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ISRAEL SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

BY

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Israel Security In The 21st Century:  
Risks And Opportunities

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Unlike the United States which publicizes its national security strategy and national military strategy in official public documents, Israel, does not produce such documents for the general public. This may appear paradoxical in that the State of Israel, from its very inception, has invested enormous energy in its security. Nevertheless, Israel has no detailed security doctrine approved and updated by the Cabinet, the Knesset (Israel’s parliament) or the General Staff. The lack of an official, published, security doctrine does not imply that Israel lacks a coherent political and military strategy based on doctrine-like concepts. Israel’s political and military successes are proof to the contrary. Our purpose, then, is to identify a number of the critical Security Principles that have shaped Israeli strategy. This will provide us the foundation for our main discussion which is the risks and challenges to Israeli security in the 21st century and possible responses to those challenges.
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Introduction

Modern Israel’s turbulent fifty year history is characterized by periods of prolonged conflict interspersed with short episodes of relative peace. Security issues weigh heavily on the minds of Israel’s leaders and her citizens. Yet, unlike the United States which publicizes its national security strategy and national military strategy in official public documents, Israel, does not produce such documents for the general public. This may appear paradoxical in that the State of Israel, from its very inception, has invested enormous energy in its security. Nevertheless, Israel has no detailed security doctrine approved and updated by the Cabinet, the Knesset (Israel’s parliament) or the General Staff.

The lack of an official, published, security doctrine does not imply that Israel lacks a coherent political and military strategy based on doctrine-like concepts. Israel’s political and military successes are proof to the contrary. Our purpose, then, in light of no official doctrine, is first to identify a number of the critical Security Principles that have shaped Israeli strategy. This, in turn, will provide us the foundation for our main discussion which is the risks and challenges to Israeli security in the
Background

When Israel declared its independence on May 14, 1948, the armies of five Arab nations refused to accept United Nations Resolution 181 which recognized Israel as a new nation state.² Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq combined forces and deployed 130,000 regular soldiers against Israel's fledgling army of 24,000.³ When the Arab forces attacked on May 15th, they were equipped with light infantry weapons, artillery, armor and attack aircraft. Israeli forces possessed only light infantry weapons and a handful of artillery pieces. The total population in support of the Arab effort was 30 million. Israeli forces were supported by a population of 700,000. Out of this asymmetrical and desperate situation with the survival of the State at risk, emerged Israel's Principles of Security.⁴

During the War of Independence, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) strategy was to fight during the night, exercise initiative and surprise, and reduce the advantages the Arabs had in weapons and man power. This enabled the IDF to
capitalize on its advantages; its highly motivated soldiers, unity of effort and total commitment to protect the country.

The war ended successfully for the State of Israel but it brought to the forefront the high degree of asymmetry between Israel and the Arab countries. Israel quickly recognized that the overwhelming Arab population, Arab economic resources and Arab political clout made it abundantly clear that even in victory Israel could never subdue its adversaries. Yet if Israel would lose even one war, that war would be its last war.

This situation obliged the founding fathers to adopt Principles of Security which would strengthen the State of Israel and simultaneously convince the Arabs to abandon their idea of the conquest and destruction of the State of Israel.

The founding fathers came up with five Principles of Security:

a. Commit all necessary national resources, human, material, and political as a foundation for national security and stability.

b. Expend all necessary energy to make peace with the Arab countries.
c. Seek an alliance with a world power.

d. Define the legitimate use of force to include preemptive strikes.

e. Build a deterrence capability.

In 1956 Israel joined Britain and France after Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal and blockaded the Red Sea. Israel, within 100 hours, occupied the whole area of Sinai but withdrew in response to intense political pressure by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower. This war demonstrated Israel’s military capabilities which would continue to improve in the years to come.

