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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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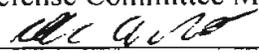
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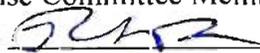
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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Israel's Efforts to Defeat Iran's Nuclear Program: An Integrated Use of National Power

**Author:** Lieutenant Commander Risa B. Simon, United States Navy

**Thesis:** Israel's integrated use of national power to counter the Iranian nuclear program has thus far failed insofar as it has not prevented Iran from developing an advanced and fairly well protected nuclear program. This places the Jewish state in a conundrum. On the one hand, and with ample justification, Iran's nuclear program is anathema to Israel's national security strategy; many, including current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, feel it poses an existential threat to the Jewish state. On the other hand, having employed multiple (albeit not all, and not with equal effectiveness) instruments of national power at its disposal to thwart Iran's program, Israel is left with few good courses of action to reach a satisfactory solution. One of these options, a military bombardment of Iranian nuclear sites, to include active uranium enrichment facilities, would likely be disastrous.

**Discussion:** Since 2007, Israel has viewed Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions as a primary threat to its national security. Many in Israel see a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat—two nuclear warheads would be sufficient to annihilate most of Israel's population and destroy its key infrastructure. Meir Dagan, a former director of Israel's secret intelligence service, the Mossad, outlined Israel's integrated use of national power for solving the Iranian nuclear problem. The plan included diplomatic and economic initiatives to isolate the Iranian regime and bolster the "moderate" Iranian opposition. Militarily, the plan called for unspecified covert actions against the Iranian regime. Of note, Dagan failed to mention any informational initiatives as part of the integrated plan, and the area of strategic communications is one with which Israel struggles. Though Israel has achieved some tactical successes with its plan, strategic success has thus far proven elusive. This essay examines Israel's use over the past five years of multiple instruments of national power to counter Iran's nuclear program; evaluates the degree to which those efforts have met with success; and proposes alternative approaches that Israel could employ with a possibly greater degree of success than it has to this point achieved.

**Conclusion:** Israel has applied an integrated use of national power to curtailing Iran's nuclear program in the short-term, and changing the hostile character of the Iranian regime in the long-term, unevenly and with less effectiveness than desired. The success to date of Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs drive home this point. The most serious flaw with Israel's approach is its over-reliance on covert military operations and a lack of investment in other instruments of national power, such as strategic communications and diplomacy. As U.S. President Ronald Reagan so aptly demonstrated in defeating the Soviet Union—without engaging it in war—while no single instrument of national power is capable of achieving strategic victory, in concert they form a formidable approach.

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Israel's Efforts to Defeat Iran's Nuclear Program: An Integrated Use of National Power

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03 May 2013

## **Israel's Principal Enemy: Nuclear Iran**

In late 2012, the intensity of Israel's public clamor for a military attack on Iran's nuclear infrastructure reached a crescendo, with many observers predicting that Israel would conduct a unilateral bombing campaign against Iran within the near term. Even today, many continue to speculate on the imminence of such an attack in 2013.<sup>1</sup> In spite of continuing and adamant Iranian insistence that their nuclear program is strictly peaceful, most countries and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) now concur that the opposite is true; evidence indicates that the Islamic Republic is in fact pursuing, and appears to be on the cusp of achieving, a nuclear weapons capability or "break-out" capability—the wherewithal to produce nuclear weapons in a matter of months. In spite of years of Israeli (as well as U.S. and international) endeavors to prevent it, Iran today has mastered the nuclear fuel cycle to a level of 20 percent; has stockpiled nearly enough fissile material to build at least one nuclear warhead (and continues to produce more each day); has built an advanced arsenal of ballistic missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead and striking vital targets in Israel and even Europe; and has experimented with neutron initiators, an integral step toward developing a nuclear weapon.<sup>2</sup>

When it comes to nuclear weapons, Israel's national security doctrine and its nuclear policy are closely intertwined. The former stipulates that Israel maintain a technologically-based military advantage (to include an ambiguous nuclear weapons capability) over its regional enemies in order to counter their demographic, geographic, and economic superiority. The latter, also known as the Begin Doctrine, dictates that Israel "prevent all States in the Middle East Region from developing a nuclear program ... or attempting to acquire nuclear weapons."<sup>3</sup> In 2007, Meir Dagan, then director of Israel's secret intelligence service, the Mossad, outlined to U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns an integrated, multidisciplinary

approach that his government was pursuing in order to solve the Iranian nuclear problem.<sup>4</sup> It outlined several mainstays of an Israeli strategy, broken down here in accordance with the Diplomatic-Informational-Military-Economic (DIME) construct. Diplomatically and economically, Israel would strive to isolate the Iranian regime within the international community and impose international economic sanctions as matters of top priority. Simultaneously, Israel would encourage internal Iranian regime change by supporting moderates within Iran's opposition movements. Militarily, Israel would conduct unspecified covert actions against the Iranian regime as a key tool to deny Iran access to nuclear technology and knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Information as an instrument of national power did not figure into Dagan's list, which may, as this essay will later demonstrate, account for Israel's particularly poor track record in the arena of strategic communications. Also conspicuously missing from Dagan's list is any mention of conventional air strikes—which he has described as “stupid” and a potential violation of international law.<sup>6</sup>

But this approach has thus far failed insofar as it has not prevented Iran from developing an advanced and fairly well protected nuclear program. This places the Jewish state in a conundrum. On the one hand, and with ample justification, Iran's nuclear program is anathema to Israel's national security strategy; many, including current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, feel it poses an existential threat to the Jewish state. On the other hand, having employed multiple (albeit not all, and not with equal effectiveness) implements of national power at its disposal to thwart Iran's program, Israel is left with few good courses of action to obtain a satisfactory solution. One of these options, a military bombardment of Iranian nuclear sites, to include active uranium enrichment facilities, would likely be disastrous. To quote Gideon Rose of the Council on Foreign Relations, “all the options are lousy. The

challenge is ... selecting a marginally less bad one with slightly fewer or less worrisome downsides than the others.”<sup>7</sup>

This essay will briefly explore the backdrop against which Israel came to view Iran as its primary threat in the region. Next it will examine Israel’s use over the past five years of multiple instruments of national power to counter Iran’s nuclear program, and evaluate the degree to which those efforts have met with success. Finally, as this is an ongoing crisis and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future, this essay will propose alternative methods approach that Israel could employ against Iran with a possibly greater degree of success than it has to this point achieved.

## **Background**

Though difficult to fathom in today’s bellicose climate, Iran and Israel are not inherent enemies and hostility between the two states is a fairly recent development.

The countries do not share a border, but they do share a rich history as two of the only non-Arab countries in the greater Middle East. Diplomatic ties between Israel and Iran were initiated immediately after the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 under Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and lasted until Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini came to power in 1979, turning Iran from one of Israel’s closest friends into its fiercest enemy.<sup>8</sup>

When the Shah had initiated Iran’s nuclear energy program, neither the U.S. nor Israel felt threatened, in spite of some assertions that even then, Iran’s nuclear aspirations were “not limited to the peaceful uses of atomic energy.”<sup>9</sup> Even after the Islamic Revolution, and especially following Iraq’s invasion of Iran in the fall of 1980, Israel continued to support the Islamic Republic (in spite of Khomeini’s anti-Israeli rhetoric), both by supplying it with military arms and by lobbying Washington to seek rapprochement with Tehran.<sup>10</sup> Two decades would pass

before the Islamic Republic's emerging desire for a nuclear weapons capability would attract Israel's attention in 2002. But it was not until 2007 when Israel would begin in earnest to view a nuclear-armed Iran as its principal national security threat. A number of developments coalesced to swing Israel towards this view. First, having recovered extensive Iranian war materiel and military documents from the battlefield of its 2006 "Second Lebanon War" with the Iranian proxy group Hizbollah, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) reached two conclusions. The first was that Israel had been engaged in fighting Iran itself, for the first time in its history, and not just its traditional enemy, Hizbollah. Second, "the IDF quickly needed to improve and prepare itself for the big war against Iran that loomed on the horizon."<sup>11</sup> Israel began to invest heavily in the long-range strike capabilities of its Air Force and Navy, to include tanker aircraft for in-air refueling and submarine-launched cruise missiles. It also relentlessly pursued the acquisition of fifth generation aircraft, such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, as well as bunker-penetrating ordnance. Such materiel would render Israel capable of stealthily penetrating the advanced enemy air defense systems and effectively striking the hardened or buried targets of a long-range enemy such as Iran. Moreover, Israel sought these new capabilities at the expense of upgrading its ground forces' weapons systems, which are essential for defending the state against near enemies, such as Hizbollah or Hamas, reflecting the primacy, which Israel accords to the Iranian nuclear threat.

