



Israel's Doctrinal Thinking and Palestinian Statehood

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An Analytical Review

The notion of security has played a vital role in shaping Israel's national doctrine since its establishment in 1948. Both the horrific experience of the Holocaust in Europe and Israel's wars with neighbouring Arab armies have contributed to the Israeli feeling of possibly being annihilated.¹ This perception of an existential threat was the foremost component of Israel's doctrinal thinking and it has remained strong in the minds of the Zionist leadership for decades.

This paper argues that instead of evolving in response to vital internal, regional, and international developments, Israel's national doctrine has largely remained unchanged, with traditional offensive postures at the core of its military-security policy-making.

Background and Formation

Historical discrimination of the Jewish people and the events of the Holocaust brought a feeling of insecurity and a 'siege mentality' to the newly born Israeli state.² Hence, history could be the major component influencing the Israeli strategic doctrine. Dima Adamsky argues that a state concept of national security is mainly shaped by two elements, the 'operational milieu' including the strategic environment and state's resources, and the 'psychological milieu' of political-military leaders.³ According to Uri Bar-Joseph, Israel's "concept of national security comes from both the 'psychological and operational milieus' of the Holocaust and the experience of the 1948 War and the Yishuv".⁴

Ideological beliefs were another factor that influenced Israeli doctrinal thinking.⁵ Warfare plays a key part in shaping the character of the Jews in the 'Torah', or 'Mikra'. According to Judaism there are two kinds of warfare, war by commandment, or 'Milhemeth Miswah', which is obligatory, and 'Milhemeth Rishut', which is optional and discretionary.⁶ In contrast to Milhemeth Rishut, which is an offensive warfare that permits territorial expansion for political reasons, Milhemeth Miswah is only waged for defensive purposes when national interests are threatened.⁷ This helps explain Israel's refusal to withdraw from occupied territories after the 1967 War, particularly Judea and Samaria / West Bank and the Syrian Golan Heights; the former are considered locations of biblical importance that contain holy sites and the latter are a strategic security asset.

1 Mark A. Heller, *Continuity and Change in Israeli Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 9.

2 Daniel Bar-Tal and Dikla Antebi, "Beliefs about Negative Intentions of the World: A Study of the Israeli Siege Mentality", *Political Psychology*, vol.13, no.4 (Dec., 1992): 633-645, p.633.

3 Adamsky Dima, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010), P. 116.

4 Uri Bar-Joseph, "Towards a Paradigm Shift in Israel's National Security Conception", in *Israel: The First Hundred Years: Volume II: From War to Peace?* 99-114, edited by Efraim Karsh (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p 99.

5 Uri Ram, *The Changing Agenda of Israeli Sociology: Theory, Ideology, and Identity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 5.

6 Lawrence Schiffman and Joel Wolowelsky, *War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition* (New York: Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press, 2007), p. xv

7 Ibid.

Moreover, mainstream Zionism has a tendency to consider hard power the only means to solve security threats. David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, for example, emphasised the importance of security and use of military force to deter Arab offensives by employing a tough reprisal strategy,⁸ which brought the concept of 'self-reliance' to Israel's security mind-set. The concept of 'self-reliance' is rooted in the Zionist ideology and derived from distrust of anyone else to defend the state of Israel.⁹ It simply means that in order for Israel to survive, it must rely on its own military power and 'defend itself by itself' politically, economically and militarily.¹⁰ This concept is not only critical for self-defence, but also it allows Israel to have unlimited freedom of action to seek its national interests without being pressured to alter its behaviour.¹¹

Sergio Catignani contends, "It was David Ben-Gurion's security assumption that contributed the most in establishing not only the foundations of Israel's national security doctrine, but also Israel's civil-military relations."¹² He further notes that such a security doctrine has remained largely constant during the long course of warfare between Israel and its neighbouring Arab states¹³ even though Israel has never articulated a formal written military-security doctrine. Instead, it has generally been shaped by the historical experiences of certain political events, as well as the knowledge gained from the process of 'trial-and-error' during wars.¹⁴ In fact, Israel Tal argues that the "patterns of strategic thinking which serve as the basis of Israel's security doctrine were formulated for the most part in the period between the end of the 1948 war and the Sinai Campaign of 1956."¹⁵ For Yigal Allon, the small geography, geo-strategic vulnerability, and limited resources and manpower were essential elements that shaped the Israeli doctrinal thinking.¹⁶