In 1967 war broke out between Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Israel faced a difficult challenge. The Arab countries deployed ground, air and sea forces for an attack on Israel with the intent to destroy the state. In this war the IDF struck preemptively against the Arab air and ground forces and within six days Israel achieved a great victory which validated Israel’s Principles of Security. These principles provided the solutions to Israel's lack of strategic depth and the requirement to prosecute a war as quickly and decisively as possible.
The 1967 war produced two significant results. The first was that Israel became responsible for 1.5 million Palestinians. The second was that Israel acquired strategic depth because of the conquest of the Sinai, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. Additionally, the battlefield successes and a prevailing attitude of invincibility lulled the Israeli leadership into a false sense of complacency. Consequently, the leadership failed to update its Principles of Security in response to changing conditions in the Middle East.

Several months after the Six Day War, on September 1, 1967, Arab leaders gathered in Khartoum, Sudan. They decided on four resolutions which challenged Israel's Principles of Security:

1) Reorganization and rearmament of the Arab military forces with the help of the Soviet Union.

2) War of attrition against Israel.

3) The reaffirmation of the destruction of the State of Israel and the establishment of the an Arab State of Palestine.
4) The employment of terrorism by the Palestine Liberation Organization and other Palestinian organizations against Israel and Israeli targets abroad.

The War of Attrition between Egypt and Israel started on May 1969 and ended with cease-fire on August, 1970. This war aimed at Israel's weak points to include: lack of human resources, lack of economic resources and high sensitivity to casualties. Israel's solution to acts of terrorism included strategic and retaliatory air strikes and commando operations in the Arab countries where terrorists initiated their attacks.

The cease-fire which came in August, 1970, lasted until October, 1973. The Arab leaders felt time was running against them and decided to start a war against Israel in order to break the political status-quo. Egypt and Syria recognized that the destruction of Israel was unlikely. Instead, their leaders chose another route to change the strategic equation. In order to acquire what they perceived as the necessary leverage for future negotiations and at the same time to save face from previous defeats, they believed, quite correctly, that by recapturing limited amounts of
territory now under Israeli control they would be able to negotiate from a position of greater strength.

In 1972, recognizing that Egypt and Syria were becoming more formidable militarily thanks to the Soviet buildup of Arab forces, the IDF General Staff responded by adopting the following principles:

1) Preserve and expand Israel's deterrence ability against the Arab countries.

2) Prepare to fight and win on two fronts simultaneously.

3) Strike preemptively.

4) Defend all fronts.

Intelligence indications of war began to appear in Israel in March, 1973, but the Israeli leadership misunderstood the situation. The Syrians and the Egyptians achieved strategic deception and surprise when they attacked Israel on October 6, 1973.

The Egyptian goal was to cross the Suez Canal and to conquer 40 miles of west Sinai. The Syrian goal was to conquer the Golan Heights and continue as far south as Nazareth. The combined military strength and the numerical superiority of the Arab forces, put the State in a very
serious situation. The lack of military preparedness, according to the Agranat Commission which convened following the War, blamed both the military and political leadership for failing to act in accordance with Israel's Principles of Security. In particular, both the Government and the IDF failed to fully develop and act upon the tactical intelligence it received from the field which would require the IDF to initiate a preemptive strike in accordance with Israel's Principles of Security.

Ten hours before the war began, Israeli intelligence received indisputable information regarding the approaching Egyptian and Syrian Forces. The IDF Chief of Staff understood that war was imminent and issued a warning order to the IDF Air Force to initiate a preemptive attack in order to disrupt the Syrian and Egyptian intentions. The Government over-ruled him and did not approve this action for two reasons: First, the Government believed that there was still time to prevent a war. Second, the Government believed that if the world would recognize the Arabs as the aggressor rather than Israel, then Israel would have a better chance in getting U.S. support.
The Yom Kippur War started on October 6, 1973, and the Israeli government decision not to implement a preemptive attack resulted in many Israeli casualties. After two weeks of fighting Israel began to initiate a counter offensive. Even though Israel ultimately defeated both the Egyptian and Syrian forces, it was unable to end the war having achieved its political objectives because of American and Soviet involvement. In particular, if Israel would not have been constrained by the United States and the Soviet Union, it would have continued the fight until it would have achieved and overwhelming victory which would have included the defeat of Egypt's Third Army and the defeat of Syrian President Asad's "Presidential" forces. Israel's Security Principles requires that the IDF achieve overwhelming victory in order to extend the periods of relative peace and enable the Israeli Government to negotiate with its adversaries from a position of strength.