2007 was also the year that Israel lost confidence in the United States' ability or willingness to resolve the Iranian nuclear problem. In late summer 2007, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert briefed President George W. Bush on the discovery of a secret Syrian nuclear reactor in the desert, close to the Turkish border. The American response surprised Israel. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reviewed the evidence and cautiously opined that the Syrian

reactor was unlikely to be part of a nuclear weapons program. With the political maneuver room thus provided, Bush recommended against military action and advised Israel to refer the issue to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for a diplomatic resolution. Reluctant, however, to trust in the IAEA, which under Mohammed ElBaradei's leadership had permitted Iran's nuclear program to flourish, and fearing that any delay in military action would enable the Syrian reactor to come online (thereby curtailing available military options), Israel unilaterally bombed and destroyed the Syrian reactor in September 2007.

Merely two months later, Washington again astonished Israel when it released a national intelligence estimate (NIE) on Iran's nuclear program, in which the CIA assessed with high confidence that Tehran had "halted its nuclear weapons program" in 2003, albeit while preserving the option to resume its development at will.<sup>12</sup> Israel vehemently dissented and, in response, conducted a series of military exercises over the Mediterranean intended to signal its own defiant determination to conduct military strikes against Iranian targets on its own if necessary. These events significantly impacted Israel's strategic thinking. First, for Israel, the two U.S. assessments reflected an overly timid intelligence establishment, eager to redeem itself for previous temerarious appraisals of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Second, with U.S. troops bogged down in increasingly unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush administration's cautious approach to Syria's and Iran's nuclear activities, demonstrated an abject reluctance to confront additional Arab or Muslim states militarily.<sup>13</sup> The Israeli government concluded that any military strike against Iranian nuclear targets would fall solely on the IDF to carry out. According to a recent poll, this opinion still prevails: 70 percent of Israelis doubt that the United States will adhere to its own policy of preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.<sup>14</sup>

Other political and military events over the next several years, taken in conjunction with the steady progress of Iran's nuclear program, further increased Israel's anxiety and sense of urgency regarding Iran. To begin with, Iran significantly advanced its ballistic missile program. In mid-2008, Iran conducted multiple successful test launches of its Shahab-3, solid-fueled medium range ballistic missile (MRBM). The Shahab-3, which debuted in 1998 under the painted slogans "Israel must be destroyed," and "the United States can do nothing," is capable of mounting a nuclear warhead as well as ranging Israel's major population and industrial centers.<sup>15</sup> In February 2009, Iran successfully launched its *Omid* Satellite into orbit, gaining it entry into a rather exclusive group of countries—including Israel—that boast such a capability. For Israel, the satellite launch represented a significant erosion of its technological superiority over Iran and a violation of a major tenet of its national security strategy. In addition to demonstrating Iran's sophisticated rocketry skills, the launch also demonstrated a mastery of advanced guidance systems. The bad news for Israel is that the same precision technology used to emplace a satellite into orbit can also be used to accurately strike long-range terrestrial targets with ballistic missiles.<sup>16</sup>

In the political arena, developments were equally vexing. Within Iran, in June 2009, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has coupled his particularly vitriolic Holocaust denials and calls for Israel's destruction with substantial military and financial support for active anti-Israeli terrorist groups, secured a second four-year term as Iran's president. Besides, the regional implications for Israel of Ahmadinejad's victory, the fraudulent elections themselves as well as the state's post-electoral crack-down on opposition figures bode ill for the eventual reemergence of a moderate Iranian government. Support for the emergence of such a government comprises a major objective of Israel's multidisciplinary strategy vis-à-vis Iran.

Internationally, also in 2009, following a series of lengthy negotiations, the diplomatic efforts of the P5+1 (the five permanent member states of the U.N. security council and Germany) talks with Iran collapsed spectacularly. First, the talks failed to obtain Iran's agreement to limit its nuclear energy program to the production of low enriched uranium (LEU)—uranium enriched to a level of 3.5 percent. They also failed to persuade Iran to export its already substantial and growing stockpile of LEU to a third country for reprocessing into fuel plates for the Tehran Research Reactor, a plan that would have significantly reduced the amount of fissile material available for further enrichment into weapons grade High Enriched Uranium (HEU). Finally, the breakdown of the talks actually spurred Iran into a decision to pursue domestic enrichment to a level of 19.75 percent, from which nuclear material can be easily refined into HEU. Today, as the P5+1 engage in still further negotiations with Iran, it is worth noting that more than half of the Israeli public doubts that “international diplomatic negotiations can be taken seriously.”<sup>17</sup>

In other regional developments, if by November 2010 it was not already clear to the Israeli government that other Middle Eastern powers shared Israel's concern over the threat posed by a nuclear-armed Iran, a massive Wikileaks disclosure of classified diplomatic dispatches would have so alerted them. The documents revealed that several influential Arab countries, to include Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, supported—indeed advocated—a U.S. military strike against Iran. Such a hostile regional political climate towards the Islamic Republic would certainly have fortified Israel in its own convictions regarding Iran.<sup>18</sup>

Israel has ample and legitimate grounds to fear the impacts of a nuclear-armed Iran on the security calculus of the Middle East. At the strategic level, Israel would lose its monopoly as the only nuclear-armed power in the region (though it has never officially confirmed this status). A nuclear-armed Iran would also detract from Israel's overall technological military edge, upsetting

the very cornerstone of its national security policy. Israel also fears that the backing of a nuclear power will further embolden Iran's proxy groups, Hamas and Hizbollah, in their attacks upon Israel while simultaneously sapping Israeli resolve to engage those groups militarily.<sup>19</sup> The proliferation of nuclear weapons is yet another concern—one shared by global powers such as the United States; Iran's possession of a nuclear weapons capability could drive other states in the region, particularly Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to seek their own nuclear arsenals.<sup>20</sup>

Many Israelis believe that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose an existential threat to Israel and describe three aspects to this threat. First, Iran's history of supplying conventional weapons to anti-Israeli terrorist groups suggests that it may just as easily provide these groups with nuclear or radiological weapons as well. Unconstrained by *raison d'état*, these terrorist groups would have no qualms about using such weapons against the Jewish state.<sup>21</sup> Second, Iran could itself launch a nuclear attack against Israel. Two nuclear warheads would be sufficient to annihilate Israel's small population of seven and a half million, the majority of whom live in a concentrated area along the coastal plains.<sup>22</sup> Although some observers discount this contingency as unlikely, Israel would still have to honor the threat: Iran would after all possess the capability, regardless of intent, of destroying the Jewish State in a matter of minutes. Finally, because of the above two eventualities, Israel fears that Iran's mere possession of a nuclear weapons capability would cause a brain-drain, emptying Israel of educated and affluent citizens who would flee to the diaspora, as well as scaring off foreign investors who are vital to Israel's economic sector.<sup>23</sup>

### **Israel's High-Tech National Security Doctrine and Military Strategy**

Futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler have postulated that countries fight wars in the same manner in which they conduct business. *Third Wave* states—those whose economies are

information-based, rather than primarily agrarian (*First Wave*) or industrial (*Second Wave*)—“sell information and innovation, . . . advanced technology, software, education, training, medical care, and financial and other services to the world. One of those services might well also turn out to be military protection based on its command of superior Third Wave forces.”<sup>24</sup> While as yet no state can boast a completely Third Wave economy, Israel comes close and this status is reflected in its national security doctrine. Both Israel’s national security doctrine and its strategic military policies are heavily invested in advanced, indeed superior, technology. Well over half of Israel’s “technologically advanced market economy” resides in the services sector, which employs over 80 percent of the workforce.<sup>25</sup> One of the world’s smallest countries, Israel’s technology sector is involved in some way or other with half of the world’s technology companies, contributing advanced hardware, software, or engineering designs to most of the world’s high-tech products, including computers, mobile phones, and internet-based services such as online security and social networking.<sup>26</sup> Israel’s technology sector developed out of the need to overcome its lack of human and natural resources under conditions of adversity.

Israel was attacked seven times in the first sixty-two years of its existence and subjected to comprehensive diplomatic and economic embargoes. No foreign soldiers came to its aid. The only way we could overcome our attackers’ quantitative superiority of weapons was to create an advantage built on courage and technology. Israel bred creativity proportionate not to the size of our country, but to the dangers we faced.<sup>27</sup>

It follows logically then that technological superiority over its adversaries constitutes a primary pillar of Israel’s national security strategy. According to retired Israeli Brigadier General and former Knesset Member Ephraim Sneh, Israel uses its technological advantage to overcome its relative territorial and demographic paucity: surrounding Arab states have 650 times Israel’s land mass and 50 times its population.<sup>28</sup> Sneh explains that “only the combination

of two factors can correct this disadvantage and grant Israel strategic balance with the countries surrounding it. One is the combination of military, technological, and intelligence superiority. The other is a defensible border.”<sup>29</sup> This doctrine necessitates that Israel maintain “cutting-edge” military equipment, so far ahead of anything its enemies possess, that it provides Israel the decisive advantage in any military battle, an advantage that Israel’s enemies know they cannot hope to counter.<sup>30</sup> What Sneh is describing is an evolved version of the Ben Gurion Doctrine.<sup>31</sup> This is true of both Israel’s combat proven defensive systems, such as its multi-layered missile defense shield, as well as its offensive capabilities, which include fourth generation fighter-bomber aircraft with highly advanced avionics suites; submarines; cruise missiles; and precision guided munitions. Iran’s nuclear weapons program, indigenous satellite capability, and arsenal of advanced ballistic missiles undermine, and therefore pose a direct threat to, Israel’s national security.

