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The fortunes of small states are especially dependent upon the power structure of the international system and the fluctuations in the regional power relations.[1] The modification of the international system following the demise of the Soviet empire and the changes in the Middle East in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War have been generally considered as beneficial to Israel's security.[2] The further ascendance of the United States in world politics and the Arab radicals' loss of a superpower patron are usually credited for the progress in the Middle East peace process – a welcome regional development indicating the weakening of Arab enmity towards the Jewish State. Yet it is still uncertain whether the process will culminate in a genuine regional détente. Furthermore, the myopic preoccupation with the details of the negotiations between Arabs and Israelis blurs the wider Middle Eastern picture. It is all too easily forgotten that the Middle East, in contrast to other regions where the New World Order has drastically improved the security situation, remains a "zone of turmoil", characterized by continuous security challenges.[3] In this period of transition in the Arab-Israeli arena, the attempts to establish a new Middle East order have failed;[4] and it remains a region where the use of force is widely considered a policy option and even enjoys popular support.

The negative effects of the systemic changes on the international arena and on the Middle East have been similarly overlooked. Israel's existential predicament has hardly changed. It still is a small state facing various existential challenges from powerful regional foes. Therefore, Israel will have to continue to devote considerable attention and resources to preserve its security. The main variables affecting Israel's national security are its strategic environment (both international and regional) and the threats emanating from it; its ability to deter and/or overcome emerging challenges; and its freedom to act according to its own assessment of strategic imperatives. This article reviews each of these variables and attempts to assess their attendant security implications for Israel.

ISRAEL'S STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Global Changes

The end of the Cold War has entailed several positive results, such as

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the unification of Germany, the drawdown of nuclear arsenals, and drastic cuts in the defence budgets of the western countries. Small states seem to live in a more benign environment. Yet the new international system has also led to fragmentation and civil strife in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Nationalism and ethnic identity are still powerful motivating forces and a continuing cause for political instability. Moreover, there is no evidence of a decline in the use of force by political actors in the international arena. Quite the reverse in fact, armed conflict has increased in some regions, involving primarily small states.

Similarly, the end of bipolarity in world politics has mixed effects on the Middle East actors. The demise of the Soviet Union allowed for an effective American-led international coalition to beat back the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait; but American preeminence has neither put an end to Saddam Hussein's rule nor secured the cooperation of several other Middle Eastern actors. In addition, the continuous flow of American arms to the region may well have a destabilizing effect particularly in the Arab-Israeli arena. Hard pressed American military industries – the result of shrinking domestic and international arms markets in the post-Cold War era – are eager to sell with little restraint to potential Middle Eastern clients.

In the absence of a Soviet world presence, the radical Arabs have lost their superpower umbrella, which was a restraining factor in Israeli strategic calculations. Also, Israel has no longer to worry about deterring a direct Soviet military attack on Israeli targets, or Soviet intervention on behalf of its Arab allies. But nowadays Russian arms are no less available than during the years of bipolarity. Russia's dire need for foreign currency earnings has come to override the political considerations that had guided Moscow's traditional Middle Eastern policy. In marked contrast to the Soviet era, characterized by caution and circumspection, Russia presently sells nuclear reactors to Iran, as well as sensitive nuclear technology. The borders of Russia and the former Soviet republics are increasingly porous, while central control over nuclear and advanced conventional weapons has eroded, enhancing the chances for transfers of destabilizing weapons to revisionist powers in the Middle East.[5]

