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ISRAEL I. RELATIONS WITH IRAN

ISRAEL, continued

i. DIPLOMATIC AND POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH IRAN

The relationship between Israel and Iran has since the very inception of the Jewish state in 1948 been a complex function of Iran's geo-strategic imperatives as a non-Arab, non-Sunni state in an overwhelmingly Arab and Sunni environment, and its need to find an appropriate relationship with its Arab/Sunni neighbors in order to materialize Iranian regional leadership aspirations.

Though military and intelligence cooperation with Israel has at times been seen as necessary to advance Iran's geo-strategic goals primarily the balancing of threats emanating from Iran's Arab neighbors ties to the Jewish state has impeded the attainment of Iran's second goal; that of achieving long-term security by befriending the Arab/Sunni states in its immediate neighborhood and gaining legitimacy for Iran's quest for supremacy.

This entry is divided into two sections:

(1) The Pahlavi Period (1948-78).

(2) Post Revolution Period (1979-2007).

(1) The Pahlavi Period (1948-78)

Under the Pahlavi regime, and particularly since the 1960s, Israel and Persia enjoyed close ties, resulting in informal strategic alliance. While seeking close ties with the West and striving for modernization, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1941-79) viewed Israel as a natural ally. Israel's strength and progress fascinated him, and its conflict with the Arab world and opposition to Communist influence in the region further promoted the strengthening of ties. The shah also believed that through relations with Israel, Persia would benefit in the United States, gaining the support of American Jewry, the congress, media, business community, and the administration. Persia then felt threatened by its Arab neighbors, some of which, like Nasserist Egypt and Baʿathist Iraq, were common adversaries of both countries. Although domestic concerns regulated relations in the initial years of Israel's independence, later regional and domestic developments encouraged the expansion of ties.

Israel, then seeking legitimacy in the Middle East, viewed Persia an ideal ally. While the intent to befriend Persia existed prior to independence, it intensified in the late 1950s when Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion coined the "periphery concept." It prescribed that in the absence of relations with its neighbors, Israel should seek the friendship of "the neighbors of the neighbors." This was translated into a close, though informal, alliance with Persia (Gilad, 2002, p. 252; Gilboa, p. 257; Welāyati, 2001, pp. 97-103; Fallāḥ-nežād, pp. 121-27). Gradually, as the shah gained further power and expanded his ties with Washington, in conjunction with the enticing Iranian oil income and lucrative development plans, Israel had even better reasons to cultivate ties with Persia. Although several regional developments (declining Arab nationalism, Persia's improved ties with Egypt, and the Algier Accord with Iraq) joined to diminish Israeli significance for Persia's interests in the 1970s political, economic and strategic ties continued to expand. This period of close ties came to an abrupt end with the fall of the Pahlavi regime and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in February 1979. Fierce hostility still continues to define their "relations" twenty-eight years later. Moreover, Persia's Islamic stance has placed the Arab-Israeli conflict on a different footing, projecting it rather as a religious crusade than merely a political-national conflict. Persia's involvement in Lebanon and support for Islamist movements (Hamas, Hizballah and Islamic Jihad) has made it more directly involved it in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Its nuclear and missile programs were

viewed as a major threat to Israeli security, as was its alleged engagement in terrorism. Thus, while Persia views Israel as the enemy of Persia, Islam, and mankind, Israel regards Persia as the primary threat to its existence and to the safety of the free world; and whereas Persia volunteered to hoist the anti-Israel flag, Israel undertook to lead the anti-Persian camp.

Early contact, 1948-63. In the Jewish collective memory, Persia is cherished as a friendly nation. This goes back to the days of Cyrus the Great (q.v.), who granted the Jewish people significant liberties. The close ties between the two countries under the last shah reinforced such perceptions. This image of Persia existed despite the fact that over history Persian Jews frequently suffered periods of persecution and harassment to a greater extent than they did under Ottoman rule.

Since the emergence of the Zionist movement in the late 19th century, Persia's attitude has been ambivalent, if not hostile, to the idea of Jewish statehood. While Persia's national interests and the last shah's pro-Western tendencies have led to a somewhat tolerant approach, as a Muslim state influenced heavily by the ulama, hostile attitudes remained prevalent. Israel's initial contacts with Persia focused on issues relating to the Persian residents in Israel and the Jewish inhabitants of Persia. In 1942, Zionist agencies sent emissaries to provide Persian Jewry with education and indoctrination. Yet, paradoxically, the immediate stimuli for this interest was both the misfortune of European Jewry, many of whom arrived in Persia after fleeing the European Holocaust, and the growing threat to the Jews of Iraq who wished to immigrate to Israel via Persia.

Prior to Israel's independence, Persian policy toward a Jewish state was unfavorable. Persian ulama (some of them residing in shrine cities of Iraq), took the lead in expressing vehement criticism (Welāyati, 1997, pp. 163-69). In 1947, serving on the UN Special Committee for Palestine, Persia was one of the three states that voted against Palestine's partition, favoring a federal solution. When the General Assembly endorsed the partition plan (29 November 1947), Persia again voted against it. It later sided again with the Arab states (11 May 1949) voting against Israel's admission to the United Nations. During the 1948 war, Persia showed tacit solidarity with the Arab states, but proved reluctant to involve itself in combat. Ayatollah Abu'l-Qāsem Kāšāni worked to recruit volunteers to fight on Israeli fronts, but the Persian government resisted Arab demands for support in the war efforts, preferring indirect involvement (Welāyati, 2001, pp. 68-74; Fallāḥ-nežād, pp. 24-26).

Gradually, political realities forced a measure of contact between Israel and Persia. During the 1948 war, some Persian residents of Palestine fled the country and their properties, like those of the Arabs who had left, were put under government custody. These Persian refugees asked Tehran to interfere on their behalf to redeem their properties. In March 1949 Persia sent an unofficial envoy, ʿAbbās Ṣayqal, without official invitation or formal portfolio, to manage these claims. Israel attempted reciprocation, asking to send one of its diplomats in Ankara to Tehran as non-resident minister, but Persia refused (Gilad, 2002, pp. 251-52; Bialer, 1985, p. 300). The persecution of Iraqi Jews and their immigration restrictions added to the urgency of forming Persian contacts, as Persia had become a transit point for Iraqi Jews (Sobhani, pp. 27-40).