As previously mentioned, Israel has come to view Iran as its primary strategic enemy in the region since the Second Lebanon War of 2006.<sup>32</sup> For Israel this rivalry with what it terms a “Third Circle” threat—an enemy country that does not border Israel—presents both a conceptual as well as concrete challenge to its national security. Conceptually, with respect to Iran, Israel’s technological military advantage is far less pronounced than it would be in a conventional conflict with “First Circle” threats (internal Palestinian terrorist groups) or even “Second Circle” enemies (bordering states such as Syria or Lebanon). Pragmatically, Iran’s own progressing and already somewhat advanced military programs, as discussed earlier, have significantly increased the onus on Israel to maintain its technological superiority.<sup>33</sup>

On the defensive side, to counter the Iranian missile threat, Israel has developed the world’s most advanced missile defense shield. The shield has proven highly capable in

countering the threat of short-ranged rockets and missiles fired by Iranian proxy organizations such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hizbollah. Though as yet untested under conditions of real combat, Israel's missile shield is also designed to counter medium-range missiles that could be fired from Iran proper. Because the intercepting missiles target and destroy the incoming projectile's warhead, theoretically at least, it would make little difference if that warhead were nuclear. The problem, however, is that no defense system is 100 percent foolproof. In a world where two nuclear warheads can obliterate Israel and another six million Jews in a second Holocaust, the stakes for Israel are prohibitively high vis-à-vis a nuclear-armed Iran.

Israel's missile defense shield is part of what Sneh calls "new deterrence," a layered system of four strata of defense to protect Israel from enemy attack.<sup>34</sup> The first stratum, Passive Defense, consists of such individual and collective protective measures as bomb shelters and gas masks.<sup>35</sup> The second stratum, Active Defense, consists of missile defense systems such as the Iron Dome system. Iron Dome distinguished itself in November 2012 during Operation Pillar of Defense, when it achieved a success rate approaching 90 percent against approximately one thousand rockets and missiles fired at Israel by Iranian proxy groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad from the Gaza Strip. In late November 2012, on the heels of Iron Dome's spectacular performance, Israel successfully test-fired its Magic Wand system (also known as David's Sling), adding yet another layer to its multi-tiered missile defense shield.<sup>36</sup> Designed to counter the missile threat from Lebanese-based Hizbollah, which reportedly possesses upward of 50,000 Iranian missiles and rockets, Magic Wand is expected to become operational later this year. Another component of Israel's active missile defense system is the Arrow-2 (and in the near future Arrow-3), interceptor system, which, using the U.S.-operated X-Band radar located in the

Negev desert for targeting data, can theoretically shoot down an Iranian-launched medium-range ballistic missile before it reenters the atmosphere.<sup>37</sup>

The third stratum of Israel's new deterrence strategy, Responsive Defense, is likely still in the developmental stages. "This system intercepts missiles at the beginning of their courses, in the 'boost phase,' when they first accelerate. Its advantage is that a missile carrying a nuclear or chemical warhead explodes where launched and not above its target," explains Sneh.<sup>38</sup> This system relies on Israel's gigantic *Eitan* medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). Israel claims that this UAV (which boasts a one-ton payload capacity, a 24-hour loiter capability, and a compliment of Hellfire missiles) is capable of operating just off of Iran's borders, where its mission would be to shoot down Iranian-launched missiles while their engines are still firing. If Israel does succeed in bringing this capability to fruition, it would be no small technological feat; according to a recent National Research Council report, boost phase missile defense systems are not practical because of an extremely short window for interception—a mere three to four minutes.<sup>39</sup>

To date, the first three circles of Israel's new deterrence strategy have been undeniably successful on many levels. Socially, they have boosted the confidence of average Israelis in their sense of security. This has helped mitigate the brain drain that Israel fears Iran's increasing nuclear advances would generate. It has also translated into political success for Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Likud party, who won a majority of seats in Israel's January 2013 parliamentary elections.<sup>40</sup> Also of significance, this sense of security has replaced the previous sense of alarm and urgency Israelis felt as late as October 2012, with respect to the imminence of the Iranian threat. This reprieve has resulted in fewer calls for a military strike against Iran and

has provided both breathing space and perspective, with which to allow the exercise of other forms of national power to play out.

### **A Preventive Strike Against Iran's Nuclear Targets?**

The fourth stratum of Israel's New Deterrence Strategy, Preemptive Defense, is perhaps the most controversial. Sneh describes preemptive defense as the ability to conduct long-range strikes to destroy an enemy's offensive weapons systems with power and precision.<sup>41</sup> As there are no indications that Iran intends to launch a direct attack—nuclear or otherwise—against Israel, any Israeli strike against Iranian targets at this point would more accurately be labeled preventive vice preemptive. The IDF's history is replete with examples preventive strikes against enemy targets. As recently as January 2013, Syria accused Israel of bombing a military research facility outside Damascus; while Israel did not officially claim responsibility, Minister of Defense Ehud Barak hinted at Israeli culpability, warning “when we say something we mean it.”<sup>42</sup> More prescient to the case against Iran, however is that historically Israel is also the only state to have conducted preventive attacks to destroy the nuclear facilities of two of its adversaries. In 1981 the Israeli Air Force destroyed an Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak and in 2007 they did the same to the illicit reactor in Syria before either facility could come online.

Since 2007, Israel has forcefully advocated a U.S. strike against Iran's nuclear infrastructure; threatened to conduct its own unilateral strike should the United States decline to undertake the mission; and relentlessly sought advanced military hardware to facilitate the operation. Even before the apparent cooling of relations between the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government, the Bush administration denied numerous Israeli requests for bunker-penetrating munitions, tanker aircraft for aerial refueling, and (at the time) authorization

for its warplanes to transit Iraqi airspace.<sup>43</sup> The prospect of an Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear infrastructure has been the subject of much recent prognostication, particularly since one of its most vocal proponents is Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu will remain in office for some years to come following his January 2013 electoral victory. While the subject merits brief attention here, a detailed analysis of such a strike goes beyond the scope of this paper. For our purposes it is sufficient to concede, as have many observers, that, although such a mission would be immensely complex, Israel does have the technical and operational capability to accomplish it.

On the other hand, there is no consensus on the wisdom of such a strike. Quite to the contrary, there are several points that recommend strongly against it. First, most observers, including Israeli experts, agree that a military strike can delay Iran's nuclear weapons program, but cannot stop it.<sup>44</sup> Not only would Iran likely maintain the ability to reconstitute its nuclear program, a military bombardment of its nuclear facilities will likely galvanize the regime, its scientists, and its people to pursue the development of actual nuclear weapons in order to deter future attacks. Moreover, such a military strike would certainly compel Iran to withdraw from the nuclear nonproliferation treaty (NPT), and drive its nuclear program, currently the subject of rigorous IAEA scrutiny, deep underground.

Second, many point out that the Iranian response to such an attack would likely be disastrous for Israel, the United States, and the global economy. At a minimum, Iran's proxy groups, Hamas and Hizbollah, would subject Israel to a massive barrage of thousands of short-range rockets and missiles, which Iran has supplied for just such an eventuality. Iran could also target Israel directly with its arsenal of MRBMs for months on end.<sup>45</sup> It might also sponsor attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets outside of Israel, along the lines of the Buenos Aires

bombings of 1992 and 1994 or the attacks on Israeli tourists in Bulgaria in July 2012. Should Iran decide to target U.S. interests, it could conduct direct or indirect attacks against American forces and facilities in the Arabian Gulf, Afghanistan, or elsewhere. In 2004, Iranian Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani threatened as much, cautioning that “the U.S. military presence near us ... may under certain circumstances become a hostage in our hands.”<sup>46</sup> Iran would also almost certainly disrupt shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, through which flows over 35 percent of the world’s oil.<sup>47</sup> If nothing else, such a disruption would cause global oil prices to soar, further exacerbating an already severe worldwide economic crisis.

