

## **Israeli National Security, 1973-96**

**Efraim Inbar**

Reprinted with permission from  
*The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*  
Vol. 555 (January 1998): 62-81

© The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies  
Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 52900, Israel  
<http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa>  
[besa@mail.biu.ac.il](mailto:besa@mail.biu.ac.il)  
ISSN 0793-1042  
February 1998

### **The Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies**

The BESA Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University was founded by Dr. Thomas O. Hecht, a Canadian Jewish community leader. The Center is dedicated to the memory of Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, who concluded the first Arab-Israel peace agreement. The Center, a non-partisan and independent institute, seeks to contribute to the advancement of Middle East peace and security by conducting policy-relevant research on strategic subjects, particularly as they relate to the national security and foreign policy of Israel.

*BESA Security and Policy Studies* serve as a forum for publication or re-publication of research conducted by BESA associates. Publication of a work by BESA signifies that it is deemed worthy of public consideration but does not imply endorsement of the author's views or conclusions. *BESA Colloquia on Strategy and Diplomacy* summarize the papers delivered at conferences and seminars held by the Center, for the academic, military, official and general publics. In sponsoring these discussions, the BESA Center aims to stimulate public debate on, and consideration of, contending approaches to problems of peace and war in the Middle East. *A listing of recent BESA publications can be found at the end of this booklet.*

### **International Advisory Board**

Founder of the Center and Chairman of the Advisory Board: Dr. Thomas O. Hecht

Members: Prof. Moshe Arens, Mrs. Neri Bloomfield, Dr. Josef Burg, Madame Madeline Feher, Gen. Alexander M. Haig, Mr. Robert Hecht, Hon. Shlomo Hillel, Maj. Gen. (res.) Mordechai Hod, Sir Robert Rhodes James, Mr. Yehuda Levy, Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman, Mr. Robert K. Lifton, Maj. Gen. (res.) Daniel Matt, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Rt. Hon. Brian Mulroney, Prof. Yuval Neeman, Maj. Gen. (res.) Ori Orr, Mr. Seymour D. Reich, Amb. Meir Rosenne, Prof. Eugene V. Rostow, Hon. Yitzhak Shamir, Lt. Gen. (res.) Dan Shomron, Amb. Zalman Shoval, Amb. Norman Spector, Dr. Adolphe Steg, Mr. Muzi Wertheim

### **International Academic Advisory Board**

Eliot A. Cohen *SAIS Johns Hopkins University*, Irwin Cotler *McGill University*, Steven R. David *Johns Hopkins University*, Yehezkel Dror *Hebrew University*, Lawrence Freedman *King's College*, Robert J. Lieber *Georgetown University*, John J. Mearsheimer *University of Chicago*, Amos Perlmutter *American University*, Alvin Z. Rubinstein *University of Pennsylvania*, Bruce M. Russett *Yale University*, Albert Wohlstetter *University of Chicago* (deceased), Roberta Wohlstetter *Pan Heuristics*

### **Research Staff**

*BESA Center Director:* Prof. Efraim Inbar

*Senior Resident Scholar:* Prof. Barry Rubin.

*Senior Visiting Scholar:* Dr. Col. (res.) Shmuel Gordon

*Senior Research Associates:* Dr. Zeev Bonen, Prof. Stuart A. Cohen, Dr. Gil Feiler, Prof. Eliyahu Kanovsky, Dr. Amikam Nachmani, Maj. Gen. (res.) Avraham Rotem, Prof. Shmuel Sandler, Dr. Max Singer and Prof. Gerald Steinberg

*Research Associates:* Dr. Menachem Klein, Dr. Avi Kober, and Dr. Dany Shoham

*Coordinator for External Affairs:* David M. Weinberg

*Program Coordinator:* Hava Koen

*Production Editor:* Elisheva Brown

*Executive Secretary:* Alona Briner Rozenman

## Israeli National Security, 1973-96

By EFRAIM INBAR

**ABSTRACT:** This article focuses on the main Israeli decision makers, reviews their perceptions of the changing strategic environment, and analyzes the dilemmas and policies with respect to Israel's main national security components. A review of the period shows much continuity: (1) the pattern of decision making remained highly centralized; (2) many of the Israeli leaders were socialized in the defense establishment; (3) Yitzhak Rabin was the towering figure for most of the period; (4) the main elements of Israeli strategic thinking (deterrence, early warning, decisive victory, and self-reliance) remained constant; (5) Israel did not succumb to the temptation to adopt an open nuclear strategy; (6) the Israeli level of threat perception became lower primarily because of the emergence of a more benign international environment. We see in the 1990s a slight departure from past premises and policies, although all in all, it can be said that Israel has not fundamentally changed its security doctrine during the period reviewed here.

---

*Efraim Inbar is associate professor of political studies at Bar-Ilan University and director of its Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies.*

THE Yom Kippur War of October 1973 was a watershed event in Israeli political history and in the development of its national security outlook. Although the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) repelled much of the Egyptian-Syrian invasion and successfully carried out a counteroffensive—which forced the two countries to ask for a ceasefire—the war did not provide Israel with a sense of victory. Israel suffered a painfully high number of casualties during the hostilities, and afterward it was isolated internationally.

The shock of the 1973 war discredited the political leadership of the time and ushered in a younger generation of Israeli leaders. This development eventually led to a change in Israel's political system, a shift from a hegemonic party to a multiparty system, with two large parties, Labor and Likud, competing for political dominance. The Yom Kippur War also shattered Israel's confidence in the IDF and caused the fundamentals of Israeli strategic thinking to be questioned. This article focuses on several areas of Israeli national security in an attempt to underline trends of continuity and change. It offers a composite portrait of the main decision makers, reviews their perceptions of the changing strategic environment of Israel, and analyzes the dilemmas and policies concerning Israel's main national security components.

A review of the period 1973-96 shows much continuity on several accounts.

1. The pattern of decision making remained highly centralized.

2. Many of the new Israeli leaders were socialized in the defense establishment.

3. Yitzhak Rabin was the towering figure for most of the period.

4. The main elements of Israeli strategic thinking (deterrence, early warning, decisive victory, and self-reliance) remained constant.

5. Israel did not succumb to the temptation to adopt an open nuclear strategy and continued, therefore, to rely on building a superior conventional force.

6. The Israeli level of threat perception became lower primarily because of the emergence of a more benign international environment.

Through these patterns, we see in the 1990s a slight departure from past premises and policies, although all in all, it can be said that Israel did not fundamentally change its security doctrine over the decades reviewed here.

#### THE DECISION MAKERS: A COMPOSITE PORTRAIT

Israeli decision making in defense matters has always been extremely centralized and has remained the coveted privilege of the very few.<sup>1</sup> The defense minister is the most important decision maker. He has almost exclusive authority within his ministry, and in only a few cases do others, such as the prime minister (PM) and

1. See Yehuda Ben-Meir, *National Security Decisionmaking: The Israeli Case* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1986); Yoram Peri, *Between Battles and Ballots: Israeli Military in Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

senior cabinet members, have access to the defense decision-making process. Inclusion occurs in decisions about the use of force by the IDF and the appointment of the chief of staff, himself a key player with greater influence than most cabinet members.<sup>2</sup> Other instances in which the decision-making circle is expanded are those with a large impact on the national budget or with important diplomatic ramifications.

