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## NUCLEAR IRAN: AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT OR A POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ISRAEL?

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**JCSP 44**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Israel assertively expresses its view that it considers Iran a serious threat to world security and specifically that it poses an existential threat to the State of Israel if nuclearized. To understand why such a determination has been made, this essay will ask: Why does Israel treat Iran as the most significant threat to its national security? It will be argued that in an effort to ensure the continued domestic relevance of the Jewish-Zionist state in the face of emerging societal changes, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has entered into a strategy of the deliberate securitization of Iran, which serves to safeguard Israeli institutions, while uniting Israeli national-will against a definable external threat. This thesis will be developed by regarding the Israeli Approach to Iran from three overlapping lenses: Objective, Historical, and Intersubjective. Through this process it will become apparent that Iran is a rational actor that is pursuing a larger deterrence strategy as it interacts with regional actors and the United States in particular. Although this should disarm Israeli concerns, an historical review will discover that Israeli strategic culture assumes that it is threatened, therefore the perception of the security threat may carry more weight than the objective analysis. Finally, it will be shown that Prime Minister Netanyahu and the *Likud* government are leveraging Israeli strategic culture toward the securitization of Iran, which serves to distract Israelis from domestic challenges and reinvigorate the national institutions.

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## INTRODUCTION

For nearly a decade the world has watched as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called for action in response to a perception of growing Iranian regional aggression, and the threat of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. It was only following a failed Iranian attempt to enter Israeli airspace with a military drone on 10 February 2018 that tensions escalated into a direct military confrontation between Israel and Iran for the first time, within Syrian territory.<sup>1</sup> Speaking only eight days after the drone incident at the Munich Security Conference, Netanyahu described his belief about the threat of an Iranian Regime armed with nuclear weapons. This was his summarizing statement:

*“This in my judgement is the greatest threat to the world”<sup>2</sup>*

Israel and Iran are two nations separated by immense geography and no common borders, yet the Prime Minister of Israel openly describes the Iranian Regime as the most dangerous threat to Israel and the world. To understand how such a perception has materialized it is pertinent to ask: Why does Israel treat Iran as the most significant threat to its national security?

It will be argued that traditional threats to Israel’s existence are rapidly being eclipsed by domestic societal challenges: In an effort to ensure the domestic relevance of the Jewish-Zionist state, Benjamin Netanyahu has entered into a strategy of the deliberate securitization of Iran, which serves to safeguard Israeli institutions, while uniting Israeli national-will against a definable external threat.

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<sup>1</sup> No author. “Israel intercepts Iranian drone, jet shot down by Syria.”. Reuters World News (10 February 2018). Retrieved 10 April 2018: <https://www.reuters.com/article/israel-iran/israel-intercepts-iranian-drone-jet-shot-down-by-syria-idUSL8N1Q004T>.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu. “Statement by Israeli Prime Minister.” *Munich Security Conference* (Munich: 18 February 2018), Retrieved 19 Feb 2018: <https://www.securityconference.de/en/media-library/munich-security-conference-2018/video/statement-by-benjamin-netanyahu-followed-by-qa/filter/video/>, 6:27.

To examine the complex nature and vastness of this question, this essay will examine the interaction between Israel and Iran in three chapters; each of which will explore dissimilar but complimentary aspects of the relationship towards understanding the security relationship. The three lenses that will be applied to describe the relationship will be: the objective, the historical, and the intersubjective.

In the first chapter an objective lens will be employed to examine the Iranian military forces and their strategies as they relate to not only Israel, but the entire region. This will be demonstrated by gaining an understanding of the Iranian use of conventional forces for defensive domestic action, and their preference for irregular 'proxy' campaigns that deter regional actors and the United States (US) from acting against its interests. It will also be relevant to examine if Iran is a rational actor and based on the assessments of American and Israeli security experts develop an understanding of the potential outcomes of a nuclearized Iran. This objective analysis of Iranian military capabilities and aspirations is important as it will demonstrate the factual capabilities and strategies that Iran can field against Israel. In terms of Iran's nuclear aspirations, this chapter will clearly articulate if the nuclear program should be viewed as an existential threat to the Jewish state, or a mechanism of Iranian deterrence.

In the second chapter an historical analysis of the key Israeli national 'myths' and institutions will lead to an understanding of the Israeli security culture. This will demonstrate that the Israeli identity was formed on a Zionist ideology that reveres the Israel Defence Force (IDF) as its most important institution. This reliance on the IDF is underpinned by a Holocaust legacy that assumes existential vulnerability, and therefore is willing to accept the use of extraordinary military means to assure survival. These elements are important towards understanding the context between Israel and Iran as PM Netanyahu is appealing to the core

beliefs of the Israeli strategic culture towards an attempt to securitize Iran. Following the objective analysis of the Iranian capabilities in the first chapter, the analysis of core tenants in the Israeli strategic culture will demonstrate the difference between actual threats and culturally perceived threats.

Finally, in the third chapter this essay will examine the Israeli domestic environment to understand how intersubjective interactions impact Israeli convictions and institutions. This final chapter will initially examine domestic developments that are being perceived as political challenges to core Israeli institutions and the security culture. To articulate this argument, a number of specific examples will be articulated through: the socially declining stature of the IDF, demographic change, the growth of the ultra-Orthodox minority, and the threat to the Zionist ideology. By securitizing Iran, PM Netanyahu is focusing the national and political conversation away from the domestic political situation toward a constructed foreign threat. At the same time this securitization invigorates the national ideology and the IDF.

While securitization is normally viewed as an interaction between a person with political authority and their domestic population, it will be shown that the securitization of Iran is not only aimed at the Israeli domestic audience, but in this case, it also targets a number of foreign audiences. PM Netanyahu has securitized Iran as a means to achieve political aims across a breadth of audiences that are both domestic and foreign. By explicitly targeting non-Israeli audiences, this hybrid use of a securitizing issue is a departure from the usual Copenhagen School's definition of securitization as it specifically targets the American electorate and leaders within the Arab World.

Most of the security experts agree that Iran does not pose an existential threat to Israel. It is clear that Iran is actively engaged in the region through the use of proxies, and is willing to



engage in limited and indirect conflicts with potential its adversaries towards deterrence-based objectives. Israel is not Iran's only adversary. It will be shown that much of the Iranian deterrence is aimed at limiting American regional interaction and destabilizing Saudi Arabia. As a rational actor, if Iran were to secure nuclear weapons it is probable that it would only use these weapons toward an expanded deterrence strategy.

PM Netanyahu has a long-standing foreign policy that views Iran as an existential threat to Israel. Based on an understanding of the Iranian regional objectives this narrative does not align with the facts as we understand them. That said, the narrative that Israel will be vulnerable to an Iranian nuclear threat does reinforce Israeli perceptions and myths associated with the Israeli Strategic culture. It will be impossible to discern if Benjamin Netanyahu truly believes that Iran poses an existential threat to Israel but it will become apparent that fostering this narrative provides significant political distractions, and opens political opportunities to define the national priorities.

**CHAPTER I:**  
**OBJECTIVE APPROACH: EVALUATING THE IRANIAN THREAT TO ISRAEL**

The regional developments of the 1990s caused Israel's to re-evaluate its environment and its potential adversaries. The decline of the Soviet Union implied a temporary reduction in adversaries' access to state of the art weapons required for a serious conventional war, coupled with Israel's significant and positive strides toward normalization within the region through peace agreements. Since the 1978 Camp David Accords Israel had withdrawn from the Sinai Peninsula, and achieved a stable peace with Egypt, while the Multinational Force & Observers guaranteed the demilitarization of the Sinai. Egypt, which was historically Israel's most serious adversary, began bilateral interactions and trade which assured that future hostilities would not be likely.<sup>3</sup> In the East, Israel signed a peace agreement with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1994, making any significant threat along the majority of Israel's Eastern borders unlikely. Meanwhile, in the North, the Syrian civil war has ensured that the al-Assad regime is firmly engaged in internal power struggles. It was in this context of reduced state-based threats to Israel at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, that the Iranian missile program and their nuclear aspirations entered into the Israeli security discussion in July 2000 with the successful launch of *Shahab-3* rocket, powered by a North Korean Engine.<sup>4</sup>

In an effort to look at the Iranian threat to Israel from an objective perspective, this chapter will examine the military capabilities available to Iran as they intersect with an ability to actually affect Israel. This will acknowledge that Iran is developing parallel capabilities within the domains of space, conventional forces, and influence activities through regional irregular proxies. Beyond an analysis of Iranian capabilities, it will be important to put these into context

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<sup>3</sup> Multinational Force & Observers. "Our Mission". Retrieved 18 October 2017: <http://mfo.org/en>.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, "Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction: Capabilities, Developments, and Strategic Uncertainties," *Center for Strategic & International Studies* (14 October 2008), 20.

by examining Israel's ability to counter or deter these Iranian capabilities. Lastly, this chapter will integrate the professional opinions of numerous American and Israeli security experts as they perceive Iran's intentions in the region.

### Iranian Military Capabilities as they relate to Israel: Conventional, Irregular, and Nuclear

Iran and Israel share a significant geographical barrier. Jerusalem and Teheran are separated by over 1500 kilometers and there are at least two nations in between them from any geographic approach. Iran is a resource-rich nation with a regionally significant population of 82 million citizens, numbering more than ten times Israel's population. Despite this large population Iran only boasts an economy that is five times larger than Israel's. This resource reliant economy is a significant source of vulnerability.<sup>5</sup>

From a conventional perspective, Iran has access to almost two million combatants. Iran leverages its large population by maintaining a standing military of over 500,000 with an estimated 150,000 of these believed to be Islamic Revolutionary Guard Personnel. These could be augmented by an additional 350,000 reserves, and a one million strong *Basij* para-military reserve. Yet the size of this force, the largest in the Middle-East, is relatively inconsequential as it is believed to have a small budget with mediocre training and poor equipment.<sup>6</sup> Many American analysts have suggested that Iran has developed its military only in so far as to mount a credible defence of its territory but would be incapable of mounting aggressive military action against its neighbors. In a very prominent 2007 report on the Iranian conventional capabilities Anthony Cordesman, a senior analyst the Center for Strategic and International Studies,

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<sup>5</sup> CIA. "The World Factbook: Iran" *CIA World Factbook* (2017), retrieved 20 December 2017: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Claire Taylor. "Iran: Conventional Military Capabilities." *UK Library of House of Commons*. (International Affairs and Defence Section, 24 September 2009), 2-3.

described the Iranian conventional capabilities as ineffectual.<sup>7</sup> The Iranian conventional forces were not viewed as an offensive threat within the region, and had almost no ability to resist a serious attack by a determined nation equipped with modern Western-made weaponry. If invaded, it is expected that Iran would leverage its enormous militarized population and difficult geography to engage any adversary in large cities or specially selected terrain.<sup>8</sup> In an analysis of the Iranian regional strategies, Cordesman believes that the Iranian Regime is very aware of these short-comings and has purposefully invested its resources in other directions.

Iran has been more conservative in modernizing its conventional military forces. Iran has never rebuilt the level of conventional forces it had before its defeat in its war with Iraq in the 1988. Iran's conventional military readiness, effectiveness, and capabilities have declined since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, and Iran has not been able to find a meaningful way to restore its conventional edge in the region ... Iran has only been able to order \$2.3 billion worth of new arms agreements during 1997- 2004. Saudi Arabia ordered \$10.5 billion, Kuwait \$3.1 billion, and the UAE ordered \$12.0 billion. Even a small nation like Oman spent \$2.5 billion. This inability to modernize its conventional forces is seen by many experts as one of the reasons for Iran's "nuclear ambitions" and its focus on building its asymmetric capabilities.<sup>9</sup>

Although Iran continues to neglect much of its large conscript military, Cordesman has recently revised his assessment of the conventional capabilities, noting that Iran could pose a serious conventional threat in the Gulf through the use of very specific capabilities. This proficiency is largely the result of a rapidly expanding and effective missile force.

Regardless of the success or failure of the Iranian nuclear agreement, Iran continues to be a rising threat by increasing its conventional missile forces, building up the capability to threaten shipping and naval forces in the Gulf, and expanding its pressure on Bahrain, Kuwait and Yemen. The U.S. failures to act decisively in Syria and inability to limit Iranian influence in Iraq are only part of the problem. The self-destructive tensions

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman. "Iran: Weakling or Hegemon?" *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (Washington DC: February 2007), 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman. "Iran: Weakling or Hegemon?" *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (Washington DC: February 2007), 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman. "The Gulf Military Forces in the Era of Asymmetric Warfare" *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (Washington DC: June 2006).

between the Arab states have handed Iran opportunity after opportunity for spoiler operations, and Iran has inevitably taken advantage of every one of them.<sup>10</sup>

At the moment Iran is not generally viewed as a direct or significant conventional threat to Israel, but the same cannot be stated for the Gulf nations. Iran's lack of serious investment in offensive conventional forces has led to the atrophy of its traditional military capabilities but has resulted in the development of a significant conventional deterrence which compensates for this weakness due to pressing domestic priorities in the Gulf. Beyond the development of missile forces, Cordesman argues that Iran is absorbed in building asymmetric capabilities, which are arguably already interacting with Israel through proxies.

The executor of Iran's flourishing proxy policy is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) which was created in the 1980s to counter the threat to the Regime from the US and Iraq.<sup>11</sup> More recently the IRGC has been used in support of external operations against Lebanon, Israel, and Saudi Arabia; but they are also crucial to exerting Iranian influence in the destabilized Iraq and Syria. To understand the threat that such proxies pose in the region and to Israel in particular, it is critical to understand the role and strategy in the employment of these proxies. In his testimony before the US Senate in November 2016 Matthew McNinn argued that the Iranian use of proxies is part of a larger attempt to develop deterrence from direct foreign intervention in Iranian interests. Specifically, he believes that these can be divided into two particular sub-categories: retaliatory deterrence and passive deterrence.

*Retaliatory deterrence* is achieved by developing a significant militarized network that can "instill fear of significant casualties, destruction of critical infrastructure, or economic

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman. "Saudi Arabia is Sideshow Compared to Our Real Problems in the Middle-East." *The Hill* (19 November 2017). Retrieved 5 May 2018: <http://thehill.com/opinion/international/361043-saudi-arabia-is-sideshow-next-to-our-real-problems-in-middle-east>.

<sup>11</sup> J. Matthew McNinn. "Iranian Deterrence Strategy and Use of Proxies." Statement before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on "Defeating the Iranian Threat Network: Options for Countering Iranian Proxies" (American Enterprise Institute, 29 November 2016).

disruption to dissuade Teheran's conventionally more powerful enemies from taking direct action."<sup>12</sup> The IRGC directly targets Israel with this type of deterrence through Lebanese Hezbollah with the hopes of achieving the dual aims of occupying Israeli attention at its borders, but also deterring the US by threatening its regional ally. What is interesting in this approach to deterrence is that it is not uniquely aimed at Israel. While Lebanese Hezbollah is one of Iran's oldest and most trusted proxies, significant efforts have been made to develop the Houthi threat to Saudi Arabia. Operating through proxies is a form of retaliatory deterrence that allows Iran to distance itself from the conflicts while maintaining some plausible deniability. In return Iran can avoid the threat of direct military confrontations and has a reduced the risk of economic isolation.

