (p. 125), "We estimate that natural gas-powered transportation is an interim solution with high economic feasibility for assimilation in the short term. Furthermore, we do not foresee an additional increase in gas consumption for transportation as of 2025, due to the penetration of vehicles powered by other means. Natural gas will serve the transportation market in Israel for 25 years, while due to various reasons (climate change, environmental considerations, natural resource limitations, and continued technological progress) the forecast is for it to be replaced by other sustainable energy technologies by the middle of the current century."
- 11 Ariella Berger, "Demand Forecast for Natural Gas," a presentation of the Economic Planning Institute, June 5, 2013.
- 12 Avi Bar Eli, "Export Less Gas, Keep More for the Economy," *The Marker*, May 25, 2013.
- 13 Meirav Arlozorov, "Bequeath to Our Children the Gas Money So They Can Fix What We Destroyed," *The Marker*, August 1, 2013.



## Conclusion

# A Time for Decisions: Toward Agreements and Alternative Plans

Amos Yadlin

In 2013, Israel's national security balance sheet was largely positive. In contrast, in the second half of 2014, complex and problematic processes underway in the region – including the efforts to contend with the Iranian nuclear program, the effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the upheaval in the Arab world, and stature of the United States in the Middle East – can be expected to pose significant challenges to Israel's security. The positive components of the balance sheet should make it easier for Israel to formulate a solution to various challenges through agreements, or, if agreements cannot be reached, to devise suitable alternatives. In any case, this is a time for Israel to make decisions and take political and security initiatives in order to arrest adverse trends and prevent the negative items in the balance sheet from developing into clear and immediate threats and dangers.

### **The National Security Balance: Principal Positive Components**

- a. Israel enjoyed almost complete tranquility on its borders. Israel's deterrence is very strong and is patently effective against neighboring countries and terrorist organizations with strongholds in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.

- b. Despite the upheaval in the Arab world, Israel's peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan have been maintained.
- c. President Barack Obama's visit to Israel in March 2013 and the unequivocal US support for Israel in the security sphere, which includes preservation of Israel's qualitative edge and the development of its missile defense capabilities, have upgraded the IDF's powers and continue to constitute an important element in Israeli deterrence.
- d. The Syrian military, which is preoccupied by the civil war, has been drastically weakened. It has lost many soldiers and a great deal of equipment, and its chemical weapons are in the process of being dismantled.
- e. Hizbollah is engaged in the fighting in Syria, and is thereby losing legitimacy in the Arab world in general and in Lebanon in particular. There has been no response to air strikes, attributed to Israel, against high quality weapons en route to Hizbollah from Syria.
- f. The standing of Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA), headquartered in Ramallah, improved, while the stature and power of Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, has been greatly weakened. This balance of power in the Palestinian arena facilitated the renewal of negotiations between Israel and the PA on a permanent agreement – a development that to some extent has relieved the international pressure on Israel and slowed the delegitimization campaign waged against it in recent years.
- g. Iran's economy was significantly damaged both by the international sanctions and by poor economic management under former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. For the first time in a decade, Iran came to the negotiating table in a position of weakness, compared to the major powers leading the effort – the P5+1, and foremost among them the US – to block Iran's march toward nuclear weapons capability. The talks concluded with an interim agreement designed to slow the progress of Iran's nuclear program and even roll it back slightly.
- h. The Muslim Brotherhood regime was overthrown in a military coup with civilian support. The Egyptian military, which of all the elements active on the Egyptian political scene is the most positive for Israel, is back in the driver's seat. The Egyptian military is fighting the terrorist

groups operating in Sinai with great determination, and is hostile toward Hamas.

- i. A broad confluence of interests between Israel and Arab countries belonging to the moderate Sunni world, especially the Gulf states, has emerged. This meeting of the minds is based on a similar perception of the developments involving Iran, Syria, and Egypt, and on similar preferences regarding the changes underway in the Arab world.
- j. Threats of a major wave of terrorism by global jihad from the areas in the Syrian Golan Heights and Sinai not under centralized control did not materialize over the past year.
- k. A preliminary agreement to end the crisis between Israel and Turkey was achieved. From Israel's perspective, the weakening of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is also a positive development.
- l. Natural gas from the Mediterranean is again flowing into Israel – this time from the richer fields in Israel's northern economic waters. This development makes it easier for Israel to bear the cost of energy, and upgrades its geopolitical standing.

## **Upsetting the Balance**

Looking ahead, there is cause for concern about negative long term strategic processes that pose significant potential challenges and risks to Israel's national security. At the heart of these processes are four key issues that confront Israel's strategic thinking and demand proactive policies that depart from the status quo and convert the negative trends into a strategic situation that is more favorable to Israel. These four issues appear to be independent of one another, but in fact the linkage between them will become more significant in 2014.

The first of these issues is the Iranian nuclear program. The risks of the coming year include the possibility of Iran reaching the nuclear threshold, and the possibility of an agreement between Iran and the major powers that will leave Iran the capacity for continued progress on its nuclear program, while weakening the principal US leverage for pressure on Iran: the sanctions regime and the credibility of the military option.

The second challenge is the Israeli-Palestinian political process. Among the potential political and security consequences of failed negotiations are

a diplomatic and legal campaign against Israel in the international arena and intensified boycott efforts, as well as the (less likely) development of another round of violence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

A third threat may emerge from the upheaval in the Arab world and its effect on Israel's neighbors, i.e., Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. Instability in these countries, and especially weakened central governments, will have consequences that threaten Israel's national security.