In 1949 Israel's foreign ministry asked the head of its UN mission, Abba Ebban, to initiate talks with the Persian ambassador, Naṣr-Allāh Enteẓām (q.v.), and stress the good will Israel has shown toward Persian nationals in Israel. Enteẓām, in turn, promised to work to improve relations. Responding to yet another Israeli initiative, after the Israeli-Arab cease-fire talks in Rhodes, the Persian ambassador to Washington, said his country will consider recognition of Israel, though doubted that it could be achieved soon (Hacham, pp. 83-89). The Persian efforts to get support from the United States, combined with American interest in securing Persian recognition of Israel, provided fertile ground for Israeli lobbying. During the shah's visit to the United States in late 1949, Israel's recognition was discussed. Turkey's recognition of Israel in September 1949, made Persia's recognition more appealing as they could not be accused of breaking the Israeli blockade first. Israel also stressed the financial benefit to Persia, as Israel would supply Persia with the raw materials it needed to import. A peculiar scheme was also underway to pay a considerable sum of money to interested parties to help expedite the recognition (Hacham, pp. 90-100; Bialer, 1985, pp. 301-8; Welāyati, 2001, pp. 57).

On 6 March, 1950 while the Majlis was in New Year recess, the government recognized Israel de facto, without formal announcement. On 7 March Enteẓām informed Abba Eban of the recognition (Hagana Archives, 14/13A; Hacham, p. 95). On 26 March, Reżā Ṣafiniā, a Persian diplomat with ministerial rank, presented his credentials as a "special envoy." The recognition led to fierce opposition at home (mainly clerics and nationalists) and abroad in Arab countries. On 7 July 1951, shortly after taking power, Moḥammad Moṣaddeq's

government closed its Jerusalem consulate, due to “financial difficulties,” but did not revoke the de facto recognition (Israel Government Archives, 2410/11/A; Hacham, pp. 101-6). Economic cooperation continued, and Persia offered agricultural products in exchange for the importation of industrial goods, medical equipment, and for additional technical assistance. On 11 June 1953, an agreement was signed between the respective National Banks for opening a line of credit (Hacham, p. 109; Gilad, 1953, p. 294). To encourage business ties an Iranian-Israeli trading company IRIS was also founded in 1953 (Bialer, 1988, p. 193).

Following the fall of Moṣaddeq government through the coup d’état of 1953 (q.v.), the prevailing Cold War and regional tensions bolstered an improvement in Persian-Israeli relations. The Egyptian revolution (July 1952) presented Israel and Persia with a common enemy: Gamal/Jamāl ʿAbd-al-Nāṣer and Egypt’s arms deal with the Soviet Union (September 1955) illuminated the challenges of regional subversive activity and Soviet penetration in the Middle East. The shah, then, based his “positive nationalism” on maximizing Persian security and promoting economic development through alignment with the United States. The Baghdad Pact (q.v.) of 1955 also provided him with the sense of security that he needed to pursue his regional goals. Israel fit these goals perfectly: it could help Persia’s economic programs, balance Egyptian-Soviet alliance, and be instrumental in strengthening his ties with the United States. Persia also needed oil-markets following the 1954 agreement with the Consortium (an international body of companies that replaced Anglo-Persian Oil Company, q.v.), and Israel was viewed as a potential partner. It was not surprising then that Israel’s diplomat, Zvi Duriel, arrived in Persia (early 1956) under the cover of an IRIS representative, settling in an indistinguishable office with no flag or official sign (Gilad, 2002, p. 252).

The next impetus for extending relations was the impressive Israeli military show in the Sinai campaign (October 1956), which also opened the port of Eilat to the Red Sea shipping, thus further assisting trade. The shah considered Israel a valuable tool for preoccupying ʿAbd-al-Nāṣer in the Arab-Israeli front, thereby preventing the spread of his creed to the Persian Gulf region. The strategic value of Israel for Persia in meeting the challenges of internal subversion and regional aggression further encouraged the cultivation of closer economic ties as well as security and intelligence cooperation since the late 1950s. The opening of the Tiran Straits turned Eilat into a natural route for importing oil to Israel and later to Europe. In 1957, Israel started buying

Persian oil through alien ships unmarked with the Israeli flag. Over the years, Israeli export expanded and El-Al Airline eventually opened a direct line to Tehran. The assignment in Persia of two Israeli officials further enhanced their mutual cooperation. Meir Ezri, a Persian native, was sent by the Israeli foreign ministry to Tehran in 1958 and remained there as minister and ambassador until 1973 (Ezri, pp. 58-169; Welāyati, 2001, p. 41; Fallāḥ-nežād, pp. 140-42). Jackob Nimrodi, an intelligence officer, was originally assigned to Persia on a Mossad mission, and later returned to Persia as military attaché and private businessman (Nimrodi, pp. 142-343; Fallāḥ-nežād, pp. 142-47). These men were instrumental in translating the general understandings between the two parties into a network of intimate cooperation. In September 1957, General Teymur Baḵtiār, deputy prime minister and head of the newly established SAVAK (Sāzmān-e eṭṭelāʿāt wa amniyat-e kešvar) met in Paris with the Israeli ambassador (Yaacov Zur) offering cooperation in the exchange of intelligence, a suggestion Israel warmly welcomed (Hacham, p. 81; Sobhani, pp. 57-60; Nimrodi, I, pp. 170-93).

The regional occurrences of 1958 (the formation of the United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria in February, the collapse of Iraq's pro-Western monarchy in July, and the subsequent collapse of the Baghdad Pact) augmented Persian concerns about Communist penetration and Arab radicalism and reinforced Persian decisions to enhance Israeli-Persian relations. On 24 July 1960, the shah reiterated publicly his country's recognition of Israel. ʿAbd-al-Nāṣer responded with harsh criticism, breaking all diplomatic ties with Persia (to be restored only in 1970). Ben-Gurion described relations between Persia and Israel then as friendly, informal, "but not hidden," and based on "mutual benefit" (Gilad, 2002, pp. 252-53). Ben-Gurion was the first Israeli prime minister to visit Tehran (December 1961), setting the precedent for visits of prominent officials on both sides. Although these hesitant initial steps gained significant momentum since the White Revolution (a series of economic and social reforms announced by the shah in January 1963), they remained informal. Even so, their relations gradually developed into what one Persian official described it to me as "relations of love without a marriage contract."

The White Revolution growing alliance. The culmination of the events of the early 1960s engendered deeper bonds between Israel and Persia. The shah, who began his career as a mere figurehead and was harshly scrutinized by local powers and super-powers, emerged as an absolute monarch determined to proceed in his development plans. His ideology, basing itself on

westernization, secularization, nationalism, and edging closer to the West permitted increasingly greater Persian-Israeli cooperation. Viewing himself as a benevolent leader following in the footsteps of Cyrus the Great probably reinforced his tolerant approach to religious minorities and his friendship with Israel, whose officials persistently made flattering comparisons between the two men in their joint-meetings. It is also apparent that his close ties with Israel stemmed from an overestimation of the power of world Jewry. After 1967, with ʿAbd-al-Nāṣer considerably weakened and incapable of conducting subversive activities, the shah was able to expand ties with Israel with less anxiety and with the support of Unites States. The new realities were seen as a golden opportunity for Israel, to promote its economic interests and strategic schemes.