In the 1991 Gulf War, Israel did not take part in the fighting. However, during the war forty missiles were launched towards Israel causing very limited damage. The effects of the missiles were mostly moral and psychological because Israel would have preferred to retaliate. In order
to protect its long term interests with the United States, Israel chose to exercise restraint. As Israel's neighbors begin to acquire long range missiles, the strategic balance in the region will shift and Israel will be required to adapt its strategic posture in order to confront the challenges posed by this new threat in the years to come. Israel believes it can minimize this threat through ongoing diplomacy, the development of anti-missile missiles such as the Arrow, and, if necessary, unilateral strikes against nuclear facilities such as the strike against the Iraqi nuclear plant in Osariq, in July, 1981.

**Recent Developments:**

Israel's military successes and the rapidly changing geopolitical nature of the Middle East following the end of the Cold War have contributed to Israel's reassessment of its Principles of Security. Four significant recent developments that account for this reassessment are:

1) The peace agreements between Israel and the PLO, Egypt and Jordan.

2) Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in the region.
3) Extremist terror organizations such as Hamas and Hizballah who are sponsored, in part, by foreign governments.

4) The role of the United States as a key player in the peace process.

The Peace Agreements

Beginning with Israel's independence and up to the present time, Israel's leaders repeatedly stated their intent to make peace with all neighboring Arab countries. Prime Minister David Ben Gurion declared on August 2, 1949, that Israel's security goal was to defend the country and to enter into a peace alliance with the Arab world. After forty nine years and six wars between Israel and the Arabs, it appears that both sides are close to reaching this goal.

To date, Israel has entered into three formal peace treaties with its former adversaries to include Egypt, (1979), the Palestinian Liberation Organization (1993) and Jordan, (1994). In addition, Israel has established interest sections in other Arab capitals such as Morocco, Tunisia, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

The peace agreements between Israel and the Arabs are transforming the balance of power in the Middle East and
have reshaped the political landscape of the region. These newly signed international agreements have improved regional stability, have led to a demilitarization of some military forces, and have enhanced American prestige as a principal mediator and guarantor of peace.

The peace agreements obliged the State of Israel to withdraw from areas conquered in the past. With the return of territory to Arab control, Israel risks a loss of strategic depth in the pursuit of peace. This situation creates significant military challenges for the IDF in which Arab police and military forces are now, in some cases, within five to twenty miles from main Israeli population centers.

The peace negotiations with Syria and Lebanon have been going on for about six years without much success and progress. The negotiations between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon are stuck right now because of the inability for all sides to agree to a formula which insures joint security arrangements, territorial guarantees, and mutual recognition. Even if Israel, Syria and Lebanon succeed in achieving peace, there is still a problem with the radical
countries such as Iran, Iraq and Libya who object to the peace process.

As today's Israeli leadership ponders the future, one of the key challenges facing decision makers is whether or not existing peace agreements and future agreements will solve Israel's security problems. Perhaps the existing, successful arrangement between Israel and Egypt can serve as a model for future peace agreements.

Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, wrote in his book: "The peace has dangers, but as a person who led Israel's struggles as a soldier in the battle field and as a politician, I have no doubt that the peace risks are preferred much more than the gloomy certainty of war."¹²

One of the lessons that history teaches is that the foundation for successful, lasting peace is best insured when all parties deal from a position of strength. From the Israeli perspective, Israel must keep its military superiority. Israel's leaders and military commanders must remember that most modern wars began during periods of peace. Paraphrasing Liddell Heart, Israel should act in accordance to his principle, namely, one who wants peace will always be ready for war.¹³
**Proliferation of WMD in the region**

Missiles that were launched during the Gulf War toward the big cities in Israel augur the new strategic threat which will have an influence on Israel's security for the years to come. The ability to hit population centers exposed Israeli civilians to new dangers and heightened their vulnerability to became casualties. Given the fact that most of the IDF consists of civilian reserves who are mobilized in case of an emergency, the threat of a missile attack which would disrupt a call-up has far reaching implications affecting Israel's security.

Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol, stated in 1966 that Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East, but also, he added, Israel will not let the Arabs be the first.\(^\text{14}\) It can be said that the State of Israel applied Eshkol's warning fifteen years later, when Israeli planes attacked on June 7, 1981, the nuclear reactor in Osarik, Iraq.

Arab countries, to include Syria, Libya, Iraq and Iran, who believe Israel has a nuclear capability, are constructing chemical and biological facilities in order to create a deterrence towards Israel. These countries
purchased missiles that can strike targets nearly anywhere in Israel (see map pg.). Syria has stockpile of Scud C missiles from North Korea which can range 500 kilometers and M9 missals from China which can range 600 kilometers. These missiles give an impressive strategic ability. Iran and Iraq continue their effort to develop a nuclear capability.

Israel's perceived threats from enemies both near and far obligate it to take new and far reaching steps to counter these threats. Israel continues to improve and extend its intelligence gathering capabilities; it will soon complete the development and deploy its antiballistic missile program (Arrow); it will improve its strategic air capability to serve as a deterrent for countries beyond its borders. Furthermore, Israel will communicate to non democratic regimes in the region that it will no longer act passively in the event of attack as it did during the Gulf War. Israel will respond forcefully and decisively.

Extremist terror organizations

The rise of the Ayatollah Homeni in Iran in 1979, the emergence of Islamic extremism and the use of terror as a religious, social, cultural and political phenomena, is a
response to what it perceives as internal and external threats to Islamic law and order. From the external perspective, Islamic extremism sees Zionism, Christianity, communism and western culture as a threat. From the internal perspective, Islamic extremists strive to root out the corrupt and evil influences of existing Moslem regimes by adhering to the strict, orthodox interpretations of Islamic law.

Islamic extremism and Islamic based terrorism is not a new phenomena. Its historical roots can be traced back to the eleventh century. The Shia movement of Islam in Syria and Persia would employ assassins in support of its religious aims. Professor Harkabi, former IDF Chief of Military Intelligence, points out that Islamic religious fanatics who impose forcefully their religious agendas in the name of God are likely to escalate their actions in the form or terrorism against those whom they perceive to be enemies of God and the agent of the devil.17

The terrorist factions from within Hizballah and Hamas are two examples of the application of radical Islam who carry out their religious and political agendas in the form of indiscriminate suicide attacks in the name of their god.
Israel has suffered from continuous terror attacks from its very inception because much of the Arab world does not accept its existence. Arab countries support these terror organizations as part of their long term struggle against Israel.

In March 1995 Israel experienced a series of very severe terror attacks which caused many casualties. The government could not refer to these attacks as an annoyance but as a real threat against the people of Israel. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin declared that radical Islamic terror is a strategic threat to the State of Israel and that the State must apply all necessary resources to fight this war of terror.

Other terrorist attacks such as those that took place at New York's Trade Center Twin Towers and the Pan American 007 explosion near Lockerby, Scotland, proved that these actions are not a local problem between Israel and its neighboring countries. Iran, Syria and Libya used these terror attacks as a political instruments against sovereign countries.

The solution to the growing problem of terrorism in the region will only come through expanded peace agreements,
such as the Israeli-PLO Interim Agreement or through cooperative efforts of sovereign states. Even within the Arab world, pro-western states such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt have encountered significant problems from Islamic terrorism. The Moslem Brotherhood, Islamic Jihad and similar organizations that are sponsored by Iran and other radical states, are destabilizing factors in the Middle East. Those Arab states who recognize Israel and who share common security interests can effectively fight terrorism.

The role of the United States

When Israel declared its independence in 1948, its very survival was tenuous at best. Israel's leaders quickly recognized that the future security of the State depended upon its ability to form strategic alliances with a major world power. Between 1948 and 1950, Israel received considerable support from the Soviet Union. Later, as relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated, Israel and France maintained close ties until 1967. Following the Six Day War in June 1967, Israel has maintained a particularly close relationship with the United States.

