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*in*FOCUS

QUARTERLY

Israel's Allies and Adversaries



Natan Sharansky on Israel's Strategic Priorities | **Mark Meierowitz** on American's View of the Jewish State | **David M. Weinberg** on the Success of the Abraham Accords | **Mitchell Bard** on BDS Failures | **Richard Kemp** on the Soviet Origins of Israeli "Apartheid" | **Matti Friedman** on China-Israel Relations | **Shoshana Bryen** on U.S.-Israel Cooperation | **Yoni Ben-Menachem** on the Palestinian Authority's Failures | **Eran Lerman** on Iran's Malign Behavior | **Jennifer Dyer** on Confronting Iran Militarily | **Sean Durns** on Iran's Inflaming Arab Israeli Opinion | **Lauri B. Regan** reviews *Gaza Conflict 2021*

Featuring an Interview with Maj. Gen. **Amos Yadlin**, IDF (ret.)

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Welcome to our annual Israel issue – the good news and the worrisome news about Israel, its defense, and its place in the world. But as we go to press, Israel is becoming something new. Mediating the effort to end the hideous Russian invasion of Ukraine, Israel is the center of a stage much larger than its size and history would suggest.

Or not. For all the Israel bashing that goes on in international institutions, Israel is a strong, confident, and important international player. In his interview with *inFOCUS* Quarterly editor Shoshana Bryen, Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin provides a broad picture of Israel's military thinking and its capabilities.

The war in Ukraine made us introspective. How did we get here? What did we miss? Natan Sharansky, the conscience of Israel and the Jewish people, tells us. We didn't do it to bash Russia, but it works – Richard Kemp exposes Soviet Russia's promulgation of the "Israel Apartheid" lie and how it was pushed into the international mainstream. Yet, Mark Meirowitz puts Israel in the mainstream of positive American thinking – despite "the Squad" and its allies. The BDS movement has foundered, writes Mitchell Bard, and lost ground with Ben



& Jerry's and Unilever. David Weinberg sees the Abraham Accords continuing to create progress for the people of the Gulf and Israel, even as the parties worry about American policy. Israel and China, according to Matti Friedman, is a mixed bag, but undeniably moving forward. Shoshana Bryen reports that American military relations with Israel are strong and growing.

Iran is Iran. Eran Lerman, Jennifer Dyer, and Sean Durns take on Israel's response to the threat, pre-emption as military doctrine, and Iran's attempt to radicalize Israel's Arab citizens.

Was it only a year ago that Israel faced the Hamas rocket war? Hamas has plans on the West Bank as well, writes Yoni Ben Menachem. And Lauri Regan reviews Jonathan Schanzer's *Gaza Conflict 2021*.

If you appreciate what you've read, I encourage you to make a contribution to the Jewish Policy Center. As always, you can use our secure site: <http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/donate>

Sincerely,

Matthew Brooks
Publisher

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Israel, Russia, and the U.S. Moral Abdication

by **NATAN SHARANSKY**

President Obama's fecklessness in Syria and the Iran deal forced Jerusalem to choose survival over its principles.

As Vladimir Putin's barbaric assault on Ukraine unfolds, the public conversation about Israel's response has grown predictable. On one side are the defenders of *realpolitik*, including many Israelis, who see the need for coordination with Russia in Israel's fight against terrorism on its northern border. On the other side are a small group of moralists, myself included, who regard Mr. Putin's

Israel has sent significant humanitarian aid and condemned the Russian invasion in the U.N. General Assembly.

Every country that values democracy and human rights ought to stand in solidarity against Mr. Putin's actions. Yet when former U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen tells a reporter he is "deeply disappointed" with Israel and demands that we choose between Russia and the U.S., it is clear an important point has been forgotten: It was America's lack of moral clarity that forced Israel to become so dependent on Mr. Putin.

conflict, the factor that would lead him to use military force against Mr. Assad. In 2013 reports surfaced of a devastating chemical weapons attack in the rebel-controlled suburbs of Damascus. Hundreds of civilians were killed. Yet the Obama administration delayed action and the momentum for a military intervention faded, leading to a massive humanitarian crisis.

Mr. Putin saw the U.S. retreat in Syria as a sign of weakness and exploited the opportunity to advance his project of renewing Russia's great-power status. In 2014 he invaded Crimea. In 2015 he established a military base in Khmeimim, Syria, and began air strikes to support Mr. Assad's forces there. Both maneuvers provided him with an opportunity to test his military strength. His presence in Syria further ensured that the keys to Syrian airspace would remain in his hands.

The next development in the U.S. abdication of moral leadership was the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. The agreement neglected to demand that Iran respect human rights and end its support for global terrorism in exchange

It was America's lack of moral clarity that forced Israel to become so dependent on Mr. Putin.

actions as the ultimate threat to freedom and who urge Israel to join the rest of the civilized world in standing unequivocally against him. Israel's leaders have hewn a cautious path between the two. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met with Mr. Putin in the Kremlin over the weekend and spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky by phone. One week into the war the Israeli government declined to join 81 other countries in co-sponsoring a United Nations Security Council resolution against the Russian invasion. The Israeli government has repeatedly declined requests for military aid from Mr. Zelensky. But

How did this happen? The first major development was President Barack Obama's disastrous response to Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's use of chemi-

Mr. Putin saw the U.S. retreat in Syria as a sign of weakness and exploited the opportunity to advance his project of renewing Russia's great-power status.

cal weapons against his own people. In 2012 Mr. Obama declared chemical weapons to be a "red line" in the Syrian

for billions of dollars in cash. A significant portion of these funds went to Hezbollah, which in turn managed to



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. (Photo: Kremlin.ru)

transform itself from a partisan group into an army, building bases in Syria and continuing its operations there and in Lebanon.

Israel had no choice but to reach a strategic agreement with Russia to fight against Iran and its proxies. In protecting itself from terrorist aggression, Israel must consider Russia's presence in Syria and secure Mr. Putin's agreement for airstrikes against targets there. This arrangement, which began under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, renders Israel dependent on Russia's goodwill even now, during Mr. Putin's worst aggressions to date.

Making matters worse, an imminent nuclear deal with Iran will give yet more money to the regime without any linkage to its behavior. As a result, Israel will become even more dependent on Russia.

Israel would not have been forced

to choose between its principles and survival had it not been for the lack of moral clarity in Europe and the U.S. The same free world that now stands in solidarity against one dictator is on the verge of signing—with that very dictator—an agreement that would give hundreds of billions of dollars to another corrupt, oppressive regime that has vowed to destroy Israel.

It isn't too late to change this state of affairs. One option is to table the latest Iranian nuclear agreement and instead make clear to Tehran's theocrats that their aggressions won't be tolerated, let alone rewarded. If a deal is inevitable, another solution is to tie financial support for Iran to the latter's verifiable commitment to protect human rights at home and cease its terrorist incitement abroad. This simple solution, which both the Obama and Biden administrations

have thus far refused to accept, would not only reflect moral clarity, it would undermine Mr. Putin's growing power on the world stage.

Russia's actions in Ukraine are a test for the free world, which is why my government's reluctance to oppose them forcefully is disappointing. Yet the reality of Israel's dependence on Russia shows again that if the U.S. wants to lead the free world in confronting tyranny, its actions in confronting tyrants must be clear and consistent.

NATAN SHARANSKY is a former Soviet dissident, Israeli government minister and author of *The Case for Democracy*. He is chairman of the International Supervisory Board of Kyiv's Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center. Reprinted with permission of The Wall Street Journal.

How Israel is Seen In the Mind of America

by **MARK MEIROWITZ**

Israel is not on America's mind. Americans are preoccupied with coming out of the COVID pandemic, jobs, the economy, etc.

As for foreign policy, Americans have become more isolationist – this was the case with Afghanistan with the hasty U.S. pullout, and now, with Ukraine, while sympathizing with the Ukrainian struggle against Russian aggression, many Americans are more interested in how the Ukraine crisis will affect gas prices. J D Vance, a Republican running for a U.S. Senate nomination in Ohio, was quoted as saying that he didn't "really care what happens to Ukraine one way or another." Vance elaborated that, "I'm sick of Joe Biden focusing on the border of a country I don't care about while he lets the border of his own country become a total war zone."

As for Israel, added to the lack of interest or focus on international affairs, Americans have been susceptible to a veritable onslaught of disinformation related to what is going on in the Jewish state.

The Democratic Socialists of America made it clear that their platform includes "continued support for and involvement with the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, and efforts to eliminate U.S. military aid to Israel, while resisting the 'normalization' of relationships between the Israeli government and other governments." The DSA also used terms such as "ethnic cleansing," "racism," and "apartheid" to vilify Israel.

Progressives, including members of Congress in the so-called "Squad," have

been strident critics of Israel and have taken action in Congress to try to limit funding of Israel's military defensive needs, including even the Iron Dome system which has saved countless Israeli lives. One "Squad" member even falsely accused Israel of putting children in cages in the West Bank.

As reported recently in the *New York Times*, "[a]ccording to Gallup polling, Americans' views of the conflict have changed significantly since 2013, with sympathy for the Israelis falling slightly and sympathy for the Palestinians more than doubling. The shift has overwhelmingly been on account of Democrats; while Republican opinion has changed little, Democrats have gone from sym-

barrage of missiles seeking the annihilation of the Jewish state.

Many Americans perceive Israel as a powerful country in the Middle East with an advanced economy and incredible high-tech achievements. But on a closer look, Israel is in grave and existential danger from its adversaries, especially Iran, whose leaders have vowed to wipe it off the map.

As many commentators have noted, Israel is now seen as Goliath, with the Palestinians as David. This image is far from the truth.

Media coverage of Israel has been blatantly biased. According to the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA),

'Democrats have gone from sympathizing more with Israel by a margin of 30 points in 2002 to being more or less evenly split today.'

pathizing more with Israel by a margin of 30 points in 2002 to being more or less evenly split today."

There has been a veritable and palpable inversion from seeing Israel as the underdog with its survival threatened by hostile nations, to Israel being seen as an oppressor of innocents, even when Israelis have been targeted by an endless

National Public Radio (NPR) "presented a one-sided, propagandistic account of demolitions in the Silwan area of Jerusalem that omitted half the story ... it established a misleading narrative that blamed Israel for sparking conflict in the region." CAMERA also noted that other NPR reportage was lacking in providing Israeli voices and viewpoints.



Secretary General of Amnesty International, Agnes Callamard (Center) holds a press conference in East Jerusalem on February 1, 2022. (Photo: Anadolu Agency)

NGO Monitor noted that NPR coverage “[p]romoted a one-sided approach to the conflict, placing sole blame for the failure of the peace process on Israel.”

While some journalists such as Peter Beinart, a *New York Times* contributor and journalism professor at City University of New York, have advocated a one-state solution for the future of Israel, Bret Stephens, also of the *Times*, has described this approach as “utopian in theory and would be disastrous in practice.” A one-state solution would mean the end of Israel as the one Jewish majority country.

We can scoff at ice cream makers Ben & Jerry’s boycott in Israel but it has affected perceptions of the country. The founders of Ben & Jerry’s, Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, stated that to allow selling their products in what they called the “Occupied Palestinian Territory”

would be inconsistent “with our values”, and that this action is “a rejection of Israeli policy, which perpetuates an illegal occupation that is a barrier to peace and violates the basic human rights of the Palestinian people who live under the occupation.”

No matter that Israel won the territories in a defensive war in 1967 and retained them in another such conflict in 1973, and remains the obligatory military occupational authority until the Palestinian side agrees to negotiate a peace settlement.

Amnesty International in a recent report accused Israel of “massive seizures of Palestinian land and property, unlawful killings, forcible transfer, drastic movement restrictions, and the denial of nationality and citizenship to Palestinians [which] are all components of a system which amounts to apartheid

under international law. This system is maintained by violations which Amnesty International found to constitute apartheid as a crime against humanity, as defined in the Rome Statute and Apartheid Convention.”

Indeed, detractors of Israel seek to link Israel to white supremacy in the United States and so-called American imperialism. One commentator was of the view that “the similarities between white supremacists in the U.S. and Zionist settlers in Israel are not coincidental.”

All of the above have combined to undermine the perception of Israel in the thoughts and attitudes of Americans, and may well lead to further diminution in public support for, and attitudes about Israel.

However, there is still room for optimism. Israel has friends and supporters

in the world who know the real story. Bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress, notwithstanding the “Squad,” has been rock solid. The majority of participants in the Evangelical Christian move-

The Abraham Accords among Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and later Morocco and Sudan have provided a way forward to real peace in the Middle East. Supporting this approach

with Israel could serve as catalyst for positive change among the Palestinian leadership and within Palestinian society. If we are fortunate enough to arrive at that stage, the hateful rhetoric and deceitful imagery that is today the Palestinian narrative will simply lose relevance. The underdog will have wandered off.” There is a great deal of work to be done.

As for Israel, added to the lack of interest or focus on international affairs, Americans have been susceptible to a veritable onslaught of disinformation related to what is going on in the Jewish state.

ment are steadfast supporters of Israel. Americans will come to learn the truth about Israel and discard the campaign of misinformation. Americans quickly saw through the tears of a “Squad” member who cried when Congress passed special legislation continuing defensive military aid for Israel.

Also, as Walter Russell Mead has observed:

[W]hile American ‘soft power’ goals in the region (the spread of democracy, the creation of a democratic and peaceful Palestinian state) may be out of reach even with intense American engagement, our most important security and economic goals have never been easier to achieve. For decades, Arab-Israeli tensions complicated the path of American regional diplomacy. Today, most of the Gulf states are strategically aligned with Israel. Thanks to Russian assertiveness in Ukraine, Syria and the Caucasus, Turkey seems open to a new kind of relationship with Washington, Jerusalem, and Riyadh. Properly managed, a powerful alliance network in the Middle East will reinforce America’s global peace strategy at a reasonable cost.

will require American policy makers to rethink their ideas about the region, including Israel, uninfluenced by the torrent of false information about the Jewish State.

Hopefully, policy makers and journalists, and Americans at large will

Following the Russian attack on Ukraine, the structure of world politics will be unclear. Will the United States come to the defense of Israel if Israel is subjected to another war by Hamas or Hezbollah, or, most frighteningly, from Iran? With the United States on the brink of another ill-advised nuclear deal with Iran, will America back Israel in its hour of need (as it has done in the past) if Washington finalizes a deal with Iran and then the ayatollahs go nuclear, threatening Israel’s very existence?

Israelis must stay strong and resolute and know the cause is just. Israel and its supporters must continue mak-

If Israel continues to advance diplomatic relations with her Muslim neighbors, it is reasonable that they would concede the need for the Palestinians to also recognize Israel’s legitimacy...

come to understand the importance of the Abraham Accords – which are a true game changer in the Middle East. It is a commentator’s view that if Israel continues to advance diplomatic relations with her Muslim neighbors, it is reasonable that they would concede the need for the Palestinians to also recognize Israel’s legitimacy and negotiate a mutually acceptable settlement. Diplomatic and even economic pressure from Arab countries at peace

ing its case that it is a vital democracy in the Middle East facing true existential threats. Israel must demonstrate that, despite its enemies, it will continue to exist, thrive and live according to its values. In doing so, Israel will counter the misperceptions and falsehoods meant to undermine its existence.

MARK MEIROWITZ is Professor, State University of New York (SUNY) Maritime College.

Embrace the Abraham Accords Already!

by **DAVID M. WEINBERG**

Western progressives are dissing rather than embracing the Abraham Accords. This is a tragedy. Time to rebrand the Accords and get the Biden administration to adopt a more enthusiastic approach to expanding Arab/Islamic peace with Israel.

The Abraham Accords have transformed the strategic architecture of the Middle East, with Israel moving from a defensive stance against Iran and its proxies to an offensive posture that is buttressed by a network of alliances with key Arab countries.

It might even be said that the Abraham Accords have brought about an end to Arab-Israeli conflict. What remains live and combustible is an Iranian-Israeli conflict with some co-combatants in the Arab world on either side.

As a result, Israel is becoming the center of a new international security order, an emerging alliance structure aimed at combating belligerent actors in the Middle East, a framework that spans the United States and Europe to North Africa, Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies, and India.

In recent months, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was received with royal honors in Manama by the King of Bahrain. Israel signed a historic defense cooperation agreement with the kingdom that will see Israeli defense officials and naval personnel permanently stationed in Bahrain.

According to some reports, Israel's submarine force equipped with nuclear-tipped missiles will be able to anchor and restock in Bahrain, something that literally gives Israel a forward base on Iran's borders.

Israeli President Yitzhak Herzog, Bennett, and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid also have made grand visits to the United Arab Emirates, and Defense Minister Benny Gantz signed defense accords (including significant arms sales) on a visit to Morocco.

■ *Changes in Attitude*

The Abraham Accord alliances are marked by warm friendships too, backed by a discourse of genuine tolerance and ideological moderation. The Emiratis, Bahrainis, and Moroccans have decorated their meetings with Israeli leaders with symbols of true acceptance—such as the playing of Israel's national anthem, “Hatikvah” (The Hope, which describes the Jewish soul's desire for a return to Zion) in their palaces and on their official airwaves.

By referencing the Abrahamic common heritage of Moslems and Jews in the foundational document of the Abraham

Clearly, the leaders of these countries want to redefine the self-identity and global image of Arab Moslems by blending tradition with enlightenment, anchored in an admirable discourse of religious moderation and broad-mindedness.

Affiliating with Israel fits perfectly into this agenda because this is exactly how they view Israel too – as a nation that successfully synthesizes strong ethnic and religious identity with modernity. Therefore, the Abraham Accords are deeply rooted in genuine ideological intentions (as well as urgent security realities) and are locked-in for the long term.

Here is a concrete example of this new moderate discourse: The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) has found that much of the old anti-Israel material in Emirati textbooks has been deleted or altered. Passages that previously demonized Israel, presented

...the Abraham Accords are deeply rooted in genuine ideological intentions...and are locked-in for the long term.