The fourth challenge concerns US policy in the Middle East. At issue here is a possible change in emphasis in American foreign policy, given the growing interest of the US administration in Asia and the weakening of American influence in the Middle East. US reluctance to use military force in regional crises and a focus on diplomatic measures, some problematic, are liable to pose a strategic challenge to Israel.

In the second half of 2013, following election campaigns of previous months and the formation of new governments in the US, Israel, and Iran, several diplomatic processes began that will have a significant effect on developments in 2014: the interim agreement signed by Iran and the major powers in Geneva in November 2013 as a step toward a comprehensive resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue; the nine-month period allotted to negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, which will expire in April 2014; and the process of dismantling Syria's chemical weapons, which is slated for completion in 2014, along with a possible process toward some settlement between the warring parties in the civil war.

These processes will all converge in the late spring-early summer of 2014. Their progress and results will directly affect Israel's core security issues and require the government to take difficult decisions. Postponing decisions is always an option, but responsible leadership must be particularly sensitive to timing. It must recognize when postponing a decision exacts a heavy price, such as the diplomatic price that will accompany Israel's being held responsible for failure of the negotiations with the Palestinians. It must identify when it is right to await the result of diplomatic processes in the international arena and to delay decisions about Israeli action, for example, if the Western powers promote a solution to the crisis with Iran that meets Israel's security interests. And it must determine what does not require decisions, but does require careful monitoring and readiness for

negative developments, such as an outbreak of fighting on the northern front (on the border with Syria or Lebanon) or a change of regime in Egypt and/or Jordan. Furthermore, responsible leadership will be able to take advantage of opportunities for cooperation with pragmatic Sunni countries to promote joint interests.

### **Iran's Nuclear Program**

Iran's progress in uranium enrichment, along with the construction of a heavy water reactor at Arak – a key element in obtaining nuclear weapons on the plutonium track – meant that in 2013 Iran drew closer to an ability to break out to nuclear weapons within a short time. A few months will suffice to build the first device, and it will take one year to obtain an operational weapon. Once the Arak reactor becomes hot, no military attack will be able to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, primarily because of the extensive environmental damage that such an attack would cause. This development, combined with the fear of an Israeli attack against Iran, confronted the US and the world powers with the urgent need to decide between three alternatives: to continue the current policy of intensifying sanctions in order to translate the growing economic pressure on Iran into an agreement and arrest Iran's progress toward a short breakout capability, and even roll back its progress by a few years; to use the military option if there is no progress toward an agreement; or to accept a reality of Iranian breakout capability and its achievement of nuclear military capability.

The increased effectiveness of the sanctions and Iran's aggravated economic situation provided the background for mounting pressure in Iran's internal arena for change. Hassan Rouhani, the more "moderate" candidate, was elected president in June 2013. In his election campaign, he spoke in favor of a more flexible position by Iran on the nuclear question and improved relations with the West. Rouhani won by an overwhelming majority in the first round of the elections. Many reasons were given for the acceptance of the election results by Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the real decision maker in Iran, in contrast to his decision to tamper with the results of the preceding elections. Perhaps this decision reflected the realization that the nuclear project, for many years considered an asset that contributed to the regime's stature and stability, had to some

extent become a burdensome threat. If so, the Iranian leadership must decide between continuing the nuclear program in its current format, perhaps while making do with the civilian program, or, if the economic pressure cannot be relieved, completing the program and breaking out to a bomb.

Against this background, negotiations resumed between Iran and the major powers, reflecting the desire of both sides to refrain from choosing between alternatives that would incur overly high costs. Tehran seeks to ease the economic pressure and distance the threat of military action, while the US and its allies seek to avoid the price of military action against the nuclear program, whether by the US or by Israel, or the price of Iran with a nuclear military capability. All parties therefore began the negotiations with the feeling that failure was not an option, and all displayed willingness to soften their traditional positions.

After the adoption of the Iranian proposal to conclude an interim agreement quickly that would enable the parties to negotiate a final agreement during a limited period of 6-12 months, the parties negotiated intensively in Geneva and agreed on a Joint Plan of Action. Its thrust is a halt in the progress of the Iranian enrichment program and its partial rollback in exchange for a partial removal of sanctions. The agreement was criticized on both sides; conservative parties in Iran objected strongly to the deal. Of those opposing the Iranian nuclear program, Israeli criticism was particularly vocal, reflecting the idea that to a large degree the interim agreement indicates Western willingness to ultimately accept an agreement that will leave Iran with complete control over an active nuclear fuel cycle and the ability to break out to a nuclear weapon. Furthermore, if no further agreement is concluded, the interim agreement will de facto become a permanent situation, at least indefinitely, i.e., Iran will retain the ability to break out to a nuclear weapon within a short time. Once the agreement was signed, it appeared to fulfill its original purpose and give the parties breathing room for negotiations on a comprehensive agreement. Under the likely assumption that the parties reach agreement on the technical aspects of the interim agreement, following which the negotiations on a full settlement will begin, each party will have to decide how to take advantage

of the allotted time in order to maximize the chances of achieving results that will serve its strategic aims, and what it will do if the negotiations fail.

