

# Changing Direction? Updating Israel's Nuclear Doctrine

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## **Regional Balance and "Deliberate Ambiguity"**

Operation Protective Edge invited the conclusion, yet again, that Israel's chief security issues involve Palestinian terrorism. Although such a view is not necessarily shortsighted or mistaken, the genuinely existential issues of nuclear strategy and nuclear war must remain at the very forefront of IDF planning attention.

Israel's leaders have always understood the need for a recognizable "security equalizer." Already in the late 1950s, then-Prime Minister David Ben Gurion fixed his hopes for national survival and self-defense on some apt form of Israeli nuclear weapons capability. More specifically, Ben Gurion calculated that just having "the bomb" would adequately assure the Jewish state's strategic deterrent, at least with regard to possible enemy attacks employing weapons of mass destruction, and/or large scale conventional arms. Clearly, all of Ben Gurion's successors have adhered, more or less openly, to this same line of strategic reasoning.<sup>1</sup>

And why not? From the start, the Israeli policy of a "bomb in the basement" seemed to make eminently good sense. Everyone essentially understood that Israel possessed nuclear weapons. Why, then, should Jerusalem be gratuitously more precise? Why, too, should an evidently fragile Israel reveal more, and needlessly alienate the United States?

A meaningful and convincing answer to this question, rooted in precise conceptual understanding, is that no automatic, necessary correlation can ever be made between general enemy perceptions of Israel's nuclear

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capacity and credible Israeli nuclear deterrence. In certain circumstances, moreover, any such adversarial perceptions could undermine Israeli nuclear deterrence. A pertinent case in point would concern those conditions in which Israel was believed to hold exclusively high yield/strategic nuclear forces. This plausible belief could elicit reasonable doubts about any still undeclared Israeli willingness to activate such nuclear forces in retaliation for any enemy first strike attack.

Nonetheless, “deliberate ambiguity” has managed to endure as the invariable and inviolable core of Israel’s nuclear doctrine. Somehow, ignoring the potentially lethal deterrence shortcomings of opacity, Jerusalem seemingly remains convinced that removing the bomb from Israel’s basement could prompt widespread and possibly insufferably corrosive global condemnation. Such Israeli political and public relations concerns are understandable. Still, they pale in significance beside the probable costs of any consequent security failure of the country’s nuclear deterrent.<sup>2</sup>

### **Rationale for New Policy Limitations on Deliberate Ambiguity**

In the arcane world of nuclear strategy, it can never be sufficient that enemy states merely acknowledge Israel’s nuclear status. In terms of Israel’s protection, it is not enough that these states merely believe that Israel *has* nuclear weapons. They must also be prepared to believe that Israel has eminently *usable* nuclear weapons, and that Israel would be prepared to employ these presumably usable weapons in very specific and readily identifiable threat situations.

Israel needs its nuclear weapons. This bold statement is not even remotely controversial. While US President Barack Obama seeks a “world free of nuclear weapons,” Israel could not survive without these weapons. Understood also in terms of Carl von Clausewitz’s famous adage in *On War* (1832), there can come a military tipping point when “mass counts.” For Israel, which is half the size of America’s Lake Michigan, this tipping point is always nearby; there is simply no formidable “mass.”

The security risks of any sort of denuclearization or nuclear weapons-free zone for Israel are both specific and tangible. They are not merely general, or simply generic. In part, this is because the country’s extant regional adversaries will presumably be joined at some point by: (a) a new enemy Arab Palestinian state;<sup>3</sup> or (b) a newly-nuclear enemy Iran. If this scenario includes both components, the result would be an even more challenging situation. Synergistically, this profoundly interactive development could

then devolve into conditions considerably more detrimental to Israel than the simple sum of its two separate parts. If deprived of its nuclear weapons, whether still-ambiguous or newly-disclosed, Israel would irremediably lose its residual capacity to deter major enemy aggressions. More precisely, without these weapons, Israel could no longer respond convincingly to existential hazards with any plausible threats of retaliation, and/or with any persuasive threats of counter-retaliation.