Accords, and playing “Hatikvah” in their royal palaces, Arab countries implicitly are acknowledging that Jews are a Biblical people indigenous to the Land of Israel. This is a joyous revolution that overturns generations of Arab and Islamic ideological delegitimization of Israel.

anti-Semitic conspiracies, and blamed “the Zionist enemy” for seeking to “exterminate the Palestinian people” have been removed. Especially noteworthy is the removal of passages that presented the Palestinian issue as “the basis of conflicts in the Middle East.” Passages

focusing on tolerance towards Jews have been inserted instead.

■ **People to People Ties**

People-to-people ties are developing between Israeli and Gulf groups, too, alongside exploding trade ties.

...the Accords are a blunt refutation of the ongoing Palestinian campaign to deny and criminalize the Jewish people's historic rights in Israel.

The UAE-Israel Business Council has developed into a community of more than 5,000 entrepreneurs, professionals, investors, companies, and government officials who regularly meet through an ever-expanding range of conferences, webinars, and in-person events. The Gulf-Israel Women's Forum is the first association bringing together female leaders from across the Middle East. The Gulf-Israel Policy Forum draws academics, policymakers, and cultural leaders from across the region.

In 2022, bilateral UAE-Israel trade in goods and services is expected to reach \$2 billion, an increase of 50 percent over 2021, with significant growth in tourism, agriculture, investment, cleantech and professional services. Close to 500 Israeli companies have business dealings in the UAE, including 250 with a permanent presence or collaboration with a UAE partner.

Trade between Israel and the other Abraham Accords countries should jump this year to as much as \$1 billion. There even is a strong increase in Israeli trade with Egypt and Jordan – where the stigma of trading with Israel is gradually fading away, thanks to the Abraham Accords.

■ **You Can't Please Everyone**

Alas, for parts of the political left and the anti-Israel mobs it is hard to

exult in the Abraham Accords. It means swallowing the fact Israel is demonstrably a force for good, knowledge, prosperity, and stability in the Middle East. After all, that is the reason the Abraham Accord countries are band wagoning with Israel.

It is even harder for extremists on the hard left to accept the Abraham Accords. De facto, the Accords are a blunt refutation of the ongoing Palestinian campaign to deny and criminalize the Jewish people's historic rights in Israel.

■ **The Statement**

In February, a smorgasbord of so-called “progressive” advocacy organizations in the U.S. called upon Congress “to reject the dangerous Abraham Accords”; those accords being the um-

Trade between Israel and the other Abraham Accords countries should jump this year to as much as \$1 billion. There even is a strong uptick in Israeli trade with Egypt and Jordan...

brella framework that “dangerously” has wrought peace treaties thus far between Israel and four Arab countries. The U.S. Presbyterian Church, Progressive Democrats of America, Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, and other fringe

groups kvetched that “lasting peace comes from justice, not weapons deals.”

America must embrace a foreign policy toward Palestine/Israel that is rooted in human rights, justice, and equality, and to resoundingly reject any attempts to further the Trump administration's 'Abraham Accords,' including through legislation like H.R. 2748/S. 1061, the Israel Relations Normalization Act of 2021. While masquerading as 'peace' and 'diplomacy,' the Abraham Accords and this legislation are in fact an endorsement of arms sales and political favors between the U.S. and authoritarian regimes – including weapons sales to the UAE and the recognition of Morocco's illegal annexation of Western Sahara – in exchange for the sidelining of Palestinian rights... We must end support for Israel's violations of Palestinian rights and its apartheid rule.

Prominent Moslem advocacy groups also signed the statement, including Linda Sarsour's MPower Change, Arab Resource & Organizing Center (AROC) and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

Opposition to peace in the Middle East by these purportedly progressive groups, their opposition to dialogue and cooperation with Israel, and their support for continued boycotts against Israel – because the recalcitrant and violent Palestinians have been left behind



Former Israeli Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, and Bahrain Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa at the Abraham Accords signing ceremony in Washington, DC. (Photo: AP)

– tells you all you need to know about the nefariousness of these American groups.

Their sour and rejectionist remarks – asserting that the Abraham Accords are no more than a Trump-tainted gimmick or a Netanyahu-stained end-run around the Palestinians, and not an authentic breakthrough for peace and security in the Middle East – are absolutely false.

Their attitude is a nasty, bitter, and ideologically distorted take on Israeli and American goals. And as described above, it also is a complete misreading of Emirati, Bahraini and Moroccan purposes in pursuit of peace with Israel.

■ **Strengthening the Accords**

How might the intransigent Palestinians and their backwards backers in America be convinced to appreciate and take advantage of the gargantuan opportunities made possible by the Abraham Accords?

To begin with, moderate forces on the democratic left – for example, Biden administration officials and mainstream Democrats in Congress – ought to move beyond their Trump traumas and get behind the Abraham Accords revolution. Instead of sitting on the sidelines of this historic transformation, Biden’s Washington should be embracing the Accords and investing in their expansion.

While the administration’s rhetoric on the Abraham Accords has improved lately, the palpable momentum of one or two years ago has been lost. The administration has made it clear that its top interest is begging Iran for a renewed nuclear deal, not buttressing the anti-Iran camp nor solidifying a new regional alliance with Israel as its fulcrum.

As a result, Biden has paid only lip service to the Accords (for a while his aides even refused to use the moniker “Abraham Accords”) while doing little concrete to promote them. For example,

the administration has not appointed a special envoy tasked with advancing or expanding Abraham Accord-type reconciliations between Arab/Islamic countries and Israel. This is something that should have been an early Biden White House move, with a high-profile appointment on the level of a Jared Kushner in the Trump years.

Instead, the present administration rapidly appointed a special envoy tasked with withdrawing U.S. support for the battle against Iranian-backed Houthi forces in Yemen (a terribly mistaken decision), while distancing the U.S. from Saudi Arabia regarding the Yemen war and just about everything else. This, too, relates to the administration’s helter-skelter rush to another bad deal with the Iranians.

In fact, Biden administration behavior casts a pall over the Abraham Accords and engenders doubt that the “Abrahamic narrative” can grow beyond its current contours.

Why should the Saudis, for example, take another step towards Israel, if Washington looks upon this with disfavor (again, because it would anger the Iranians)?

Similar questions are being asked angrily by countries that already have bought into the Abraham Accords. For example, the Emiratis are furious (yes, furious!) with the Biden administration for abandoning the fight against the Houthis, for cozying up to the Iranians, and for monkeying with the agreement to sell American F-35’s to Abu Dhabi.

Why should the Omanis upgrade their relationship with Israel if Israeli leaders cannot help broker better ties for Muscat in Washington?

Why should the Indonesians make a breakthrough normalization agreement with Israel if the Biden administration is not enthusiastically backing the Abraham Accords?

■ **The Current Climate**

All this must change. Especially in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

and the special role that Israel has played in preventing escalation to all-out war between America/NATO and Russia, it is time for the Biden administration to adopt a more positive approach to ex-

(which was the Trump administration's focus). The Accords can and should mean reconciliation and acceptance.

Consider the psychological impact that the Accords have on Israelis. They

the hopes of Israelis for peace with Palestinians – although sadly that seems a long way off because of Palestinian sclerosis. In the reciprocal direction, Egyptian and Jordanian attitudes towards Israelis seem to be warming somewhat as well.

In sum, the Abraham Accords are about much more than diplomatic relations; much more than a defense partnership against Iran; much more than tourist exchanges; much more than commercial ties and high-tech advances. The Abraham Accords are about a deep change of paradigm.

Perhaps down the road, if smart actors in Washington handle the Abraham Accords opportunity with more vigor, even the Palestinians can become better disposed toward real compromises for peace.

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panding Arab/Islamic peace accords with Israel.

Despite "Trumpian residue" on the Abraham Accords and Palestinian dissatisfaction with the Accords dynamic – doubling-down on the pacts should be a priority U.S. foreign policy goal, a "no brainer."

In fact, the Abraham Accords can and ought to be rebranded as a spur to peace with the Palestinians. Progressives ought to connect with this benefit. The Accords mean much more than economic peace benefits for the Palestinians

can travel and trade openly with Arabs across the region. They "feel the love," viscerally feel the amity and excitement of their new partnerships.

This has provided Israelis with a sense of calm and confidence about their future in the region. After all, key Arab actors and leading Moslem clerics have reaffirmed the indigenoussness of Jews in their holy land and accepted the permanence of the State of Israel.

I sense that this has softened overall Israeli attitudes towards Arabs and Moslems, as well as reinvigorated

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The Trustees and Fellows of the Jewish Policy Center mourn the passing of Walter Stern. May his memory be a blessing for his family and all who knew him.

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Driving a Stake Through the Failing Boycott of Israel

by MITCHELL BARD

The boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) campaign is nothing if not consistent when it comes to declaring victory to disguise its failures. The latest example was the movement trumpeting Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Co.'s decision last summer to stop selling its products in Judea and Samaria – the “occupied West Bank” to its supporters. To no one's surprise, withholding ice cream from Jews living in their homeland did not cause the collapse of Israel – the point of BDS – and did not improve the welfare of Palestinians one iota. As in other cases, however, the BDS advocates did succeed in galvanizing their critics and creating a public relations and financial nightmare for B&J's parent company Unilever.

No one should be surprised; after all, based on history, why do BDS proponents believe they can have any impact?

■ A History of Boycotts

Consider that the Arab League instituted a boycott in 1945 that was blatantly anti-Semitic – it was directed at Jews because Israel did not exist. It had the weight of the entire Arab and Muslim world behind it, and the complicity of companies and countries around the world, and still failed. The boycott did not prevent the establishment of Israel, its evolution into a global technological power with a vibrant economy, its emergence as a cultural mecca, or its diplomatic relations with most other countries.

Prior to the 1973 oil embargo, the boycott was considered “a toothless and gutless” propaganda device. It only gained traction when countries like Japan began to fear their oil supplies might be

threatened by OPEC if they traded with Israel, and companies worried they would lose access to the Middle East market. Even then, however, the boycott did little to harm Israel's economy and had no impact whatsoever on its policies.

In 2020, the UN Human Rights Council decided to do the BDS movement's dirty work by publishing a blacklist of 112 companies that it said were profiting from Israeli settlement policy so they might become boycott targets. Then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said, “Its publication only confirms the unrelenting anti-Israel bias so prevalent at the United Nations...We call upon all UN member states to join us in rejecting this effort, which facilitates the discriminatory boycott, divestment, and sanction (BDS) campaign and delegitimizes Israel.”

Scandalous as it is, the UN HRC's blacklist pales in comparison to the more than 1,000 companies once on the Arab League's list. No American banks would open branches in Israel. The Ben & Jerry's of its time was Pepsi, which refused to sell its goods in Israel, so Israelis faced the hardship of drinking Coke, much like Jewish settlers must now suffer eating Israeli gelato.

Most American companies supported anti-boycott legislation with the notable exception of oil companies and others with large investments in the Arab world (at one point Saudi Arabia informed the Arabia American Oil Company – ARAMCO – it would not issue visas to “undesirable persons” by which it meant Jews). RCA Executive Eugene Seculow called the boycott's effect on American business “capricious and insidious.” He

said, “Our position has been very simple. We believe in free trade, and we are attempting to do business everywhere in the world where it is not against U.S. laws. But we won't comply with the boycott to win our way off the list.”

That should be the attitude of the companies on the UN HRC list.

■ Congress Gets Involved

One of the catalysts for congressional action was the 1975 publication of the Saudi blacklist of 1,500 U.S. companies, which made the public aware, for the first time, of the scope of the Arab boycott. Even more disturbing was the exposure of U.S. government complicity, as in the admission that the Army Corps of Engineers excluded Jewish soldiers and civilians from projects it managed in Saudi Arabia.

In reaction to these revelations, Congress adopted the Export Administration Act (EAA) in 1977, which encouraged and, in some cases required, U.S. companies to refuse to take actions that have the effect of supporting the restrictive trade practices or boycotts fostered or imposed by any foreign government against a country friendly to the United States or against any American.

The law was adopted despite threats from the Arab world. As *The Washington Post* wrote: “No realistic person would assert that an anti-boycott law will not cost something But if there is a price to keep foreigners from compelling Americans to trample on their own basic values, surely it is worth paying and, as surely, thoughtful and responsible Americans will be willing to pay it.”



Anti-BDS protesters outside a Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream location in New York City. (Photo: Getty)

Despite hysterical warnings about the deleterious impact the legislation would have on U.S.-Arab relations, those ties only grew stronger. Moreover, while the BDS movement encourages a boycott, the most important members of the Arab League have abandoned theirs. Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, the UAE, Sudan, and Morocco formally ended their participation when they established relations with Israel and, even countries without diplomatic ties such as Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, have had various levels of engagement with Israel. The boycott is still technically alive but rarely enforced, sustained by a handful of countries that take relatively trivial actions (e.g., Lebanon just banned the film *Death on the Nile* because it stars Israeli actress Gal Gadot, and the United States fined Kuwait in 2020 for refusing on 14 occasions to accept passengers with Israeli passports on flights from New York to London).

■ **The Boycott Fails**

Recognizing the failure of the Arab League boycott, a new campaign emerged at the infamous United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa

in 2001. The final declaration established an action plan – the “Durban Strategy” – promoting “a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel...the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes, the full cessation of all links (diplomatic, economic, social, aid, military cooperation and training) between all states and Israel.”

The strategy, however, has failed and caused an international backlash.

Just as the Arab League effort to ostracize Israel proved futile, so too has the Durban strategy. Today, Israel has diplomatic relations with more countries than ever before – 167 of the 193 member states of the United Nations.

In addition, 35 U.S. states have adopted laws, executive orders or resolutions that are designed to discourage boycotts against Israel. Some have been challenged in court on free speech grounds, but a circuit court just upheld the legality of Maryland’s executive order and, even in the recent case in Texas where a court blocked the enforcement of the state anti-boycott law against a Palestinian-American contractor, the injunction did not apply to the entire breadth of the law. A federal judge struck down an anti-boycott law in Georgia, but on February 21,

Governor Brian Kemp signed a modified version that is expected to withstand judicial scrutiny.

Meanwhile, despite the vocal support of BDS by leftists in Europe, their governments have continued to sign military contracts and expand trade and other forms of cooperation with Israel and adopt measures against boycotting Israel.

In France, promoting the boycott of Israel is illegal.

The German government designated the BDS movement as antisemitic, and several German cities have adopted anti-boycott laws.

The United Kingdom – one of the birthplaces and strongholds of the boycott movement – has closer ties than ever with Israel. In November, the two countries signed a 10-year memorandum of understanding for deepening ties on issues such as cybersecurity, technology development, defense, trade, and science. British Conservative politician Robert Jenrick later announced that the government was planning “to outlaw BDS in the UK.”

Even governments that have been hostile toward Israel do not support BDS. Last October, Sweden’s foreign minister became the first senior Swedish official to visit Israel since 2014 when Sweden recognized “Palestine” as a state. Earlier, she said, Sweden wants “more cooperation with Israel, not less,” and that Stockholm does not support boycotts of Israel.

One of the European governments that has been most critical of Israel, and has politicians who support the boycott, is Ireland. Nevertheless, Israel’s exports to the country increased 517 percent in 2021.

Israel’s once tense relations with Asia have dramatically improved, particularly with India and China. Trade with China has grown exponentially from \$50 million in 1992 to more than \$18 billion in 2021 when China became Israel’s third largest trade partner. China was also Israel’s largest source of imports, surpassing the United States.

The Abraham Accords have been a boon to Israel and its partners. For example, in the first year after normalization

of relations, trade with the UAE reached \$570 million. This is in addition to a range of cooperative agreements related to technology, health, water, and other mutual areas of interest. On February 21, Morocco and Israel signed a trade and economic cooperation agreement, which Israel hopes will generate \$500 million in annual trade.

■ *The Palestinians*

Even more embarrassing to the boycotters are the ongoing relations between the Palestinians in the West Bank and Israel. Ben & Jerry's and other BDS advocates thousands of miles away face no consequences for telling Palestinians what's good for them. But when a boycott campaign was launched against SodaStream, then the largest employer of Palestinians in the disputed territories, more than 500 Palestinians lost their jobs (at least 74 were rehired when the company moved its factory to the Negev). Meanwhile, more than 100,000 Palestinians are happy to have jobs in Israel while about 30,000 more working in those "obstacle to peace" settlements.

In addition, journalist Tom Gross noted that the most recent data (October 2021) published by the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics indicated that exports of Palestinian goods and produce to Israel totaled \$132.9 million, an increase of 19 percent from the previous month. Palestinians imported \$624.7 million worth of goods and services from Israel in October, a 22 percent jump. In 2020, Palestinian imports from Israel were \$2.77 billion and exports were \$955 million. Palestinians are voting with their feet and their pocketbooks against the boycott being pursued in their name.

■ *Unilever Pays for Ben & Jerry's*

Overall, BDS was so successful that total Israeli exports hit a record high of \$140 billion in the pandemic year of 2021.

On the other side of the ledger, since Ben & Jerry's announced the cancellation of its Israel contract, Unilever's stock

has plunged 20.7% – a loss of \$26 billion in value – and the company fired some 1,500 workers worldwide and split its ice cream division from its food division. The state of Arizona sold \$93 million in Unilever bonds and planned to sell the remaining \$50 million in its portfolio. New Jersey divested \$182 million from Unilever. Florida was expected to sell

enhance the existing anti-boycott legislation, but it never came to a vote. In 2019, the Senate passed legislation including anti-boycott provisions by a vote of 74-19. The House, however, was only willing to pass a resolution condemning the boycott of Israel. Though that resolution had overwhelming support (it passed 398-17), adoption of anti-boycott legislation was

35 U.S. states have adopted laws, executive orders or resolutions that are designed to discourage boycotts against Israel.

about \$139 million worth of its Unilever investments and Illinois voted to pull its state pension funds from Unilever. While these financial woes were not exclusively caused by the backlash to the Israel boycott, substantial negative publicity and the sell-off of shares by U.S. states that put the company on their prohibited investment lists undoubtedly contributed to Unilever's difficulties.