Iran will have to choose one of two possibilities. It can act on the belief that through limited and non-substantive concessions it can preserve most elements of its nuclear program, including the ability to break out to a nuclear weapon within what it regards as a reasonable timetable, while achieving its goal of removing the sanctions and removing the military threat. It can attempt to promote an agreement with the major powers and create momentum toward easing of the sanctions, by creating a positive atmosphere of negotiations and cooperation. Iran could also decide in principle to settle for a civilian program through concessions that will make a breakout to a nuclear weapon impossible, but maintain its national honor and give the impression that the regime has adopted a firm stand. It is fairly clear that the Iranian negotiators will pursue the first possibility. The key question is what Iran will do if it does not make more substantial concessions and the negotiations are on the brink of failure, at which point it will have to analyze the consequences of failure for Iran's economy and regime stability and decide what path to take.

The P5+1 will also have to make several decisions, although a decision on some issues has apparently already been taken. The first is whether the only subject for discussion is the nuclear program, or whether it is worthwhile broadening the dialogue to other areas of Iranian behavior (such as support for terrorism). It appears that this question has already been decided, and the talks will be limited strictly to the nuclear program. This is a reasonable choice, because introducing other elements into the negotiations will only complicate them and interfere with their chances for success. Solving the nuclear issue will make the rest of Iranian wrongdoing easier to deal with. Regarding the economic pressure on Iran, sanctions against the nuclear program will need to be separated from sanctions against other elements of Iran's behavior in the international arena.

Another issue that has already been decided is whether under a full agreement Iran will be allowed to enrich uranium. The realistic assessment is that no agreement is possible that does not give Iran some enrichment capability. The critical question, therefore, is what combination of parameters in the agreement – the number and type of centrifuges, level of

enrichment, amount of enriched material that Iran will retain in its raw state, neutralization of the plutonium reactor, closure of the Fordow enrichment site, and strict inspection of Iran's nuclear activities – will in fact roll back the program and lengthen the time required for breakout and increase the chances of early detection. What if, however, an agreement with Iran is not reached? Will the time allotted to negotiations and the interim agreement be extended? Will failure be declared, and if so, what will follow? Without doubt, the six parties negotiating with Iran, each with its own different interests, will find it difficult to agree among themselves on these questions, not to mention reach agreement with Iran. The US has already begun to address the dilemma of maintaining the sanctions regime (except for the sanctions whose removal is stipulated by the interim agreement) and preventing their erosion. Later, the administration will have to decide whether and how to preserve the credibility of the military option, which has already been undermined. The administration will also have to address the specific problem of a Congress with a fairly confrontational attitude on these issues, which will attempt to take measures that the administration sees as detrimental to the negotiations.

Israel, which is particularly threatened by the Iranian nuclear project, will also have to make several decisions. Clearly Israel has no possibility of exercising a military option during the current negotiating period. The Israeli government will therefore have to decide whether continued negotiations beyond the allotted period will make it necessary to revive the military option. If the negotiations fail, Israel will have to decide whether to realize the military option, or whether to first consider the possibility of additional sanctions. The key question that Israel must address, however, is how to keep the US, and the other major powers, from conceding the important elements of an acceptable agreement with Iran that will deny Iran effective breakout capability. This goal can only be achieved through intensive dialogue with the major powers, headed by the US.

Other questions that Israel must face involve military force buildup. The most important of them is whether to preserve only military capabilities that are important generic capabilities in theaters beyond Iran (an option with a reasonable price), or whether to continue development of additional capabilities in order to make sure that the Israeli military option vis-à-vis

Iran is maintained, despite the significant cost entailed by development of military capabilities for the long term. Given the socioeconomic situation in Israel, the second possibility appears more problematic.

Accordingly, Israel should strive to reach agreement with the US administration on the definition of a reasonable deal, the parameters of such a deal, and the alternative plan for stopping Iran if no agreement between Iran and the major powers is reached. Israel must also maintain a credible military option in case the alternatives fail.

The area of agreement between Israel and the US, combined with the major powers' ability to maintain the sanctions regime, a credible military threat coming from the US and Israel, and the power of Iranian President Rouhani in the internal power struggles in Iran, are variables that will determine the outcome of the Iranian crisis.

### **The Israeli-Palestinian Political Process**

Defying predictions that President Obama, who failed to restart Israeli-Palestinian negotiations during his first term, would assign a low priority to the Israeli-Palestinian political process in his second term, US Secretary of State John Kerry has made the renewal of negotiations between the parties a high priority. His determination and persistence succeeded in making the Israelis and Palestinians forego the conditions they had set for renewing negotiations.

The nine months allotted to these negotiations will expire in April 2014, and the chances that this round of talks will succeed are slim. The gaps between the respective positions are wide, and the mutual distrust complicates any efforts to narrow the gaps. Each of the parties believes that the other will be unwilling to make the minimum concessions necessary to formulate an agreement. The Israeli side does not believe that the Palestinians will accept an agreement that guarantees Israel adequate security, agree to an end of the conflict and all claims, and concede the so-called right of return. For their part, the Palestinians do not believe that the Israeli side is willing to return to the 1967 borders and allow the Palestinians to make East Jerusalem their capital. From the Palestinian perspective, Israel wants to continue controlling the West Bank through other means, and is therefore making "excessive" security demands.

The US has attempted to bridge the differences between the parties by formulating a compromise proposal on security, under the assumption that agreement on this issue will lead to a breakthrough and progress on other disputed issues. The American mediators apparently feel that once Israel's security demands are met, Jerusalem will be more flexible in other areas. For this reason, General (ret.) John R. Allen and his staff, who drafted the American proposal on security, have spoken mainly with the Israeli side. The Palestinians, who judged the proposal as biased in favor of Israel, rejected it. This American effort to mediate on the security issue only revealed how wide the gaps between the parties are. If the Palestinians have shown no flexibility on the security arrangements between the parties, which appear to be less of a problem, it is hard to believe they will be more flexible on the end to the conflict or on refugees demanding the right of return.

