The Anti-Israel Toolbox:
From Hard Power to Soft Tools

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Introduction

Enmity is a relative state of affairs, since it is essentially linked to what happens in the surrounding environment. In the past, enmity often translated into wars and invasions with the intent of removing a certain regime or placing different militias or parties in power. History doesn't relate whether there were cultural or economic wars in the modern meaning of the concept, except for the desire to control resources – which is a basic objective of any war. Moreover, there is no mention in the annals of history of economic sanctions used against any country.

Being a powerful state doesn't necessarily mean having abundant resources, but being capable of influencing the behavior of other countries. In contemporary times, the use of all-out military power has been largely abandoned and is generally limited to the point-of-no-return cases. It has been replaced with new tools and means. Similarly, because of the shift in the threat concept, protecting the country becomes more complicated as objectives shift with the change of the political actors. Any state gives utmost priority to military power but nowadays must take into consideration other factors to guarantee its security and stability. Thus Israel's security does not rest on its military deterrence capability alone, but in its ability to affect politics and induce other countries to behave in a manner that serves its interests. At the same time, this does not mean a full abandonment of familiar military and strategic balance concerns, but it means accepting some limitations on use of this traditional power.[1]

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Against this background, the article below aims at evaluating the concept of "hard power" and "soft power" in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Soft power involves using new tools and means other than those used in traditional conflicts, first and foremost, conventional military power.

The Concept of Hard Power

Israel's national security concept is based on three pillars: deterrence, early warning, and decision. This entails Israel having the military power that can deter any enemy; means that give early alerts of imminent hostile military action; and the ability to mobilize reserve forces in case deterrence fails to deliver the desired results. It also counts on a powerful military machine that can quickly take the battle into the enemy's territory. Furthermore, Israel now has the Iron Dome, a mobile all-weather air defense system that is part of a larger aerial defense system to counter the high trajectory threat, from rockets to ballistic missiles.[2]

The Arab Spring and Obama's policies on Iran and Syria made Israel's longtime enemies weaker and have made Israel the least vulnerable state in the region. Syria is torn apart by a civil war, Iraq still suffers, Iran is under heavy pressure over its nuclear program, Turkey's Islamic empire project has failed, Hizbollah is trying to survive even as its allies are suffering, and Hamas is experiencing serious difficulties. However, Israel must address a new challenge, and that is the emergence of "soft enemies," or more precisely, soft power tools.

The Concept of Soft Power

The use of soft power tools doesn't aim at inflicting material damage to an enemy's state, as in the case with conventional war tools. Rather, it aims at undermining the enemy's international reputation, capitalizing on the fact that human rights and respect of individual freedom are now part of the global agenda, whether in Western communities or elsewhere.

In other words, the success of an anti-Israel campaign following the killing of a Palestinian on the Israel-Gaza border does not compare to that of a campaign launched after Israel halts fuel supplies to the coastal enclave and as a result power stations stop operating. The world in general and the West in particular becomes more sympathetic to a city engulfed by darkness and children's hospitals being unable to operate due to power outages than to the death of someone who crossed a fence. A suicide operation that claims the lives of civilians or even military personnel would be futile

and undermine the support of sponsoring organizations, in comparison to political and cultural clashes at the United Nations Human Rights Council or UNESCO. Those who consistently use soft tools skillfully know how to craft their approach in the conflict over values, concepts, and ethics that are related to human rights and Western liberal democracy values.

The use of soft tools has two sources: first, the inability to use force because of the exorbitant toll it exacts of the attacking party; and second, the growing conviction in today's world that the soft approach to hostility is more effective and influential in relations between countries, given that human values and rights are at the forefront of the international agendas.

Since its establishment, Israel was the object of three waves that aimed at its complete elimination; the first wave was military, i.e., the Arab-Israeli wars (1948, 1956, 1967, and to a lesser extent 1973); the second wave was terrorist, led by the suicide attacks from 1987 to 2004; and the third and most difficult wave is the delegitimization campaign. Neither the first nor the second wave succeeded, and while it is still hard to predict the outcome of the third wave, it is certainly the most painful. The conflict with Israel has moved to new arenas of soft power tools. The media, the internet, and international tribunals have become the grounds for the new war Israel faces.

Soft power fills two roles; a systemic and value-based role, and a functional role. According to the former, soft power is centered on values, ideals, and ethics associated with global freedoms and basic human rights. With this approach, efforts focus on removing the target state out of the circle of human values and branding it as an enemy and violator of these values. In its functional role, soft power is not intended at fighting or competing for resources or land and doesn't involve direct military confrontation, but is based on restricting the enemy's capability to carry out a military or economic response in case of a clash. It seeks to narrow the chances of using military force.