In February 2022, Unilever CEO Alan Jope reacted to the backlash and announced that the board of Ben & Jerry's intends to develop a "new arrangement" for sales in Israel by year's end. While Jope didn't criticize the B&J board for its actions against Israel, he did observe that "On subjects where Unilever brands don't have the expertise or credibility, we think it's best that they stay out of the debate."

In signing the EEA into law, President Jimmy Carter said: "The issue goes to the very heart of free trade among nations." Carter added the legislation was intended to "end the divisive effects on American life of foreign boycotts aimed at Jewish members of our society. If we allow such a precedent to be established, we open the door to similar action against any ethnic, religious, or social groups in America."

Sadly, today's Congress is permitting the antisemitic targeting of American Jews by the BDS movement. In 2017, the Israel Anti-Boycott Act was introduced to

ultimately sabotaged by Democrats echoing the American Civil Liberties Union's bogus argument that it would violate the First Amendment.

Nothing in the proposed law, nor in the state laws, however, prevent expressions of support for boycotts. Even the antisemitic divestment campaigns mounted on many college campuses are protected. As legal scholar Eugene Kontorovich has written, "If the anti-boycott measures are unconstitutional, as the ACLU argues, it would mean that most foreign sanctions laws are unconstitutional. If refusing to do business with a country is protected speech because it could send a message of opposition to that country's policies, doing business would also be protected speech."

The fact that a U.S. company like Ben & Jerry's would declare a boycott directed at Israel, ineffective as it may be, only reinforces the need for the adoption of a federal anti-boycott law to uphold American principles and combat the antisemitic BDS movement.

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Exposing the Soviet Lie of Israeli Apartheid

by Col. RICHARD KEMP (ret.)

The lie of “Israel apartheid” was dreamt up in Moscow during the Cold War and driven home by a relentless Soviet propaganda campaign until it took hold in the United Nations and across the Middle East and the West. This included the repeated comparison of Israel with South Africa in Soviet media and in books such as *Zionism and Apartheid*, an official state publication of Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union.

When Israel was re-established in 1948, following UN General Assembly Resolution 181, the new state initially pursued a policy of non-alignment. Surrounded by enemies, it needed economic support and arms from either or both the USA and USSR or their allies. Given the socialist political influences in Israel, Soviet leadership expected the country would turn toward communism

the beginning. In any case, the pressures of the Cold War in the 1950s, as well as domestic political considerations and concerns over antisemitism inside the Soviet Union, led Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion to align his country with the West, beginning with support for US-led UN intervention in Korea, against the Soviet will.

Israel’s participation with the United Kingdom and France in the 1956 Suez campaign further alienated the Soviet government, which wrote a letter to Jerusalem (as well as to Paris and London) threatening rocket attacks and promising direct military support to the Egyptian army.

The breakdown in Israel-Soviet relations was later compounded by Israel’s defensive victories against the Arabs in 1967 and again in 1973. Over this period, hope of Israel becoming a

not succeed, so instead focused on using Arabs as terrorist proxies, directing, training, funding, and arming groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), PFLP-General Command (PFLP-GC), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and Fatah to carry out attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets, including wave after wave of aircraft hijacking.

■ *Ion Pacepa*

General Ion Pacepa, chief of Romania’s foreign intelligence service, played a significant role in Soviet bloc operations directed against Israel and the US. In 1978, he became the highest-ranking intelligence officer ever to defect from the Soviet sphere and, among many secret revelations, provided details of KGB operations against Israel. Pacepa says the chairman of the KGB, Yuri Andropov (later Leonid Brezhnev’s successor as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party), told him:

We needed to instill a Nazi-style hatred for the Jews throughout the Islamic world, and to turn this weapon of the emotions into a terrorist bloodbath against Israel and its main supporter, the United States.”

And,

Islam was obsessed with preventing the infidels’ occupation of its territory, and it would be highly receptive to our characterization of the US Congress as a rapacious Zionist body aiming to turn the world into a Jewish fiefdom.

One of Stalin’s main reasons for quickly recognizing Israel in 1948 was the intention to use it to undermine British dominion in the Middle East.

and align with the USSR, thus strengthening Soviet power in the Middle East and its wider competition with the West. One of Stalin’s main reasons for quickly recognizing Israel in 1948 was the intention to use it to undermine British dominion in the Middle East.

■ *Israel Aligns with the West*

Even with significant Soviet covert and overt efforts to lure Israel into its fold, this may have been a vain hope from

Soviet client had steadily evaporated. Arab armies sponsored, trained, and equipped by the USSR had been humiliated by American-armed Israelis, and so had Moscow. Thus, the Soviets progressively developed a policy of undermining Israel. Their primary objective was to use the country as a weapon in their Cold War struggle against the United States and the West.

The Kremlin understood that conventional attacks against Israel could

In other words, he knew that the Arabs would be easy tools in the anti-Israel propaganda war and were already playing their part. Their work only needed to be focused, intensified, and funded.

To achieve its objectives, the Kremlin devised Operation SIG, a disinformation campaign intended “to turn the whole Islamic world against Israel and the US.” Pacea reported that by 1978, under Operation SIG, the KGB had sent some 4,000 Soviet bloc “agents of influence” into Islamic countries to help achieve this. They also printed and circulated vast amounts of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish propaganda, including the fabricated, antisemitic text *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, translated into Arabic.

■ **Changing the Game**

As well as mobilizing the Arabs to the Soviet cause, Andropov and his KGB colleagues needed to appeal to the democratic world. To do so, the Kremlin decided to turn the conflict from one that sought simply to destroy Israel into a struggle for human rights and national liberation from an illegitimate American-sponsored imperialist occupier. They set about transforming the narrative of the conflict from religious jihad — in which Islamic doctrine demands that any land that has ever been under Muslim control must be regained for Islam — to secular nationalism and political self-determination, something far more palatable to Western democracies. This would provide cover for a vicious terrorist war, even garnering widespread support for it.

To achieve their goal, the Soviets had to create a Palestinian national identity that did not hitherto exist and a narrative that Jews had no rights to the land and were naked aggressors. According to Pacea, the KGB created the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the early 1960s, as they had also orchestrated so-called national liberation armies in several other parts of the world. He says the 1964 Palestinian National Charter was drafted

in Moscow. This document was fundamental to the invention and establishment of an artificial Palestinian nationhood.

■ **The PLO Is Created**

The initial charter did not claim the West Bank or the Gaza Strip for “Palestine.” In fact, it explicitly repudiated any rights to these lands, falsely recognizing them respectively as Jordanian and Egyptian sovereign territories. Instead, the PLO claim was to the rest of Israel. This was amended after the 1967 war, when Israel ejected the illegal Jordanian and Egyptian occupiers, and the West Bank and Gaza for the first time were re-branded as Palestinian territory.

The first mention of a “Palestinian people” to mean Arabs in Palestine appeared in the 1964 charter. Previously, and particularly during the League of Nations/United Nations Mandate for Palestine 1919-1948, “Palestinians” had been commonly used to describe Jews living in the territory.

Zuheir Mohsen, a senior PLO leader, admitted in 1977:

The Palestinian people do not exist. The creation of a Palestinian state is only a means for continuing our struggle against the state of Israel for our Arab unity... Only for political and tactical reasons do we speak today about the existence of a Palestinian people, since Arab national interests demand that we posit the existence of a distinct ‘Palestinian people’ to oppose Zionism. Yes, the existence of a separate Palestinian identity exists only for tactical reasons.

This reality has been publicly supported, sometimes inadvertently, in statements by several other Palestinian leaders. Quoted by Alan Hart in his 1984 book, *Arafat: A Political Biography*, PLO leader Yasser Arafat himself said: “The Palestinian people have no national identity. I, Yasir Arafat, man of destiny, will give them that identity through conflict with Israel.”

Moscow first took its campaign to brand Israeli Jews as the oppressors of their invented “Palestinian people” to the UN in 1965. Its attempts to categorize Zionism as racism failed then, but succeeded almost a decade later in the infamous UN General Assembly Resolution 3379. Its determination that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination” was revoked under US pressure in 1991 but by then had gained great traction and is frequently cited today by anti-Israel campaigners.

The Mitrokhin documents [notes of KGB archivist and later defector Vasili Mitrokhin] show that both Yasser Arafat, and his successor as PLO chief, Mahmoud Abbas, now president of the Palestinian Authority, were KGB agents. Both were instrumental in the KGB’s disinformation operations as well as its terrorist campaigns.

Moscow, through Egypt, had installed Arafat as leader of the PLO in 1969 and its support kept him there in the face of internal dissent following the PLO’s expulsion from Jordan in 1970. According to Pacea:

In 1969 the KGB asked Arafat to declare war on American ‘imperial-Zionism’... It appealed to him so much, Arafat later claimed to have invented the imperial-Zionist battle cry. But in fact, ‘imperial-Zionism’ was a Moscow invention, a modern adaptation of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and long a favorite tool of Russian intelligence to foment ethnic hatred. The KGB always regarded antisemitism plus anti-imperialism as a rich source of anti-Americanism...

■ **Arafat and Abbas**

Moscow had assigned to Romania the task of supporting the PLO, and Pacea was Arafat’s handler during his KGB career. He provided Arafat with \$200,000 of laundered cash every month throughout the 1970s. Pacea also facilitated Arafat’s relationship with

Romanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu, a master propagandist who had been given the job of schooling him in hoodwinking the West. For his dealings with Washington, Ceaușescu told Arafat in 1978: “You simply have to keep on pretending that you’ll break with terrorism and that you’ll recognize Israel — over, and over, and over.”

Ceaușescu’s advice was reinforced by North Vietnamese communist General Vo Nguyen Giap, whom Arafat met several times: “Stop talking about annihilating Israel and instead turn your terror war into a struggle for human rights. Then you will have the American people eating out of your hand.” (David Meir-Levi, *History Upside Down: The Roots of Palestinian Fascism and the Myth of Israeli Aggression*)

An internal KGB document among the Mitrokhin archives reported: “Krotov [Mahmoud Abbas’s covername] is an agent of the KGB.” The KGB

his predecessor Arafat, his consistent rejection of every offer of peace with Israel, while concurrently talking the talk about peace and sponsoring terrorism, shows the residual influence of his Soviet masters.

■ *Israel’s Image*

The KGB disinformation campaign transformed the image of Israel from regional underdog, surrounded by powerful enemies, into widely hated colonialist oppressor and occupier of the downtrodden Palestinian people, a narrative that remains as strong as ever today.

Meanwhile the Palestinian movement created by Moscow, in the words of American historian David Meir-Levi, is “the only national movement for political self-determination in the entire world, and across all of world history, to have the destruction of a sovereign state and the genocide of a people as its only *raison d’être*.” This remains explicit in Hamas’s charter, while somewhat more opaque

General Assembly vote and the UN Human Rights Council’s determination to brand Israel a racist, apartheid state prove that the Soviet Cold War narrative remains alive and well. Most Western nations also still slavishly follow the Soviet program.

Increasing media-driven erosion of popular support for Israel in the US, and the suppurating divisions it causes, are evidence of the Soviet ghosts’ success against their primary target: America.

■ *Paying the Price*

The chief victims, however, have been Palestinian Arabs, whose lives have been worsened; and Jews in the diaspora who have suffered immeasurable antisemitism based on Soviet-initiated propaganda. The former may not have been intended but would have been of no concern to Moscow; the latter was very much part of the plan.

Israelis of course have paid a great price for KGB-inspired terrorism and propaganda but have survived and flourished even under such enormous pressure. North Vietnamese General Giap, who once advised Arafat as we have seen, has an explanation for this, as recounted by Dr. Eran Lerman, former Israeli deputy national security adviser. According to Giap:

The Palestinians are always coming here and saying to me, ‘You expelled the French and the Americans. How do we expel the Jews?’ I tell them that the French went back to France and the Americans to America. But the Jews have nowhere to go. You will not expel them.

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...the Soviets had to create a Palestinian national identity ... and a narrative that Jews had no rights to the land and were naked aggressors.

definition of agents is those who “consistently, systematically and covertly carry out intelligence assignments, while maintaining secret contact with an official in the agency.”

Among other tasks, Abbas was used by the KGB to spread propaganda accusing “Western Imperialism and Zionism” of cooperating with the Nazis. He attended a Moscow university controlled by the KGB in the early 1980s. There, under the supervision of his professor who later became a senior communist politician, Abbas wrote a doctoral dissertation denying the Holocaust and accusing Zionists of assisting Hitler.

Abbas is now entering the 18th year of his four-year elected term of office. Like

in the Soviet-influenced utterances of Abbas’s Palestinian Authority, especially those directed towards the West.

Moscow’s campaign was significantly undermined by the 2020 rapprochement between Israel and several Arab states. The lesson here is the importance of American political will against authoritarian propaganda, which led to the game-changing Abraham Accords. Had this project been vigorously pursued after its initial success, it might have eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet-initiated Palestinian project and perhaps a form of peace between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. It might yet achieve that if the U.S. again musters the resolve to carry it through.

Meanwhile the December UN

Chinese Itzik Comes to Israel Through Haifa

by **MATTI FRIEDMAN**

In January, I drove up to Haifa to see with my own eyes a sight that, for most Israelis, has yet to sink in: the country's brand new port, our third, which is beautiful, automated, efficient, and operated by the same Chinese company that runs the megaport at Shanghai. The first full container ship dropped anchor the day after my visit. Chinese characters adorn the soaring ship-to-shore cranes, freshly painted red and white; Israeli workers man joysticks opposite computer arrays running Chinese software; and in the managerial offices sit Chinese executives. To get to the port, I paid a toll and drove through the Carmel Tunnels, which were dug a few years ago by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation. At a gas station on the way I bought a pineapple yogurt made by the iconic dairy-products giant Tnuva, founded as a cooperative by Labor Zionists and now controlled by Bright Food – 263 Huashan Road, Jing'an District, Shanghai. China was far, far away, until suddenly it was right here.

■ **Itzik**

The most prominent face of China in Israel belongs to a guy named Itzik. His real name is Xi Xiaoqi, and he's a 35-year-old resident of Beijing, but here he's known as Itzik ha-Sini, or "Chinese Itzik." He gets recognized on the street. He stars in hundreds of internet videos about life in Israel from a Chinese perspective, and about life in China made accessible for Israelis. Some of these appear on his own YouTube channel, but sometimes he appears on Israeli outlets like Channel 12 or KAN 11, the public broadcaster, where journalists are delighted to

have a Chinese figure – the first – who speaks perfect, slangy Hebrew and has an acute grasp of the Israeli audience. He's impossible not to like.

A good introduction to the Itzik genre is the video where he lists his top 10 reasons for loving Israel, including malawah, Jewish holidays, and the Pride Parade in Tel Aviv. Or the one where he introduces his grandfather Xi Rennan, 87, an energetic veteran of the Korean War (on the side of the communist North, of course), gives him a Hebrew name (Ronen), and teaches him to sum up his philosophy with the Hebrew workaholic expression *nanuach bakever*, "We'll rest in the grave." In Itzik's world, China is a great place, but one that can learn from us Israelis about openness, creativity, and fun. He has much respect for who we are and what we've accomplished. The "top 10" video actually includes only nine things, but he ends by saying, "It's OK, these are Israelis,

that Jews were smart – people of the book. Everyone thinks this in China, he said. If his years communicating with real Jews in Israel has disabused him of this notion, he was too polite to say so. During his Hebrew studies, first in Beijing with an Israeli teacher and then at Tel Aviv University, he adopted his Hebrew name, a diminutive of Yitzhak, or Isaac.

In 2009, with China taking a greater interest in Israel, he was selected to run the Hebrew desk at China Radio International, a state outfit that might uncharitably be called a propaganda arm or, more generously, a showcase for China's best self. (The Hebrew desk doesn't actually broadcast radio, only videos.) The CRI website has a lot of upbeat content about, for example, the many pluses of life in Xinjiang. In Itzik's rise from an obscure city to an elite college, then to studies abroad, and then to an official media job, it's possible to sense the hand of the state identifying

Americans increasingly see China as an adversary, but Israelis don't.

they're good people, not small-minded – they won't make a big deal about it." He snaps his fingers. "That's the 10th thing."

I caught Itzik on Zoom from Beijing. He was born in the city of Jiangyin, he said, son of a traffic cop and a real estate agent. He'd never met a Jew or heard a word of Hebrew before arriving at university at age 18. The school offered Japanese, Nepali, Dutch, and a few other languages, but his grandfather told him

and promoting a gifted young person.

In one video (not available in the U.S.), he joins Golani Brigade soldiers in basic training, getting his shaggy hair buzzed by an army barber and struggling to clear a concrete wall in the obstacle course. He's impressed! The tough guys from Golani play along, hands on their rifles. They look down on their funny guest from China and miss the real power dynamic – that the visitor



The Israelis celebrate the Chinese Navy on docking at the Haifa port. (Photo: IDF)

represents a superpower that is rewiring the planet, while they represent a country whose entire population is the size of minor Chinese cities that even people in China probably haven't heard of.

■ **Talking to Israelis**

Itzik is worth watching not just because he's entertaining and interesting, but because he's a way to understand how China would like to talk to Israelis now. Someone there is watching us carefully and learning fast. It was only in 2014 that the local Chinese embassy hosted Liu Qibao, a member of the Politburo, for a speech at Tel Aviv University, and asked university administrators to instruct students to stand outside the building waving Chinese flags.