Nonetheless, Israel and the Palestinians will likely fulfill their promises to continue negotiating until April 2014, despite the difficulties and pitfalls. At the same time, they will both have to contemplate what to do if the negotiations over a final settlement are unsuccessful.

Israel must take into account that this may be the last opportunity to reach a two-state solution. Processes on the ground are underway that can make the trend toward a one-state situation irreversible, with all the risks that this development presents to Israel's Jewish and democratic identity and the Zionist vision. Possible additional results of a failure to reach an agreement include the weakening of the PA to the point of collapse and a decision by international players – especially the European Union – that there is no point in continuing to invest in the unsuccessful project called the PA. A halt or a serious reduction in the international aid to the Palestinians would leave maintenance of the Palestinian territories, with all concomitant political and economic problems, solely in the hands of Israel, because as long as there is no agreement between the parties, the international community regards Israel as responsible for the welfare of the population in the territory under its control.

There are also signs that the sentiment on the Palestinian "street" is moving toward support for a renewal of violence against Israel. In recent years it was reasonably certain that the Palestinians had no desire to return

to the chaos and suffering of the second intifada and that the prevailing atmosphere was therefore opposed to violence, but it appears that there are incipient signs of change. The passage of time has had an effect; the children of the intifada are now young adults for whom past memories of 10-12 years ago exert no restraint. When growing frustration among the Palestinian public about the lack of a political process is added to the equation, a change in trend appears more plausible. The relative increase in “populist” terrorist attacks – not initiated by the organizations – may signal this change of atmosphere, and it may be only a question of time until the outbreak of a third intifada. Such an outbreak would differ in nature and scope from the riots in the Palestinian territories in the late 1980s and early in the twenty-first century. These developments are also liable to accelerate the existing efforts at delegitimization of Israel in the Western world. It therefore follows that the status quo does not serve Israel’s strategic interests, and that an alternative plan is required.

As of now, the only other evident plan is the Palestinian “alternative plan.” In the short term, this plan focuses on a vigorous comprehensive diplomatic campaign against Israel in the UN and international institutions in order to obtain recognition of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders and heighten the delegitimization of Israel. In the long term, the Palestinians are likely to seek a one-state solution. Israel should prepare for these possibilities by offering its own alternative plan. It cannot leave the status quo and the Palestinian alternative plan as the only games in town.

Israel’s policy should ensure that it will not be saddled with the blame for failure of the negotiations. This is an essential condition for successful handling of the Palestinian alternative strategies. It therefore follows that Israel should find room for maneuvering in the negotiations that will make it possible to demonstrate enough flexibility and readiness to bridge the gaps in positions, which will motivate the Palestinian side to continue negotiations after April 2014. If the United States submits a proposal for a framework agreement or principles for a final settlement, Israel should make every effort to respond positively to most of the principles, demonstrating, at the very least to the United States, that it cannot be blamed for failure of the negotiations. This issue will also have consequences in the internal

Israeli arena – it will reinforce the sense of justice and the lack of other choices, especially if a violent conflict develops.

A recommended strategic alternative for Israel is to advance toward a two-state situation, even if there is no full agreement between the two parties. These measures can be taken either through agreement between the two sides or unilaterally. Negotiated measures are clearly preferable, because they involve commitments by both sides. The Palestinian leadership, however, strongly opposes partial agreements, which it regards as a means for Israel to perpetuate its control over the West Bank and dictate a one-sided Israeli solution. At the same time, the Palestinians may change their attitude toward this idea when they face a concrete risk of failure of the talks.

There are various ways to encourage the Palestinians to accept such interim agreements. One is to give up the principle of “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed,” which will enable negotiations for a permanent settlement in tandem with partial agreements. The two sides will be able to identify areas in which agreement can be reached and implemented while the negotiations continue. A second way is to portray the partial agreements as a continuation of the 1995 interim agreement. Indeed, the third stage of IDF redeployment stipulated in this agreement has not yet been carried out. If the parties manage to agree on principles for a permanent settlement, even without details, it will be easier to begin implementing partial agreements.

Unilateral measures, whether coordinated (ideally) or uncoordinated (less preferred) with the Palestinian side are the last option, but likely the only one to remain that depends solely on Israel if the Palestinians reject partial solutions. It will also be difficult for Israel to embrace the idea of unilateral measures, given the Israeli public’s view of the outcome of the unilateral measures in southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. However, notwithstanding the poor outcome of those measures, the strategic decision underlying them was sound: most of the Israeli public did not want to retain control of the security zone in Lebanon or to retain control of the Gaza Strip. Rather, the problem lay in the implementation of the decisions. Lessons drawn from the 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon and the 2005 withdrawal from Gaza can help ensure correct implementation if Israel decides to outline its borders unilaterally. In this framework, any unilateral

measure must be preceded by a proposal that is considered generous by Israel's Western allies and would be implemented in coordination with them, which will earn legitimacy for Israel's policy. IDF forces should remain in the Jordan Valley in order to prevent the smuggling of weapons and terrorists into the West Bank, with territory retained as a bargaining chip in future negotiations on a permanent settlement. Jewish residents of the evacuated areas must be relocated and appropriately compensated.

