

Israel's National Security Amidst Unrest in the Arab World

Despite all the optimism accompanying the uprisings of 2011, the Arab Middle East remains a stagnant region in deep socio-political crisis with little chance for positive change anytime soon. The current regimes may stay in power or get replaced by new dictatorships, moderate or radical. Either way, in the near future, weak states will continue to grapple with domestic problems and the direction of their foreign policies. For good reason, this situation has Israeli leaders worried about the implications for their country's national security. The changing regional balance of power favors Turkey and Iran, both of whom encourage radical elements in the region, not Israel, while the seeming decline in U.S. clout has negatively affected both the Arab-Israeli peace process and Israel's deterrent power.

Israeli society has displayed great resilience facing national security challenges in the past. Most Israelis understand that they live in a rough neighborhood which has the potential to become even more brutish rather quickly. The good news is that, although the regional security environment has deteriorated, Israel remains a strong state. The power differential between Israel and its neighbors is larger than ever, which will allow Israel to meet most challenges on its own. But make no mistake: Israel is facing greater regional isolation, more terror, threats to the sea lanes as well as energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the prospects of a nuclear Iran.

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The Arab Middle East remains a stagnant region in deep socio-political crisis.

The Deteriorating Neighborhood

As the stability within the Arab states in Israel's neighborhood has been shaken, the regional balance of power is favoring non-Arab powers. In parallel, the ability of the United States to stem these tides has declined. Despite over a century of Western cultural influence, the Arab world has failed to modernize in many respects. No Arab state

has evolved into a stable democracy. Several UN reports point out that the Arab world lags behind much of the rest of the world in civil liberties, political rights, education, gender equality, and economic productivity.¹ This deplorable state of affairs is the root cause of discontent and frustration fueling mass protest. However, absent a liberal-democratic political culture, mass mobilization in pursuit of political change is not necessarily conducive to democracy.

Heralding the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia or the "Lotus Revolution" in Egypt as movements of popular discontent leading to democracy reflects a misunderstanding of complex political processes. Indeed, the hope for a more open and just political system was hijacked in free elections in Tunisia and in Egypt, as well as previously in Lebanon by Islamists whose commitment to democracy is nil. The Islamist political forces are the best organized alternative to the current dictators of the Arab states and have the best chance of gaining power, whether by elections or revolutionary means.

The increased Islamist influence in Arab states may generate regimes with varieties of revolutionary zeal. Unfortunately for their neighbors, revolutionary regimes generally tend to display warlike behavior in the immediate years after taking power.² Even if the weak democratic elements in the Arab world, despite all odds, succeed in generating a democratization process, these states would still be a danger to their neighbors. While a democratization process is laudable, the historical record suggests that states in transition to a stable democracy are more war-prone than autocratic regimes.³ Neither Islamic revolutionary regimes nor fledgling democracies portend well for regional stability.

The potential for further regional deterioration and the risk of additional states being torn by turmoil and civil war, or sliding into "failed state" status, has increased significantly.⁴ Such a scenario exists in Libya and Yemen, and the disintegration of Iraq and Syria is not far-fetched. The Arab world's unrest, Islamization, and potential for fragmentation testify to its socio-political crisis and decline.

The Regional Balance of Power

The upheavals in the Arab world accentuate the rise of the non-Arab powers in the Middle East—Iran, Israel, and Turkey. The further weakening of the most important Arab states—Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, which face serious domestic challenges—also affects the regional balance of power. So far, Saudi Arabia and Jordan have weathered the crisis,

but they have to pay great attention to their domestic affairs, too. With the exception of Bahrain, which required a Saudi military intervention to stabilize, the Arab Gulf monarchic regimes seem to have greater political resilience than their republican sisters.⁵ In any case, the need to focus on domestic problems will reduce the ability of Arab states to build national power, project power beyond their borders, and combat Iranian and/or Turkish influence in the region.

Iran and Turkey, both of whom are aligned with radical Islamist forces, have welcomed the “Arab Spring,” particularly in Egypt.⁶ Both are interested in weakening the Arabs, their historic regional rivals, and are vying for regional primacy. An Egypt beleaguered with domestic problems has little energy to focus on countering Iran’s and Turkey’s aspirations. Moreover, the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt suits the ideological inclinations of Iran’s and Turkey’s rulers. At the eastern end of the Arab world, the United States’ exit from Iraq has opened the door for Iran, as well as for Turkey, to meddle in the affairs of another important Arab state, albeit a weakened one. Turkey actively encourages the Sunni Islamist opposition to the Alawite regime in Syria,⁷ whose fall would be a blow to Iran. The instability in Syria has focused attention on the historic Ottoman–Persian rivalry in the region, signaling the dilution of Arab power and decreased Western influence.