The Peace Process

The peace process has enhanced Israel's security by significantly lowering the military threat emanating from Egypt – the largest Arab state. Whatever their deficiencies, the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO provide retroactive legitimization for the Egyptian decision to seek peace with Israel, and further strengthen the pro-Western, pro-reconciliation orientation embraced by some other Arab elites. The Arab World is undergoing an historic process of grudging acquiescence in Israel's existence, which in turn offers a window of opportunity for

diplomacy that could stabilize the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the American-led war against Saddam Hussein further sensitized Arab elites to the sources of regional instability and reduced the threat perception related to Israel. Furthermore, the 1991 Gulf War greatly diminished, at least for the time being, the chances for erecting a radical Arab coalition against Israel. Iraq has been weakened; Libya marginalized. Syria in its anxiety not to estrange the United States was pushed into participating in the peace process.[6] Jordan – the linchpin of an "Eastern Front" – signed a peace treaty with Israel in October 1994. These developments have lowered the probability of the establishment of such a front, which is so potentially threatening to Israel's heartland (80kms to the Israeli coast on the Mediterranean), as well as of dragging Egypt back into the circle of violence against Israel. Consequently, the current likelihood for a large-scale conventional war is low.

Yet the peace process does not preclude limited conventional attacks whenever temporary setbacks occur. One of the lessons learned by the Arabs after the October 1973 War was that the limited use of force is effective in breaking a political stalemate, and that Israel is very vulnerable to this type of warfare.[7] Syria, for example, is perfectly capable of waging a controlled war of attrition, or of launching a limited invasion on the Golan Heights. It can also attack a few selected targets within Israel with missiles. Syria is presently waging war by proxy against Israel from southern Lebanon through the militant Hizballah movement; and this military activity meets with little international criticism. It is conceivable therefore that even the United States may turn a blind eye to a limited Arab attack on a perceived intransigent Israel in order to entice it into greater flexibility in the peace negotiations. Indeed, a deterioration in US-Israeli relations could lead to Syrian and Egyptian violations of their demilitarization agreements with Israel and possibly to outright Arab aggression.[8]

Moreover, it is too early to conclude that the peace process is an irreversible trend. Syrian intentions are not entirely clear. Similarly unclear is the direction of the Syrian political system after Asad; it can well revert to the notorious instability characteristic of the pre-Asad period. The good fortunes of the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan are also not to be taken for granted after King Hussein joins his forefathers. In present Egypt there are generals who still see Israel as a potential enemy, while the future of the Mubarak regime is increasingly in question.

Furthermore, the expectation that the United States, in the new world power configuration, will enforce peace and security in the Middle East is ill-founded. Despite its newly-gained preeminence in world politics, the United States possesses neither the political will, nor the imperial political culture, nor even the ability to impose a Pax-

Americana on the Middle East. The American 1991 intervention is not to be taken as a model for future behaviour. The Middle East commands lesser American attention following the collapse of the Soviet empire and the emergence of a buyers oil market. Furthermore, the military ability of the United States to intervene in distant places has been decreasing following the actual and planned cuts in its defence budget and force strength.[9] It is worth remembering that the main breakthroughs in the peace process, – the November 1977 Sadat visit to Jerusalem, the September 1993 Israel-PLO accord and the October 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty – were not a direct result of American diplomacy, though the Americans were involved in footing the bill and in promoting the process. Therefore, it is arguable that a reduction in tensions and increased stability will come to the region only when the regional actors are ripe for it, which may still take some time.

Negative Regional Trends

While the peace process has, on the whole, had a positive influence on Israeli security, several other trends have been rather disconcerting from the Israeli standpoint: the surge in Islamic radical influence; the worsening economic situation in most Arab countries; and the intensified conventional and non-conventional military buildups, including the proliferation of long-range ballistic missiles and the quest for nuclear weapons.