In accordance with the Israeli political milieu, informal fora are preferred. Formally, the decisions are approved by the full cabinet or by the Ministerial Committee for Defense. Yet, this committee, mandatory by law since 1991, has limited input and is primarily a means for bestowing extra status on specific cabinet members. The plenum of the Parliamentary Committee for Security and Foreign Affairs is the stage for the exchange of views, occasionally privy to sensitive material. Several of its subcommittees have greater access to classified material, although they perform a primarily watchdog function rather than formulate policy. Notably, all attempts to establish a National Security Council have failed, partly because of the opposition on the part of the existing bureaucracies to introduce a new player. Yitzhak Rabin's reluctance to establish such a council was an important factor in preserving the status quo in the many years he was in a position of influence. As a result, the IDF and the Ministry of Defense were the main sources of expertise.

2. For the types of interaction between the chief of staff, the PM, and the defense minister, see Peri, *Between Battles and Ballots*, pp. 156-74.

Most decision makers, in the period under discussion, grew up in the defense establishment and had a good grasp of national security problems. Among them, Rabin developed over the years an unsurpassed authority in defense matters and became the dominating figure in national security issues during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>3</sup> As chief of staff, Rabin led the IDF to triumphant victory in the 1967 war. As ambassador to the United States from 1968 to 1973, he dealt with important security-related issues. From 1974 to 1977, Rabin took over as PM, later serving as defense minister (1984-90) and returning to the premiership and defense portfolio (1992-95).

Shimon Peres was similarly an old hand in security affairs. In the 1950s and 1960s, he made a seminal contribution to the formation of Israel's alliance with France, the building of the Dimona nuclear reactor, and the infrastructure for the Israeli military industries. In 1974, Peres became defense minister in Rabin's first government. In addition, he served as PM (1984-86) and foreign minister (1986-88). In the Labor-led government (1992-96), Peres returned to the Foreign Ministry (1992-95), ultimately becoming PM following the assassination of Rabin in November 1995.

PM Menachem Begin (1977-83) spent most of his political career as the opposition leader, being exposed to defense issues only when serving in the Parliamentary Committee for

3. For Rabin's contribution to Israel's national security, see Efraim Inbar, "Yitzhak Rabin and Israel's National Security," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 20 (June 1997).

Security and Foreign Affairs and as minister without portfolio in the 1967-70 period. The key posts in his first cabinet, defense and foreign affairs, went to Major General (reserve [res.]) Ezer Weizman and Lieutenant General (res.) Moshe Dayan, both with rich national security experience.

After the 1981 elections, Begin appointed Major General (res.) Ariel Sharon as minister of defense. Like Weizman, Sharon was on Rabin's general staff in 1967, and also like Weizman, he left the army (in 1973) when it became clear that the top IDF position would be denied to him. Sharon, too, joined an opposition party. Serving in the first Begin government, Sharon's influence in security affairs grew until he officially became defense minister in Begin's second government. He and then Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan were the architects of the 1982 Lebanon War, the preventive rationale of which was similar to the 1956 Sinai Campaign—one of their formative strategic experiences.<sup>4</sup>

When Sharon was forced to resign in February 1983, Moshe Arens was called as the new defense minister. Arens, an aeronautical engineer, was in 1962 the chief engineer of the Israel Aircraft Industry, the largest defense company in Israel. Later, when the Likud came to power in 1977, Arens became the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Secu-

4. For their outlook on the Lebanon War, see Ariel Sharon, *Warrior: The Autobiography of Ariel Sharon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), pp. 422-92; Rafael Eitan, *A Story of a Soldier* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Maariv Library, 1985), pp. 205-320.

rity and Foreign Affairs; in 1982 he was appointed Israel's ambassador to the United States. He served as defense minister (1983-84), minister without portfolio (1984-87), foreign minister (1988-90), and again as defense minister (1990-92) in the right wing, Shamir-led government.

PM Yitzhak Shamir was a civilian, though he spent a decade in the Mossad. In October 1979, Shamir replaced Dayan in the Foreign Ministry, and in October 1983 he succeeded Begin as PM. He served in this capacity until July 1992 (with the exception of the period from November 1984 to October 1986). His involvement in daily security affairs was minimal, allowing Arens and Rabin, his two defense ministers, great leeway. His role was central, however, in Israel's decision not to retaliate against Iraqi missile attacks in the winter of 1991.<sup>5</sup>

New blood entered Israel's national security leadership when Benjamin Netanyahu took over the political reins in June 1996. A former junior officer in an elite IDF commando unit, Netanyahu proved to be an eloquent advocate of Israel's case abroad. Also new to the inner circle of decision makers is Netanyahu's defense minister, Major General (res.) Yitzhak Mordechai. Mordechai ended his military service in October 1995. Like others before him, he entered politics after becoming frustrated by efforts to block his career in the IDF, and he joined the Likud. Like many other Israeli generals who became politicians, he was a security-oriented pragmatist. Other generals

5. See his memoirs, *Summing-Up* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Eidanim, 1994), pp. 263-72.

serving in Netanyahu's cabinet are Sharon and Eitan.

What is revealed by this overview is the dominance of ex-generals at the helm of defense matters. The ex-generals, on both sides of the political fence, underwent the same IDF socialization process. The career pattern of Rabin, "Mr. Security" in Israelis' eyes, is not that different from Weizman's, Sharon's, or Mordechai's. The so-called civilians (Peres, Begin, Shamir, Arens, and Netanyahu) accumulated limited experience in Israeli national security before exercising influence on defense matters. In the context of the current Israeli political culture, it would be odd to place defense policymaking powers in the hands of a civilian with no previous experience in national security issues.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE  
STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT  
AND CHANGING  
THREAT PERCEPTIONS

Security policies are devised to cope with emerging threats from the strategic environment. The outlook on the environment, therefore, is the basis for policymaking. The first years after 1973 were characterized by an extremely high threat perception, which was gradually replaced with an evaluation that the existential threats, though still present, were receding. Moreover, fears about a large-scale conventional military encounter with Israel's neighbors have gradually reduced as the peace process has evolved since the late 1970s. Nevertheless, in the mid-1970s, grave concerns emerged about

the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the region. In addition, since the mid-1980s, the Israeli defense establishment has become sensitized to the fact that the country is vulnerable to missile attacks, which amplified fears about nonconventional weapons.

Following the 1973 war, PM Rabin believed Israel was facing one of the most dangerous periods in its history because of the collapse of Israel's foreign relations; the country was left with "only one friend in the world and that was the U.S."<sup>6</sup> In Rabin's final analysis, "Israel shall dwell alone and only our military might guarantees our existence."<sup>7</sup> Rabin's Jewish prism, formed by the Jewish historical experience of suffering and solitude, was most noted in his reaction to the November 1975 anti-Zionist resolution by the United Nations: "The whole world is against us—when was it not so!"<sup>8</sup>

The perception of enhanced Arab international leverage and the increase in resources available for Arab military buildup as the result of the oil crisis, coupled with a more tenuous Israeli relationship with the United States, led Israel's leadership to believe that war was imminent. Rabin repeatedly expressed his apprehensions of an impending war during the 1974-76 period.<sup>9</sup> Peres continued to fear war even following

6. Quoted in Robert Slater, *Rabin of Israel* (London: Robson Books, 1977), p. 204.

7. *Maariv*, 25 Sept. 1974.