Small-sized state

Israel's small geography made the Israeli leadership acknowledge two facts. The first is that Israel's wars would be based on the 'few against many' principle that reflects imbalances in manpower and resources; and the second fact relates to the need for a superpower's support.¹⁷

Imbalances in weaponry, resources and manpower

David Ben-Gurion showed great concern over the small size of Israel's army compared to those of neighbouring Arab states. Israel had less than one million inhabitants, while Arab states had many millions, and he called this issue a 'unique military problem'. He argued that even if the Israeli population doubled or tripled, it would remain in the position of the 'few against the many'.¹⁸ To solve this problem, Ben-Gurion

8 Fred J. Khouri, *The Arab-Israeli Dilemma*. 3rd ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse U.P., 1985), p. 187

9 Uri Bar-Joseph, "Towards a Paradigm Shift in Israel's National Security Conception", p. 107.

10 Ibid.

11 Efraim Inbar, *Israel's National Security: Issues and Challenges since the Yom Kippur War* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 97.

12 Sergio Catignani, *Israeli Counter-Insurgency and the Intifadas: Dilemmas of a Conventional Army* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.45

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., p.44

15 Reuven Pedatzur, "Ben-Gurion's Enduring Legacy," in *Security Concerns: Insights from the Israeli Experience*, 139-164 edited by Daniel Bar-Tal, Dan Jacobson, and Aaron Klieman (London: JAI Press, 1998), p.139.

16 Yigal Allon, *The Making of Israel's Army* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1970), p. 24.

17 Reuven Pedatzur, "Ben-Gurion's Enduring Legacy," p. 142

18 Ze'ev Tzahar, "Ben-Gurion's Mythopoetics", in *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory, and Trauma*, 61-85, edited by Robert Wistrich and David Ohana (London: Cass, 1995). p. 79.

and Yigal Yadin established a structure of 'three-tiers' that includes small-sized units of captains and larger numbers of conscripts and skilled reservists.¹⁹

This structure is also known as 'nation in arms.'²⁰ However, it has some disadvantages. Firstly, Israel cannot launch strategic shock attacks before mobilising its reservists, and prolonged wars are not to its advantage. Therefore, Israel may deliberately escalate a crisis to achieve a decisive and fast victory in order to release reserve soldiers.²¹ Secondly, because the structure of the Israeli military is based on reserve soldiers who are predominantly civilians, the economy of the state cannot endure prolonged warfare, and therefore Israel cannot possess a defensive strategy since it needs to end wars as soon as possible and avoid lengthy attrition wars, which would favour its enemy.²² Lastly, these disadvantages require Israel to adopt an offensive strategy that supports rapid Jewish immigration and aims to destroy its enemy's resources and manpower capabilities quickly. In this strategy, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) is the vehicle for societal integration.²³ Although Israel followed a defensive strategy in the first twenty years of its establishment due to its vulnerable situation, it always followed an offensive doctrine on tactical and operational levels.²⁴

Geo-strategic vulnerability

Aaron Yaniv refers to the concept of 'strategic depth' as the area between the farthest lines where states may preserve armed troops for their defence without affecting the sovereignty of other states. If its heartlands are seized by an adversary, it indicates the collapse of the state's sovereignty and for "Israel [it] means physical liquidation."²⁵ Israel's 1948 borders were considered indefensible since the territory lacked strategic depth particularly when the distance between its heartlands and borderlines are examined. Such strategic vulnerability was not only because of the small space between its borders and heartlands, but also due to topographical reasons. The nature of topography in the West Bank and Golan Heights borders created a strategic advantage for Israel's enemies.²⁶ This short distance and proximity to Israeli critical infrastructure produced a feeling of insecurity and the threat of a unified Arab invasion that would only require a few hours to reach and destroy the Israeli heartlands.²⁷ Hence, Israeli leadership had to follow an offensive strategy in which Israel needs to stop enemies from entering its territory, and rapidly transfer the fight onto the enemy's ground.²⁸

19 Ibid.

20 Dan Horowitz, "The Israeli Concept of National Security", in *National Security and Democracy in Israel*, 11–55, edited by Avner Yaniv (London: Lynne Rienner, 1993), p. 15.

