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**ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: PAST AND
FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

BY

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**Israel's National Security Strategy:
Past and Future Perspectives**

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ABSTRACT

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In this paper the author reviews the historical underpinnings of Israel's National Security Strategy (NSS), including the rationale for its adoption and the objectives to be secured by it. The paper then examines how the strategy has held up over the years as the national security environment confronting Israel has evolved. The importance of the 1967 Six Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War is then examined with emphasis on the changing nature of Israel's national security posture as the result of the acquisition of additional territories in those wars. From here, the paper moves to an analysis of the current strategic situation in Israel and, with that, an assessment of the degree to which the historic NSS serves to provide for the security of the state today. The paper concludes with a view to future and suggests changes to the strategy that will be required to ensure the long-term security of Israel in a volatile and constantly changing national security environment.

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Israel's National Security Strategy: Past and Future Perspectives

The ideas and principles of the Israeli National Security Strategy were put together in the beginning of the 1950s. The foundations of this strategy were planted by a relatively small group of commanders and staff officers lead by the Prime Minister and Secretary of Defense, David Ben-Gurion. This group, and other commanders and staff officers that built on these foundations, and expanded the strategy, deserve much credit for developing a very original and unique Israeli strategy.

From the beginning, it was clear to the leaders of Israel, that the forecast of the future was not bright. The sky of Israel's National Security were likely to be cloudy for many years to come and Israel would have to rely on its own sword.

A National Security model that suggested good answers consistent with Israel's situation and threats was not available. A unique strategy was needed in this situation of - *Few Against Many*, of a small island surrounded by ocean, threatening to flood it.

At first, development of a suitable strategy seemed almost impossible. As the years went by, a strategy evolved and over time proved itself as it dealt successfully with many hard and complicated problems. Unfortunately, this strategy failed at

but on balance, it met the expectations of the leadership, and has provided the security needed for development of the State of Israel.

Writing the above, I would like to present in this paper, some elements of the Israeli National Security Strategy and my view, based on my research and analysis of why and how Israel should look at its strategy, and to some degree, update it, for the future security and well-being of the State.

Deterrence in Israel's NSS

The National Security Strategy (NSS) that Israel developed, was designed to ensure its ability to exist by force of arms, for as long as the Arabs continued their efforts to weaken and destroy it. The strategy of deterrence was designed to prevent offensive operations against Israel. Specifically, according to the NSS the objective of Israel's military power is to deter the Arab Nations from attacking Israel, and to defeat them at war if deterrence is proved to be insufficient.

The objective of deterrence in this case, is to prevent war, in particular, when Israel's objectives in war are defensive and are designed only to prevent the Arab's from destroying her. This theory is grounded in the conviction that, wars are always unnecessary and damaging in every way, even when victory is large. However, if war breaks out, Israel must win, both fast and decisively. This must be done without active participation of allies in order to strengthen Israel's image of deterrence, and

to prevent attrition to save lives and equipment if possible. Furthermore, if forced to fight meaningless wars, Israel shall make the best of it. Israel will destroy the Arab military power as much as possible, by capturing land, and by improving defensive lines for bargaining purposes. In this way, Israel seeks to make clear to the Arabs that by war they will not succeed. Each time they will choose to fight, they will be defeated and humiliated so their motivation to try again will become smaller.

Deterrence, in this case, is implemented not only by winning full scale wars, but also by regular operations such as holding Israel's borders, special operations in enemy territory (as self defense acts between wars), and showing great technological power.

The deterrence of any hostile state is based also on its allies. The Arab Nations have much weight in the international arena, and have many potential allies in the Muslim world and Asian and African states. Additionally, they are usually able to garner support of most of the world. The truth is, Israel has one permanent ally, the Jewish People throughout the world. Additionally, Israel is supported by a select group of friendly nations. The United States (USA) is by far Israel's greatest national ally.

It is emphasized in Israel's NSS that Israel must blend into the region and the world, morally, economically and militarily,

to prevent isolation. Therefore, Israel's deterrence at different times, relies on cooperation with friendly nations lead by the USA. Support provided by friendly nations is generally manifested as political support in the international arena, and seems to deter Israel's enemies from engaging first hand against her by supplying economical support and military equipment. It would be fair to say that Israel depends on her allies mostly in deterrence between wars, and less at times of war.

In summary, Israel's deterrence strategy is based on the cumulative influence of successes in frustrating the Arab's intents to realize their goals by war against Israel. Historically, Israel's deterrence power has been mainly projected by the strength of the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) (THE MEANS) and by the results of the wars and battles they fought. These results, and the position taken by friendly nations (THE WAYS), have been the main influence on the Arab Nations to leave the way of war and to acknowledge and accept the existence of Israel (THE ENDS).