Finally, while some observers have acknowledged that collateral damage would have to be factored into the analysis of any military strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities, few have discussed in detail the sheer enormity of the humanitarian and environmental disaster that would ensue. When Israel struck the nuclear facilities in Iraq and Syria, it did so before the reactors came online. Moreover, both of those sites were isolated and remote, resulting in an extremely low casualty rate. By contrast, Iran’s nuclear reactors are active; in some cases (such as Isfahan and Bushehr) located adjacent to major population centers; and house an inventory of close to 400 metric tons of toxic uranium hexafluoride. Iran is also woefully unprepared to deal with the aftermath of any nuclear mishaps, be they the result of deliberate or accidental actions. The targeted destruction of Iran’s nuclear sites could be “far more devastating than nuclear and industrial accidents such as Chernobyl, Fukushima, Three Mile Island or Bhopal;” would likely cause the deaths of tens of thousands of noncombatants; and spread radiological contamination throughout Iran and other states in the Gulf region.<sup>48</sup> Barak is one of very few Israeli officials to acknowledge this truth. In 2009, he cautioned U.S. Ambassador James B. Cunningham that after

2010 military airstrikes against Iran's nuclear facilities "would result in unacceptable collateral damage."<sup>49</sup>

For all these reasons Israel is unlikely to conduct a conventional airstrike against Iran's nuclear facilities. It is perhaps because this is the least likely course of action that it is also the one most discussed in public. After all, there was no public debate prior to the attacks on the Iraqi or Syrian reactors. The Israeli government and military take operational security very seriously and would not compromise actual ongoing military planning with "loose lips." There is little doubt, however, that Netanyahu—who has reportedly spent nearly three billion dollars of Israel's national budget on preparations for a war with Iran over the past two years alone—sincerely considers Iran's nuclear ascension to be Israel's most pressing security concern: "my priority, if I'm elected for a next term as prime minister, will be first to stop Iran from getting nuclear weapons."<sup>50</sup> But for a Third Wave country such as Israel, where global, real-time information broadcasts can mitigate the need for "full-scale warfare," Netanyahu's bellicose rhetoric has been a source of political power in its own right.<sup>51</sup> Besides shoring up domestic support for the staunch security platform of his right-wing coalition, and distracting domestic and international attention from the stagnant Palestinian peace process, Netanyahu contends that his "threat of war avoided war" by compelling the international community, including the United States, to substantially increase political and economic pressure on Iran.<sup>52</sup>

### **"Unnatural" Events: Israel's Unconventional War Against Iran**

A far more likely course of action, than air strikes, would be for Israel to continue with its unconventional, "covert" military and intelligence operations against Iran, which, as Dagan mentioned, comprise a key component of Israel's whole-of-government strategy for thwarting

Iran's nuclear program. Dagan is a credible authority on these activities; he is the supposed architect of Israel's "new front in the confrontation with Iran," a front characterized by "an increasing number of cyber attacks and other sabotage efforts."<sup>53</sup> Dagan took office as Director of Mossad in 2002—just as the full depth of Iran's nuclear aspirations were becoming apparent—with orders from then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to do one thing: "stop Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon."<sup>54</sup> By 2007, when the Israeli government concluded that Israel alone would shoulder the burden of this mission, it increased Dagan's budget to half a billion U.S. dollars.<sup>55</sup> Later, with encouragement from the Netanyahu government, Dagan's covert operations soared to new heights. Many mishaps befell Iran's nuclear program, for which Israel has been blamed but has never claimed responsibility. Though not an acknowledgement, Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz once ominously warned that "whatever you imagine Israel is doing, Israel is doing much more."<sup>56</sup>

The extensive catalog of mishaps includes acts of sabotage against equipment destined for the Iranian nuclear program; the disappearances, defections, or targeted killings of scientists associated with Iran's nuclear program; and elaborate feats of cyber warfare.<sup>57</sup> In June 2011, the crash of a passenger airliner in Petrozavodsk killed five of the Russian specialists, who had engineered the Bushehr nuclear facility and whose first-hand knowledge would be difficult to replace due to idiosyncrasies in the plant's design.<sup>58</sup> In September 2012, Fereydoon Abbasi, Director of the Atomic Energy Agency of Iran, revealed that during the previous month, saboteurs had blown up the power lines to the uranium enrichment facility at Fordow. The attack closely resembled a previous explosion, which severed power to the facility at Natanz in 2007. Because of their precision function, many of Iran's centrifuges suffered severe damage as a result of these power outages.<sup>59</sup> In January 2013, Israeli newspapers published an unverified

report that a massive explosion had torn through the Fordow enrichment facility; Iran denied the allegation.<sup>60</sup> Since 2007, one Iranian nuclear scientist has disappeared (having either defected or been kidnapped); five scientists have been assassinated; and one scientist, the aforementioned Abbasi, narrowly escaped a violent attempt on his own life.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, Israeli and Western intelligence agencies have exploited the cyber domain to covertly target Iran's nuclear program on multiple levels. Cyber warfare has been employed not only to target Iranian bank accounts electronically, vanishing funds allocated for its nuclear program, but also to target Iran's nuclear facilities directly, especially its sensitive centrifuges.<sup>62</sup> Unit 8200 is the Israeli military's responsible agency for information operations, to include cyber warfare. Counted as one of the most capable organizations of its kind worldwide—on par with its counterparts in the United States, China and Russia—Unit 8200 has made effective use of computer network operations, military deception, signals intelligence, and psychological operations against Israel's enemies. Between 2008 and late 2010, Unit 8200 reportedly collaborated with its counterparts at United States Cyber Command and the National Security Agency to create a highly sophisticated malware program engineered to destroy the fragile centrifuges at Iran's nuclear enrichment facilities at Bushehr and Natanz. Designed to operate surreptitiously, Stuxnet, as the malicious code became known, masked its presence within the Iranian network and even transmitted spurious signals to facility operators that the affected centrifuges were operating within normal parameters even as they were tearing themselves apart.

The Stuxnet attack represented a triumph of Third Wave warfare on multiple levels. First, as former CIA Director Michael Hayden has stated, "this is the first attack of a major nature in which a cyberattack was used to effect physical destruction. . . . an attack on critical infrastructure."<sup>63</sup> Second, it sowed an environment of extreme mistrust among the Iranian

scientists and nuclear engineers: mistrust in their own abilities, in one another, in the reliability of their equipment, and in its German suppliers. They began accusing each other of negligence and even dismissing personnel in paranoid witch-hunts.<sup>64</sup> Third, it provided a viable alternative to kinetic strikes. According to Ralph Langner, a German computer security expert, “this was nearly as effective as a military strike but even better since there are no fatalities and no full-blown war.”<sup>65</sup> The Stuxnet attack, in conjunction with other acts of sabotage, is credited with setting Iran’s nuclear weapons program back several years; in late 2012, Israel shifted its estimates for Iran’s attainment of a breakout capability from 2012 to 2015. This delay has been crucial for providing additional time for diplomacy, economic sanctions, and other unconventional activities time to take effect. It also decreased Israel’s anxiety and sense of urgency for conducting kinetic strikes against Iran. Finally, though unintentional, even Stuxnet’s discovery sent a message to Iran. The sheer genius of the cyber attack; the impressive fifteen thousand lines of code; the fact that its insertion implied intimate knowledge of the Islamic Republic’s most guarded facilities flaunted the vulnerability of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure. Israel’s message to Iran was simple: no matter how far you’ve come, we are still superior ... and we are inside your systems.

In May 2012, the IAEA reported that Iran had fully recovered from the specific damage inflicted by Stuxnet. Thus, the success of this particular program has been limited. As with other unconventional Israeli attacks, Stuxnet can best be described as a tactical, perhaps operational, level success. The key value of these covert activities, which Dagan insists “are working,” is that they have provided the United States and the international community with the maneuver room to translate these tactical victories, in combination with other instruments of national power (such as economic sanctions and the threat of air strikes) into a strategic success.

Indeed, Iran's decision to slow the pace of advance of its enrichment program and its apparent willingness to cooperate more diplomatically with the P5+1 in 2013 may indicate that Israel's integrated use of national power is finally bearing fruit.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Israel has abandoned cyber attacks or other covert operations as a method of compellence. Quite to the contrary, as IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Benny Gantz warned last year, Iran will likely continue to suffer from "unnatural" incidents.<sup>67</sup>

### **Information Operations: Messaging Iran**

For a country whose military has adeptly mastered so much of the technical art of information operations, Israel's civilian government has done an appallingly poor job of strategic communications. Israel spends close to seven percent of its gross national product on its military, one of the highest rates in the world, amounting to over 16 billion U.S. dollars per year. By contrast, Israel devotes only nine million U.S. dollars annually to public diplomacy (PD), reflecting the very low priority it ascribes to this critical instrument of national power.<sup>68</sup> According to veteran Israeli statesman and current President Shimon Peres, Israel doesn't need public diplomacy because policies, good or bad, speak for themselves and no amount of "PR" can change that.<sup>69</sup> But public diplomacy is not public relations. Rather, it is a low cost, low risk, foreign policy tool used by governments to shape public opinion in other countries. Veteran diplomat and presidential advisor John Lenczowski emphasizes the criticality of PD to the grand strategy, which President Ronald Reagan employed to defeat the Soviet Union and bring an end to the Cold War.<sup>70</sup> According to Lenczowski, PD cannot function in isolation, but must be properly orchestrated with other instruments of national power to comprise a comprehensive and "integrated strategy."<sup>71</sup> Thus, information operations alone are unlikely to achieve Israel's

strategic objectives. But combined with other forms of national power, they can provide Israel with a decisive advantage over its adversaries.<sup>72</sup> For example, Israel could employ PD to attempt to persuade the Iranian people to reject the hostile, anti-Israeli policies of their own government as well as its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Israel could also use PD to attempt to discredit the very legitimacy of the Iranian government in the eyes of its people, which according to Dagan is one of Israel's strategic objectives. In a world where the stakes of nuclear war are so high, PD becomes all the more important for its potential to deescalate the very crises that could lead to such war. But in spite of recent evidence that the Iranian people might be receptive to such messaging, the Israeli government has failed to take advantage of the opportunity.