21 Ibid., p.16.

22 Michael Mandelbaum, "Israel's Security Dilemma", *Orbis*, vol. 32, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 355–368, p. 256.
Reuven Pedatzur, "Ben-Gurion's Enduring Legacy," p. 142
Ze'ev Tzahar, "Ben-Gurion's Mythopoeics", in *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory, and Trauma*, 61–85, edited by Robert Wistrich and David Ohana (London: Cass, 1995). p. 79
John Laffi, *The Israeli Army in the Middle East Wars 1948–73* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1982), p. 4
Dan Horowitz, "The Israeli Concept of National Security", in *National Security and Democracy in Israel*, 11–55, edited by Avner Yaniv (London: Lynne Rienner, 1993), p. 15

Ibid., p.16.

Michael Mandelbaum, "Israel's Security Dilemma", p. 256

23 Gregory F. Giles, "Continuity and Change in Israel's Strategic Culture", Accessed online 10 August 2015, <http://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/dtra/israel.pdf>. p. 4.

24 Eligar Sadeh, "Militarisation and State Power in the Arab–Israeli Conflict: Case Study of Israel 1948–1982", p. 39–40

25 Aharon Yariv, "Strategic Depth," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* no. 17 (Fall 1980): 3–12, p. 3.

26 Ibid., p. 7.

27 Eliot Cohen, Michael Eisenstadt, and Andrew Bacevich, "Knives, Tanks, and Missiles: Israel's Security Revolution", p. 19.

28 Ibid.

Since deterrence and offensive strategies cannot stop a surprise attack against Israel, defensive measures were followed. The first element of Israeli defensive strategy is the early warning component.²⁹ The strong, well-equipped intelligence system in the IDF provides early warnings against attacks and allows the IDF to be effectively mobilised and prepared to deter an attack. Not only is an early warning strategy used for defensive purposes but also it has been used for pre-emptive strikes.³⁰ The second element is the policy of settlements in the West Bank. These settlements are the first-line of defence, can deter any Arab attack from reaching the Israeli heartlands, and provide an early warning until reservists are mobilised.³¹ There is no doubt that the settlement policy contributed to Israel's security. However, it created more security problems in terms of evacuation and protection during serious conflict,³² and also increased the sense of the Israeli unwillingness to withdraw from occupied territories and allow the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state.

Although Israel gained strategic depth after seizing the West Bank and Golan Heights, which brought drastic changes to Israel's geopolitical, topographical and psychological status quo, it barely changed its strategic doctrine since the existential threat of a coordinated Arab attack remained strong.³³ According to Abba Eban, these new territories were thought to be a vital deterrent element by themselves due to their topographical nature, which provided Israel with 'defensible borders'.³⁴ However, another opinion viewed the occupation of these territories as meaning an increase in insecurity since they were not internationally recognised, and harder to protect.³⁵ As Eban notes, "dictated borders are not protected,"³⁶ hence hostility would continue.

Peace treaties

Peace treaties with Egypt, Jordan, and the PLO were a major watershed for Israel's doctrinal thinking in the sense that Israel's strongest enemies accepted it as a legitimate state in the region and hence weakened the existential threat of a unified Arab attack.³⁷ Although peace with Egypt and Jordan brought some changes – in addition to the new strategic environment where Israel emerged as a regional superpower in the aftermath of the second Gulf War, and the Arab Spring revolts – Israel did not change its strategic doctrine except for removing Egypt and Jordan from its list of imminent threats, and its perception of an existential threat remained strong, particularly from Iran and its proxies.³⁸ Nevertheless, the Israeli victory over the Arab armies, military superiority, and strong relations with the United States, proved that Israel was a powerful state and the threat of being annihilated had been exaggerated.