Militant Islam: The danger of Islamic upheavals has been considered by some Israeli leaders, such as Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin as an issue that might unite Israel and today's Arab leaders.[10] For Israel, the rise to power of such groups means the continuation of armed conflict, as these do not hide their absolute rejection of the existence of Israel. While the conclusion of peace agreements between Israel and its neighbours can possibly diminish the appeal of Islamic fundamentalism – which thrives on the existence of a perceived foreign enemy such as Israel – growing fundamentalist influence in Egypt, in Jordan and among the Palestinians is primarily the result of socio-economic problems. Peace agreements with Israel cannot conclusively neutralize the power of Islamic fundamentalists, nor ensure that the agreements can never be revoked. The appeal of Islamic radicalism is indeed primarily the result of domestic inadequacies, little influenced by the evolving Arab-Israeli relations. This is patently true in Algeria, as well as in Turkey where, in the March 1994 municipal elections, the Islamists scored victories in the two largest Turkish cities, Ankara and Istanbul. These groups are not yet in a position to take control over the entire country, but their growing appeal after many decades of Turkish efforts to shape a secular and western-oriented society is a cause for serious concern. If an Islamic regime were to emerge in Turkey, this

would have tremendous regional and international destabilizing repercussions.

Presently, the very visible Islamic regimes in Iran and Sudan do not pose a conventional military challenge for Israel, though they could send expeditionary forces to participate in the fighting, were the political climate in the countries neighbouring Israel to change. Nevertheless, Iran supports Islamic groups which conduct low-intensity warfare against the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in southern Lebanon and Israeli civilian targets in the adjacent Galilee. The acquisition of the Sager anti-tank missiles by the Hizballah enhances the capabilities of this group to hit the IDF and its allies in South Lebanon; recently supplied shoulder anti-aircraft missiles limit Israeli air superiority, while Katyusha rockets threaten Israeli towns and kibbutzim along the Lebanese border. The Hizballah attacks, which are encouraged by Iran and condoned by its ally, Syria, obviously put strains on the peace process.

Economic Factors: The economic situation in the Arab World does not promise stability. Current Arab political elites seem incapable of implementing the structural reforms required to develop sound economies. Even Saudi Arabia has run budget and balance of payments deficits every year since 1983.[11] Since the Iraqi invasion, Kuwait has incurred huge deficits and its foreign assets have been severely depleted. The Egyptian economy is ailing despite large-scale Arab and Western foreign aid and a post-Gulf War cancellation of approximately half its foreign debt; its unemployment level stands at over 20 per cent. Jordan's economy is similarly in trouble. Like most poor Arab countries, Jordan suffers from the loss of employment opportunities in the Gulf states, which has drastically reduced the remittances from Jordanian workers abroad. Significant population growth in countries like Egypt, Iraq and Iran, where the regime has difficulty in supplying sufficient food to the public, makes it especially difficult to implement fundamental economic reforms. This predicament enables Islamic radicals to make headway, feeding on the apparent ineptness and paralysis of the current regimes. Furthermore, even the most favourable results possible in the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations will not rescue the Arab economies from their perilous state. The much heralded economic dividends of peace are rather meagre.[12]

Military Buildup: Since the August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, defence expenditures across the region have risen steadily, after half-a-decade of decline. The drastic changes in world politics have actually enhanced the availability of weapons because the loosening of the bi-polar international system has removed some of the political constraints on arms sales.[13] As noted earlier, the United States and Russia embarked on an aggressive marketing of their latest weaponry. Russia's new and more assertive role in international relations

reinforces this trend. Its former satellites, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Poland have also expanded their arms sales, with no interference from Moscow. In addition, Third World producers, such as Brazil and North Korea have a greater access to the market.