The Palestinians will also have to consider what to do if the talks fail. At the strategic level, they will have to decide whether to abandon the two-state solution and adopt a strategy that opts for one state. More than a few Palestinians see advantages in this strategy, due to their confidence that they will win the demographic race. At this stage, the leadership in Ramallah is still inclined toward a two-state strategy, but through means other than negotiations. One way under consideration is to obtain UN recognition of a Palestinian state; another way is through "popular resistance."

These two methods have many weaknesses. By appealing to the international community and international institutions, such as the International Criminal Court, the Palestinians would alienate Israel and accelerate the process of its delegitimization, but these two solutions can yield only slow and limited fruit, and it is doubtful whether they will prompt any significant change in the Israeli government's position. "Popular resistance," which is fundamentally non-violent or violent to a limited extent (e.g., stone throwing) also involves an internal contradiction. If it is conducted carefully and controlled by the Palestinian leadership in order to avoid escalation to full scale violence, it will not have any substantial effect on Israeli policy. On the other hand, if it takes place on a large scale with little control, escalation to massive violence by both sides becomes more likely. It is doubtful whether the Palestinian leadership, which itself has a problem with internal legitimacy, will be able to stand at the head of widespread "popular resistance," and it is not at all clear that such a popular uprising would not be aimed first and foremost at the PA leadership itself. Recognition of the weaknesses of these options is likely to lead the Palestinian leadership to consider continuing the negotiations in 2014.

The US must also make important decisions. First, the American team must consider the right way to present the framework agreement to the two

parties, and what degree of pressure is best applied to encourage them to accept this format. Another question is at what stage of the nine months allotted to this round of negotiations, and according to which criteria, will it become necessary to announce the impending failure of the talks, and how to proceed if this occurs. One alternative is a dramatic lessening of American involvement on the Israeli-Palestinian channel, meaning a return to the administration's policy of Obama's first term. It is doubtful, however, whether Kerry will recommend this, given his wholehearted commitment to the issue. The United States can also consider promoting the idea of gradual progress toward a two-state reality through various means, and try to extend the period of time allotted for negotiations.

In the context of this discussion, the dilemmas relating to the Gaza Strip under Hamas should also be addressed. At this point, it appears that Israel, the PA, and the US have adopted an approach in which agreements will apply solely to the West Bank, and even then only gradually. This does not, however, free those involved in the negotiations from the need to decide on a policy for the Gaza Strip.

There are three possible alternative policies regarding the Gaza Strip. The first is to continue the current policy of containing Hamas. This policy is becoming more complicated because of the pressure that the Egyptian regime is exerting on Hamas, which it regards as an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood. This pressure is reflected in the closing of the border crossings between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, as well as Egyptian action against the terrorist infrastructure in Sinai and weapons smuggling into the Gaza Strip. These measures, combined with the distancing of Hamas from its Iranian patron as a result of Iran's support for the Bashar al-Assad regime, have impacted negatively on Hamas, particularly its economic and political situation. They have also increased the Gaza Strip's dependence on Israel and undermined the main objective of the Israeli withdrawal, namely, separation from the Gaza Strip. The pressure on Hamas is liable to cast it into dire straits and propel it back into confrontation with Israel – especially given its efforts to rebuild its terrorist infrastructure in the West Bank and launch terrorist attacks from the area – even though this is clearly a risky course for the organization. Operations against Israel originating from the Gaza Strip itself, such as rocket fire, terrorist attacks

that use tunnels in order to penetrate into Israeli territory, and so on, will draw a severe response from Israel that Hamas will have trouble absorbing, given its lack of support in Egypt and its isolation from weapons supplies. Containing Hamas is therefore the desired alternative, but at the same time, action should be taken to reduce the Gaza Strip's strategic dependence on Israel as much as possible.

The second alternative is to join Egypt in the effort to overthrow Hamas in the Gaza Strip through a combination of political means (pressure to hold elections in the PA), continued economic pressure, and even military means. This alternative prompts the question regarding a replacement for the Hamas government. It is unclear whether there is a real alternative to Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip, and if there is, what it will consist of. It is also difficult to see how Mahmoud Abbas can regain control of the Gaza Strip without general elections, not to mention the fact that there is little chance that Hamas, now at its lowest point, will agree to hold elections. As long as it is unclear whether there is a united and strong enough pragmatic force that can replace Hamas rule without external military intervention, this strategy is not recommended for Israel.

The third alternative for the Gaza Strip is to exploit Hamas's distress in order to cause a dramatic change in its policy that will force it to become a (silent) partner in the political process. To implement this policy, a dialogue with the organization is necessary that will clarify whether pushing Hamas in this direction is possible. While exploring this possibility is worthwhile, at the moment it appears that conditions are not yet ripe for a scenario whereby Hamas abandons its ideological position that opposes recognition of Israel and advocates violent resistance.

## **The Upheaval in the Arab World**

The biggest change in the Arab world in 2013 was reversal of the trend regarding the rising strength of political Islam, specifically, the Muslim Brotherhood and movements with similar views on the role of religion in society and the state. The most significant development in this context was the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt by a mass protest movement and the military. This coup had major repercussions throughout the Arab world. It encouraged opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood in

other countries and weakened its popular support and overall standing in many places. This development will make it easier to contain the threat posed by the Muslim Brotherhood to other regimes in the region, including Jordan. Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood government in Tunisia was forced to resign and was replaced by a government of technocrats.