8. Doron Rosenblum, "The 1000 Days of Rabin," *Haaretz Magazine*, 6 May 1977.

9. *Haaretz*, 8 Aug. 1984; *Maariv*, 24 Apr. 1975; *Haaretz*, 5 Sept. 1975; *Maariv*, 26 Feb. 1976.

Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in October 1977.<sup>10</sup>

Under Rabin, Israel's immediate goals were to rebuild an adequate and confident military force and to delay a war with the Arabs until the political circumstances improved and until the IDF was militarily ready for such an encounter.<sup>11</sup> Good relations with the United States were needed for both objectives. The United States was regarded by Israel as sensitive enough to its security needs to be relied on as a mediator. Therefore, Rabin's government reached the September 1975 agreement with Egypt, which included a withdrawal from the western part of the Sinai peninsula. As a result of this agreement, Israel succeeded in greatly reducing Egypt's incentive to go to war, thus weakening the potential two-front Arab coalition, and managed to secure arms supplies from the United States, which brokered the agreement.

In 1977, PM Begin inherited a well-armed Israel with greater freedom of action than it had enjoyed earlier. The Sadat visit to Jerusalem in 1977 and the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty alleviated Israel's military and political situation. Yet the existential fears of the Israeli leadership remained. Egypt was ostracized in an Arab world that was not ready for reconciliation with the Jewish state. While Israel was committed to returning to the 1967 line along its

southern border, the size and the quality of the arsenals of Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia were perceived as gradually neutralizing the territorial advantages conferred on Israel by its control of Judea, Samaria, and the Golan Heights. Therefore, Sharon, the defense minister, concluded in 1981, "We face on our present borders the very same defense problems we had on our 1967 lines."<sup>12</sup> Another reason for great concern at that time was "Soviet expansionism."<sup>13</sup>

Two Soviet allies of particular concern in the early 1980s were the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Syria. For ideological reasons, the PM and his Likud colleagues were firmly opposed to Palestinian political demands, and the growing success of the PLO was seen as a great challenge to the Jewish claim over the Land of Israel. Until then, the prevalent view regarded Palestinian activity as a mere harassment devoid of strategic significance. Within the nationalistic perspective of the Begin government, terrorist acts assumed great symbolic significance, which somewhat overshadowed military strategic considerations. In the early 1980s, the PLO developed its political and military infrastructure in Lebanon, establishing a state within a state and acquiring destructive weaponry such as tanks and long-range artillery. What alarmed Jerusalem in particular was the Palestinian ability for

10. Shimon Peres, *Tomorrow Is Now* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mabat, 1978), p. 226.

11. See Yitzhak Navon, "The Changes in the Israeli Position on the Arab-Israeli Conflict" (in Hebrew), in *Between War and Settlements*, ed. Alouph Hareven and Yehiam Padan (Tel Aviv: Zmora, Bitan, 1977), p. 158.

12. Ariel Sharon, "Israel's Strategic Problems in the 1980s" (official text) (Address to the Symposium on Strategic Problems at Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel, 14 Dec. 1981), p. 8.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 1.



massive bombardment of Israeli settlements in the north of the country. As a result, Israel sought to limit the PLO's freedom and ability to act from Lebanon, as well as to curb Syria's presence and influence in that country. Israel became particularly apprehensive of Syrian army buildup and its drive toward what was termed in Damascus "strategic parity with Israel." The Syrian military presence in Lebanon was no longer seen as having a divisive effect on Syria's ability to wage war, but as an option for a two-prong attack on Israel. These perceptions led to the 1982 Lebanon War.<sup>14</sup>

A new element in Israel's threat perception was the advancing Iraqi nuclear program. Already in August 1978, Begin called a high-level meeting on the Iraqi reactor; the participants decided to concentrate on diplomatic means and to monitor Iraqi progress carefully.<sup>15</sup> Begin saw in the spread of nuclear weapons to Iraq a danger of the total destruction of the Jewish state, a new Holocaust.<sup>16</sup> Two years later, in October 1980, the Israeli government approved military action against the Iraqi nuclear reactor,<sup>17</sup> which led to the successful June 1981 air strike. Israel's nuclear fears were relieved for a decade.

The geostrategic situation of Israel improved in the 1980s. An important element in this improvement was Israel's relations with the United States, which had become considerably better despite occasional disagreements. The strategic cooperation between the two countries was gradually institutionalized, and during President Reagan's two terms (1981-89), the two countries developed frameworks and mechanisms for further cooperation. Several important agreements between the two countries were signed.<sup>18</sup> Israel felt reassured by American statements and behavior.<sup>19</sup>

The Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) lowered the chances of war against Israel. Iraq's military engagement limited the possibility of an effective eastern front, and Arab countries' attention moved away from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the gulf, as they sought to help Iraq neutralize the new Islamic threat embodied in the old Persian enemy. In addition, Israel's belligerent neighbor, Syria, sided with Iran and, therefore, was isolated in the Arab world. Nevertheless, despite a lower threat perception, Defense Minister Arens learned from the Iran-Iraq war that the Middle East was not ripe for peace.<sup>20</sup> In

14. For an analysis of the war, see Avner Yaniv, *Dilemmas of Security: Politics, Strategy and the Israeli Experience in Lebanon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

15. Shlomo Nakdimon, *Tammuz in Flames* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Eidanim, 1986), pp. 81-83.

16. See Aryeh Naor, *Begin in Power* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 1993), pp. 218-19.

17. Nakdimon, *Tammuz in Flames*, pp. 147-51.

18. For the evolution of the strategic cooperation, see Shai Feldman, *The Future of U.S.-Israel Strategic Cooperation* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute, 1996), pp. 5-21.

19. For Shamir's high regard for the American friendship, see his *Summing-Up*, pp. 147-50. Arens characterized this period as a "honeymoon" in Israeli-U.S. relations. See his *Broken Covenant* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 1995), p. 25.

20. Moshe Arens, "The Termination of Wars," *Maarachot*, 292-93:4 (Mar.-Apr. 1984).

addition, Iraqi missile attacks on Tehran in the spring of 1988 signaled to Israel that it was within the range of Iraqi missiles as well. This realization grew into a major concern.