For its part Damascus embarked on a shopping spree, with $2 billion in spending money donated by Saudi Arabia – a thank-you gift for Syrian participation in the 1991 Gulf war. Syria has purchased Mig-29 fighter aircraft from Russia, T-72 tanks from the Czech Republic, and self-propelled artillery pieces from Bulgaria; from North Korea it has bought Scud-C missiles and the infrastructure to produce them. In April 1994, Russia announced a new $500-million arms deal with Syria.[14] The Saudis are engaged in a military buildup aimed at doubling their forces. Since the Gulf War, Riyadh has placed orders for $26 billion worth of military equipment from the United States alone. The British and the French have also secured Saudi military contracts worth billions of dollars. Egypt continues with its military modernization drive and incorporated advanced F-16s aircraft into its arsenal during 1994. And Iraq, despite its 1991 defeat, is still the largest military power in the Gulf region. Furthermore, it has rebuilt much of its conventional military industries, as a first step towards rearmament.[15] Furthermore, lifting of the economic sanctions would allow Baghdad to use petro-dollars to enhance its military strength. Yet even in its present capabilities, an Iraqi expeditionary force sent to Syria or Jordan could become an important contribution to an "Eastern front" military coalition against Israel. While economic considerations can hypothetically cap these military procurement programmes, Arab leaders have usually subordinated economic considerations to military and political concerns. Most of the weapon purchases are for modernization purposes, namely, replacement of dated hardware rather than expansion of military forces. Nevertheless, the Israeli predicament of being a small state surrounded by large standing armies remains unchanged.

The buildup of Middle East military capabilities is not always related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but accumulated conventional potential is readily convertible to actions against Israel, as past military history teaches. The most likely scenarios for conflict involve various types of limited war; one such threat – missile attacks – was successfully demonstrated during the 1991 Gulf War. Though the number of Israeli casualties from Iraqi Scud attacks was small and the damage to property was light, the country was practically paralysed for almost a month, which caused great economic damage.[16] Since no territorial contiguity is needed to launch such missile attacks on Israel, this allows additional countries, beyond Israel's immediate neighbours, to initiate or to escalate armed conflict. This enables the "second ring" countries, such as Iraq or Libya a greater ability than before to trigger military encounters and to destabilize Arab-Israeli relations. Iran, too,

acquired missiles capable of hitting Israel – the North Korean Nodung.

The addition of chemical warheads to many Arab arsenals, and continuing attempts by Iraq and Iran to acquire nuclear weapons are additional causes for concern in Jerusalem.[17] Arab states are also fearful of the development of an Iraqi or Iranian nuclear bomb. Capitalizing on widespread apprehensions of nuclear proliferation, they have sought to curtail Israel's nuclear programme, as well. Egypt leads this campaign, despite the tacit understanding (reached between the two countries before signing the 1979 peace treaty) that the nuclear issue will not be dealt with until the end of the peace process. The nuclear spectre in the Middle East threatens Israeli nuclear superiority, which has had an important deterring and stabilizing function in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Thus, while the probability of a large-scale Arab-Israeli military engagement in the near future is low, low-intensity conflict will continue to affect Israel so long as forces opposed to Israel's mere existence cannot be entirely eradicated. The most problematic security challenges are limited attacks (particularly with missiles) and the prospects for nuclear proliferation in the region.

CAPACITY FOR ACTION

Overall, the IDF is still a very good fighting machine, blessed with motivated troops, a capable officer corps, and the very best weaponry. Deployed along the present borders, on the Golan Heights and along the Jordan River, it can parry an Arab attack and probably win a large-scale war in the near future against any of its regional rivals, singly or in a coalition, despite the cuts in its order of battle in recent years. In addition, the IDF still enjoys, for the time being, a technological edge useful for winning a war. Yet this factor should not be overestimated. It would be wrong to interpret the 1991 American victory as stemming primarily from superior technology, which could augur well for the IDF; no less than a result of technological disparity, this victory was the consequence of a grossly flawed Iraqi political-military strategy.[18]

Subsequently, the price of an Israeli victory may be very high, particularly for a country which has become extremely sensitive to casualties and increasingly war-weary. As the meaning of victory is context dependent, the Israeli criteria for feeling victorious at the end of a war become more difficult to meet. This is exactly why limited attacks intended to bleed Israel, rather than to vanquish it, are more attractive to Arab strategists and therefore more likely.