The decline in the relative power of Egypt enhances the leadership role of Saudi Arabia as the only Arab state with the ability to somewhat contain Iranian and Turkish influence. Not surprisingly, the balancing game is complex, especially with recent Saudi–Turkish cooperation to end Bashar Assad’s rule in Syria, an Iranian ally. While the Saudis fund much of the opposition to the Alawite regime, Turkey serves as the opposition’s base on Syria’s border. The successful Saudi intervention to protect the Sunni regime in Bahrain is another example of curtailing Iranian influence. In this role, Saudi Arabia is a tacit ally of Israel.

Yet, the pro-Western alliance in the Middle East, of which Israel is part, has been generally weakened. Most significantly, both Cairo and Ankara are diluting their pro-American orientation, and cooling their relations with Jerusalem.

The ability of the United States to stem these tides has declined.

Islamist political forces have the best chance of gaining power.

The once favorable regional balance of power, from Israel's perspective, is deteriorating.

The Decline of American Clout

In 2011, developments in the Middle East underscored the erosion of the U.S. position in the region. In part, the empowerment of the mobs in the Middle East inevitably strengthens anti-American elements. The

United States and its ally Israel are the favored scapegoats in the region, reflecting deeply rooted anti-Western attitudes by frustrated multitudes that yearn for the long-gone Muslim Golden Age.⁸ In part, this erosion has been due to the Obama administration's deliberate "multilateral retrenchment . . . designed to curtail the United States' overseas commitments, restore its standing in the world, and shift burdens onto global partners."⁹

More to the point, it is also partly due to the administration's confused, contradictory, and inconsistent responses to unfolding events. First, there was a quick demand to oust Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, an action unequivocally viewed in the region as a betrayal of a loyal friend and ally.¹⁰ Then, U.S. criticism of Saudi Arabia's military intervention in support of the Sunni ruling Al-Khalifa family in Bahrain raised eyebrows in Arab capitals.¹¹

Similarly, many Middle Easterners were puzzled by Washington's response to Muammar Qaddafi's domestic troubles in Libya, leaving the initiative for his removal to America's Western European allies. Deserting Qaddafi, who cooperated with the West by giving up his arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in 2003, was a surprise. Washington failed to grasp that this showed Middle East leaders that it is better to stick with WMD programs in order to prevent a Western military intervention. In contrast, the brutal suppression of the local opposition by the anti-American regimes in Tehran and Damascus elicited only mild and very late expressions of criticism from the Obama administration.

Middle Eastern leaders have now seen a U.S. retreat from Iraq and Afghanistan, engagement (or appeasement, in Middle Eastern eyes) of America's enemies Iran and Syria, and the desertion of friendly rulers. This strengthens the general perception of a weak and confused U.S. foreign policy.

The Strategic Implications for Israel

Israeli perceptions of current Middle East trends are hardly positive.¹² Israel remains a small state with limited resources and diplomatic leverage to shape its environment. It cannot attain what Professor Arnold Wolfers called "milieu

goals”—shaping the environment in which it operates.¹³ Israel carries some weight in the international politics of the Middle East, but it has to adjust to regional and global developments, rather than try to shape them. It must focus on emerging threats and prepare adequate responses to parry them.

Israel has built a large and sophisticated intelligence apparatus, but was surprised by the 2011 events in the Middle East. Israel's intelligence analysts and academic experts predicted a smooth transfer of power in Egypt. Similarly, Israel failed to gauge the strength of the opposition in Syria. This is a stark reminder of the potential for rapid change and uncertainty in the Middle East. Strategic surprises, as improbable as they are, still can happen. This requires preparations for a variety of scenarios, particularly those of the worst-case kind.¹⁴ Four, in particular, raise concerns.

The risk of additional states sliding into “failed state” status has increased significantly.

Regional Isolation

The growing power of Islamist circles and the damaged status of the United States in the Middle East have negatively affected the peace process among Israel and its neighbors. This process, characterized by a reluctant acceptance of Israel as a *fait accompli* in the region, primarily resulted from the gradual realization that Israeli power (and that of its American sponsor) meant the country could not be eradicated by force. With the Islamists on the rise, that is no longer the case. Another factor that helped bring Arab actors to the negotiating table was the vital diplomatic role played by the United States in narrowing party differences and in taking measures to reduce Israeli anxieties when the country took risks for peace. The Obama administration has been less capable than its predecessors in inducing Arab states to sign peace treaties with Israel; it also is less credible in making attempts to compensate Israel for concessions which entail security risks—the Obama administration is more constrained economically and its willingness to intervene abroad is reduced.