Yet merely possessing nuclear weapons, even when they are unhesitatingly acknowledged by enemy states, can never ensure successful Israeli deterrence. However, an appropriately selective and nuanced end to deliberate ambiguity could reliably improve and sustain Israel's otherwise-imperiled nuclear deterrent. In this connection, the probability of assorted enemy attacks in the future could likely be reduced by making available certain additional and limited information concerning Israel's nuclear weapons and its associated strategic postures.

To achieve Israel's relevant deterrent objectives, this crucial information would necessarily center upon the major intersecting issues of nuclear capability and decisional willingness. Would an Israeli move away from a policy of deliberate nuclear ambiguity be helpful with respect to certain prospective non-nuclear threats to Israel? To be sure, the plausibility/credibility of any appropriate Israeli threat of nuclear retaliation would be greatest wherever the particular aggression posed was also nuclear. Still, there are circumstances in which a determined enemy or coalition of enemies might contemplate "only" a devastating conventional first strike against Israel, and conclude that such a strike is worthwhile because it would not elicit any Israeli nuclear retaliation.

In such conceivable circumstances, the enemy state or coalition of states will have concluded that any non-nuclear first strike against a nuclear Israel, however massive, could in fact be rational and cost effective (because Israel's anticipated retaliation would necessarily stop short of crossing the nuclear threshold.) If, however, the prospective aggressor(s) had previously been made deliberately aware that Israel possessed a meaningfully wide array of capable nuclear retaliatory forces, both in terms of their range and yield, these enemies would more likely be deterred. Here, as a distinctly welcome consequence of certain incremental and previously nuanced "disclosures," Jerusalem will have signaled its relevant adversaries that it can and will cross the nuclear retaliatory threshold to punish any potentially existential national destruction. In narrow military parlance, Israel's actions here

would be correctly designed to ensure “escalation dominance.” In this scenario, moreover, the pertinent nuclear deterrence advantages to Israel of implementing certain moves away from “deliberate nuclear ambiguity” would lie in the compelling “signal” that it sends; that is, that Israel would not need to retaliate here with only massive and plainly disproportionate nuclear force.

Such advantages could extend beyond enhancing credible threats of Israeli nuclear retaliation, to enhancing credible threats of Israeli nuclear counter-retaliation. If, for example, Israel should initiate a non-nuclear defensive first strike against Iran before that enemy state becomes nuclear capable (an act of “anticipatory self-defense” under international law), the likelihood of any massive Iranian conventional retaliation could better be diminished if there were more openly disclosed and prior Israeli threats of an aptly measured nuclear counter-retaliation. In essence, by following an incremental path away from “deliberate nuclear ambiguity,” Israel would be less likely to replicate America’s initial nuclear posture error vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, that is, of “massive retaliation.”

Skeptics disagree. They argue that thus far, Israel’s nuclear ambiguity has succeeded in keeping the country’s enemies from mounting any sort of authentically existential aggressions. If so, why rock the boat?

### **170,000 Rockets Pointed at Israel**

Even if Israel’s enemies were all to remain non-nuclear, they could, at least in principle, still launch potentially lethal assaults against it. If these entirely conventional enemies were ever able to fashion a determined collaboration, they could, perhaps in concert with certain insurgent proxies, inflict especially grievous harm. That such a prospect is altogether real was expressed by Major General Aviv Kochavi. Speaking in late January 2014, Maj. Gen. Kochavi, who was then head of IDF Intelligence, indicated that 170,000 rockets were already “pointing at Israel.”

These are sobering numbers. Israel’s state and sub-state enemies, especially in any collaborative military undertakings, would have substantial and advantageous mass. In order to counter even certain non-nuclear threats, Israel could ultimately need to exploit the compensatory deterrence advantages of its indispensable nuclear forces.

Israel protects itself not only by implicit and explicit threats of reprisal, but also via critical and inter-penetrating elements of national defense. More precisely, as is obvious following Operation Protective Edge, an integral part

of Israel's multi-layered security system lies in active defenses, including Iron Dome against short range rockets and (in the future) the Arrow against Iranian weapons. Yet even the already well-regarded and successfully-tested Arrow could never achieve a sufficiently high probability of interception to adequately protect soft targets, that is, Israeli civilians. No system of ballistic missile defense can ever create a hermetic seal, and even a single incoming nuclear missile that somehow managed to penetrate Arrow defenses could kill tens or hundreds of thousands of Israelis. Significantly, these "leakage" limitations would likely be less consequential if Israel's traditional reliance on deliberate ambiguity were suitably diminished.