The strengthening of ties since the early 1960s corresponded with Ben-Gurion's "periphery concept," or an alliance between Israel and each of Persia, Turkey, and Ethiopia. Persia was perceived as an especially important country due to its strategic location, size, and economic potential; it is a Muslim (but not Arab) state and had no ostensible reason for conflict with Israel. Although the precise scope of the economic and military cooperation remained unclear, they were most profound in the 1960s and 1970s. Israel trained Persian students and officers, sent experts in various fields (agricultural development and modernization, medical services, exploration of water resources, road pavement, and reconstruction, most significantly of the Qazvin region after an earthquake). In the last two years of the shah's rule, the present writer resided in Persia conducting research and noticed a wide range of Israeli business, and numerous representatives of leading Israeli firms active in Persia. The Israeli presence was in fact so large that it necessitated the opening of an Israeli school in Tehran. Intimate cooperation between the security agencies developed and economic ties rocketed forward (Gilboa, pp. 257-58; Nimrodi, I, pp. 289-332; Ezri, pp. 181-255; Welāyati, 2001, pp. 203-28). From the interviews conducted by the present author with former officials (e.g., ambassadors, military attachés in Persia), it seems resonable to conclude that much remains to be told about the extent and depth of the relations.

In the years 1958-67, while Israel helped develop Persia's armed forces, Persia accelerated its sale of crude oil to Israel. Although certain projects aimed at transferring oil through pipelines (from Eilat to Beer Sheva) were examined previously, after the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967, Persia and Israel embarked on a joint venture to construct the Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline. This

pipeline initially transferred annually more than ten million tons of oil, which was more than Israel's annual consumption (Ezri, pp. 341-51; Sagev, pp. 94-102, 121). Israeli imports from Persia, as shown in the official Israeli statistics, grew from $1.3m in 1967 to $2.7m in 1969, $4.5m in 1975, reaching $5.8m in 1977 (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, XXI, p. 219, XXIX, p. 222). Israeli exports to Persia grew from $22.3m in 1970 to $92.4m in 1975, reaching $103.2m by 1977, higher than its rate of export to Japan and Turkey (99.5m and $33.6m, respectively; Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, XXI, p. 219, p. 223). Between 1973 and 1974 alone, Israeli exports to Persia almost doubled (State of Israel, p. 101; see also data in Welāyati, 2001, pp. 159-201; Fallāḥ-nežād, pp. 207-45). It should be noted, however, that the figures cited above do not include the entire scope of trade and can only illustrate the general trend in trade business.

In the early 1970s, several regional developments threatened to obstruct their flourishing relations. The death of ʿAbd-al-Nāṣer (September 1970) followed by the rise of Moḥammad Anwar-al-Sādāt significantly altered the shah's negative attitude toward Egypt. Unlike ʿAbd-al-Nāṣer, the shah trusted Anwar-al-Sādāt and supported his Middle East policy. Subsequently, the October War (1973) diminished the prestige of the Israeli army. Moreover, in March 1975, Persia and Iraq signed the Algiers Accord (see BOUNDARIES iv), putting (a temporary) end to the Persian-Iraqi conflict and closing a chapter in Persian-Israeli common support for (Iraqi) Kurds. The incentives for close relations with Israel were less compelling in this new conciliatory atmosphere, although extensive cooperation continued in various fields.

Throughout this period of friendship, anti-Israeli attitudes continued to prevail, particularly among the clergy and the anti-shah and anti-western elements. Most prominent among these spokesmen was the Ayatollah Ruḥ-Allah Ḵomeyni, who, in a speech on 3 June 1963, gave vent to such views: Israel wishes "to seize your economy, to destroy your trade and agriculture, to appropriate your wealth"; it "does not wish" the Qurʾān, the ulama, or any learned man "to exist in this country." Addressing *ḥajj* pilgrims in 1971, Ayatollah Ḵomeyni typically portrayed Israel as "the universally recognized enemy of Islam and the Muslims," that has "penetrated all the economic, military, and political affairs" of Persia, turning the country into "a military base for Israel" and "by extension, for America" (Ḵomeyni, 1981, pp. 177-80, 197; Fallāḥ-nežād, pp. 191-94). As long as the shah was behind the wheel, domestic distaste for close relations with Israel was largely ignored, but the

instatement of the Ayatollah Ḵomeyni signaled the termination of an alliance that had continued over two decades.

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(DAVID MENASHRI)

(2) Post Revolution Period (1979-2007)

The impact of Iran's change to an Islamic state on Israeli-Iranian relations must be seen within the context of Iran's geo-strategic imperatives as a non-Arab, non-Sunni state in an overwhelmingly Arab and Sunni environment beyond the camouflage of Islamic rhetoric and exaggerated threat depictions in order to assess the changes that the Revolution of 1977-79 brought about and the continuities that it failed to end.

The legacy of the Pahlavi era. In the Pahlavi era, Iran and Israel formed strategic ties based on their common threat perceptions; both states felt threatened by Arab nationalism and Soviet influence in the Middle East. Nevertheless, in spite of extensive Israeli-Iranian intelligence and military cooperation, Iranian government refrained from recognizing Israel de jure, precisely due to the need to win regional approval and support for Iran's leadership ambitions. Distancing Iran from Israel was the primary political vehicle used by the shah to reconcile Iran with the region's Arab states. As Iran's power rose and the need for Israel decreased, the shah increasingly sought to distance Iran from Israel in order to translate Iran's increased capabilities into an acceptance of its preeminence.

The shah's efforts to distance Iran from Israel went so far that Israel feared that the Iranian monarch would severe all ties with the Jewish State (Segev, p. 89). These fears turned out to be unfounded, however. Though the Israeli-Iranian entente had weakened due to Iran's rise in the early 1970s, and though the threat from the Arab world and the Soviet Union had been reduced, neither threat had been neutralized.

These geo-political realities survived the birth of the Islamic Republic, which put Iran's clerical leaders in the awkward position of finding themselves on the same side, geo-politically, as Israel. Iran continued to fear Soviet intentions, and the threat from the Arab block, particularly Iraq, was greater in 1980 than it ever had been in the previous decade. In addition, Iran had since 1976 experienced a relative decline, fueled by the rise of Iraqi power. Israel assessed regional threats similarly. Publicly, the Islamic Republic took an uncompromising position on Israel, calling for its destruction and vehemently criticizing any Muslim country that negotiated with Tel Aviv. In a symbolic move, only six days after Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran, the

compound of the Israeli mission to Iran was handed over to Yassir Arafat, and the street on which it was located was renamed Palestine Street (Entessar, p. 5).