When I asked Itzik about human-rights abuses in places like Xinjiang, for example, which have been widely reported in the Western press, he replied, "I think the Israelis can understand China better than anyone else." He meant that

Israel is also the target of misleading coverage from the same outlets reporting on China, and that Jews are used to being lied about. "There's the blood libel," he said, "the idea that Israelis are drinking the blood of Palestinians. Speaking honestly, before I came to Israel, I heard things like that as well. But I wondered if it was true. And I came and checked and saw that it wasn't." He noted the abuse of the term "genocide," which of course has been thrown around by Israel's opponents as well as China's, and has lost much of its meaning.

When one of Xi's bosses, the vice president of China Radio International, was in Israel a few years ago, he was asked a similar question. "This is my first time in Israel," he said, "and my impression is that the country is different from what I saw on CNN." Leaving aside the question of what's actually going on in places like Xinjiang, and disregarding the undoubted cynicism of the Chinese government, these observations about

the West's addled media and Israel are true, and this messaging for an Israeli audience is smart.

Americans increasingly see China as an adversary, but Israelis don't. When the Pew Research Center carried out a survey on global attitudes in 2019, two-thirds of Israelis said their view of China was "favorable," and just a quarter said the opposite. This was close to a mirror image of the American public, where it was 60% unfavorable and just 26% positive. Unlike Americans, Australians, and Canadians, Israelis haven't yet seen China's teeth. There hasn't been a high-profile incident like the humiliating muzzling of NBA teams, for example. Stories like the disappearing tennis star Peng Shuai, or the erasure of freedoms in Hong Kong, haven't made much of an impression. Israelis have many problems, and China has never been one of them.

Israel and China go way back; how far back depends on what you mean by

“Israel” and “China.” For a few months in 1948, Israel had relations with the Chiang Kai-shek government, but then came Mao. Although the new state of Israel became the first Middle Eastern country to recognize the even newer People’s Republic in January 1950, those tentative feelers quickly fell victim to the Cold War and pan-Arab politics. It was 1992 before official relations resumed, complicated by American sensitivities.

■ *Israel-China*

In a great game between two powers there are always opportunities for agile little players who can work both sides, but getting that right isn’t easy. There have been a few defense deals signed and then dramatically junked because of pressure from Washington, like the \$1 billion Phalcon airplane snafu of 2000 and the Harpy drone debacle of 2004. The latter, according to Professor Aron Shai, the dean of Israel’s China scholars, “dragged U.S.-Israel relations to a low point unknown since the imprisonment of Jonathan Pollard.” Defense deals have been off the table since then. And China continued to sell all kinds of things to our enemies in Iran: Four Israelis who died aboard a navy vessel in the 2006 war with the Iranian proxy Hezbollah, for example, were killed by a Chinese Silkworm missile.

And yet the relationship survived, and over time the flow of shekels and renminbi grew from a Jordan River trickle to a Yangtze torrent. For much of the last decade Chinese tech investments were the talk of the local venture capital scene. Barely a week went by without Chinese executives in Tel Aviv on the “startup nation” tour, and if in 2011 there were only five China-Israel tech deals, worth a total of \$31 million, by 2018 there were 72, worth \$4.8 billion. But about three years ago much of that unexpectedly petered out, and the capital hustlers who cluster in hot new markets moved on. Today, as financial analyst Sam Chester, a veteran Israel-China hand, told me, all the investment

guys you used to see around the Chabad House in Shanghai or Chengdu are in Dubai. The end came, Chester said, partly because of a Chinese crackdown against citizens trying to move wealth out of the country. It was also because early Israeli sanguinity about breaking into the China market was dampened by too many failure stories, and because Israeli CEOs realized that state-linked

centers for China studies have brought Israeli scholars and students into greater contact with Chinese people – and with their government, which funds the institutes and shapes their content. Some scholars in Israel, like many colleagues abroad concerned by the approximately 500 Confucius Institutes that have opened worldwide, have warned that the centers compromise the academy. Once

We have ‘entered the stage in which the Chinese have begun to create economic centers of power, which in time can be transformed into strategic and geopolitical centers of power’...

Chinese stockholders affect potential American investors like citronella affects mosquitos.

But ties have only grown closer, cemented by – well, by cement. Last year I was driving up to Belvoir, a Crusader fortress above the fields of the Jordan Valley, when I came upon construction signs with lovely Chinese characters that looked as out of place as a pagoda in an Iowa cornfield. It turned out that Sinohydro, the state contractor raising dams and ports from Nigeria to Sri Lanka, was building us a hydroelectric plant. Israel’s second new port, at Ashdod, will be run by a Dutch operator, but it’s being built by China Harbor. There’s so much action that a group of big Israeli contractors just appealed to the Supreme Court to stop what they called a Chinese “takeover” of our infrastructure. (It didn’t work.) Trade between the two countries, worth barely \$1 billion in 2001, is now 10 times that, mostly in the form of Chinese exports to Israel.

■ *Building Closer Ties*

Beyond the realms of concrete and steel, a notable feature of China’s presence here can be found in the two Confucius Institutes that opened at Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University. The

you’re in bed with “Confucius,” enjoying Chinese funding and scholarships, you’ll think twice before antagonizing the people who write the check.

■ *Critics and Supporters*

One critic is Noam Urbach, who fell in love with China after a post-army trip in the 1990s, followed by a few years of travel and study at Shandong University. He later spent more than a decade teaching Mandarin at Bar-Ilan University and the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya. He found himself feeling increasingly unwelcome in the field as his criticism of Chinese government policies was frowned upon by colleagues and administrators eager to cooperate with Chinese institutions, less in the cash-strapped humanities than in science and tech, where real money is at stake. Israeli academics who study China, he said, have learned to speak very differently in public and in private. I asked if this meant that a department head, for example, might quietly suggest that a doctoral student change a research topic, or decide that a proposed academic conference might best be indefinitely postponed. “All the time,” he said.

“Let’s say an academic department in the sciences is studying a certain

plant, and starts accepting funding from that plant to say good things about it,” he said. “Once that happens, those botanists aren’t botanists anymore.” Urbach isn’t describing an obscure academic spat: He’s saying that Israel’s China-watchers are being neutralized by the people they’re supposed to be watching. Urbach has let his doctoral studies lapse and currently runs an art gallery.

A moment of understanding came, he said, when he served as a translator at a meeting for executives from an Israeli company and the Chinese firm that had just bought a controlling share. (He wouldn’t name the companies.) The Chinese executives, he said, had studied every nook of the Israeli operation and knew every detail of every government regulation in the market. The investment, he understood, combined political and economic goals that were meant to serve each other.

We have “entered the stage in which the Chinese have begun to create economic centers of power, which in time can be transformed into strategic and geopolitical centers of power,” Shai, the China scholar, who is a proponent of ties with the Chinese, wrote in his 2019 book *China and Israel*. “Realistically, we must anticipate that in Israel as well as in the region that it occupies, China will have influence at a level that currently seems the stuff of fantasy.”

■ *Haifa Port*

Just two years after those lines were published, I was at the new port in Haifa and met Israeli guys named Dima, Yasser, and Chris, who were training on the mechanical claw that moves containers remotely maneuvered from a control room overseen by a skilled operator from Shanghai. This is the first foreign venture for SIPG, the company that operates the Shanghai port, which moves about 43 million shipping containers a year. That’s nearly 15 times what comes in and out of the entire state of Israel.

The Americans expressed concern about this deal, in part because the old

Haifa port, just across the bay, has long been used by the U.S. Sixth Fleet. But no American company bid when the contract was up for grabs. The deal went ahead, and when I was there the new port crew was preparing to handle its first full ship, a Chinese Ocean Shipping Company vessel due the next day. As one of the Chinese managers, a man in glasses and a neon yellow vest, told me proudly, the port was actually operational last summer, half a year ahead of

In a great game between two powers there are always opportunities for agile little players who can work both sides, but getting that right isn’t easy.

schedule. The Israeli government, on the other hand, was supposed to provide a rail link to the coastal train line about a mile from the pier – and is running three years late. China, the manager said, opens 30 miles of new track every single day.

The original Haifa port, with old equipment and even older labor agreements, can’t handle the volume – you can see the traffic jam of cargo ships stretching out into the Mediterranean, sometimes waiting weeks to dock, a vast expense ultimately paid for by Israeli consumers. The new port has better tech, isn’t unionized, and pays its workers less. It plans to do the same work with a third of the staff. Contracts with the Israeli government limit the autonomy of the Chinese company. Israeli security officers stationed at the port answer to the Israeli police. But the Chinese are in charge.

■ *Larger Interests*

The lease runs until 2045, but the Shanghai company is playing an even longer game than that. Part of the idea of the new port isn’t about Israel at all, but about consolidating containers from the smaller ships that come through the Suez Canal from China and the East, loading them onto larger vessels at Haifa’s

deep-water port for transit west, thus streamlining global shipping and saving money. Another part of the idea is to be here when trade expands between Israel and its neighbors, including current enemies. In such a scenario, Haifa goes back to being what it was before 1948: a portal to the region, not just to Israel. SIPG wants to be here when that happens. I said I wasn’t sure about the chances, but the manager was unimpressed with my skepticism, and with our local prob-

lems. “We are here for business,” he said, “and the businessmen want peace.” The way he said it, “peace” didn’t sound like a fluffy Western dream. It sounded as blunt and necessary as an iron pipe.

I found myself wondering about this new world. The immediate threat to Haifa and its port facilities comes from Hezbollah, the Iranian proxy in Lebanon, which rocketed the city during the last war in 2006 and threatens to do so again if another war breaks out. China does billions of dollars of business with Iran. A major Chinese firm now has an entire port in Haifa. Imagine the port is disrupted or damaged, costing millions. A phone rings in Tehran. Nihao! [Hello!]

What happens then? What does all this mean for the Middle East? And what happens if the U.S.-China cold war becomes hot, with Israel in an increasingly convoluted minefield of interests – a Sixth Fleet port-of-call on one side of the bay, Shanghai on the other? It’s impossible to say. All we know is that a ship has sailed, and we’re on board.

MATTI FRIEDMAN is a *Tablet* columnist and the author of *Spies of No Country: Secret Lives at the Birth of Israel*. A version of this article first appeared in *Tablet Magazine*.

“Our Grand Strategy is to Survive”

An *in*FOCUS interview with AMOS YADLIN

Major General (ret.) Amos Yadlin is a senior fellow in the Middle East Initiative at Harvard’s Belfer Center of Science and International Affairs. With 40 years of service in the IDF, he was a fighter pilot for 33 years, ultimately becoming Deputy Commander of the Israeli Air Force. As Major General, he served as a commander of the IDF Military Colleges and the National Defense College, Defense Attaché to the United States, and Chief of the Military Intelligence Directorate. He was executive director of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) from 2011 to 2021. *in*FOCUS Quarterly Editor Shoshana Bryen caught up with him in March.

***in*FOCUS: CAN YOU TALK ABOUT RUSSIA’S RELATIONSHIP TO ISRAEL IN TERMS OF LONGER-TERM GOALS? MILITARY DECONFLICTION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND RUSSIA OVER SYRIA, HAS BEEN GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL. AFTER RUSSIA’S INVASION OF UKRAINE, HOW DO YOU SEE RUSSIA AND ISRAEL COOPERATING IN THE FUTURE?**

Amos Yadlin: When I was young pilot, Russia was the enemy, and we fought over the Suez Canal. We fired at them, they fired at us. Russia was an ally of our enemies. This is not the case today. Today they have an embassy in Tel Aviv, we in Moscow; there are very good relations between the prime minister and the president, the former prime minister and the present one. This prime minister spends a lot of time with Putin. We are not enemies anymore. However, we are not allies. Some of our interests conflict, some are the same – so we are managing, and deconfliction is one of the mechanisms to manage this relationship.

When Russia came to Syria in 2015, they had several goals: To show the world that, unlike America, they are loyal to their allies; to obtain bases and a port for their navy; to remove America from Syria; to save Bashar al-Assad; and to fight ISIS [Islamic State in Iraq and Syria]. Not all of these interests run counter to ours. Our main interest is to have freedom of action in Syria against Iran. And on this, we came to agreement with the Russians. It wasn’t easy, but the

fact that we have a deconfliction mechanism is a proof that they let Israel have freedom of action against Iran.

I’m not sure they want the Iranians to move out of Syria; they are allies there, sharing two strategic issues – saving Assad and removing the Americans. So, what is the conflict of interest between Russia and Iran? People say that they are competing for the “peace dividend” in Syria that will come from reconstruction money. I’m not buying it. The peace dividend in Syria is about \$500 billion and who will rebuild Syria after the decades of destruction? So, there is some competition about who gets the cellular company, or some other natural resources in Syria. But this doesn’t come close to the

BUT NOT IF IRAN IS PULLING THE STRINGS. DOES THAT WEIGH AT ALL WITH THE RUSSIANS?

Yadlin: The Sunni states, unfortunately were unable to support a moderate opposition in Syria, and they have come now to a position that Assad is better the devil they know, than the devil they don’t know, so they have started to renew relations and open embassies. But they will not do the reconstruction if they know the Iranians are still there. So, they will wait to see whether Assad removes the Iranians, and once again, my assessment is that Assad cannot remove the Iranians. They saved him, they gave him a lot of money, otherwise Syria

The Sunni states, unfortunately were unable to support a moderate opposition in Syria, and they have come now to a position that Assad is better the devil they know, than the devil they don’t know...

strategic objectives they share. If somebody is betting that the Russians will remove the Iranians from Syria, it’s an illusion. The ouster of Iran from Syria can only be done by Israel.

***iF:* THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO SAY THAT THE SUNNI STATES WOULD BE WILLING TO HAVE ASSAD RETURN TO, LET’S SAY, CIVILIZED LIFE,**

would have collapsed. And with all due respect to the Sunni Arabs, I don’t see Assad replacing Iranians with them.

■ **Ukraine**

***iF:* ISRAEL, RUSSIA, AND UKRAINE: IT’S A NEW SITUATION. THE U.S., ISRAEL’S BEST FRIEND, IS ON ONE SIDE AND RUSSIA, WITH WHOM ISRAEL HAS VERY IMPORTANT**

SECURITY INTERESTS, IS ON THE OTHER SIDE. HOW DO YOU THINK ISRAEL'S GOING TO PLAY THE UKRAINE QUESTION?

Yadlin: Israel tries to keep good relations with both sides. On one hand, as you said, America is our biggest ally, it's sometimes our only help, so it's important, very important, for Israel to keep the best relationship with the United States. Russia is enabling Israel to operate in Syria; this is important. In addition, there are Jewish communities in both Russia and in Ukraine. Israel is trying to offer its good relations with the sides to help them reach some kind of agreement. But stronger countries than Israel have also tried and failed. In the war, Israel will be on the side of the U.S. and NATO and the Europeans. This is the right thing to do.

■ **EUCOM and CENTCOM**

iF: ISRAEL HAS ENTERED CENTCOM AND HAS DONE A MILITARY EXERCISE IN THE RED SEA. HOW COMFORTABLE IS ISRAEL IN CENTCOM, GIVEN THAT SOME OF THE COUNTRIES WE WORK WITH IN THE UNITED STATES HAVE VERY HOSTILE RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. ISRAEL STILL HAS MILITARY RELATIONS, SECURITY RELATIONS WITH THE EUCOM COUNTRIES AND NATO SINCE THE SWITCH, RIGHT?

Yadlin: Moving to CENTCOM is a very positive move. We asked it for years, but the Americans were reluctant because most of the CENTCOM countries were very hostile to Israel. Now the Middle East has changed. We have peace with Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Bahrain, and very good relations with other countries in the region. We are very welcome in CENTCOM, even though some countries are still hostile. But it is natural to be in your own geographic area.

We haven't cut our relations with EUCOM. It is still very positive and welcoming for us. But the CENTCOM



Amos Yadlin at the World Economic Forum. (Photo: Christian Clavadetscher)

move is important, especially for the future. If as a last resort, there will be some action in Iran, all sides, the Americans, the Sunni Arabs, and Israel will have to cooperate. I strongly advocate a Middle East Air Defense Alliance (MEADA), focused on threats from Iran, including ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and UAVs, which are attacking all of us in the region. Iran and Iranian proxies are all over the place. And it's in the interest of all of us to share intelligence, early warning and interception capabilities. This is legitimate and defensive, it's not offensive, but rather defends the citizens of the Arab countries and Israel and American forces based in the region.

■ **Preemption**

iF: ISRAEL HAS ALSO SAID THAT IT WOULD CONSIDER ATTACKING IF IRAN REACHES A POINT WHERE IT IS AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO ISRAEL AND ISRAEL FELT IT HAD NO OTHER CHOICE. UNDER THAT CIRCUMSTANCE, WOULD YOU EXPECT

A THREE FRONT WAR? IRAN, PLUS HAMAS AND HEZBOLLAH?

Yadlin: Israel can deal with three fronts. Israel was attacked on four fronts when it was founded in 1948, and the IDF is built for that. We have been spoiled, by the way. Since the Yom Kippur War [1973], we have had wars only on one front at a time. Believe me, as somebody who participated in Yom Kippur War, what comes at us from Lebanon and Gaza are operations, not wars. Israel can deal with three fronts, but with different rules of engagement, because these are terror organizations that shield behind civilians in Lebanon or in Gaza. If there was a real war, then we might behave as CENTCOM behaved in the war against ISIS. Look what happened to Mosul. There will be different rules of engagement.

But I'm not sure the Iranians will go to war at all, although I'm sure they will react.

Unlike Saddam Hussein, they will



Service members representing the participating nations of Blue Flag 2019 pose for a photograph at Uvda Air Base, Israel. (Photo: U.S. Air Force / Airman 1st Class Kyle Cope)

not be surprised if they are attacked, and they will react, but I think the retaliation will be limited and very calculated. After losing the nuclear program, they will still have infrastructure, the oil and energy industry, the military and government headquarters. I'm not sure that they will run immediately, automatically to a full-scale war. In the case of [Hezbollah leader Hassan] Nasrallah, remember for the last 15 years he's been down in a bunker, not starting wars with Israel. Qassem Soleimani pushed him to retaliate after Israel attacked Iranian assets in Syria, but he didn't. And Hamas, after the rocket war last year, is not looking for another round.