Israel's NSS is completely open and clear to all so that "The Rules" will allow preventing a down slide to war by a mistake of the Arab Nations. Israel's stated deterrence principles may be used as "Red Lines" that leave no place for doubt. Only if an enemy really wants war will he cross these lines, fully understanding the consequences. These red lines in short are:

1) A military threat.

The IDF must be ready to assemble in a very short time and strike first at any concentration of Arab armies that are in fact a military threat to Israel. Because the IDF is a "Civilian Army", Israel cannot afford to call up the reserves and form static defensive positions against an enemy for a long time. In this case, Israel's economy and systems of life would be paralyzed and Israel's deterrence image would be damaged.

2) Attrition.

Any strategy of attrition by the Arabs, such as opening fire from there side of the border against settlements, terrorism, full attrition war and others in this category, will be responded to by the IDF. Such response includes, bombing, commando operations and even full scale war. The considerations taken by Israel in this case would be the need to defend the country and people, the national morale, Israel's self image and the recovery or emphasis of deterrence.

3) Full scale war against Israel.

Israel will not hesitate to attack first. All vital interests objectives and all population centers are within the reach of Israel's strategic arm; the Air Force. Arab states must understand that any attempt to strike Israel before Israel has assembled its full ground power, will bring upon them the fire power of the Air Force into the depth of their countries. Israel

also emphasizes the difference between the strategic goal of the IDF, as Israel Defense Forces, and it's operational use as Israel Offensive Forces.

4) Total war.

In a case of unlimited total attack that will cause major loss of life and wholesale destruction, and which puts at risk the physical being of the Jewish state, Israel is prepared to respond in kind with no compromise in choosing means. Although, by the Jewish ethos, the Goal (ENDS) does not sacrifice the Means, in this case survival of the State, does.

Israel's National Security Strategy -Aftermath.

The Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War (1973), taken together may be considered an historical turning point that influenced the destiny of Israel and the relationship between Israel and the Arab world.

As a result of the Six Day War, an illusion was formed in Israel, that we can shape future reality as we want. The nation became split in its views, and the consensus of national goals and the legitimate borders of the state were lost.

At the same time, Egypt, Syria and Jordan, though in shock, came together with their common Pan-Arab goal, a homeland for the Palestinians, in addition to their immediately national goal, to regain the Sinai, the Golan Heights and the West Bank.

In the Yom Kippur War Israel was attacked by Egypt and Syria, reinforced by seven other Arab nations. Israel's reserved

forces were not called up, and therefore the IDF lost its operational balance immediately in the beginning of the war and was forced to fight a strong defensive battle against enormous fire power. The conclusion was clear that if Israel could achieve a military victory in this case, it would be sure to win under regular circumstances at her best.

Israel's National Security Strategy "lost balance" after the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War. The strategy no longer fit the changes in the basic strategic conditions after each war. Arab nations realized they could not defeat Israel with conventional forces and therefore changed their strategy. Their interim goals became recovery of the Golan Heights, Sinai, and the occupation of the west bank, and the settlements there. Their efforts to recover lost territories inspired the Palestinians living in Israel and the occupied territories and gave rise to the Intifada.

The best method to examine Israel's strategy and its relevance, as it was put together after the War of Independence, is to see how successful it was in the eyes of its designers. I think that it is fair to say that the strategy was basically very successful. It was designed to achieve what then seemed to be practically impossible. It had to ensure Israel to survive under continuous attempt to destroy her in different ways- full scale wars, attrition wars and acts of terrorism. Against Israel in this situation, stood enormous Arab hatred, millions of people

and petro-dollar wealth. In addition to all of this there were the Third World countries, in partnership with Soviet Russia, that resented the state of Israel.

Israel's strategy asserted, that the basic interest of the people of Israel, survival, was much stronger than the negative interest of the Arab nation to destroy her. This assumption was based on the understanding that the Jews, having no other choice but to survive, will show heroic bravery and extreme national will, proportionally greater than the Arab nations. The strategy assumed further an Israeli quality; against Arab quantity, namely, personal, moral and technological quality.

In full scale and attrition wars Israel was able to prove to the Arab Nations that they could not impose their will by force. As a result, the Arab states started to shift towards the recognition of Israel. The first step was made by Egypt in 1977, and I will not elaborate on the peace process, but I will say that there still is a strong chance that Israel may never really be recognized by its Arab neighbors and the chance of war is still alive.