The *intifada*, which erupted in December 1987, was initially seen as a minor security problem, but the scope, intensity, and duration of the Palestinian uprising changed this initial evaluation. PM Shamir and his defense minister, Rabin, soon realized the radical goals of the *intifada*: Israel's withdrawal to the 1967 borders and the establishment of a Palestinian state. At that time, the two suspected that the Palestinians maintained their hopes of destroying Israel.<sup>21</sup> While the Palestinians' limited capabilities were not seen as an existential threat, the Israeli leadership gradually became cognizant of the corrosive effect of the *intifada* on Israel's social fiber and IDF morale. Furthermore, the struggle against the *intifada* increased the willingness of Israelis to make territorial concessions. Israel's response to the *intifada* was a strategy of attrition, which employed limited military force coupled with economic and administrative pressures. Arens, Rabin's successor, shared a similar perspective on the *intifada* and continued the same policies.<sup>22</sup>

The 1991 gulf war was a reminder of the vicissitudes of Mideastern poli-

21. For Shamir's evaluation, see his *Summing-Up*, p. 220; for Rabin's perception, see his "We Have Our Priorities," *Spectrum*, 6:11 (Apr. 1988).

22. For Israeli policies, see Efraim Inbar, "Israel's Small War: The Military Response," *Armed Forces and Society*, 18(1):38-39 (Fall 1991). See also Shamir, *Summing-Up*, pp. 219, 222; Arens, *Broken Covenant*, p. 15.

tics, the vulnerability of Israel to missile attacks, and the limits of Israeli military power. The Iraqi missile attacks (with conventional warheads) resulted in only minimal casualties, but the economic damage was considerable as the country was paralyzed for several weeks. PM Shamir preferred to react militarily in cooperation with the United States, but in the absence of this option and in light of the small number of casualties, he opted for not burdening the United States and the coalition against Iraq with Israeli unilateral action. Even the possibility of Iraqi attacks with chemical warheads was not seen by Shamir as an existential threat.<sup>23</sup> Arens, his defense minister, though more eager for a military response, also rejected the possibility of acting without American coordination.<sup>24</sup>

The gulf war was a turning point in the Israeli outlook on its environment. In the 1990s, the threat perception of the Israeli leadership stood in great contrast with that of earlier periods. This was particularly evident among the Laborites when compared to the 1970s. Rabin and Peres, the main political players of the period immediately after the 1973 war, played a crucial role in defense and foreign affairs two decades later, but their security prism had changed drastically.<sup>25</sup>

The most important change in the Israeli strategic equation was the col-

23. See Shamir, *Summing-Up*, pp. 271-72; Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 197-200, 208, 215-17, 229-30.

24. Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 193-235.

25. For their thinking in the 1990s, see Efraim Inbar, "Contours of Israel's New Strategic Thinking," *Political Science Quarterly*, 111(1):41-64 (Spring 1996).

lapse of the Soviet Union, a development fully grasped only after the gulf war. The collapse of the Soviet empire was seen by the Israeli leadership as creating a new international atmosphere; it was often credited with opening the door to peacemaking in the Middle East. In addition, it allowed hundreds of thousands of Jews from the Soviet Union to emigrate to Israel, which strengthened the Jewish state. Rabin also viewed the Iraqi defeat by the American-led coalition as having positive security results for Israel.<sup>26</sup> These developments strengthened the Arab perceptions of Israel as an entrenched Mideastern fact and seemed to have led to the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, which started a series of bilateral and multilateral negotiations between Israel and Arab countries. The impact of this shift was clearly expressed in the September 1993 Israel-PLO accord, and the October 1994 Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty. The 1979 Peace Treaty with Egypt, when added to these events, indicated to many Israeli leaders that a historic process of Arab acceptance of Israel was under way.

Rabin also noted that international attitudes toward the Jewish state had changed: "Israel is no longer 'a people that dwells alone.'"<sup>27</sup> Rabin stressed his conviction that Israel lives in a new environment: "The world is *no longer* against us. . . . States which never stretched their hand to us, states which condemned

us, which fought us . . . regard us today as a worthy and respectable address."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, already in 1992, Rabin assessed Israel's situation optimistically: "We live today in a period in which the threat to the very existence of Israel has been reduced."<sup>29</sup>

Yet despite Rabin's view that the probability of war was low for the near future and that the existential threat was reduced, he believed that Israel should continue to ready itself for serious military challenges. For him, the nature of the threats and the sources had changed. While the probability of war with the "first-ring countries" (Israel's immediate neighbors) was reduced as a result of the peace process, their capability to wage war was enhanced, primarily as a result of the presence of missiles and unconventional warheads. The main dangers perceived were not conventional strikes on Israel but terror attacks from radical Islamic groups and nuclear strikes from the more distant "second-ring" countries. For Rabin, the major enemy in the 1990s was Islamic Iran, which sponsored terror and was engaged in acquiring a nuclear capability.<sup>30</sup> In Rabin's eyes, terror was no longer a military nuisance but a strategic threat that could derail the peace process.

28. Yitzhak Rabin, speech to graduates of the National Security College (official text), 12 Aug. 1993, p. 3.

29. "Address by Yitzhak Rabin," in *Towards a New Era in U.S.-Israeli Relations*, p. 2.

30. "Interview with PM Rabin," *Bamahane*, 23 Sept. 1992, p. 9. See also Stuart A. Cohen, "Israel's Changing Military Commitments, 1981-1991," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 15(3):330-50 (Sept. 1992).

26. "Address by Yitzhak Rabin," in *Towards a New Era in U.S.-Israeli Relations*, ed. Yehudah Mirsky and Ellen Rice (Washington, DC: Washington Institute, 1992), pp. 1-2.

27. Rabin's address to the Knesset, in *Knesset Minutes*, 13 July 1992.

The most optimistic view belonged to Peres, who believed that the Middle East was close to peace and prosperity. He wrote, "Instead of visions of blood and tears, there will rise visions of happiness and beauty, life and peace."<sup>31</sup> He heralded the birth of a new Middle East in which war would be obsolete.<sup>32</sup>

Netanyahu's government, which came to office in June 1996, was less inclined than the Labor-led government to regard the Middle East as a benign environment. Yet even Netanyahu showed a rather low threat perception. He observed that past Israeli PMs were preoccupied with national security, "but today Israel can afford turning into a normal state, which will allow her prime minister to take care first of economic issues and social reforms."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, despite his evaluation that the prevention of the emergence of a nuclear Iran was Israel's first priority, his government moderated Israel's acrimonious tone against Iran. In his evaluation, the chances of a war with Syria were also low,<sup>34</sup> though his government was not ready to concede all of the Golan Heights (in contrast to the Labor-led government).

CONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE,  
EARLY WARNING, WAR-WINNING  
CAPABILITIES, AND SELF-RELIANCE

The three pillars of Israeli military doctrine have been deterrence, early warning, and the winning of a deci-

31. Shimon Peres with Aryeh Naor, *The New Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), p. 46.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 78.

33. *Haaretz*, 7 July 1996.

34. *Haaretz*, 26 Aug. 1996.

sive victory. The buildup of Israeli conventional military power was to deter the Arabs from launching a large-scale attack on Israel. In case of a deterrence failure, the working assumption was that Israeli intelligence would provide a sufficient early warning so as to allow Israel to mobilize the reserves (the bulk of the IDF) and to administer a decisive blow to the challengers of the status quo.<sup>35</sup> All three elements were called into question in light of the 1973 war. Egypt and Syria were not deterred; rather, they succeeded in surprising Israel. The IDF had difficulties in achieving a quick and decisive victory. Furthermore, the war shot down Israel's aspirations for self-reliance in the area of national security.

