Nonconventional Deterrence between Three Parties: Lessons from the Gulf War

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The Spanish philosopher George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."[1] But Yehezkel Dror makes a no less valid point: drawing complete analogies between the present and past experience could lead us to ignore the particular circumstances characterizing the challenges of the present and damage our ability to confront them.[2] Because there is never full congruence between the past and the present, it is important to examine their similar and different conditions, and in light of this ask what we can learn from the past. This essay seeks to balance the two philosophical insights in studying the lessons of the triangle of nonconventional deterrence between the United States, Israel, and Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War and apply them to future cases of triangles of nonconventional deterrence.

A "triangle of deterrence" is a simple form of multilateral nonconventional deterrence, whereby three different parties concurrently use the threat of nonconventional capabilities attributed to them to deter at least one of the other two parties, giving rise to a situation in which three deterrent efforts are exerted simultaneously. The deterrence triangle that existed for many years between three nuclear powers – the Soviet Union, the United States, and China – is an example of the model. Were the nuclear nations of France, Great Britain, India, and Pakistan to have used their nonconventional capabilities to create deterrence against the three superpowers, the world would have had a state of multilateral deterrence. While this example is theoretical, meant to demonstrate the complexity of a multilateral deterrence model, changes in the international arena are making this model more relevant than it has ever been in the past.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signaled the death knell for the bipolar condition that typified the Cold War era. In this world, the two nuclear superpowers – the Soviet Union and the United States – maintained a deterrence regime known as MAD (mutually assured destruction) to prevent escalation to nuclear war.[3] The deterrence involved a Soviet nuclear threat to the United States and an American nuclear threat to the USSR. The world arranged itself around these poles, and nations were divided into American allies, Soviet allies, and the bloc of nonaligned nations. Virtually every crisis that occurred during the Cold War was overshadowed by the threat of nuclear war and was therefore affected by the bilateral nuclear deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Cold War may be divided into three waves of theoretical development, during which three basic principles were formulated that are critical to the success of deterrence as a strategy:[4]

a. The deterred side's decision making process[5] must be guided by *strategic rationalism*, namely, a process of examining the utilities of various alternatives in an organized fashion and choosing the alternative with the highest utility level. This is a necessary condition, because potential threats issued by the deterring side are designed to raise the cost of a threatening action and reduce its value to the opposing side so that such an action will not pay off compared to other alternatives, especially when compared to maintaining the status quo.
b. *Threat relay*: The deterring side must make sure that the other side understands exactly what the prohibited act is and that engaging in it will result in an intolerable punishment.
c. *Threat credibility*: The threat must be seen as credible in order to have an effect on the deterred side's decision making process. If the deterred side views the threat as empty, the threat will have no effect on its decision making. This condition entails two components: the deterred side must believe that the deterring side has the capability to make good on its threats in practice and that it is determined to act if the deterred side engages in the prohibited act.

The professional literature dealing with deterrence maintains that all three conditions are necessary for deterrence to succeed and be stable, i.e., prevent unintentional and uncontrolled escalation. This conclusion served as the foundation for the strategy of deterrence between the United States and

the Soviet Union during the Cold War as well as the basis for the theoretical discussion of deterrence that has developed ever since.

Since the fall of the USSR and the weakening of America's hegemony, the world order has become multipolar rather than bipolar, i.e., many parties have varying capabilities though none has more power than the combined might of all the others. For example, alongside the economic and military force of the United States, Russia has regained some of its historic power since the rise of Vladimir Putin; China has become a global superpower; Japan, Turkey, and Iran have started to fill the regional void left by the waning of influence of the United States and the USSR in Asia and the Middle East, respectively. In this matrix, regional powers, small nations, and non-state entities have increased incentive to attain nonconventional military capabilities in order to upgrade their status and expand their ability to operate in a changing environment.[6] Nations that were once under the auspices of one of the superpowers during the Cold War and are now trying to maintain or even enhance their regional power must develop independent means of deterrence to ensure maneuvering ability against the other players. This conclusion holds for both nations seeking to maintain independence vis-à-vis neighbors who are vying to become regional powers and non-state entities seeking to exploit the changes in the balance of power in order to expand their own reach. In such a multipolar and unorganized system, the appearance of multilateral models of deterrence becomes more likely.

However, despite the need for a broad, multi-layered review of nonconventional deterrence, the professional literature continues to focus on the traditional bilateral model.[7] For example, the typology suggested by Thazha Varkey Paul, the efforts of the "fourth wave" of deterrence (in addition to the three that occurred during the Cold War) suggested by Jeffrey W. Knopf, and even the analysis by Suzanne Werner of the dynamics of what she calls "extended deterrence" in which Player A seeks to deter Player B from attacking Player C, all retain the classical bilateral approach.[8] The few attempts made to study the multilateral model are mostly theoretical and are not based on past case studies.[9] In light of the theoretical lacuna, this essay undertakes a specific case study – the 1991 Gulf War, which includes a trilateral model of nonconventional deterrence that represents a relatively simple model of multilateral deterrence. Expanding the analytical limits of the three fundamental principles of bilateral deterrence to the trilateral case poses three challenges; these will be examined for relevance and validity to

the case study. The essay will conclude with some policy recommendations based on the conclusions of the analysis about the current state of trilateral deterrence.