According to Cheryl Rubenberg, the reason why Israel accepted the withdrawal from Sinai and negotiated with Egypt was for the 'demilitarisation' of the area, which would give Israel an early warning

29 Uri Bar-Joseph, "Towards a Paradigm Shift in Israel's National Security Conception", p. 100.

30 Uri Bar-Joseph, "Rotem: The Forgotten Crisis on the Road to the 1967 War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 31, no. 3 (July 1996): 547–566, p. 549–50.

31 Ariel Levite, *Offence and Defence in Israeli Military Doctrine* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), p. 27.

32 Uri Bar-Joseph, "Towards a Paradigm Shift in Israel's National Security Conception", p. 100.

33 Mark A. Heller, "Continuity and Change in Israeli Security Policy", p. 13.

34 Dan Horowitz, "The Israeli Concept of National Security", p. 23.

35 Anders Lidén, "Security and Recognition: A Study of Change in Israel Official Doctrine, 1967–1974", p. 123.

36 Ibid.

37 Hemda Ben-Yehuda and Shmuel Sandler, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict Transformed: Fifty Years of Interstate and Ethnic Crisis* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 134.

38 Ibid.

space and a barrier against surprise attacks.³⁹ Moreover, Michael Mandelbaum argues that Israel could have accepted demilitarisation of the rest of the occupied territories in 1967 for the sake of peace, but rejected this not only because these territories were vital security assets, but also because it did not trust the intentions of the Palestinians.⁴⁰ This claim sounds quite reasonable and reflects the Israeli security reluctance, but did not show the real reasons behind not negotiating. Prior to the Camp David Accords, Israel also did not trust the Egyptians good intentions as well, so why did it not allow the establishment of a Palestinian State?

The demilitarised area provided Israel with a buffer zone that had a similar role of security importance as the defensible borders.⁴¹ It was believed that such a buffer zone in the Sinai would minimise the threat of surprise attacks and provide an early warning time for mobilisation and deployment of the IDF.⁴² However, political leaders, especially Likud members, opposed the concept of buffer zones and argued that the Palestinians could smuggle in heavy artillery and missiles to these areas particularly in the West Bank, and attack Israeli heartlands before the IDF could even move any soldier.⁴³ Dan Horowitz contends that demilitarisation comes with an agreement that is protected by the supervision of great powers, UN presence, and regular patrols and any act that would violate the agreement would lead to a 'Casus Belli.'⁴⁴ Dan Horowitz defines it as, "vital Israeli interests vulnerable to short-of-war Arab provocations which could be regarded as violations of the rules of the game of a relatively stable dormant conflict."⁴⁵ For Israel, it not only rejected demilitarisation of West Bank because it has more strategic importance than Sinai, but also because of ideological beliefs and the right of Jews to settle anywhere in these areas, as explained earlier. The increasing extent of settlement construction since the 1967 War reflects this reality.⁴⁶

As an integral part of Israel's new concept of defence, military leaders called for increasing the numbers of settlements in both the Golan Heights and the West Bank, and supplied them with heavy weaponry, tanks, anti-tank missiles, surface-to-air missiles, and advanced communication tools in order to be the first line of defence and give the IDF more time to be mobilised and deployed.⁴⁷ If these settlements were not provided with advanced weaponry, indeed, they would be a burden on Israel during wartime.⁴⁸ This new settlement strategy was not only aimed at reinforcing security, but also aimed at consolidating Israel's control of the occupied territories.⁴⁹ This provoked the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians, and showed that Israel had no intentions to withdraw from or evacuate those lands any time in the future.

39 Cheryl Rubenberg, *Israel and the American National Interest: A Critical Examination* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 148–149.

40 Michael Mandelbaum, "Israel's Security Dilemma", p. 367.

41 Efraim Inbar, "Israel's National Security: Issues and Challenges since the Yom Kippur War", p. 9–10.

42 Dan Horowitz, "Israel's Concept of Defensible Borders", p. 18.

43 Sara M. Averick and Steven J. Rosen, *The Importance of the "West Bank" and Gaza to Israel's Security* (Washington, D.C.: American Israel Public Affairs Committee, 1985), p. 32.