Much like the shah, Iran's religious leaders sought a central role for Iran in the affairs of the region, but while the language through which the shah articulated Iran's ambitions was one of Iranian nationalism, the clerics expressed the same aspirations through a religious lexicon. While the shah sought approval and legitimacy for his hegemony through financial aid to, and military protection of, the surrounding Arab states, the revolutionary regime sought the same through the instrument of political Islam. The shah believed that his aspirations could be achieved within the framework of the existing order. The revolutionaries, on the other hand, needed to redefine the guiding principle of state to state interaction in order to reverse Iran's decline and restore its bid for regional leadership. The export of the revolution was key to the restructuring of the region for the enablement of Iranian leadership. The shah's quest to legitimize Iran's hegemony through American backing, strong ties and military aid to the regions moderate Arab government, and financial aid to the more radical Arab states, combined with public distancing from Israel, ultimately failed to persuade the Arabs to grant Iran the role it aspired. Historic Arab-Iranian suspicions, as well as resentment for the shah's entente with Israel, served to deny Iran that role. Furthermore, pan-Arab thought dominated the Arab states; an ideology that by definition excluded Tehran due to Iran's non-Arab nature.

The Islamic Revolution. Through political Islam, however, the revolutionaries hoped to bridge the Iranian-Arab divide and establish a normative framework that included, rather than excluded Iran from the peoples of the region; but Islamic unity and an Islamic order hardly suited the existing regimes in the region, particularly the Arab kingdoms. The Arabs had been wary of the shah's ambitions, but they were terrified by Khomeini's revolutionary designs (Menashri, p. 207). Rather than restructuring the political order of the region, Iran found itself increasingly isolated. Iran's pro-Arab stance and venomous rhetoric on Israel won it few, if any, Arab friends (Hunter, p. 104). As a result, in spite of its anti-Israeli ideology and rhetoric, geo-strategic forces compelled Iran to avoid any direct confrontation with Tel Aviv.

According to a former Iranian official who worked closely with Khomeini, the Ayatollah's view was that the Palestinian issue was primarily a Palestinian issue. At the second level, it should involve the Arab states neighboring Israel,

and only at the third level should it involve Iran. Consequently, Iran should never be a front-line state against Israel (Interview, former Iranian official, Tehran, August, 2004). In the words of former deputy foreign minister, Maḥmud Wāʾeẓi, Iran never operationalized its rhetoric into actual policy, since it aimed "to avoid getting entangled in the Palestinian conflict" (Interview, Tehran, 16 August 2004; the same view was also related by Eqbāl Ahmad, a Pakistani political scientist, who visited Khomeini in Qom during the early weeks after the victory of revolution [interviewed by Ahmad Ashraf, Fall 1985, Bennington, Vermont]).

This distinction between Iran's public posture and operational policy was exemplified by Khomeini's blocking of attempts by more radical elements in the government to dispatch 10,000 Iranian soldiers to southern Lebanon to fight the Israelis (Chehabi, pp. 211-13). Khomeini prevented this potentially disastrous operation by declaring that the road to Qods (i.e., Jerusalem) went through Karbalā, thus, reaffirming Iran's ideological goals while ensuring that these goals would not be acted upon. The "liberation" of Jerusalem would remain an ideal to be used in Iran's rhetoric to win legitimacy in the Arab world, but not to be operationalized for its own purposes. This intricate and perilous balancing act was intended to ensure the pursuit of Iran's role ambitions without jeopardizing its short-term security needs. Primarily, Iran needed Israel's assistance in procuring American weaponry and spare parts for Iran's American-built air force. Iran's behind the scenes dealings with Tel Aviv accentuated the continuation of Iran and Israel's geo-strategic commonalities, in spite of Iran's Islamic rhetoric and anti-Israeli ideology.

The extent of these dealings came to light through the Iran-Contra Affair (q.v.), in which Israel lobbied the United States to arm Iran in its war efforts against Saddam Hussein in order to achieve a "broader strategic relationship with Iran" (Segev, p. 249). Unconfirmed reports claim that Israeli military advisors even visited the Iranian frontline to evaluate Iran's capabilities and needs. All in all, according to Aḥmad Ḥaydari, a Iranian arms dealer, roughly 80 percent of the weaponry bought by Tehran immediately after the onset of the war originated from Israel (Entessar, p. 7). Israel's motivations for supporting a state that officially called for its destruction also lied in the continuity of these geo-strategic realities.

Israel had great difficulties coming to terms with the Revolution and the strategic setback of losing the shah's support. After twenty-five years of Israeli investments into the relations with Iran, the ties to Tehran had become a

crucial element of Israel's regional strategy. In the words of David Kimche, the former head of the Israeli Foreign Ministry: "We had very deep relations with Iran, cutting deep into the fabric of the two peoples. It was difficult for people to accept the fact that all of this intimacy was thrown out of the window. So there were a lot of attempts during the first year after the Revolution, to see if we could revive the relations with [Iran]" (Interview, Tel Aviv, 22 October, 2004). Israel believed that the Revolution and Iran's Islamic orientation was a historical parenthesis; the real, geo-strategically oriented Iran would resume and the shah's cooperation with Israel would soon reemerge.

From Israel's perspective, it was Iraq and not Iran that constituted the greatest threat to its security. Tel Aviv was very concerned about Baghdad's rise and looked toward Iran as a potential partner to contain Saddam's ambitions (Alpher, p. 155). Iran continued to be viewed as a non-threat due to its lack of offensive capabilities. "Throughout the 1980s, no one in Israel said anything about an Iranian threat—the word wasn't even uttered," according to David Menashri of Tel Aviv University (Interview, Tel Aviv, 26 October 2004).

Iran-Iraq War. The outbreak of the Iraq-Iran War (q.v.) was seen as a setback in Tel Aviv due to the risk of an Iraqi victory, which would leave the Jewish state in a far more vulnerable position (Entessar, p. 7). A Iranian victory, on the other hand, was not seen as negative since Iran's ability to participate in a war against Israel remained minimal (Segev, p. 22). According to David Kimche, "We weren't happy with the idea of exporting the Revolution, but between the two, Iraq was a greater threat and we didn't want to see Iraq win" (Interview, 22 October 2004).

Three days after Iraqi troops invaded Iran, Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan urged Washington to forget the past and help Iran keep up its defenses (Sick, p. 114). Two days later, Deputy Defense Minister Zippori announced that Israel would provide military aid to Iran if it changed its hostile approach to the Jewish state (Associated Press, 28 September 1980).