Triangle of Deterrence: The 1991 Gulf War

The 1991 Gulf War, known in common parlance as the First Gulf War, was the second stage of the Persian Gulf crisis, which started on August 1, 1990, when the Iraqi military invaded Kuwait and occupied the country. American President George H. W. Bush reacted by enlisting 34 nations, including some Arab states, in a coalition to liberate Kuwait. In light of the American threat, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein threatened that if he were attacked, he would attack Israel. Operation Desert Storm, designed to drive the Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, started on January 17, 1991. Immediately after the attack on Kuwait and Iraq, the Iraqi leader realized his threat and ordered conventional missile fire at Israeli cities. Saddam Hussein repeated his threats of April 1990 that he would also use nonconventional weapons against Israel.[10] In response to the Iraqi threats, the American administration threatened to expand the attack on the Iraqi regime. Some of the American threats contained veiled references to nonconventional means for retaliating against Iraq for a nonconventional Iraqi attack on Israel. The Israeli government, headed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, also relayed threats that a nonconventional attack by Iraq would result in a similar Israeli response. As demonstrated in this essay, as part of Israel's vague policy of deterrence, the messages hinted that Iraqi use of chemical or biological weapons would serve as a reason for Israel to use the nuclear capabilities attributed to it. By the end of the fighting, 43 Iraqi missiles with conventional warheads would be fired at Israel; not a single missile fired carried a nonconventional warhead.[11]

In the First Gulf War, there was a specific three-sided model of deterrence in which two players, with attributions of nuclear weapons, operated against a third player with chemical and biological WMD. The American administration and the Israeli government tried to deter the Iraqi leader from using WMD against Israeli targets.[12] Since then, many studies have analyzed the Israeli and American decisions aimed at deterring Saddam Hussein from attacking Israel during the war, especially with nonconventional weapons.[13] These analyses usually assume that the Iraqi restraint was the result of Israel's policy of deterrence. Yet because "all deterrence is self-deterrence"[14] in the eyes of the party one wants to deter, what is lacking is an analysis from

the point of view of the Iraqi leader: how did he interpret the Israeli and American messages, and how did they affect his decision not to fire missiles with chemical or biological warheads at Israel? Attention to these questions would enable analysis of the influence of the Israeli and American threats on Saddam Hussein's decision to avoid firing nonconventional missiles at Israel in 1991 and analyze the success of deterrence, specifically an analysis of the effect of the deterring party's threatening messages on the party being deterred.[15]

Iraqi documents obtained during the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and recently released to the public allow a glimpse of the Iraqi decision making process and the effect that the American and Israeli threats had on it.[16] These documents inform part of the "third leg" of the triangle of nonconventional deterrence in the First Gulf War and should provide an empirical, historical foundation for implementing two of the three fundamental principles of bilateral deterrence – threat relay and threat credibility – to the trilateral deterrence model.[17]

The First Challenge: Relaying a Coherent Message despite Different Understandings of the Strategic Situation

In bilateral deterrence, the major challenge is relaying a coherent message that will affect the matrix of considerations of the deterred side so that it will conclude that engaging in the prohibited act is not worthwhile. To achieve this it is necessary that there be coordination between the organizations and people in charge of generating and transmitting the messages of deterrence, establishing communication with the deterred side, and relaying a convincing message about the deterring side's ability and willingness to punish the deterred side should it engage in the prohibited act.[18] In a triangle of deterrence, this key challenge is even harder. Not only does the deterring side have to transmit a clear, coherent message to the deterred player, but it must also do so in a way that matches the deterred side's understanding of a complex strategic situation. In bilateral deterrence, it is clear that each actor communicates only with the other, but in triangle of deterrence each actor communicates with two other players. If the deterred side views the other two as independent actors, it will distinguish between their messages. But if it believes the two are operating in concert against it, it will attribute the messages of Actor A also to Actor B. In such a case, the deterred side's assessment of the strategic situation and the relationship between the policy of the two players

facing it is a decisive factor in the deterring players' ability to maintain a clear, coherent message. The analysis is of course graduated and dynamic, affected by real-time events, rather than dichotomous or static. The closer the relationship between the two deterring parties is seen to be, the blurrier the distinction between them by the deterred side. The dynamics of the First Gulf War provide a clear demonstration of a state in which three players comprising one trilateral nonconventional model of deterrence arrived at different strategic assessments.

For the Iraqis, the triangle of deterrence between the three nations was in effect a case of bilateral deterrence between Iraq and its enemies that cooperated fully against it. An analysis of Iraqi documents indicates that Saddam Hussein hardly distinguished between Israel's policy and America's policy. For him, it was all a single entity, even if geographically divided into two, one close by and one far away. For example, in a meeting with a member of the Cuban National Defense Council in 2001, Hussein claimed that, "If Iraq had possessed long-range missiles [during the 1991 Gulf War], we would have hit the White House."[19] Since he had no long range missiles, the Iraqi leader believed that attacking Israel was as almost attacking the United States.

Evidence of the close relationship the Iraqi leader attributed to the United States and Israel, not only in offensive aspects, lies in the explanation that Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi foreign minister, offered in a 1996 interview about the decision to attack Israel after the start of the NATO air strikes on Kuwait: "Israel was part and parcel of the military aggression against Iraq. They did not participate directly, openly, but they provided all support to the aggression against Iraq so...well, when you are attacked by an enemy, you attack your enemies."[20]

Researchers David Palkki and Hal Brands examined the Iraqi documents and concluded that "because Saddam frequently failed to distinguish U.S. from Israeli policies, he held Israel largely responsible for the conflict and assumed hidden Israeli involvement."[21] They explain that "Saddam was never entirely clear on whether the United States controlled Israel or vice versa, but he nevertheless perceived a dangerous nexus between U.S. power and Israeli ambitions. He argued that Israel had been 'created by colonialism,' and that Israel was merely 'an extension of the United States of America.'"[22] Their research supports the assessment that in Iraq's mind there was almost total congruence between Washington and Jerusalem.