44 Dan Horowitz, "Israel's Concept of Defensible Borders", p. 19.

45 Ibid., p. 9.

46 Sara M. Averick and Steven J. Rosen, "The Importance of the "West Bank" and Gaza to Israel's Security", p.33.

47 Efraim Inbar, "Israel's National Security: Issues and Challenges since the Yom Kippur War" p. 9–10.

48 Efraim Inbar, "Israeli Strategic Thought in the post-1973 Period," p. 8–9.

49 Sara M. Averick and Steven J. Rosen, "The Importance of the "West Bank" and Gaza to Israel's Security", p.36.

The Establishment of the Palestinian State

Instead of deterring the Arabs, the occupation of the 1967 lands actually provoked them, particularly the Palestinians, and increased insecurity not only for the state of Israel, but also for its citizens.⁵⁰ Yitzhak Rabin referred to the low intensity conflict with the Palestinians as annoying and cruel guerrilla-type warfare that does not annihilate Israel, but threatens the survival of its people.⁵¹ Most Labour Party members supported a recognised border; however, their counterparts in the Likud Party rejected the withdrawal from the 1967 territories not only for security reasons, but also due to Zionist beliefs that Jews have the right to settle everywhere in the Land of Israel.⁵² If this were purely a security-related issue, then why would Israel not demilitarise those territories similar to the Sinai Peninsula in the 1970s, and why would the issue of settlements remain unresolved? The settlements' security purpose was related to wartime. But during peacetime, it could be a negotiation card for peace with the Arabs and not only Palestinians.⁵³ Michael Mandelbaum argues that the problem related to land-for-peace is that Israel has to give up land that is vital for its security but the Arabs need only to change their minds and accept the Israeli state as a legitimate body.⁵⁴ If Israeli withdrawal from occupied lands would bring peace then why not? Israel was the one who attacked first, and it is the one who needs to compromise for the sake of peace, if it wants peace in the first place, not war.

Although a Palestinian state was advocated during the Oslo Peace Accord on the basis that it would increase Israeli security, political elites in Israel maintained scepticism and regarded an independent Palestinian state as a future security threat considering the unpredictability of the regional balance of power, which in return provoked the Palestinians. The prevalent Israeli perception only considered Palestinian violent-resistance as a secondary threat and it was only when the new notion of establishing a sovereign Palestinian state on the 1967 borders was seriously brought to the international agenda, that Israel began perceiving the Palestinian state as an existential threat.⁵⁵ Although the Israelis acknowledged the fact that establishing a Palestinian state would not threaten the survival of Israel, what was a major security concern was the fact that it could be used as a launching stage by either an individual Arab state or a coalition from Israel's defenceless border, the Eastern Front.⁵⁶ More importantly, a sovereign Palestinian state is believed to be dangerous for Israel's survival because it obligates Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories, which would bring back Israel to its geo-strategic vulnerability as prior to 1967 green line border.⁵⁷

The rationale behind the Oslo peace process was intended to address grave security related-issues, which emerged following the eruption of the First Intifada and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which brought unprecedented changes to the regional balance of power. The logic was to decrease existential threats but accept bigger threats to the daily life of Israeli citizens. Members of the Labour party believed that the alleviation of existential threats was more vital than the threat

50 Daniel Robinson, *Israel and the Palestinian Territories*, 7th ed. (London: Lonely Planet, 2012), p. 37.

51 Ami Gluska, "The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War Government, Armed Forces and Defence Policy 1963–1967" p. 89–90.

52 Leslie Derfler, *Yitzhak Rabin: A Political Biography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 49.

53 Efraim Inbar, *Israeli Strategic Thought in the post-1973 Period* (Israel: Israel's Research Institute of Contemporary Society, 1982), p. 1.

54 Michael Mandelbaum, "Israel's Security Dilemma", p. 358.

55 Mark Heller, *A Palestinian State: The Implications for Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 14.

56 *Ibid.*, p.15

57 *Ibid.*, p.16.

resulting from low intensity conflict with the Palestinians because it could never threaten Israeli survival.⁵⁸ That is why, strategically and in the long-term, that policy was logical. But it was problematic for the security anticipations of civilians and other Israeli hardliners with ideological beliefs who had long opposed peace with Arabs.