The question is what will succeed the Muslim Brotherhood, once deemed the rising star of the regional upheaval. One possibility is a return to military dictatorship, which is what occurred in Egypt. In an era in which the public is aware of its power and has largely lost its fear of rulers, however, it is unclear whether a military dictatorship is sustainable. Another possibility is a weakening of the state and a loss of governance, along with the risk of the collapse of states and/or their becoming failed states. Still another possibility is the rise of more extreme Islamist groups, including al-Qaeda, Salafi, and jihad elements. In Syria, for example, a process is underway that combines these two possibilities. In any case, these developments are exerting a major effect on the regional balance of power, reflected mainly in the intensified struggle between the Sunni axis led by Saudi Arabia and the Iran-led Shiite axis.

These developments contain both risks and opportunities for Israel. The instability and governmental weakness in nearby states increase the likelihood that armed non-state groups will penetrate into the border areas and make the problem of regular security more acute. This trend is already evident in Sinai, and is beginning to take hold in Syria in areas close to the border with Israel. At the same time, the challenge posed by an increase in terrorist activity on Israel's borders by terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, which is not new, has thus far not materialized into a strategic threat, and Israel has handled it well. It is right to continue preparing to deal with this threat and to formulate a suitable doctrine – but it should not be described as a tsunami that poses an existential threat to Israel.

At this stage, it appears that from Israel's perspective, the opportunities presented by the upheavals in the Arab world outweigh the risks they incur. First, the worsening of relations between the Sunni and Shiite axes and the weakening of the Shiite axis, primarily as a result of the civil war in Syria, has broadened Israel's room to maneuver in the Middle East and created an opportunity to expand its cooperation with the Sunni axis countries. The

possibility that the Assad regime will survive the civil war exists and has even become more likely, given the stalemate in Syria between the regime and the rebels, but the regime will in any case be much weaker. Hizbollah, allied with the Assad regime, has suffered political damage as a result of its involvement in the Syrian civil war.

The Muslim Brotherhood's reversal of fortune also expands the potential for cooperation between Israel and the moderate Sunni countries, some of which were formerly defined as the pro-Western camp in the Arab world. On the concrete level, anxiety about deterioration in relations between Israel and Egypt has been removed. Coordination between Israel and Egypt on terrorism in Sinai and against the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip has been upgraded. There is still a degree of long term risk, because it is hard to predict the response of the Muslim Brotherhood, which maintains a strong grip on large sections of the Arab societies, to suppression by military force or to the pressure of the liberal public. The possibility of a decline into civil war in Egypt remains, and this would have severe consequences for Israel due to the geographic proximity and Egypt's central role in the Arab world, but this scenario is unlikely.

Furthermore, the weakening of the central governments in countries near Israel and their focus on internal problems greatly weakens the conventional threat to Israel posed by their armies – even if the relative weight of irregular and asymmetric military threats in the region has increased as a result. As long as Iran does not obtain nuclear weapons capability, the threat of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East is now reduced. Following the threat of American military action, Syria, the country with the greatest capability in chemical weapons, has agreed to dismantle its chemical arsenal and apparently its biological arsenal as well.

Some have argued that events in the Middle East have proven that there is no link between the leading strategic issues facing Israel: for example, there is no connection between the Iranian nuclear program and the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The Persian Gulf states are more worried about the Iranian threat than the Palestinian issue, and there is therefore no connection between their willingness to act against Iran and developments on the Israeli-Palestinian track. A reasonable argument can also be made that underlying motivation for Iran's nuclear program is unrelated to Israel

and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Even if true, however, it is equally true that the ability to take advantage of the potential for cooperation between Israel and Middle East states highly depends on what happens on the Israeli-Palestinian track, given Arab public opinion on the Palestinian issue. Furthermore, if Iran is exploiting hostility to Israel in the Arab world to enhance its influence, lessening the hostility toward Israel on the Arab street should therefore be an important tool in the struggle against the Iranian axis.

When Israel makes decisions about its policy on the Iranian nuclear issue and on weapons of mass destruction in general, as well as on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, and weighs developments in the neighboring countries affected by the upheaval in the Arab world, it should take this linkage into account. If Israel has an interest in the creation of a regional security regime in the Middle East based on cooperation with at least some of the countries in the region, it should therefore recognize that crises or successes on the Israeli-Palestinian track or developments vis-à-vis Iran will have an enormous effect on the ability to make progress toward this objective.

### **The Status of the US in the Middle East**

The strategic partnership with the US is one of the cornerstones of Israel's strategic position and its deterrent power. Any weakening in the status of the US in the Middle East therefore has a direct and negative effect on Israel's strategic position. The image of American power and its ability to exert influence in the region and elsewhere in the world has declined greatly in recent years. Some assert that the weakness is real, due to US failures in Iraq and Afghanistan and the withdrawal of American forces from those countries without achievement of the objectives for which they were sent in the first place. Another factor noted for weakening America's status in the Middle East is the US response to the "Arab Spring," which led its allies to sense that they would be abandoned in time of need. Others argue that the weakness in question is mainly a matter of image, and that in reality the US has merely accepted the limits of its power that have always existed. Regardless, image is also significant, and a weak image

undermines US influence on its allies in the Middle East. Unquestionably, the US has shown reluctance to use the force at its disposal.

Furthermore, the Obama administration itself has declared that the importance of the East Asian and Pacific region has risen in comparison with the Middle East, and is accordingly adjusting its strategic emphasis and pivoting toward East Asia. In addition, the US is approaching energy independence, following dramatic developments in the cultivation of its own oil and gas resources. These trends have aroused concern that the US has not only become weaker, but is even planning to abandon the Middle East.