Indeed, since 1973, Israel's capability to deter armed conflict, particularly at the lower end of the violence spectrum, has eroded.<sup>36</sup> The Israeli nuclear option and its conventional power might deter an Arab attempt to destroy the Jewish state by a large-scale conventional attack, but uses of force against Israel short of an all-out attack can have devastating results for Israel. For example, a short advance into Israeli-held territory or a war of attrition, both intent on bleeding Israel, could be and have been very painful in political and material terms. In 1991, Israel failed to deter Iraq from attacking its cities with

35. Ariel Levite, *Offense and Defense in Israeli Military Doctrine* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Post; Tel Aviv University, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1989), pp. 25-62; Israel Tal, *National Security: The Few Against the Many* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1996), pp. 41-116.

36. Efraim Inbar and Shmuel Sandler, "Israel's Deterrence Strategy Revisited," *Security Studies*, 3(2):330-58 (Winter 1993-94).

missiles, resulting in economic paralysis in Israel.

Despite the problems surrounding Israeli deterrence after 1973, Israeli leadership has refrained from emphasizing nuclear deterrence. The 1973 war shook Israel's confidence in its conventional superiority, and fundamental assumptions concerning national security became subject to public debate. Nuclear weapons, in particular, attracted greater support than before the war.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, all Israeli governments rejected the option of an overt nuclear posture to enhance deterrence and preferred to continue the policy of nuclear ambiguity. The prevalent wisdom was that ambiguity best served Israel's interests. In any case, much of the Arab world sees Israel as a nuclear power,<sup>38</sup> and this perception has been beneficial in bringing Arabs to accept the Jewish state as a *fait accompli*.

In contrast to nuclear deterrence, conventional deterrence has become less dependable for several reasons. After 1973, it became clear that Israeli military superiority could not be easily translated into political gains. Even if Israel had the ability to win a war, its success could prove irrelevant to ensuing diplomatic developments. In 1973, an Egyptian military defeat was followed by Israeli withdrawals. The same happened in the Syrian sector. Similarly, military pre-

37. For the nuclear debate, see Efraim Inbar, "Israel and Nuclear Weapons Since October 1973," in *Security and Armageddon*, ed. Louis Rene Beres (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1985), pp. 62-67.

38. Ariel Levite and Emily Landau, *Israel's Nuclear Image: Arab Perceptions of Israel's Nuclear Posture* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Papyrus, 1994).

ponderance had little value in 1982. Israel withdrew its forces from Lebanon without achieving Christian hegemony or limitations on Syrian influence there. Even the weak Palestinian police force was not deterred from initiating armed conflict with the IDF in September 1996. Since 1973, the Arabs have recognized that if their power was not sufficient to defeat Israel militarily, it could be employed to create more favorable political conditions to further Arab interests.

The appearance of long-range ballistic missiles in the Arab arsenals, some armed with chemical warheads, has made the Israeli home front vulnerable, a new experience, and has somewhat balanced the tacit Israeli threat to strike at high-value targets with conventional airpower or with nonconventional warheads. In general, the Arab ability to launch missiles against targets in Israel compensates the Arabs for the Israel Air Force's ability to prevent air attacks on Israel. The emerging symmetry in the capacity of Israel and its rivals to inflict considerable damage on population centers allows the Arabs greater freedom of action and limits Israel's ability to escalate in order to prevent attacks on its population. The balance of terror—a questionable proposition in itself—could possibly eliminate the threats of large-scale invasion of Israel, but Israeli threats of "massive retaliation have no deterrent value against attacks at the lower levels of violence.

Whatever merits can be attributed to the Israeli restraint in 1991, it was costly in terms of deterrence. The lack of response to the missile attacks

damaged Israel's reputation for hitting back, which is essential for establishing deterrence. Furthermore, the Israeli defensive posture (in a passive and active mode) for dealing with missile attacks involving chemical warheads was similarly a problematic signal.<sup>39</sup> Bowing to public pressure, the government provided the population with gas masks and protection kits (passive defense). Later on, the efficacy of this equipment was found to be questionable. The Patriot surface-to-air missiles deployed to intercept missiles (active defense) failed dismally, and after the war, the IDF established a new command in charge of the home front designed to enhance the readiness of the civilian population for war. Paradoxically, preparing the population for missile attacks and chemical warfare is counterproductive in terms of deterrence, because it signals to the challenger that attacks on civilians are acceptable. Furthermore, defensive steps add little to deterrence because they do not threaten the challenger's territory or its highly valued targets.

Nevertheless, Israel is developing (with U.S. financial assistance) two systems to defend itself against ballistic missiles. The Arrow anti-ballistic missile (initiated in the mid-1980s) has passed several tests, and plans for the system call for it to be partially deployed by the end of the century. The Arrow's ability to hit a missile technologically more advanced than the Scud is not clear,

39. See Gerald Steinberg, "Israeli Responses to the Threat of Chemical Warfare" *Armed Forces & Society*, 20(1):85-101 (Fall 1993).

while the cost of intercepting a Scud is much higher than the price of the incoming missile. This exposes Israel to saturation attacks designed to exact a high economic cost even if the intercept is certain. Israel, with U.S. backing, is also engaged in the development of a missile boost-phase interception system, Moab, which uses unmanned aerial vehicles armed with Python 4 air-to-air missiles. The progress on this system and its estimated cost are not yet clear.

An important component in Israeli deterrence is its informal alliance with the United States. In the past, an attack on Israel was seen by the Arabs as a challenge to the United States.<sup>40</sup> With the Soviet Union no longer around, there is a decline in the general perception of Israel's value as an American ally. The calculus of American interests in the Middle East has changed, and small allies are less likely to be courted. The Gulf War demonstrated the problematic ally status of Israel when the United States made efforts to minimize the Israeli role. In the new American-dominated international order, the differing points of view between Jerusalem and Washington on the contours of a settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict are resurfacing to Israel's disadvantage. Israeli "intransigence" in the American-sponsored peace process has already led to Palestinian limited military action, which could be emulated by Syria.

40. Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Arab Rationality and Deterrence," in *Deterrence in the Middle East: Where Theory and Practice Converge*, ed. Aharon Klieman and Ariel Levite (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 91-92.

In addition, the peace process is problematic with respect to deterrence. There is an inherent tension between the requirements of a deterrence strategy and a conciliatory policy designed to lower tensions and achieve peace between Israel and its neighbors. A strong Israel is necessary for its acceptance as an unchallengeable fact, but Israeli military strength and the occasional use of force needed to maintain a reputation for toughness and readiness to fight could generate traditional fears in the Arab world regarding Israeli expansionism. Similarly, restraint meant to reassure the Arabs of Israeli moderation might be understood as weakness or lack of resolve and might rekindle the hope that the destruction of Israel in the near future is feasible.

The Netanyahu government, in contrast to its immediate predecessor, seems to have realized that Israel's deterrence has deteriorated and is now grappling with the problem.<sup>41</sup> One method that it has used to remedy the situation is to issue threatening statements. For example, in September 1996, David Levy, Netanyahu's foreign minister (he served in the same capacity during the Gulf War), warned Saddam Hussein that Baghdad would be destroyed in the case of missile attacks. He explained that in 1996 there was no reason to refrain from action in order to maintain the coalition against Iraq.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Netanyahu warned the Syrians several times not to attack Israel in the course of 1996.