The 'land-for-peace policy' that encompassed territorial withdrawal showed additional modifications in conventional Israeli doctrinal thinking regarding the importance of the strategic depth component. According to the Labour administration, strategic depth became less important; particularly after the Gulf War, which specified how protected borders shouldn't be linked with territorial significance.⁵⁹ This rationale changed the old mainstream understanding about the concept of 'defensible-borders' that is only based on geography and topography and started to advocate for the effectiveness of bilateral recognition of secured borders. Such thinking allowed the possibility of territorial compromises and withdrawal from parts of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.⁶⁰ But with the return of the Likud party to power in 1993, the policy of land-for-peace was strongly opposed to the extent that the principle of any territorial withdrawal for peace was completely revoked from the agenda.

Another permanent Israeli argument revolved around the economic and political challenges that would increase chaos and instability within the newly born Palestinian state adjacent to Israel.⁶¹ Anders Liden argues that the people revolting against socio-economic injustice and the lack of employment, who are also fighting against Israeli occupation, which caused such unbearable conditions, have nothing to lose if they attack Israel again after establishing a potential failed state. Therefore, they will become more radicalised and violently motivated.⁶² But this claim is quite exaggerated; if Palestine had been established, it would have been recognised by the international community, which would provide economic, political and military support, and hence international aid, economic investments, and trade would increase the likelihood of a stable economy and job opportunities, which ultimately will lead to de-radicalisation.

According to Shlomo Brom, the threat perception of a Palestinian state has been overstated, and the reason for this is purely political since the Palestinian question was and still is one of the core issues of the Arab-Israel conflict. He states that creating Palestinian statehood could eradicate a fundamental source of violence in the region.⁶³ This argument makes sense since the creation of a Palestinian state could minimise the security threat that comes from the Eastern Front, since the likelihood of a coordinated Arab attack would be terminated. However, the issue of 'irredentism' is also considered a major threat.⁶⁴ Moshe Dayan was one of the Israeli leaders who always claimed that the Palestinian right to statehood would ultimately lead to the annihilation of Israel, since the PLO leadership and other radical groups would not be happy enough to exist side-by-side with Israel, but would attempt to push the Jewish state into the sea.⁶⁵ Such threat perception was reflected in the Palestinian 'doctrine of phases' that calls for the

58 Ibid., p.16.

59 Mark Heller, *A Palestinian State: The Implications for Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 16.

60 Ibid.

61 Anders Liden, "Security and Recognition: A Study of Change in Israel Official Doctrine 1967-1974," p. 172.

62 Ibid.

63 Shlomo Brom, "From Rejection to Acceptance: Israeli National Security Thinking and Palestinian Statehood", *United States Institute of Peace*, vol.177 of Special report (Oct 2008): 1-19, p. 11.

64 Jerome Slater, "A Palestinian State and Israeli Security". *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 106, no. 3 (Autumn, 1991): 411-429, p. 414-415.

65 Ibid.

liberation of the rest of Palestine after establishing the Palestinian state on the 1967 borders. Although this doctrine is no longer relevant, events on the grounds suggested otherwise, notably the rise of fundamentalist groups like Hamas in 2006.⁶⁶ Given the small size of any future Palestinian state and its limited military capability, it is unlikely to attack Israel, which possesses one of the strongest armies in the world. In addition, Palestinian leadership would not take a step that might put the Palestinian state at existential risk. Yet using this argument as an excuse shows that Israel had no intention in creating a Palestinian state nor ending the conflict with its Arab neighbours.

The 'realpolitik' policy in the interpretation of events reflects Israel's unwillingness to pursue peace and its continued perception of everything from a realist security-military perspective that would hinder any prospects of a peace settlement.⁶⁷ However, if Israel is actually committed to peace and believes in a two-state solution for two people living side by side with peace, security and dignity based on the 1967 borders, it vital for Israeli leadership to re-think its national security doctrine and seek an alternative methodology to make actual shifts in the region.

Policy Options

1. *Building an Independent Palestinian State*

Allowing the prolongation of the low intensity conflict with the Palestinians will untimely lead to more gradual and grave challenges to Israel as it carries the cost of losing Israeli legitimacy in the international environment. The international isolation of Israel has been a vital element of Palestinian strategy, and remains so to this day.