However, the Iraqi understanding of the link between Israeli and American policy was in no way similar to Israel's strategic perception of the triangle of deterrence. The Israeli leadership vacillated between near complete loss of trust in the American administration's willingness to work with Israel and ensure its security, and great wariness of the administration, while trying to force it – by threatening to operate independently – to promote Israel's interests during the fighting. Loss of trust was at the root of the doubt expressed by Foreign Minister Arens on the eve of the war about America's ability and willingness to undermine Iraq's threat against Israel. On December 24, 1990, the US State Department transmitted a message to Tel Aviv demanding that Israel suspend its security relations with South Africa at once. Arens recalls: "The very fact that, at this time, Bush and Baker bothered sending Israel such a message was for me a clear signal of a lack of sympathy and distrust on their part....The point – if there was indeed a point to this ruse – seems to have been to remind us that the administration was capable of embarrassing Israel publicly and that we'd better behave ourselves. It was a boorish, ugly move, typical of much of the diplomacy conducted by that administration towards Israel."[23]

On January 16, 1991, the day before the war broke out, Arens wrote: "I wasn't at all sure about the ability of the Americans to take out the Iraqi missile threat against Israel. I was angry with their unwillingness to share with us with intelligence they had that was most critical for Israel, and I was frustrated by the lack of trust that was typical of their attitude to us."[24] Prime Minister Shamir, too, made his suspicions clear by sending frequent threats to President Bush that unless he acted to preserve Israel's security, Shamir would be forced to act contrary to America's wishes that Israel conduct itself with restraint. For example, in a phone conversation between Shamir and Secretary of State James Baker on January 15, 1991, the Prime Minister said that Israel had prepared a response to Iraqi fire.[25] In a letter forwarded to the President on January 22, 1991, Shamir demanded that the administration "step aside and allow Israel to retaliate."[26]

To be sure, the cooling off of relations between Washington and Israel was apparent before the war. The Bush administration was busy constructing its anti-Iraq coalition and cooled its relations with the Israeli government as part of the effort to recruit Arab nations into that coalition. In part, the cooling off also stemmed from differences of opinion on the Palestinian question. The administration supported the international condemnation of Israel that

followed the suppression of the riots that broke out on the Temple Mount on October 13, 1990 and the United Nations declaration that Israel had no sovereignty over Jerusalem.[27] The deterioration in relations also stemmed from a lack of coordination between the two nations on intelligence issues and policies on the Gulf crisis. The Israeli sense was that the United States was not sharing the intelligence it had gathered on Iraq, including information about the missile threat to Israel, and that the American administration did not comprehend the Israeli fear of an Iraqi attack on Israel's cities, even going so far as to ridicule it.[28] In early December, Reuters reported on an Iraqi mid-range missile test. Arens estimated that "it was clear that the decision had been made not to provide us with this important information. I didn't think there was any excuse for this hypocritical behavior."[29] In other words, from Israel's perspective the triangle of deterrence had two independent parties cooperating up to a point in trying to deter a third party from taking action.

The tense relationship between Washington and Jerusalem resulted in an American assessment by the American leadership of the triangle of nonconventional deterrence that differed from the assessments made both in Israel and Iraq. The key concern in Washington was that an uncoordinated attack by Israel would threaten American efforts to establish a broad-based coalition against Iraq whose purpose was to ensure the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Such a scenario could have unfolded had Iraq attacked Israel with nonconventional weapons or had Israel decided to respond to conventional missile fire from Iraq. This is why the administration sought to deter Saddam Hussein from using nonconventional weapons against Israel while simultaneously trying to prevent Israel from acting independently and without first coordinating its actions with the United States. Secretary of State Baker claimed that, "We were very concerned about what Israeli intervention in the war might mean for our effort to keep the coalition together; there's no doubt about that."[30] Richard Haass, special assistant to the American president explained that, "Not only did we not want the Israelis to shoot first, we didn't even want them to shoot second and that if they were attacked the understanding was that they would come talk to us before responding because our equities in this entire crisis were arguably even greater than theirs." He added that, "We almost wanted to become members of the Israeli cabinet on this decision and I think it worked."[31]

In other words, according to the American view, the Gulf War was a triangle of deterrence in which the United States worked together with Israel

to deter Iraq from attacking Israel with weapons of mass destruction but was working against Israel to prevent it from attacking Iraq. In this sense, the United States was moving between a state of extended deterrence in which it was deterring Saddam Hussein from attacking Israel and a state of "pivotal deterrence" in which it was deterring both sides from escalating the conflict.[32] The more Israel cooperated, the more the administration moved in the direction of extended deterrence; the more Israel threatened to act independently, the more the administration moved toward a pivotal stance.

In short, each of the players – Iraq, Israel, and the United States – had a different strategic perception of the triangle of deterrence. Iraq viewed the relationship of deterrence with the United States and Israel as a bilateral one, while Israel and the United States assessed that the triangle of deterrence was one in which both nations conducted independent strategies of deterrence. The difference between these perceptions was of strategic significance: Iraq attributed American messages to Israel and Israeli messages to America. Given this perception, a very high level of cooperation and coordination between the United States and Israel was needed in order to ensure that a clear, coherent message of deterrence was being transmitted. Because the two governments viewed the relationship of deterrence differently and operated independently of one another, they failed to grasp both the opportunity that had come their way and the challenge to maintain the first condition of deterrent stability, i.e., prevent unintentional escalation.

To delve more deeply into some of these challenges and opportunities, it is necessary to understand the transition from extended deterrence to a triangle of deterrence. The following two challenges deal with the significance of this transition in terms of the second condition for deterrent stability – the credibility of the threat.