The historic Israeli policy of depending upon an undeclared nuclear capacity will not work indefinitely. Left unrevised, this policy will sometime fail. The most probable and fatal locus of such failure could be Iran.

In the next several years, Iran will almost certainly become a full member of the nuclear weapons club. To be deterred, a newly-nuclear Iran would need convincing assurance that Israel's own nuclear weapons were invulnerable and penetration-capable. Any Iranian judgments about Israel's capability and willingness to retaliate with nuclear weapons would depend largely upon some prior Iranian knowledge of these weapons, including their presumed degree of protection from Iranian surprise attack, and their presumed capacity to adequately breach any Iranian active and passive defenses. At the same time, the uniform appearance of Israeli nuclear weapons as being "too large" and "too powerful" could weaken Israel's nuclear posture. For example, Iranian perceptions of exclusively mega-destructive Israeli nuclear weapons could effectively undermine the credibility of Israel's core nuclear deterrent. Here, Israel's deterrent credibility could actually vary inversely with the perceived destructiveness of its nuclear arms.

Israel might learn here from another prominent adversarial dyad, this one in southwest Asia. It involves an already-nuclear India and an already-nuclear Pakistan. In this ongoing and still-bitter polarity of conflict (three open wars since independence in 1947), Pakistan is now increasingly leaning toward smaller, or tactical, nuclear weapons in its arsenals. Moreover, since Pakistan first announced its test of the 60-kilometer Nasr ballistic missile in 2011, its emphasis upon smaller nuclear weapons has been most conspicuously oriented toward the deterrence of a conventional war. In this connection, by threatening to use relatively low yield "battlefield" nuclear weapons in retaliation for an Indian aggression, Islamabad seeks to appear less provocative to Delhi, and therefore less apt to elicit any Indian nuclear

reprisals. To be sure, the IDF has already rejected any policy of expanded reliance on tactical nuclear forces, but the underlying concept of nuclear deterrence based upon less than altogether “massive retaliation” would still be worth pursuing.

### **Conceptualizing an Incremental End to “Deliberate Ambiguity”**

Once coexisting with an already-nuclear Iran, Israel would not benefit from any increase in nuclear secrecy, but rather from certain limited and residual forms of expanded nuclear disclosure. This would mean a deliberate incremental end to Israel’s bomb in the basement.

At some point, a newly nuclear Iran might decide to share some of its nuclear components and materials with Hizbollah, or perhaps with another kindred terrorist group. To prevent this, Jerusalem would need to convince Iran, inter alia, that Israel possesses a viable range of distinctly usable nuclear options. Israeli nuclear ambiguity could be loosened by releasing certain general information regarding the availability of appropriately lower yield weapons. A policy of continued nuclear ambiguity might no longer be sufficiently persuasive.

In Jerusalem (with the Prime Minister) and Tel Aviv (the Ministry of Defense), it is necessary to calculate vis-à-vis a soon-to-be nuclear Iran the exact extent to which Israel should communicate key aspects and portions of its nuclear positions, intentions, and capabilities. To ensure that its nuclear forces appear sufficiently usable, invulnerable, and penetration-capable to all prospective attackers, and not just to Iran, Israel will benefit from selectively releasing certain broad outlines of strategic information. This disclosed information, released solely to enhance Israeli nuclear deterrence, would in part include the hardening, dispersal, multiplication, basing, and yields of selected Israeli nuclear forces.

### **Enemy Rationality or Irrationality?**

Once it is faced with a recognizable nuclear adversary in Tehran, Israel will need to convince its recalcitrant Iranian enemy that it possesses both the will and the capacity to make any intended Iranian nuclear aggression more costly than gainful. No Israeli move from ambiguity to disclosure, however, would help in the case of an irrational nuclear enemy. For dealing with irrational enemies, those particular adversaries who would not value their own continued national survival more highly than any other preference<sup>4</sup> or combination of preferences, even preemption could be too late.<sup>5</sup> For

example, to the extent that an Iranian leadership might subscribe to certain visions of a Shiite apocalypse, Iran could cast aside all rational behavior. Were this to happen, Iran could effectively become a nuclear suicide bomber. Such a destabilizing prospect is highly improbable, but it is not inconceivable. Although rarely discussed, a similarly serious prospect may exist in already-nuclear and substantially coup-vulnerable, Pakistan.