Today, Israel's peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan are under great strain as anti-Israeli domestic forces in the respective countries, particularly the Islamists, become more influential and vocal.¹⁵ Even if the vector of Egyptian politics does not change dramatically in the near future, the current regime is weaker than its predecessor and probably doesn't want to be burdened with the Israeli relationship. This means that the “cold peace” might become even chillier. Similarly, Jordan might prefer to keep Israel at arm's length so as not to expose itself to criticism by radical opponents. A breakthrough in the peace negotiations with the Palestinians is unlikely as well, given Hamas' role in

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Palestinian politics, which makes the already slim chances of bridging the Israeli–Palestinian differences even more remote.

Non-radical states in the Arab world are likely to relegate their pragmatic cooperation with Israel to back channels. The weak Arab states are becoming more vulnerable to radical penetration by Iran, backed by domestic

Islamist forces opposed to rapprochement with the Jewish state. As the rulers in the pro-American Arab states conclude that U.S. support is not reliable, they will inevitably distance themselves from the United States and its ally, Israel. Furthermore, the rising non-Arab powers in the Middle East, Iran and Turkey, are not friendly to Israel.

Erosion in Israel's Deterrence

While the U.S. decline in world affairs and particularly in the Middle East might be temporary, it is real for the near future.¹⁶ This negatively affects Israel's deterrence, which is not simply limited to its military power and capacity to win wars; the perception that the United States will come to Israel's aid if needed is of comparable importance. The Obama administration has disappointed some of its allies in the Middle East, and friendly feelings toward Israel are not self-evident. As a result, Israel could not necessarily rely upon Washington's diplomatic, economic, or military support in the event it were attacked. Furthermore, Israel's use of force could exacerbate the Jerusalem–Washington relationship. Such considerations are not entirely new, but they are now more relevant than before, as Israel considers military action against Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran. A decline in Israeli deterrence invites aggression.

Having said that, much of the Arab world is less able to challenge Israel with conventional war, even if Egypt and/or Jordan abolish their peace treaties with Israel. The Arab world is comprised of many weak states too busy with domestic affairs to form a military coalition against Israel and build a modern conventional military force capable of rivaling it. As noted, the military, economic, and technological differential between Israel and its neighbors has widened over the years, making a large scale conventional attack unlikely.

This does not, however, exclude other military threats at the lower rungs of the ladder of violence, particularly in light of weakening Israeli deterrence. Moreover, unstable or failed states are less deterred by threats to exact retaliatory costs than states with strong centralized political control. Therefore, the current crisis increases the military challenges for Israel, particularly if new leaders in the Middle East are strongly motivated by hatred of Israel, are inexperienced, or make crucial miscalculations. Moreover, neighboring Arab leaders may decide to divert

the attention of their populaces from domestic problems by starting a war of attrition with Israel or by initiating terror attacks.

Also, the domestic problems facing weakened Arab states make them more terror prone. As states lose their grip over their territory and their borders become more porous, armed groups and terrorists have greater freedom of action. For example, in the Sinai Peninsula on Israel's border, a pipeline supplying Israel with Egyptian natural gas has been repeatedly sabotaged. Sinai has also turned into an unimpeded route for weapons supplies to Hamas from Iran and a base for terrorist attacks against Israel.¹⁷

In addition, national arsenals of conventional (and non-conventional) arms become increasingly vulnerable as weak states lose control over their security apparatuses. The weakening of Arab states could result in the emergence of increasingly well-armed, politically dissatisfied groups which seek to harm Israel. For example, following the fall of Qaddafi, Libyan SA-7 anti-air missiles and anti-tank RPGs seem to have reached Hamas in Gaza.¹⁸ Similarly, in the event of a collapse of the Syrian regime, its advanced arsenal, including shore-to-ship missiles, air defense systems, and long-range missiles, could potentially end up in the hands of Hezbollah or other radical elements.¹⁹