The second pillar of Israeli military doctrine is early warning. The

1973 strategic surprise led, inter alia, to a reassessment of the structure and the performance of the national intelligence organs. It also generated much research, whose underlying lesson was that it is extremely difficult to supply adequate warning about decisions taken by Israel's enemies.<sup>43</sup> One of the lessons learned and stressed by the Agranat Inquiry Commission, which investigated the reasons for the successful surprise in the 1973 war, was that the intelligence establishment must be expanded and diversified. Subsequently, there was an attempt to strengthen the Mossad and the Research Unit in the Foreign Ministry, as well as the Intelligence Branch of the IDF. An adviser for intelligence to the PM was also appointed, for a short time only, as recommended by the Agranat Commission. After the beginning of the *intifada* in 1987, another strategic surprise, a research and evaluation unit was established in the General Security Services to deal primarily with the Palestinians. Nonetheless, the Intelligence Branch remained the most influential intelligence actor and the provider of the National Intelligence Estimate.

Since 1973, Israel has expanded considerably its capabilities in the areas of data collection and analysis, personnel, and equipment. In 1976, Israel expressed an interest in purchasing an intelligence satellite from the United States. This request was

43. See, inter alia, Zvi Lanir, *The Fundamental Surprise: The National Intelligence Crisis* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1983); Ariel Levite, *Intelligence and Strategic Surprises* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Ephraim Kam, *Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

41. *Haaretz*, 28 Nov. 1996.

42. *Maariv*, 6 Sept. 1996.

turned down, and, following a well-known pattern in the development of Israeli military items, the American denial provided the impetus for indigenous research and development leading to the launching of the Israeli-made spy satellite *Ofeq* in 1989.

Early warning against ballistic missiles, which became critical to providing a measure of defense to the Israeli population against conventional and nonconventional warheads after 1991, is one area in which Israel could not develop an independent capability. Such a project is beyond the means of a small state such as Israel, and as a result Israel is dependent upon the United States. Israel made efforts to shorten the time required for the United States to provide information from its own satellites to Israel. A missile attack on Israel does not require long preparation, and even if detected by the American satellites, such an attack could surprise Israel.

The large investments in enhancing Israeli intelligence did not spare Israel a few strategic surprises, such as the 1977 Sadat initiative, the *intifada*, and the 1991 missile attacks. In addition, the war in Lebanon was, to a great extent, a result of faulty intelligence: the Christians' military and political power and their willingness to fight were grossly overestimated. The Iraqi progress in building a nuclear device, which was revealed by an Iraqi scientist who defected in the spring of 1991, similarly surprised Israel's intelligence sector. Indeed, Israel reconciled itself to the idea that it was impossible to establish a foolproof mechanism against surprises. Major General (res.) Yitzhak

Hofi, with the hindsight of eight years of experience as director of the Mossad, had concluded, "We will never be able to know with certainty [about an impending attack]."<sup>44</sup>

Despite the 1973 shock of an Arab first strike, Israeli strategic thinking continued, for most of the period under consideration, to refrain from preventive and preemptive strikes, which had been prevalent before 1967. Israel continued to hold that as long as it had strategic depth and secure borders, it could afford to absorb an Arab first strike and then go on the offense. The continuous deemphasis of preemption suited the perceived international isolation of Israel in the 1970s and the desire not to look aggressive. Furthermore, Rabin came to the conclusion that Israel had little to gain from military initiatives and that its best strategy would be to delay a military encounter as long as possible. Only during the short period of Sharon's possession of the defense portfolio (1981-83) did the official strategic thinking stress a preemptive and preventive mode of action, accompanied by a declared set of *casi belli*.<sup>45</sup>

While Israel maintained a defensive strategy, a clear lesson learned after 1973 was the need to expand considerably the IDF. First, Israel wanted a larger army with greater firepower to avoid collapse if again surprised. For a small state like Israel, what matters in case of a strategic surprise is not military poten-

44. Yaakov Erez, "The Generals of the Northern Command," *Maariv Magazine*, 13 Sep. 1996, p. 38.

45. See Efraim Inbar, "Israeli Strategic Thinking After 1973," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 6(1):48-54 (Mar. 1983).



tial but immediately available military power. Second, the 1973 war highlighted the neglect of firepower capacity, which had resulted from the Israeli emphasis on mobility. The traditional Arab quantitative advantage had to be matched by enhanced IDF firepower. The great expansion of the Arab arsenals after 1973 reinforced this new Israeli emphasis. Third, Israel hoped to establish a force large enough to enable it to mount a counteroffensive on two fronts simultaneously. Israel desired to accumulate enough military muscle to smash the Arab armies before the superpowers could intervene. As noted, such a victory was needed also to reestablish lost deterrence. Fourth, Israel anticipated a higher attrition rate than in 1973 due to the greater destructive power and accuracy of weapons, as well as the expected increase in the size of the opponents' armies.

Indeed, within three years, the size of the military establishment was expanded. Close to 50,000 men and women were added by tightening service regulations and by drawing upon categories of the population that previously had been exempted. In addition, many areas previously limited to men were opened to women in order to divert men to combat assignments. The first Rabin government was also successful in its weapon procurement plan. By June 1977, Israel had replaced all its losses in matériel. Moreover, its tank force increased by 50 percent; the artillery, by 100 percent; armored personnel carriers, by 800 percent; and aircraft, by 30 percent.<sup>46</sup>

46. Yitzhak Rabin, *Memoirs* (Tel Aviv: Maariv, 1979), p. 505.

The growth of the IDF ended in the early 1980s mainly due to financial limits. Since then, Israel has engaged primarily in replacing old equipment with modern weapon systems. Yet the actual weapon procurement budget has declined over the years. The amount of American financial military support (\$1.8 billion) remained unchanged; it was not adjusted for a reduction in its purchasing power, in terms of constant dollars and the rise in the price of military equipment. There is also less money for weapons in the IDF budget because the cost of manpower has risen. The share of this component of the defense budget rose from 27 percent in 1984 to 44 percent in 1995.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the remarkable growth in the IDF and in its sophistication, an Israeli ability to win a military encounter decisively, that is, to quickly destroy the Arab armies and capture a territory of importance, is not evident. The past performance of Arab armies shows that they can prevent a decisive Israeli victory. The Syrians did just that in 1973, while in 1982 they prevented the IDF from reaching its strategic goals in Lebanon in the central and eastern sector. Nor does the Iraqi defeat in 1991 indicate that a highly technologically advanced army such as the IDF can easily win a military encounter with an Arab army.<sup>48</sup> War games show that

47. *Haaretz*, 30 Oct. 1995.