Deterrence literature deals at length with the problem of credibility in extended deterrence.[33] An example of extended deterrence is the American threat to act against the USSR should the latter attack America's European allies. It is not hard to understand that a nation will be less inclined to act when another nation is attacked, than when it is attacked itself. Therefore, a threat to act in the case of an attack not aimed directly at the nation issuing the threat will be perceived as less credible than a threat to retaliate if it itself is attacked. In order to confront the limits of extended deterrence, the deterring side must persuade the deterred side that it is both capable and determined to act on its threats. The second challenge has to do with the

element of willingness, and the third challenge is connected to the element of capability.

The Second Challenge: Deterrence – Credibility toward the Third Player

In the case of bilateral deterrence, the deterred side must be convinced of the willingness of the deterring side to act. In a triangle of deterrence, it is critical that the third actor, whom the deterring side seeks to protect, must also be convinced. If the third side does not feel it is protected, it is liable to act independently and thereby escalate the crisis. For example, had France concluded that the United States did not demonstrate sufficient deterrent power against the USSR during the Cold War, it could have threatened a preemptive strike against the USSR in order to force the United States to show greater resolve towards the Soviet Union. In such a case, the French lack of trust in American deterrence could have caused tension in the triangle of deterrence by damaging the Soviet sense of security, driving a further wedge into French-American relations, thereby damaging United States extended deterrence against the USSR, and at a later stage forcing France into a preemptive strike.

This example demonstrates the difference between a state of extended deterrence and a triangle of nonconventional deterrence. In extended deterrence there are clear power relations, in which the third party relies on the threats issued by the deterring party. In such a situation, the deterring side has significant leverage with the third side. In a triangle of deterrence, this leverage is greatly reduced because the third party has the means to take independent action and exert pressure on the other two parties. Therefore, the perception of the credibility of the threat of the deterring party, which is supposed to protect the third party from the deterred sided, becomes critical for maintaining the stability of the state of deterrence and preventing escalation.

The French example is theoretical, but is relevant to the dynamics that developed in the Gulf War in 1991. The Israeli government did not trust the credibility of the American threat to respond to an Iraqi nonconventional attack and therefore threatened to damage the launch capabilities of the Iraqi army in a preventive effort to reduce the threat. By doing this, Israel also sought to exert pressure on the United States to exhibit greater resolve against the Iraqi nonconventional threat. The United States, understanding the complex situation and worried about independent Israeli action, sought

to prevent it by increasing the attacks on the Iraqi launch forces in western Iraq, sending Patriot anti-missile batteries to Israel, establishing a hotline between the military HQ in Tel Aviv and the White House, and increasing public declaration of America's commitment to Israel's security. After the war, Vice President Richard Cheney said that these efforts "helped us justify to the Israelis why they had to stay out of the war, that we were doing everything that could be done."[34]

However, during the war it was not at all clear to the American administration that it could rein in the Israelis. For example, Richard Haass claimed that during the war his assessment that the United States could prevent Israel from responding to the Iraqi missile fire (and take advantage of the attack for foiling purposes) was about 50 percent.[35] General Scowcroft, the National Security Advisor, concluded that it was almost certain that the United States would fail.[36] His assessment led President Bush to propose to the Israeli government that it retaliate to the January 19 Iraqi missile attack in coordination with the United States. According to the testimony of the American President, he suggested to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to launch surface-to-surface missiles at Iraqi air force bases located in northern Iraq.[37]

Despite American concerns and Israeli efforts to formulate an independent operational plan, Prime Minister Shamir did not in fact issue the order to attack during that war. The United States managed to ensure Israeli restraint and prevent Israeli intervention, which could have resulted in escalation that would have jeopardized the unity of the coalition forces, thus damaging American efforts in Iraq. Although the Americans correctly identified the challenge and succeeded in preventing escalation, the US policy provided more than one hint that the response to an Iraqi nonconventional attack on Israel would have to be Israeli rather than American. The most prominent example was the interview the vice president granted to CNN during the war. In the interview, Cheney referred explicitly to the toll Israel would take on Saddam Hussein if he decided to use nonconventional weapons: "I assume that he [Saddam Hussein] knows that if he were to resort to chemical weapons, that would be an escalation to weapons of mass destruction and that the possibility would then exist – certainly with respect to the Israelis, for example – that they would retaliate with nonconventional weapons as well."[38]

The American policy, both its successes and its failures, is linked to the first challenge, the credibility factor, which relates to the deterring party's

willingness to make good on its threat as perceived by both the deterred party and the third party.

The Third Challenge: The Credibility of the Capability Factor

The second factor regarding threat credibility is the capability factor. The deterred party's assessment of the deterring party's ability to punish it in an intolerable fashion, i.e., its ability to carry out its threat using serious retaliation (in the case of nonconventional weapons, an intolerable response) to the prohibited act, is critical to the success of a policy of deterrence.[39] Only if the deterred party believes that the deterring party can – and will – realize its threats is the deterred party likely to change its intentions. If the deterred party believes the deterring side is bluffing, and is not backed by real capabilities, it will not attribute any importance to the threat. In order to convince the deterred party of the credibility of the capability factor, different nations employ the media to reveal information about their abilities, e.g., by publishing information about weapons testing or by demonstrating their capabilities in another arena. For example, if we accept the assertion that the American use of the atomic bomb at the end of World War II in Japan was meant to showcase American military nuclear capabilities to the USSR, thereby deterring the Soviet leadership from destabilizing relations with the United States,[40] then America's use of nuclear weapons on the Japanese arena was meant to serve American deterrence in the European arena.

While the key challenge of demonstrating capability in a bilateral deterrence regime is the skill in transmitting a credible message to the deterred party, in a triangle of deterrence one may identify both an opportunity and a challenge: the opportunity that the deterrence regime might help amplify the credibility of the deterrence, and the challenge of reducing the deterrent damage that could result from an assessment that the capability is no longer independent but has become relative to the capability of the other deterring party.