Soft Power Tools

a. *Delegitimization*: Israel faces a comprehensive international delegitimization campaign that could result in international isolation with massive economic damage. Boycotts by world countries would cement Israel's undermined ability to defend itself. A state delegitimized not only by Arab countries but by Western superpowers finds it difficult to survive when it must respond to acts of aggression not only by Iran, but by organizations such as Hizbollah and Hamas as well. A delegitimization

campaign against Israel would require superpowers to rein in Israel or at least censure it before it is able to defend itself.

b. *International image*: Israel's international status has deteriorated since it was labeled as a violent and aggressive state. Israel has been forced into a defensive position in international diplomacy and in public opinion and been increasingly cast as an occupying and violent state that has no respect for human and civil rights. This leads to a situation that has been equated with the apartheid system and seen in parallel to the (im)morality of terrorist organizations. Therefore, any possible use of force by Israel will be automatically condemned because it entrenches the negative stereotypes and makes an attack on it legitimate and justified.

c. *International lawfare*: Since the late 1990s, there has been a growing attempt to arrest and try citizens for crimes they committed against other countries. A good example is the arrest of former Chilean military dictator Augusto Pinochet by Britain in October 1998.[3] Another example is the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, as international law, which was in force during the war and ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, was applied. This tribunal further applied the doctrine that evolved in the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials after World War II: not only states are responsible for wide ranging crimes, but also persons who occupied official positions.[4]

This approach allows taking advantage of international law jurisdiction in European countries to charge Israeli generals and politicians of war crimes, and taking action against Israel in the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice. It also entails filing lawsuits against companies engaged in businesses with Israel. Another aspect is challenging the legitimacy of Israel's legal system and using the international legal system against it. The inability or lack of will by a legal system in a country to apply justice is a prerequisite for the application of universal legal jurisdiction against this country. As such, attacking the legal system in Israel is necessary to move forward in the delegitimization campaign. In 2009, a British court issued an arrest warrant for Tzipi Livni, the Israeli foreign minister during Operation Cast Lead, on charges of war crimes.[5] Another lawsuit was filed against Avi Dichter, former head of the General Security Services, on charges of war crimes and other gross violations of human rights for his alleged involvement in a 2002 military strike against Gaza. In addition, the International Criminal Court prosecutor Luis Gabriel Moreno Ocampo considered

investigating whether Lieutenant Colonel David Benjamin, a reserve officer in the Israeli army who is also a citizen of South Africa (which has signed the International Criminal Court charter), was involved in the authorization of military operations during Operation Cast Lead.[6]

d. *Economic boycott*: Israel's fears of international economic boycott are growing. Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who heads Israel's negotiations team with the Palestinians, has warned that if there is no political progress, the European boycott of Israeli goods will not stop at products from settlements in the West Bank but will include Israel as a whole. Livni said that the discourse in the European Union has become more centered on ideology, even when it comes to economic issues. For this reason, she said, calls for an economic boycott of Israel have grown recently.[7] "True, it started with the settlements," she said. "But the [EU's] problem is with Israel, which is seen as a colonialist state. It won't stop with the settlements but will spread to the rest of the country."

Moreover, major European banks with wide international operations have considered denying loans to Israeli companies with business in the Palestinian territories. According to reports, investment committees at these banks have mulled recommendations not to grant loans or assistance to companies or banks operating in the territories. Despite being overturned following an Israeli campaign, the recommendation still haunts Israel. A comprehensive European boycott of all that is related to the territories would result in massive economic isolation. The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which calls for economic and political boycott of Israel, has made some achievements in this regard.

More recently, the Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global (GPFG) announced its reconsideration of a previous decision made in August 2013, which rescinded the 2010 ban over two Israeli companies, Africa Israel Investments and its construction subsidiary, Danya Cebus. The re-exclusion was made due to "an unacceptable risk of the companies, through their construction activity in East Jerusalem, contributing to serious violations of the rights of individuals in situations of war or conflict," as stated by the recommendation report made by the Norwegian Council on Ethics