Some of Israel's enemies might be irrational in the technical sense, but not entirely "crazy." For example, Iranian decision makers could act in conformance with a preference that values the destruction of the Jewish state more highly than any other preference or combination of preferences. In such improbable but not impossible circumstances, Iran would be irrational, yet remain subject to alternate Israeli threats of deterrence.

To protect itself against military strikes from rational enemies, particularly attacks that could potentially carry existential costs, Israel will need to better exploit every aspect and function of its nuclear arsenal and doctrine. The success of Israel's efforts here would depend not only upon its selected targeting doctrine (enemy cities and/or military forces), but also upon the extent to which this choice were made known in advance. Before any rational enemies could be deterred from launching first strikes against Israel, and before they could be deterred from launching retaliatory attacks following any Israeli non-nuclear preemption, it will not be enough for them merely to know that Israel has the bomb. These enemies would also need to detect that usable Israeli nuclear weapons were sufficiently invulnerable to first strike attacks, and that at least a determinable number were fully capable of penetrating high value population targets. More than likely, Israel has adopted a counter-city or "counter-value" nuclear targeting policy. That policy, in some controlled measure, replicating US targeting doctrine during the Cold War, must soon be made known in advance to all of Israel's identifiable enemies. Without such deliberate advance disclosures, the Israeli nuclear deterrent policy could eventually fail.

Removing the bomb from Israel's basement could enhance Israel's strategic deterrence to the extent that it would heighten rational enemy perceptions of both secure and capable Israeli nuclear forces. Such a calculated end to deliberate ambiguity could also underscore Israel's willingness to use these nuclear forces in reprisal for certain enemy first strike and retaliatory attacks. This brings to mind the so-called Samson option, which could allow various enemy decision makers to internalize that Israel is prepared to do whatever is needed to survive.

### The Samson Option

Only a selective end to its nuclear ambiguity could allow Israel to exploit the potentially considerable benefits of a Samson option. Should Israel choose to keep its bomb in the basement, therefore, it could never make any use of the residual Samson option.

Irrespective of its preferred level of ambiguity, Israel's nuclear strategy will remain oriented toward deterrence, not to war-fighting. The Samson option refers to a policy that would be based in part upon a more or less implicit threat of massive nuclear retaliation for certain specific enemy aggressions. Such a policy could be invoked credibly only in cases where such aggressions would threaten Israel's very existence, and could involve more destructive and high yield nuclear weapons than would otherwise be thought "usable." A Samson option could make strategic sense for Israel, but only in presumably last resort, or near last resort, circumstances. Where it is involved, an end to deliberate ambiguity could help Israel by emphasizing that particular portion of its nuclear arsenal that is less usable. This is not a contradiction of the prior argument that Israel will need to take the bomb out of the basement in order to enhance its deterrent credibility. Rather, it stipulates that the cumulative persuasiveness of Israel's nuclear deterrent will require prospective enemy perceptions of retaliatory destructiveness at both the low and high ends of the nuclear yield spectrum. Ending nuclear ambiguity at the proper time would best permit Israel to foster such perceptions.

The main objective of any Samson option would not be to communicate the availability of any graduated Israeli nuclear deterrent. Instead, it would intend to signal the more-or-less unstated promise of a counter-city reprisal. Made plausible by an end to absolute nuclear ambiguity,<sup>6</sup> the Samson option would be unlikely to deter any enemy aggressions short of "high end" nuclear and/or biological first strikes against Israel. Samson would "say" the following to all potential nuclear attackers: "We (Israel) may have to "die," but (this time) we won't die alone." The Samson option, made possible only after a calculated end to Israeli nuclear ambiguity, could serve Israel as an adjunct to deterrence, and to certain preemption options, but not as a core national nuclear strategy.