48. For a military analysis, see Stephen Biddle, "Victory Misunderstood: What the Gulf War Tells Us About Future Conflict," *International Security*, 21(2):138-79 (Fall 1996). See also Zeev Bonen and Eliot Cohen, *Advanced Technology and Future Warfare* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 1996).

a force armed even with the most sophisticated weapons should not expect easy and quick victories against lesser-equipped adversaries.<sup>49</sup> The Israeli military record in southern Lebanon is mixed and the two large-scale campaigns against the Hizballah—Operation Accountability in July 1993 and Grapes of Wrath in April 1996—were neither a military nor a political success. Actually, the protracted conflict in southern Lebanon elicits growing domestic pressure on the Israeli government to disengage unilaterally from the Lebanese imbroglio. Furthermore, military sources have recently questioned Israel's capacity for quickly winning a large-scale war with Syria without an increase in the defense budget.<sup>50</sup>

The introduction of missiles into the Arab arsenals was problematic not only in terms of deterrence but also in terms of Israeli offensive capability. Missile strikes at airfields, military depots, and staging areas in the critical opening stages of a war could hinder an Israeli effort to transfer the war to enemy territory. Israeli strategists still grapple with finding the best mix of measures to respond to the missile challenge. Apart from active defense programs, reviewed earlier, Israel also extended the range of its military reach in order to enhance deterrence, as well as offensive capabilities. The strategic context of several weapon procurement decisions was the growing and more

49. "War Game Predicts Challenging Lengthy Future Conflicts," *Defense News*, 2-8 Dec. 1996, p. 31.

50. *Maariv*, 21 Nov. 1996. Such leaks could also serve demands for budget hikes.

distant threats from missiles, as well as weapons of mass destruction. Israel ordered Saar-5 corvettes in 1988, two Dolphin submarines in 1991 (at Germany's expense), and F-15I aircraft in 1993. All these weapon systems are able to project military power to great distances.

The economics of defense have also limited Israeli capabilities. Since 1973, Israel has decreased its defense expenditures and has diminished the security burden on the Israeli economy, particularly since 1985 (see Table 1). While after 1991, Israel responded to the renewal of the Arab massive weapon procurement by increasing its own defense outlays, the defense budget as a proportion of gross national product, as well as the defense expenditures per capita, has decreased over the years. The expansion of Israel's economy facilitated this process.

Economic constraints are predominant in one area where Israel has given up the quest for selective self-sufficiency: weapon development. In 1987, pressure from the United States and several domestic circles led Israel to cancel the Lavi advanced aircraft project. In addition, the contract for building the Saar-5 corvettes was awarded to an American company, rather than Israel Shipyards, because the American company was paid through military assistance funds that have to be spent in the United States. The Israeli military industries, an important element in Israel's technological superiority, today are troubled as a result of a shrinking world arms market after the end of the Cold War and

TABLE 1  
ISRAELI DEFENSE EXPENDITURES, 1973-96

Year	Defense Budget (Billions of dollars)	Defense Budget per Capita	Defense Budget as a Percentage of Government Budget	Defense Budget as a Percentage of Gross National Product
1973	7.89*	2490		47.8
1974	5.98	1813	50.0	31.8
1975	6.25	1860		28.3
1976	5.43	1558	56.7	36.3
1977	5.49	1515	32.4	29.9
1978	5.37	1440		23.0
1979	4.86	1272		20.4
1980	4.77	1223		19.6
1981	5.84	1460		25.0
1982	9.51*	2320		35.5
1983	5.42*	1290		19.3
1984	5.37	1277	39.1	22.4
1985	4.82	1139	30.1	21.2
1986	5.15	1169	24.8	18.9
1987	3.72	852	20.8	14.8
1988	3.50	784	20.7 <sup>†</sup>	12.6 <sup>†</sup>
1989	3.77	836	23.7 <sup>†</sup>	14.1
1990	3.46	704	18.1 <sup>†</sup>	12.0
1991	3.09	607	16.5 <sup>†</sup>	9.9
1992	3.80	748	13.6 <sup>†</sup>	11.1
1993	4.97	971	16.9 <sup>†</sup>	9.5
1994	5.25	986	12.4 <sup>‡</sup>	9.5
1995	5.50	977		
1996	5.90 (budgeted)			

NOTE: Figures are given in 1982 dollars.

\*"Not fully reflective of expenditure connected with recent war." International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1974), p. 78.

<sup>†</sup>Figure is from Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel* (1995).

<sup>‡</sup>Figure is from U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Fact Book* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995).

a decrease in domestic demand. Israel's technological superiority seems to have eroded also because of reduced allocations for military research and development (according to Israel's state controller) by 43 percent from 1986 to 1994.

Additional fears of erosion in Israel's qualitative edge in weapon technology, an important element in Israel's conventional superiority, stem from an influx of Western equip-

ment into Arab armies.<sup>51</sup> For example, the sale of F-15E airplanes to Saudi Arabia in 1992 and advanced versions of Harpoon ship-to-ship missiles to Egypt threaten Israel's air force and navy. Israel even refrained from buying certain advanced equipment in order to prevent the sale of similar equipment to the Arabs. For

51. See Dore Gold, "U.S. Policy Toward Israel's Qualitative Edge" (JCSS Memorandum no. 36, Tel Aviv University, Sept. 1992).

example, in 1995, Rabin decided to buy the TOW-2A antitank missile, rather than the more advanced 2B version, for this reason. Preserving military technological superiority has been one of the main issues that Israelis stress in their strategic dialogue with the Americans.

The fast IDF buildup after 1973 has led to several organizational problems, such as an unbalanced development in the officers corps, unnecessary fragmentation of labor, and too short a job rotation. The result of such shortcomings is insufficient professionalism.<sup>52</sup> Attempts to change the IDF radically, along the lines of the "Slimmer and Smarter" slogan (enunciated at the end of the 1980s by Chief of Staff Dan Shomron) were only marginally successful. Israel's cautious attitude to the "revolution in military affairs" reduced the pace of change to an incremental level. The IDF remains an impressive fighting force, but beleaguered by many problems.

A recent problem is the morale of the troops. The IDF admitted that it observed lower motivation on the part of new soldiers to serve in combat units. Major General Gideon Sheffer, the commander of the IDF Manpower Branch, linked the phenomenon to the progress in the peace process.<sup>53</sup> The reduced threat perception and political developments, which are often portrayed as ending the Arab-Israel conflict, lead to a feeling that defending Israel is no longer an existential need and a challenge

52. Emmanuel Wald, *The Decline of Israeli National Security Since 1967* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), pt. 3.

53. *Haaretz*, 3 Sept. 1996.

for the younger generation. The lack of motivation is even greater among the reservists, despite the trend of reducing the length of their service. According to a state comptroller report, the number of reserve service dodgers went up by 54 percent in the 1992-95 period.<sup>54</sup> As the bulk of the IDF still comprises reserve units, the morale problems in those units have serious consequences for waging large-scale war. The reduced willingness to serve in the army, as well as a higher sensitivity to casualties, is a result of changes in Israeli society and its attitudes toward the IDF. The military has lost some of its centrality in Israeli society.<sup>55</sup> The strategic consequence of this phenomenon is greater limitations on Israeli use of force and particularly on offensive operations.