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in September. One day later, Danske Bank, the biggest Danish bank, announced it was pulling out of the two companies as well as Israel's Bank Hapoalim for the same reasons.[8]

e. *Scientific boycott*: London is considered a key center with wide international influence in the delegitimization efforts. London's influence stems from being a leader in international media and human rights organizations, in addition to being home to some of the finest academic institutions in the world. Moreover, London's influence can be attributed to its influence among English-speaking nations. The academic boycott of Israel was born in London and reached new heights when Cambridge professor Stephen Hawking rescinded his acceptance of an invitation to deliver a keynote address at the fifth annual Israeli Presidential Conference in June 2013, saying he was boycotting the event due to Israel's policies against the Palestinians.[9] Since 2003, there have been many attempts in the United Kingdom to impose an academic boycott on Israel. A prominent example of this is an attempt by the largest union for lecturers in Britain (NATFHE) to support the boycott of Israeli lecturers and academic institutions that don't publicly distance themselves from "apartheid policies."[10]

Bergen University, one of the largest academic institutions in Norway, imposed an official academic boycott on Israel for what it called apartheid policies. Norway's Trondheim University, which hosted a lecture on "Israel's use of anti-Semitism" as a political tool, took a similar decision. More recently, the American Studies Association decided to a boycott Israel. Despite the fact that this decision may not have a tangible impact in the United States, it is another indication of Israel's evolution from a non-negotiable issue into a controversy.

f. *International organizations*: Unlike other UN bodies that monitor the application of human rights charters and are made up of independent experts, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) comprises countries, which makes its decisions more susceptible to politicization than other bodies. Although the Council has not responded to all predictable requests because of the prevailing political climate, it is still considered a central body working on progress in the human rights issue. Its Universal Periodic Review (UPR), when all the member states in UN are obliged to appear, is part of the international human rights system. Until recently, Israel wasn't a member in any regional grouping, which intensified its isolation and made it difficult for it to drum up

support for political issues. However, Israel became a member of the Western group in the council after realizing that its absence would limit its ability to influence the council's agendas. If it is barred from the forum, its absence will also open the door for broader international criticism, which would be considered a success for the delegitimization campaign.

Following a Palestinian request, UNESCO decided to offer the Palestinians full membership. The move came within the framework of the Palestinians' pursuit of international recognition in the UN. The decision may act as a springboard for a wave of international recognitions of the Palestinian state by countries and UN bodies such as the World Food Program, the UN Environment Program, the UN Industrial Development Organization, the UN Development Program, UNHCR, the World Health Organization, the World Meteorological Organization, the UN Administrative Tribunal, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA).

g. *Popular definition, e.g., recognition by Google*: Google's May 2013 decision to refer to the Palestinian territories as Palestine[11] was viewed as a precedent because it came from an element that is larger than the US and Israel and gave a political entity without geographical boundaries official international recognition as a state before it is established or recognized by the international community. The Palestinian Authority has received international recognition as a sovereign technical zone limited to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. While Israel puts hurdles in the way of the Palestinian Authority and opposes international recognition of the Palestinian state on the 1967 lines, Palestine has been given permanent observer status in the UN as a recognized and technical sovereign region. The result was that many countries upgraded the diplomatic representation of the Palestinian Authority to the status of a state. Moreover, international organizations in the fields of human rights, sports, culture, and society recognized Palestine as a political entity under occupation. Some may see Palestine as a state that only exists in the internet or Facebook; however, Palestine of the 1967 borders is more and more a real state in the eyes of the Palestinians and the world.

h. *Social networks and media*: Although in the fifteenth century the dissemination of information was limited to a few priests, the invention of the Western printing press led to groundbreaking changes in all walks of life, including the establishment of democratic regimes.[12] Nowadays, the internet and the emergence of sophisticated smartphones make it possible for everyone to disseminate information anywhere and anytime. The new media has brought radical change to the way we get information and make decisions. Thirty percent of the world's population use social networks and 65 percent of people under the age of 29 get news from the internet. Thus, one picture uploaded to Facebook can damage Israel's image all over the world.

Rectifying "Israel's image" requires a change in policies because social networks and the media have become an effective weapon against Israel and can't be foiled without a change in Israeli behavior. Confronting this soft power tool, Israel has established student media units that speak on behalf of the Israeli government on social networks. These units operate in universities and are concerned with political and security issues in addition to boycotts, anti-Semitism, and delegitimization campaigns. Furthermore, they are tasked to stress Israel's democratic values, freedom of worship, and pluralism as well as other topics that reflect Israeli government policies. However, while such an approach can help in changing impressions, it does not change behavior.