The Iran-Iraq War reinforced the common Israeli-Iranian threat picture and increased hopes in Israel that Iran would realize the utility of an alliance with Tel Aviv. In the words of Joseph Alpher, a former senior Mossad official, "certainly there was a strong sense that the Iranians are fighting the Arabs again, aren't we their natural allies? Why don't they understand that? Why don't they overcome their religious ideological compunctions and understand that?" (Interview, Tel Aviv, 27 October 2004). According to Israel former

ambassador to the United States, Itamar Rabinovich, “in strict geo-political terms, if you don’t consider regimes, our friend should be Iran, and we should never forget that” (Interview, Tel Aviv, 17 October 2004).

To Iraq’s surprise, however, Iran was no push-over, and Iraqi expectations of a swift victory soon proved false. Though Israel initially supported Iran, it came to appreciate the way the war absorbed Arab resources and prevented the Arabs from focusing on the Palestinian issue. Tel Aviv reasoned that providing military assistance to Iran contributed to Israel’s security by further splitting the Arabs (Sobhani, p. 150).

According to David Kimche, “our big hope was that the two sides would weaken each other to such an extent that neither of them would be a threat to us” (Interview, 22 October 2004). Balancing between continued warfare (Israel’s preferred outcome at the time) and an Iraqi victory was an imprecise science. An Iraqi victory would make Baghdad the undisputed hegemonic power in the Persian Gulf, with the world’s third largest oil reserves and an army more than four times the size of Israel’s. It was not until 1987, when Iraqi prospects for victory had grown substantially that Tel Aviv concluded that a continuation of the war would be too risky and viewed a stalemate as the best possible outcome. Although Iraq did not win the war, by the time of its conclusion, Baghdad emerged as the most potent military power in the region, save Israel. As a result, Iraq remained Israel’s primary threat, and Iran its preferred partner in balancing Iraq. This underlined the endurance of the geo-strategic forces bringing Israel and Iran together. According to an Israeli official, “the basic geo-political interests, which originally dictated an Israeli-Iranian link were far from being a mere whim of the Shah’s. These common interests will remain valid” (*Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 7 December 1986).

Nevertheless, though Iran utilized its contacts with Israel in order to boost its military, it avoided the formation of strategic ties with Tel Aviv, due to its second strategic goal, that of improving relations with Iran’s immediate neighborhood in order to satisfy its hegemonic inclinations. Thus, Khomeini preferred a cold peace with Israel, in which it opposed the Jewish state at the rhetorical level without translating that rhetoric into operational policy. Albeit not a whim, the geo-political forces that provided a basis for the Iranian-Israeli cold peace only endured for three more years after the end of the war. By 1991, the geo-strategic map of the Middle East was significantly transformed by two critical events, namely, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demolition of the Iraqi army in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Indeed, the real

turning point in Israeli-Iranian relations was not in 1979, but in 1991, since the end of the Cold War also ended the Iranian-Israeli cold peace. The distribution of relative power shifted towards Iran and Israel and formed a nascent bipolar structure in the region. The defeat of Iraq and the collapse of the Soviet Union evaporated Iran and Israel's common threats and improved their security environments, but it also left both of them unchecked. Without Iraq balancing Iran, Tehran would become a threat, so argued Israeli hawks. This initiated a Iranian and Israeli redefinition of their respective roles and positions in the emerging Middle Eastern order under the hegemony of the United States. Since the United States was seeking to establish an order based, not on a realist assessment of the power distribution in the region, but on its own ideological disposition and bilateral relations with individual states, powerful countries like Iran and Iraq with justified role aspirations could be the biggest losers in the new Middle East order, due to their tense relations with Washington.

For Iran, the second Persian Gulf War provided an opportunity to improve its relations with Washington in order to break out of its isolation and return to a state in which Iran's power in the region would be recognized and its role objectives met. Tehran adopted a policy of "positive neutrality" during the war, but was in essence allied with the United States by, amongst other things, permitting Washington to use Iranian airspace to attack Iraq (Interview, Wāʿeẓi). Iran expected to be rewarded by the Unites States for its tacit support and be granted what it believed to be its rightful role in the formation of the new Middle East order. Israel, on the other hand, had its continued alliance with the United States to thank for its avoidance of complete isolation. Now, it feared that the United States reorientation towards the Arabs and a possible U.S.-Iran rapprochement would leave it isolated. With the Soviet Union gone, Israel usefulness for the United States had diminished significantly.

By the time the Labor Party swept the June 1992 elections, the need for bold action was evident. Labor's landslide victory, the Arabs' military weakness, and the PLO's near-collapse led the Labor Party to conclude that Israel's long-term security would be better served by befriending the Arab states of Israel's vicinity, instead of the non-Arab states in its periphery. This strategy reflected the new geo-strategic realities. The redistribution of power had caused Iran to become a rival rather than a potential allie, which in turn necessitated improved relations with Israel's Arab neighbors. By befriending the under-developed Arab states, Israel could become the economic engine of the Middle East, the producer for the 250 million consumers in the Arab countries. Israel

could become the dominant economic power in the Middle East in addition to its military domination, which would help regain its strategic importance in Washington. This was at the heart of Peres' vision of the "New Middle East," which had little room for Iranian prominence.

Israel's vision of the new Middle East order came at the expense of Iran since Yitzhak Rabin believed that the Israeli population would be unlikely to accept peace with the Arabs unless a greater and more ominous threat, namely Iran and Islamic fundamentalism, was looming in the horizon. Moreover, the Arab states would be more inclined to make peace with Israel if they felt more threatened by Iran's fundamentalist ideology than by Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and its nuclear arsenal. According to Ephraim Inbar of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, "there was a feeling in Israel that, because of the end of the Cold War, relations with the U.S. were cooling and we needed some new glue for the alliance. And the new glue was radical Islam. And Iran was radical Islam. So Rabin played [the Iranian threat] more than it was deserved in order to sell the peace process" (Interview, Jerusalem, 19 October 2004). In the words of an Israeli diplomat, the Israeli gambit was to establish a new Middle East order in which Iran would "have no choice but to accept" its own isolation and Israel's leadership (Interview, Israeli UN diplomat, New York, 31 March, 2004).