While Israel can deter an attempt to conquer it, it is less able to deter lower-level challenges. Indeed, Israel has already experienced several deterrence failures in this regard, such as the October 1973 surprise attack, the Spring 1974 War of Attrition on the Golan Heights,

and the Winter 1991 Iraqi missile attacks. Concomitantly, the perception of Israel as America's indispensable ally, an important component in Israel's deterrent capability, has been negatively affected by the structural changes in the international system. Not only is Israel no longer "a bulwark against Soviet expansionism" for the United States, but the 1990-91 Gulf crisis demonstrated its problematic status as an ally in Middle Eastern wars. Washington was eager to prevent an Israeli military response to the Iraqi missile attacks on Israeli cities (a clear deterrence failure), which further eroded Israel's deterrent power. The 1991 Gulf War was also a failure of US extended deterrence (deterring an attack on an ally). The American soldiers who manned Patriot missiles batteries, for the first time in combat duty on Israeli territory, failed to deter Iraqi missile attacks on Israel (and Saudi Arabia).[19]

The decline in Israel's value as an ally is also reflected in present (reasonable) Israeli fears about a gradual elimination of American economic assistance, though such cuts will be primarily the result of American domestic concerns. Despite the close US-Israeli relationship, Israel is not a central component of the American military posture in the Middle East in the post-Desert Storm era.[20] Attempts to latch onto the Islamic fundamentalist threat as a new basis for the United States-Israel strategic partnership are problematic. Despite their hatred for America and what it stands for, Islamic radicals are hardly a threat to the United States of the Soviet Union's order. Thus far they lack a nuclear arsenal, and their ideology has little appeal in the West. There are many reasons to doubt whether the United States will play a major role in compensating Israel for security risks it might take in the peace process, by financial aid and by inviting its full participation in emerging regional security arrangements. Thus the contribution of the United States to Israel's capacity to defend itself, beyond what it has already undertaken, will probably be minimal.

Interestingly, the peace process might even call into question or undermine Israel's nuclear deterrent. In the multilateral talks, arms control is one of the issues on the agenda and it will be very difficult to ignore Israel's nuclear programme. In this venue, the Arabs, led by Egypt, are relentlessly pursuing the goal of minimizing Israeli nuclear capabilities. Egypt even tried to convince Third World countries to refrain from joining the NPT, which was up for renewal in the spring of 1995, without an Israeli adherence to this international regime. Divesting Israel of its nuclear deterrent is a dangerous proposition. On the other hand, a nuclear Middle East is a nightmare for Israel because a balance of terror model, which was credited for the stability in the relations between the two superpowers, can hardly be applied to this region.

The peace process lowers the chances for war in the near future, but entails a price for Israel in terms of strategic assets such as territories,

which weakens Israel's defensive posture over the long run. It is clear that the lack of military action on the Golan Heights in the past two decades, despite Israeli-Syrian tensions and military exchanges in Lebanon, has been largely due to the fact that the IDF was deployed within a mere 60 kilometres of Damascus. This provided for deterrence. In addition, the topography of the Golan allowed for the best defence against an armoured Syrian thrust towards Israel; and Israeli intelligence facilities on the Golan peered deep into Syria and provided strategic early warning of Syrian military movements.

Similarly, withdrawal from parts of the West Bank would hamper Israel's ability to defend its "heartland" – the Jerusalem-Tel-Aviv-Haifa triangle – in the event of an attack from the east. This area, which holds 70 per cent of Israel's population and 80 per cent of its economic infrastructure, is very close to the Jordan River and adjacent to the territories to be turned over to the Palestinians. Strategic vulnerability invites aggression. A redeployment in the West Bank would also curtail Israel's ability to deal with terrorist activities. The PLO, even if it will seriously attempt to curb attacks on Israeli targets, is unlikely to be as effective as the Israeli security services. As a matter of fact, the rationale of the present government's negotiations with the PLO (though never presented in such terms) is to accept greater threats to the routine life of Israelis (current security) in exchange for reducing existential threats, thus improving "basic security". Indeed, in its reluctance to deviate from its political course in reaction to stepped-up terrorist attacks, the Israeli government has effectively called upon its population to display a higher level of tolerance towards such attacks. Therefore, a reduced capacity to cope by force with low intensity conflict is an in-built component of the peace process. Strategically, this policy makes sense; politically it is very problematic because public opinion is more concerned with the current security situation rather than with potential security dividends in the future.