In spite of the current and larger degree of global recognition and acceptance of the Israeli state, the state's acceptance among the Arab and Muslim world is still questioned. International condemnation of the Israeli illegal occupation alongside its aggressive policies towards the Palestinians alienated regional states and consolidated the feeling that Israel resorts to war not diplomacy, preferring illegal settlement to diplomatic settlements. This vision is predominantly shared among the Palestinians, who attempt to deny Israel international acceptability for its domestic policies – such as security measurements, targeted killings / deliberate assassinations, or Israeli biblical claims in the West Bank and Jerusalem – but also of its right to exist. The Palestinian policy has constantly attempted to demean Israel and undermine its international legitimacy by building an effective use of nongovernmental organisations and international settings where Arab and non-Arab states muster large numbers of supporters to the Palestinian cause. Comparisons of Israel to Nazism or to the Apartheid system in South Africa damage Israel's credibility internationally and further its isolation.

This tactic gained growing reliability in the mass media and in the political and academic spheres in Western states. Moreover, new historian academics and critics in Israel also offered a platform of support for the Palestinian issue. For many, the Jewish state became the main source of hostility in the region and is the key reason behind the Arab–Israeli conflict, in which the logic of the Zionist project in constructing a Jewish homeland has been jeopardized regionally and

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Efraim Inbar, *Rabin and Israel's National Security* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 1999), p. 29.

internationally. Therefore, Israel must adopt a more “win–win” strategy to maintain and protect its international legitimacy by resorting to diplomacy rather than war. Allowing the establishment of a Palestinian state will not only promote Israel's image and legitimacy but also will bring massive economic and security benefits to the whole region, including Israel and Palestine.

Subsequently, diplomacy and bilateral peace deals can have vital influence in the pre-emption of grave security threats and collaboratively maintain regional and domestic peace efforts. It must be in the Israeli national security interest to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and allow the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. Israel should not only perceive the conflict with the Palestinians as an existential threat, but also as a hindrance to attaining overall security and to safeguarding its territorial integrity in both the short-term and the long-term. Israel must alter its traditional zero-sum-game tactic and embrace a more positive standpoint that promotes win–win results between Israel and the Palestinians, based on the principle that the accomplishments of one party should not be achieved at the expense of the other side. This approach takes into consideration the fact that Israel's position of strength allows it to act accordingly. A good example of this approach is the on-going security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

2. *Bilateral Security Coordination*

The traditional rationale of unilateralism, which is largely supported by Israeli politicians, would create additional security challenges for both the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Uncoordinated territorial withdrawal leaves a power vacuum which can be exploited by extremists and would place more strategic targets at risk on both sides. It also means partial loss of monopoly over the use of force and the implementation of order. Indeed, the uncoordinated withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005 has enabled the smuggling of sophisticated weaponry into the hands of anti-PA militant groups, which replaced the PA and changed the rules of the game. It has also deepened the necessity for greater surveillance efforts against radicalised groups and criminals attempting to infiltrate from Egyptian controlled territories into Israel and PA-administrated territories. In general, the absence of control over the use of force, and the collapse of law and order produce an environment that facilitates radicalisation. Indeed, the West has become increasingly concerned over states incapable of exercising full sovereignty in an effective method, with particular fears over political unrest and insecurity. A lack of cohesive security coordination with the Palestinian Authority and a lack of support for the establishment of a viable and strong Palestinian state will open the door for new radicalised groups in Israeli and Palestinian societies, and will further complicate the prospects for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Moreover, bilateralism can effectively contribute to establishing secure borders. The lines that explain the current Israeli borders are predominantly the outcome of cessation of hostilities arrangements, peace treaties, and facts on the ground imposed unilaterally by the Israeli side. Two peace deals have been achieved among others: The first is the peace deal done with the Egyptian state, which defines and protects the Israeli southern border alongside the Sinai Peninsula. The second peace deal is with Kingdom of Jordan, which defines and safeguards the Israeli border along the eastern bank of the Jordan River. Nevertheless, the legal status of the Palestinian occupied

territories in 1967 has not been defined since the 1949 'green line' end of hostilities agreement. From the 1967 War, these lands have been exclusively under Israel's military rule.