In order to demonstrate the opportunity inherent in a triangle of deterrence, consider a situation in which two nations are trying to deter a third. Nation A has a large, advanced navy allowing it to carry out nonconventional attacks. Nation B has a giant, advanced air force with highly developed nonconventional capabilities. Nation C, which Nations A and B are trying to deter, knows its enemies can punish it both at sea and in the air. It will find it much more difficult to foil such a joint attack than to foil each attack separately, and therefore the chances that Nation C will avoid going to war

in the case of a coordinated threat by Nations A and B are much higher than they are in the scenario in which Nation A or Nation B takes separate action. Morgan describes a state of "collective actor deterrence," in which one party is the collective player, i.e., an organization in which the level of coordination and congruence of interests is high.[41] He explains that in the context of such organizations – like NATO and the European Union – nations whose military power is small amplify their deterrence thanks to reliance on the capabilities of their strong allies. Although this is an extreme state of deterrent relations, it is possible to infer from it the inherent potential of coordination and cooperation at different levels, from ad hoc cooperation to full prior cooperation, in order to amplify the capability factor and therefore also the credibility of the deterrence. Note that a cardinal condition of transmitting a credible message about joint capabilities is agreement on the action the two parties would carry out. These insights are relevant both to conventional and to nonconventional deterrence.

In the Gulf War, Israel doubted America's willingness to respond to an Iraqi nonconventional attack and made a distinction between its own credibility and that of the United States. This skepticism resulted in the Israeli military receiving orders to develop operative capabilities for striking Iraq;[42] and in the presence of 25 American senators, Foreign Minister David Levy threatened that were Israel to be attacked it would retaliate in order to maintain its security and defend its citizens.[43] Senior Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Defense Minister Moshe Arens, made it clear that a nonconventional attack by Iraq would constitute the "crossing of a red line" and result in damage "of the most serious kind."[44] The Israeli defense minister referred explicitly to Cheney's threat that Israel would retaliate with nonconventional weapons to an Iraqi nonconventional attack: "Cheney did not talk specifically, and I would not have expected him to do so under present circumstances. But if you say that Saddam has reasons to worry – that is correct."[45]

The defense minister's testimony indicates Israel's nervousness and suspicion about America's willingness to retaliate against attacks on Israeli cities, and about the future use of WMD. The message transmitted to Washington was clear: were Israel to suffer an attack with nonconventional weapons, Israel would be the one to retaliate.[46]

According to Haselkorn,[47] this message was read loud and clear by the American side: "In response to an Iraqi CB attack, Washington – rightly or

wrongly – expected Israel to resort to its nuclear missiles." The testimony of American Defense Secretary General Colin Powell also indicates that the United States believed Israel would retaliate on its own to an Iraqi nonconventional attack. In his meeting with Deputy Chief of Staff Ehud Barak, the Israeli general told him that should the Iraqis attack with chemical weapons, "You know what we must do."[48] Powell said that "I had a pretty good idea of what he meant. Israeli missile crews were reportedly on full alert. And who knew what they would be firing."

Haass, the presidential advisor, also testified in a similar vein,[49] corroborating the assumption in Washington that any retaliation to an Iraqi nonconventional attack on Israel would be Israeli. In an interview granted after the war, he stated that after the news of the first Iraqi attack on Israel arrived in Washington, it wasn't clear if Saddam Hussein had used chemical weapons. "My reaction was, if that's true, you can't keep the Israelis from holding back, and at that point we said, if it's true that the Iraqis have used chemicals, then we're talking about the nature of the Israelis response, not whether the Israelis will respond."

By contrast, the Iraqi perception of an almost bilateral state of deterrence resulted, in practice, in Israel benefiting from the might of America's nonconventional deterrence. Saddam Hussein, for whom the two nations were virtually synonymous, was afraid of a destructive nuclear attack and did not distinguish between Israel's limited capabilities and the far greater capabilities of the world's strongest nuclear power. For example, in 1995, General Hussein Kamal, the Iraqi minister of military industry, and Saddam Hussein's stepson, stated that, "During the Gulf War... there was no decision to use chemical weapons for fear of retaliation. They realized that if chemical weapons were used, retaliation would be nuclear."[50] General al-Samarrai also raised this claim in a 1996 television interview: "I do not think that Saddam was capable of taking a decision to use chemical weapons or biological weapons, or any other type of weapons against the allied troops, because the warning was quite severe, and quite effective. The allied troops were certain to use nuclear arms and the price would be too dear and too high."[51]

These statements are congruent with the actions taken by the Iraqi regime before and during the war. In September 1990, Iraqi intelligence analyzed the nuclear capabilities of the United States and its policy, and distributed the conclusions among Iraq's leaders.[52] In December 1990, Baghdad held a large scale evacuation drill simulating an attack "with WMD used by the

United States or its allies" on the city.[53] Immediately after the start of the aerial attacks by the coalition forces on Iraq and Kuwait, Saddam Hussein ordered missiles fired at Israel, showing that he did not make a distinction between his attacker, the coalition forces headed by the United States, and the target of his attacks – Israel: "Iraq would initially attack only with conventional warheads...and would use its chemical and biological weapons 'in return for the warheads they use.'"[54]

In this situation, and although its leadership was unaware of this in real time, Israel in practice enjoyed the deterrent might of the world's strongest nuclear power. The fact that Israel saw fit to threaten to use its own limited capabilities, compared to those of the United States, is ample evidence. Had the messages Israel transmitted caused Saddam Hussein to distinguish between them and the messages transmitted by the White House, Israel's deterrence would have shrunk compared to the deterrence Israel enjoyed in practice. Because it was clear that the potential of Israel's retaliation was limited compared to American capabilities, Saddam Hussein's cost-benefit analysis could have been affected as a result of the lower cost he would have to pay for using his stock of chemical and biological weapons against Israel.