McInnis' perception of a second layer of deterrence is *passive deterrence*. It is aimed at reducing external influences while allowing Iran 'freedom of movement' in regional interactions. It is believed that this is the longer-term strategy currently being employed in Iraq and Syria to deter American interests and involvement in the region.<sup>13</sup> One of the most widely shared insights into this passive deterrence in Iraq was through the Iranian development and supply of 'shaped-charges', which were used in improvised explosive devices to assist Shiite groups in Iraq, and used against American soldiers.<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of what the motives are for the use of proxies in the Middle-East, it is evident that the IRGC is supporting the rapid expansion and strength of these groups. The proxies that interact directly with Israel are Lebanese *Hezbollah*, and the Palestinian Islamic *Jihad*. Hezbollah is the most serious threat as at the highest estimates it has up to 21,000 fighters, and

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Marcus Weisgerber, "How Many US Troops Were Killed By Iranian IEDs in Iraq?" *Defense One*, (September 8, 2015), Retrieved 2 February 2018, <http://www.defenseone.com/news/2015/09/how-many-us-troops-were-killed-iranian-ieds-iraq/120524/>.

can double that number if it calls upon its reserves. Although Israel is not currently involved in a conflict with Hezbollah along the Northern borders, it is believed that up to 8,000 of the fighters are currently engaged in combat operations in Syria which will provide important experience when they are eventually deployed back to the Israeli frontier.<sup>15</sup> Possessing caches of up to 150,000 rockets of various types along the Israeli border, Hezbollah has the capacity to fix Israeli attentions for a protracted period, while potentially causing significant casualties through the use of increasingly advanced tactics and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance technology.<sup>16</sup>

Iran is also known to employ proxies inside Israeli, most notably the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, but it has also developed opportunistic connections with the non-affiliated groups like *Hamas* that operates in the Gaza Strip. The US State Department has reason to believe that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad is funded directly by Iran, and even though it is estimated to number less than one thousand members, it is responsible for numerous suicide bombings within Israel against Israeli civilians.<sup>17</sup> Israeli security agencies occasionally arrest alleged members of the IRGC operating in the Palestinian territories, but this news is not significant given Iran's ability to distance itself from the controversy while casting doubt on the legitimacy of the Israeli claims against Iran. On 3 January 2018 the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that it had arrested two members of a cell who were working directly for Iranian intelligence based in South

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<sup>15</sup> Nadav Pollak, "The Transformation of Hezbollah by Its Involvement in Syria," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, (No. 35, August 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Avi Issacharoff, "Israel Raises Hezbollah Rocket Estimate to 150,000," *Times of Israel*, (November 12, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> United States: Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015," (US Department of State, 2015), retrieved 3 March 2018: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257523.htm>.

Africa. The cell's mission was to recruit Palestinian operatives who would carry out suicide or shooting attacks against Israeli targets.<sup>18</sup>

Iran's proxy threat is not specifically designed to attack Israel; instead it is part of a larger regional deterrence strategy that discourages American regional interactions while also deterring from a direct confrontation with Iran. The Iranian proxies that are in direct confrontation with Israel can be used to effectively fix large portions of the IDF in a war on the Israeli Northern borders while simultaneously attacking Israeli citizens indiscriminately and eroding the Israeli economy. These are important capabilities that Iran has used cautiously on only a few occasions, but most notably during the 2006 Second Lebanon War. The threat posed by the proxies is a very significant challenge to Israel, but none of these proxies could attempt to defeat the IDF. A prolonged confrontation with Israel would erode proxy weapons stockpiles and very likely result in heavy losses of experienced fighters, making such conflicts only tenable for short periods with Israel.

### Nuclear Weapons and Religious Ideology

There is no doubt about Iran's long-range missile development program which has resulted in the Shahab missile system with a current estimated range of up to 3,000 kilometers, as acquisitions of parts and rocket testing have been widely publicized.<sup>19</sup> Iran is also openly developing nuclear technologies which it declares to be for peaceful purposes. The coincidental development of parallel nuclear technologies and long-range delivery systems cannot be ignored in light of the Iranian regional aspirations and its deterrence strategies used to date. This essay will not attempt to decrypt the true intentions of the Iranian Regime regarding the development

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<sup>18</sup> Israel. "ISA Foils Iranian Terrorist Infrastructure in the Hebron Area." (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 3 January 2018). Retrieved 4 Jan 2018: <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Pages/ISA-foils-Iranian-terrorist-infrastructure-in-the-Hebron-area-3-January-2018.aspx>.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman. "Iran: Weakling or Hegemon?" *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (Washington DC: February 2007), 16.



of nuclear weapons, but it is reasonable to acknowledge that there are important ramifications in the development of nuclear technologies. Like Japan, even if Iran did not pursue nuclear weapons immediately, access to nuclear technological knowledge and capability could establish a virtual capacity to allow the rapid construction of devices if desired.<sup>20</sup>

If Iran was known to definitively possess nuclear weapons and delivery methods, there would be regional and extra-regional consequences. Within the region there is a strong probability that Saudi Arabia would pursue its own weapons, while Israel would likely enhance its nuclear capabilities with an emphasis on sea-based deterrence strategies due to its small geographic mass. As an extra-regional actor, the US would be seriously engaged in developing Iranian specific preventative and pre-emptive strike options.<sup>21</sup> Regardless of the Iranian intention with a nuclear arsenal, it is assessed that the Regime and the Persian people would not survive in any significant capacity at the conclusion of a nuclear exchange. Yakov Hirsch summarizes this interaction from an Israeli perspective: “Make no mistake about it: if Iran knows anything about Israel they’d be aware the retaliation will be severe. Iran will be punished not only for their own attack but for all of history’s attack on the Jews.”<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most important question in the event of a nuclear Iran is to ask: Is Iran a rational actor? The answer to that question should determine much of the Israeli response to the Iranian nuclear program and should provide reassurance or concern for the future of the region. If one ascribes to the McInnis testimony that Iran is a rational actor that is pursuing a regional deterrence strategy, then the thought of an armed Iran is concerning but not insurmountable. On

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<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Lewis. If Japan Wanted to Build a Nuclear Bomb It’d Be Awesome at It.” *Foreign Policy* (26 June 2014). Retrieved 5 May 2018: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/26/if-japan-wanted-to-build-a-nuclear-bomb-itd-be-awesome-at-it/>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 16-20.

<sup>22</sup> Yakov Hirsch. “Iran is so irrational it would invite its Own Destruction (Inside the mind of the anti-anti-Semites)” *Mondoweiss*. (10 October 2012) Retrieved 2 April 2018: <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/10/iran-is-so-irrational-it-would-invite-its-own-destruction-inside-the-mind-of-the-anti-anti-semite/>.

the other hand, if Iran is an irrational actor that may use nuclear weapons as part of an ideological framework and accept self-destruction, this is a very startling development.

One of the important narratives that indicated irrational behaviour was the world view of former Iranian President Ahmadinejad who ascribed to particularly virulent aspect of Shi'ism which invoked the return of the messianic *Mahdi* who “will appear before the day of judgement to restore justice and equity on Earth.”<sup>23</sup> Prior to his election Ahmadinejad spoke of his desire for a “developed, powerful and Islamic society in Iran so that our country would become the beginning of the justice-oriented movement of the ‘Lord of the Age’,<sup>24</sup> widely believed to be invoking a call for the *Mahdi*. With Ahmadinejad’s passing from the Iranian political arena there is some hope that his spiritual beliefs left with him. Yet if the Regime was willing to appoint a man with such strongly ideological personal beliefs to office, it could be argued that they either share some of these views, or they were leveraging this rhetoric for other political purposes. It is difficult to discern if such ideologies would be backed by actual means.

#### Does Iran Pose a Threat to Israel’s Existence?

When assessing the Iranian objectives it can be difficult to discern rhetoric from the actual capabilities and intentions. Publically Iran’s policy towards Israel is what it wrote on a missile during a recent theatre ballistic missile test, namely that “Israel must be wiped off the face of the Earth.” This was written in Hebrew for all Israelis to read and was widely publicized in the Israeli media.<sup>25</sup> Yet the reality of the situation may be different than the caricature that is on display.

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<sup>23</sup> Abdulaziz Sachedina. “A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imamate Imam”. *Studia Islamica* (JSTOR, number 48), 109-124.

<sup>25</sup> Roi Kais. “Iran Launches Ballistic Missiles Bearing Hebrew Writing”. *Ynet News* (9 March 2016), retrieved 1 April 2018: <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4776269,00.html>.

In a 2015 visit to Tel-Aviv General Martin Dempsey expressed his view that Iran's irregular military proxies are the most challenging threat emanating from Iran. He discussed the concerns about a nuclear weapons capable Iran with Israeli leaders, and remained convinced that Iran will not pose a nuclear threat to Israel. He did acknowledge that the US will assist Israel in "thickening" its integrated missile defence systems.<sup>26</sup> An action that would protect against a potential nuclear threat as much as it would protect from the more likely continuation of irregular missile threats from *Hamas* and *Hezbollah*.

When Israeli defence experts are pressed to provide their professional opinions about the Iranian threat, the security agencies do not align with the political narrative. One of the former Chiefs of the Israeli Mossad, Efraim Halevy, expressed his opinion about the Iranian situation during a C-SPAN interview. In describing Iran's situation he stated the following:

The Iranians have shown on many occasions in the past when it's not in their national interest to continue with the level of confrontation which they have developed over years against the entire world they have found ways and means of backing down (from an escalation)."<sup>27</sup>

Halevy added that in his belief the efforts of the 5+1 are succeeding to deter Iran. This specifically is through the use of sanctions and the devaluation of Iranian *Rial* currency, which is directly impacting Iran's tenuous economy. Halevy's perspective advocates that diplomacy is still preferable to military reactions, and assumes openly that Iran will respond to rational interactions in the international community. Yet all of this discussion remains hypothetical as Iran does not yet have the capacity to build a nuclear weapon. When asked specifically if an Iran

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<sup>26</sup> Phil Stewart. "US Military Chief Seeks to Reassure Israel on Iran Threat." *Reuters World News* (9 June 2015), retrieved 5 May 2018: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-usa-defence/u-s-military-chief-seeks-to-reassure-israel-on-iran-threat-idUSKBN0OP1CW20150610>.

<sup>27</sup> United States. "Middle East Politics and Security" Former Mossad Director Efraim Halevy (C-SPAN 30 October 2012) Retrieved 10 January 2018: "<https://www.c-span.org/search/?searchtype=All&query=middle+east+politics+and+security+halevy>, 29:30.

with nuclear weapons would be an existential threat to Israel, Halevy responded with an emphatic “no”.

No. I don't think that there is an existential threat to Israel. I do not think that there is any power in the world or capability in the world that can bring about the demise of the state of Israel<sup>28</sup>...this is a belief in capabilities...the Iranians are not suicidal.<sup>29</sup>

Efraim Halevy had access to knowledge about Israeli strategic plans capabilities, and he does not indicate that there is any specific concern about an Iranian threat.

Meir Dagan, also a former Mossad Chief, gave a compelling and frank interview on the BBC's *Hard Talk* in 2014. In this interview he was asked directly about a situation where Iran may possess a nuclear device, if that would be a serious cause for concern to Israel. His reply was that in such an eventuality Israel would “present the costs if the Iranian regime might go further into this project.”<sup>30</sup> This seems to indicate a belief that mutual deterrence is possible. He elaborated that Israel would not use direct means to prevent a nuclear project, stating that Israel would “create(ing) a situation where you are encouraging the opposition internally.”<sup>31</sup> The BBC pressed the former chief about Israel's interest or ability to stop the Iranian nuclear programme. To this Dagan replied that there are three reasons why Israel cannot and will not use military means to engage the Iranian nuclear program. Firstly, a strike against Iran would not be able to stop the project, only cause delays. Secondly, it would create a situation that will rally the Iranian public behind the leadership. Finally, it would provide justification to expedite the nuclear military project that Israel wishes to avoid.<sup>32</sup> Dagan's perspective on Iran is interesting as he would not comment on the ability of Israel to deter Iran, but he also implied that Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon is inevitable and not to be opposed militarily. Israel may use

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 41:40.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 49:37.

<sup>30</sup> United Kingdom. “Meir Dagan – Director of Mossad (2002-2010)”. (BBC, 18 June 2012), Retrieved 10 January 2018: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00t6kjd>, 7:00

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 2:00.

indirect means to delay such a project but ultimately it is clear that Dagan views Iran as a rational actor that will interact in a predictable manner.

Regardless of whether Iran is truly a threat to the State of Israel, there are indications that Israel is already engaging in activities to delay an Iranian nuclear capability. Despite Dagan's claims, Ronen Bergman believes that Israel is taking the Iranian nuclear threat very seriously, and has already engaged in a non-militarized offensive strategy for over a decade. This involves a five pronged disruption of Iranian nuclear capabilities that began as early as 2003. He describes the approach by defining these elements:

Heavy international diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, support to Iranian minorities and opposition groups to help them topple the regime, the disruption of consignments of equipment and raw materials for the nuclear program and, finally, covert ops, including the sabotage of installations and targeted killings of key figures in the program.<sup>33</sup>

The first step of diplomatic efforts will continue for the duration of the campaign against the development of a nuclear weapons capability. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) is a 2015 diplomatic effort to work in cooperation with Iran towards the monitoring of the Iranian nuclear program with special emphasis on the enriched-uranium required specifically for weapons development. The agreement was ratified by the United Nations' Security Council Permanent Five and Germany.<sup>34</sup> This plan's purpose is to limit the development of an Iranian weapon while cooperating with the regime towards the development of nuclear power. Israel's public policy toward the attempts to influence on the Iranian nuclear program through diplomatic efforts has been uniformly indignant. Viewing the JCPA as the most recent agreement in over a

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<sup>33</sup> Ronen Bergman. "When Israel Hatched a Secret Plan to Assassinate Iranian Scientists." *Politico Magazine* (5 March 2018). Retrieved 14 April 2018: <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/03/05/israel-assassination-iranian-scientists-217223>.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel, Joyner. *Iran's nuclear program and international law: from confrontation to accord* (First edition ed. New York, NY), 2016.

decade of misleading Iranian diplomacy efforts, PM Netanyahu has been vocal about his lack of confidence in the agreement, making a statement in July 2015:

Far-reaching concessions have been made in all areas that were supposed to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons capability. In addition, Iran will receive hundreds of billions of dollars with which it can fuel its terror machine and its expansion and aggression throughout the Middle East and across the globe. One cannot prevent an agreement when the negotiators are willing to make more and more concessions to those who, even during the talks, keep chanting: 'Death to America.' We knew very well that the desire to sign an agreement was stronger than anything, and therefore we did not commit to preventing an agreement. We did commit to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and this commitment still stands. I say to all the leaders in Israel, it is time to put petty politics aside and unite behind this most fateful issue to the future and security of the State of Israel.<sup>35</sup>

PM Netanyahu's displeasure with diplomatic efforts towards Iran are widely publicized. There is reason to believe that Israel has independently, and perhaps on occasion in cooperation with the US, made covert attempts to delay or sabotage the Iranian development of nuclear capabilities. Instances of sabotage are rarely attributable to a government or security agency, but there is significant credible reporting in the cases surrounding anti-Iranian subterfuge. The most commonly referenced instance of subterfuge is the so-called 'Stuxnet Virus' attack against Iranian computer systems that operate nuclear centrifuges. "The origins of the cyber-weapon, which outside analysts dubbed Stuxnet, have long been debated, with most experts concluding that the United States and Israel probably collaborated on the effort. The current and former U.S. officials confirmed that long-standing suspicion, after a New York Times report on the program."<sup>36</sup> The attack is alleged to have planted a computer 'worm' which rendered inoperable

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<sup>35</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "PM Netanyahu's statement concerning the nuclear agreement with Iran." (14 July 2015). Retrieved 12 February 2018: <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/PM-Netanyahu's-statement-concerning-the-nuclear-agreement-with-Iran-14-July-2015.aspx>.

<sup>36</sup> Ellen Nakashima & Joby Warrick. "Stuxnet was the work of US and Israeli Experts, Officials Say." *The Washington Post* (2 June 2012). Retrieved 8 Feb 2018: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/stuxnetwasworkofusandisraeliexpertsofficialssay/2012/06/01/gJQAlnEy6U\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.111ff2ffce35](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/stuxnetwasworkofusandisraeliexpertsofficialssay/2012/06/01/gJQAlnEy6U_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.111ff2ffce35).

nearly one thousand out of the six-thousand Iranian centrifuges, eroding the Natanz nuclear facility's operations, and the overall progress of the Iranian nuclear program.