As mentioned earlier, Netanyahu's rancorous calls for a military attack against Iran are themselves a form of strategic communication. Netanyahu feels that his messaging campaign has been successful.<sup>73</sup> According to his logic, the international community, having consumed his message and hoping to avert war, has applied sufficient pressure to Iran, to slow the advance of its nuclear program.<sup>74</sup> But the international community is not the only consumer of this message and other recipients have reacted less favorably toward Netanyahu's policy toward Iran. With respect to the primary target, Iran, the message has likely been counterproductive; the more threatened Iran feels, the more stridently it will cling to the notion that a nuclear weapon is its best protection against a military attack. Yet another audience upon which Netanyahu's war message has had a less-than-productive effect has been his own constituency—the Israeli population.

“Information fratricide” occurs in an era of global communications when a government's own citizens consume and are adversely affected by strategic messaging intended for a different target audience.<sup>75</sup> If with his rhetoric Netanyahu hoped to elicit any response from Israel's

citizenry, it was support for his government and its security policies. “The most sought-after label in Israeli politics is that of Mr. Security—Mar Bitachon.”<sup>76</sup> While this may have worked for roughly half of Israel’s population, Netanyahu’s message stirred the other half into adamant opposition to any strikes against Iran. Troubled by the talk of war, on March 14, 2012, an Israeli graphic designer, uploaded a poster to Facebook that read “Iranians ... We [heart] you ... we will never bomb your country.” Within hours, he received an overwhelming outpouring of positive responses, including messages from ordinary citizens in Iran, where such behavior is punishable with imprisonment or worse. Edry had started a grassroots social networking movement with massive participation. Over two million people from Israel, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and elsewhere indicated their support for the “Israel-Loves-Iran” Facebook site in the span of a single week. Soon reciprocal pages, such as an Iranian “Iran-Loves-Israel” site, graced the scene.<sup>77</sup> Edry had opened a dialogue between ordinary Israeli and Iranian citizens and in the process had unveiled the existence of a high degree of amity amongst the two peoples despite the state of belligerence between the two governments. By August 2012, Israeli citizens bombarded their government with a “flurry” of petitions against an attack on Iran, including one, which urged Air Force pilots to disobey any orders to conduct the strike.<sup>78</sup> Accountable to the Israeli electorate, the Netanyahu government will have difficulty ignoring such widespread domestic opposition to his war plans. Of equal significance, however, is the opening that Iran’s citizens demonstrated to their Israeli counterparts.

At around the same time that Edry was creating his Facebook site, Iranians were also becoming increasingly enamored of Iranian-born Israeli pop singer Rita, buying and playing her “illegal” music CDs at significant personal risk.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, according to an online poll conducted by the Iranian government in 2012, the results of which it quickly suppressed, 75

percent of respondents favored relinquishing Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.<sup>80</sup> These events are far from conclusive and the Iranians involved do not represent all segments of their society. But they do suggest that a well designed and implemented Israeli strategic communications campaign, employed as part of an integrated application of multiple instruments of national power, could go a long way toward achieving Israel's strategic goals.

But not only has Israel failed effectively to employ strategic communications to its benefit, it has at times actually undermined its own agenda with serious mistakes. At midnight on March 20, 2009, President Barack Obama sent an unprecedented *Nowruz* (Persian New Year) message to the Iranian people and their government. The message was extraordinary in a number of ways, demonstrating a sophisticated and well thought out public diplomacy effort. First, the tone of the message as well as its content extended an olive branch, inviting Iran to take part in "engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect" with the United States. The phrase "mutual respect" held as much meaning for the government of Iran as Obama's use of the country's full title, the Islamic Republic of Iran. Second, the President made effective use of the Internet, when he released the message on both Youtube.com and the official White House website. This novel use of social media, a trait for which Obama has earned some renown, ensured that in addition to the Iranian government, millions of Iranian citizens would also be able to access the message directly, free of their government's censorship or editing. "It immediately went viral in Iranian circles and dominated conversation in Iran the next morning," wrote Trita Parsi, founder of the National Iranian American Council and noted Iran scholar.<sup>81</sup> As added evidence of the success of Obama's message, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei personally responded to the President within one day; no other U.S. president has succeeded in

inducing such a response.<sup>82</sup> The Obama administration had opened an opportunity for dialogue and diplomacy—not only with the Iranian regime but also directly with the Iranian people.

The next day, Shimon Peres undermined Obama's message with his own crudely hewn and contradictory one. Poorly received in Iran, Peres' message may have diminished the goodwill that Obama's had generated, undercutting Israel's and the United States' efforts vis-à-vis Iran.<sup>83</sup> At a minimum, the message showed Iran that no unified front existed between Israel and the United States on this matter. An editorial in the Israeli daily *Haaretz* sharply criticized the rift that Peres' message had opened: "It is clearly in Israel's interest to halt Iran's nuclear program, but it is no less in our interests to have close ties and a coordinated policy with the United States. The new government should give Obama's diplomatic initiative a chance."<sup>84</sup>

### **Diplomacy and Economic Sanctions**

Neither has Israel made diplomacy its strongest instrument of national power. According to a senior Israeli diplomat, the Israeli government's heavy investment in the military has come at the expense of the Foreign Ministry, whose diplomatic corps it has neglected; whose budgets it has cut; and whose overseas consulates it has dismantled.<sup>85</sup>

Israel, six decades after its founding, remains a nation in thrall to an original martial impulse, the depth of which has given rise to succeeding generations of leaders who are stunted in their capacity to wield or sustain diplomacy as a rival to military strategy."<sup>86</sup>

To be fair, when it comes to Iran, Israel has had to conduct diplomacy by proxy, relying on third country interlocutors, especially the United States, and the international community to pursue its strategy. Dagan identified both isolating Iran diplomatically and enforcing international economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic as strategic priorities in Israel's multidisciplinary approach toward Iran. To the extent that today many of the world's

governments concur with the Israeli assessment of Iran's nuclear ambitions—if not Israel's methods for countering them—the Netanyahu government's diplomatic efforts have been relatively successful. On the other hand, Netanyahu has also seriously eroded his government's relations with the Obama Administration, a trend, which both leaders hope to reverse with Obama's official visit to Israel in March 2013. This deterioration in and of itself can be considered a serious diplomatic lapse for Israel. As Sneh has noted, “the greatest of Israel's strategic assets, except for its indigenous strength, is its special relationship with the United States.”<sup>87</sup> He adds that “in times of trouble it is preferable not to lose this support, even if the cause is a justifiable action on a secondary front.”<sup>88</sup>

As for U.S. diplomatic efforts, since 2009, the Obama administration has pursued a dual track policy to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. On the one hand, the United States has engaged Iran diplomatically via the multilateral P5+1 talks (and offered to conduct bilateral discussions) in pursuit of a negotiated settlement. On the other hand, the United States has simultaneously employed an array of punitive mechanisms designed to pressure Tehran to negotiate seriously.

These are measures that directly or indirectly worsen Iran's nuclear no-deal option.... actions that increase the difficulty or time required for Iran to achieve its military nuclear aims, that degrade the effectiveness of that program, or that completely block its success.... [and] simultaneously improve the U.S. no-deal option.<sup>89</sup>

An integral part of what political scientist Alexander George termed “coercive diplomacy,” these mechanisms have included a series of international and unilateral economic sanctions; covert activities (such as collaboration with Israel on the Stuxnet cyber attack); a professed commitment to a strategy of prevention vice containment; and the ever present and increasingly credible threat of air strikes.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps the crowning achievement of Obama's diplomatic efforts was securing

the support of Moscow and Beijing, no small feat, to support international economic sanctions against Tehran and convincing Russian leader Vladimir Putin to refrain from providing the Iranians with the S-300 advanced air defense system to shield its nuclear infrastructure from military strikes.<sup>91</sup>

For its part, however, far from facilitating the process, Israel has actively hampered the Obama Administration's diplomatic efforts. Israel has attempted to impose impractical deadlines and uncompromising preconditions on negotiations; has sent contradictory and counterproductive strategic messages regarding regime change; and persistently called for or threatened to conduct military attacks against Iran at a time when the Washington was trying to assuage Tehran's anxieties.<sup>92</sup> In spite of Israel's hindrances, as of March 2013, it appears that the U.S. dual track policy may at last be showing signs of success. Leading up to the latest round of P5+1 negotiations in Almaty, Kazakhstan, Iran had been signaling a greater than usual readiness to achieve diplomatic progress. Following the talks, members of the Iranian regime and press proclaimed the negotiations a victory: the West had "had backed down and now recognized Iran's nuclear rights," clearing the path for reciprocal confidence-building-measures, such as the verifiable curtailment of Iran's enrichment activities in exchange for economic sanctions relief.<sup>93</sup> The Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini is likely feeling the combined mounting pressures wrought by strangling economic sanctions, internal political dissent, and a general sense that time is running out: any further failure to reach a diplomatic solution may well result in military strikes against Iran. Even Netanyahu, uncharacteristically quiet on the subject of late, appears ready at last to allow international diplomacy a chance to work, if only because its failure would provide the necessary impetus for the military strikes he so strongly advocates.