The example of Israel's policy during the Gulf War points to the opportunity inherent in a triangle of deterrence in terms of capability; the Israeli threat did not stand alone but was accompanied by the American threat. However, this rationale can also be applied to the threat that a triangle of deterrence poses. Because the deterrent message does not stand alone, but in relation to the third party's capabilities and message, the deterring player must present a threat of greater damage than that presented by the parallel state of deterrence. The Gulf War provided an example also of this. Although it was a case of conventional deterrence between nations, it can be instructive in the case of a triangle of nonconventional deterrence.

Early in the crisis in the Gulf, Israel tried to deter Saddam Hussein from launching conventional missiles at Israel should he be attacked by the United States. After the start of the attack by NATO forces headed by the United States military, Saddam Hussein ordered the attack on Israel. In 1996, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz explained that the Israeli army could not have caused Iraq significant damage in addition to the damage already inflicted by the US-led coalition.[55] Israel, failing to understand that its capabilities in this situation were limited compared to the American attacks, continued to issue threats until the war broke out and it was targeted by Iraqi missiles.

The Israeli threats were in fact irrelevant once they were put to the test, because they did not promise additional damage beyond that already caused by the American attacks. The Israeli failure provides an important lesson for triangles of deterrence: the parties must understand that their threat does not stand alone but affects the deterred side relative to the threats issued by the third side.

The analysis of the triangle of deterrence during the Gulf War from the Israeli perspective reveals that Israel's planning was flawed in that it failed to grasp the opportunity offered by relying on America's nonconventional deterrence, and it also failed to understand the threat that the conventional American force posed in its messages of deterrence at the start of the crisis, before the war broke out. These Israeli failures indicate that triangles of deterrence raise both new opportunities and new dangers to the stability of the deterrence, opportunities and dangers that need to be studied further.

Trilateral Deterrence is Less Stable than Bilateral Deterrence

The state of deterrence between three nations, all of which are said to have possessed nonconventional weapons in the Gulf War, is a case study instructive for possible current triangles of deterrence given a multipolar world lacking clear lines of demarcation between powers. The dynamics of deterrence that characterized the 1991 Gulf War are an example of a very specific type of trilateral deterrence that occurs when two players of significantly different strengths work in tandem, even if independently of one another, against a third player with nonconventional, though not nuclear, capabilities. Despite this reservation, one can learn something about the dynamics of a trilateral nonconventional deterrent system from this analysis and present the insights as the basis for recommendations for Israeli policy, should Israel again find itself in a similar situation.

The main conclusion suggested by this analysis is that a trilateral nonconventional system of deterrence is structurally less stable than a bilateral system of deterrence, i.e., it is more prone to inadvertent escalation. While such a system provides opportunities for improving the credibility of the capability factor, it does so only under very specific circumstances of coordination and congruence of interests. Alongside this opportunity inherent in the triangle of deterrence, however, is a significant danger, to the actors' ability to transmit a clear, coherent message to their enemies, and of erosion of credibility of the capability factor, i.e., the ability to convince

both the deterred and the third party that the threat is credible. This is true in a multipolar world in which nations have unequal powers and interests and mistrust one another. In this situation, the task of transmitting a credible message of intolerable retaliation for an attack becomes more complex and harder to fulfill than in a state of bilateral deterrence.

The insights suggested herein are not limited to the theoretical realm, and can be adapted to today's reality. The Israeli-American dilemma in terms of the Syrian chemical threat, as well as Israeli-American cooperation against Iran's nuclear ambitions, show the relevance of the triangle of deterrence to challenges facing the Israeli government. This analysis gives rise to three insights on Israeli policy on these issues and on others that may arise in the future.

The Use of Models of Trilateral Nonconventional States of Deterrence

Although the analysis herein is preliminary, it demonstrates that bilateral models, including that of extended deterrence, are insufficient for understanding the special dynamics created in trilateral deterrence. In a bipolar world, experts expect to encounter ever more complex deterrent states, and it is therefore necessary to analyze them by means of an appropriate model. One must determine when the analysis calls for the traditional bilateral model and when a more complex model is necessary. In light of the power that Israel's enemies attribute to the relationship between Israel and the United States, it is necessary to examine when Israel's deterrence is perceived by its enemies to be trilateral. Much has been written about the nonconventional deterrence expected to develop between Israel and Iran, should the latter develop nuclear weapons.[56] It may be that the Tehran leadership sees itself as a power taking on Israel and the United States simultaneously. If the outlook in Tehran is similar to the outlook adopted by the Iraqi leadership in the Gulf War, the analyses that have been conducted to date are partial, making a more complex analysis – one based on trilateral deterrence – imperative. It would have to take into account the Iranian assessment of the relationship between Israel and the United States, the United States' commitment to attack Iran in retaliation to an Iranian attack on Israel, and the power available to Israel and the United States jointly.

Skepticism of the Credibility of Trilateral Nonconventional Deterrence

The main conclusion derived from the analysis is that trilateral nonconventional deterrence is, by its very nature, less stable that bilateral deterrence. In other words, in this type of deterrence the challenge of avoiding escalation is greater than in deterrence involving only two parties. The challenges presented by this model, as well as the opportunities inherent in multilateral deterrence, have not yet been studied comprehensively, casting doubt upon the likelihood of trilateral deterrence remaining stable. The State of Israel, or any nation that considers nonconventional deterrence as a major strategy in its security concept, must approach this strategy with a great deal of skepticism. This insight demonstrates, for example, some of the limitations of nonconventional deterrence vis-à-vis Bashar Assad at the present (as long as he possesses chemical and biological weapons), as well as the fragility of future deterrence vis-à-vis a nuclear Iran. The reservation about the stability of multilateral deterrence will become stronger if the threat of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East should be realized as a result of Iran's successful development of nuclear weapons.[57] In such a situation, deterrence would be multilateral, thus more complex and less easily understood than trilateral deterrence. The organizations responsible for intelligence assessments and policy formulation for the Syrian and Iranian arenas must provide comprehensive analyses that take into account this complexity and the implications for the stability of the deterrence.