The IAEA's findings, combined with new analysis of the Stuxnet worm by independent experts, offer a mixed portrait of the mysterious cyberattack that briefly shut down parts of Iran's nuclear infrastructure last year. The new reports shed light on the design of the worm and how it spread through a string of Iranian companies before invading the control systems of Iran's most sensitive nuclear installations.<sup>37</sup>

Even more difficult to attribute to Israel than the Stuxnet virus are the alleged reports of attempts by Israeli security agencies to intimidate and even attack individual scientists working in the Iranian nuclear program. According to Joby Warwick who has pursued the story over years of investigative reporting, Israeli security agencies collaborated to create a list of ten senior scientists and perpetrated numerous targeted killings without the cooperation of any American security agencies.<sup>38</sup>

### The Implications of a Nuclearized Iran

As Israel prepares for the possibility of an Iran armed with nuclear weapons it must also prepare to re-examine its own strategic assumptions. Until this point in time the Israeli nuclear posture has remained consistent in that “the tiny country’s presumptive nuclear weapons can succeed only through calculated non-use, or via systemic deterrence.”<sup>39</sup> Beres, who is a Professor at the University of Tel-Aviv, states that the fundamental assumptions in the Israeli nuclear calculation are that national enemies must be rational. Israeli planners must also look at assessing the remote possibilities and potential behaviour of sub-state actors who might eventually benefit from technologies developed by otherwise rational adversaries.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Joby Warrick. “Iran’s Natanz nuclear facility recovered quickly from Stuxnet cyberattack”. *The Washington Post* (16 February 2011). Retrieved 19 January 2018: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2011/02/15/AR2011021505395.html?tid=a\\_mcntx](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2011/02/15/AR2011021505395.html?tid=a_mcntx)

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Louis René Beres. “Nuclear Deterrence and Conflict: The Case for Israel” (OUP Blog, 3 February 2018), Retrieved 3 February 2018: <https://blog.oup.com/2018/02/nuclear-deterrence-conflict-israel/>.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*

## Defence in the Full Spectrum of Conflict

One of the most significant arguments to support the belief that Israel would survive in the event of a nuclearized Ira is that Israel benefits from an overwhelming qualitative military edge. This is apparent in Israel's conventional military, but it also overlaps in cyber, space technology, and missile defence. It can be argued that even if Iran intended to use nuclear weapons against Israel, it would be extremely hard to deliver them.

This qualitative advantage is necessary as the Israeli security environment possesses many overlapping threats that intersect the full spectrum of conflict. On one hand there is a requirement to field and maintain large conventional forces to counter the threat of direct attack. On the other hand, Israel must field an array of varied responses to a variety of irregular threats, ranging from non-lethal civil unrest, to counter terrorism, to conventional threats from state actors, and finally strategic nuclear deterrence.

Maintaining a qualitative edge against a conventional adversary characterizes the bulk of known Israeli military preparations, with the Israeli Air Force representing the most important aspect of this qualitative edge. The IAF's 25 F-15I combat aircraft and 102 F-16I combat aircraft have greatly contributed to Israel's technological edge in the field of air supremacy over other countries in the region.<sup>41</sup> These aircraft are equipped with advanced stand-off weapons and related sensors supplied by the Israeli military industry and by the US, including highly accurate heavy guided glide bombs and guided missiles with ranges of at least 90 km and possibly up to 400 km. To maintain its technological edge Israel is expected to receive up to 75 F-35A combat aircraft from the USA, which will be upgraded to the uniquely Israeli F-35I *Adir* variants.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> D. Lennox. Jane's Strategic Weapon Systems, Issue 53, *Jane's*, (Surrey 2010), 80-84.

<sup>42</sup> Pieter D. Wezemen. "Conventional Strategic Military Capabilities in the Middle East." *EU Non-Proliferation Consortium* (Brussels, 6 July 2011), 8-9.



Although these assets are expected to be used infrequently they represent the backbone of Israel's operational defensive capability.

Backing up this powerful conventional force is Israel's significant strategic deterrence. Israel's strategic deterrence is a controversial and secret matter of national security which is widely assumed to be made of about one hundred nuclear devices with a variety of delivery methods.<sup>43</sup> Beres describes the challenges of a Middle-Eastern nuclear deterrence strategy in that Israel must use a strategy of "deliberate ambiguity". This approach implies that Israel cannot openly confirm its own ability to use nuclear force, nor does it define the circumstances where in which Israel might be compelled to use nuclear weapons.<sup>44</sup> The deliberate ambiguity strategy was designed during the Cold War to respond to two needs: allow the US to remain separated from the political implication of an openly nuclear Israel, and avoid the potential opening of a regional arms-race. At the same time this ambiguity allowed Israel the freedom to act in a way that Beres describes as an "independent variable" whereby Israel does not define its own strategic nuclear aims. This ambiguity serves to quell any public debate about Israel's strategic capabilities, thereby reducing the pressure on the US to manage a potential nuclear arms race with competing Arab states.<sup>45</sup>

The challenge with such an ambiguous approach as it interacts with modern Iran is that it could actually lead to escalations if there are no defined boundaries. The situation in the Middle East is clearly changing: Russia is increasingly active in the region, especially in Syria. Iran may

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<sup>43</sup> Avner Cohen. *The Worst-Kept Secret: Israel's bargain with the Bomb* (Columbia University Press, 2010), Table 1, xxvii, 82.

<sup>44</sup> Louis René Beres. "Israel's Nuclear Strategy and America's National Security." Prepared especially for publication in the Yuval Ne'eman workshop for science technology and security. (Tel-Aviv University Press, December 2016), 4-5.

<sup>45</sup> Louis René Beres. "Looking Ahead: Revising Israel's Nuclear Ambiguity in the Middle East." Herzliya Conference Policy Paper, Herzliya Conference (Herzliya, Israel: March 11-14, 2013). Also: Louis René Beres and Leon Edney (Admiral/USN/ret.), "Facing a Nuclear Iran, Israel Must Rethink Its Nuclear Ambiguity," *U.S. News & World Report*, (11 February 2013), 3.

eventually develop a nuclear weapon, which may lead to an arms race with Saudi Arabia. In such an environment it is no longer sufficient to have an ambiguous nuclear position. In a weaponized environment it may become necessary for Israel to create an overt nuclear policy which will outline so called “red-lines” that are not to be crossed. All of this assumes that regional actors will act rationally as they interact with such a policy, and there is already significant precedent that such a policy would be respected.

The relationship of ‘peaceful coexistence’ between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War is a prime example where humanity may have avoided World War Three due to the threat of a nuclear war.<sup>46</sup> This concept of ‘peaceful coexistence’ is attributed to Soviet Premier Khrushchev during the Cold War, who during the 1950s did not ascribe to the popular Marxist belief that war with the capitalists was inevitable.<sup>47</sup> Such peaceful coexistence can be demonstrated in other conflicts like India-Pakistan, where despite an inflammatory conflict, the development of open nuclear strategies and red-lines can deter from full-scale war and escalations. Given the historical context there is it is reasonable that Israel and Iran could achieve peaceful coexistence even if both have nuclear weapons.

According to Beres there are four potential nuclear scenarios that must be forecasted, and the “red-lines” for such scenarios must be understood by all parties if they are to be respected. These include: (a) nuclear retaliation, (b) nuclear counter-retaliation, (c) nuclear pre-emption, and (d) nuclear war-fighting. To ensure its readiness, Israel must look at each of these scenarios with seriousness as they relate to a potentially nuclear Iran. Due to Israel’s small land mass it is understood that any nuclear strike within Israeli territory or in one of its cities would likely mean

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<sup>46</sup> Louis René Beres, "Israeli Strategy in the Case of a New Cold War," *The Jerusalem Post*, (March 5, 2014).

<sup>47</sup> James Lee Ray. *The United States in Asia: The Coming Clash with China?* *American Foreign Policy and Political Ambition* (Sage Press, New York: 2014), 286. Note: Definition of “peaceful coexistence” in the Cold War context.

the end of the country in its current form. This implies that (a), (b), and (d) are wholly unacceptable situations for the Jewish state.<sup>48</sup> Option (c) is not significantly better, as a pre-emptive nuclear strike against an adversary is likely to bring universal international condemnation and set the conditions for Israel's complete diplomatic isolation. In such a scenario the Israeli population may be saved, but there are likely long-term repercussions that would largely negate the value of pre-emption.

The implication for Israel is that there is no situation where the use of nuclear weapons will result in a positive outcome. At the same time adversaries with larger land masses, larger populations, and sub-state proxies may continue to escalate the threat of nuclear weapons against Israel. To avoid a serious escalation with an adversary, Israel is now in a position where it must consider moving away from an ambiguous nuclear standing to a clear and public strategy which advertises 'red-lines' to adversaries. The consideration of 'red-lines' as it relates to the proliferation of a nuclear device or capability to a sub-state proxy at some point in the future is likely the critical point.

#### Concluding Remarks: An Objective Review of the Iranian Threat to Israel

Throughout this chapter there was an attempt to look objectively at the Iranian aspirations in the region and the ramifications for the State of Israel. It was observed that while Iran has largely abandoned the development of a powerful conventional military it has expanded the use of irregular forces significantly in the last decade. These irregular forces which are centralized under the auspices of the Revolutionary Guard are used primarily outside of Iran in support of proxy activities. Although it was argued that Iran's conventional military poses no direct threat to Israel, it is clear that Iranian proxy organizations like *Hezbollah* could fix Israeli defence efforts through a serious conflict and have the ability to attack the Israeli public indiscriminately

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

via rockets and terrorist sleeper cells. This type of proxy campaign against Israel would no doubt have significant ramifications for Israelis but it would not constitute an existential threat to the State of Israel because such proxy actions are not sustainable for long durations.

In regarding the use of proxy actions, it is important to note that the Iranian proxy strategy was created as a deterrent from direct intervention or meddling in Iran. This deterrence strategy to divert attention from the Iranian regime and its territory is intended to simultaneously occupying the attention of Israel, the US, and Saudi Arabia allowing the Regime to pursue nuclear weapons capabilities. The proxy strategy is not limited to Israel; Iran supports the Houtis in Yemen against Saudi Arabia, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and a variety of smaller groups in Iraq and Syria in an effort to deter American involvement.

Finally, if Iran is a rational actor, it can be concluded that the development of Iranian nuclear weapons is a continuation of the larger Iranian deterrence strategy. The hypothesis that Iran is a rational actor was confirmed by a very recent American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Martin Dempsey, along with two former heads of the *Mossad*. The belief in a rational Iran is a widely held view within the Israeli security complex. It is clear that Israel is using its means to delay the creation of an Iranian nuclear weapon, but will likely draw a line at the use of its military forces. This demonstrates a departure from the tenants of the Begin Doctrine, and implies that Israel is ensuring that its own deterrence to a nuclear Iran.

From an objective approach, all indications suggest that Israel would not be at risk in the event of a nuclearized Iran. Israel's military qualitative edge and strategic deterrence capabilities imply that Iran could not attack Israel with nuclear weapons and reasonably expect to survive. The predominant opinion is that as a rational actor, Iran would not enter into such an engagement. Yet, as we examine all of the available information, and despite disagreements

with his security apparatus, the Netanyahu government has continued to present the possibility of a nuclear Iran as an existential threat to Israel. To understand why such a political narrative continues to carry weight it will be necessary to look within the domestic context of Israeli political life, and understand the competing priorities that cannot be observed from an external-objective approach. To understand why a threat can be perceived despite indications otherwise, an understanding of Israeli strategic culture will lead to an understanding of this sentiment.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **HISTORICAL APPROACH: DEFINING ISRAEL'S STRATEGIC CULTURE**

In an attempt to understand Israel's current security approach to Iran, this chapter will examine the salient aspects of the Israeli historical context and how it has defined the perception of adversaries through the formation of a "strategic culture,". There are a number of competing definitions surrounding "strategic culture" but for the purposes of this chapter, the definition penned by British International Relations theorist Ken Booth will be accepted as it provides an interaction with a wide range of factors. He defined it by these terms: "strategic culture refers to a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, habits, symbols, achievements, and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force."<sup>49</sup>

Attempting to understand the components of Israel's strategic culture as they might be applied against the Booth definition this chapter will examine and develop historical context through an analysis of the following institutions and concepts: The holocaust legacy, Zionism, and the Israel Defence Force (IDF). These particular aspects were selected as defining in the Israeli security culture due to their recurring importance through decades of conflict, and their normative importance in Israel's behaviour when interacting with a threat. At the conclusion of this chapter it will be demonstrated that these aspects of the Israeli strategic culture have already led to tangible policy decisions and defence priorities through the application of the 'Begin Doctrine.'

By looking at the Israeli-Iranian security relationship through the Israeli strategic culture lens it will become apparent in the final chapter that PM Netanyahu government has leveraged

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<sup>49</sup> Ken Booth. "The Concept of Strategic Culture Affirmed." *Strategic Power: USA/USSR*, ed. Carl G. Jacobson (London: The MacMillan Press Limited, 1990), 125.

its knowledge of national sentiments about threats toward political objectives. This is interesting as it signifies an elevation of strategic culture over the objective facts in the national discourse.

### The Holocaust Legacy

Perhaps the most important factor in Israeli Strategic culture is the legacy of the Holocaust. The European Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis during the Second World War is a cataclysm that impacted and resonates with the entire global Jewish community. Although the Holocaust is not an event that is particular to Israelis, the response to the Holocaust in Israel has developed a narrative which is unique within the Jewish world. The impact on the political and security establishments in Israel cannot be underestimated. The historical proximity between the liberation of Europe in 1945 and the 1948 Israeli War of Independence means that from the earliest days the Holocaust legacy was intertwined in the Israeli psyche. Evidently there will be overlapping personalities and narratives that would emerge between such events, but how can such events be tied together to understand a strategic culture? This connection between the Holocaust and the Israeli strategic culture was described in detail by an Israeli political scientist on behalf of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs as recently as 2000, citing the following:

One of the strongest underpinnings of Israel's security doctrine is the Holocaust consciousness and the historical resolve expressed in the slogan "Never Again!" When the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces in the mid-1990s, Ehud Barak, later to become the country's Prime Minister and Defense Minister, visited Auschwitz at the head of a delegation of officers and soldiers and proclaimed there, facing the crematoria, that "we have come here too late," he expressed, along with yearning, a stance of defense, state, and political nature. When the Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Abba Eban, in his speech after the Six-Day War, made it clear that the war had been a defensive one that was meant to forestall an "Auschwitz borders" situation, he was expressing the State of Israel's political attitude.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Shewach Weiss. "The Impact of the Holocaust on Politics: Elementary Remarks and Several Banalities." Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (February 2000). Retrieved 26 March 2018, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFA-Archive/2001/Pages/The%20Impact%20of%20the%20Holocaust%20on%20Politics-%20by%20Profes.aspx>

It is relevant and interesting that Weiss draws the connection between statements made by Israel's senior soldier in the 1990s, and one of Israel's most important diplomats in the 1960s, Abba Eben. In 1967, Abba Eben was reflecting Israel's security situation as it related to President Nasser's attempt to block the Red Sea's Strait of Tiran against the calamity of the Holocaust and the Auschwitz death camp. The June Crisis which escalated into Six Day War of 1967 represents one of the most serious crises in Israeli history, yet the comparison to Auschwitz is somewhat odd given the realities and differences in Israel's actual capabilities, especially when comparing Israel's impressive military strength in 1967 as compared to the powerlessness of the Holocaust victims.<sup>51</sup> In understanding this aspect of Israeli strategic culture it must be understood that in viewing the Israeli existence, compared against the recollection of the Holocaust, psychologically there is no amount of military assurance that can guarantee survival.

In looking at the mid-1960s 'June Crisis' we can observe the impact of the Holocaust on the Israeli strategic culture clearly. At the time, many Israeli Jews had only emerged from the European Holocaust two decades earlier. Their shared perception of the 'existential threats' to Israel intertwined with an Israeli society that had already endured a number of regional wars. Levi Eshkol the Prime Minister (PM), and General Rabin the Chief of General Staff (CGS) of the IDF spoke openly about the similarities between the Holocaust and their sentiment towards the Middle-Eastern security situation at the time. At the peak of the crisis before the beginning of the Six-Day War, PM Eshkol penned a public letter to USSR Premier Kosygin, explaining Israel's position:

Only twenty-five years ago, one third of the Jewish people was cruelly annihilated by the murderous forces of the Nazi enemy... only nineteen years have passed since these

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<sup>51</sup> Ben Schmidt. "A Forgone Conclusion: A Study of Israel's Disproportionate Reliance on Military Power During the June 1967 Crisis. Canadian Forces College: JCSP 44 (9 November 2017), 4-5.



survivors won their national independence and began reconstructing the ruins of their national existence (in the State of Israel).<sup>52</sup>

In his role as the senior soldier in the IDF during the crisis, General Rabin later described his perception of the zero-sum parameters of the conflict with the Arab world, in a 1972 interview with the *Ma'ariv* newspaper.