The possibility of three fronts exists, yes, and we have to be ready. Is it a hundred percent going to happen? I'm not sure.

■ **The Retaliatory War**

iF: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE HOME FRONT RESPONSE?

Yadlin: We are ready. The strategy against missiles from Lebanon is based on five layers. First, early warning plus a

very good shelter system, so most people will be protected. Second, preemption. We are not going to sit and absorb an attack. The good news is that they have a limited number of missiles with a higher intelligence as well as an operational signature that can reach everywhere in Israel – there are not ten thousand of them and we will destroy many of them. Then, we have the best air defense in the world – Iron Dome, Arrow, and David's Sling. True, they have more missiles than we have interceptors, but as I say, we will destroy some of them on the ground before they launch. Then we have tanks. If they attack us, if Tel Aviv is under fire, believe me, Lebanon will go back to the Stone Age.

So, will it be different from previous wars? Yes. The resilience of the Israeli population will be tested, but don't underestimate the fact that if Israel is attacked the Israeli spirit will remain strong.

iF: I NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE ISRAELI PUBLIC. IS THERE ANY POSSIBILITY OF HEZBOLLAH BEING REMOVED FROM LEBANON?

Yadlin: I don't think that anybody can remove Hezbollah from Lebanon because Hezbollah is Lebanon. Hezbollah controls the government, the politics of Lebanon. You cannot have a prime minister in Lebanon if Hezbollah doesn't approve him. Hezbollah is the most formidable military power. Basically, much of the elite has already emigrated. One reason that Nasrallah is not interested in another war with Israel is that the state of Lebanon is miserable.

The only way to remove Hezbollah is when the Lebanese people decide that enough is enough. They're not there yet, and Hezbollah will not let them do it because it's the strongest power in Lebanon. My approach to Hezbollah and Lebanon is to say, "Hezbollah is Lebanon. We are not going to look for you within the Lebanese state. YOU are the Lebanese state, and the infrastructure, and the power stations, and everything in Lebanon according to international law. If you fight against Israel again the country will be destroyed."

iF: THAT'S A MUCH DIFFERENT POSITION FOR ISRAEL IN 2006.

Yadlin: That's my lesson from 2006. Unfortunately, our ally the United States, asked us then to target only Hezbollah and not Lebanon, and we listened. The war took too long and Nasrallah, in the end, declared divine victory and went to his bunker. I think we could have had a much, much shorter war if we had attacked the elements of the Lebanese state.

iF: IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD TRY TO STOP YOU AGAIN?

Yadlin: It is. But in a way it might have been better if they had stopped us in 2006. In the first days of any war, Israel has to have achievements based on good intelligence and our excellent Air Force, such that everybody would remember it is not a good idea to go to war with Israel. A long war is not our interest.

iF: WERE YOU PLEASED WITH THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION LAST MAY, WHEN IT BASICALLY ALLOWED ISRAEL TO DO WHAT IT NEEDED TO DO IN GAZA?

Yadlin: They basically gave us a week then asked us to stop. Actually, two days before Biden asked us to stop, I recommended on Israeli TV that we stop. We had achieved a lot.

Deterrence was reestablished, but even if it was not, we got the lucrative targets in the first couple of days. Continuing this war, if you didn't intend to go inside with boots on the ground, would not have been a good idea. This is my lessons from 2006, "Don't get into a long bombing period, it doesn't pay for us."

■ The Two-State Solution

iF: THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION HAS GONE BACK TO THE "TWO-STATE SOLUTION" CONCEPT. THEY'VE MADE IT VERY CLEAR THAT THEY WANT A PALESTINIAN STATE.

Yadlin: A "two-state solution" is not something that Israel sees as a disaster.

Many Israelis see it as a way to ensure that Israel will stay Jewish and democratic. However, the parameters are not the same for Israeli and for Palestinians – and sometimes for Americans. That's why we are unable to get there.

At the same time, there are 10 files on the president's desk that are more important and more immediate than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They are smart enough to understand that they're not "Secretary [John] Kerry-types," thinking that if we solve the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the rest of the

I strongly advocate a Middle East Air Defense Alliance (MEADA), focused on threats from Iran, including ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and UAVs...

problems will go away. I know the policy makers in the White House, in the National Security Council, in the State Department – they are not enamored of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, and they understand that at that moment, it cannot move forward. I'm not too worried.

When the Palestinians have different leadership, one willing to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, that will stop providing financial support to terrorists after they commit their crimes, at that time advancing two-state solution will not be a disaster for Israel.

iF: THERE ARE THREE GOVERNING POWERS – HAMAS IN THE GAZA STRIP, THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY IN THE WEST BANK, AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL. TO GET TO A TRUE TWO-STATE SOLUTION, ONE OF THOSE HAS TO GO AWAY.

Yadlin: You are absolutely right. One reason we cannot reach an agreement with the Palestinians is that they are

divided. In Gaza, there isn't one Israeli settlement and they have their own army, and their own everything, so there is a Palestinian state. There is the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. And if an agreement can be reached, it will be reached with the leadership in Ramallah. To bring Gaza on board, Israel requires a demilitarized Palestine state, so Hamas has to be demilitarized. I have no idea who can do it other than Israel. Not the Palestinian Authority, not Egyptians, not NATO, not America. That is why I'm not optimistic even

though, as I told you, in the long run I want to see this structure with different leadership.

■ Future Warfare

iF: GOING BACK TO LARGER SCALE WARFARE, YOU HAVE CHANGES IN CYBER WARFARE, DRONE TECHNOLOGY, THE COLLECTION OF INTELLIGENCE. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT CYBER WAR? WHO ARE THE BIGGEST CYBER ENEMIES? AND HOW DOES ISRAEL FEEL ABOUT ITS ABILITY TO COUNTERACT CYBER WARFARE?

Yadlin: There are five cyber superpowers today.

iF: I HOPE YOU'RE ONE OF THEM.

Yadlin: Yes – the U.S., Russia, China, the UK, and Israel. Our enemies, Iran and Hamas and Hezbollah, are not in this league and their capabilities are not a threat. You may think that China and Russia are interested in Israel and

cyber-attacks, but they don't attack us. And of course, the U.S. and the UK are allies, and we work together in the cyber realm. Cyber deserves more than three minutes here. It's a whole semester course to understand cyber power, what it can achieve, the limits of its power, and what it can add to other military powers like the navy and the army. If anyone thinks cyber is all there is, they're wrong.

Cyber is another dimension of war, very much like the airpower in the 20th century. It is more like being in 1920 or 1930 with airpower than having airpower of the 1980s or 1990s. We have a lot more development to do in the cyber realm. It is not tangible, and you can't see it the way you see an aircraft carrier or a submarine or a tank. You don't see it, you don't exercise it, and usually, it has no borders, and the rules of engagement are not agreed. It's very difficult to understand what cyber can do and cannot do.

iF: IS THAT TRUE ALSO OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE? WE'VE BEEN READING THAT THE CHINESE ARE MAKING ENORMOUS INVESTMENTS IN AI – THINKING STRATEGICALLY THAT AI WILL BE THE WAY TO FIGHT WARS IN THE FUTURE. ARE THEY IN THE SAME POSITION WITH AI THAT WE ARE WITH CYBER, JUST TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO WITH IT NOW?

Yadlin: Nobody wants to drive a car using artificial intelligence.

iF: I DON'T.

Yadlin: And driving that car will be easier than going into the battlefield. The enemy of an AI car is basically an old woman crossing the road, or weather that blocks some of the sensors. On the battlefield, you also have people who want to kill you, and you go in the mud, and you have to cross rivers. It is not here today, and it won't be in 2025 as some people predicted 10 years ago. But

imagination and innovation may bring artificial intelligence to the battlefield in 2045 or 2050. Even then, I don't believe it will be another dimension, it won't be an "ace" that kills everything else. It will

There is no left and right on the Iran nuclear issue... on Iran's entrenchment in Syria... on Hezbollah... or if the Saudis decide to join the Abraham Accords.

more likely be within aircraft, or in the navy or in the army – not a separate service that decides war.

iF: FINAL QUESTION: ISRAEL HAS A COALITION GOVERNMENT NOW THAT SOME PEOPLE THINK IS WEIRD. DISPARATE PEOPLE, DISPARATE OPINIONS. ARE YOU COMFORTABLE WITH DECISIONS THAT NEED TO BE MADE FOR THE IDF AND FOR ISRAEL'S STRATEGIC POSTURE?

Yadlin: First, the fact that we have a government is proof that miracles continue to happen in land of Israel. This government is a miracle. No political analyst could have predicted this government, or that it would last. On strategic planning, I have to remind you that we didn't have a budget for the past three years, so there was no planning because there was no budget to support the planning. Israel is not good at strategic planning. The last prime minister I remember doing it was named David Ben Gurion. Our grand strategy is to survive. And we used to have a defense doctrine.

This is what I'm teaching now at Harvard, Israel's defense doctrine. Basically, we build it bottom up, identifying problems, solving them in the IDF, taking it up for approval in the political echelon.

The fact that we have right wing and left wing parties, extreme left, and extreme right, and then other parties, is not so important on issues of national security. There is no left and right on the

Iran nuclear issue, nobody wants Iran to be nuclear. There is no left and right on Iran's entrenchment in Syria. Nobody wants to see the Iranians in Syria. There is no left and right on Hezbollah, no left and right on Hamas, no left and right what will happen if the Saudis decide to join the Abraham Accords. The Saudis would be blessed from the left and from the right.

Only on the Palestinian issue is there a left and a right. But the government has decided not to move forward or backward, not to remove settlements or build new settlements, and both sides agree that there is no partner. On Israel's national security, they agree almost on most issues – and actually, for the first time in a long time there is a real discussion in the government about Iran. It was "outsourced," so to speak to the previous prime minister and it wasn't discussed for the past five years or more. I am happy that they are discussing it again. It's a very tough issue and it should be discussed in the government with participation from many angles. On a nuclear Iran, there is no margin for error.

iF: AMOS YADLIN, ON BEHALF OF THE READERS OF inFOCUS AND THE MEMBERS OF THE JEWISH POLICY CENTER, THANK YOU FOR A MOST ENLIGHTENING CONVERSATION.

U.S.-Israel Security Cooperation in 2022

by SHOSHANA BRYEN

Over time, mainly since the early 1980s, Israel has gone from being considered a net security consumer to a net security producer. This means that by its presence Israel makes the region more secure and the United States does not expend resources to defend it.

There have been issues. There was serious American upset about Israel's defense relationship with China in 2005. It was managed between allies. The 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal with Iran caused tension over the possible military implications of Iranian cheating. Today, there is increasing American concern about Chinese aggression. Israel has responded by creating governmental offices to better vet potential high-tech projects with China.

But since the first cooperation agreement was signed in 1981, the relationship between the Israeli and the American military establishments has grown in compatibility, interoperability, and significance. The relationship has two centers, one governmental/financial, the other military/operational. Today, there is good news and bad news on both fronts.

■ **Good News First**

Cooperation still has a bi-partisan basis. Senators Gary Peters (D-Mich.) and Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) have introduced a bill to create the United States-Israel Operations-Technology Working Group that will:

- Provide a standing forum for the United States and Israel to identify and share intelligence-informed military

capability requirements.

- Assist defense suppliers in both countries to gain government approval for conducting joint science, technology, research, development, test, evaluation, and production efforts.

- Develop combined U.S.-Israel plans to research, develop, procure, and field weapons systems and military capabilities to meet common capability requirements.

According to the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Defense Exports and Cooperation, "Once the two countries identify future military capabilities, they both will need, the OTWG could facilitate development of combined U.S.-Israel plans to research, develop, procure, and field systems as quickly and affordably as possible."

For those who believe money Israel receives is money unavailable for

together, conduct combined exercises, and share best practices."

Tunnel detection, countering unmanned aerial systems, armored vehicle and tank protection are high-priority areas of cooperation. Perhaps most important is ballistic missile defense research, in which Israel's government and industries partner with Ballistic Missile Defense Agency (BMDA) and American industry.

■ **Now, *The Bad News***

The financial consensus is eroding and the operational one faces challenges.

Long before the September 2021 kerfuffle in the U.S. House over President Joe Biden's promise of emergency money for Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system, "progressive" political candidates and anti-Israel speakers at the 2019 J Street Conference had questioned the utility of American aid to Israel except,

There is now regular opposition in the House to security support for Israel – not couched in polite terms, but in vile language which includes comments that can only be called antisemitic.

American defense, Bradley Bowman of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) notes, "Israel uses billions in annual U.S. military aid to purchase American weapons – strengthening America's defense innovation base, creating U.S. jobs, and building vital U.S.-Israel military interoperability. U.S. and Israeli service members train

perhaps, as "leverage" to force Israel to meet their hostile, leftist demands. Even some mainstream candidates were willing to "explore" the issue. There is now regular opposition in the House to security support for Israel – not couched in polite terms, but in vile language which includes comments that can only be called antisemitic.

Some of the opposition is simply anti-Israel. Some is intended to support Biden's apparent belief that diplomacy with the Islamic Republic of Iran requires "paying" Iran in the currency of stifling Israeli defense measures, as Israel is the only country in the region able to threaten Iran militarily. And some is old fashioned anti-American, anti-military opposition. Some of the "no" votes on Iron Dome were in the stated belief that defenses are, in fact, aggressive. Knowing that Israel's population is protected could make the Israeli military more inclined to engage in heavier bombing of Palestinians, they say. The same anti-defense logic was common in the U.S. during the Reagan administration.

Don't expect the opposition to disappear. On the contrary.

■ *Two Military Mandates*

Has the American military establishment followed the leftward tilt away from Israel? No. But other, domestically-driven stresses are making themselves felt.

Every national military operates with a mandate from its government. Israel's mandate is the defense of the borders of the homeland using a conscripted force. With the rise of the threat from Iran and Iranian proxies on Israel's

a system of formal alliances, and worldwide counterterrorism operations are included. With a volunteer military.

Not that American military wants the draft back – it really doesn't – but the leadership has always been just a little bit jealous of what it sees as Israel's clear and narrow mission, the unity of the civilian population, and the willingness of civilians to serve, including years of reserve duty.

■ *And... But...*

The mandate of the civilian and military leadership in the U.S. has been expanded to domestic issues including Critical Race Theory, "climate literacy," gender and racial "equity" replacing "equality," and for the first time, the upper echelon of the Pentagon has taken on the task of rooting out what it calls "far-right extremists" in the armed forces. The horribly mismanaged and deadly dash from Afghanistan came on top of all of that, leaving many soldiers unclear whether their leadership has their backs.

■ *There is History Here*

The last time the American military had a serious crisis of identity and policy was at the end of the American part of the Vietnam War. The troops had fought the good fight – as had the

On the other hand, the U.S. had already ended the draft and was well into the creation of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF).

The AVF has been an enormous success at many levels and helped overcome the hangover of Vietnam. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the freeing of the "Captive Nations" were, in part, tributes to the steadfastness of NATO led by American soldiers and money. The 1990 Gulf War restored the independence of Kuwait with few coalition casualties. After 9/11/2001, the American military response in Afghanistan was extraordinary. (And who could forget the photos of American Special Ops forces on horseback with helicopters flying above them?) The invasion of Iraq was a military success. The American people appreciate their AVF force in a way the Vietnam-era military was never appreciated.

■ *Israel as a Rising Partner*

In November 1983, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and President Ronald Reagan signed an agreement to expand "cooperation in areas where our interests coincide, particularly in the political and military area." Early in 1984, I convened a group of American military professionals to add muscle to the agreement – they were fully on board with Israel as a friend but were distinctly of the opinion that a small country facing enormous, existential threats could not add much to American capabilities. After two days, however, the group created a grid of American needs and Israeli capabilities that could mesh. Their memo became part of the U.S. delegation's background material in the first formal strategic cooperation talks.

After 9/11, Israel shared its counterterrorism, police, and urban counterterror capabilities with the U.S. "Opening the closet," they called it. American Marines were thrilled by the Israeli bomb-sniffing dogs, but it takes years to train them. "Take ours," the Israelis said. It took less time to teach the Marines Hebrew commands than to retrain the dogs.

Israel remains perhaps the only country the United States can rely upon to defend itself by itself..

borders, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has broadened its reach but its mandate to protect the people of Israel remains the same. The United States has a much, much broader mandate. Worldwide freedom of navigation, enforcement of international blockades, protection of friends and allies both bilaterally and through

South Vietnamese military – and the American military departure was done without incident. But the politicians had no follow-on strategy and no plan that couldn't be undermined by a combination of North Vietnamese/Chinese lies and congressional Democrats. The South fell to communist forces in 1975.



Israeli air defense commander Brig. Gen. Tzvika Haimovitch, right, shakes hands with Lt. Gen. Richard Clark, head of the U.S. delegation to the Juniper Cobra air defense exercise. (Photo: Israel Defense Forces)

■ CENTCOM

Israel has been moved formally from a partner in the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) to the Central Command (CENTCOM). It retains its working relations with NATO that commenced in 2005. Joint exercises, technology and intelligence sharing, and a similar, democratic outlook on governance have made military-to-military relations a benefit to both. European governments criticize Israel politically, but they are aligned on regional security concerns.

In CENTCOM, the IDF is better able to work with the U.S. and the Gulf partners of the Abraham Accords – and, perhaps, achieve better intelligence and security cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia. The Saudis have not joined the Abraham Accords, but years of quiet sharing with Israel can now be enhanced. Israel is only beginning to explore the possibility of diplomatic relations with the world of CENTCOM in which Israel is the only democracy.