But Israel could contribute much more to international diplomatic efforts to isolate Iran and further its own stated strategic goals. The Iranian problem has long been loosely linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But the Israeli and U.S. governments approach this linkage from different points of departure. For the Netanyahu government, progress with the Palestinians hinges on first eliminating the existential threat posed to it by Iran. For the United States, and many other observers, linkage is viewed in reverse: a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essential for isolating and weakening Iran.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, peace talks have stagnated under Netanyahu's hawkish government and relations with the Palestinians have seriously deteriorated, though recent calls by the Israeli Prime Minister to resume talks give cause for optimism. While resuming negotiations with the Palestinians is no guarantee of reaching a peace settlement, allowing the peace process to falter is a counterproductive strategy for Israel. Iran "burnishes its Islamic credentials" by portraying itself as the staunchest supporter of the Palestinian cause, an argument that resonates with the ordinary man on "the Arab street."<sup>95</sup>

By working toward, and ultimately signing, a peace accord to create a politically stable and economically viable neighboring Palestinian state, Israel would essentially deny Iran its "biggest propaganda card" and erode its popular support on the Arab street. Iran's recent foreign policy actions have revealed just how vulnerable its image is among everyday Arab citizens. By siding with Bashar al-Assad's regime in the ongoing Syrian civil war and by severely chastising Hamas for signing a ceasefire with Israel following the November 2012 hostilities, Iran has opened itself up to significant Arab criticism—not just from Arab governments but from ordinary citizens as well.<sup>96</sup> Iranian-born Israeli Professor David Menashri has wisely described the policy that Israel should pursue: "Instead of threatening to bomb [Iran], we should work on

the Palestinian peace process. It would be good for us anyway, and it would weaken Iran as a bonus.”<sup>97</sup>

Another area where Israel can exercise creative diplomacy to isolate Iran concerns its policy of nuclear ambiguity. Israel, which unlike Iran is not a signatory to and therefore not legally bound by the NPT, is assessed to possess an arsenal of between 75 and 200 nuclear weapons.<sup>98</sup> Israel’s policy of ambiguity, introduced by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, however, dictates that Israel never confirm its nuclear weapons capabilities, instead allowing its enemies’ own speculation to serve as a deterrent.<sup>99</sup> Political scientist Yehzkel Dror has argued correctly that faced with the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran, Israel may have to abandon its policy of ambiguity.<sup>100</sup> Israel’s de facto acceptance in the world as a nuclear power, even as Iran is hounded for pursuing the same capability, has long stoked a sense of injustice among Arabs and Muslims. Iran has long exploited this negative mood diplomatically with calls for a nuclear free middle east, which are in actuality no more than a ploy to draw negative attention to Israel’s nuclear program and away from its own.<sup>101</sup>

In spite of its own egregious violations of the NPT, Tehran hosted a well-attended conference in 2009 entitled “Nuclear Energy for All, Nuclear Weapons for No One.”<sup>102</sup> But Israel could conceivably accept Iran’s challenge. If Israel were to concur in theory with the concept of a nuclear free Middle East, it could dangle the long-term prospect of giving up its nuclear weapons once its security is guaranteed by a true and lasting peace in the Middle East. Even Netanyahu has been quoted as saying: “as far as a nuclear weapons free zone, you know, when the lion lies down with the lamb ... then we might have this kind of transformation in the Middle East.”<sup>103</sup> Such an end state is hardly conceivable in the near term and would entail among other actions, Iran’s abandonment of its nuclear weapons aspirations and its support for

terrorism as well as its acceptance of Israel's right to exist. While nothing concrete is ever likely to come of such an initiative, it would at least counterbalance Iran's diplomatic efforts on this front.

Finally, and this would admittedly be extremely difficult, Israel could seek direct diplomatic communications with Iran, such as those which existed between the United States and the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. Direct channels would help decrease the chance of misunderstanding and miscalculation that could lead to the outbreak of regional war. In spite of the current state of hostility between Iran and Israel, diplomatic relations between the two nations are not unprecedented and even thrived once under the Shah's reign. The development of such relations is also one of the recommendations put forth by the Rand Corporation in its study "Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry."<sup>104</sup>

Dror contends that Israel needs a "novel grand strategy," that holistically fuses military and diplomatic efforts, in order to overcome the changing security environment of the Middle East: "for Israel the price of clinging to obsolete political-security strategies is unbearable, putting the country's very existence at stake."<sup>105</sup> Proceeding in good faith with the Palestinian peace process, abandoning its policy of nuclear ambiguity, and establishing direct diplomatic channels with Iran are all bold initiatives that would fit the paradigm of such a grand strategy. But realistically, Israel is unlikely to pursue such initiatives in the near term. Their purpose here is merely to illustrate how, in contrast to its brilliant intelligence and military operations, Israel's exercise of diplomacy to counter the Iranian threat has been unimaginative and lackluster at best.

### **The Iranian Perspective**

This paper has catalogued multiple reasons why Israeli fears of Iran's nuclear weapons aspirations are justified. What has not been mentioned is that Iran too has good reasons for seeking a nuclear weapon. During the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, Iraq used chemical weapons against at least 100,000 Iranians, while the world looked on and did virtually nothing. "This experience has left deep wounds in the Iranian national psyche, and inculcated a profound distrust of international arms control treaties (to which Iraq had been a signatory), as well as international organizations like the United Nations. And it has bred a determination in Iran that these bitter experiences not be repeated."<sup>106</sup> Moreover, two nuclear-armed powers, Israel and the United States, have made it clear that they are prepared to attack Iran over its nuclear program; the former has forces all around Iran, in the Arabian Gulf, along its eastern border in Afghanistan, and up until recently, along its western border in Iraq. The latter has a history of preventive strikes against nuclear facilities and other military targets in adversarial countries. Finally, the Shiites have suffered a long and storied history of persecution at the hands of surrounding Sunni Arabs. Shiite Iran rightly feels the animosity of its Sunni neighbors, whose enmity toward Iran persists. In calling for the U.S. to attack Iran in 2009, Saudi King Abdullah encouraged Washington to "cut off the head of the snake."<sup>107</sup> In their sense of vulnerability and history of persecution, Shiite Iranians are very similar to Jewish Israelis. One of Iran's key motivations for acquiring a nuclear weapons capability is likely the same as that which drove Israel to develop its nuclear program: as a security guarantee against attacks by hostile neighbors.

Yet another reason Iran clings so passionately to its nuclear program is their national sensitivity to the idea of foreign encroachment on Iranian sovereignty.<sup>108</sup> Because of its geographic location, a crossroads between East and West, and more recently, because of its rich

endowment of natural resources, Iran has long been subjected to interference from foreign powers. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Iran served as the chessboard, upon which the British and Russian empires played their Great Game. During the Cold War, Iran represented a contested “prize” sought after by both the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>109</sup> “In the 21st century, the struggle against foreign influence still defines Iran’s current stand-off with the world.”<sup>110</sup> And Iran sees this struggle, in fact its very independence and prospects for future greatness, as closely intertwined with its nuclear program: “For many ordinary Iranians, the right to enrich uranium to fuel nuclear reactors is first and foremost and issue of sovereignty.”<sup>111</sup>

One final explanation for Iran’s inflexibility concerning its nuclear program concerns domestic interests and rivalries more than foreign policy. According to Scott D. Sagan’s “Domestic Politics Model,” sometimes special interests within a state provide the key to understanding why a state pursues nuclear weapons.<sup>112</sup> “Whether or not the acquisition of nuclear weapons serves the national interests of a state, it is likely to serve the parochial bureaucratic or political interests of at least some individual actors within the state.”<sup>113</sup> In Iran’s case, the likely candidate driving the quest for nuclear weapons is the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the *Pasdaran*. Perhaps the most dominant institution in Iran today, the IRGC has seen its power grow over the past several years to unprecedented levels. They are a military, political, social, and economic powerhouse, with direct or indirect control over tens of billions of dollars worth of capital across diverse business sectors, to include construction, engineering, black market commerce, and most importantly for our purposes, “university laboratories, weapons manufacturers—including Defense Industries Organization—and companies connected to nuclear technology.”<sup>114</sup>

It is likely that the IRGC, though sworn to uphold the Iranian Revolution, today constitutes a competing center of gravity to the Supreme Leader himself, a situation, which has been exacerbated since the fraudulent 2009 election. The events of 2009 tarnished Khamenei's status in the eyes of many Iranian citizens, forcing him to rely more heavily on the IRGC for protection and thereby increasing their strength even further.<sup>115</sup> If Iranian politics are opaque to the outside observer, the IRGC is nearly impenetrable. Due to their size and diverse political and economic interests, the *Pasdaran* are far from a homogenous organization.<sup>116</sup> With respect to Iran's nuclear aspirations, the IRGC likely faces a real dilemma. On the one hand, they have a clearly vested interest in promoting Iran's nuclear program. On the other hand, the crippling economic sanctions leveled against Iran as a result of its nuclear program have taken a huge toll on IRGC revenues, which may cause them to seek a compromise solution to facilitate sanctions relief. In any event, although legally, the Supreme Leader is Iran's final arbiter of foreign policy, it is unlikely that any decision can or will be made vis-à-vis the future of Iran's nuclear program without the consent of the IRGC.