I said at the time: we have no alternative but to answer the challenge forced upon us, because the problem is not freedom of maritime navigation in the Straits, the challenge is the continued existence of our State of Israel, and this (Six Day War) is a war for that very existence.<sup>53</sup>

The underlying cultural insinuation that Israel is at risk of becoming the victim of a Holocaust-like event is an important aspect of the cultural underpinnings of the Israeli psyche. The realities of neighboring actors hostile to Israel, and the history of conflict, lends to this perception.

In an attempt to better define the phenomenon of the Israeli fear of annihilation historians Michael Brecher and Benjamin Geist defined this attitude and pattern of behaviour more narrowly as a 'Holocaust Syndrome', describing it as "the constant fear that Israel's existence (is) threatened."<sup>54</sup> Although such a designation could be perceived as a pejorative commentary on the Israeli psyche, it is used in this context to demonstrate the common approach that many Israeli citizens and Israeli elites alike, use when perceiving a threat. The binary nature of the approach implies that Israel's defense is zero-sum, in that the state and its citizens will either win or they will cease to exist. This dramatic and somewhat fatalistic mindset was, and remains, a pervasive narrative within Israeli society that has permeated the approach of military and diplomatic elites. While it can be argued that the example of the 1967 crisis is already somewhat

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<sup>52</sup> PM Levi Eshkol. Letter to USSR Premier Kosygin on 1 June 1967. (English version published in Jerusalem Post, 4 June 1967).

<sup>53</sup> Yizhak Rabin. "Six Days and Five More Years," (*Ma'ariv*, 2 June 1972).

<sup>54</sup> Michael Brecher and Benjamin Geist. *Decisions in Crisis: Israel, 1967 and 1973*. (Berkley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 38.

dated, Weiss still believes that the Holocaust legacy remains a lens which is part of the implicit approach to security in the current environment.

While the concept of a ‘Holocaust Syndrome’ and its impact on the national psyche is relatively abstract, the influence of Zionism is a concept which has very real and tangible ramifications in the Israeli strategic culture.

### Zionism and the State of Israel

The concept of modern Zionism is widely attributed to Theodore Herzl who in 1897 formally initiated the World Zionist Conference, a conference which contemplated a state for Jews in the wake of incidents of anti-Semitism in Europe. Herzl’s aspirations were encouraged through the British 1917 Balfour Declaration that favoured a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, but in the wake of the persecution and extermination under Nazi Germany, this came closer to reality following the Second World War. Zionism achieved its principal aims with the creation of the State of Israel in May 1948.<sup>55</sup> Zionism as a concept was able to tolerate a wide range of perspectives and ideologies, notably it cannot be defined as socialist or capitalist, but in the formation of the State of Israel it did describe who could come to the country, most notable through laws concerning the ‘right of return’, formalized in 1950 as “every Jew has the right to come to this country...unless the applicant is engaged in an activity against the Jewish People; or is likely to endanger public health or the Security of the State.”<sup>56</sup>

To many Israelis, these definitions and applications of Zionism are not sufficient to describe its nature and aspiration. Ari Shavit is a modern Israeli writer and reporter who believes that Zionism is a cornerstone and critical concept even in Israel’s modern context. In his

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<sup>55</sup> Iain McLean. *Concise Dictionary of Politics* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 537-538.

<sup>56</sup> Israel: The Knesset. “The Law of Return 5710 (1950)” (Laws of Special Interest, 1950), Retrieved 22 November 2017: <https://knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/return.htm>.

description of what Zionism means in Israel, he views the interaction of the concept with the state as necessitating three principal characteristics: secular, Jewish identity, and tied to territory (land).<sup>57</sup> Any deviation from these three principles would be a challenge to the Zionist ideal. Zionism is particular in its requirement for a territory as the Jewish identity has not viewed a specific connection to any territory in two millennia. In the realities that would emerge with the establishment of a Jewish Zionist State and the immediate requirement to enter into military hostilities with neighboring Middle-Eastern countries, the most important institution in Israel would be formed, the IDF. In terms of strategic culture, the constant requirement to secure the national borders, and Israel's vulnerable geographic position lends to the continued institutional importance of the IDF, not only as a means to save the population from destruction, but also as a building block for socialization and entry into politics. The next section will develop the importance of the IDF within the Israeli strategic culture, as it establishes how Israelis perceive Iran in the security context.

### The Institutional Importance of the Israel Defence Force

David Shelatiel summarized this sentiment as an IDF commander during the 1948 War of Independence: "The enemy turns his eyes toward Jerusalem, the eternal seat of our eternal people. It will be a savage and merciless battle without retreat. Our fate will be victory or annihilation. We shall fight to the last man among us."<sup>58</sup> The subsequent wars at decade intervals with neighboring Arab-states continued into the 1980s, entrenching this perception of an existential threat that solidified the already enormous influence of the IDF. As a serious conventional threat to Israel was gradually reduced through the technological supremacy of the

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<sup>57</sup> Ari Shavit. "Israel and the Future of Zionism." *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life* (Key West Florida: 4 December 2006). Retrieved 17 February 2018: <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/12/04/israel-and-the-future-of-zionism/>

<sup>58</sup> No Author. "Jerusalem Truce Halts Israeli Push to Retake Old City." *New York Times*. (18 July, 1948).

IDF, nuclear and chemical weapon threats from hostile states has dominated much of the external political defence narrative.

Since the earliest days of the Israeli identity, military means and military solutions have dominated the Israeli approach to regional confrontations. Veterans of pre-independence para-military groups were key military figures in the Israeli War of Independence. During the British Mandate in Palestine, the *Haganah*<sup>59</sup> was one of the para-military organizations that was instrumental in Israeli societal development. Edward Glick, a sociologist and commentator on Israeli culture, describes the institutional importance of the IDF in Israeli society in that “the permeating influence of *Zahal*<sup>60</sup> ...can be understood when one realizes that its origin predates the founding of the state of Israel.”<sup>61</sup> In this sense the IDF’s origins are tied directly to the *Haganah*, and constitute the oldest and most trusted institution. Glick goes further to state that not even the communal *kibbutz* movement, which was a cornerstone of the early Zionism and Israeli identity, could compete with the societal regard for the *Haganah* and later the IDF.<sup>62</sup> In this sense, the military institution was and remains the most influential organization within Israeli society.

The elevation of the IDF as the most important institution within Israeli society is not abstract. The connection between the legacy of the Holocaust and Israel’s emergence through conflict can be summarized in that “most Israelis are absolutely convinced that the only thing that stands between them and their destruction is the Army.”<sup>63</sup> Approaching geo-political problems in such a way has permeated Israeli belief that military solutions are valid and very-

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<sup>59</sup> Note: *Haganah* can be directly translated from Hebrew to mean “defence.”

<sup>60</sup> Note: *Zahal* is the direct transliteration of the Hebrew acronym for Israel Defence Force.

<sup>61</sup> Edward Bernard Glick. *Between Israel and Death*. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1974), 16.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

often necessary. Starting in 1947 Ben-Gurion prioritized defence spending and preparations over any other part of national development:

It would be a grave, or perhaps fatal error to refuse to understand the situation and prepare to meet it with all our strength... The *Haganah* must be prepared to confront the face of real war. It has to obtain heavy arms: tanks, artillery, halftracks, and heavy mortars for the ground units, fighter planes for the foundation of an air force, torpedo boats and even submarines for the Navy.<sup>64</sup>

Beyond the prioritization of resources towards defence, the role and influence of the IDF in Israeli society is immense as it has access to virtually all citizens. As a national institutional the IDF interacts with all of Israeli society due to universal conscription. As a military model, the IDF is often regarded as a three-tiered defense system, consisting of a small but influential professional officer and non-commissioned officer corps numbering under forty thousand, a mid-sized full-time conscript army, and a massive reserve force.<sup>65</sup> The conscription law requires that all citizens perform obligatory service starting at age eighteen. Males must complete three years and females two years. In some cases officer candidates may extend service or consider entering into the professional corps of officers. Beyond the initial full-time conscription, all male citizens are obligated to a maximum of thirty-day service per year until their 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. Some allowances are made for conscientious objectors and other special cases that are permitted to work in equivalent non-military programmes.<sup>66</sup> Within Israeli society the IDF is viewed by many as the final ‘rite of passage’ to full citizenship, and an integral part of the fabric of

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<sup>64</sup> David Ben Gurion *Diary* (15 August 1947).

<sup>65</sup> Ben Schmidt. “Israeli Civil-Military Relations: Challenging Samuel Huntington’s Theory.” Royal Military College of Canada: Armed Forces in Society, (14 August 2014), 2-3.

<sup>66</sup> *The Military Balance*, International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992-1993 (London: Brassey's, 1992), 111. The International Institute of Strategic Studies estimates that during the IDF consisted of approximately 35,500 regulars, 139,500 conscripts, and 430,000 reservists in 1993.

society.<sup>67</sup> To not participate in the IDF can lead to social isolation, and even practical changes in personal access to universal medical care and other state funded programs.

This societal interaction with the military is of interest especially as it interacts with political life. There is value in briefly reopening the case of the 1967 crisis which was a defining moment in Israeli history, and later looking at the overall interaction over the course of a few decades. In the 1967 Six-Day War for example, virtually all of the key Israeli decision makers were products of the Israeli pre-independence para-military organisations or the IDF. This creates an interesting dynamic as General Rabin and the Minister of Defence during the 1967 crisis, Moshe Dayan, were veterans of the War of Independence and had a shared experience of viewing solutions through a military lens.<sup>68</sup> Even Abba Eban, who was the senior Israeli diplomat in Washington in 1967, began his career in the Haganah as an arms supplier.<sup>69</sup> Where this might be viewed as an exception during a particularly challenging crisis, it is worth evaluating the interaction of military elites with senior government functions over the span of Israel's relatively short history.

Dr. Uri Ben Eliezer, a political sociologist and professor at the University of Haifa believes that the IDF has progressively expanded its role and influence in government over the last few decades. He asserts that this expanding influence is not connected “with modernization and nation-building, not even with military coups and the army's direct political intervention, but with militarism and war”.<sup>70</sup> In examining the orientation of officers entering politics following a professional military career he notes that “they view politics as the continuation of their military

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<sup>67</sup> E.O Schild. "On the Meaning of Military Service in Israel," in *Israel: Social Structure and Change*, ed. M. Curtis and M. Chertoff (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1977), 419-432.

<sup>68</sup> David J. Bercusin. *The Secret Army*. (Toronto, ON: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1983), 165-166.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>70</sup> Ben-Eliezer, “From Military Role-Expansion to Difficulties in Peace-Making: The Israel Defence Forces 50 Years On”, in Daniel Maman, Eyal Ben-Ari and Zeev Rosenhek (eds.), *Military, State and Society in Israel*, (New Brunswick, 2001), p. 141

service by other means and not vice versa.”<sup>71</sup> Ben Eliezer’s hypothesis demonstrates the challenges that the military institution conducts against the Clausewitzian principal of political supremacy in state matters.<sup>72</sup> Declaring a nation as ‘militaristic’ could draw comparisons with Prussian military social constructs, but this is not the implication in Israel. The concept of militarism in Israeli politics does not imply that society has a tendency towards conservative or aggressive military hierarchal structures; rather it implies that the uses of military means, towards political ends, are prevalent. This ‘militarism’ combined with the zero-sum approach of the Holocaust Syndrome implies that military leaders benefit from disproportionately high societal influence. Paradoxically, as a society Israel has demonstrated that it has actually become more socially liberal since the 1970s. In some ways the prestige of the military has also somewhat declined since the 1980s in the face of some inconclusive conflicts with non-state actors and wide ranging leadership scandals. All this aside, there is an implication that in any regional dispute Israel is likely to rely upon its military muscle, if not as a deterrent then in direct action in response to a threat.<sup>73</sup>

Between the 2009 election and 2015, twenty-three General-Officers of the IDF were elected into parliament. Overall, nine of sixteen of the former Chiefs of General Staff of the IDF have been elected to the *Knesset*. These statistics are remarkable in a democracy. The way in which these generals enter politics is remarkably sporadic in terms of political affiliation as they enter through a variety of political parties featuring a wide spectrum of political perspectives and

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 149

<sup>72</sup> Note: “war is simply the continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means,” Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War, Book VIII*. (Oxford Press, UK, 2008), 252.

<sup>73</sup> Michael I Handel. *Israel’s Political-Military Doctrine* (Cambridge, MA thesis, 1973), 1-6.

agendas. Almost half of these recently elected generals, eleven out of twenty-three, entered via left-wing parties, eight via right-wing parties and four via centre parties.<sup>74</sup>

Statistically generals of the IDF are far more likely to successfully enter politics than in any other democracies. This is especially true for the appointment to the Minister of Defence, which historically has a significant connection with former generals of the IDF.<sup>75</sup> This is an important development as unlike many other Western nations where the minister of Defence might be a portfolio of secondary importance; in Israel the Minister of Defence is widely considered the most powerful person after the Prime Minister. In fact, the defence portfolio is viewed with such importance that historically some Prime Ministers have retained the file for themselves as a means to better understand and control the security environment.

The apparently randomized pattern of political adherences furthers the impression that there is no political influence or connection to the advancement of IDF leadership, implying that the IDF is an *objective* model in accordance with Samuel Huntington's civil-military relations model.<sup>76</sup> The relatively constant entrance of so many senior generals into the political arena following their military service was common enough to require legislation that would regulate these former generals through a "cooling-off" law. Similar variants of this type of legislation also exist in the United States. This Israeli law states that former military officers must take at least a one year break between military service and entry into politics, a symbolic period of time. This law demonstrated the relative normalcy of this occurrence, as this legislation was tied to the "cooling-off" period of one-year designated for soldiers ending their mandatory military service,

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> See Figure 2.1.

<sup>76</sup> Note: The entry of generals into various political parties demonstrates an independent and professional military that promotes officers based on professional capacity and skill, not political loyalty. This implies a high degree of military professionalism and independence from the political environment. This respects the tenants of Huntington's Objective civil-military relations model. See: Samuel P. Huntington. *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Belknap Press: Cambridge, London. Second Ed. 1985), 80-83.



which exempts them from being recalled to the reserves.<sup>77</sup> The key principal behind this legislation directed mostly towards senior military leadership who wish to enter politics, is to avoid a situation like that of 1967 where the former CGS Moshe Dayan became the Minister of Defence with intricate military and institutional experience. Such a person could view their role in government as a “Super CGS” and representative of the military rather than a political leader.

Despite the intent of the law, an exception was made in 2003 as Lieutenant-General Shaul Mofaz retired as CGS and was immediately appointed as the Minister of Defence within Prime Minister Sharon’s administration. Such an exception was also made when General Mattis (Retired) had his waiting period waived to become the US Secretary of Defence. Such exceptions can be viewed by some as a risk to the democratic separation between politics and the military. In Israel, the loop hole for such an appointment existed because ministerial appointments were not subject to the “cooling-off” law, largely defeating the original intent of the legislation.<sup>78</sup> ‘Figure 2.1’ demonstrates the staggering trend in appointments to Minister of Defence from amongst IDF generals, and the significant number of PMs who once served as generals within the IDF.<sup>79</sup> Although it is compelling to observe the historic status of former generals in the two top positions, this table does not reflect the overall impact and participation of former generals in other ministerial positions or as members of parliament at large.

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<sup>77</sup> Amir Oren. “The Attorney General's Passivity”, *Ha'aretz*, (20 May 2003).

<sup>78</sup> A. Bar-Or. “Political–Military Relations in Israel, 1996–2003”, *Israel Affairs*, (Vol. 12, No. 3, 1996).