However, it does not appear that this extreme claim is grounded in strong evidence. The US will continue to regard the Middle East as an important region in every strategic respect – energy, the home of Islamic terrorism, the Suez Canal, Israel's security, potential proliferation of nonconventional weapons, and Iran's hegemonic aspirations. Given China's increased importance, Chinese dependence on energy from the Middle East will also require the US to maintain significant means of exerting influence in the region. Moreover, any analysis regarding a major power alternative to the US in the Middle East reveals that no country can in fact replace the US and invest the necessary resources to address the region's problems. The argument heard in certain circles in Israel, namely, that Israel needs to search for other allies to replace the US as its strategic backer, has no basis in reality. No other power has supported Israel in the international diplomatic arena over the past 57 years, or has consistently vetoed anti-Israel resolutions in the UN. No other power has granted Israel over \$3 billion annually in military aid, and there is no comparison to the strong and influential pro-Israel lobby (in particular, AIPAC).

It appears that the US is well aware that failure to deal with Middle East problems would be self-damaging. This could invite shocks to the global energy market that would harm US allies and in turn the US itself (despite its energy independence); violence originating in the Middle East (the memory of September 11, 2001 is still fresh); and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It can therefore be assumed that announcements that the US is abandoning the Middle East are premature.

Israel's actions also greatly affect the standing of the US in the Middle East. Undercutting important US diplomatic efforts, or activity that highlights the inability of the US to influence close allies dependent on its aid in many areas will not strengthen American standing in the Middle East. Israel should therefore consider how to help strengthen the American position in the Middle East – even if this incurs significant costs.

### **Recommendations for a Proactive Policy**

Israel faces important decisions involving the Iranian nuclear program, Israeli-Palestinian relations, its relations with Arab countries, and its relations with the US. In many cases, there is strong linkage between the different decisions. Sometimes, when the price of decisions and the level of uncertainty concerning the policies derived from them are high, there are good reasons for postponing the decisions. It appears, however, that in 2013, Israel neared the point at which the time for postponing decisions has run out. The price of avoiding decisions is greater than the risk of making them, while the regional conditions, which are favorable for Israel's balance of power with its neighbors, make it possible for Israel to take risks that were previously untenable.

According to a popular refrain sounded in Israel in the initial period following the “Arab Spring,” times of uncertainty are bad for taking decisions, and decision making should be avoided while awaiting times of greater stability. This maxim is no longer valid. It reflects a passive approach that assumes that Israel is unable to influence developments in the Middle East. It is true that Israel does not have much influence over internal developments in regional states, but it does wield influence on how these developments will affect it and its relations with regional actors. Israel is an important player, although not the only one, and both the actions it takes and the actions it does not take are significant. For this reason, Israel should cultivate initiative and pursue a proactive policy, taking advantage of opportunities and addressing risks while considering the linkage between various channels and challenges. The Israeli government should recognize the fact that the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian political process will have consequences far beyond the Israeli-Palestinian arena itself, while

the same is true for decisions on Iran, the Arab states, and relations with the US.

Above all, a proactive Israeli policy should include an alternative program (Plan B) in case the diplomatic efforts fail on the two leading issues for its national security: the talks between the major powers and Iran, and the talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

Talks in Geneva with Iran may prove unsuccessful, if there is a failure to reach a final agreement, there is a gross Iranian violation of the interim agreement signed in November, or an agreement is reached that Israel considers bad, i.e., one that puts Iran only a few months away from obtaining a bomb. Israel should maintain its ability to take independent action to prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons capability. An attack is a bad option, but it is still better than a situation in which Iran attains nuclear weapons capability. Preserving Israel's capability will also maintain the credibility of the military option during the talks with Tehran. This threat was a key factor in the imposition of effective sanctions on Iran and in persuading the regime in Tehran to agree to serious talks with the major powers, and it will be essential in persuading the Iranian regime to agree to significant concessions on the nuclear issue.

Devising an alternative plan in coordination with Israel in the event that the talks with Iran fail will help the US promote its dual objectives on the Iranian question: prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power and prevent a military attack. The US administration will be mindful of a situation in which Iran drags its feet in the negotiations, or commits a gross violation of the signed agreements. The US has two main tools for exerting pressure, which helped it persuade Tehran to negotiate over its nuclear program. The first is the economic lever – sanctions against the Iranian economy, including its energy industry and in the financial sphere. The US will have to apply stronger economic pressure against Iran if Tehran refuses to moderate its positions, including additional sanctions by Congress and measures against imports of Iranian oil by Russia, China, and India, whose trade with Iran has been less significantly affected until now. The US will also have to bolster the credibility of the military threat by means of a clearer commitment by President Obama that if Iran thwarts the diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis, the US will be willing to take military action in

order to prevent Iran from completing its nuclear program. Underscoring American determination and reinforcing its commitment to denying Iran nuclear weapons will improve trust and coordination between the American administration and Israel, and enable Jerusalem to make its stand more flexible, thereby giving Washington more room to maneuver in the negotiations with Iran.

In addition, Israel needs to devise an alternative plan on the Palestinian question. The choice Prime Minister Netanyahu faces today is between maintaining the status quo and being dragged into a situation in which the Palestinian alternative to negotiations gains recognition and support in the international arena, with Israel suffering growing delegitimatization and diplomatic isolation. In order to stop the momentum toward these two alternatives, both of which are clearly problematic for Israel, the Israeli government will have to take steps, in tandem with diplomatic measures, to preserve Israel as a Jewish and democratic state that enjoys international legitimacy, especially among the Western countries, and promote optimal security arrangements. This can be done in part by promoting independent measures toward separation from the Palestinians, while making an effort to coordinate them with the American administration and preserving the linkage between them and a future consensual settlement. The main point is to create an Israeli alternative to failure in the negotiations that will offer an appropriate response to the Palestinian alternative, change the cost/benefit calculations of the Palestinians, and generate a new dynamic in which Israel regains the initiative and is not perceived as responsible for the failure to promote a settlement through negotiations.