In my view, Israel's original national strategy was true and right, and only when Israel failed to obey it was she was punished. The Yom Kippur War was a war of survival because of Israel's denial of its own strategy. The IDF was not called up and in position and thus Israel could not employ a preemptive

attack. In addition, the IDF failed to see and understand its loss of close support air power.

The lessons learned by Israel in its wars for survival are that she must be strong and able to defeat her enemies at war by herself, and that she must stick to her national strategy. With that said, Israel must be open and creative when her enemies come to speak peace.

Israel's NSS in the future

The principles of Israel's NSS were put together in the 1950s, and remain little changed. The foundations are the same today as in the first days. This strategy proved itself many times in the fifty years of Israel's existents, and has fulfilled its role. Even so, it looks as if Israel will have to renovate its strategy in the next coming years. Among the reasons for this are:

- 1) Development of military technology has enabled the Arab states, both near and far, to attack Israel from their countries with ground to ground missiles and other new strategic weapons. At the tactical and operational level, new anti aircraft systems have the potential to severely limit the ability of the Israeli Air Force to support the ground forces.

- 2) It is hard to tell what the New World Order will be in the 21st Century, and developments in the Middle-East are unknown; the destiny of the peace process between Israel and Arab nations, the expansion of fundamental Islam, its size and weight,

and the nature of relationships that will rise between the regional states.

3) On the horizon we can see the possession of mass destruction weapons by fanatical Moslem countries. In this case, the shadow of mass destruction will fall over the Middle-East, and the term "The Art of War" will not be relevant any more. Instead, the term "The Art of Mutual Deterrence" will take its place. A reality of this kind might not be controllable, and is very dangerous.

4) Dealing with terrorists (such as the Hammas) who are willing to lose everything including their lives emphasizes the difficulties of a democratic state to fight and succeed in deterrence.

Strategic Deterrence

Since achieving independence, Israel's enemies have always had the capability to bomb settlements and different objectives within the country, either by artillery or by air. Israel's answer to that threat was its strategic deterrence force, the Air Force. The Arab states feared the IDF, and understood that Israel would use its Air Force massively and retaliate by attacking strategic targets in their countries. Furthermore, whenever enemy planes would try to penetrate Israel's air space, they would be shot down by our fighters. Israel's control of the air was complete.

Israel's NSS always gave larger weight to strategic considerations than to tactical and operational ones. For this reason the General Staff preferred the Air Force when allocating resources. As long as Israel's, and the Arab's, strategic fire power was built on the Air Force, and as long as Israel had complete superiority, Israel's strategic deterrence was efficient.

It is probable, that in the future, great change will take place, with a significant strategic value. The Arab states are equipping themselves with ground to ground long range missiles. This arsenal is growing rapidly in quality and in quantity. It is possible that not only nearby Arab states, but distant ones as well, will be able to attack Israel from long range and hit population centers and military targets. Because of their economic power, many Arab nations can buy missiles, from many different sources at relatively cheap prices. If this happens, the strategic equation of fire power will change in the Middle East. The Arab nations will be able to close the gap in this strategic arena where they were traditionally inferior to Israel. It will be possible to surprise Israel by starting an indirect fires war before a maneuver war. Furthermore, many of these Arab States are out of Israel's strategic reach, and thus, Israel's Air Force cannot fulfill the role of strategic deterrence. This development is probably Israel's most dangerous and important issue relating to the NSS from the conventional warfare aspect.

War in the region in the future most probably will be different from the ones we have fought in the past. Winning a war might not only be the result of operational victory on the ground, in the air and at sea, but will depend greatly on the ability of Israel to absorb a strategic attack, project its vital centers and decisively counterattack. This can be achieved by acquiring the ability to use different means to shoot down incoming missiles, to destroy the enemy's ability to launch them, and, mostly, on the ability to project massive fire power on enemy targets, including population centers, as an act of retaliation.

Israel's air power is still very important, but Israel cannot base its future strategic deterrence on the air force alone. In the past Israel's NSS was updated according to changes in doctrine, weapon systems and the organization, but now we probably need a complete new concept for the future NSS.

In the future it will be proper to maintain a superior air force, but not in the place of developing and maintaining strategic deterrence using satellites and alternative conventional weapon systems.

Fire Power in the Ground Battle

The concept that based the air plane as the strategic and tactical fire power carrier and deliverer, was correct until the Yom Kippur War. In this war, Israel lost its ability to project fire power from the air in support of the ground battle as a

result of modern antiaircraft weapons. Since the airplane was introduced to warfare, its use was influenced by weather. From the beginning of the 1970s airpower's ability to fly freely was greatly reduced by modern antiaircraft batteries. With the ground to ground long range missiles, runways can be damaged and air bases attacked, which will reduce further enemy air's capability. For all of these reasons, the air force will be greatly restricted in supporting the ground forces on the tactical and operational level. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the development and deployment of alternative modern weapon systems in order to prolong Israel's superiority in the ground battle.