<sup>79</sup> The information for this table was compiled using information available through Government of Israel open source information: [https://www.knesset.gov.il/govt/eng/GovtByNumber\\_eng.asp](https://www.knesset.gov.il/govt/eng/GovtByNumber_eng.asp)

Prime Ministers, Ministers of Defence, & Chiefs of General Staff (CGS) (1948-2015)					
PRIME MINISTER	TERM START	MINISTER OF DEFENCE	TERM START	CGS	TERM START
David Ben-Gurion	14-May-48	David Ben-Gurion	14-May-48	Yaakov Dori	1-Jun-47
Moshe Sharet	26-Jan-54	Pinhas Lavon	26-Jan-54	Yigael Yadin	9-Nov-49
David Ben-Gurion	3-Nov-55	David Ben-Gurion	21-Feb-55	Mordechai Maklef	7-Dec-52
Levi Eshkol	26-Jun-63	Levi Eshkol	26-Jun-63	Moshe Dayan	6-Dec-53
Yigal Allon	26-Feb-69	Moshe Dayan	5-Jun-67	Haim Laskov	29-Jan-58
Golda Meir	17-Mar-69	Shimon Peres	3-Jun-74	Tzvi Tzur	1-Jan-61
Yitzhak Rabin	3-Jun-74	Ezer Weizman	20-Jun-77	Yitzhak Rabin	1-Jan-64
Menachem Begin	20-Jun-77	Menachem Begin	28-May-80	Haim Bar-Lev	1-Jan-68
Yitzhak Shamir	10-Oct-83	Ariel Sharon	5-Aug-81	David Elazar	1-Jan-72
Shimon Perez	13-Sep-84	Menachem Begin	14-Feb-83	Yitzhak Hofi (Acting)	3-Apr-74
Yitzhak Shamir	20-Oct-86	Moshe Arens	23-Feb-83	Mordechai Gur	16-Apr-74
Yitzhak Rabin	13-Jul-92	Yitzhak Rabin	13-Sep-84	Reafael Eitan	16-Apr-78
Shimon Perez	22-Nov-95	Moshe Arens	11-Jun-90	Moshe Levi	19-Apr-83
Benjamin Netanyahu (Captain)	18-Jun-96	Yitzhak Rabin	13-Jul-92	Dan Shomron	19-Apr-87
Ehud Barak	6-Jul-99	Shimon Peres	4-Nov-95	Ehud Barak	1-Apr-91
Ariel Sharon	7-Mar-01	Yitzhak Mordechai	18-Jun-96	Amnon Lipkin-Shahak	1-Jan-95
Ehud Olmert (Lieutenant)	14-Apr-06	Moshe Arens	27-Jan-99	Shaul Mofaz	9-Jul-98
Benjamin Netanyahu (Captain)	31-Mar-09	Ehud Barak	6-Jul-99	Moshe Ya'alon	9-Jul-02
		Binyamin Ben-Eliezer	7-Mar-01	Dan Halutz	1-Jun-05
		Shaul Mofaz	4-Nov-02	Gabi Ashkenazi	14-Feb-07
		Amir Peretz (Captain)	4-May-06	Benny Gantz	14-Feb-11
		Ehud Barak	18-Jun-07	Gadi Eizenkot	16-Feb-15
		Moshe Ya'alon	18-Mar-13		

LEGEND	
	No Intersection of Military service and becoming PM or DM.
	Politician who was a veteran the of a British-Mandate para-military organization.
	Completed IDF military service (Rank).
	Former General Officer in the IDF - Who became the PM or DM.
	Former Chief of General Staff (CGS) of the IDF - Who became PM or DM.

**Figure 2.1 – Selection of senior political offices, reflecting prior military experience.**

Source: The information for this table was compiled using open source information available through Government of Israel: [https://www.knesset.gov.il/govt/eng/GovtByNumber\\_eng.asp](https://www.knesset.gov.il/govt/eng/GovtByNumber_eng.asp).

### Begin Doctrine: Deriving Policy from Strategic Culture

The impact of the Holocaust, Zionism, and the IDF have all been explored as key aspects of the Israeli strategic culture. In this final section it will be demonstrated that these aspects of the Israeli strategic culture have already led to tangible policy decisions and defence priorities through the application of the 'Begin Doctrine'. The Begin Doctrine is the conceptual demonstration of the connection between the Holocaust legacy and the militarisation of political tools in Israel, and may be an important indicator of how Israel might interact with Iran in the future.

The Begin Doctrine can be articulated by stating that "Israel will never accept the fact that a hostile country that calls for Israel's destruction holds the means to deliver nuclear destruction."<sup>80</sup> Commonly referred to as a doctrine due to its political relevance and military consequences, it resulted in two separate military operations intent on destroying foreign nations' capacity to develop nuclear weapons. The 1981 Operation Opera was an attack against Iraqi nuclear facilities while the 2007 Operation Orchard strike against Syrian nuclear facilities was only recently officially credited to the IDF. The key tenant of the doctrine is that military means should and must be used in the event that all diplomatic, covert, or indirect capacities have been exhausted. It requires that no circumstance may exist where the Israeli population can be targeted with a weapon of mass destruction. The doctrine's name is derived from Israel's sixth Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, who was a founding member of the politically conservative *Likud* Party and a veteran of both the *Irgun* and the *Haganah* at Israel's inception.

Operation Opera was the first important manifestation of the Begin Doctrine. On 7 June 1981 Israeli F-15 and F-16 fighter aircraft successfully destroyed the Iraqi *Osirak* nuclear facility

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<sup>80</sup> Ronen Bergman. "Israel's Begin Doctrine." *Big Think, Smarter Faster* (Recorded: 19 September 2008). Retrieved 10 Jan 2018: <http://bigthink.com/videos/ronen-bergman-on-israels-begin-doctrine>.

just a few kilometres outside of Baghdad. The operation resulted in the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear facility, and significant delays to the program. A direct and unilateral military strike against such a distant Arab facility without any adjoining borders to Israeli marked a departure from the Israeli approach up to that point. The Osirak mission would prove to be Israel's new approach to many security threats in the region for the next few decades.

Similarly, Operation Orchard was a raid against the alleged Syrian nuclear facility on 6 September 2007. Operation Orchard was significantly less famous than the strike against Iraq in 1981, but it similarly was conducted with F-15 and F-16 fighter jets, flying into Syrian airspace and bombing a major facility deep inside Syria. Due to lack of information about the facility or the alleged Israeli attack, Israel did not take responsibility for this engagement until March 2018 when it officially released targeting videos courtesy of the Israeli Air Force.<sup>81</sup>

The Begin Doctrine encourages the idea that unilateral military action is an acceptable and on occasion necessary course of action to preserve the survival of the Jewish State, but the Begin Doctrine may have unintended diplomatic consequences. The Doctrine insists that a step-by-step process of progressively more forceful actions must be taken to avoid an adversary acquiring a nuclear weapon. The international challenge for Israel is that once the line is crossed into unilateral military action against a sovereign nation, the legal and diplomatic ramifications can lead to complete isolation. The implication of the doctrine is that Israel might be perceived as an actor that may take action unilaterally and at worst this could be perceived as irrational behaviour by its closest allies. Unilateral actions also strain diplomatic relations with non-aligned nations, demonstrated in that "Western Industrialized nations were looking to the United States for leadership, believing that Reagan can be more influential with Israeli Prime Minister

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<sup>81</sup> Stephen Farrell. "Israel Admits Bombing Suspected Syrian Reactor in 2007, Warns Iran." *Reuters World News* (20 March 2018). Retrieved 1 April 2018: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-syria-nuclear/israel-admits-bombing-suspected-syrian-nuclear-reactor-in-2007-warns-iran-idUSKBN1GX09K>.

Menachem Begin than anyone else.”<sup>82</sup> The ability and willingness to act alone can impact the bilateral relationship with the US, and indirectly cause unplanned difficulties for the American administration with Arab allies in the Middle East. Following the attack on the Iraqi Osirik facility in June 1981 President Reagan placed a temporary halt on the shipment of American made F-16s to Israel. This symbolic strangling of military hardware deliveries was both a punishment and a reminder of Israel’s potential isolation and dependence on American fighter-aircraft.<sup>83</sup> Although Operations Opera and Orchard were separated in time by over a quarter century, they demonstrate a pattern in the Israeli security approach in the region, and specifically the enduring relevance of the Begin doctrine in the current Israeli strategic culture, and the context of Iranian interactions.

#### Concluding Remarks: Israel’s Strategic Culture and its Interaction with Iran

The Israeli belief that their existence is being threatened can be reduced to the mottos of “never again”, and “victory or annihilation.” This perspective is part of a tangible strategic culture derived from the legacy of the Holocaust. The intertwining of the Holocaust legacy with very practical requirements to safeguard the borders of a geographically vulnerable Zionist State has led to the enormous prominence of the IDF in society. The ascension of the generals’ prestige and their interaction in Israeli political life means that Israel risks approaching national challenges through a militaristic approach; meaning that it will quantify military solutions above other approaches. Yet at the same time there are occasions when the generals can have a moderating influence in Israeli politics, as the IDF’s senior leaders are the product of an *objective* and professional military. In an attempt to frame the current Israeli security environment, this chapter outlined how the Israeli strategic culture has developed in the historical

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<sup>82</sup> Lou Canon & Les Whittington. “Reagan Halts F-16s for Israel.” *The Washington Post*. (21 July 1981).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

context and demonstrates that the interaction of the strategic culture with policy development can lead to the implementation of approaches like the Begin Doctrine, which are willing to use any means to neutralize an existential threat. This is a tendency that can be easily politicized.

When this historical lens is applied to the understanding of the Israeli strategic culture in the political interaction with modern Iran, it provides some important indicators as to how Israel might react to a perceived threat from Iran. Israeli fears were confirmed in the last decade as former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and other senior Iranian leaders repeatedly vowed to “wipe Israel off the face of the earth.”<sup>84</sup> Such rhetoric is known to exist within the regional parlance and among belligerent nations in general, but it has never been acted upon due to the severity of the consequences. For example, in the India-Pakistan conflict even as recently as September 2016 senior Pakistani officials have threatened to annihilate India with nuclear devices.<sup>85</sup> While rhetoric about the destruction of an adversary is common, the Israeli perception of the Iranian threat is taken literally in the context of its strategic culture. Iran’s known theatre ballistic missile capability in the *Shahab* program,<sup>86</sup> and a burgeoning nuclear program fits neatly into Israel’s fears of national survival.

This chapter developed an historical context for the Israeli strategic culture which lends to suggest that if Israel faces a confirmed nuclear threat from Iran, it will be taken very seriously by the Israeli population regardless of security reality or actual Iranian intentions. It was argued

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<sup>84</sup> Yeganeh Torbati. “Iran Threatens Israel; New EU Sanctions Take Force” (Reuters World News, 1 July 2012), retrieved 8 November 2017: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran/iran-threatens-israel-new-eu-sanctions-take-force-idUSBRE8600HG20120701>.

<sup>85</sup> Khawaja Muhammad Asif (Pakistan Defence Minister). “Interview with Samaa TV” (The Washington Standard, 30 September 2016), Retrieved from: <http://thewashingtonstandard.com/pakistan-defense-minister-threatens-wipe-india-nuclear-attack-stating-will-annihilate-india/>. Note: the relevant quote by the Defence Minister regarding India: “Our programmes that we have developed, they have been developed for our protection. We haven’t kept the devices that we have developed as showpieces. But if our safety is threatened, we will annihilate them (India).”

<sup>86</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, “Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction: Capabilities, Developments, and Strategic Uncertainties,” *Center for Strategic & International Studies* (14 October 2008), 19-33.

that as a result of the strategic culture, in the past Israel has developed and implemented policies like the Begin Doctrine which have historically led to a deliberate military actions against both Iraq and Syria. When applying the same model to Iran, it could be argued that Israel has already engaged in the early measures of the Begin Doctrine which have included diplomatic interventions, resource interference, direct sabotage, and perhaps even assassinations. If one follows the historical precedent, Israel's desire to limit the Iranian nuclear capability could eventually lead to direct military actions. It is clear that if such a military action occurred, it would isolate Israel and incite the Iranian population against it.

While the Israeli strategic culture might lead us to believe that military actions against Iran are imminent, this still does not sufficiently describe the complexity of the interaction between the two countries. Until this point the objective approach to the security relationship showed that Iran is not likely to be a serious threat to Israel, although it is granted that the elaborate proxy campaign is highly destabilizing. Despite the objective conclusions about Iranian capabilities and aspirations it became apparent in this chapter that Israeli strategic culture requires threats to be taken seriously, and even literally. This strategic culture allows a particular political approach, where military means may be considered necessary even when other approaches remain available.

**CHAPTER III**  
**INTERSUBJECTIVE APPROACH:**  
**ISRAELI SOCIETY AND THE SECURITIZATION OF IRAN**

In the first two chapters this essay examined the Israeli interaction with Iran through lenses of historical strategic culture and an objective analysis of Iranian capabilities and behaviour. These two perspectives provided ample explanation regarding the security environment and the context that exists between the two nations. However, these first two chapters have also demonstrated that there is a significant gap between the objective abilities of the Iranian Regime and the Israeli foreign-policy response. During the 2018 Munich Security Conference PM Netanyahu confirmed his persistent view of Iran as the greatest threat to Israel, the region, and global security.

Iran openly declares its intentions to annihilate Israel with its six million Jews; it makes absolutely no bones about it. Iran seeks to dominate our region, the Middle East, and seeks to dominate the world through aggression and terror. It is developing ballistic missiles to reach deep into Europe and to the US as well. Henry Kissinger said that Iran must choose between being a country or a cause. Well, the Regime in Iran has chosen to be a cause. The Chief of the Revolutionary Guard, Ali Jafri, said “we are on the path to the rule of Islam world-wide”... This in my judgement is the greatest threat to our world.<sup>87</sup>

In this final chapter the Israeli political approach to the ‘Iranian threat’ will be regarded as part of a political reaction to evolving domestic and societal challenges in Israeli institutional legitimacy. If we accept that “legitimacy involves the capacity of the political system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society,”<sup>88</sup> a loss of institutional legitimacy can lead to political destabilization. Israel’s reaction can be understood from an intersubjective theory approach as a result of significant domestic challenges; whereby in the face of adversity “experience always emerges,

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<sup>87</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu. “Statement by Israeli Prime Minister.” *Munich Security Conference* (Munich: 18 February 2018), Retrieved 19 Feb 2018: <https://www.securityconference.de/en/media-library/munich-security-conference-2018/video/statement-by-benjamin-netanyahu-followed-by-qa/filter/video/>, 5:41-6:33.

<sup>88</sup> Iain McClean. “Legitimacy.” *Concise Dictionary of Politics* (Oxford University Press: 1996), 281.



maintains itself, and transforms in relational contexts. It is held for reasons of personal inclinations, philosophical belief, and conviction.”<sup>89</sup> This suggests that elements of the Israeli strategic culture discussed in the previous chapter are being channeled by domestic actors in an effort to make sense of Iran.

In a second part, this chapter will also argue that as a result of the domestic social challenges, PM Netanyahu has securitized the Iranian issue as a means to justify extraordinary measures which will focus the national attention externally while protecting Israeli institutions through unifying uncertainties. Securitization theory is a product of the Copenhagen School, and can be recognized by a number of actions. One of the notable requirements of securitization is the use of a ‘speech act’ which is comprised of three principal characteristics.<sup>90</sup> A securitizing ‘speech act’ needs to follow a specific rhetorical structure which fulfill three criteria. Firstly it is a discursive process by an actor with authority, who claims that a referent object is existentially threatened. Secondly the actor demands the right to take extraordinary measures to deal with that threat, and finally the actor convinces the audience that rule-breaking behavior is justified to counter the threat. A subject is securitized once the audience takes the speech act as read. In short, by labeling something as ‘security,’ an issue is dramatized as a subject of supreme priority in a scripted way allowing the normal political bargaining process to be bypassed. Securitization in the military-security environment is often associated with the belief that military actions and solutions must be considered beyond normal diplomatic negotiation and settlement.<sup>91</sup> In this essay it will be argued that PM Netanyahu’s securitization of Iran is goes beyond the theoretical model that focuses on a single audience because he has not only targeted the Israeli population,

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<sup>89</sup> Donna M. Orange. “Intersubjective Systems Theory.” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* (New York: Volume 1159, Issue 1, 1 April 2009), 237.

<sup>90</sup> Barry Buzan, Wæver Ole, & de Wilde, Jaap. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

but simultaneously he has also targeted two key foreign audiences regarding Iran: the American electorate, and the leaders of the Sunni-Arab world.

## PART I: MOUNTING ISRAELI DOMESTIC CHALLENGES

The emerging, and most significant challenges to the status-quo of the Jewish State are perhaps no longer external but domestic in nature. This is a shift that is beginning to be held as a belief among numerous Israeli academics and is shaking the role of the Israeli institutions. Changing demographic trends and shifting cultural norms are going to pose new and significant challenges that are only beginning to be addressed. The impact of a shifting political and regional landscape is also beginning to impact aspects of the Israeli strategic culture. Such a shift could signify changes to political approaches and undermine the political narrative of some Israeli political parties.