The Importance of US-Israel Relations

The analysis of the triangle of deterrence in the Gulf War reveals the importance of the relations between the United States and Israel, both for the stability of deterrence and for furthering Israel's interests in the context of the complex dynamics created by the system of deterrence. The cool relations between the George H. W. Bush administration and the Shamir government gave rise to grave concern in Jerusalem that damaged Israel's ability to rely on the credibility of the nonconventional deterrence of the world's greatest superpower, as attributed to Israel by the Iraqis. The shaky relationship between the respective leaders also resulted in the transmission of messages that could have damaged the credibility of the threat attributed by the Iraqi side and Israel's unnecessary allocation of resources to the development of independent deterring capabilities that may have been redundant given American policy and the credibility attributed to it by Saddam Hussein.

This may lead to the conclusion that given better coordination between Washington and Jerusalem, Israel might have been able to enhance its deterrence against the Iraqi threat before the outbreak of the war and allow more effective management during the war.

When confronting the nonconventional crisis in a conflict with Syria or Iran, Israel and the United States will have to formulate and present better coordination and cooperation than what was displayed during the Gulf War. Their ability to engage in frank discourse and achieve full coordination will be a decisive factor in deciding whether to rely on deterrence or embark on a preemptive strike. The development of the crisis during the 1991 Gulf War teaches us that this question will come up at the very start of a crisis and grow more insistent as the crisis progresses when the divergent interests of the nations involved are at risk. Only excellent relations between Washington and Jerusalem will ensure that when the interests of one nation are threatened, it can rely on cooperation with the other and clearly transmit this message to the enemy – preconditions for maintaining the stability of trilateral nonconventional deterrence.

Notes

1 George Santanaya, *Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense* (Scribner's, 1905), p. 284.
2 Yehezkel Dror, *Be Our Leader* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 2011), pp. 488-89.
3 Gordon S. Barrass, *The Great Cold War: A Journey Through the Hall of Mirrors* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).
4 Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004); T. V. Paul, "Complex Deterrence: An Introduction," in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age,* eds. T. V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 1-30.
5 That is, the party toward which the efforts of deterrence are aimed. For the readers' convenience, the essay will use phrases such as "deterring party/side/actor" and "deterred party/side/actor," even though these terms describe the success of the deterrence efforts rather that the objective state. Some of the literature speaks of "challengers" and "defenders" when describing the existence of efforts of deterrence.
6 Keith B. Payne, "Deterring the Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Lessons from History," in *The Niche Threat: Deterring the Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, ed. Stuart E. Johnson (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1997), pp. 71-94; E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey*, 5th ed. (New York: Longman, 2001), pp. 384-85; Freedman, *Deterrence*; Paul, "Complex Deterrence: An Introduction."

7 Suzanne Werner, "Deterring Intervention: The Stakes of War and Third-Party Involvement," *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 4 (2000): 720-32; Jeffrey W. Knopf, "The Fourth Wave in Deterrence Research," *Contemporary Security Policy* 31, no. 1 (2010): 1-33; Paul, "Complex Deterrence: An Introduction."
8 Analyzing a policy of extended deterrence by the deterring side is done in the context of a bilateral examination – between the deterring and deterred sides – so that although the purpose of the policy is to protect the third side, the framework of the analysis retains the dynamics between the deterring and deterred parties.
9 Stephen L. Quackenbush, "Not Only Whether but Whom: Three-Party Extended Deterrence,'" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 4 (2006): 562-83; Patrick M. Morgan, "Collective Actor Deterrence," in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, pp. 158-82.
10 Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles: Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War* (Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press, 2008), p. 152. On April 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein warned that were he to be attacked, he would "burn down half of Israel." In his book (p. 169), Woods explains that this threat preceded the Iraqi capability of launching missiles armed with nonconventional warheads, a capability attained only in August that year.
11 Although the Israeli assessments are that 41 or 42 Iraqi missiles were launched, this essay uses the Iraqi estimate that 43 missiles were fired at Israel.
12 It is important to note that the American policy of deterrence also included a threat against using chemical and biological weapons against American troops and America's allies, including Saudi Arabia. Because this goal did not overlap with Israel's goals, it is not suited to a trilateral model of deterrence, and was therefore not included in this analysis.
13 Amatzia Baram, "Israeli Deterrence, Iraqi Responses," *Orbis* 36, no. 3 (1992): 385-403; Laura Zittrain Eisenberg, "Passive Belligerency: Israel and the 1991 Gulf War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 15, no. 3 (1992): 304-29; Shai Feldman, "Israeli Deterrence and the Gulf War," in *War in the Gulf: Implications for Israel*, ed. Joseph Alpher (JCSS: Jerusalem, 1992); Avigdor Haselkorn, *The Continuing Storm: Iraq, Poisonous Weapons, and Deterrence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).
14 Freedman, *Deterrence*, p. 30.
15 Ibid, p. 29.
16 The collection of the Saddam Hussein regime lies in the National Defense University (NDU). See the table of contents at the official website of the Saddam Hussein collection at http://www.ndu.edu/inss/index.cfm?type=section&secid=138&pageid=4. Woods notes that some of the Iraqi narrative was misconstrued. However, despite the language barrier, which should be kept in mind, these documents offer a unique observation into Iraqi perceptions, within the limits of a non-Iraqi viewpoint. See "A Note on Sources" in Woods, *The Mother of all Battles*.
17 Given the scope of this essay, the analysis does not refer to the issue of strategic rationalism and the implications for a trilateral model of deterrence. The complex issue requires its own in-depth analysis.
18 Gerald M. Steinberg, "Parameters of Stable Deterrence in a Proliferated Middle East: Lessons from the 1991 Gulf War," *Nonproliferation Review* 7, no. 3 (2000): 43-60;

Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Freedman, *Deterrence*; Robert L. Jervis, "The Confrontation between Iraq and the US: Implications for the Theory and Practice of Deterrence," *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 2 (2003): 315-37; Paul, "Complex Deterrence: An Introduction"; Janice Gross Stein, "Rational Deterrence against Irrational Adversaries? No Common Knowledge," in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*.