The Blue Flag exercise in October 2021, was a melding of the two. UAE Air

Force Commander Maj. Gen. Ibrahim Nasser Mohammed al-Alawi was there. France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, the UK, and the United States all sent fighter aircraft and personnel to Israel. It had the first French Rafale fighter squadron and the first Indian Mirage fighter squadron to fly in Israel, and the first British fighter squadron in Israel since 1948. There was a rumor about Jordanian military observers that proved to be false – it was a Jordanian pilot flying.

In February 2022, a massive Red Sea naval drill led by the U.S. Fifth Fleet included Israel for the first time. Countries of the Abraham Accords were there – UAE, Morocco, and Bahrain. But so were Bangladesh, Comoros, Djibouti, Oman, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, with which Israel has no formal relations. There will be a huge learning/sharing curve, but it clearly discomfits Iran, which is important.

■ Conclusion

In 2022, it appears the substructure of U.S.-Israel security cooperation

is sound, but the U.S. military finds itself with problems – foreign and, increasingly, domestic. Having been focused for 20 years on the Middle East and South Asia, the military is not well prepared for an aggressive and high-tech China. The Navy is too small; the Marines have been deprived of their traditional mission; no service is up to date on Artificial Intelligence (AI); China is stealing American technology and creating monopolies in strategic minerals; and more. At the same time, soldiers are grappling with a “woke” mandate for personal behavior. The pursuit of non-compliant soldiers has been exacerbated by COVID-19 vaccine mandates that even many vaccinated soldiers detest.

That is a recipe for a force lacking a measure of self-confidence, and one in which our allies will have less confidence.

But the rise of the force after the setback of Vietnam bodes well for the resilience of America’s military. It would be a mistake to assume, as perhaps some do, that the United States is finished as a superpower. A superpower, after all, is a country that has the military and the economic muscle to take care of its interests and its friends. There is no other country that has both capabilities – China might like to think it does, but no.

The United States is Israel’s ally of first choice. And Israel remains perhaps the only country the United States can rely upon to defend itself by itself and in coordination with American interests. But on a daily basis, Israel is not the priority for the American military.

Good friend – yes
On our side – yes
Smart – hell, yes
High-tech – yes, in spades
We don’t have to defend them -
thank God!

And, for now, that might have to be enough.

SHOSHANA BRYEN is Senior Director of the Jewish Policy Center and Editor of *inFOCUS Quarterly*.

The PA Fades

by YONI BEN MENACHEM

For the Palestinian Authority (PA) under the long-time administration of Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, 2021 was difficult, caught in a severe economic crisis while coping with the coronavirus pandemic. In the aftermath of the May 2021 war in Gaza (Operation Guardians of the Walls), Hamas' standing rose in the Palestinian "street," while the PA lost power in parts of the West Bank.

Both the PA and Abbas face economic, security, and leadership crises that may intensify during 2022. The battle for succession at the top of the ruling Fatah faction certainly has intensified, and the United States and Israel have been working to strengthen the PA, prevent Hamas from entrenching itself in the West Bank, and assist the PA chairman in transferring power to his associates in preparation for his descent from the political stage.

■ *PLO Policy Makers Fail*

The 31st session of the PLO's Central Council, held in Ramallah on February 6, 2022, concluded with a thud. Decisions announced had already been made in 2018 – and never enacted.

The conference's closing statement said that the PLO's Central Council had decided to end all forms of security coordination with Israel until a Palestinian state was recognized. It added: "The Council has decided to define practical aspects of the transition of power to the state and to reject 'economic peace' measures as an alternative to a permanent and just peace."

Decisions were also made at the conference regarding the PLO's relations with the United States. The Central Council rejected former President Trump's "deal of the century" plan, the recognition of a united Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and the relocation of the American Embassy to

Jerusalem. The Central Council called on the Biden administration to honor promises to end Israeli settlements, reopen the PLO offices in Washington, and re-open the U.S. Consulate in east Jerusalem.

■ *"Economic Peace"*

The Central Council rejected the idea of "economic peace" that the Biden administration is now trying to promote as a temporary step until the political process is renewed. But in practice, Abbas, as head of the PA, already responded to this initiative of the Biden administration when he met with senior American officials in Ramallah – Hady Amr, who is in charge of the Palestinian desk at the State Department, Secretary of State Tony Blinken, and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.

Israel also responded to the request of the Biden administration, with Defense Minister Benny Gantz assigned the

the Palestinian economy while making it clear that this is not a substitute for a "political horizon" and the resumption of negotiations between the two sides.

■ *Don't Fight the White House*

The Palestinian strategy now is to avoid fighting with the Biden administration and the Israeli government. The PA is undertaking a serious political effort to reopen the PLO offices in Washington and the American Consulate in Jerusalem. Its main task at the moment is to erase the steps taken by the Trump administration and to turn back the clock on Jerusalem's status.

Abbas is happy to receive economic and humanitarian largesse from Israel, but this is not what he really wants. Senior PA officials report that Abbas outright rejects the "economic peace" ideas that the Biden administration and Israel are trying to promote. These ideas have no po-

Senior PA officials report that Abbas outright rejects the 'economic peace' ideas that the Biden administration and Israel are trying to promote.

task. Gantz has already met twice with PA Chairman Abbas and his associates Hussein al-Sheikh and Majed Faraj. In those meetings, Israel granted the PA economic relief related to Palestinians working in Israel and family reunification.

The decisions made by the PLO Central Council are subject to the approval of Abbas, who does not want a confrontation with the Biden administration or Israel, especially in light of the PA's dire economic situation. He, therefore, continues the talks on strengthening

political horizon; therefore, the chairman demands the convening of an international peace conference for Middle East Peace under the auspices of the Quartet (the United States, the UN, the European Union, and Russia) that will force Israel to accede to international declarations about retreat to 1967 lines and recognition of a Palestinian state with eastern Jerusalem as its capital.

Abbas clarified his intentions to National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan during the latter's visit to Ramallah on

December 21, 2021, as well as to Defense Minister Benny Gantz, with whom he met at his home in the Israeli town of Rosh Ha'ayin on December 28, 2021, according to senior Fatah officials.

Abbas explained that he was looking for an Israeli partner for peace and that without a political horizon, all economic and security ideas would not lead to any solution. On January 2, 2022, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed al-Shatiyeh said that the Palestinians aspired to gradually disengage from the Israeli economy and improve Palestinian national GDP.

■ **PA Losing the West Bank**

In recent months, the PA has lost power and control in several areas of the West Bank, specifically in Hebron, Jenin, and probably in Nablus.

In Nablus, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades affiliated with Fatah is operating again, and it challenges the PA and Israel from a security standpoint. In Jenin, new cells of Fatah and the Iranian-affiliated Islamic Jihad were formed; in the latter case, it called itself the Jenin Battalion.

These independent military groups acquire their own weapons and ammunition without outside funding. They operate against Israel to undermine the security situation. Their operatives are members of the new generation born after the signing of the Oslo Accords or during the “second intifada.”

The PA failed to deal with the armed groups in the Jenin refugee camp, and the IDF has been forced to operate in the camp after a pause of several months. Thousands of illegal weapons and large quantities of ammunition are circulating in the Jenin area and these armed groups are attacking IDF soldiers when they enter Jenin to arrest wanted persons.

Israeli security officials are concerned about the enormous quantities of illegal weapons in the West Bank, even though large amounts are also used for self-defense purposes in the event of factional or clan fights.

The United States also closely monitors the functioning of the PA's security

forces, which are supported by \$30 million annually, and the Biden administration wants to make sure that Maj. Gen. Majed Faraj, head of the General Intelligence Service and considered the “strongman” in the West Bank, does deliver.

The PA's new security activity also has implications for the battle of succession at the top of Fatah. If the PA is losing power and authority in several areas of the West Bank while Mahmoud Abbas is alive and functioning, Israeli and American security officials ask, what will happen on the ground after he dies?

■ **Economic Hardship**

The PA is suffering from a major budget crisis with a deficit that reached \$1.4 billion in 2021.

According to Israeli security officials, in 2021, the PA received only 17 percent of the total financial commitments for assistance from the United States, Europe, and other countries, creating a significant deficit and delaying the execution of many projects.

Arab countries stopped economic assistance to the PA in part due to the rise of close relations between Israel and the countries of the Abraham Accords, and the PA's relations with the EU deteriorated in terms of economic support because there have been no elections in the West Bank since 2006.

PA officials claim that the EU has agreed to transfer \$29 million to the PA this year on the condition that it commits to comprehensive reforms to its mechanisms. The EU continues to support the [the United Nations Relief Works Agency [UNRWA] and has allocated \$55 million in annual aid to the refugee welfare and employment agency.

In 2019, Israel activated the “offset law” approved by the Knesset, which requires annual cuts to the PA in the amount the PA uses as funds for terrorists and their families every month, affecting the PA's cash flow and increasing its deficit.

The Biden administration has renewed financial support for UNRWA

that the Trump administration had discontinued, but that does not help the PA directly. In addition, The Taylor Force Act, passed by Congress and signed into law, prevents American financial aid paid directly to the PA until the PA stops paying salaries to terrorists.

In response to both the U.S. and Israel, Abbas has said the PA would continue the payments.

To overcome its financial liquidity problem and pay salaries to its officials, the PA has been forced to take loans from local banks at high interest rates.

■ **Corruption**

The PA does not deal seriously with the effects of cronyism and financial corruption. The result has been that the Palestinian public in the West Bank has lost external assistance from a number of countries around the world for projects that would help the people.

The Palestinian parliament is paralyzed by the split between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the deep disagreement between Fatah and Hamas that resulted in open warfare in 2007. As a result of the divisions, there is no oversight of the PA's financial activities. Abbas controls the judicial system and security apparatuses, which permits senior PA officials to continue their acts of financial corruption without fear of being punished.

Senior Fatah officials accuse PA officials of setting up fictitious companies to facilitate the theft of funds, and they claim that Mahmoud Abbas is aware of the situation but turns a blind eye.

■ **Conclusion**

The combination of years of corruption, malfeasance, and sclerotic leadership, brings the unavoidable conclusion is that the West Bank in for economic challenges and a further loss of control by Abbas and the PA in favor of Hamas and other military forces.

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The Iranian Threat and Israeli Response

by Col. ERAN LERMAN, IDF (Res.)

There is a monument in Israel to Israeli-Iranian friendship as it was until the late 1970s: It is 200 kilometers long and it leaks from time to time. It's called the Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline and it was built to carry Iranian crude to Mediterranean shores.

The problem of Iran has to do with the ambition and self-perception of the Iranian Revolution under the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini – and now Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the inheritor of the former's mantle as Supreme Leader. Their ambition was/is to lead Muslims, and then the world, in a revolution that will finally validate their side of the ancient debate on the future of Islam between Shia and Sunni.

Today the Iranian revolution, which redefined what it means to be Shia, is in the business of destroying Israel. Being in a position to do what the Sunni “cowards and traitors” decided not to do from Sadat onward is central to who they are. This is not about doing; this is about being. This is identity politics, which, in the Middle East tends to overturn the logic of cost and benefit.

The higher the cost of making Iran the one player left pursuing the destruction of Israel when everyone else in the region has more or less succumbed to the idea that Israel is a fact, makes the leadership in Tehran – in their own mind – claimant to a historic role of the first order. And that justifies for them the immense cost of what they, and their allies, proxies, and dependents have been trying to do.

Israel has not pursued a rivalry or

enmity with Iran. Israel's Directorate of Military Intelligence dismantled the Iranian Section after the Iran-Iraq War because we thought Tehran would settle into a more normal existence. But the exact opposite happened. To justify all the inequities and failures of the Iranian revolution, not to mention repression, torture and death the Iranian revolutionary leadership had inflicted on its own people, Israel became and continues to be central. And central to the Iranian nuclear military project.

Which is a second point. We are past the time at which anyone can still latch on to that nonsense about a *fatwa* [religious injunction] by the leader saying Iran is not interested in a bomb. This is a military project; it was always a military project. Even before we stole Iran's nuclear archive [in 2018], we knew that. The program is not big enough to be civilian and it's not small enough to be research. It is not an accident that it is the size of the Pakistani enrichment program, which was military from day one. And it was A. Q. Khan, head of Pakistan's nuclear effort, who sold the Iranians the technology that they're now using and improving.

They are committed to our destruction, and they're committed to getting the bomb. Nobody enriches uranium to 60 percent, let alone 90 percent for any other purpose.

■ *The Begin Doctrine*

This creates a fundamental question for Israel. Do we apply the so-called Begin Doctrine enunciated by Menachem Begin in 1981, after the

bombing of the Osirak facility in Iraq just short of it going hot? And applied by Ehud Olmert's government in 2007 in Syria? The doctrine obliges Israeli governments of all colors to prevent a sworn enemy of Israel from having the capacity to destroy us.

And in the background, central to the ultimate question, is a typical F. Scott Fitzgerald situation, in which you have two contradictory ideas and try not to lose your capacity to act. The contradictory idea is that this is not our business alone.

■ *It is Not North Korea*

This is not only about Israel. Iran breaking the barrier, Iran becoming a threshold nuclear power, let alone a military nuclear power is a catastrophe for the region and for the future of the world. Iran is not North Korea.

North Korea is an isolated hermit colony with no followers of its creed anywhere beyond its tightly shut borders. Iran is a different story. Iran has apologists in important places in American academic life and it has proxies, allies, and agents in and across the region and beyond – all the way to Venezuela and the triangle in the south between Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. And the West African seaboard, where Shia Lebanese families have been established for generations.

In the immediate region, Iran is in possession or partial possession of four Arab capitals. Beirut is in the deadly grip of Hezbollah, which is a fully-owned Iranian proxy. Damascus is a condominium of Iranian and Russian influence.

Baghdad, under Prime Minister Mustafa al-Khadhimi, is struggling to shed total dependence on violent pro-Iranian or Iranian-sponsored factions and proxies.

And in Yemen, more than half the country is under the control of the Houthi uprising, which is a Shia movement with nowadays a deep and abiding affiliation with Iran. There are, as well, subversive elements on the eastern seaboard of the Arabian peninsula.

An Iranian bomb will drive Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Egypt has been able to live in its own way with the perceived capacity of Israel, but Cairo will not tolerate a Shia challenger to Muslim leadership.

Israel's Directorate of Military Intelligence dismantled the Iranian Section after the Iran-Iraq War because we thought they would settle into a more normal existence.

So, the region, and then the world would be thrown into a nuclear arms race, exactly what the entire international community has been trying to prevent since the Cuban missile crisis led to the promulgation of the NPT [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty] in the late 1960's.

North Korea cracked the dam, but the dam did not fail. But the Iranian cross crack will be the end of the NPT system as we know it.

■ **Pressuring Iran**

Iran is vulnerable to sanctions. This is a society historically integrated in the regional economy, in the global economy. Its isolation hurts and has led it before to come to the negotiating table. It is a country vulnerable to pressure and pressure should be applied effectively.

We have the Iranians over an empty barrel. And that leverage should be used to the hilt instead of being thrown away to regain some kind of symbolic agreement. Israel is not opposed to an agreement, but the current and previous Israeli governments have believed no agreement is better than a bad agreement.

And this one is a bad agreement.

For Israel, a military option is preferable to Iran having the bomb. We would have to contend with the consequences, including facing Hezbollah's 120,000 rockets in Lebanon aimed at our civilians. We are willing to do it if this is only way to prevent Iran from having the bomb.

■ **No Containment, No Constraint, No Contradiction**

There can be no containment of a nuclear Iran in the way the Soviet Union or even Mao's China were contained.

There can be no constraint. The

American commitment over the years – and by the current administration as well – is that Israel is entitled to defend herself by herself. And I would add, according to her own lights based on Israel's reading of the level of danger and the nature of the challenge.

Any constraint on that would be a mistake.

Finally, there's no contradiction between Israeli parties in our government. Having a credible military threat does not contradict negotiations or the use of other levers, including sanctions. It enhances the prospects of success in both cases. If the Iranians assume that they can get away with their nuclear project, then they will use negotiations to waste time. They will tell their own people that the sanctions are worth suffering because, ultimately, they will be in a position to make the rules and, finally, make Iran not only a hegemonic religious superpower, but also a prosperous place.

That is the promise of the Iranian leader – unless they understand they will never have the bomb. Unless they understand that all the suffering from

sanctions and playing games with negotiations will avail them nothing. Therefore, a clear and credible military threat gives the negotiators a better position and gives sanctions a much more effective imprint on the mind of the people on the other side of the table.

■ **Israel and U.S. vs. Iran**

The present Israeli government is interested in coming to practical terms with any American administration. The professionals on both sides understand the issues and have been able to have a serious conversation. There are still major differences as to what is an acceptable agreement. The gaps have not entirely closed. And we may face a situation where even with the best intentions of an American administration eager to come back to an agreement with Tehran, the United States will have to walk away.

And at that point we all will be looking at the range of options from sanctions through the full spectrum of non-kinetic measures (i.e., derailing the Iranian project without sending aircraft to bomb), all the way to the possibility of military action. Interestingly, when Israel's defense minister was in Washington, the *American* side leaked that an exercise simulating an offensive joint operation would be on the table.

This kind of leak indicates that people in Washington also understand the utility of a credible military threat. Where this takes us depends on whether the Iranians get the message and relent at Vienna, or we are headed toward the collapse of negotiations and the need to rethink strategy, both in Israel and in Washington.

■ **Will America Back Israel?**

There is a saying in Hebrew that he who is always afraid is better off. And we are afraid that the United States will not be there when we need it. Israel has been building its own homemade capacities with the help of Washington, but ultimately there is no question that they are inferior to what America can bring to bear.

That's not to say Israel cannot attack, but we cannot act as extensively and as effectively. We are not sure the United States would be there, given the growing reluctance about use of force on both sides of the American aisle. We've heard some very dispiriting things about the folly of military action.

The only thing that may balance this is the understanding, forced upon all of us by Iranian arrogance or miscal-

who know it: the Saudis, the Emiratis, Egyptians, Jordanians, and everyone else who feels the brunt of Iranian's subversion believes it as well.