The Israeli leadership must work to allow the establishment of defensible borders that are recognised by the United Nations and the international community. These borders can only be determined by bilateral negotiations and settlements with all stakeholders involved, particularly the Palestinians. Considering the fact that Israel is a small country, surrounded by enemies and lacking in strategic depth, these coordinated agreements, which are largely founded on common interests, have great significance. In times of need, they can be used as defence alliances. Thus, for example, the Israeli peace agreement with Jordan established Israel's eastern line of defence on the border between Jordan and Iraq. Additionally, close security arrangements and agreements with the Palestinians will bring security and stability which in the short-term can lead to trust-building among both sides to collaboratively combat radicalisation and set the foundation of strong and secure Palestinian and Israeli states living side-by-side with peace, security and prosperity.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that security is critical for every country, but since every country is inherently unique and faces diversified security threats and strategic vulnerabilities, each country tends to treat security as the ultimate foundation of its survival. The newly born Israeli state placed security at the core of its national military-security doctrine since its foundation in 1948 and therefore, security has been the steering wheel of Israel's doctrinal thinking. This paper has investigated the key components that contributed to the formation of Israel's national security doctrine and how they evolved in relation to Palestinian statehood. Moreover, the paper has answered the question of whether Israel's national security doctrine has undergone radical/slight changes due to the shifting external and internal environment, or whether it remained unchanged. It concludes that Israel's strategic doctrine went through certain modifications due to changes in the strategic and political environment, and that is why Israel considered entering into peace deals with the Palestinians. Yet the principle of offensive strategy by prevention and pre-emption continued to be the dominant factor in the Israeli doctrinal thinking regardless of the improvement in the geo-strategic level. The existential threat of being annihilated remains the key element that influences Israel's concept of national security, which is arguably exaggerated in order to justify the use of military force, offensive strategy and denying the Palestinians their right of statehood.

Having examined Israel's national security doctrine, it can be predicted that Israel is highly unlikely to alter its doctrinal thinking in the near future and the existential threat perception of total annihilation will continue to be the dominant element in its policy-making. The new environment of the 'new world order' brought even more significant advantages to Israel both on the political and geo-strategic levels such as; good relations with the US, the peace deals with Egypt, Jordan, and the PLO, the elimination of the Iraqi threat after the 2003 Gulf War, and the on-going intrastate conflicts in the Middle East. Unfortunately, Israel has followed one of the most offensive strategies and has fought disproportionate and indiscriminate wars against the Palestinians.

Israel's Doctrinal Thinking and Palestinian Statehood

More importantly, Israeli deterrence has failed many times in dissuading Arab-attacks, as with the recent assaults in the Gaza Strip. Iran's nonconventional capability and the potential of a WMD missile attack from its regional 'state-like' allies has now become the foremost existential threat for Israel's national security. The recent Iranian nuclear deal in addition to the increasing proliferation of nonconventional weapons in the region with the involvement of superpowers poses a significant existential threat not only for Israel but also to Arab states since it will lead to a nuclear Middle East. Therefore, it is arguable whether Israel will change its doctrinal thinking and indeed, perhaps its national security doctrine will be further expanded to include more explicit offensive postures like; rethinking its deliberate nuclear ambiguity policy and adopting a policy of unconcealed nuclear deterrence by 'removing the bomb from the basement'; and seeking new strategic alliances with countries on the periphery of the Middle East. Rethinking its doctrinal thinking and threat perceptions concerning the establishment of a Palestinian state can ultimately promote Israel's position and acceptance among the Arab world. The current geopolitical environment of the Middle East arguably provides an unprecedented opportunity to make peace not only with the Palestinians, but also with the Arab world as a result of an agreement with the Palestinians. Therefore, it is vital that the Israeli leadership consider the policy option detailed in this paper should they wish to make peace possible.

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Addie is an active young professional who possess a great amount of practical experience gained by working primarily with International NGOs in subjects related to human rights, socioeconomic justice, peace and security in conflict zones. He believes that combined higher education and practical knowledge is vital to bringing about peace and justice to the Middle East. To this end he is seeking to continue his studies with a PhD in War Studies so that he can contribute to existing research and perhaps add new thoughts concerning the Palestine-Israel conflict.

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