This next portion will argue that the Netanyahu *Likud* coalition government has recognized the potential of these changes and is taking active steps to steer Israel toward the retention of its traditional identity and the protection of the institutions since 2009. These efforts were reinvigorated since the most recent 2015 *Likud* election victory. The threats to the status-quo can be defined through the undermining of the Israel's Zionist ideology, a long term demographic threat, and the undermining of the institutional prominence of the IDF.

### Zionism in Peril

At the core of the current *Likud* government, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, there is an underlying need to defend the Zionist ideology which underpins the *raison d'être* of the modern State of Israel. The fabric of Israeli society and the cultural underpinnings of the Jewish State are being challenged by a declining birth rate, the decline of secularism, and the changing

perception of national security. The general decline of conventional adversaries and “Palestinian-fatigue” are challenging the validity of the IDF as a national grass-roots institution. These domestic societal trends could pose more of a challenge to the current construct of the Jewish State than any foreign adversary. In a lecture and question period held by the Pew Research Center in 2006, Ari Shavit, an Israeli writer, reporter, and self-described Zionist explains his perception of Zionism and the ideological framework required to maintain it:

Why am I a Zionist? Because I am a Jew, a secular Jew. As a secular Jew I’m committed to Jewish life. As a secular Jew I’m committed to the existence of a non-Orthodox Jewish civilization. As a secular Jew I believe there is no way to secure the future of a non-Orthodox Jewish civilization without maintaining a Jewish home. For me Zionism is just that: It’s home... In order to understand the deep rationale of Zionism, one has to understand Jewish exceptionalism... Jewish exceptionalism is about an exceptional challenge. How to survive as a people for a millennium and a half without a territory or kingdom. How to maintain your unloved existence among others without vanishing into thin air.<sup>92</sup>

According to Shavit the key tenants of Zionism that bind Israel into the ideology are: secularism, physical territory, and the Jewish identity. By definition it is expected that within this framework that actors that do not conform to these ideals will be threats to Zionism.

Arguably, PM Netanyahu can observe the trends of mounting threats to the Zionist movement, and may view them as more important to Israel’s political future than any external actors’. As Shavit describes tenants of Zionism as being: secular, Jewish, and with a defined territory; there is ample evidence to suggest that the future of Israel will not be secular; will become less-Jewish, and will not ascribe to institutions like the IDF which are the protectors of Israeli sovereignty. If this is the case it is not unreasonable to expect an attempt to reinforce the underpinning aspects of the Israeli security culture.

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<sup>92</sup> Ari Shavit. “Israel and the Future of Zionism.” *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life* (Key West Florida: 4 December 2006). Retrieved 17 February 2018: <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/12/04/israel-and-the-future-of-zionism/>

### A Changing Demography

Israel has unique caveats underlying its democracy due to its status as a “Jewish Zionist State”. This official title describes policy underlying Israel’s citizenship laws that restrict Israeli citizenship to Jews, in most cases. Jews who are born in Israel and those who live elsewhere in the world that wish to immigrate to Israel may become citizens. Application for citizenship is very much tied to Jewish heritage. The immigration of Jews from the diaspora to Israel is known as *Aliyah*<sup>93</sup>, an immigration trend that has maintained and grown the Israeli population since its earliest days. At independence, other caveats for citizenship existed for about 156,000 Palestinian-Arabs, and their offspring, who remained within Israel’s borders. These “Israeli-Arabs” now number in the hundreds of thousands. Druze and Bedouin within Israel’s borders also have citizenship; however citizenship is generally blocked to any new non-Jewish applicants who might wish to immigrate, regardless of profession or personal wealth.<sup>94</sup>

Until the early 1990s most of Israel’s population growth came as a result of immigration waves. According to a United Nations study conducted by sociologist Dov Friedlander, the 1940s through 1970s saw an influx of secular and highly-educated North American and European Jewish migrants. Overlapping with the arrival of this group was the migration of Jewish-Arab communities from across the Middle-East and North Africa to Israel. The final two lumps of migration came from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia in the early 1990s, which represented an injection of over one million immigrants in a short period, increasing the overall Jewish-Israeli population by nearly twenty percent.<sup>95</sup> These immigration waves quickly integrated into

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<sup>93</sup> Note: The translation of *Aliyah* is “to go up”, or “ascent”, implying a return to Zion/Jerusalem which is on a high feature. This term is reserved for Jews returning to Israel from the global diaspora.

<sup>94</sup> Shourideh Molavi. “Stateless Citizenship and the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel.” *Refuge* (Vol. 26, No 2.), 20.

<sup>95</sup> Dov Friedlander. “Fertility in Israel: Is the Transition to Replacement Level in Sight?” *United Nations Publications*. Retrieved 22 November 2017: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/completingfertility/RevisedFriedlanderpaper.PDF>.

Israeli institutions where they became, and remain, active in the work-force and military service.

An emerging challenge is that in the current environment there are no significant immigrant influxes predicted. For the first time Israel must now grapple with the requirement to maintain a ‘replacement based birth rate’. This will be a challenge as Israel’s human development index continues to rise, which is associated with lower birth rates and a tumbling total fertility rate (TFR).

There is one exception to this draw-down in the fertility rate, and that is with the Jewish ultra-orthodox communities that sustain one of the highest birth-rates anywhere in the world, at about six children per woman.

ISRAELI DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS		
GROUP / ETHNICITY	PROPORTION OF ISRAELI SOCIETY	TOTAL FERTILITY RATE (PER WOMAN)
Jewish, secular*	67-70%	2.0-2.2
Jewish Ultra-Orthodox and National-Orthodox	12-15%	6.0-7.0
Muslim-Arab (includes Druze and Bedouin minorities)	16%	4
Christian-Arab	2%	2.6
Average Total Fertility Rate		2.9

**Figure 3.1 – Israeli demographic trends, reflecting religious and ethnic divisions based on available 2002 data.**<sup>96</sup>

\*Note: Jewish, secular; denotes citizens who may choose to practice personal faith, but still participates in the general labour force and contribute to national institutions.

The cross-section of the Israeli TFR by ethnicity and social group demonstrates the problematic nature of Israel’s demographic future. The current non-participation of the ultra-orthodox in Israeli institutions, particularly military service, will pose a significant challenge to

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 446.

the continuation of the Israeli defence agencies. Israel's secular population currently represents the dominant social group at about 70% of the overall population; but this proportion is expected to dramatically decline in the next few decades. Israel maintains a healthy TFR by Western standards (without immigration) at 2.9% however this statistic is not representative of the societal shifts concealed in who is having children. Israeli non-Jewish populations are outpacing secular Israelis with a TFR between 2.6-4%. Unto itself this is a problematic statistic due to Israel's status as a Jewish Zionist State, if the 'Jewishness' of the country cannot be sustained. On the other hand, the 'Jewishness' of the country can be maintained through the exceptionally high birth rate among Ultra-Orthodox groups, yet the secular Zionist aspects will begin to fade.

In a recent Jerusalem Post article, statistics were cited that demonstrate that based on current demographic trends by 2065 the balance of Jews and non-Jews in Israel could remain relatively constant at 79% Jewish and 21% other. Yet this does not clearly demonstrate the challenges that a systemic change to the country's Jewish demography will present to the current political structures. Based on current projections in 2065 the Israeli population could reach nearly twenty million, up from about eight today. More interestingly, of that potential twenty million the portion of ultra-Orthodox will rise to about 40%, a dramatic rise from the 11% that they represent today.<sup>97</sup>

#### The Boon and Threat of the ultra-Orthodox to the State of Israel

To elaborate on why the ultra-Orthodox are a political threat to the Zionist construct of the State of Israel requires an understanding of why the ultra-Orthodox fertility so high. In a commentary about the fertility rate, Friedlander describes the tenants of the ultra-Orthodox culture, "Marriages are arranged and take place at an early age. Couples are expected to have

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<sup>97</sup> Lidar Grave-Lazi. "Israel's Population to reach 20 million by 2065: A Third of the Population is Forecast to be Ultra-Orthodox." The Jerusalem Post (21 May 2017), retrieved 10 February 2018: <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Report-Israels-population-to-reach-20-million-by-2065-492429>.

their first child within a short time following marriage, and high fertility is encouraged.”<sup>98</sup> In most cases among the ultra-Orthodox, education is not a priority in the secular sense. Women have access to little education, but are often also required to be the bread-winner for the family care for the children while supporting the husband’s scholarly pursuits. This constitutes support for husbands who are academics, but only in matters of religious education. This spiritually minded, and extremely traditional religious family model is a recipe for personal poverty, especially when combined with a world view that rejects modernity and social progress.<sup>99</sup> Due to the growing demographic influence of the ultra-Orthodox community, the government is increasingly appealing for political support in coalition governments in the *Knesset*. These agreements with the ultra-Orthodox have led to disproportionate government subsidies and child-bonuses to the community in exchange for votes in a system dominated by coalition politics.<sup>100</sup> As the ultra-Orthodox community grows it will increasingly be able to pull on the political levers of government towards the sustainment of a unique lifestyle.

The result of the interaction of the ultra-Orthodox minority with the state of Israel is counter-intuitive as they can guarantee an ethnically Jewish state for the foreseeable future, but they simultaneously erode the Zionist nature of the state. As a growing minority group their economic interaction with the country will become more important with each passing year. As a sub-culture that does not value modernity or financial pursuits, the tendency for religious studies and high fertility rates means that the cost to the government in terms of services and tax

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<sup>98</sup> S.C. Heilman, and M. Friedman. “The *Haredim* in Israel.” *American Jewish-Israeli Relations*. (American Jewish Committee, New York: 1991).

<sup>99</sup> Dov Friedlander. “Fertility in Israel: Is the Transition to Replacement Level in Sight?” *United Nations Publications*. Retrieved 22 November 2017:

<http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/completingfertility/RevisedFriedlanderpaper.PDF> , 445.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 445.

exemptions far exceeds any of the minor contribution in economic development or workforce contributions.

Much of the ultra-orthodox community is openly anti-Zionist. This fact creates challenges that have yet to be articulated for future generations of Israelis. The reality of this world-view is that many ultra-orthodox do not view the State of Israel as legitimate, and those that do participate in political life as voters or politicians may act on self-serving or narrow political platforms. Rabbi Mordechai Mintzberg defined his community's "Century-long anti-Zionist struggle" against the State of Israel in an interview with a *Mondoweiss* reporter:

"Jews were expelled from ancient Israel because they had gone against God's commandments," the group believes. Jews are not allowed any form of a state until the coming of the Messiah, which is expected to occur following a Jewish "spiritual redemption" that would right the sins of the past. Zionists have used Judaism to further their political goals in the region and "conquer" the territory, Mintzberg told *Mondoweiss*, adding that a Jewish nationality is antithetical to the teachings of Judaism. He considers Zionism to be a "parasite" on the Jewish faith. According to his beliefs, Jews inside Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory should be living under Palestinian rule.<sup>101</sup>

Despite Israel's universal conscription laws, most ultra-orthodox men do not enter military service. They do not condone any service with or in proximity to secular Israeli women, and they are opposed to their entry into military service in general.

In this truly unusual context of a Jewish Zionist state, the importance of the IDF as one of the corner-stones of Israeli society was already established in the first chapter, and it requires a constant throughput of citizens to remain relevant.<sup>102</sup> This is not only a part of the practical military requirements for able-bodied people, but also as an institutional method of acculturating recruits to Israeli institutions and values as a 'rite of passage'. Universal conscription requires all

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<sup>101</sup> Jaclynn Ashly. "Clashing with the Jewish State: ultra-Orthodox Israelis who Reject Zionism." *Mondoweiss* (22 March 2018), Retrieved 23 March 2018: <http://mondoweiss.net/2018/03/clashing-orthodox-israelis/>.

<sup>102</sup> Schild, E.O. "On the Meaning of Military Service in Israel," in *Israel: Social Structure and Change*, ed. M. Curtis and M. Chertoff (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1977), 419-432.



citizens, men and women, to perform obligatory service starting at age 18. Males must complete three years and females two. Beyond the initial full time employment, all citizens are obligates to a maximum of 30 days service per year until their 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. Some allowances are currently made for conscientious objectors, who are permitted to work in equivalent non-military programmes.<sup>103</sup>

The result is that the traditionally secular and democratic nature of Israel is rapidly changing due to the high birth rate of the Israeli ultra-Orthodox community and the Arab communities as compared to secular Israelis. The Israeli *Ha'aretz* newspaper recently commented on these startling shifts and the impact on the Israeli democratic process. A bill is currently proposed in the *Knesset* with the purpose of removing mentions of democracy and the declaration of independence from all legislation. The bill's purpose is to set the groundwork for the elevation of the Jewish nature of the Israeli state over its democratic construct. In theory this means that the Supreme Court of Israel would have to rule in favour of Jewish interests and traditions over democratic process, a significant deviation from the Zionist approach.<sup>104</sup>

These demographic trends can be perceived as threats to the internal functioning of Israeli political institutions, but they may also change the way Israel is viewed by its current guarantor, the US. Eran Etzion, a diplomat and strategist who collaborates to write at the Israeli Middle East Institute, believes that Israel's ties to the US must continue, but he affirms that the current trends require diplomatic diversification. In evaluating the evolving US-Israel relationship he perceives that there is potential for a rapid shift in the paradigm of diplomatic

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<sup>103</sup> The International Institute of Strategic Studies estimates that during the IDF consists of approximately 35,500 regulars, 139,500 conscripts, and 430,000 reservists. *The Military Balance*, 1992-1993 (London: Brassey's, 1992), 111.

<sup>104</sup> Lahav Markov. "Israeli Ministers Approve Controversial Jewish State Bill." *The Jerusalem Post*. (7 May 2017), retrieved 10 March 2018: <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Ministers-approve-controversial-Jewish-State-bill-489972>.

relations currently enjoyed between the two countries. He perceives that much of the current US support to Israel is based on the American perception of Israeli democracy, and its rational-secular approach to governing. Etzion asserts that American administrations will gradually diverge in approaches. Etzion places emphasis on two key shifts in Israeli society that may have an impact on the reliability of American backing in the future: Israel's increasingly religious influences in government, and the consequent decline of the democratic process.<sup>105</sup>

### Decline of the 'People's Army'

Yagil Levy is a noted Israeli Political Sociologist who has been exploring Israeli civil-military relations and specifically the relationship between the IDF and society for almost two decades. His research and conclusions demonstrate that there is a growing rift between Israeli society and the cultural norms and expectations within the IDF. Following a widely publicized perception of a loss of confidence in the IDF following the Second Lebanon War in 2007, Levy published a detailed analysis of the so-called "motivation crisis" towards the IDF. The findings are important. Although there was a visceral societal response towards the perceived motivation crisis, Levy argues that this was representative of a larger decline in IDF legitimacy in Israeli Society since the early 1980s. He argues that the decline of the IDF's institutional power and particularly the participation of secular middle class in combat units are deeply rooted in social and cultural changes. A perception that casualty aversion, budget cuts, and political manipulation are now significant aspects in the IDF, is leading to the decline of the IDF as Israel's eternal 'People's Army.'<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Eran Etzion. "The next Administration and Recalibrating US-Israel Ties." *Middle East Institute* (Policy Focus Series: Vol. 9 2016).

<sup>106</sup> Yagil Levy. "Is there a Motivation Crisis in Military Recruitment in Israel?" *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 15 No.2 (Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 155-156.

It is also possible that the growing aversion to service in combat units is due to the changing nature of the perceived threats. The decline of Israel's traditionally conventional rivals, Egypt and Syria, means that the increased focus on domestic civil-policing and larger external threats like Iran are not enticing entry into Army units, while there is a perception of greater requirement for a professionalised air-force and space focused military. The professionalization of the IDF and the abandonment of the 'People's Army' construct is already a notion that is gaining traction in Israel. In his 2003 book *The Israeli Army: A Radical Proposal*, Ofer Shelah discusses the merits of an all-volunteer force in lieu of a universal service model.<sup>107</sup> Although received with mixed reviews, this type of discussion is gaining traction within the Israeli narrative, and if adopted would lead to a fundamental restructuring of Israeli society.