The domestic dynamics of some countries are, of course, more consequential due to their strategic significance or politico-cultural resonance in the region. Egypt, the strongest and most populous Arab state, plays a pivotal role in Middle Eastern politics. It remains to be seen how well the Egyptian military can ride the Muslim Brotherhood tiger. An Islamist takeover of Egypt might revive an Arab military coalition against Israel. Indeed, Major General Eyal Eisenberg, head of Israel's Home Front Command, warned that developments in the Arab world have increased the probability of an all-out regional war.²⁰

Israel's fears focus on the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty (the Camp David Accords), which removed the strongest military threat on Israel's list of enemies and prevented the Arabs from launching a two-front war against Israel. This allowed for significant cuts in Israel's defense expenditures. The demilitarization of Sinai stabilized the strategic Egyptian-Israeli relationship by denying the two sides the option of a surprise attack. The demilitarization arrangements, often seen in Egypt as an infringement on its sovereignty, might now be violated. Such violations would cause Israel to raise its threat perception and might be considered a *casus belli*. Moreover, the erosion of Egyptian sovereignty in Sinai could turn the area into a haven for terrorists, as in parts of Lebanon, or a base for pirates, as in Somalia.

The good news is that Israel remains a strong state.

Israel closely monitors developments in Jordan, which signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994. So far, King Abdullah has been successful in riding out the current Middle East storm. However, opposition is rising, and if Iraq or Syria were to fall to Muslim radicals, the pressure on the Hashemite dynasty would grow once more. Jordan's fall would put hostile forces on Israel's longest border, and the one closest to its heartland—the Tel Aviv–Jerusalem–Haifa triangle that holds most of Israel's population and economic infrastructure.

Syria, on Israel's northern border, is also in turmoil, and it is not clear whether the Alawite regime will survive or be replaced by a Sunni-led group. In the summer of 2011, Assad tried a diversionary war against Israel, by sending civilians to cross the fences along Israel's border on the Golan Heights. Such a tactic could possibly be employed by his successors. In any case, Israel has to prepare for a time when its quiet border on the Golan Heights might turn noisy.

Recent regional events have detracted attention from the Palestinian issue. The Palestinian Authority's ability to harm Israel in order to reignite international interest is very limited, and the renewal of a campaign of terror against the Jewish state might be very costly to the Palestinians. Yet, a Palestinian strategic miscalculation, leading to the eruption of another terrorist campaign, is always a possibility that Israel cannot ignore. Altogether, recent events have potentially made Israel's increasing conventional superiority less relevant to Israeli security, leaving Israel vulnerable to an array of security challenges.

Threats to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea Lanes

The turmoil in the Arab world is also changing the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean basin, where elements of radical Islam could gain control and generate threats to Israel's and the West's unrestricted access to the area. About 90 percent of Israel's foreign trade is via the Mediterranean, making freedom of navigation there critical for Israel's economic well-being. Moreover, Israel's chances of becoming energy independent and a significant exporter of natural gas are linked to its ability to secure free passage for its maritime trade and defend its newly-found (December 2010) large hydrocarbon fields.

Problems could come from the African shore of the Mediterranean. In Tunisia, the Islamists won November 2011 elections. In Libya, the evolving political events after the fall of Qaddafi indicate that radical Islamist elements will play a greater role in the country's future. If the transition to a new regime descends into civil war, the ensuing chaos may allow greater freedom of action for Muslim extremists.

Egypt is still ruled by the military, but November 2011 elections catapulted the Islamist parties into a dominant role in their emerging political system. Apart from having important ports on the Mediterranean, Egypt also controls

the Suez Canal—this critical passageway might fall into the hands of the Islamists. Significantly, Egypt has already opened the Suez Canal to military vessels belonging to Iran. This enhances the ability of Iran to supply its Mediterranean allies, such as Assad's Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Gaza. Moreover, it has enhanced Iranian access to Muslim states in the Balkans, namely Albania, Bosnia, and Kosovo, thereby increasing Tehran's influence in that part of the Mediterranean. As noted, the tenuous control of Egypt over Sinai could lead to the "Somalization" of the peninsula, thus negatively affecting the safety of naval trade along the Mediterranean and the approaches to the Suez Canal and Red Sea.

North of Israel, along the Mediterranean coast, sits Lebanon, a state dominated by Hezbollah whose ports are inhospitable to the West. Hezbollah has already laid claim to some of the huge Israeli-found gas fields in the Mediterranean—fields which have the potential to diminish Europe's energy dependence on Russia and Turkey. Moreover, Syria exerts considerable influence in Lebanon. Its Mediterranean shores, north of Lebanon, are also hostile to the West and its ports even supply services to the Russian navy. While Assad may fall, a successor regime could be Islamist and anti-Western.