Ultimately, all of Iran's concerns—its sense of vulnerability, its concerns over sovereignty, and its internal interests in promoting nuclear energy or nuclear weapons—will have to be addressed in order to achieve a meaningful, long-term solution to the Iranian nuclear problem. Meanwhile, when it comes to global tolerance as a nuclear power, regime character and behavior do make a difference. While there may be many parallels and even a blossoming, albeit limited, amity between the peoples of Iran and Israel, the prospect of the current Iranian regime achieving a nuclear weapons capability is not palatable. Tehran's lack of transparency and NPT violations; its use of terrorism as a primary foreign policy tool; its denial of another

state's right to exist and calls for its destruction; and its violent repression of domestic political opposition make its aspirations to attain nuclear arms unacceptable.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Israel's integrated use of national power has thus far yielded a mixed record, but one weighted heavily in favor of military operations at the expense of strategic communications and diplomacy. Yehezkel Dror acknowledges this shortfall and advocates a more equitable blend of diplomatic and military endeavors in his call for Israel to develop a long-term and “largely novel grand-strategy.”<sup>117</sup> Ultimately, and in spite of Israel's demonstrable military prowess, the long-term solution to Israel's conflict with Iran is not attainable through offensive military operations. Rather, the long-term solution resides in changing the behavior of the Iranian government, if not the regime itself. Strategic communications and diplomacy, not military strikes, are the tools Israel needs to employ to effect such change—to force the Iranian government to evolve. The neoconservative strategy that drove the Middle Eastern policies of the George W. Bush Administrations were half right: transforming autocratic Middle Eastern states into a liberal democracies would extinguish the “taproot” of Islamic extremism and render them responsible members of the international community.<sup>118</sup> Democratic states, even those armed with nuclear weapons, do not threaten other democratic states and a reformed Iran could even conceivably voluntarily relinquish its nuclear weapons program, as have such states as Brazil and South Africa. But as the U.S. military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated, democracy does not thrive when imposed upon a nation by external forces.

The case of post-Arab Spring Tunisia, on the other hand, gives cause for optimism regarding the transformative power of indigenous opposition movements to positively alter the

character of a formerly repressive regime. Using the tools of soft power at its disposal, Israel should focus on informing and supporting the opposition movements that are already active in Iran; have proven receptive to social media messaging; and would like to shed Iran's nuclear program, support for terrorism, and legacy as a pariah state. As Ilan Berman has noted:

Iran's 78-million-person population is overwhelmingly young (two-thirds are under the age of 35), educated and Western-oriented. Iran's ruling ayatollahs, by contrast, are aging, infirm and out of touch with the aspirations of their people. It is this disparity that represents the fundamental fault line within the Islamic Republic today, and the one which to a large extent will dictate the country's future course.<sup>119</sup>

If Israel is committed, as Meir Dagan has stated, to an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to effecting regime change in Iran, then Israel must restructure its strategy, ensuring that its military, diplomatic, informational, and economic policies are balanced and harmonized. Not only must they be internally balanced, they must also play in concert with those of the United States. For Israel and the United States to contradict and undermine each other on the subject of Iran is counterproductive to both countries' efforts. With this in mind, Israel could employ the following instruments of national power to achieve greater strategic results than it has to date with its predominantly military and covert activities.

#### Diplomatic Initiatives:

- Israel should relax its insistence that negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran be confined to the subject of the latter's nuclear program. Rather, negotiations should be broadened, to encompass a "big for big" or at least a "medium for medium" deal that seeks verifiable reforms not only of Iran's nuclear program, but of its behavior in general, particularly its support for terrorism and domestic repression of political opposition.

- In the post-Arab Spring era, Iran's Green Movement and other democratic opposition groups must not be neglected or sacrificed on the alter of political expedience to a dictatorial regime. Any "grand bargain" agreement must include human rights and transparency monitoring, particularly surrounding the June 2013 elections. In exchange for verifiable improvement in its human rights behavior, Iran should be guaranteed that external powers would not seek to overthrow the regime. This will provide the maneuver room for Iran's own people to reform their government internally.
- Iran should be encouraged to cease support for terrorism, particularly against Israel. In exchange, Israel would have to commit to cease supporting violent anti-Iranian insurgents such as the Mujahaddin-e-Khalq; spectacular acts of sabotage and assassinations of Iranian scientists would have to stop.
- Iran would of course have to freeze its nuclear program and permit extensive inspections in order to convince the world that it is not pursuing nuclear weapons. Israel and the West would have to accept Iran's right to domestic enrichment at a level of three to five percent.
- Outside of the P5+1 talks, the United States should facilitate the resumption of meaningful negotiations Israeli-Palestinian negotiations for two-state solution. Should such an agreement be reached, the P5+1 might even be able to pressure Iran to recognize Israel's right to exist.
- Finally, Israel should make every effort to open direct diplomatic channels with Iran.

Considering the potentially catastrophic consequences if negotiations fail, "the range of potential deals that are better in terms of each party's perceived interests than the best alternative to a negotiated agreement (or "no-deal option") of each party" is broad.<sup>120</sup> The key is ensuring that

everyone's minimal requirements are met. This will require compromise not only of Iran, but of Israel as well. Coercive diplomacy will never succeed unless Israel and the West provide Iran with a face-saving means to declare its own victory. Georgetown University's Derek Leebaert points to this approach as an essential component of the grand strategy that Reagan used to force the Soviet Union to "concede the starkest compromises," leading to an end to the Cold War.<sup>121</sup> "While squeezing the Soviet Union on all fronts, Reagan offered a constructive path out of old conflict," and so too Israel must provide just such a path for Iran.<sup>122</sup>

#### Informational Initiatives:

Contrary to Shimon Peres' assertions, Israel does need to practice strong Public Diplomacy.

- Insofar as reducing Tehran's anxiety is imperative to long-term behavioral reform, Israel must refrain from threatening to bomb Iran. The more threatened Iran feels, the likelier it is to cling to the safeguard provided by nuclear weapons. For Iran, the example of Libya—a regime that gave up its nuclear weapons program only to be toppled with Western assistance—is likely instructive. Israel's threatened attacks are actually counterproductive.
- The Israeli government should also allocate increased resources to a formal public diplomacy campaign in order to build on the successful citizen outreach already demonstrated by citizens like Ronny Edry or celebrities like Rita. This type of messaging humanizes Israelis and undermines the anti-Semitic rhetoric of the Iranian government. As one Iranian Facebook respondent to Ron Edry's online peace initiative wrote "Most people here feel no hatred toward Israel and of course Israelis.... We have cultural and historical links. We can and obviously 'must' keep this connection."<sup>123</sup>

- Any Israeli public diplomacy campaign should also directly target Iran's nuclear program. Aside from Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability, its nuclear facilities are unsafe and endanger the Iranian population. It is telling that Iran is the only nuclear state not to sign the 1994 Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS), of which even Israel is a signatory.<sup>124</sup> Neither does Iran have an emergency response capability or plan to deal with a crisis at one of its facilities should a Chernobyl or Fukushima type disaster transpire. Most Iranians are not aware of the potential risks to which they and their country are being exposed; Israeli PD could correct this, generating increased internal pressure for Iran to either relinquish its program altogether or at least subject it to more rigorous international oversight.
- Finally, Israel must ensure that its strategic messaging is well researched and prepared in order to produce effective products like President Obama's Nowruz letter of 2009 and to avoid debacles like Shimon Peres' ill-received follow-up to that message. As with diplomacy, strategic communications must be closely coordinated with Israel's other national efforts and with those of the United States in order to ensure to prevent the two programs from contradicting or undermining each other. Consistency is a key tenet of strategic communications.