Israel adopted a very aggressive posture on Iran, echoing Iran's venomous rhetoric against the Jewish state. The view of Iran as an unredeemable terrorist state became an integral part of Israeli political rhetoric to the extent that that any act of terrorism anywhere in the world was automatically blamed on Iran (White and Logan, eds., p. 218). Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin missed no opportunity to stress the "Iranian danger," Iran's "dark murderous regime," and the "turbid Islamic wave" that it produced. Shimon Peres followed the same line and even made open threats directed at Iran, stressing that Israel could take action against Iran (Menashri, p. 295). Peres also urged Erope to "stop flirting" with Iran, declaring that Iran "is more dangerous than Hitler," and that "Iran is the center of terrorism, fundamentalism, and subversion" (Reuter, 7 March 1996). This stands in stark contrast to Rabin's view of Iran at the height of Iran's export of Islamic fundamentalism in 1987, when he said "Iran is Israel's best friend and we do not intend to change our position in relation to Tehran" (Agence France-presse, 28 October 1987).

Exclusion and confrontation. The first indication that Washington was not inclined to include Iran in future regional decision making was President

George H. W. Bush's justification of the decision not to dethrone Saddam. Bush argued that Saddam was needed to balance Iran (Interview, Wilkerson). The other watershed event was the United Stated did not invite Iran to the multilateral talks at the Madrid conference in October 1991. These two events had a profound impact on Iranian decision makers, who concluded that Washington would not include Iran in the formation of the new Middle East order unless the exclusion of Iran makes the execution of its policies too costly.

As Iran began to realize the implications of Israel's New Middle East, it reassessed its long-standing position of avoiding direct confrontation with Israel. Iran, which in the early 1990s reduced its financial support to Hezbollah and lacked strong ties and presence in the Palestinian territories, started to reach out and develop relations with rejectionist Palestinian groups after the Madrid conference. Suddenly, Iran's geo-strategic imperatives and ideological disposition no longer collided. Tehran began translating its anti-Israeli ideology into operational policy in order to undermine the American-Israeli push for the new Israel-centric Middle East by attacking its weakest link, the peace process. According to an Israeli diplomat, Iran's active participation against Israel began after its exclusion from the formation of the new Middle East order (Interview, Israeli UN diplomat, New York, 31 March 2004). In the view of Itamar Rabinovich, Iran's anti-Israeli acts began in 1994 with the bombings of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires and a Jewish community center in Argentina (Interview, Itamar Rabinovich, Tel Aviv, 17 October 2004), although no evidence has yet been presented to tie Iran to these bombings. Peres said that the Iranians "are doing whatever they can to bring an end to peace and bring an end to the government that goes for peace" (Reuters, 8 April 1996.); and according to Keith Weissman of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), "it's not an unreasonable assertion that the Iranians understood that by electing Netanyahu, you would slow-down the peace process. And that's exactly what happened" (Interview, 25 March 2004).

In May 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu defeated Peres on an anti-Oslo platform. As the Likud government put an effective freeze on the peace process, it also initiated a re-examination of its relations with Iran. A political source in the Israeli prime minister's office told Israel Radio Station (IDF Radio) in late 1996 that the era of dual containment (i.e., the Oslo process) was over and that Israel had changed its approach toward Tehran (IDF Radio, 10 November 1996.). The Israeli accounts were confirmed by the Islamic Republic's News

Agency (IRNA), which reported that the Likud was seeking to settle its political issues with Tehran through the assistance of Iranian Jews (IRNA, 24 July 1996). Through these conciliatory measures, Netanyahu sought to avoid any unnecessary provocation against Iran that could lead to similar attacks with unpredictable political consequences. He didn't want to use rhetoric that would just antagonize the Iranians for no reason. A decision was made at the highest political levels to lower Israel's profile on issues concerning Iran.

Netanyahu and the Likud Party were ideologically opposed to the Oslo process and did not conceal their mistrust of the Palestinians. Therefore, they subscribed to the view that since peace with the Arabs remained highly unlikely, Israeli security was best achieved by forging alliances with the Middle East's non-Arab states, that is, a return to the pre-1991 strategy of Israel. In their view, not only was Peres' vision of the New Middle East inherently flawed, his strategy of demonizing Iran was also contrary to Israel's national interest in the sense that it significantly reduced the possibility of reviving the Iranian-Israeli entente, which the Likud viewed as next to inevitable in case of a failure to reach an accord with the Palestinians. Accordingly, the Likud strategists needed to keep the Iran option alive. According to Dore Gold, "The Likud tended to be more open to the idea [that] maybe there are residual elements in the revolutionary regime that see things geo-politically the same way as it was during the shah's time" (Interview, Jerusalem, 28 October 2004).

Moreover, Israel wanted to avoid a scenario in which Iran and the United States would resume diplomatic ties while Iranian-Israeli relations were still hostile, since improved relations between them under such circumstances could come at the expense of Israel (IDF Radio, 10 November 1996). Finally, from a domestic political perspective, Netanyahu's aim was to turn the Israeli public against the Oslo process and end the land for peace formula. In the words of an AIPAC representative, "Blaming the Iranians for Palestinian terrorism would be counterproductive to his message that terror was coming from the Palestinians" (Interview, AIPAC representative, 25 March 2004). In short, whereas the Iranian threat depiction served Rabin's efforts to convince the Israeli public to support reconciliation with the Arabs, the very same Iranian threat depiction undermined Netanyahu's efforts to convince Israelis to oppose that very same reconciliation. From the Iranian perspective, Likud was preferred over Labor for this very reason: an Israel that doesn't pursue the peace process won't need to confront Iran. As argued by a Iranian political

strategist, “in Iran, the perception was that Likud is not serious about peace, so they do not need a scapegoat [Iran]. Labor, however, needed a scapegoat” (Interview, 26 February 2004).

In the end, the Likud’s attempt to reduce tensions with Iran failed. By 1997, Iran announced the production of Šahāb-3 ballistic missiles, which would put Israel within Iran’s reach. Furthermore, Israeli intelligence reports indicated that Iran was swiftly moving towards a nuclear weapons capability. To many Israelis, the alarmists’ exaggerated view of the “Iranian threat” from the early 1990s started to be reflected in reality by the late-1990s. At the same time, Iran increasingly felt sufficiently confident about the doomed destiny of the peace process to readopt the policy of not translating Iran’s anti-Israeli rhetoric into actual policy. The more Iran became politically integrated into the region through improved relations with the outside world, the less of a strategic threat it perceived the peace process to be.

The effect of the decrease in the tension on Tehran’s perception of the peace process was crystallized one year later when Iran’s new president, Moḥammad Ḵātami, reinstated the policy of accepting any deal agreeable to the Palestinians, including a two-state solution (Interview, Ambassador Nežād-Ḥosayniān, Tehran, 12 August, 2004). In addition, the eruption of the second Intifada in 2000 and the deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian territories were met by a lowering of Iran’s profile on the Palestinian issue. Eventually, however, Ḵātami’s efforts were hampered by his inability to improve relations with the United States, which in turn prevented Iran from gaining recognition for its rising power and moderated foreign policy. This failure cost the Ḵātami government dearly and paved the way for the rise of the Iranian isolationists who opposed Ḵātami’s policy of détente.