The next state on the eastern Mediterranean coastline is Turkey, which has shifted away from a pro-Western foreign policy and adopted a radical foreign policy stance under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AKP).²¹ The Turkish government supports Hamas and Hezbollah, opposes sanctions on Iran, and holds strident anti-Israel positions, reflecting the AKP's Islamic coloration. A combination of Turkish nationalism, neo-Ottoman nostalgia, and Islamic-jihadist impulses has pushed Turkey into an aggressive stance on several regional issues.

Turkey has flexed its naval muscle by threatening Israel that it will escort flotillas trying to break the blockade on Gaza (Israeli forces killed nine Turkish citizens on a Turkish ship attempting to break the blockade in May 2010).²² Turkey has also threatened Cyprus regarding its desire to acquire a share of the potential energy riches south of the island.²³ Turkey is interested in gaining control or partial ownership over the maritime gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean, as this would help fulfill its ambitions to serve as an energy bridge to the West. This puts Turkey at loggerheads with Cyprus and Israel, who share an interest in exporting gas to energy-thirsty Europe.

The Iranian Nuclear Challenge

The upheaval in the Arab world has deflected attention from Israel's most feared scenario—a nuclear Iran. The Middle East turmoil aided the Iranian strategy of playing for time in order to present the world a nuclear *fait accompli*. Iran has

continued to work on its nuclear project, hardly impressed by economic sanctions and diplomatic displeasure.

Israel is very concerned about the ineffective international response to Iranian nuclear progress, which seems to indicate a lack of political will to tackle a difficult strategic problem or an inadequate understanding of its far-reaching implications.²⁴ A nuclear Iran would generate nuclear proliferation in the region as states such as Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia could hardly resist the rationale for adopting similar nuclear postures, thereby turning a multipolar nuclear Middle East into a strategic nightmare. Also, a nuclear Iran would strengthen its hegemony in the strategic energy sector by its mere location along the oil-rich Persian Gulf and the Caspian Basin. An emboldened Tehran, after nuclearization, would become more active in supporting radical Shiite elements in Iraq and agitating those communities in the Persian Gulf states. Moreover, as Tehran lends support to terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad, it might be reckless enough to transfer several nuclear bombs to proxy terrorist organizations. These are some of the greatest fears that dominate Israeli security thinking.

Israeli Responses

Jerusalem realizes that the demonstrating Arab crowds are not likely to constitute effective agents for democratization, and that the popular sentiment in the Arab world is largely anti-Western and, of course, anti-Israeli. Moreover, conflict and bloodshed are an historic constant in Israel's region. Indeed, realizing that its survival is largely dependent upon its national power, Israel has created a remarkable military machine. As a result, the last large-scale war fought by Israel was in 1973. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have been preoccupied with small wars and non-state actors ever since. Yet, the changing strategic environment dictates more caution and the need to meet a wider variety of threats.

Israel has little choice but to increase its defense outlays. It must invest in building a larger and stronger force—both ground and naval—that can deal with a variety of contingencies, including large-scale war. Since force building is a lengthy process, this should be done as soon as possible. Several additional areas need special attention, such as missile defense and research and development (R&D).

The uncertainty concerning the futures of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan revives the dangerous scenario of simultaneous military challenges on all of Israel's borders, which requires stationing larger forces on these borders. Also, a larger navy, responsible for hosting strategic systems, is increasingly important to defend Israeli air bases and deployment theaters from missile attacks. The

modernization and expansion of the surface fleet (not submarines) has been neglected for some time. The growing threats to the sea lanes traversing the Eastern Mediterranean and to the new gas discoveries similarly require the need to upgrade and expand Israel's navy.

Dealing with missiles of a variety of ranges has been on the national security agenda for at least two decades. All of Israel's territory could come under intense rocket and missile assault in any future conflict with Iran's proxies, Hamas and Hezbollah. While budgetary constraints and anti-defense prejudices have slowed the development and adequate deployment of a multi-layered missile defense system, that system can wait no longer.

Meeting the missile challenge requires improving passive protection and active defense. Passive protection refers to the construction of shelters and fortified rooms in homes as well as educational institutions and centers of commerce. Active defense refers to the adequate deployment of "Iron Dome" batteries for intercepting missile threats of up to 70 kilometers as well as "David's Sling" systems for threats of up to 300 kilometers (not operational yet).²⁵ A missile defense system would also expand freedom of action on the political level. It could potentially save the need for land operations in Gaza and Southern Lebanon, or limit their cost. The Arrow-2 and Arrow-3 (in development) anti-ballistic missiles would address the challenge of long-range missiles.