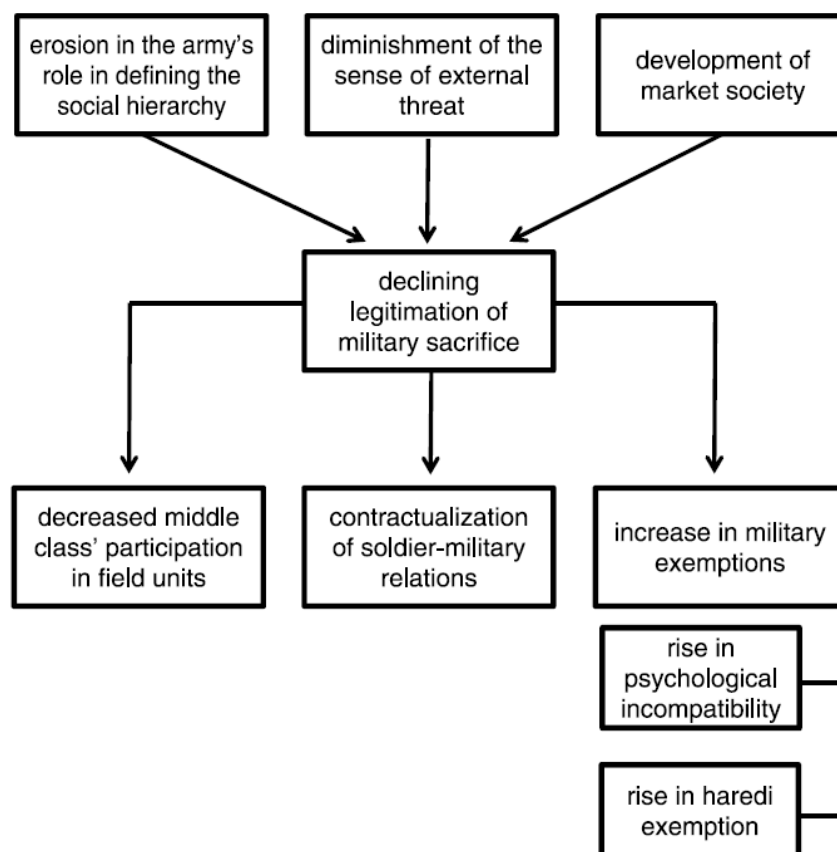
Levy asserts that the intersection of declining motivation with the loss of middle-class participation in IDF field units is only a symptom of larger socio-economic shifts, and the reluctance to entertain traditional self-sacrifice norms among segments of Israeli society. Beyond the perception of the security environment, the perception that the IDF is increasingly entertaining exceptions to military service have created a growing sense that military service is an optional institution. This is compounded by the continued projection of the IDF's combat units as a policing force in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, associated as a conflict against a largely non-militarized civilian adversary.

This politicisation of military missions in the national discussion has led to an increasing trend towards the 'political selection of missions.' This trend means that the government will only use military ground forces where there is a social consensus regarding the perceived legitimacy of the action. This trend is most evident in how the IDF uses its reserve units, which comprised of older men (25-40 years), who are active in Israeli society and are reluctant to report

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<sup>107</sup> Ofer Shelah, *The Israeli Army: A Radical Proposal*, (Or Yehuda, 2003) (Hebrew).

for duty if there is a perception of illegitimate political motivation.<sup>108</sup> In short, unlike earlier Israeli wars against neighboring states, the current domestic security environment diminishes the legitimacy of IDF actions.



**Figure 3.2 – The Character of Declining Motivation Towards IDF Service.**<sup>109</sup>

\*Note: *Haredi* is a Hebrew word for Orthodox Judaism. It is also widely associated with ultra-Orthodox movements that reject modern secular culture.

### IDF Dodging: Gaining Traction as a Societal Norm?

The movement to ‘dodge’ the national service draft is not limited to the ultra-Orthodox. There is growing movement among secular Israeli youth that no longer sees the IDF as a legitimate defence institution, but a ‘mechanism of occupation’ in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

<sup>108</sup> Moshe Tamir, *Undeclared War* (Tel Aviv, 2005), 10–11, 274 (Hebrew).

<sup>109</sup> Yagil Levy. “Is there a Motivation Crisis in Military Recruitment in Israel?” *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 15 No.2 (Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 137 “Figure 1”.

A group known as the *Mesarvot*<sup>110</sup> has gained increasing clout among some young Israelis in the last two-years due to a growing counter-culture against military service; specifically a loss of confidence in the legitimacy of the IDF, advocating an end to the Israeli presence in the West-Bank. *Mesarvot* is affiliated with the non-governmental agency known as the “War Resisters International” which advocates peace and cooperation through non-violent and non-military means. In a high-profile political stunt, in November 2016 two eighteen year old Israeli women who are members of the group, Tamar Ze’evi and Tamar Alon, publically refused the conscription order to enter into military service. They were subsequently imprisoned on a number of occasions and are engaging in an ongoing legal battle regarding the legitimacy of military service.<sup>111</sup> The group is active on social media and has gained traction in attracting both Israeli and international attention by leveraging an “International Day of Action.” The group is attempting demonstrate not only the institutional erosion of the IDF, but also the associated connection to the Israeli weapons industry:

Alongside military service, Israel is also dependant on arms for maintaining the occupation of Palestine. Israel buys weapons and components to use in the West Bank and Gaza, and Israeli arms manufacturers sell “battle proven” arms to 130 countries worldwide. Whoever sells weapons to Israel profits from the occupation. Whoever buys Israeli weapons has a strong interest in maintaining it...The international day of action is organized by *Mesarvot*; a network of Israeli organizations, groups and individuals who support political Conscientious Objectors, War Resisters International, Refuser Solidarity Network, Association France Palestine Solidarity and Connection.ev.<sup>112</sup>

This type of challenges to the institutional legitimacy of the IDF is viewed by the government as a serious threat to the deepest constructs of Israeli society, and the future health of the institutions that are designed to preserve the Israeli identity.

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<sup>110</sup> Note: *Mesarvot* translates to “refusers.” This is in derived in the plural-feminine, in a nod to the case of the Ze’evi & Alon case which is continuing to be adjudicated in the Israeli courts.

<sup>111</sup> No Author. “Refuse to Occupy – 1<sup>st</sup> December International Day of Action.” War Resisters International (23 Nov 2016). Retrieved 12 October 2017 from: <https://www.wri-irg.org/en/story/2016/refuse-occupy-1st-december-international-day-action>.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

While groups like *Mesarvot* likely represents a relative fringe within the Israeli political left, there is significant evidence that the IDF does increase its institutional trust during wars, or when there is a growing concern about a security crisis. The notable exceptions to this observation are the 2006 Second Lebanon War named Operation “Cast-Lead,” and the ongoing security operations in the Palestinian Territories which reduce public trust in the IDF.<sup>113</sup> This suggests a correlation between of confidence and support for the IDF from the Israeli public in times of a perceived security threat, and an appreciable decline in support when dealing with more benign domestic or border security issues.

According to a 2011 poll regarding perceptions of confidence in Israeli institution, the IDF scored the highest as compared against others: conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute: “93 percent of the Israeli public expressed confidence in the IDF compared to 84 percent in the president, 64 percent in the Supreme Court, 59 percent in the police, and 36 percent in the political parties.”<sup>114</sup> Yet despite the steady level of confidence in the IDF’s ability to defend the country, there is evidence of a growing sentiment within Israeli society that the IDF should no longer be citizen-military. This growing view supports the notion that the IDF should transition to an all-volunteer force made up of career professional soldiers. In asking the question: “Should Israel move to a more volunteer, professional army and away from conscription?” In February 2008 15.3% believed that conscription should be cancelled, compared to a slowly growing 21.1% in 2013. In 2013, when asked if the IDF was an “Army of the People,” 25.4% responded that the description was “not appropriate.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Roni Tiargan-Orr & Meytal Eran-Jona. “The Israeli Public’s Perception of the IDF: Stability and Change.” *Armed Forces & Society*. (Sage Publication, 2015), 12-14.

<sup>114</sup> Tamar Hermann et al. *Democracy Index 2011* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2011).

<sup>115</sup> The Evans Program in Mediation and Conflict Resolution. “The Peace Index 2013.” *The Israel Democracy Institute* (University of Tel-Aviv, The Guttman Center: 28 October 2013).

In short, the conclusion that can be drawn from all of these changing perceptions about the institutional importance of the IDF is that the Israeli population feels less threatened than previous times in Israeli history. This is leading to a changing perception of security and the role of the IDF. Although perhaps counter-intuitive, it is politically valuable among some political parties for a threat to be felt, as this will fuel political aspirations and sustain institutional values surrounding the IDF.

## PART II: NETANYAHU'S SECURITIZATION OF IRAN

The following will describe PM Netanyahu's securitization of the Iranian issue as a means to justify extraordinary measures, and to safeguard Israeli institutions in harmony with its current strategic culture. As described earlier, Securitization theory is a product of the Copenhagen School of International Relations, and can be recognized by a number of actions, but notably the 'speech act' which is comprised of three principal characteristics. A securitizing 'speech act' needs to follow a specific rhetorical structure which fulfill three criteria: Firstly it is a discursive process by an actor with authority, claiming that a referent object is existentially threatened. Secondly the actor demands the right to take extraordinary countermeasures to deal with that the threat. Finally, the actor convinces an audience that the use of 'rule-breaking behavior' is justified to counter the threat.<sup>116</sup> In short, by 'securitizing' an issue, it is dramatized as a subject of supreme priority in a scripted way that will allow for extreme measures to be taken towards survival.<sup>117</sup>

In this next portion it will be argued that PM Netanyahu has securitized Iran. It will be demonstrated that he has employed the 'speech act' and has set the conditions to take extreme

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<sup>116</sup> Barry Buzan, Wæver Ole, & de Wilde, Jaap. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

‘rule breaking’ measures if required. It will also be argued that NPM Netanyahu has diverged from the Copenhagen School’s traditional definition of securitization, as he has not only targeted the Israeli population, but he has also targeted two key foreign audiences regarding Iran: the American electorate, and the leaders of the Sunni-Arab world.

The domestic securitizing of Iran leads naturally to three intersecting ‘lines of threat’ that require different Israeli responses. These Iranian threats to Israel are presented as: nuclear, proxy aggression, and domestically through influence and control over the Palestinian Fatah and Hamas. The intersection of securitizing elements constructs a particular view of the regional conflicts and allows the Israeli government wide ranging substantiation for any potential actions, while diverting domestic attention from domestic political issues.

#### ‘Speech Act’ at the United Nations General Assembly

Discussions regarding international security and debates surrounding the seriousness of specific international threats are traditionally the purview of security agencies, discussed in a deliberate manner. On 27 September 2012, Benjamin Netanyahu spoke to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly about the threat of Iran to the international community, in a discourse that would later be called the “Red Line” speech. The following excerpts demonstrate key ideas presented in the speech:

For nearly a decade, the international community has tried to stop the Iranian nuclear program with diplomacy. Well, that hasn’t worked. Iran uses diplomatic negotiations as a means to buy time to advance its nuclear program... The international community has tried sanctions with Iran. Under the leadership of President (Barack) Obama, the international community has passed some of the strongest sanctions to date. I want to thank the governments represented here that have joined in this effort. It’s had an effect... but we must face the truth: sanctions have not stopped Iran’s nuclear program either. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, during the last year alone, Iran has doubled the number of centrifuges in its underground nuclear facility in Qom. So at this late hour, there’s only one way to peacefully prevent Iran from getting atomic bombs, and that’s by placing a clear red line on Iran’s nuclear weapons program.



Red lines don't lead to war. Red lines prevent war. Just look at NATO's charter. It made clear that an attack on one member country would be considered an attack on all, and NATO's red line helped keep the peace in Europe for nearly half a century. President Kennedy set a red line during the Cuban missile crisis. That red line also prevented war and helped preserve the peace for decades. In fact, it's the failure to place red lines that's often invited aggression. If the Western powers had drawn clear red lines during the 1930s, I believe they would have stopped Nazi aggression, and World War II might have been avoided.<sup>118</sup>

Speaking in such a candid manner at the UN General Assembly is not uncommon, but General Assembly speeches are not generally viewed as venues to make serious progress toward diplomatic objectives; rather they are often used to promote a perspective.

### Securitizing Iran: The American Audience

Although this speech was delivered at the UN General assembly, there was no expectation from Israel that any decisive action would be taken by the UN. In fact, Israel's contempt for the UN is notorious, given the Israeli perception that the UN is hostile to Israel and partial to the Palestinian Authority. In a separate speech to the UN General Assembly, on 22 September 2016, PM Netanyahu describes the Israeli sentiment towards the authority of the UN by stating that "the UN began as a moral force, has become a moral farce."<sup>119</sup> He also quipped about the imbalanced approach to Israel's human rights record in the same speech: "what about the joke called the UN Human Right Council? Which each year condemns Israel more than all the countries of the world combined."<sup>120</sup>

The famous "Red Line" speech of 2012 used rudimentary props to demonstrate the seriousness and imminence of the nuclear threat. Using a sensational diagram of a cartoon bomb was not intended as a serious explanation of the security situation to delegates in the General

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<sup>118</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu. "Key portions of Israeli PM Netanyahu UN Speech on Iran." *Reuters* (UN General Assembly: 27 September 2012). Retrieved 14 Dec 2017: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-israel-text/key-portions-of-israeli-pm-netanyahus-u-n-speech-on-iran-idUSBRE88Q1RR20120927>.

<sup>119</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu. "Israel – PM Addresses General Debate, 71<sup>st</sup> Session." United Nations (United Nations Web TV, 22 September 2016), Retrieved 7 Jan 2018: <http://webtv.un.org/search/israel-prime-minister-addresses-general-debate-71st-session/5137166140001/?term=netanyahu&lan=English&sort=date>.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

Assembly; rather it played directly to the American domestic news cycle as a ‘sound bite’ and headline photograph to demonstrate the immense threat that Iran posed to Israel, and most importantly, to the United States. PM Netanyahu purposefully used this opportunity to securitize Iran with the American electorate by invoking narratives that are particular to the US. Firstly, the reference to NATO Article 5 ‘collective defence’ alludes to the Cold War dynamics, and the threat of nuclear war. Specifically referencing President Kennedy and the seriousness of the Cuban Missile Crisis is a deliberate appeal to the American concerns about a threat to the US mainland. These references are known within the America electorate, but not considered as seriously in non-American circles. The specific references to the failure of diplomatic efforts, and the shortness of time invoked the potential requirement for ‘rule breaking’ or extreme actions against Iran.

Arguably, this approach did resonate with the American electorate as quotes and photos from the speech were widely publicized, in a modern America that is very supportive of Israel, and PM Netanyahu in particular.<sup>121</sup> The credibility and impact of an Israeli appeal to the American electorate about a common security threat to both Israel and indirectly to the US cannot be understated. In a 2015 survey of American adults, when asked to “please name a national or world leader that you admire most,” Benjamin Netanyahu was overall the third most cited name after Barack Obama and Ronald Reagan.<sup>122</sup> When the surveyed Americans identified as ‘Evangelical Christian’ PM Netanyahu was most frequently named, and when Americans identified as ‘Republican’ PM Netanyahu was tied with Ronald Reagan as most admired world

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<sup>121</sup> Michael Martinez. “Netanyahu asks UN to draw ‘red line’ on Iran’s nuclear plans. *CNN* (CNN World: 28 September 2012), Retrieved 30 November 2017: <https://www.cnn.com/2012/09/27/world/new-york-unga/index.html>.

<sup>122</sup> Steven Kull, Evan Lewis, Clay Ramsay, et al. “American Attitudes toward the Middle East and Israel: A public opinion poll by Shibley Telhami.” *Middle East Policy* (Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, 4-10 November 2015).

leader.<sup>123</sup> These statistics demonstrate American cultural values and tendencies to support Israel, but most importantly they demonstrate the personal ‘brand power’ that Netanyahu has developed in the US.