In my view, the logic of "cultivating our relative advantage" should be implied, instead of the traditional "giving an answer to the gaps." The greatest effort in building this superiority should be directed to the "quality components of our force," in which we have a relative advantage. Therefore it is wise, to "pull" the war to the technological field as much as possible. As the war between Israel and the Arab nation becomes more and more technological, Israel's relative advantage will grow. The opposite is probably true as well. As the war becomes less and less technological Israel's relative advantage becomes smaller.

Here it would be legitimate to ask if technology will always be an advantage to Israel. Israel is indeed a hi-tech developer, and on a much higher level than the Arab nations, but Israel's

hi-tech must compete not simply with the Arab's hi-tech, but with the best they can buy: T-80 tanks, MIG 29 fighters, F-15/16, TOW-2 and so forth. In such a situation, Israel might find itself in a worse position after the Arab's purchase hi tech systems superior to those available to Israel. The importance of this question is emphasized when one understands the character of hi-tech weapon systems. Even a "stupid" operator can at times achieve very good results using a hi-tech weapon. For example, not just anyone can purchase the skill of riding a horse to be a knight, but even a non-fit soldier with only elementary education can easily shoot down a 30 million dollar fighter using a hand-held anti-aircraft missile. The combination of a hi-tech weapon and a "smart" soldier is *synergetic*, meaning that even a small difference between the personal capabilities of two pilots flying equally modern air fighters can be significant in the final result of the battle between them. It is true that hi-tech weapons can be used by "stupid" warriors, but when used by "smart" ones, the result may be significantly greater. In the modern battlefield, even a small technological advantage, can result in a very high destruction ratio. Because there is now and, hopefully, always will be a clear quality advantage to Israel's soldiers as warfare moves to the ever more sophisticated technological field, Israel's relative advantage will grow.

Depth

Ever seeking peace, and because it does not want to become a two-nation state, Israel will not keep most of the territories it captured in the Six Day War. Therefore, Israel will not possess strategic and operational geographical depth. The term strategic depth is related most usually to land, geographical space. In truth, this is a very simplistic way of putting it. However, strategic depth is a multi-dimensional term. As a geo-political term, for example, allies, mutual interests and international support, contribute to strategic depth. The Jewish people around the world are actually strategic depth to Israel, as are the Arab demography and Muslim nations to the Arab states.

With the lack of "horizontal" strategic depth, and in view of future threats, it is necessary to rely on all the components of strategic depth. The term "depth," in modern warfare, is not only based on the face of the earth, the depth of the sea and the sky above, but also on outer space. The term relates to volume and not only to area. Israel's military power in the future, in war and peace, will have to be based on investing great national resources, and on scientific and technological development, in order to stay within the security standards attendant to modern warfare.

Risks and Military Power

Basic strategic factors in the Middle East are changing. Side by side to the growing economical and modern military power

of the Arab states, a process is developing that gives hope that some day there will be real peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. A reality of formal peace agreements with no real conciliation between nations hides many risks. Arab threats can be very dangerous even without war. It is possible that at least a political, economic, or cultural war could develop, and, in the worst case, a violent attrition of terrorist actions inside Israel. The advantages of peace are clear, but it will take many years to achieve peace with real conciliation. Peace will also involve the loss of operational and tactical depth and the creation of easy circumstances for using terrorism against Israel.

Israel must be ready for these new realities. First of all, Israel cannot reduce further its security budget. If, conflict in the region comes to an end, and the threats against Israel are lifted, it will be possible to devote less resources to the security budget. Although, even then there will be a need for a strong military to keep the peace if it is ever challenged.

A Pessimistic and Optimistic Remark

An analysis of Israel's strategic situation in the Middle East can lead to both a pessimistic and an optimistic conclusion at the same time. On the pessimistic side, Israel has no real way to deal with the numerical superiority of its neighbors. Even if all the Jews in the world should immigrate some day to Israel, we will still be considerably smaller than our neighbors. This fact

has a direct influence on Israel's endurance and the Arabs endurance. Israel will never be able to defeat in a final way its enemies. The primary architect of Israel's NSS, David Ben Gurion, said: "There is one historical difference between us and our enemies... our side cannot afford a last battle. We cannot assume ever that we can defeat our enemy in one decisive battle which will be the last and after it there will be no need to clash or to go to war. We have no ground to assume that by one war, we can finish the problem. Our enemies can assume that too.