What is of greater concern, however, is that some of the impending threats cannot be dealt with unilaterally by Israel. For example, Israel's attempt to minimize the vulnerability of its home front by building an anti-ballistic-missile (ABM) defence system around the "Arrow" missile seems to be beyond its means. The development of the missile alone is largely subsidized by the United States (presently 72 per cent). Thus a decision to produce and deploy the Arrow and its supporting systems towards the end of the decade could cost approximately $5 billion, which would leave few resources for other military needs. Furthermore, there are serious questions as to whether such a system will be significantly effective against saturation missile attacks or improved missile warheads.[21]

Unilateral military action has become more difficult due to political, economic, operational and intelligence constraints. Even a superpower like the United States was not able to eliminate the Iraqi nuclear

programme; and the success of its attempts to curb the North Korean nuclear programme remains to be seen. The old-new nuclear aspirant, Iran, is even more geographically remote than Iraq. Thus, while Israel has purchased F-15Es fighters capable of carrying a large payload at long range with these distant threats in mind, its political leadership believes that only American-led concerted international action can be effective in stopping Iran or Iraq from acquiring nuclear weapons. The former Chief-of-Staff, Lieutenant General Ehud Barak, stated in 1994 that not only Israel was threatened by the Iranian nuclear quest and hence: "Dealing with this threat must be the central effort of the international community, under American leadership, with serious participation of the G-7... This effort requires coordination, political and diplomatic, as well as in the intelligence area".[22] Even Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu, reputed hawks, shared such views.

Another disturbing trend concerning the capacity for action is the erosion in Israel's indigenous arms production capability.[23] Israeli military industries have been facing considerable economic difficulties in recent years. Though some streamlining and changes of focus are obviously needed for adjusting to a changing arms market, the shrinking of this industrial sector threatens Israel's technological edge. Israel has already decided to no longer develop its own main platforms for its air and naval forces; and fewer financial resources are being invested overall by Israel in security-related research and development (R&D). In the 1986-94 period, according to the State Comptroller report, Ministry of Defence allocations for R&D were reduced by 43 per cent.[24] A gradual elimination of US military assistance funds, which are partly apportioned to Israeli arms producers, or even a maintenance of its present level, whose constant value is eroding, reduces the amount of funds available to local military industries. Similarly, intensified American efforts to control Israeli military exports could further hurt the Israeli weapons production base. Transfers of hi-tech Western weapons to the Arab states is also helping them bridge the technological weapon gap and reduces Israeli capacity for winning easily a military contest.

FREEDOM OF ACTION

The freedom of action of small states such as Israel is highly dependent upon the international constellation. The collapse of the Soviet empire is sometimes credited for opening the door to Middle East peacemaking. Israel's Arab adversaries have lost their "Soviet umbrella", a politico-military relationship that was an important factor in their ability to confront Israel. Yet the loosening of the bi-polar system allows for a greater leeway to all international actors. The absence of superpower competition in the Middle East has similarly afforded greater freedom of action to Syria, Egypt and Iraq, among

others. The Middle East has never been a tight bi-polar regional sub-system like Europe or the Korean peninsula, though the superpowers' wishes were a factor to be taken into consideration by regional protagonists.[25] Once constrained by superpower concern about uncontrolled military escalation, these regional actors are now free to pursue their own interests with less regard for the global implications of their actions. Israel may theoretically have greater freedom of action, just like its neighbours, but the need to preserve good relations with the United States still limits its ability to carry out preventive and preemptive strikes. Such strikes will become ever more necessary if Israel loses some of its defensive capability as a result of territorial concessions. Furthermore, since Israel is a *status quo* power it is more concerned about the greater freedom of action of its regional rivals than of its own.