**Figure 3.3 – CNN headline news following the Netanyahu 2012 speech to the UN General Assembly.**<sup>124</sup>

The concept that the leader of Israel can securitize Iran in the US is interesting as it refutes the idea that securitization is a domestic interaction between a government and its people. If such a securitization of the American electorate is even possible, what would be the value? Jones & Murphy assert that Israel has historically made significant efforts to attract America as an ally and regional partner through an extensive image campaign, and has met with great

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* This dramatic photo was pictured across most US news agencies and demonstrated a simple portrayal of the Iranian dangers to American constituents.

success. Israel is the single largest recipient of US aid, totalling \$65 Billion from 1948-1996, and the recipient of significant military equipment and technology. Israel's qualitative military advantage over adversaries is directly linked to its ability to maintain American support.<sup>125</sup> Israel cannot afford to lose American support and preferential backing, but at the same time Israel wishes to retain its ability to act unilaterally in the region. In 1981 after the attack on the Iraqi Osirik nuclear facility President Reagan temporarily stopped the delivery of F-16 fighter jets to Israel as a means to discipline Israel's unilateral action and 'rule-breaking' behaviour.<sup>126</sup> Ultimately the deliveries resumed very quickly because the American electorate was willing to accept that Israel's 'rule breaking' and unilateral military action was acceptable because an Iraqi nuclear weapon would be unacceptable.

Is PM Netanyahu attempting to securitize Iran with the American electorate in preparation for future Israeli military actions against Iran? To do so would be acting against the advice of many senior Israeli security experts, but it cannot be discounted given Israel's history of unilateral action in such instances against both Iraq and Syria. What is certain is that should Israel take extreme steps to attack Iran unilaterally, Israel cannot afford to lose the support of the American electorate that enables its military funding and the assurance of its military qualitative edge.

#### Securitizing Iran: The Arab Audience

A review of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs media and press releases shows just how consistent this messaging is in diplomatic circles. As an example, on 25 Jan 2018 the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs pressroom released four separate stories about PM Netanyahu's engagements with foreign leaders at the Davos Economic Conference. These releases discussed

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<sup>125</sup> Clive Jones & Emma Murphy. *Israel: Challenges to Identity, Democracy, and the State*. (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 114.

<sup>126</sup> Lou Canon & Les Whittington. "Reagan Halts F-16s for Israel." *The Washington Post*. (21 July 1981).

meetings with the leaders of France, the US, Germany, and lumped together Canada, Belgium & Switzerland. Each release specifically quotes the PM regarding discussions on security stance towards Iran.<sup>127</sup> Similarly the Foreign Ministry Press room mentions the discussion of “Iran aggression” with Foreign Minister Gabriel of Germany on 31 January 2018, and “Iran in Syria and Lebanon” with President Putin of Russia on 1 February 2018.<sup>128</sup> The prominence of the place of Iran in Israeli foreign ministry discussions is so prevalent that a review of Israeli diplomatic interactions between the periods of December 2017 to March 2018, Iran is mentioned as a threat in virtually every case.

Taking the Israeli demonstration of the Iranian threat a step further, the Israeli Foreign Ministry has weaponized its websites to deliver specific messaging to different readers. For example, in the English language site Iran is the only nation to have a dedicated page in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Policy site.<sup>129</sup> The Foreign Ministry site demonstrates the use of specific messaging towards particular readers based on language. The site has a deliberate language selection which includes English, Hebrew, Russian, Arabic, and Farsi; however, each language selection provides different language specific articles and information. For example, the English language site contains articles dedicated to exemplifying the Iran threat, while the Hebrew language page mostly supports consular and administrative information for traveling Israelis.

The Israeli demonization of Iran within the International community does serve other purposes beyond gaining Western support for Israeli security needs. The Securitization of Iran also appeals to Saudi Arabia, a nation which views Iran as an even greater threat than Israel.

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<sup>127</sup> Israel: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (Press Room 24-25 January 2018) Retrieved 2 Feb 2018: <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2018/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Israel: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (Foreign Policy: Iran) Retrieved 2 Feb 2018 <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/Pages/default.aspx>.

When PM Netanyahu has an opportunity to interact with a Saudi diplomat, he use the opportunity to present the Iranian Regime as a threat to the entire region, and to demonstrate the Israeli resolve against Iran. The recent Munich Security Conference was an exceptional example of such efforts, in that Iran was first rebuked by PM Netanyahu, followed almost immediately by an equally passionate rebuke from the Saudi Foreign Minister, Al-Jubeir. In his discourse at the Munich Security Conference PM Netanyahu specifically appealed to the Arab and Muslim World in the struggle against Iran.

This is in my judgement is the greatest threat to our world. Not just to Israel, not just to our Arab neighbors, not just to Muslims far and wide...because once armed with nuclear weapons Iran's aggression will be unchecked and it will encompass the entire world. Look at what they are doing before they have nuclear weapons. Imagine what they will do later if God forbid they have them.<sup>130</sup>

The growing Saudi Arabian fear of Iran and the simultaneous cooling of hostilities towards Israel is perhaps a sign of a rapidly changing geo-political landscape. At the recent Munich Security Conference on 18 February 2018, the Saudi-Arabian Foreign Minister Al-Jubeir addressed the delegates, stating that the “problems in the region began with the Kumauni Revolution in 1979.”<sup>131</sup> Al-Jubeir continued to describe Hezbollah as the world’s most dangerous terrorist organization in the world, sponsored by Iran.<sup>132</sup> These statements are important as in previous decades Saudi Arabia traditionally depicted Israel as the destabilizing actor in the region by invoking the Palestinian conflict. Such examples of passive cooperation in any area between Israel and Saudi Arabia are unparalleled, but there even more tangible demonstrations of the warming relationship between Israel and Saudi as the travel ban of Israel bound flights over

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<sup>130</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu. “Statement by Israeli Prime Minister.” *Munich Security Conference* (Munich: 18 February 2018), Retrieved 19 Feb 2018: <https://www.securityconference.de/en/media-library/munich-security-conference-2018/video/statement-by-benjamin-netanyahu-followed-by-qa/filter/video/>, 6:27-7:05.

<sup>131</sup> Abel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir. “Statement by Saudi Foreign Minister.” *Munich Security Conference* (Munich: 18 February 2018), Retrieved 19 Feb 2018: <https://www.securityconference.de/en/media-library/munich-security-conference-2018/video/statement-by-abel-bin-ahmed-al-jubeir-followed-by-qa/filter/video/>

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

Saudi airspace was finally lifted in March 2018. CNN reported on this development as “Air India completes historic first flight to Israel over Saudi Skies.”<sup>133</sup>

Israel and Saudi Arabia are not aligned, but perhaps Iran is a nation that poses similar threats to both countries, leading to an opening for some passive diplomatic cooperation that would have otherwise been impossible. Iran also targets Saudi Arabia with its proxies, and the threats to Saudi are similar to those experienced in Northern Israel. For instance, on 11 April 2018 Al-Jazeera reported that Riyadh was attacked by *Burkan* 2-H Scud type missiles that emanated from Iranian backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.<sup>134</sup> This tactic resembles the approach often used by Iranian backed *Hezbollah* on Israel’s northern frontier.

Securitizing Iran with a Saudi audience is more complicated and less apparent than the efforts made to securitize the American electorate. Chiefly it is extremely unlikely that the Israelis and the Saudis will be seen to cooperate openly regarding any threat, not even Iran. Secondly, any normalization in the relationship does not constitute friendship, but a mutual understanding that Iran poses a threat to both nations. So how can Israel benefit from such an understanding? A competing distraction away from the unresolved and sensitive Palestinian issue is welcome within the Israeli diplomatic community. If Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations passively cooperate with Israel in their condemnation of Iran, it allows a shift of attention to a common external threat.

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<sup>133</sup> Rishi Lyengar. “Air India completes historic first flight to Israel over Saudi Skies.” *CNN Money*. (23 March 2018) Retrieved 24 March 2018: <http://money.cnn.com/2018/03/23/news/india/air-india-first-flight-delhi-tel-aviv-saudi-arabia/index.html>.

<sup>134</sup> No author. “Yemen’s Houthi Rebels Fire Ballistic Missile at Saudi Capital: Saudi air-defences intercept missile fired at Riyadh, videos published on social media purportedly show.” *Al Jazeera* (11 April 2018). Retrieved 11 April 2018: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/yemen-houthi-rebels-fire-ballistic-missile-saudi-capital-180411153418562.html>.

### Securitizing Iran: The Domestic Israeli Audience

Securitizing Iran in the Domestic Israeli context is the most important aspect of PM Netanyahu's approach. There is no discernible single "speech act" which can be invoked to demonstrate the application of Iranian securitization, rather it has been a consistent fixture of the *Likud* policy for nearly a decade. There are numerous examples that demonstrate the Prime Minister's interaction with the populace in the securitization of Iran but if there is a single quotable example, it was at the April 2018 Holocaust memorial at *Yad Vashem* in Jerusalem. On this site which evokes the victims of the Holocaust, and faces across from Mount Herzl, the tomb of the father of modern Zionism, Netanyahu gave the following speech on Israeli national television. In context this speech is comparing the actions of the Iranian regime to the preparatory actions of Nazi Germany in the late 1930s:

We are thwarting the aggression at its core. These are not empty words. We are backing them with actions. Our policy can be summarized in three words (in Hebrew): Strength in the face of aggression. Strength in Defence; strength in deterrence; strength in offensive action. Strength against all those who threaten us. Today there is a radical regime which is threatening the entire world. This regime declares that it intends to destroy us, the Jewish state...I have a message to the rulers of Iran: Do not test the resolve of the State of Israel! (Translated from Hebrew)<sup>135</sup>

Clearly from an intersubjective perspective this speech resonates with the Israeli public as it resonates with philosophical beliefs about the Israeli national context. It confirms a connection to the fundamental characteristics of the Israeli strategic culture. Namely the Netanyahu speech warns that the State of Israel is the focus of an existential threat from Iran. Within the discourse PM Netanyahu states that "these are not empty words" and "we are backing them with actions" demonstrating that extraordinary measures may be needed to remove the threat.

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<sup>135</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu. "Netanyahu at Yad Vashem: Iran – do not test the Resolve of the State of Israel." *Channel 10 TV*. (12 April 2018). Retrieved 13 April 2018: <https://www.10.tv/news/160222>, 3:44-5:00, 5:52-6:00.



In the domestic setting securitizing Iran can be viewed as a distraction from the many challenges to the political status quo and facing by the Jewish State from within. An Iranian threat is a tantalizing concept because it is simultaneously nuclear but also offers an irregular nexus through the use of proxies that engage in direct action against Israeli territory. Beyond this, Iranian meddling in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict serves to undermine the Palestinian position for many Israelis, while unifying the Israeli electorate sufficiently toward the need to secure the Palestinian territories. Iran poses challenges that must be addressed by all levels of the defence institutions, providing ample work for the intelligence agencies and the IDF.

Securitizing Iran could legitimize the use of military force in an extreme situation, but in more practical terms it can also provide substantiation for the continued development of a robust conventional military. National support and belief in the value of the institutions is critical to maintain the very expensive qualitative military edge. If the electorate is concerned about a foreign threat it will likely not clearly see the national challenges at their doorstep.

## CONCLUSION

Attempting to understand the interaction between Israel and Iran in the regional context this essay asked: Why does Israel treat Iran as the most significant threat to its national security?

It was argued that traditional threats to Israel's existence have been eclipsed by emerging domestic societal challenges: In an effort to ensure the domestic relevance of the Jewish-Zionist state, Benjamin Netanyahu has entered into a strategy of the deliberate securitization of Iran, which serves to safeguard Israeli institutions, while uniting the Israeli national-will and institutions against a definable external threat.

To address the complex nature of this question, this essay examined the relationship between Israel and Iran in three chapters that presented dissimilar but complimentary perspectives through the following approaches: Historical, objective, and intersubjective.

In the first chapter an objective lens was employed to examine the Iranian military forces and their strategies as they relate to not only Israel, but the entire region. This was established by gaining an understanding of the Iranian use of conventional forces for defensive domestic action, and their preference for irregular 'proxy' campaigns that deter regional actors and the United States (US) from acting against their interests. It was also demonstrated that there is a strong consensus within the American and Israeli security communities that Iran is a rational actor.

In the second chapter an historical analysis of the key Israeli national 'myths' and institutions led to an understanding of the Israeli security culture. This was demonstrated by defining an Israeli identity that was formed based upon a Zionist ideology that reveres the Israel Defence Force (IDF) as its most important institution. This reliance on the IDF is underpinned by a Holocaust legacy that assumes existential vulnerability, and therefore accepts the use of extraordinary military means to assure survival. There is ample evidence that Israel has fused its

strategic culture and foreign policy even recently with the application of the Begin Doctrine. This led to military action against both Iraq and Syria.

Finally, in the third chapter this essay returned to the Israeli domestic environment to examine how intersubjective interactions impacted Israeli convictions and institutions. This final chapter initially examined domestic developments that were challenging the core institutions and political assumptions of the Israeli identity and security culture. This was substantiated by specifically addressing the challenges of the socially declining stature of the IDF, future demographic changes that will undermine political parties, and the rise of the ultra-Orthodox minority. All of these elements combine to challenge the Zionist ideology. It was reasoned that PM Netanyahu has securitized Iran indirectly serves to reinvigorate the national institutions, while ensuring that the IDF maintains a central role. Further, it was argued that PM Netanyahu has not only securitized Iran with the Israeli populace, but is going beyond the Copenhagen School's definition of securitization by also explicitly targeting non-Israeli populations, specifically: the American electorate and leaders within the Arab World.

The examination of this complex situation using three different lenses has demonstrated that all positions carry some weight in defining the Israeli interaction with Iran. On one hand, the objective approach of this paper demonstrated that Iran is likely a rational actor in the region. This implies that a nuclearized Iran would only use nuclear weapons for the purposes of deterrence, a deterrence that is principally aimed at the US. Despite this consensus from the military and security establishments, political actors have pursued the Iranian threat narrative.

Regardless of the Iranian intentions, there is a strong indication that PM Netanyahu has securitized Iran to produce two diverging effects. On the one hand he has established that there may be circumstances that would require Israel to take extraordinary military action to quell an

Iranian threat. It is likely that if PM Netanyahu took unilateral military action against Iran tomorrow, that large segments of the Israeli population would accept this action as necessary. Secondly, the external nature of the Iranian threat facilitates narrative of the strategic culture and contributes to a national unifying purpose for institutions like the IDF and the Zionist ideology.

All this said, in examining the motives for securitizing Iran, it is difficult to discern if PM Netanyahu truly believes that Iran poses an existential threat to the State of Israel, or if this is a convenient distraction from political and economic pursuits that are rarely emphasized. In a fairly candid interview in March 2018, Netanyahu described his government's approach to developing Israeli power, without discussing Iran.

This is the triangle: it's economic power, security power, (which) gives you diplomatic power. That will take a few years to transcend into the votes of this archaic body called the General Assembly of the United Nations. Or some of the other bodies, that will take a while until they get the news. But it's happening all over the world. Israel has never been stronger militarily, economically, diplomatically; it's a very deliberate policy.<sup>136</sup>

Netanyahu freely admits that Israel has never been stronger. He hopes that the continued development of military and economic power will lead to a more prominent international role for Israel and increased diplomatic clout. The growing relevance of the Israeli Weapons Industries in the world markets, and Israel's normalization with regional actors is a significant stride toward strengthening the Israeli position. The securitization of Iran with the American electorate was an interesting concept to explore as it demonstrated the enormous political influence that Israel possesses in the US. Historically, Israeli unilateral actions have had little impact on American support, cementing Israel's ability to remain a regional military super-power.

As a concluding remark, this essay approached the topic from three perspectives in an attempt to understand why Israel views Iran as its most significant threat. These three approaches

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<sup>136</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu. "Netanyahu Opens up about his history with America." *Life, Liberty & Levin* (Fox News, 11 Mar 2018). Retrieved 12 March 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNqQ2IHBR0w>, 13:18.

are informative, but they are insufficient to explain all of the complexities of the interaction between Israel and Iran. This essay largely valued certain perspectives emanating from Israeli and American academic and security establishments, while relying on PM Netanyahu's interaction with Israeli societal trends to provide an indication of Israeli values and strategic culture. This provides a partial understanding of why Israel is approaching Iran in this manner, and how it might react in the future. To expand on the complexities of the Israeli-Iranian relationship would require further analysis that investigates the perspective of the Iranian strategic culture, and an understanding of the Iranian regime. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine the Israeli use and support of proxies against Iran. An examination of the Israeli influence within the Kurdish *Peshmerga*, and influences in Azerbaijan would demonstrate that although less publicized, Israel is engaging Iran in an irregular campaign of its own.

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