19 Hal Brands and David Palkki, 'Saddam, Israel, and the Bomb: Nuclear Alarmism Justified?' *International Security* 36, no. 1 (2011): 158.

20 Tariq Aziz, interview to *Frontline*, January 25, 2000, available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/aziz/1.html .

21 Brands and Palkki, "Saddam, Israel, and the Bomb: Nuclear Alarmism Justified?" pp. 157-58.

22 Ibid, p. 158.

23 Moshe Arens, *War and Peace in the Middle East 1988-1992* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot 1995), pp. 182-83.

24 Ibid, p. 190.

25 James Baker and Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), p. 387.

26 Ibid, p. 389.

27 Arens, *War and Peace in the Middle East 1988-1992*, pp. 172-73.

28 For example, Arens refers to a statement attributed to General Schwarzkopf, commander of the coalition forces, to the effect that an Iraqi missile attack on Israel was no worse than a thunderstorm over Atlanta. The general made this statement during discussions about the tasks to be carried out by the aerial forces in Iraq and whether to bomb the launchers and missiles capable of reaching Israel or to bomb targets that would help the war in Iraq. Arens, *War and Peace in the Middle East 1988-1992*, p. 203.

29 Ibid, p. 179.

30 James Baker, interview to *Frontline*, January 25, 2000, available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saudi/interviews/baker.html.

31 Richard Haass, interview to *Frontline,* January 25, 2000, available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/haass/1.html.

32 For more reading on pivotal deterrence, see Timothy W. Crawford, *Pivotal Deterrence: Third-Party Statecraft and the Pursuit of Peace* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Timothy W. Crawford, "The Endurance of Extended Deterrence: Continuity, Change, and Complexity in Theory and Policy," in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, pp. 294-95.

33 Werner, "Deterring Intervention: The Stakes of War and Third-Party Involvement"; Morgan, *Deterrence Now*; Freedman, *Deterrence*, pp. 34-35.

34 Richard Cheney, interview to *Frontline*, January 25, 2000, available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/cheney/1.html.

35 Haass, interview to *Frontline*.

36 Brent Scowcroft, interview to *Frontline*, January 25, 2000, available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/scowcroft/1.html.

37 George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), p. 455.

38 CNN Cable News Network's *Evans and Novak*, February 2, 1991.
39 Morgan, *Deterrence Now*; Freedman, *Deterrence*.
40 Martin J. Sherwin, "Hiroshima as Politics and History," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 3 (1995): 1085-93.
41 Morgan, "Collective Actor Deterrence."
42 Feldman, "Israeli Deterrence and the Gulf War"; David A. Welch, "The Politics and Psychology of Restraint: Israeli Decision-Making in the Gulf War," *International Journal* 47, no. 2 (1992): 328-69; Arens. *War and Peace in the Middle East 1988-1992*.
43 Cited in Welch, "The Politics and Psychology of Restraint," p. 329.
44 Dani Sade, "The Red Line: The Use of Nonconventional Weapons against Israel," *Yediot Ahronot*, February 4, 1991; Feldman, "Israeli Deterrence and the Gulf War," p. 198.
45 Feldman, "Israeli Deterrence and the Gulf War," pp. 202-3.
46 Arens, *War and Peace in the Middle East 1988-1992*.
47 Haselkorn, *The Continuing Storm*, p. 124.
48 Colin Powell, and Joseph E. Perisco, *My American Journey* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), pp. 511-12.
49 Haass, interview to *Frontline*.
50 Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), p. 22.
51 Wafaq al-Samarrai, interview to *Frontline*, January 25, 2000, available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/samarrai/1.html.
52 Woods, *Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War*, p. 169.
53 Harmony file ISGQ-2003.00072723. Correspondence Concerning Emergency Evacuation Plan in Case of Nuclear Attack, 29 December 1990, cited in Woods, *The Mother of all Battles*, p. 154.
54 Cited in Brands and Palkki, "Saddam, Israel, and the Bomb, Nuclear Alarmism Justified?" p. 160.
55 Aziz, Interview to *Frontline*.
56 Shmuel Bar, "Can Cold War Deterrence Apply to a Nuclear Iran?" *Strategic Perspectives* 7 (2011): 1-16, http://jcpa.org/text/cold_war_deterrence_nuclear_iran.pdf; James M. Lindsay and Ray Takeyh, "After Iran Gets the Bomb: Containment and Its Complications," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2010): 33-50, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66032/james-m-lindsay-and-ray-takeyh/after-iran-gets-the-bomb; Kenneth N. Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2012); Amos Yadlin, "A Conceptual Framework and Decision Making Model for Israel about Iran," *Strategic Assessment* 15, no. 2 (2012): 69-73; Emily B. Landau, "When Neorealism Meets the Middle East: Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons in (Regional) Context," *Strategic Assessment* 15, no. 3 (2012): 27-37.
57 Amos Yadlin and Avner Golov, "A Nuclear Iran: The Spur to a Regional Arms Race?" *Strategic Assessment* 15, no. 3 (2012): 7-26.