After September 11, officials in the Ḵātami government convinced the conservative clerical establishment to provide Washington with considerable assistance in the war against the Taliban (Ṭālebān) and in the reconstruction of Afghanistan’s political system. A high-level channel was set up in which Washington and Tehran coordinated their policies in Afghanistan in order to establish a stable and representative government in Kabul. Iran permitted the United States to use Iranian airfields and helped repair America’s relations with the Northern Alliance. The Iranians also used intelligence provided by the United States to find and kill Al-Qaeda (al-Qāʾda) leaders that were slipping into Iran from Afghanistan. Tehran’s assistance was instrumental, a fact recognized by the White House officials testifying in the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee (Pollack, pp. 346-49). Iran also played a critical role in the reconstruction efforts after the Iraq war and instructed its proxy groups in Iraq to cooperate with the US forces. According to Kenneth Pollack, Iran's "willingness to stay the course when initial American mistakes created tremendous problems with lawlessness, economic chaos, and the threat of a political collapse was critical in keeping the [Iraqi] situation from spiraling out of control" (Pollack, p. 355).

The Ḵātami government hoped that its constructive cooperation in Afghanistan and Iraq would pave the way for a new chapter in U.S.-Iran relations. Instead, President George W. Bush labeled Iran on 29 January 2002 as part of the "Axis of Evil," and the Iranian diplomats who spearheaded the efforts to open up to the United States were reprimanded by conservative factions in Tehran. This strengthened the hands of those in the Iranian leadership who maintained that the United States was not interested in anything less than weakening Iran and replacing its regime. No Iranian policy change could accommodate the Bush administration. Proponents of this school of thought pointed out that Ḵātami's efforts at détente with the United States and the Arab governments had failed to win Iran recognition for its security interests in the region. As a result, they argued, Iran should return to investing in the discontented Arab streets and Muslim masses, just as it did in the early 1980s.

Radicalzation of Iranian government. Muslim masses were increasingly anti-American and opposed to their own pro-American regimes. Accordingly, strategists on the Iranian side contended that investing politically in the possibility of friendly relationship with the United States and in the Arab governments could not be a successful long-term strategy for Iran. Instead, mindful of Washington's unwilling to accept Iran's rise in power and its claims for a role commensurate with its geopolitical weight, Iran should seek to build a new order in the region based on Islamic principles and the support of the discontented "Muslim Streets," through which Iran's role aspirations could be materialized.

This camp captured the Iranian presidency with the election of Maḥmud Aḥmadi-nežād in June 2005. Only months into his term, amid intensified American and Israeli threats against Iran over its nuclear program, Aḥmadi-nežād heated up Iran's anti-Israel rhetoric by making inflammatory statements. Aḥmadi-nežād's rhetorical excesses are a throwback to the Ayatollah Khomeini era. Yet, for Iran to escalate tensions with Israel and

intensify its rhetorical excesses at a time when it is facing increased pressure from Washington and Tel Aviv shows continuity rather than discontinuity in the behavior of Iranian government. Much like what Ayatollah Khomeini did in the early 1980s, Tehran is using the guise of its ideology to fight its real-political battles in order to conceal its true interests and the geo-strategic nature of its conflict with Israel.

Currently, this rivalry, set in motion by the dramatic redistribution of power in the region following the Persian Gulf War and the ensuing efforts to establish a new regional order, is still in effect and has hampered the attainment of the United States foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. While Iran has actively sought to undermine any peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians that would intensify Iran's isolation, Israel has actively undermined efforts to improve U.S.-Iran relations due to its fear that Washington would betray Israeli interests in order to patch up its relations with Tehran. Both Iran and Israel have proven to be effective spoilers, yet inadequate builders of a new order. Mindful of the decline in Arab power, those nostalgic about the strong Israeli-Iranian relationship during the Pahlavi era will have a daunting task rebuilding those ties since the bedrock of that entente is lacking in the current geopolitical environment, to wit the existence of common threats to Iran and Israel and a well-entrenched regional order.

Lebanon connection. The struggle between Iran and Israel has primarily been manifested in confrontations through proxies, of which the Lebanese Hezbollah has been the most potent and dangerous one. Though it is often believed that Iran helped form Hezbollah to target Israel, Iranian calculations regarding Hezbollah had far more to do with spreading the Iranian revolution than countering the Jewish state. In fact, Israel inadvertently handed Iran its only success in exporting its revolution in the Arab world by invading Lebanon. The invasion of 6 June 1982 was ostensibly in response to an attempt by Palestinian militants to assassinate Shlomo Argov, Israel's ambassador to the United Kingdom, but Ariel Sharon, then Israel's defense minister, had been planning a Lebanon invasion to wipe out the PLO presence there for many months, at least as early as late 1981 (Smith, p. 377).

Southern Lebanon had traditionally been the home of Lebanon's disenfranchised Shi'ite Muslim community. The Shi'ites initially welcomed the Israelis because of their own competition with Palestinian refugees for local resources and their resentment of the PLO's often heavy-handed rule of the south, but they were dismayed when the Israelis overstayed their welcome by

creating a “security zone” in the south. They soon turned against Israel as it blocked the Shiʿites’ access to northern markets and began dumping Israeli goods into their local economy, causing indigenous economic interests to suffer (Smith, p. 284). In addition, Israel’s invasion had been immensely destructive and only adding to the misery of Lebanese who had already been suffering from seven years of civil war. Close to 20,000 Lebanese were killed in the invasion and another 450,000 were displaced. In September 1982, under direction of Defense Minister Sharon, a Lebanese Christian militia unit entered the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in Beirut, and, with tacit Israeli approval, raped, killed, and maimed as many as several thousand civilian refugees. Approximately one quarter of those refugees were Shiʿites who had fled the violence in the south (Deeb, 2006). The plight of the Shiʿites under Israeli occupation made them receptive to Tehran’s message. Faced with a mighty Israeli opponent, the Shiʿites desperately needed an external ally, and Tehran was more than willing to play the part, not so much to act out its anti-Israeli sentiments but rather to find a stronghold in an Arab country. Tehran badly needed progress in exporting its revolution. It had failed in Iraq and Bahrain, in spite of the majority Shiʿite populations of those countries. Now, thanks to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Iran was given the opportunity to plant the seeds of Islamic revolution in the Levant.

Out of the Israeli invasion emerged a new and invigorated Shiʿite movement, inspired by Iran’s Islamic Revolution. Initially just a small number of armed groups of young men organized under the banner of Islam and dedicated to fighting the Israeli occupation, over time they banded together into what has proved to be one of Israel’s most formidable foes, the Lebanese Hezbollah. The Israeli-Iranian proxy war through Hezbollah culminated during the summer war of 2006, which signified a new and heightened phase in this conflict.