The "Soft Power" Approach: A Balance Sheet

The strategic results of the soft power approach can be clearly seen in the growing international interference in Israeli internal affairs, more restrictions on the use of military power, boycott campaigns, economic sanctions, and restricted movement by politicians and army personnel because of the application of universal legal jurisdiction.

International sanctions, supported by Israel as a measure against Iran, have proven a successful means to punish countries that violate the will of the international community. While hardline Iran and democratic Israel are in no way analogous, the approach is the same. Thus if sanctions had some measure of success against Iran, they may well yield similar results against Israel. For example, Israel's decision to arrive at a compromise with the EU and sign the "Horizon 2020" project agreement is clear evidence of the fruit of boycott campaigns. Today, the EU boycott is limited to Israeli settlements in the West Bank, but it may expand to include Israel as a whole.

The Europeans want to define Israel – as a legitimate state or Israel as a state of illegal settlements; as a sovereign state or as an occupying force; as an OECD member or Israel as a settlement state; as a country that lives in the twenty-first century with human and democratic values or as a state that still clings to the colonial values of the twentieth century.

The effectiveness of the "soft power" approach lies in its ability to engage and mobilize others by blurring the lines between those who criticize Israel and those who accuse it of racism and apartheid practices. One outcome was the formation of alliances on pending or disputed issues, such as the siege on Gaza, the separation barrier, and the rights of the 1948 Arab refugees.

Horizontal Relationships

Geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East are fluid, and Israel is no longer able to rely on its traditional allies. In the past, it negotiated with corrupt dictators who forced their views on their populations, but to ensure its stability and security today, Israel must develop its relations with the peoples of the region. Israel has a tendency to work from the center to the periphery, or top-down, stressing formal ties with political and business elites and focusing on mainstream media. On the other side, Israel's delegitimizers (soft power recruits) work from the periphery to the center and bottom-up, focusing on non-governmental organizations, academia, grassroots groups, and public opinion through social networks. Such an approach may strengthen Israel's position on the official diplomatic level, but weaken it among elite groups and public opinion.

Israel works with "rigid" formal frameworks and political regimes, while the "soft enemies" work through community-based organizations and public opinion. In other words, Israel deals with legal and restrictive frameworks, but its "soft enemies" work through popular methods free from any obligations.

A nation cannot choose its neighbors, but all peoples can choose what kind of relations they want to have with their neighbors.[13] It is necessary for Israel to build bridges of trust with grassroots sectors and civil society organizations and not limit its ties with political leaderships and narcissistic elites. For instance, the 30-year peace between Israel and Egypt can only be described as a "cold peace." The Arab Spring put the spotlight on people, not regimes, which will put Israel in a confrontation with the region's peoples. Therefore, it should start to build conciliatory relations and begin with recognizing the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.

The post-Arab Spring relations should necessarily be based on strategic mega projects that bring about prosperity for all people of the region. Israel must understand that the higher the income of its neighbors, the lower the tension it will have with them. A good example is the post-WWII European unity that followed the fierce wars that claimed the lives of far more many people than the Arab-Israeli wars. One important sign of European unity was the Schuman coal and steel project between Germany and France in 1952.[14]

The idea of strategic projects between Arab countries and Israel is the best way to maintain peace and security in the region. It is the guarantor of good, neighborly relations because all will be keen on preserving economic interests. Conversely, abandoning such cooperation will incur a heavy price for both parties. Energy, electrical grid, water desalination, agriculture, tourism, transport, oil and gas, and environment projects are the pillars of horizontal relationships between the peoples of the region. The deposed hardline Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt did not for a moment consider cutting off gas supplies to Israel because it knows the damage would be felt more by its people than by Israel. The philosophy of horizontal relationships is based on the importance of common interests between peoples, not between regimes and ruling parties in each country. The future of horizontal relationships, based on joint strategic economic projects, will not remain a hostage in the hands of extremist ruling regimes or the whims of politicians.

Conclusion

Israel is facing a new type of enmity that is not easily repelled, and there is no denying the successes the soft power approach has achieved in damaging Israel's image and trying to oust it from the universal human values circle. Therefore, Israel should embark on a new approach in its relations with its neighbors; an approach based on changing its policies with regard to the peace process and meeting the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people. The change must come first from inside Israel, with Israelis recognizing that occupation has a heavy price for the reputation, prestige, and the values of their country. Furthermore, Israelis must recognize that now is the time to move forward in the two-state solution and ignore those who call for a bi-national state, because they fuel the soft power approach, which will only further exacerbate hatred and the isolation of Israel.

Notes

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