The Samson option should never be confused with Israel's absolutely overriding security objective: that is, to seek stable nuclear deterrence at the lowest conceivable levels of possible military conflict. In broad outline, Samson could support Israel's nuclear deterrent by best demonstrating

an Israeli willingness to take strategic risks, including even existential risks. Moshe Dayan famously embraced this particular and potentially counterintuitive logic: “Israel must be like a mad dog,” asserted Dayan, “too dangerous to bother.”

### **The Rationality of Pretended Irrationality, and a New Cold War**

In pertinent strategic calculations, it can be rational to pretend irrationality. The nuclear deterrence benefits of pretended irrationality must always depend, at least in part, upon an enemy state’s awareness of Israel’s disclosed counter-value targeting posture. There are specific and valuable security benefits that Israel would likely incur as the result of any intentionally selective and incremental end to deliberate nuclear ambiguity.

The time to begin such an “end” has not yet arrived. But at the precisely verifiable moment that Iran crosses the nuclear threshold, Israel should remove the bomb from its basement. By the time this moment arrives, Israel should already have configured its planned reallocation of nuclear weapons assets, and the measurable extent to which this configuration should now be disclosed. This form of advance planning could enhance the all-important credibility of its nuclear deterrence posture.

One last point warrants special mention. Israel, in the fashion of every other state in world politics, operates within a “system.”<sup>7</sup> Today, there is increasing evidence that this system is rapidly falling back into an earlier era of bipolarity, and that this regression may even begin to evolve into a new US-Russia Cold War.<sup>8</sup> Should this evolution in fact come to pass, much of Israel’s still-emergent nuclear forces and corollary nuclear doctrine would necessarily be affected.

Any forthcoming decision making in Jerusalem concerning nuclear ambiguity vs. nuclear disclosure, therefore, should take careful account of newly shifting superpower commitments and alignments. In the end, an anticipated era of hardening bipolarity could render the international system effectively less anarchic, but also more narrowly adversarial. It follows that Jerusalem and Washington may soon need to recalculate their overlapping nuclear options with a more intentionally conscious awareness of certain policy transformations already underway in Moscow.

In the final analysis, Israel’s enemies should be made to understand that there are circumstances in which Israel could rationally decide to use its nuclear weapons.<sup>9</sup> These circumstances would involve the prospect of suffering a total defeat, or, in more traditional Jewish-historical terms, a

destruction of the Third Temple Commonwealth. To be sure, Israel's leaders would always do whatever is needed to survive as a state, including, if need be, nuclear preemption; nuclear retaliation; nuclear counter-retaliation; or nuclear war fighting.<sup>10</sup>

Although it is difficult to imagine any circumstances wherein Israel could ever decide to launch a preemptive nuclear strike, there are conditions in which such an option could still be entirely rational, to wit: (a) Israel's enemy had verifiably acquired nuclear, and/or other nonconventional weapons authoritatively deemed capable of destroying the Jewish state; (b) Israel's enemy had already made explicit and clear that its destructive intentions fully paralleled its capabilities; (c) Israel's enemy was believed ready to begin an irremediable "countdown-to-launch"; and (d) Israel's leadership believed that non-nuclear preemptions were no longer able to achieve absolutely minimal levels of damage limitation, that is, levels consistent with Israel's national survival.

Plainly, Israel's overriding obligation must be to never allow any such end-of-the-line circumstances to arise.<sup>11</sup> In the best of all possible worlds, this existential obligation could be met through the good offices of imaginative diplomacy, and possibly even through more centralized world-authority processes. But this is not yet the best of all possible worlds, and Israel will quickly need to determine how best to coexist with one or more threatening "scorpions in a bottle," the grotesque but effective metaphor originated by physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer in the early days of the Cold War. In Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, this daunting obligation can be met only by fashioning and refashioning Israel's strategic doctrine in accordance with the highest standards of intellectual power.

### **Israeli Nuclear Strategy as an Intellectual Imperative**

Israel can prevail only if it conceptualizes the struggle for national survival as a relentless battle of mind over mind,<sup>12</sup> a fundamentally cerebral conflict that takes measured account of growing world system anarchy, re-emergent superpower bipolarity, and the ever shifting correlation of regional military forces. Israeli military planners must always understand that Israel should not attempt to face its perils as a set of wholly separate threats. Instead, they should begin to acknowledge a more general threat environment within which all of these discrete components have a precise and determinable position.