Israel deals with it the best it can, and the Saudis are doing what they can to move Iraq's Prime Minister Khadhimi and others away from Tehran. Iraq has made some progress and there are important anti-Iranian Shiites, including Muqtada al-Sadr and Ayatollah Ali

Saudi Arabia, that we mean what we say.

Are we prepared for a full-scale war with Hezbollah? Much depends on the resilience of the Israeli rear – because the Israeli rear is going to suffer. This is not a technical question; it is a question of morale and purpose. If it is understood that this is not a war that's going to be fought to another bloody draw, as in 2006 – that this war would end in the elimination of Hezbollah as a major fighting force in Lebanon – then the majority of Israelis would be willing to endure what it takes until it's done.

The war will require a much larger IDF ground operation than anything we've fought since 1982's war against the PLO in Lebanon. But the consequences for Hezbollah would be devastating because Lebanon is full of Sunnis and Christians, and even frustrated Shias, who know what this organization has done to their country and to Syria over the last 10 or 20 years. Once Hezbollah is terminally enfeebled by Israeli military action, the Lebanese people will come after them with rusty knives. This may prove a deterrent when the day comes that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has to decide whether he and his community are willing to commit suicide on behalf of Iranian interests.

There is a saying in Hebrew that he who is always afraid is better off. And we are afraid that the United States will not be there when we need it.

ulation, that the alternatives are worse. There has to be a credible threat of action, either by the United States or by Israel – preferably together.

■ **Sanctions**

There are those who propose to rely only on sanctions. But sanctions have to be backed by a credible military threat. Nothing happened to Iran after the downing of an American drone, and nothing happened after its attack on Saudi oil facilities. Questions began to arise as to whether US-imposed sanctions were a cover for not doing anything military. There must be a complementary arrangement between sanctions and the credible military threat.

What did change the deterrent equation was the Jan. 3, 2020 elimination of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force commander Qassim Soleimani, which came as a shock to the Iranian system.

■ **Potential for Retaliation**

The Obama administration made the decision in 2015 not to bring Iran's regional subversive activities into the nuclear negotiation. Israel believed at the time this was a mistake. It still is a mistake, and we are not the only ones

Sistani. Al-Sadr won the last elections at the expense of pro-Iranian Shiite politicians in Iraq. So, the Iraqi game is open.

As for Syria and Lebanon, there's something going on called the "campaign between the wars" (CBW), an ongoing, intense campaign to destroy the Iranian bid to turn Syria into an Iranian stronghold and to supply Hezbollah with significant technological advantages.

Israel released figures showing that in 2021, more than 1,000 fighter sorties were flown, not all in the Gaza conflict in May. Hundreds were flown in Syria. Israel never admits to any single specific action in Syria unless it comes in a response to a very specific provocation from Syria. However, we do own up to the fact that in a general sense there have been some significant results.

One result is that the Russians, and maybe even Assad, have come to understand that the survival of the Syrian regime may be threatened if Assad turns the country into an Iranian playground. We've seen some indication recently that both the Russians on the ground and Assad at a certain level are curbing Iranian activity.

In the process, we are also signaling to our overt friends in the United Arab Emirates, and our less overt friends in

■ **Sharing**

Historically, there have been problems with Israel and the United States sharing intelligence, but right now we are looking at a fairly close, intense dialogue. Some of the illusions of the past are no longer relevant. I sat in meetings 12, 15, 20 years ago in which Americans tried to argue that the Iranians just basically need a deterrent because they live in rough neighborhood. I think we've moved past that point.

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Iran: The Preemption Option Expands

by Cdr. JENNIFER DYER, USN (ret.)

The idea of preempting Iran typically revolves around proposals to interdict the Iranian nuclear weapons program, and for good reason. Hardly anything would change the dynamics of the Middle East as much as a nuclear-armed Iran. Indeed, a nuclear-armed Iran would bring consequences reaching much farther than the Middle East.

Much has changed in just the last five years, however. The changes shape a new and somewhat different calculus for the preemption option against Iran, and a fresh assessment is in order. The changes include the political in various nations, geopolitical trends of the Middle East, and military developments – the latter not merely in terms of Iran’s capabilities but of the assets and regional security vision of other nations, including Israel and the United States.

One thing that has not changed is the set of consequences that would come with a radical Iran emboldened by nuclear weapons. The arguments for preemption have not lost their punch. As recently as five months ago, according to a *Jerusalem Post* article on October 2, 2021, Lotfollah Dezhkam, a representative of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, declared in a Friday sermon that, “The global arrogance led by America with complicity of Israel seeks to delay the realization of an important issue, which is the destruction of the Zionist regime.”

On November 28, 2021, the *Jerusalem Post* reported Iran’s armed forces spokesman, Brig. Gen. Abolfazl Shekarchi, doubling down on that call. Speaking to the Iranian Students News

Agency, Shekarchi proclaimed, “We will not back off from the annihilation of Israel, even one millimeter. We want to destroy Zionism in the world.”

■ *Radicals Empowered by Weapons*

History gives no cause for optimism that radical regimes empowered with weapons and encouraged by victories will moderate their ambitions. Although Iran’s radical regime is unlikely to attack Israel immediately upon getting a working bomb, it is very likely to use a nuclear arsenal as an umbrella for terrorism, proxy wars, arms proliferation, and destabilization.

That was the Soviet Union’s practice during the Cold War. The Soviets’ nuclear-backed radicalism demonstrated that the side with compunction is usually more subject to deterrence.

In a modern face-off with Iran, the

preemption itself is the most effective deterrent: don’t let Iran get the bomb.

It is not clear that a meaningful “deal” can be made with Iran to replace the defunct (and, by Iran, much-breached) Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action from 2015. We may hope for the outcome articulated by Benjamin Netanyahu to Congress in March of 2015: a better deal than the version being negotiated seven years ago. But it is essential to prepare for the possibility that an effective deal cannot be concluded.

■ *Preemption*

What does that mean for preemptive action? Such action would presumably have a military component. The priorities and options are somewhat different from what they were 10 or 15 years ago. One thing hasn’t changed, however. There is no need to use nuclear weapons to do sufficient damage to Iran’s network of nucle-

Although Iran’s radical regime is unlikely to attack Israel immediately upon getting a working bomb, it is very likely to use a nuclear arsenal as an umbrella for terrorism, proxy wars, arms proliferation, and destabilization.

U.S. and Israel could well find themselves deterred more often than the reverse – not in the use of nuclear weapons but in our tolerance for Iranian provocation, even at the cost of lives, infrastructure, and (potentially) other nations’ territory. For this problem,

ar-related facilities.

The United States would have the assets to mount the kind of operation the public envisions, with extensive aerial bombardment attacking numerous targets. Although Iran has had the

Russian-made S-300 air defense system fielded since 2016, America's bomber and strike-fighter aircraft, assisted by cruise missile barrages, are well equipped to defeat it if they take sufficient precautions. There would have to be a preliminary phase of taking out Iran's air defense systems and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' ability to strike back against regional targets with missiles, drones, and attacks at sea.

That phase need not last long. Ideally, it would be on the order of hours, not days,

Israel is also preempting Iran by growing in successful nationhood – with diverse peoples under the same flag – as well as selling natural gas...

to ensure surprise and prevent Iran from hardening protection for nuclear-program targets. The nuclear program targets would at a minimum include facilities at Natanz, Fordow, and Parchin, along with industrial complexes – some with underground facilities – east of Tehran and clustered around the main Tehran-Esfahan highway north of Esfahan. The objective would be to comprehensively destroy Iran's main enrichment sites for uranium, as well as the research and testing facilities for nuclear warhead development, and manufacturing for missiles, centrifuges, and specialty equipment.

There is no need to attack Iran's nuclear reactors. Doing so is actually very difficult, and the benefit is not worth the cost. Even the heavy-water reactor at Arak, which yields fissile material faster than the reactor at Bushehr, does not produce weaponizable plutonium at such a rate that it would pay to attack it. Iran's bottleneck in the nuclear cycle has shifted from producing fissile material (uranium and plutonium) to validating a warhead and mating it to a delivery platform, and the latter processes require greater emphasis now in designing any interdiction plan.

■ *A Scenario for Israel*

It may be, of course, that Israel has to act on its own against the Iranian nuclear weapons program. This is a tougher problem now than it would have been 15 years ago, because Iran has had time to improve tunnels and harden targets. With a much smaller total air force than America's air force and navy, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) would also be more challenged to cut a safe path through Iran's air defenses for strike aircraft.

But the outlook is not characterized

by unrelieved pessimism. Other things have also changed in those 15 years. One is Israel's continuing modernization of weapons and tactics, some of which have been proven in Syria in recent years.

An Israeli air attack force would face an unprecedented challenge in the number and type of targets in Iran, which far exceed the limited objectives in Iraq in 1981 and Syria in 2007. But the IAF in 2022 brings even more than the modern slogan repeated by well-armed U.S. strike forces during Afghanistan and Iraq 20 years ago: "We used to talk about how many air sorties per target. Now it's about how many targets per sortie."

With air-launched ballistic and cruise missiles as well as smart bombs, the IAF can use weapons of a variety that would make air defense a real problem for Iran, even if all or most of Iran's point-defense systems have not been neutralized. Israel also has submarine-launched missiles and conventional (non-nuclear) intermediate-range ballistic missiles to use against less-hardened targets.

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about an Israeli strike campaign in today's conditions is that it would not be as air-heavy as such a

campaign would have been circa 2007. Special Forces and asymmetric means are more likely to be used. The lead-time for setting it up, and the ingenious approaches involved, would be invisible to the public. It is not helpful to speculate on the various options that may be used by Special Forces, but Iran has a very long border and extensive access from the sea, and there is more than one way to get a job done – as Mossad [Israel's external spy agency] demonstrated in its raid on Tehran in 2018.

Indeed, the series of explosions at nuclear-related and missile sites in Iran in 2020 may represent a down payment on the kind of stealthy, extended campaign of attack Israel would be equipped to bring off. At least four of the explosions that summer damaged facilities linked to Iran's nuclear weapons and missile programs; several involved power plants. Regarding the latter, especially as they relate to Iranian military systems and specialized manufacturing, cyberattacks may achieve some objectives as effectively as kinetic weapons.

■ *Blowback*

In general, Israel could succeed in attacks that would inflict less collateral damage and be less attributable than aerial bombing. The United States could do so as well, but there is a special advantage to this for Israel, in that choosing stealthier means would help blunt blowback from Iran. The cost to Iran of counterattacking a perceived aggressor goes up versus the benefit if the original attack cannot be confidently attributed.

Containing regional blowback from Iran, especially in the case of a concentrated and overt strike campaign, would be Israel's greatest challenge in acting alone. U.S. power has the sheer depth and scope to do it better.

But there is another factor affecting blowback today, and that is the increasing willingness of other regional nations to shoulder the burden of containing it themselves. In this regard, the Abraham Accords work in conjunction with



Israeli Air Force F-35 fighter jets. (Photo: IDF)

political reform and growing military confidence in nations like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain. Not all of the partner nations' priorities are fully in sync, to be sure, but there is a strong common interest among Arab nations and Israel in containing both retaliation and expansionist terrorism by Iran.

■ *Inside Iran*

That shift in conditions, useful for limiting blowback, is a reminder of what is probably the most important change of all in the last 15 years. That change is the very real dissatisfaction of more and more of the Iranian people with their revolutionary regime. February 2022 marked the 43rd anniversary of Ruhollah Khomeini's return to Iran, but fewer Iranians with each passing year celebrate that with enthusiasm. The eruption of nationwide unrest at the end of 2016 has never really subsided. It is easy to be discouraged by the slow pace, but evidently the Iranians are not discouraged.

That's what matters, and what keeps this truly transformative prospect in play. As with the Reagan years in the 1980s, Israelis (and Americans) can keep in mind that denying victories to a sclerotic, hated regime is one of the most important items on the statecraft checklist. Reagan turned the 60-year tide of disruptive Soviet

"victories" with one small defeat on the island of Grenada in 1983, the first time since 1917 that Soviet proxies had been unable to establish a new fact on the ground. The U.S. didn't have to win a big victory by force of arms. A little one was enough.

Israel is surrounded by opportunities to avert big victories for Iran and secure small ones for Israel. Israelis have a tough balancing act going, with Iran's proxies on three frontiers and the constraints of emerging geopolitical conditions in which both Russia and China are looming larger in the landscape of the Middle East. A receding American posture is heightening the relative significance of Russian and Chinese influence, at least for the next few years. That condition will probably shift again, but never return to the American preeminence that characterized it a decade ago. Containing regional blowback – even mounting kinetic attacks on Iran – is more likely than before to necessitate some level of coordination with the Asian giants and respect for their interests.

But it is important to remember the Reagan principle that such fearless engagement, in which political, economic, and moral successes can be racked up, is preempting the opponent. Preemption has an essential military component, yes, and Israel must be prepared for it. But Israel is

also preempting Iran by growing in successful nationhood – with diverse peoples under the same flag – as well as selling natural gas, gaining new regional partners, and facing down Hezbollah and Hamas.

In his October 2 article at *Jerusalem Post*, cited above, author Benjamin Weinthal quoted an Iranian dissident, Sheina Volodi, who fled to Germany to escape persecution:

"The more the mullahs spread hate speech against the Jewish State of Israel, the more Iranian people realize that Israel is our friend, because the regime in Iran is the only enemy that we have." Ms. Volodi went on to say, *"We have a long history with the Jewish people, and we want to be able to revive that 2,700 years of friendship."*

There is no substitute for a military preemption option, and it may have to be used. But the day has come when Iranians themselves recall a rich history of relations with Israel and the Jewish people and want to revive it – and that is preemption too.

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Iran is Willing to Fight to the Last Israeli Arab

by SEAN DURNS

Iran, it has often been said, is willing to fight to the last Arab. The Islamic Republic's long-standing policy of using Arabs to fight its proxy wars is, it seems, being extended to the Jewish state. And Israeli Arabs are paying the price.

Many of Israel's Arab communities have seen a spike in violent crime in recent months and years. In 2013, for example, there were 58 homicides. But by 2020, that number stood at 97 – an astounding increase. That year, the *Times of Israel* observed, was for Israeli Arabs officially “their deadliest year in recent memory.”

The epidemic of violence attracted considerable coverage from news outlets, both foreign and domestic. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, among others, have devoted news and editorial space to the crime spree. Much of the press attention, however, has focused on the supposed social inequities – both real and imagined – which are allegedly fueling the violence.

“The wave of violence,” *The Washington Post* claimed in an October 2019 report, “has prompted outrage in the country's Arab communities, near-daily protests and accusations that law enforcement protects some Israelis more than others.” Two years later, an October 2021 *New York Times* dispatch warned that “killing of Arabs by Arabs has soared,” but “the prevailing assumption, an official said, was ‘as long as they are killing each other, that's their problem.’”

The news media narrative is clear: even when Israeli Arabs are shooting each other, it is somehow and someway,

still the fault of the Jewish state.

But another, more credible culprit exists: Iran.

■ *The Role of Iran*

The Islamic Republic has been sending illegal firearms and weaponry into Israel's Arab communities. And it's not speculation to say so. Rather, it's a fact.

In November 2021, Israeli police revealed that Iran has been smuggling weapons to Israel's Arab community to “sow civil strife,” as the *Times of Israel* reported. Yaron Ben-Yishi, chief superintendent for the Jewish state's northern district, told Israel's Channel 12 news that “95 percent of the smuggling from Lebanon is directed by Hezbollah, Iran's Lebanese-based terror proxy.” Some of the arms are also being smuggled across the Jordanian border.

IRGC's extensive criminal network utilizes Iran's numerous terrorist proxies and connections to the underworld to run guns, drugs, oil, ivory, and a host of other illicit goods.

Indeed, Iran has previously smuggled drugs into a variety of Middle East nations, including archenemies like Saudi Arabia and Israel. The narcotics bring disorder and death to Tehran's opponents – and they also fill the IRGC's coffers. But Hezbollah, Ben-Yishi told *TOI*, has now moved from drugs to weapons. And in far greater quantities than before.

■ *Over the Border*

Hezbollah has previously smuggled guns into Israel. But recent months have witnessed a “seven-fold” increase in the number of arms being smuggled.

Iran's strategy “is likely to inflame tensions so as to undermine the social fabric” in Israel's Arab communities.

The weapons, while destined for Israeli Arab crime organizations, “would also be available for terror attacks in the event of another surge in violence between Jews and Arabs,” *TOI* noted.

Iran has considerable expertise in smuggling. The country's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) uses smuggling to “generate revenue,” as the U.S. Treasury Department has documented. The

And not only are the quantities greater – the quality of the weapons has also improved.

In July 2021, Israeli security forces seized \$800,000 (USD) worth of weapons and ammunition. It was, officials told reporters, the “largest stash of weapons intercepted in recent years.” Footage released by Israeli Defense Forces showed the smugglers moving the material. While no arrests were announced, the



Arab Israelis demonstrate against the Jewish nation-state law in Tel Aviv in 2018. (Photo: Ammar Awad)

IDF has said that it believes Hezbollah's involvement is likely. As *TOI* noted, "Hezbollah has long maintained control over the area adjacent to the border with Israel" – it would be highly unlikely for the terrorist group to not be involved.

That Iran uses proxies to smuggle weapons to Israeli Arabs is unsurprising. It is a strategy that dovetails with Tehran's efforts – often successful – to sow chaos in the region.

■ Iran's Strategy

Jason Brodsky, the policy director of United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI), told me in an interview that Iran's strategy "is likely to inflame tensions so as to undermine the social fabric" in Israel's Arab communities. "This," he observed, "invites the instability off which Iran thrives."

Brodsky pointed out that the Islamic Republic's strategy is also "aimed at delegitimizing Israel." In his view, this is an influence operation to serve that end. By encouraging violence among Israeli Arabs, Tehran is aiding the numerous elements that are engaged in a long-running campaign to weaken the Jewish state.