The difficulties in establishing an effective active defence against missile attacks points to the need for enhanced deterrence and for greater freedom of action to undertake preemptive attacks, which also strengthens deterrence. Preemption seems to be for the time being the best option to deal with the missile threat.[26] Yet under the present circumstances conventional deterrence is eroding and preemption becomes more problematic politically.[27]

The emerging symmetry in the military capacity of Israel and its regional foes to inflict considerable damage on each other's population centres allows greater Arab freedom of action at the lower rungs of the ladder of violence because Israel might hesitate to escalate. With the advent of ballistic missiles in the Middle East, Israel has lost its monopoly on escalation dominance, namely, its ability to escalate the conflict without a need to face a similar response from its rivals;[28] threatening escalation was one way to force the rival to stop the armed conflict. While theoretically Israel still has greater freedom to escalate, it has become more dangerous for it to do so, particularly in the sphere of countervalue targets, because its own rear is now vulnerable to missile attacks. The costly nature of the conventional modern battlefield has become a clear disincentive for military action as well.

Actually, there are also growing domestic constraints on the Israeli use of force in preventive and preemptive modes. There is a greater reluctance to use force on the part of the Israeli political leadership, particularly since the controversial 1982 invasion of Lebanon. The struggle against the *intifada* since the late 1980s has also reduced Israel's willingness to engage in a competition of violence. The most obvious example was the 1991 lack of Israeli reaction to the Iraqi missile attacks – by the most right-wing government in Israeli history. In fact, recently, even anti-terrorist activities have been under marked scrutiny and criticism by Israelis.[29] The Israeli society displays signs of conflict fatigue and is less willing to pay the price for the realization of collective goals in the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict. The fear of

casualties has increasingly become an operational constraint in the use of military force.

The tendency to refrain from the use of military force is reinforced by the peace process, as Israel desires to project an image of restraint and moderation to encourage those elements in the Arab World interested in co-existence. For example, Israel has refrained from hitting the Hizballah in southern Lebanon with greater force and frequency so as not to hinder the negotiations with Syria. The peace process entails the problem that restraint aimed at reassuring the Arabs of Israeli moderation might be misconstrued for weakness or lack of resolve. Therefore, the self-imposed restraint on the country's freedom of action is problematic in terms of deterrence. The reputation for striking back when challenged is essential for maintaining deterrent power.[30]

CONCLUSION

The Middle East is located in a different socio-political time zone from the West. Hence, peace, stability, prosperity and democracy are not likely to characterize the region in the near future. The uncertainties concerning the peace process, the growth of Islamic radicalism, a proliferation of long-range missiles and non-conventional weapons, and a sharp deterioration in many Arab economies – portend continued turmoil in the region and sustained security challenges for Israel. The Israeli security predicament has undergone some changes, but the country still faces existential threats. While the chances for a general war have been reduced in the near and immediate future, the increasing conventional and non-conventional capabilities coupled with the potential for regional instability and an unclear superpower role, indicate a need for great caution and continuing investments in Israeli national security. The new international circumstances have mixed effects on Israel's freedom of action, while the capacity of the Jewish State for deterring threats and for an adequate military response has been, by and large, negatively affected.

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26. James J. Wirtz, *Counterforce and Theater Missile Defense: Can the Army Use an ASW Approach to the Scud Hunt*, Carlisle Barracks, 1995.

27. See Inbar and Sandler, "Israeli Deterrence Strategy Revisited".
28. For this term see; Herman Kahn, *On Escalation, Metaphors and Scenarios*, Baltimore, 1965, p.290.
29. See Efraim Inbar, "The Israeli Political Leadership's Use of Force", *Midstream*, 39 (October 1993), pp.2–5.
30. For a discussion of the question of establishing reputations see: Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, 1966, pp.55–59.