Regarding R&D, the largely privatized Israeli military industries have gradually become more market-oriented, prompting a shift in R&D priorities toward technologies that give them an advantage in global market sales (rather than products which suit the future needs of the IDF).²⁶ Israel needs to find the resources to ensure that R&D produces technologies necessary to win the next wars.

Israel could help mitigate some of these threats by insisting on defensible borders in any future peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and/or Syria. Simplistic slogans about the decreasing value of territory and topographical assets in the face of technological advances ignore the fact that, in historic terms, military technology has continuously fluctuated, occasionally favoring defensive postures or offensive initiatives. Topographical constants can still be a valuable asset.

Fortunately, Israel's flourishing economy can afford larger defense outlays to meet its security challenges. Yet, a hike in the defense budget is a difficult political task considering the mass social protests in the summer of 2011. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis demonstrated all over the country demanding primarily cheaper housing and food, and lower taxes. Nevertheless, a courageous Israeli leadership could explain to its people that changing circumstances require some austerity measures. Israeli society has shown remarkable resilience and

spirit in protracted conflict and might respond positively to a well-crafted call from its political leaders.

Israel also must nurture its strategic partnership with the United States. The United States is likely to remain the dominant global power for a long time, and its decline in the Middle East is probably temporary. The shared values of the two countries, along with the large and stable support for Israel in American society, make the United States the best possible ally. Israel's foreign policy should manage the differences of opinion and even conflict of interests in a way that assures continuous American friendship and support. In the final analysis, developments in Washington are much more important for Jerusalem than those in its region.

Israel also has an interest in maintaining good relations as well as the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. Reducing regional isolation will help reduce the burden of the Israeli alliance on Washington. Realpolitik could lead to alliances between strange and even politically difficult bedfellows, such as Wahhabi Saudi Arabia and Jewish Israel against Iran. Such an arrangement might appeal also to the Sunnis in Iraq. The Kurds could reemerge as a useful ally for Israel as well, and the new state of Southern Sudan looks to Israel for support. All anti-Islamist segments in the region, primarily minorities such as the Druze, Christian Lebanese, and the Assyrians in Syria and Iraq, are probably interested in ties with a strong Israel. Similarly, Greece and Cyprus are courting Israel, giving Israel some advantages in the Eastern Mediterranean. All of these actors are potential allies to help Israel insure its security in today's more turbulent Middle East.

The main challenge to Israel's security, the Iranian quest for the bomb, was unaffected by the Arab turmoil. Most Israelis do not believe that economic sanctions can change the strategic calculus in Tehran toward stopping the nuclear program. The idea that only covert operations and/or military force can delay or stop Iran's nuclear progress has much support in Israel, but it is not an easy decision to strike at Iran's nuclear installations.²⁷ An unexpected muscular move by the West may spare Israel's government of having to deliberate the issue further, but there is little hope that such a scenario will materialize, particularly if international negotiations appear to make progress, thus once again leaving the Israelis to go it alone.

Security Amidst Uncertainty

The Middle East remains a zone of turmoil, as several states have been destabilized facing Islamization and/or fragmentation. This underscores broad regional trends: the general diminution of the power of the Arab states in favor of non-Arab Iran and Turkey, and the decline of U.S. influence. The new

regional landscape brings with it myriad risks to Israel: greater uncertainty over the behavior of leaders of Israel's neighbors, increased terrorist activity, reduced Israeli deterrence and growing regional isolation, as well as emerging threats in the eastern Mediterranean and the continuing Iranian nuclear challenge.

As Israel has little influence over developments in the Middle East, and few ambitions to engage in political engineering, it can only try to better defend itself. Recommendations for Israeli policymakers include increasing defense outlays and the size of the standing army, as well as investing more in naval power, missile defense, and research and development. On the diplomatic level, preserving close ties with Washington is a central pillar in Israel's national security. Therefore, regional isolation is bearable, particularly since modern, affluent, democratic, and powerful Israel hardly wants to integrate into a region characterized by despotism, corruption, ignorance and poverty.

The domestic front is, of course, extremely important in protracted conflict. Israeli society has displayed remarkable resilience in the past when faced with severe national security tests. Despite the impressionistic reports of a divided Israel, nowadays it is more united than ever, ready to continue to live by its sword. With the right leadership, Israel can make the right choices and weather the current crisis.

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