The evolving American attitude towards Israel from 1948 until the present has been influenced by two considerations.
At first, the basis of American interest was directly related to moral concerns. Israel was created in the ashes of the Nazi holocaust and the United States felt great compassion for the survivors who were striving to build a new nation. Later, as the relationship grew and matured, America saw Israel as a strategic asset because of Israel's technological ability, military force, political stability and western orientation.

When President Truman chose to recognize Israel in 1948, he did so from idealistic, humanitarian considerations and not from political, strategic considerations. The American policy towards Israel until 1967 was directed mostly towards non military support. A major policy shift took place when President Johnson decided to supply to Israel attack weapons. Johnson was particularly troubled with the world wide spread of communism. The threat of communist expansion in South West Asia and the growing Soviet presence in Middle East was of grave concern to American leadership. American policy changed so that the United States could assert itself in the region as a barrier against communism but also to maintain a balanced policy
with the Arab countries because of economical and geo-strategic needs.

During Richard Nixon's administration, American security support to Israel increased because Nixon saw Israel as a strategic and political asset. The corporation between the United States and Israel reached its peak in September 1970 when King Hussein’s regime was in danger. Iraqi and Syrian forces planned an invasion into Jordan and because of that the President Richard Nixon placed on alert the American forces in Germany and the 82nd Airborne Division from Fort Bragg. At the same time Israel was asked to display a show of force which, at the end, changed the situation in the area. Israel responded to the American request and advanced forces to the Syrian border and declared that it would not allow an invasion into Jordan. The events of September 1970 brought to a meaningful change in the way the United States saw Israel as being a stabilizing factor in the Middle East.

The evolving relationship between the United States and Israel is particularly important to Israel far beyond the security support in the form of weapons and ammunition. From the Israeli perspective, the United States serves as the
basis for psychological deterrence thereby strengthening
Israel's status in the Arab world and reduces the
possibility for war. Israel's obligations to the United
States as a strategic partner obligates Israel to consider
American opinion and to coordinate moves with the United
States prior to any large scale military actions. For
example, prior to the Yom Kippur War the Israeli government
knew about the expected attack from Syria and Egypt the
previous day but decided not to start with a preemptive
attack in order to gain the support of the United States.²²

American prestige in the Middle East has been greatly
enhanced by the central role it has played in brokering the
peace agreements signed between Israel and the PLO, Egypt
and Jordan. America's ability to present itself as an honest
broker in negotiations has created a climate of confidence
where risk taking is possible. From the Israeli perspective,
Israel takes enormous risks when it trades territory for
peace. Only with a firm American commitment to guarantee the
peace is Israel willing to place itself in a potentially
vulnerable situation. American resolve and credibility is
what is at the heart of the recent peace arrangements that
are reshaping the strategic character of the region.
After the Gulf War the question arose whether or not Israel still remains a strategic ally with the United States since Israel did not take part in the war. The answer to this question is that Israel has to be viewed within the overall strategic context of the region. Before the breakup of the Soviet Union, no one ever said that Israel's role was to deter Soviet expansion in the region. Likewise, no one assigned Israel the duty to control Arab dictators from conquering their neighbors. Those tasks are better left to a super power. Yet, during the Gulf War Israel proved to be a worthy partner because it demonstrated restraint. Israel recognized and honored American interests and chose not to upset the fragile United States led coalition even though Israel came under attack from Iraqi SCUD missiles.

Israel was not entirely passive during the Gulf War. In terms of active support to the United States, Israel provided military intelligence and analysis. Based on Israel's impressive technological capabilities and its experience in the region, it was able to help clarify the Iraqi threat and intent for the benefit of the United States, and indirectly, for the benefit of the Coalition partners.
Of course, the United States support to Israel is much greater than the Israeli support to the United States, and for this, Israel is very grateful. Nevertheless, one of Israel's Principles of Security focuses on self sufficiency whenever possible. For this reason, Israel believes that American support to Israel should supplement Israel's own military capabilities and not replace them. The Israeli perspective is best summarized in the words of Yitzhak Rabin who said, "We are alone responsible for our security." Israel does not desire American soldiers to fight on behalf of Israel.