Even today, when the specific synergistic hazards created by impending Palestinian statehood and Iranian nuclearization are overriding and even

palpable, the core task for Israeli strategists must be to identify a broadly coherent and comprehensive framework that can accommodate the optimal understanding of all possible enemy threats. This means, *inter alia*, an obligation to fashion, in thoughtful increments, a strategic master plan, a body of generalized and interrelated propositions from which assorted and specific policy options could be suitably and reliably derived.

Israel's needed strategic master plan can never be constructed *ex nihilo*. Rather, it must become the determined outcome of an explicitly dialectical method of thinking. Plato, in the middle dialogues, describes the dialectician as the one who knows best how to ask, and then to answer, his own questions. This ancient method of seeking truth by correct reasoning remains best suited for the current and indispensable enhancement of Israeli strategic studies.

When Pericles delivered his funeral oration, it was to express confidence in ultimate victory for Athens. At the same time, as recalled by Thucydides, the authoritative Greek historian of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE), Pericles had also expressed deep fears about self-imposed setbacks along the way. "What I fear more than the strategies of our enemies," lamented Pericles, "is our own mistakes." There is an urgently important lesson here for Israel: in observing diverse enemy preparations for war and terror, do not forget that the efficacy of these preparations will always depend upon Israel's calculated responses.

Long after Pericles, Yehoshafat Harkabi, a former head of Israeli Military Intelligence, drew this operational guidance from the Bar Kokhba rebellion, a well-planned insurrection in ancient Judea (132 CE), which pushed the Jewish people to the outer margins of history: "In choosing a style of fighting, be wary of warfare in which the reaction required of the enemy, from the enemy's point of view, may lead to an action detrimental for you....This is an important lesson in nuclear circumstances; refrain from a provocation for which the adversary may have only one response, nuclear war."<sup>13</sup>

Applying Harkabi's historically informed insights to needed revisions in Israel's current strategic doctrine, two possible lessons present themselves: (a) do whatever is needed to prevent front line enemies from becoming nuclear in the first place; or (b) accept the inevitability of adversarial nuclear proliferation, together with its corollary limitations on preemption, and thereby focus instead on effectively ongoing mechanisms of national self-protection. Ideally, of course, Harkabi's wisdom would be better served

by the first option, but by now the chances for operational success of any defensive first strike are apt to be intolerably low.

So long as a fully nuclear Islamic Republic of Iran is not regarded in Jerusalem as being absolutely incapable of coexistence with a Jewish state, Israel's optimal doctrinal emphases should immediately be placed on implementing more suitable configurations of diplomacy, nuclear deterrence, and ballistic missile defense. In this connection, it will be especially important to reevaluate the longstanding Israeli policy of deliberate nuclear ambiguity, or the bomb in the basement.

### Notes

- 1 Nonetheless, on December 22, 1995, then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres declared freely to the press that Israel would be willing to "give up the atom" in exchange for "peace." Years later, on December 11, 2006, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, made much the same "slip of the tongue."
- 2 No state, including Israel, is under any legal obligation *per se* to renounce its own access to nuclear weapons, and in certain distinctly residual circumstances, even the actual resort to such weapons could be lawful. In this connection, on July 8, 1996, the International Court of Justice at The Hague handed down its Advisory Opinion on "The Legality of the Threat or Use of Force of Nuclear Weapons." The final paragraph of this Opinion, concludes, "The threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law. However, in view of the current state of international law, and of the elements of fact at its disposal, the Court cannot conclude definitively whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self-defense, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake."
- 3 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's steady insistence that any Palestinian state remain "demilitarized" is not merely unrealistic, but also potentially inconsistent with pertinent international law. On this point, see Louis René Beres and Zalman Shoval, "Why a Demilitarized Palestinian State Would Not Remain Demilitarized: A View Under International Law," *Temple International and Comparative Law Journal* 11, no. 2 (1997): 347-63.
- 4 An irrational and sovereign decision maker may value certain preferences, or combinations of preferences, more highly than even national survival. Nonetheless, the irrational and sovereign decision maker is not, by definition, either "mad," or "crazy." Rather, he may still choose among alternative options according to certain preference orderings that remain both consistent and transitive. It follows that an irrational Iran could still maintain a certain more-or-less fixed hierarchy of preferences, and that suitable threats to obstruct these particular preferences could remain a

fully plausible and compelling source of Israel deterrence. Most apparent in this regard would be certain credible threats to the Iranian decision makers personally, including family, and/or to the safety and security of certain religious (Islamic) institutions.