In both the Palestinian and the Iranian contexts, Israel should maintain an ongoing close dialogue with the American administration in order to enhance the chances of successfully implementing the alternatives that it proposes. A proactive policy coordinated with the American administration will help fortify Israel's standing in the Middle East and may help pave the way to dialogue with the pragmatic Arab countries, which would join the advantages that Israel derives from the expected improvement in its relations with the United States.

# Contributors

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**Yoram Schweitzer** is a senior research fellow and director of the Program on Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict at INSS. In the IDF he served in the Intelligence community, and he was an advisor to the Prime Minister's Office and the Defense Ministry on strategies for combating terrorism. He also served as head of the International Counter-Terrorism Department in the IDF and as a member of a task force dealing with Israeli MIAs and POWs. Mr. Schweitzer lectures and publishes widely on issues connected to terrorism. He is editor of *Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* (2006) and co-author of *The Terrorism of Afghanistan "Alumni": Islam vs. the Rest of the World* (2000); *An Expected Surprise: The September 11th Attack and Its Ramifications* (2002); *Al-Qaeda and the Globalization of Suicide Terrorism* (2005); and *Al-Qaeda's Odyssey to Global Jihad*. (2014).

**Gilead Sher**, an attorney and senior partner in Gilead Sher, Kadari & Co. Law Offices, is a senior research fellow at INSS and heads the Center for Applied Negotiations (CAN). He was the Head of Bureau of Israel's former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, served as chief and co-chief negotiator in 1999-2001 at the Camp David summit and the Taba talks, and served under PM Ytzhak Rabin as delegate to the 1994-95 Interim Agreement negotiations with the Palestinians. Mr. Sher was a visiting professor on Conflict Resolution and Negotiations at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania (2001-2011) He teaches at Tel Aviv University, is chairman of the board of Sapir Academic College, and is the founding co-chairman of the movement "Blue White Future." He is the author *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999-2001 – Within Reach* (2005).

**Shimon Stein**, a senior research fellow at INSS, served as Israel's ambassador to Germany (2001-7). Prior to this appointment he served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as deputy director general for the CIS, as well as Eastern and Central Europe. Ambassador Stein held additional MFA posts in Washington, Germany, and Israel, and was a member of Israel's delegation to multilateral negotiations on arms control.

**Amos Yadlin** was appointed Director of the Institute for National Security Studies in November 2011, following forty years of service in the IDF, nine of them as a member of the General Staff. From 2006 to 2010, Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yadlin served as head of military intelligence, following a term as IDF military attaché to the United States. In 2002 he earned the rank of major general, and was appointed commander of the IDF colleges and the National Defense College. Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yadlin served as deputy commander of the Israel Air Force. Prior to that, he was commander of two combat squadrons and two IAF bases and also headed the Planning Department of the IAF. He served as a fighter pilot in the Yom Kippur War, in Operation Peace for Galilee, and in Operation Tammuz, the attack on the Iraqi Osirak nuclear reactor. Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yadlin received a B.A. with honors in economics and business administration from Ben Gurion University of the Negev, and an M.A. in public administration from Harvard University. He is the co-author of *Regime Stability in the Middle East: An Analytical Model to Assess the Possibility of Regime Change* (2013).

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- No. 132, January 2014, Yoram Schweitzer and Aviv Oreg, *Al-Qaeda's Odyssey to the Global Jihad* [Hebrew].
- No. 131, December 2013, Amos Yadlin and Avner Golov, *Regime Stability in the Middle East: An Analytical Model to Assess the Possibility of Regime Change*.
- No. 130, December 2013, Yehuda Ben Meir and Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, *The Voice of the People: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2012* [Hebrew].
- No. 129, July 2013, Zvi Magen and Vitaly Naumkin, eds., *Russia and Israel in the Changing Middle East*.
- No. 128, June 2013, Ruth Gavison and Meir Elran, eds., *Unauthorized Immigration as a Challenge to Israel* [Hebrew].
- No. 127, May 2013, Zvi Magen, *Russia in the Middle East: Policy Challenges*.
- No. 126, April 2013, Yehuda Ben Meir and Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, *The Voice of the People: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2012*.
- No. 125, March 2013, Amos Yadlin and Avner Golov, *Regime Stability in the Middle East: An Analytical Model to Assess the Possibility of Governmental Change* [Hebrew].
- No. 124, December 2012, Shlomo Brom, ed. *In the Aftermath of Operation Pillar of Defense: The Gaza Strip, November 2012*.
- No. 123, December 2012, Shlomo Brom, ed. *In the Aftermath of Operation Pillar of Defense: The Gaza Strip, November 2012* [Hebrew].
- No. 122, September 2012, Emily B. Landau and Anat Kurz, eds., *Arms Control Dilemmas: Focus on the Middle East*.
- No. 121, July 2012, Emily Landau and Anat Kurz, eds., *Arms Control Dilemmas: Selected Issues* [Hebrew].
- No. 120, July 2012, Meir Elran and Alex Altshuler, eds., *The Complex Mosaic of the Civilian Front in Israel* [Hebrew].

