

1988

## Deterrence without the Bomb: The Politics of Israeli Strategy

Edward N. Luttwak

Avner Yaniv

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Luttwak, Edward N. and Yaniv, Avner (1988) "Deterrence without the Bomb: The Politics of Israeli Strategy," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 41 : No. 4 , Article 20.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol41/iss4/20>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

Minister Ernest Bevin to dismiss the committee's conclusions on the basis of erroneous ethnic stereotyping. And the private political agendas of both Britain and the United States skewed reasoned judgment. The results of the consequent makeshift policy are still being reflected daily on newspaper front pages.

Podet has brought to his task not only a scholar's meticulous research, conducted over ten years on both sides of the Atlantic through examination of documents and through personal interviews, but a balanced and objective analysis of the evidence. His stance is neither polemical nor apologist. Rather, he lays bare the complicated and dismaying details of international political manipulation and its effects in microcosm. In so doing, he has not only laid a firm foundation for future work in this field, but he has provided an object lesson of value to all those involved with the advancement of national goals.

RICHARD E. BARCUS  
Captain, U.S. Navy  
Naval Postgraduate School

---

Yaniv, Avner. *Deterrence without the Bomb: The Politics of Israeli Strategy*. Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1987. 324pp. \$35

At a time when Israel's conflict has come full circle, with Jews once again facing their Palestinian neighbors just down the road instead of Arab States or remote exile outfits, Yaniv's book provides an excellent

guide to what has happened so far and what is likely to happen in the future. The author steadfastly maintains his focus on the formation of Israeli strategy, and that, in turn, has been the chief determinant of the flow of events, notwithstanding the persistent interventions of greater powers outside the region, the constant attempts of other regional actors to impose their will, and the occasional initiatives that succeeded, of which Sadat's diplomatic revolution was by far the most important.

The peculiar value of Yaniv's book arises from his concentration on the level of grand strategy. He resists detours into the military history of the conflict, except to document very specifically some aspect or another of grand strategy. Hence we learn nothing at the tactical or operational levels, and not much at the level of theater strategy (How to defend the Sinai, etc.) or force strategy (How large an air force? What kind of navy?) but, on the other hand, we can really follow the evolution of Israeli grand strategy from 1949 till the present because 278 well-written pages are enough for that, given the author's disciplined refusal to be diverted from his aim.

Were the subject other than the Arab-Israeli conflict, one would not need to add that this is an analytical work concerned with the dissection of events and the evaluation of their proximate causes, i.e., the proper concerns of such scholarship as the field of political science allows. The *ex parte* claims, emotive justifications, deceptive suggestions, conscious

suppressions of evidence, and outright lies that render a very large part of the literature on the subject seriously misleading are not to be encountered in Yaniv's pages. Unlike too many academics bent on usurping the role of preachers, or willing to serve as propagandists for one side or the other, Yaniv neither justifies nor condemns anyone for anything, he cares not a fig for the justice or wisdom of anyone's motives and coolly proceeds to unfold his tale much as if he were an Icelandic historian of medieval Portugal, rather than an Israeli dissecting his people's saga of strife and survival.

As a result of its virtues, the book is most unexpectedly revealing, even to those who may be fully familiar with the events themselves. The first revelation is the focus of the politics of Israeli strategy on explicit theories of deterrence; Yaniv shows that even in the early 1950s Israeli leaders were debating how best to deter Arab attacks in terms still unknown in those days, outside the confines of RAND Corporation and a few other such places. The Israeli Armed Forces still consisted of lightly armed infantry raised in partisan style, the country was still a largely agricultural Mediterranean/Levantine phenomenon, but the strategic thinking would not have been out of place in Santa Monica. Thus we find Moshe Dayan, then Chief of Staff, composing a *Foreign Affairs* article in 1955 to explain the deterrence theory behind the reprisal policy of the time (whose goal was to force Jordan to prevent guerrilla infiltrations); only seven

years earlier Dayan's idea of military command was to ride at the head of his jeep battalion, whose only tactic was the frontal assault with all guns firing. The contrast between primitive realities and the terms of Israeli strategic thinking was in fact even sharper: most of the reprisal raids were mounted by Ariel Sharon's commandos, whose appearance, methods, and ferocity would not have been out of place among today's Afghan guerrillas, to the constant amazement of their victims, mostly the well-drilled, neatly uniformed Arab Legion of Jordan, which still had its British officers.

Since those days, Yaniv shows, matters have evolved in a most peculiar fashion, as always because of the underlying political processes that govern Israeli strategy.

On the one hand, the Israeli military establishment has utterly rejected its pristine partisan style, which was inherently counter-technical (as late as 1956 the desirability of fielding tank units was still hotly debated); today's IDF do not merely use high-tech weapons as do so many other armed forces, but also actively develop innovative military technologies across the board, with results that place Israel in a very small category of countries, all but one of which (Sweden) has at least twenty times its GNP.

On the other hand, there has been a definite regression in the sophistication of Israeli strategy at every level. At the level of grand strategy, as the 1982 Lebanon incursion showed, Israeli leaders have lost the ability to

stop short of the culminating point of success in the use of force, a quality which their predecessors certainly had. It was precisely his sensitivity on that score that made Ben Gurion a statesman of the first rank. He was perfectly willing to use force, more so in many ways than Begin (he certainly authorized many more military actions), but he also knew when to stop, and what is more, when to call off victorious action to prevent the decay of victory into defeat. Below that level, technological sophistication has itself taken its toll. Instead of working out sound and mostly economical tactical or operational solutions to military problems as they come up, Israelis are now much more likely to act as their American colleagues might, by calling for a high-tech equipment solution for every problem.

Yaniv's book actually delivers much more than the title suggests, for the reader can learn much from it about the formation of strategy as such, rather than just Israeli strategy. Having struggled with the definition of a general theory of strategy myself, I was intrigued by the theoretical understructure of this important work.

EDWARD N. LUTTWAK  
Center for Strategic and  
International Studies

---

Berkowitz, Bruce D. *American Security: Dilemmas for a Modern Democracy*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1986. 282pp. \$25

Bruce Berkowitz wades right into the many problems facing Americans in their search for a secure world and attempts to sort them out in a logical fashion. He makes clear that reality severely restricts the number and choices of solutions; that solutions are limited by economics, politics, and technology; and that even after a government chooses a solution, in a democracy the governed may still refuse the choice.

The author shows that defense spending has remained fairly stable over the years and that the recent defense buildup is not responsible for the deficit in the federal budget. He holds out hope that major savings in the budget will occur if we make alterations in foreign policy objectives. However, political interest groups, and the role they play in forming and altering defense thinking and choices, often frustrate any hope for savings.

Berkowitz does not see an end to the dilemma of nuclear war because buying nuclear weapons, compared to the other alternatives, is inexpensive. Therefore, it will be difficult to reduce the number of such weapons and their delivery systems, and the author feels that we have a real problem if we tie the traditional arms control agreements to Soviet-American relations. He does not see the proliferation of nuclear devices among nations as the threat some people have determined it will be.

The bulk of *American Security* is devoted to the issues around the Central Front and the defense of Western Europe. Berkowitz