The Israeli capability for unilateral action, as required by its self-reliance doctrine, has become more limited. While in June 1981 Israel eliminated the Iraqi nuclear threat, it is clear now that Israel cannot repeat such a feat easily. Iraq and Iran have learned the lesson and have built many underground installations, while the American experience in Iraq shows that even a superpower has difficulties in destroying the key components of a country's nuclear infrastructure. A former Israeli chief of staff, Ehud Barak, talked in 1994 about an international front to deal with the Iranian nuclear program.<sup>56</sup>

54. *Ibid.*, 1 May 1996.

55. Stuart A. Cohen, "The Israel Defense Force (IDF): From a 'People's Army' to a 'Professional Military'—Causes and Implications," *Armed Forces & Society*, 21(2):237-54 (Winter 1995).

56. *Bemahane*, 5 Jan. 1992, p. 11.

Similarly, his successor, Amnon Shahak, said in 1996 that, in order to prevent missile attacks with nonconventional warheads, "there is a need for international cooperation."<sup>57</sup> Netanyahu expressed support for such an approach as early as 1993.<sup>58</sup> While he regarded the prevention of a nuclear bomb in Iran as Israel's "most important task,"<sup>59</sup> he refrained from speaking about a military solution, emphasizing instead the political and economic steps needed to pressure Iran to refrain from purchasing or developing the critical components in a nuclear weapons program.

The peace process has hampered Israel's deterrence and also its freedom to use force, as Israeli governments now have to consider the reaction of Arab moderates to any Israeli attack against Arab targets. Israeli military actions have become tied to a set of considerations more complex than those prevalent in the past, when there had been a united Arab hostile front against Israel. In the 1990s, Israeli governments have shown greater reluctance to use force and to act unilaterally.<sup>60</sup>

An example of the shift from self-reliance is the attitude toward arms control, once an issue ignored by Israeli decision makers.<sup>61</sup> In 1991, Israel bowed to American pressure and joined the Missile Technology Con-

trol Regimes. In 1992, the Israeli government decided to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention, relinquishing its insistence on prior Arab signature. In 1993, Israel also began to report its arms sales to the U.N. arms registrar, while in 1994 it agreed to ban the export of antipersonnel mines. In 1996, Israel even chose to adhere to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Another example of the collaborative approach is the Oslo accord. This agreement, according to one of its architects, represented a strategy based upon cooperation with the Palestinians in the security area, primarily in combating terror.<sup>62</sup> Israel, particularly under Labor, was willing to consider a greater American role in Israel's defense. American-operated batteries of Patriot missiles were deployed in Israel during the gulf war. Israel under Rabin also considered the stationing of American troops on the Golan Heights as a part of the security measures compensating for the loss of territory in the framework of a peace treaty between Israel and Syria. In December 1995, Peres even suggested a U.S.-Israeli defense treaty, which had previously been discarded as limiting Israel's freedom of action.

#### CONCLUSION

The 1973-96 period witnessed many changes among the Israeli po-

57. *Haaretz*, 13 Sept. 1996.

58. *Davar*, 17 Feb. 1993.

59. *Haaretz*, 26 Aug. 1996.

60. For the recent Israeli aversion to using force, see Inbar, "Contours of Israel's New Strategic Thinking," pp. 51-57.

61. See Efraim Inbar, "Israel and Arms Control," *Arms Control*, 13(2):214-21 (Sept. 1992); Gerald Steinberg, "Israel and the Changing Global Non-Proliferation Regime: The NPT Ex-

tension, CTBT and Fissile Cut-Off," in *Middle Eastern Security: Prospects for an Arms Control Regime*, ed. Efraim Inbar and Shmuel Sandler (London: Frank Cass, 1985), pp. 70-83.

62. Uri Savir, "The Oslo Test," *Maariv*, New Year supp., 13 Sept. 1996, p. 44.

litical elite. Regardless of the personnel changes at the helm, Rabin, a few ex-generals, and even fewer civilians dominated the national security arena. Furthermore, the centralized pattern of decision making remained unchanged.

Israel's strategic environment underwent changes. Immediately after the 1973 war, Israel was weak and isolated, while by 1996 it was closer to acceptance in the region than ever before. The Israeli leadership recognized the challenges of the 1970s and the improvement in Israel's strategic situation later on. The peace process that started at the end of the 1970s, which was predicated primarily on the Arab perception of Israel as an economically and militarily strong country as well as an American ally, reduced the chances for large-scale conflict. At the end of the century, Israel is still facing severe security threats. The conventional capabilities of the regional armies are impressive. An additional source of growing concern is the proliferation of long-range missiles and technologies for the production of weapons of mass destruction. This threat was amplified when blended with the unbending enmity of the Islamic radicals in the region. These groups also conduct terrorist attacks against Israel, which are hardly a military challenge to the state of Israel, though their societal impact is considerable.

Israeli strategic thinking displayed continuity. Rabin's views were dominant, while Sharon's attempt to introduce doctrinal changes in the early 1980s did not last. Israel continued to rely on deterrence, early warning, and achievement of decisive victory, despite the problems surrounding each one of these elements. While minimizing the need for preemptive strikes, the IDF strengthened its ability to project power far away. The IDF remained geared for a large-scale land war in terms of its order of battle and doctrine. Toward the end of the period under discussion, we can detect signs of shying away from self-reliance and of adopting collaborative security measures. Israel has not been engaged in a large-scale war since 1982. It remains to be seen if the preparations for deterring or meeting the major security challenges will be successful.

Israeli society displays signs of weariness of the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict and is more concerned than ever before about personal security, which reflects the greater emphasis on personal rather than collective fulfillment. Further erosion in the willingness to serve in the IDF and to foot the bill of defense expenditures could cast doubt on Israel's capacity to sustain the effort needed to survive in a rough neighborhood such as the Middle East.

# Religious Radicalism in the Greater Middle East

*Edited by Bruce Maddy-Weitzman & Efraim Inbar*

Since the mid-1970s, radical groups within the world's religions have grown in size and popularity, taking on more active roles in the political discourses of their respective societies. In the Middle East, this phenomenon has been most pronounced, as groups espousing fundamentalist outlooks have engaged in comprehensive campaigns—sometimes involving the use of terrorism and other violent tactics—to alter the political systems of the states in which they reside, as well as in countries abroad.

*Religious Radicalism in the Greater Middle East*, the second volume in the BESA Series in International Security, provides an in-depth political analysis of religious radicalism in the Greater Middle East—a recently defined area encompassing the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa. The contributors, experts in their fields, represent various conceptual perspectives within the framework of political science, including international relations, Middle East studies, political sociology and others. Together, they allow for a comprehensive analysis indispensable to scholars, policy makers and the attentive public.

A Frank Cass & Co. publication and  
a special issue of *Terrorism and Political Violence*.

**US ORDERS AND INQUIRIES TO:**

**Frank Cass**

c/o ISBS, 5904 NE Hasalo Street, Portland, OR 97213-3644, USA

Tel: (503) 287-3093, (800) 944-1600 FAX: (503) 280-8832

**UK/OVERSEAS ORDERS AND INQUIRIES TO:**

**Frank Cass**

Newbury House, 890-900 Eastern Avenue, Newbury Park, Ilford, Essex

IG2 7HH, UK

Tel: +44 181 599 8866 Fax: +44 181 599 0984