After every war, and after every victory, we will stand again facing the same problem. We will stand in face of the second third forth and fifth round. They can assume that the second round will finish the problem, because they have unlimited man power and means." Therefore, Israel always will have, to some degree, to "rely on it's sword," and to allocate a great deal of its sources to the existence of a modern and powerful military. The Arab's endurance will force us to live for many years, strong and alert.

On the other hand, from here the optimistic view, although it is true that the basic numbers play to the Arab side, *the power in modern war (as in modern economy), is not determined by the quantity alone. The power is determined by the multiplication of the quantity. In the quality category (personnel, science and technology, modern weapon systems), Israel has a great advantage.* The proper use of this relative advantage could be used as a

substitute for its inferiority in endurance for many years to come. During this time we will try to make peace with our neighbors.

WMD Balance

It is clear that Arab states such as Iraq and Iran have and are continuing to develop Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). They have chemical and biological capabilities and are putting great efforts into achieving a nuclear capability. Israel has never admitted having a nuclear capability, but strategic deterrence is achieved by having the Arab states perceive that Israel does. If the Arab side ever achieves a nuclear capability there will danger not only to Israel but to the west in general. Jimmy Carter said recently that the West must do everything it can to prevent extremist Arab states from acquiring nuclear weapons. When asked, "but Israel has them, why not the Arabs?" his answer was that the Arabs would likely use them but Israel would not. My view is that the basic assumption should be that sometime in the future the Arab states will achieve nuclear capabilities. Acting on this assumption, Israel must keep up development and manufacturing of ballistic missile and sophisticated antimissile systems. Furthermore, Israel must put more effort and money in achieving quality intelligence about Arab states with potential nuclear capabilities. Most important of all, Israel will have to get used to the term "mutual deterrence" in this matter, and be

able to defend itself with the best weapon systems, and strike back (or first) if under WMD threat.

The Jewish State

Some areas in Israel that were captured in the Six Day War, have great security importance. They are a good base from which to launch fires and to terrorist attacks, and from which threaten the personal security of every Israeli. Israel owned strategic depth when it controlled the Sinai after the Six Day War. The West Bank and the Golan Heights today give Israel operational depth, but still have great security value. Even if Israel was free to annex these territories, it would be a bad move, because the Zionist goal is to have a one nationality state, and not a bi-national state. Therefore, there is no motivation to annex these territories. There is simply no justification to surrender the main rationale of a Jewish state to a state where the Jews will eventually be a minority. Although every square meter of land and every hill are important to Israel's security, the State of Israel itself is more important.

Security and Peace

A sword hangs over Israel's neck but not over the Arab's. Therefore, although Israel should be considerate to the Arab cause she must be very careful not to do so at any price. There are two "red line" categories to be considered. The first, from a security standpoint, the existence of Israel. The second, from the moral standpoint, Israel must be a Jewish state and not a bi-

national state. On these two fundamentals national existence is based. Israel must stick to defensive assets which are a substitution for security depth lost due to the return of territories, and not to compromise on them. Israel must not back down on its claim to border corrections which are critical to its security. Secure borders must be based on two foundations: geographical borders and demographical ones. These borders give Israel the possibility to defend against external threats as well as internal ones. The demographic border is more important than the geographic one.

Israel must behave as a democracy among non democracies. She must honor territorial, economic and cultural obligations. If, and when, the day will come when Israel will be accepted in the region as one of the Middle East States, this will fulfill the optimal condition for its security. Until this day comes, Israel remains dependent on its superior military.

Above all, the fundamental condition for Israel's national security is its internal strength. Israel's society must basically agree on the caricature of the Jewish democratic state. Most critical of all is the consensus on national security issues.

The Jewish nation must always be ready to defend its existence by any means. That is a moral command and denying it is immoral. The relationship between Israel and the Arabs obligates

Israel, with no fault, to rely on its sword and to constantly keep an efficient deterrence potential and capability.

At this historical time, at the end of the Twentieth Century, when there are talks between Israel and the Arabs, and efforts to achieve peace in the region, Israel must stay on watch, more than in the past. The giving back of territories and the loss of defensive depth will force Israel to rely on a high quality military force, and to develop and deploy hi-tech long range strategic weapon systems on the ground, at sea and in the air and in space. Progress toward termination of the conflict and creating the conditions for reconciliation between the nations in the area, obligates Israel to nourish its national security, including one of its fundamentals - peace.

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