#### Military Initiatives:

- Israel has achieved many tactical successes to date with its military and covert programs. In order to weave these successes into a strategic victory, Israel will have to integrate its military endeavors closely with a broader campaign that includes diplomacy and strategic communications. Thus, the benefit to be attained by unconventional attacks has to be

weighed against the possible adverse impact they could have on other efforts.

Meanwhile, other military programs must be diligently maintained.

- Superior intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities are key to all ongoing military activities, and they will continue to play a critical role in determining whether Iran is complying with or violating any terms agreed upon in negotiations. These activities include but are not limited to human intelligence, imagery and signals intelligence, and cyber monitoring.
- Additionally, for the foreseeable future, Israel must maintain its long-range strike capability in order to deter direct attacks from Tehran. These include Israel's ballistic missile inventory as well as air and naval forces. But Israel should avoid trying to alarm Tehran with military exercises designed to demonstrate just how vulnerable Iran is to IDF strikes. As mentioned earlier, such exercises are counterproductive. The more threatened Tehran feels, the faster it cleaves to its nuclear weapons aspirations.
- Finally, Israel must maintain its ability to conduct a unilateral strike against appropriate Iranian military targets as a means of last resort. It is possible and advisable to keep such options on the table without constantly drawing attention to them.

#### Economic Initiatives:

Though of limited use on their own, in concert with other tools, economic sanctions constitute a vital component of Israel's integrated use of national power to curb Iran's nuclear program. To recall once more, Reagan's success in solving the Soviet problem, economist Norman A. Bailey emphasizes the role played by his "security-minded economic strategy that would constrict financial and other forms of Western life-support being tapped by the Kremlin" as the lynchpin for the entire effort.<sup>125</sup> "Diplomacy without collateral strategic elements can accomplish

little.”<sup>126</sup> Though Israel is only indirectly responsible for imposing the current economic sanctions regime against Iran, a number of principles should guide Israel’s efforts in garnering support for these efforts.

- First, sanctions must be flexible enough that they can be relaxed as Iran demonstrates reform by meeting a series thresholds with respect to its nuclear program, eliminating support for terrorism, and improving its domestic human rights record. Conversely, sanctions must be tightened in cases of demonstrated Iranian recalcitrance or regression.
- Additionally, if Israel’s ultimate strategic goal is to change the character of the Iranian government, then sanctions must be employed with surgical care to ensure that the Iranian middle class is not targeted. This social stratum drives Iran’s political opposition and is therefore crucial to effecting evolutionary regime change. Unfortunately, the current series of international and U.S. sanctions, which are credited with bringing Tehran back to the negotiating table, is also taking its toll on the Iranian middle class.

“The sanctions are having a long-term negative impact on the source of societal change in Iran. The urban middle class that has historically played a central role in creating change and promoting progress in Iran are key casualties of the sanctions regime.”<sup>127</sup> Thus, if not carefully applied, economic sanctions can actually have an adverse impact on Israel’s the strategic goals.

Israel has applied an integrated use of national power to curtail Iran’s nuclear program in the short-term, and to change the hostile character of the Iranian regime in the long-term. Heavily weighted toward military options at the expense of other instruments of national power, such as strategic communications or diplomacy, Israel’s integrated approach has fallen short of a whole-of-government effort. This uneven use of national power has also

proven to be less effective than desired, as Iran's successful nuclear and ballistic missile programs illustrate. In defeating the Soviet Union without engaging it in war, President Ronald Reagan demonstrated that while no single implement of national power is capable of achieving strategic victory, in concert they can form a formidable approach. The prohibitive costs—to Iran, Israel, the region, and possibly the world—of open war between Israel and Iran, versus the versatility provided by information age resources, make the implements of soft power all the more appealing. Though success of soft power can not be guaranteed, when it comes to engaging Iran, Israel would do well to heed the sage advice of General Sun Tzu: “to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”<sup>128</sup>

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> In spite of such speculation, as of late March 2013, an Israeli military strike on Iran this year seems increasingly unlikely. Israeli intelligence's latest assessments have extended Iran's attainment of a nuclear weapons capability out to 2015 or 2016. Aside from the setbacks caused by accidents and acts of sabotage, indications show that Iran has slowed the advance of its nuclear program of its own accord. Sheera Frenkel, "Israel: Iran slowing nuclear program, won't have bomb before 2015," *McClatchy Newspapers*, January 28, 2013. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2013/01/28/181276/israel-iran-slowng-nuclear-program.html>

<sup>2</sup> Yaakov Katz and Yoav Hendel, *Israel vs. Iran: The Shadow War*, (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012. Kindle Edition), 176

<sup>3</sup> Abdullah Toukan and Anthony Cordesman, "Study on a Possible Israeli Strike on Iran's Nuclear Development Facilities," (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 14 2009), 6. The Begin Doctrine is named for former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who ordered the military strike which destroyed the Iraqi reactor at Osirak in 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Katz and Hendel, 4. The Mossad, the Hebrew word for the "Institute" is short for "The Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations." It is Israel's responsible agency for intelligence collection and analysis and "special covert operations" outside of Israel, according to the Mossad's official website.

<sup>5</sup> Katz and Hendel, 5; Trita Parsi, *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's Diplomacy with Iran*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012, Kindle Edition), Location, 578. Both authors reference a 2007 classified diplomatic cable that Wikileaks disclosed to the public without authorization in 2010.

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<sup>11</sup> Katz and Hendel, 17.

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<sup>13</sup> Patrick Tyler, *Fortress Israel: The Inside Story of the Military Elite Who Run the Country--and Why They Can't Make Peace*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux: 2012, Kindle Edition), Location 9045.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Clawson, Dennis Ross, and David Makovsky, The Washington Institute. Lecture. "How to Build U.S.-Israeli Coordination on Preventing an Iranian Nuclear Breakout." September 25, 2012. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-to-build-u.s.-israeli-coordination-on-preventing-an-iranian-nuclear-bre>. Accessed 20 Dec 12.

<sup>15</sup> Ephraim Sneh, *Navigating Perilous Waters: An Israeli Strategy for Peace and Security*, (New York and London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 60.

<sup>16</sup> Katz and Hendel, 38.

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<sup>18</sup> Katz, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Sneh, 86-87.

<sup>20</sup> Patrick Clawson and David Makovsky, "Preventing Iranian Nuclear Breakout: U.S.-Israel Coordination," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Strategic Report 8, September 2012, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Rose, 46.

<sup>22</sup> Sneh, 87-88.

<sup>23</sup> Sneh, 86-87; Katz, location 184.

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- <sup>24</sup> Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Boston, New York, Toronto, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 22.
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- <sup>27</sup> Senor and Singer, Location 31.
- <sup>28</sup> Israeli Science and Technology Homepage. "Arab-Israeli Conflict: Basic Facts." <http://www.science.co.il/arab-israeli-conflict.asp>. Accessed 26 December 2012.
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- <sup>30</sup> Sneh, 79.
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- <sup>32</sup> Katz and Hendel, 17.
- <sup>33</sup> Katz and Hendel, 36.
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- <sup>35</sup> Of note, as rhetoric in Israel over a possible military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities and an all-but-certain Iranian counterattack reached a feverish pitch during the summer of 2012, the Israeli government mandated that gas masks be distributed to every Israeli citizen. See A Soldier's Mother, "Gas Mask Distribution," The Jewish Press.com, 20 August 2012. <http://www.jewishpress.com/blogs/a-soldiers-mother/gas-mask-distribution/2012/08/20/>. Accessed 26 December 2012.
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<sup>121</sup> Derek Leebaert, *The Fifty Year Wound: How America's Cold War Victory Shapes our World*, (Boston, New York, & London: Little, Brown, and Company, 2002), 512.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Edry. Perhaps one of the most touching Iranian responses sent to Edry reads: "I am crying now after seeing your page. For years they painted the Israeli flag on the floor of our school so upon entering [sic] the school we would walk over it. It never worked. We never developed hatred towards you, never! Still every time I looked at the Israeli flag I got a bad feeling in my stomach that I did not like. After seeing your daughter holding the flag, I do not feel that way any more and I am so happy. Now: I love that blue. I love that star. I love that flag."

<sup>124</sup> Semnani, 56.

<sup>125</sup> Norman A. Bailey, *The Strategic Plan that Won the Cold War* (McLean, VA: The Potomac Foundation, 1998), iii, [http://www.iwp.edu/news\\_publications/book/the-strategic-plan-that-won-the-cold-war](http://www.iwp.edu/news_publications/book/the-strategic-plan-that-won-the-cold-war).

<sup>126</sup> Bailey, 15.

<sup>127</sup> Mehrdad Emadi, "What the Women Say: Killing them Softly: The Stark Impact of Sanctions on the Lives of Ordinary Iranians," International Civil Society Network, Brief 3, July 2012. <http://www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/ICANIranSanctionssummer12.pdf> Accessed January 30, 2013, 6.

<sup>128</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by Samuel B. Griffith, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963. Kindle Edition, 77.

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