The United States official policy towards Israel demonstrates that the United States and Israel are, indeed, allies. In the 3 May 1995 document entitled the United States Security Strategy for the Middle East it states:

In 1988, the United States and Israel signed a memorandum of agreement on strategic cooperation that reflected, as the White House spokesman said at the time: "The enduring commitment to Israel's security"...We also have extensive technology sharing arrangements such as cooperative research and development programs in which Israel is eligible to participate as a designated non NATO ally.25
In the past Israel proved to be a stable island in the stormy area of the Middle East. In the future, Israeli - United States corporation will lean on these principles:

- A strong Israel contributes to stability in the Middle East.
- Israel will continue to promote the democratic values that it shares with the United States.
- Israel and the United States will participate in strategic corporation against radical countries.
- Israel and the United States will share technologies.

The State of Israel must understand that it cannot be the only component of American Middle East policy. If the United States focuses on Israel exclusively as the center piece of its Middle East policy, both the United States and Israel stand to lose. The relationship of the United States and Israel must be balanced within the context of the overall interests of the United States in the region. But, the United States should neither minimize the essential contribution that Israel provides as a key and essential player in regional security and peace.

**Conclusions:**
• Israeli security policy is successful. Israel became a country with a world class army which succeeded in its mission to protect the country as evidenced by its successes in six wars.

• Israel's deterrent capabilities and its refusal to surrender to external threats has played a major role in convincing Arab adversaries to acknowledge the State of Israel and to enter the peace process.

• The State of Israel will continually improve its intelligence capabilities in order to prevent what happened prior to the Yom Kippur War.

• Israel will continue its policy to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

• Israel will actively participate as part of any responsible international organization that will confront and deter radical Islam and the countries who support the terrorism.

• The IDF will continue to develop and improve its forces so that it will be able to withstand any potential threat or coalition of forces in the region.
• The peace agreements and the loss of strategic depth as Israel has vacated captured territories is a source of potential vulnerability. As long as the United States honors its commitments along the lines of the Sinai model, the region will remain stable even in the event of a crisis.

• Strengthening the United States - Israel relationship is an important component for Israel's security policy in order to prevent hostile neighbors from starting a war.

Summary

Both the present and the future consist of risks and opportunities. The opportunities are the peace agreements already signed and the ongoing negotiations between Israel and the neighboring Arab countries. The risks are that in spite of the voices coming from countries like Iran, Iraq and Libya which call for the destruction of the State of Israel, Israel must remain both strong and flexible so that it can achieve peace with those nations who are willing to engage Israel in dialogue as all sides pursue their mutual interests. The potential for peace and stability exists in the region. In time it will become a reality.
ENDNOTES

1 The Hebrew term Torat HaBitachon is the term used by Israeli strategists. (See Israel Tal, National Security: The Few Against the Many, D'vir Publishing House, Tel Aviv, 1996, p.48). It literally means the Law of Security. It is used interchangeably to describe both security and doctrinal principles. In this paper we will use "Principles of Security" in lieu of Torat HaBitachon.

1 See Map 1, "The Partition Plan, 1947".


1 See Map 2, "Cease Fire Lines 1967".


1 See Map 3, "The Yom Kippur War, 1973".

1 Tal, 168.


1 Ben Gurion, 999.

1 See Map 4, "Israel Withdrawal from Sinai in Stages 1980-82".

1 Rabin, 585.


1 See Map 5, "The Missile Threat to Israel".


1 Rabin, 262.

1 Ibid., 312.

1 Ibid., 314.

1 Tal, 227.

1 Steven L. Spiegel, "The Strategic Relationship Between Israel and the United States Following the Gulf War, Nativ, (Hebrew Article, July, 1992), 36.

1 Ibid., 42.

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