- 5 In military assessments, there may sometimes be certain ascertainable variables that are stubbornly refractory to any precise measurement, but are nonetheless of considerable importance. A not so obvious example would be the religious promise of immortality, or power over death, an utterly primal form of power that carries overwhelming weight in the Islamic Middle East and Iran.
- 6 Whether or not a shift from deliberate ambiguity to nuclear disclosure would actually enhance Israeli nuclear deterrence would depend on several complex and intersecting factors. These include the specific types of nuclear weapons involved, the reciprocal calculations of enemy leaders, the effects on rational decision making processes by these enemy leaders, and the effects on both Israeli and adversarial command/control/communications operations. Moreover, if bringing Israel's bomb out of the basement were to result in selected enemy pre-delegations of launch authority, and/or new and less stable launch-on-warning procedures, the likelihood of unauthorized and/or accidental nuclear wars could be substantially increased.
- 7 For more on this point, see Louis René Beres, "Israel's Urgent Strategic Imperative," Oxford University Press blog, posted on May 12, 2013.
- 8 As the White House threatened sanctions against Russia in the run up to the March 16, 2014 Crimean referendum on secession, a Kremlin-backed journalist issued a stark warning to the United States. "Russia is the only country in the world," said television personality Dmitry Kiselyov, "capable of turning the United States into radioactive ash." He spoke in front of a backdrop of an iconic mushroom cloud. Significantly, Kiselyov had recently been named by Russian President Vladimir Putin to head a new state news agency, whose function will be to portray Russia in a favorable light.
- 9 More generally, the obligation to use force in a world of international anarchy forms the central argument of *realpolitik*, from the *Melian Dialogues* of Thucydides and the *Letters* of Cicero, to Machiavelli, Locke, Spykman, and Kissinger. "For what can be done against force with force?" inquires Cicero. Yet the kind of anarchy that we confront today is very different from earlier eras of decentralized global authority. In essence, it is more primal, more primordial, even self-propelled, and self-rewarding.
- 10 By any measure of reasonableness, the nuclear war fighting option must always be considered the most residual and the least cost effective. It must always be borne in mind, nuclear weapons can truly succeed only via non-use, that is, only as a deterrent. Even prior to the nuclear age, ancient Chinese military theorist Sun-Tzu had argued generally in *The Art of War* that "subjugating the enemy's army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence" (chapter 3, "Planning Offensives").

- 11 Recall, in this connection, Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*: “Defensive warfare....does not consist of waiting idly for things to happen. We must wait only if it brings us visible and decisive advantages. That calm before the storm, when the aggressor is gathering new forces for a great blow, is most dangerous for the defender.” See Carl von Clausewitz, *Principles of War* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 54. With regard to Iran, Israeli decision makers must now inquire, is this perhaps the “calm before the storm”? For one current and strongly affirmative answer, see Andrew Bostom, “Iran’s Final Solution for Israel,” *National Review Online*, February 10, 2012.
- 12 Rabbi Eleazar quoted Rabbi Hanina, who said: “Scholars build the structure of peace in the world.” See *The Babylonian Talmud*, Order Zera’im, Tractate Berakoth, IX.
- 13 See: Yehoshafat Harkabi, *The Bar Kokhba Syndrome: Risk and Realism in International Politics* (Chappaqua, New York: Rossel Books, 1983). The Bar Kokhba rebellion, explains Professor Harkabi, “was the culmination of a period of uprisings, such as the Great Revolt of 66-70 CE, in which the Second Temple was destroyed, and the uprisings of 115-117 CE, during the reign of Trajan, when the Jewish communities in Cyrenaica, Egypt, and Cyprus were destroyed” (xi).