Growing crime in Israeli Arab

neighborhoods feeds into the narrative, pushed by anti-Israeli NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, that Israel is an "apartheid state" – one in which justice, and societal ills, are not evenly dispensed. International media is happy to promote this narrative, as coverage of the subject illustrates.

A March 23, 2021, report by *The Washington Post*, for example, said: "Though they make up one-fifth of Israel's population, Arab Israelis say police and politicians are ignoring the high rates of crime and poverty in their neighborhoods." The dispatch, by *Post* correspondent Miriam Berger, featured more than a dozen pictures of Israeli Arabs mourning and protesting – including an image of three teenaged girls who "painted their faces with red hands to symbolize the bloodshed in their community," the newspaper said. But *The Post* failed to provide readers with essential details: the major Arab political party now sits in government; polls also show that sizable majorities wouldn't want to be part of a Palestinian state, should one be created.

Indeed, most of the reporting by

foreign press outlets has failed to note the origin of many of the weapons used in what *The Washington Post* merely labeled a "surge in gun violence" in Israeli Arab communities. If legacy media outlets were willing to dig deeper, they would find Iran's prints at the scene.

Tehran, of course, hopes to do more than just contribute to the ceaseless propaganda war against Israel. The Islamic Republic's "foreign policy and national security strategy," Brodsky pointed out, "is organized to destroy the Jewish state." Iran would be delighted if the arms that it is supplying were used in interethnic conflicts in Israel.

■ Riots in Israel

As Joe Truzman, an analyst with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), told me in an interview, smuggling weapons into Israel isn't a prime threat in and of itself. Rather, "the threat emerges when these weapons are coupled with widespread rioting – much like what occurred during the 2021 Gaza conflict."

In May 2021, Iranian proxies in Gaza launched a war against Israel. For 11 days, U.S.-designated terrorist groups like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad indiscriminately launched rockets into Israel, which responded with Operation Guardian of the Walls. The war was the fourth such conflict in the last dozen years. The latest salvo was launched by Iran to test Israel's missile defense system and for Hamas to capitalize on the growing weakness of its Fatah rival that dominates the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. However, it was also marked by a new, ominous occurrence: violence between Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews.

Towns like Lod, which have long had a heavily mixed population of Arab and non-Arab, experienced rioting and interethnic violence. Rioters torched synagogues, beat soldiers, and burned cars in what the *Times of Israel* called "some of the worst internal unrest in years." Paramedics and policemen were

shot. Indeed, in Lod alone, no fewer than five synagogues were set ablaze.

Importantly, as the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA) documented, the month before the latest Israel-Iran conflict also witnessed growing incidents of Jewish-Arab violence. Hanan Amiur, the Editor-in-Chief of *Presspectiva*, CAMERA's Hebrew department pointed out:

On April 15th, a Palestinian youngster from Jerusalem uploaded to his TikTok account a video showing him without provocation harshly slapping a Jewish religious teen riding in

Attacks on Jewish bystanders became a trend. Many young Arabs started uploading... videos to TikTok in which they are seen attacking policemen, humiliating ultra-orthodox passers-by, and beating them with severe violence

the city's light rail.

Soon afterwards, attacks on Jewish bystanders became a trend. Many young Arabs started uploading countless – dozens if not hundreds – of videos to TikTok in which they are seen attacking policemen, humiliating ultra-Orthodox passers-by, and beating them with severe violence.

Unsurprisingly, many press accounts ignored the earlier violence and portrayed the May 2021 rioting as purely the result of Arabs being “fed up” with social inequities as a May 25, 2021 *Washington Post* dispatch put it. In a December 2021 report, Human Rights Watch called the violence “peaceful protests by Palestinians” – an odd way both to refer to the burning of synagogues and attempted murder of civilians and first responders, and to refer to Israeli Arabs, the majority of whom prefer to not be called “Palestinians.”

■ **Propaganda Value**

But interethnic violence in Israel presents the Islamic Republic with numerous opportunities, including those which extend beyond the propaganda war against Israel. Simply put, it is an opportunity to not only bleed Israel, but to shake the faith of Israelis of all backgrounds in their shared future and that of the Zionist project.

There is a sort of twisted irony in Iran attempting to use Israel's own Arab citizens against it. Iran, it can fairly be said, has brought Israel and many of its Arab neighbors together. The shared threat that the Islamic Republic, a re-

visionist power, poses to the region has led to historic Israeli-Arab peace agreements like the Abraham Accords.

Iran, The Foundation for Defense of Democracies' (FDD) Jonathan Schanzer observed, is hoping to “start a bunch of fires and see what ones Israel puts out – and how.” He noted that Iran might be hoping that Israel will be preoccupied with the smuggling of larger, deadlier munitions like precision guided missiles (PGMs).

Tehran's efforts to incite interethnic violence are likely to fail. As CAMERA pointed out in a Jan. 6, 2021, *Washington Examiner* op-ed, Israeli Arabs have served on the country's Supreme Court, held high ranks in the IDF, run hospitals and businesses, and have their own political parties.

Both Israel and the United States could deter Iran's plans. As Jason Brodsky pointed out, both countries “should be working together to pressure social media companies into denying

platforms to the Iranian regime.” Social media, he told me, has been used by the regime to “create fissures between groups.” Indeed, a recent investigation by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) showed that Tehran was running a network on Facebook targeting orthodox Jews to divide and enflame along ethnic and religious lines.

Iran, of course, is not the first country to use the tactic of “divide and conquer” to construct its empire and bring ruin to its enemies. Nor is Israel its first victim – the Islamic Republic and its minions have made similar exertions in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. It only stands to reason that Israel, its foremost enemy after the United States, would be subjected to a variation. But the audacity of the Islamic Republic is striking, nonetheless.

■ **Fighting Back**

Whether Tehran succeeds will depend on several factors.

Iranian plans to sow interethnic violence and strife have been severely hampered by Israel's excellent intelligence-gathering capabilities and its border security. In Truzman's view, “Israeli authorities have done an excellent job in thwarting attempts to smuggle weapons into Israel from countries such as Lebanon and Jordan.” He added: “Pinpoint intelligence is required to detect these attempts and Israel has achieved this capability.”

Another potential factor will be Iran's expanding war chest. The sanctions relief enacted by the Biden administration will likely whet the regime's ambitions. Flush with hundreds of millions in new dollars, the Islamic Republic seems certain to finance even more terror and destruction. And some of the cost, it seems certain, will be paid with the blood of Israeli Arabs.

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The Never Ending War

review by LAURI B. REGAN

One ideological goal that has animated foreign policy decision-making over the past three U.S. administrations has been a desire to retreat from “forever wars.” For Israel, such a fantasy-driven ambition is impossible. While she neither seeks nor initiates conflict, Israel has, since her founding, been engaged in never-ending war. It wasn’t until the Abraham Accords (resulting from the Persian Gulf nations’ recognition of Israel’s strategic, military, and economic strength in the face of an emboldened Iran seeking nuclear weapons), that a glimmer of hope was ignited regarding a broader peace in the Middle East.

Iran and its terror proxies in the Gaza Strip, however, have a different plan as they wage against Israel continuous hostilities and “wars between wars,” as detailed in Jonathan Schanzer’s *Gaza Conflict 2021: Hamas, Israel, and Eleven Days of War*. In his fourth book, Schanzer, a Middle East historian and foreign policy expert, does a superb job of explaining the events, alliances, and ideologies that led to Operation Guardian of the Walls (OGW). He details the influence of Iran and other malign players on their never-ending efforts to destroy Israel, and shares the disheartening reality that, “Hamas exists to fight Israel. The group’s patrons provide funds and other assistance for exactly that reason. War will unfortunately come again.”

■ “Operations” not “Wars”

Since Hamas gained power in the Gaza Strip in 2007, there have been four “official” wars, none of which have ended with a decisive Israeli victory, what Schanzer describes as an all too “familiar

theme.” Each time, Hamas strikes with more missiles, gaining greater precision, and reaching further into the country. And each time, the international community condemns Israel. In 2008, Operation Cast Lead resulted in the infamous UN-led Goldstone Report that Schanzer terms “a weapon of ‘lawfare’ against Israel.” It was followed by Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012, Operation Protective Edge in 2014, and OGW. A senior Israeli military official explained, “We call them operations because one day there could be a much bigger war. We want the Israeli population to be prepared for that, and to know the difference.”

The “international community,” lacking a moral compass on issues pertaining to Israel fighting for survival, also has a different plan for the Jewish state. OGW not only green-lighted even more open and rampant antisemitism across the world as Israel was accused of war crimes; it became the basis for news media lies, UN inquisitions, and anti-Israel propaganda. After reading Schanzer’s book, all of this seems even more insane as he methodically walks the reader through the reality of life in Gaza under Hamas control – and life in Israel under Hamas’ constant attacks.

At the conclusion of reading *Gaza Conflict 2021*, one wonders on what basis the international community continues to target Israel for rebuke since Israel simply seeks to defend herself while simultaneously preventing as much collateral damage to the Palestinian civilian population as is humanly possible. But as Schanzer points out, Israel’s weakest front in its battle for legitimacy is perhaps in fighting the war of ideas.



■ *The War of Ideas*

Schanzer provides compelling evidence for his premise that in initiating OGW, “ Hamas’ goal was never to defeat Israel militarily. The terror group and its supporters knew that would not happen. Rather, the goal was to elicit public support for the Palestinian cause and to sow fear among Israelis. It accomplished both objectives.” One Israeli official confirmed this point stating that while

‘Had Israel simply returned fire to the exact spot of every rocket launch, regardless of its surroundings, there would have been an unspeakable bloodbath.’

OGW “was a win for us tactically ... it was a loss strategically. Strategic communication is our weakest point.” No matter how many steps Israel takes to limit damage while defending herself, she invariably faces accusations of committing atrocities. In fact, Iran and its proxies actually plan for every Israeli strike to create a public-relations disaster for Israel since their use of human shields will produce images of wounded or dead civilians for the Israel-hating public to consume in outrage.

The perfect example of this is Israel’s targeted strike on the Al-Jalaa Tower which, in addition to housing Associated Press and *Al-Jazeera* offices, was used to hide Hamas infrastructure. While the targeted strike was conducted after multiple warnings for the building’s evacuation and did not result in a single death, the public backlash was nonetheless quick and ferocious (partly due to a successful PR campaign by Hamas). Schanzer explains that Israel had “no choice” because Hamas was hiding technology deployed to jam Iron Dome, their defensive weapons system that had successfully saved countless Israeli lives. Furthermore, without the successful airstrike on the building, a ground force invasion would

have been required which would have led to innocent civilians in Gaza paying with their lives. No matter, the condemnation for the targeted strike became one more public-relations nightmare for Israel.

■ *The Hamas Caucus*

Would that Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the rest of Congress’ “ Hamas Caucus” read this book and understood, among other things, that Iron Dome is a

defensive weapon that destroys incoming missiles thus saving lives. Schanzer explains that during OGW, Israel faced the highest daily rate of rocket fire in its history as the Hamas spokesman shared that its goal was to “overcome the so-called Iron Dome by adopting the tactic of firing dozens of missiles in one single burst.” Furthermore, as Iran’s efforts in helping Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah on its northern border develop more accurate precision guided missiles (PGMs), Iron Dome may very well be overwhelmed and even run out of interceptors in a pro-

longed conflict. One Israeli official said that “with enough PGMs, the impact on certain targets could be close to the impact of a nuclear weapon.”

No matter, the Hamas Caucus wishes to end U.S. funding of Iron Dome seemingly in hopes that more dead Jews will somehow lead to peace. They simultaneously ignore the horrific crimes

against humanity committed by Hamas – including using civilians as human shields, targeting Israeli civilians with rockets and incendiary balloons, and using international humanitarian aid to build weapons and terror tunnels for the purpose of kidnapping IDF soldiers. Without Iron Dome there would also be more dead Palestinians since Israel would be forced to use less accurate weapons that could lead to greater collateral damage. Schanzer writes, “Had Israel simply returned fire to the exact spot of every rocket launch, regardless of its surroundings, there would have been an unspeakable bloodbath.”

■ *The Media’s Role*

The Hamas Caucus has partners in the international media that obsessively demonize Israel while ignoring Palestinian intransigence and terrorism. The news media’s obsession with disproportionate death counts led to the narrative that Israel had launched an offensive war rather than the reality that not only did Israel not launch the first missile, but it also spent about as much on missile defense to destroy incoming Hamas rockets as is estimated will be required for Gaza reconstruction.

The media also failed to accurately report the events that preceded OGW, ignoring the fact that “ Hamas usually picks these fights every few years, and

The Hamas Caucus has partners in the international media that obsessively demonize Israel while ignoring Palestinian intransigence and terrorism...

it does not need a particular reason. Fighting the Jewish state is the group’s *raison d’être*.” Reports blamed the conflict on the Sheikh Jarrah legal dispute while ignoring history, Israel and Iran’s “ongoing shadow war across the Middle East,” patterns discernible from prior conflicts between Hamas and Israel, Hamas’ brutality, and political division



Iron Dome missiles intercept rockets fired from Gaza in 2021.

among Palestinians. Most importantly, West Bank-based Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's cancellation of scheduled elections that likely would have led to Hamas' victory, left Hamas deciding that the way to reassert itself among the Palestinians was by inciting war with Israel.

Thousands of miles away, Schanzer was able to closely monitor the conflict in real time and report it accurately. The media failed.

■ *Iran and its Money*

Given the Vienna nuclear negotiations (at this writing, it appears a deal with Iran that will be even weaker and more dangerous than the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is near), Iran's aggression in the region and the world cannot be ignored and is an integral part of the discussions throughout the book. Iran is the world's largest state-sponsor of terrorism, funding, training, and weaponizing its proxies in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Gaza. It is also responsible for deaths and injuries to thousands of U.S. soldiers and civilians, and like its proxy Hamas, seeks the annihilation of Israel. It is therefore mind-boggling that President Joe Biden turned the Trump administration's

Maximum Pressure campaign that had a major impact on Iran into what one of Schanzer's colleagues recently called Minimum Deterrence.

Schanzer previously worked as a terrorism finance analyst at the Treasury Department and provides a great deal of insight on the topic. Iran received a massive financial windfall from the Obama administration. The Islamic Republic "was conservatively estimated to have reaped \$100 billion in direct sanctions relief and other concessions," on top of tens of billions in indirect sanctions relief. Today, as sanctions, including terrorism sanctions, are once again lifted and Iran becomes flush with money, Hamas, Hezbollah, and others will be able to advance their construction of terror tunnels, PGMs, and other weapons directed against Israel. In fact, a 2019 Treasury Department report indicated that "in the past four years, [Iran's] IRGC-QF transferred over \$200 million to" Hamas' operational arm in Gaza. In the words of Iran's supreme leader in 2020:

Iran realized Palestinian fighters' only problem was lack of access to weapons. With divine guidance and assistance, we planned, and the balance of power has been transformed

in Palestine, and today the Gaza Strip can stand against the aggression of the Zionist enemy and defeat it.

Schanzer wisely notes that "to ignore Iran's regional designs and patronage of terrorist groups is to ignore the most important aspect of a conflict that Washington says it hopes to end."

In addition to never-ending military attacks on Israel and its citizens, Israel faces a strategic and organized assault on its legitimacy from many fronts. These include non-governmental organizations, pro-Palestinian groups, the "media circus," the "Hamas Caucus" in Congress, the International Criminal Court, and the "Orwellian" United Nations Human Rights Council – another forever war with seemingly no end in sight. It is within this context that Schanzer's book is both timely and a critically important tool that should be read by everyone in the world's foreign policy establishment and certainly by every member of the UNHRC Commission of Inquiry that was recently established to persecute Israel for alleged human rights violations.

Equally important would be for Gaza Conflict 2021 to become an integral part of both high school and college curricula surrounding the Middle East and Israel. It is factual and supported by extensive endnotes, easy to read, flows well, and educates. In short, it is a must read for anyone wishing to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iranian support for global terrorism, and the precarious nature of Israel's survival in the face of forever wars conducted by both regional foes and the international community that fails to appreciate the history and political forces behind those seeking Israel's annihilation.

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■ *A Final Thought ...*

U.S. Energy and Ukraine

The Biden administration, in concert with European and other allies, imposed a wide range of sanctions on President Vladimir Putin's Russia in the wake of the devastating invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, Russian oil exports continued and just enough banking capability was left in place to finance the West's import of Russian oil and natural gas, at inflated prices that serve Russia's interests.

The situation is testimony to the gross stupidity of both the EU and the United States in energy policy. Each took what it perceived to be the easy way out of managing its resources and its population's expectations. They both should be taking both short- and long-term measures to help ensure energy independence.

Short term, the United States should reopen the Keystone XL pipeline designed to carry more than 830,000 barrels per day from Alberta, Canada to the United States, rescind the ban on fracking leases on federal property, and cancel the Biden administration's new and expensive regulations. Nuclear energy, too.

France announced an increase in nuclear power and

even Germany's Green Party announced there are "no taboos" in reducing Germany's dependence on Russia, including the possibility of extending operation of Germany's three remaining nuclear power plants beyond the end of this year. For the future, German Greens are considering extending coal-fired power past the planned 2030 cutoff – and the world won't necessarily be dirtier.

The United States is, in fact – or was, in fact, a leader in both economic growth and emissions reduction from 2005 to 2018. American total CO2 emissions fell 12%. Since 2005, American greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 10%, and power sector emissions by 27% – as the U.S. economy grew by 25%. The U.S. can teach, and the U.S. can learn.

The Biden administration's energy czar, John Kerry, lamented that war in Ukraine could lead to "massive emissions" and distract from the fight against climate change. A greater fear is empowering criminal regimes in both Russia and Iran to hold Western life and economic growth hostage in the present and in the future.