The Summer War of 2006. America’s position and credibility in the region has significantly suffered due to the ever-increasing chaos in Iraq that followed the fall of Saddam in 2003. Iran, on the other hand, inadvertently benefited from America’s policies. The fall of Saddam, Iran’s deadly enemy who engaged it in an eight-year war (see IRAQ VII.), and the emergence of a pro-Iranian Shiʿite leadership in Iraq, the removal of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, America’s unpopularity in the region, the Arab governments’ perceived inability to act independently of Washington or oppose its policies, America’s perceived inability to push back Iran militarily, and Tehran’s unhindered march towards a nuclear capability all served to strengthen Iran’s position in

the region and increase Israel's strategic vulnerability.

These developments significantly increased Israeli fears that American inaction against Iran may leave Israel alone in facing a strong, nuclear Iran riding on a wave of anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiments in the region at a time when Israel still appeared incapable of easing regional tensions by improving relationships with its immediate Arab neighbors, including the Palestinians.

The summer war between Israel and Lebanon took place against this backdrop. The fighting may have been sparked by Hezbollah's cross-border raid, but Israel's decision to expand a border clash into a full scale war was likely motivated by an intent to preempt Iran. Israel, with a potential future showdown with Iran in mind, seemed to have sought an opportunity to neutralize Hezbollah and Hamas in order to weaken Iran's deterrence and retaliation capabilities. (The summer war was preceded by heavy Israeli bombardment of Gaza.) Through these groups, Iran could bring the war to Israeli territory, a scenario that further accentuated Israel's vulnerability to asymmetric warfare. By launching preemptive attacks on Hamas and the Hezbollah, Israel could significantly deprive Iran of its capabilities to retaliate against Israel in the event of an American assault on Iran. In fact, Israel had been planning for war against Hezbollah for more than two years. In 2005, a senior Israeli army officer began giving off-the-record Power-Point presentations to American diplomats, journalists, and think tanks, setting out in great detail the plan for the expected operation. "Of all of Israel's wars since 1948, this was the one for which Israel was most prepared" (Gerald Steinberg, quoted by Matthew Kalman).

According to a former deputy defense minister of Israel, Major General Ephraim Sneh, "War with Iran is inevitable. Lebanon is just a prelude to the greater war with Iran" (author's conversation with Ephraim Sneh, 28 July 2006). Once Iran obtained a nuclear capability, however, this option would no longer be available to Israel. Moreover, in the absence of an American assault on Iran, such a strategic pushback against Iran would be beneficial to both Israel and the United States. In fact, Tehran was expecting some form of Israeli offensive against its Shi'ite allies in Lebanon, though the Iranian intelligence services had predicted a much smaller Israeli campaign that would occur in the fall of 2006 (interview with senior Iranian official, 12 October 2006).

As it became increasingly likely that Israel would fail to debilitate Hezbollah

quickly through its massive air campaign, Washington and London provided for it the political support and cover to continue the war, in spite of the international protests and calls for an immediate ceasefire. Secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, referring to the fighting, remarked on 21 July 2006 two days before her official trip to Israel to meet with Prime Minister Olmert: "What we are seeing here, in a sense, is the growing, the birth pangs of a new Middle East, and whatever we do we have to be certain that we are pushing forward to the new Middle East, not going back to the old one" (see www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006).

After some initial successes, the Israelis were stunned at Hezbollah's powerful response, including its firing of thousands of Katyusha rockets into northern Israel. Rather than facing an amateur militia, the Israelis soon realized that they were fighting a well-trained and well-equipped guerilla army. Hezbollah even used a Chinese-made C-807 missile against an Israeli warship off Lebanon's coast, catching the Israelis off guard and disabling the ship. Israeli intelligence had failed to discover in full before the war what Hezbollah had amassed in its arsenals. The Lebanese fought a high-tech war and paid as much attention to the media battle as they did to the fighting on the ground. Hezbollah fighters cracked the codes of Israeli radio communications, intercepting reports on the casualties they had inflicted. Whenever an Israeli soldier was killed, Hezbollah confirmed it by listening to the Israeli radio and then sent the reports immediately to its satellite TV station, Al-Manar, which broadcast the news live. Thus Arab audiences knew the names of Israeli casualties and where they had been killed well before the Israeli army had a chance to inform the soldiers' families. The psychological impact of this on the Israelis, who had grown accustomed to superiority over the armies of their Arab neighbors, was devastating. By the end of the thirty-four day war, Hezbollah had won a stunning victory by simply having withstood and survived Israel's onslaught. Rather than strengthening and reinforcing the image of Israel's invincible deterrence, the war that was to weaken Iran only made Israel itself more vulnerable.

With Washington unwilling to recognize Iran as a regional powerhouse with legitimate security interests, with Israel insisting on maintaining military disparity with its neighbors while clinging on to its arsenal of 200 nuclear warheads, and with Iran openly professing the military exodus of the United States from the region, open war may be avoided, but peace will remain elusive. A sustainable peace in the Middle East can only be achieved if it be

coupled with a sustainable security order. Such an order must, by definition, be all-inclusive and reflect the reining geopolitical balance. The order that the United States pursued in the 1990s under the policy of Dual Containment, was based on the exclusion of two of the strongest powers in the region, namely Iran and Iraq. The order it seeks today is equally disconnected from regional realities.

From Israel's perspective, the rise of a nuclear Iran and the defeat that Israel suffered in 2006 indicate that time may no longer be on its side. Moderate elements in Israel recognize that the security of Israel is no longer served by this balance of power paradigm, because Israel cannot indefinitely balance its more populous neighbors, particularly as they, as in the case of Iran, begin to master nuclear technology. Shlomo Ben-Ami, Israel's former foreign minister, argued that "the question today is not when Iran will have nuclear power, but how to integrate it into a policy of regional stability before it obtains such power. Iran is not driven by an obsession to destroy Israel, but by its determination to preserve its regime and establish itself as a strategic regional power, vis-à-vis both Israel and the Sunni Arab states. The Sunnis are Iran's natural foe, not Israel. The answer to the Iranian threat is a policy of detente, which would change the Iranian elite's pattern of conduct. . . . A detente policy with Iran would have far-reaching implications for the chances for peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors."

Save any major shift in the balance of power in the Middle East, the geopolitical rivalry between Iran and Israel is likely to endure regardless of the ideological predispositions of the Iranian leadership, though a change in the nature of the regime in Tehran may cause the manifestation of this rivalry to vary significantly.

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