



Converging Enemy Threats on Israel by Prof. Louis René Beres

BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 299, May 28, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Israeli strategic planners must beware the converging twin hazards of Iranian nuclear weapons and Palestinian statehood.

The following brief essay makes an informed case for a substantially enhanced Israeli consideration of foreseeable enemy “synergies.” The concept of synergy signifies that the ordinarily binding axioms of geometry can sometimes be overridden by certain intersecting phenomena. Whenever synergy is understood in expressly military or strategic terms, these complex phenomena may include a variety of converging or interpenetrating threats. Here, however counterintuitive, the geo-strategic whole offered by enemy perils could turn out to be greater than the sum of its adversarial parts.

In essence, it means that when individual perils are examined from the standpoint of how each one affects another, the cumulative effect can be worse than would be suggested by a simple addition of increments. For Israeli military and defense planners, there can be no more important or urgent expression of synergy than one particularly critical pair of threats. These are the seemingly discrete, but integrally linked, hazards of Iranian nuclear weapons and Palestinian statehood.

This unique and widely-unrecognized synergy should now be treated with an appropriate intellectual regard. Iran and Palestine, as “negative force multipliers,” do not represent separate or unrelated hazards to Israel. Instead, they define mutually reinforcing, and potentially existential perils. Consequently, Jerusalem must do whatever it can to simultaneously eliminate or reduce the expected harms on both conjoined fronts.

To be sure, Israel will need to continuously enhance its multilayered active defenses. As long as incoming rocket aggressions from Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon were to

remain conventional, the inevitable "leakage" could still be considered tolerable. But once these rockets might be fitted with chemical and/or biological materials, any such porosity could rapidly prove "unacceptable."

Facing Iranian nuclear missiles, Israel's "Arrow" ballistic missile defense system would reasonably require a fully 100% reliability of interception. To achieve any such level of reliability, however, would be impossible. Now, assuming that the prime minister has already abandoned any residual hopes for a cost-effective eleventh-hour preemption against pertinent Iranian nuclear assets, which is an altogether credible assumption at this very late date, Israeli defense planners must look towards long-term stable deterrence.

Israel's leaders also will have to accept that certain leaders of its overlapping enemies might not always satisfy the complex criteria of rational behavior in world politics. In such improbable but still conceivable circumstances, assorted Jihadist adversaries in Palestine, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, or elsewhere might sometime refuse to back away from their contemplated aggressions against Israel.

Facing a new and incalculable synergy from Iranian and Palestinian aggressions, Israel will need to take appropriate steps to assure that it does not become the object of any non-conventional attacks from these enemies, and that it can successfully deter all possible forms of non-conventional conflict. To meet these ambitious goals, Jerusalem must retain its recognizably far-reaching conventional superiority in pertinent weapons and capable manpower, including effective tactical control over the Jordan Valley.

In principle, such retentions could reduce the overall likelihood of ever actually having to enter into any chemical, biological, or nuclear exchange with regional adversaries. Correspondingly, Israel should plan to begin to move incrementally beyond its increasingly perilous posture of "deliberate nuclear ambiguity." By shifting toward prudently selective kinds of "nuclear disclosure," Israel may be able to better deter its enemies.

Paradoxically, Israeli planners may soon have to acknowledge that the efficacy and credibility of their country's nuclear deterrence posture could sometime vary inversely with enemy perceptions of Israeli nuclear destructiveness. However ironic or counter-intuitive, enemy views of a too-large or too-destructive Israeli nuclear deterrent force, or of an Israeli force that is not sufficiently invulnerable to first-strike attack, could undermine this deterrence posture.

Also critical is that Israel's current and prospective adversaries will see the Jewish state's nuclear retaliatory forces as "penetration capable." This suggests forces that seem assuredly capable of penetrating any Arab or Iranian aggressor's active defenses.

The Israeli task may also require more incrementally explicit disclosures of nuclear targeting doctrine, and accordingly, a steadily expanding role for cyber-defense and cyber-war. Alas, even before undertaking such delicately important refinements, Israel will need to systematically differentiate between adversaries that are rational and irrational.

Overall, the success of Israel's national deterrence strategies will be contingent upon an informed prior awareness of enemy preferences, and of specific enemy hierarchies of preferences. In this connection, altogether new and open-minded attention will need to be focused on the seeming emergence of "Cold War II" between Russia and the United States. This time around, for example, the relationship between Jerusalem and Moscow could possibly prove helpful rather than adversarial.

It may even be reasonable to explore whether this once hostile relationship could turn out to be more strategically gainful for Israel, than its traditionally historic ties to the United States. At this starkly transitional moment in geostrategic time, when Washington could conceivably decide to align itself with Tehran and Damascus against ISIS, virtually anything is possible.

The creation of a Palestinian state would, by definition, reduce Israel's already-residual strategic depth. Israel's missile bases (that constitute part of its second-strike capability) would be within easy reach of missiles from Palestinian-ruled territories. Palestinian control of the Judean mountain heights also could affect negatively Israel's early warning capabilities.

These detrimental realities would be exacerbated by the nuclearization of Iran. Israel would then have to focus on several mutually reinforcing strategic dangers at the same time, and would likely discover that the combined effect could prove overwhelming.

All this is aside from the danger that a Palestinian state could fall victim to Jihadist insurgencies raging across the region such as ISIS. Palestine might also end up in the Iranian ideological orbit, in either case the hazard to Israel would exceed the simple sum of intersecting threats.

The coming together of threats from Iran and Palestine warrants utterly resolute and rapt attention in Jerusalem.

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