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# Israel's New Military Doctrine

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by

Efraim Inbar

**T**his paper examines the changes in Israel's strategic thinking since 1980. We can distinguish two stages in the development of the Israeli strategic thinking since the 1973 war: the first in the 70s and the second starting in 1980. In the first period, Israel perceived its political isolation and great dependence upon the United States, which reduced its freedom of action. Furthermore, Israel needed time to rebuild its army and its confidence. Israel lost some of its deterring power, but it felt that its borders still provided the country a margin of security which could be enhanced by incorporating some military and political arrangements. Demilitarization and tripwire arrangements were sought after.

In the first stage, the Israeli military thinking resembled the doctrine of the period before the war. Israel continued to hold a defensive strategy, i.e., the ability to absorb an Arab first attack to be followed by an Israeli decisive counter attack. In order to continue the posture adopted in the 1967-73 period several improvements were required. This meant a larger army, better equipped with defensive weapons and deployed in improved fortified lines. There was a greater emphasis on quantities and firepower, and ways were devised to improve the Israeli Defense Force's ability to be well prepared for absorbing an Arab military onslaught.

In the second period, we can discern a shift from the quantitative aspect of Israel's arms competition with her Arab opponents in favor of the qualitative aspect. In addition, a system of *casi belli* was reintroduced and a greater predilection for preemptive strikes was adopted.

The two periods are indeed distinguishable not only by the content of their military thinking but also by differing leaders, ideologies, and temperaments. Israel was ruled during most of the first period by Rabin's Labor-dominated Government (June 1974-June 1977), while for most of this period the Chief of Staff was the Labor-picked Lt. Gen. Mordechai Gur (April 1974-April 1978).

In 1977, Labor was succeeded by Begin's Likud-dominated Government. In 1978, Gur was replaced by Lt. Gen. Rafael Eitan, who is ideologically closer to the Likud. The main changes in Israeli strategic thinking in the second period are connected however to Ariel Sharon's ascendancy in security affairs. After Moshe Dayan resigned from his post as Foreign Minister in October 1979 and Ezer Weizman, the Defense Minister, did the same in May 1980, Sharon became the dominant figure in Israel's defense policy. Indeed, after the 1981 election, he was elevated from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Defense Ministry.

In spite of the ultimate military successes in the 1973 war, the initial setbacks, the heavy losses in material and in casualties, the deficiencies revealed in various

aspects of the Israeli Defense Force operation and the unfavorable political outcome of the war, shattered the Israeli confidence in the ability of the Israeli Defense Force to successfully wage another war in the immediate future. Therefore, under Rabin, Israel's immediate goals were to rebuild an adequate and confident military force and to delay a war with the Arabs until the political circumstances improved and until the Israeli Defense Force was ready for such an encounter. Washington was needed for both objectives. The US was Israel's sole military supplier and it was the only country capable of giving massive support, and was regarded by Israel as sensitive enough to its security needs to be relied on as a mediator.

The September 1975 Sinai agreement epitomized Rabin's strategy. Israel succeeded in greatly reducing Egypt's incentive to go to war in the near future, thus weakening the Arab coalition and managed to secure its arms supply.

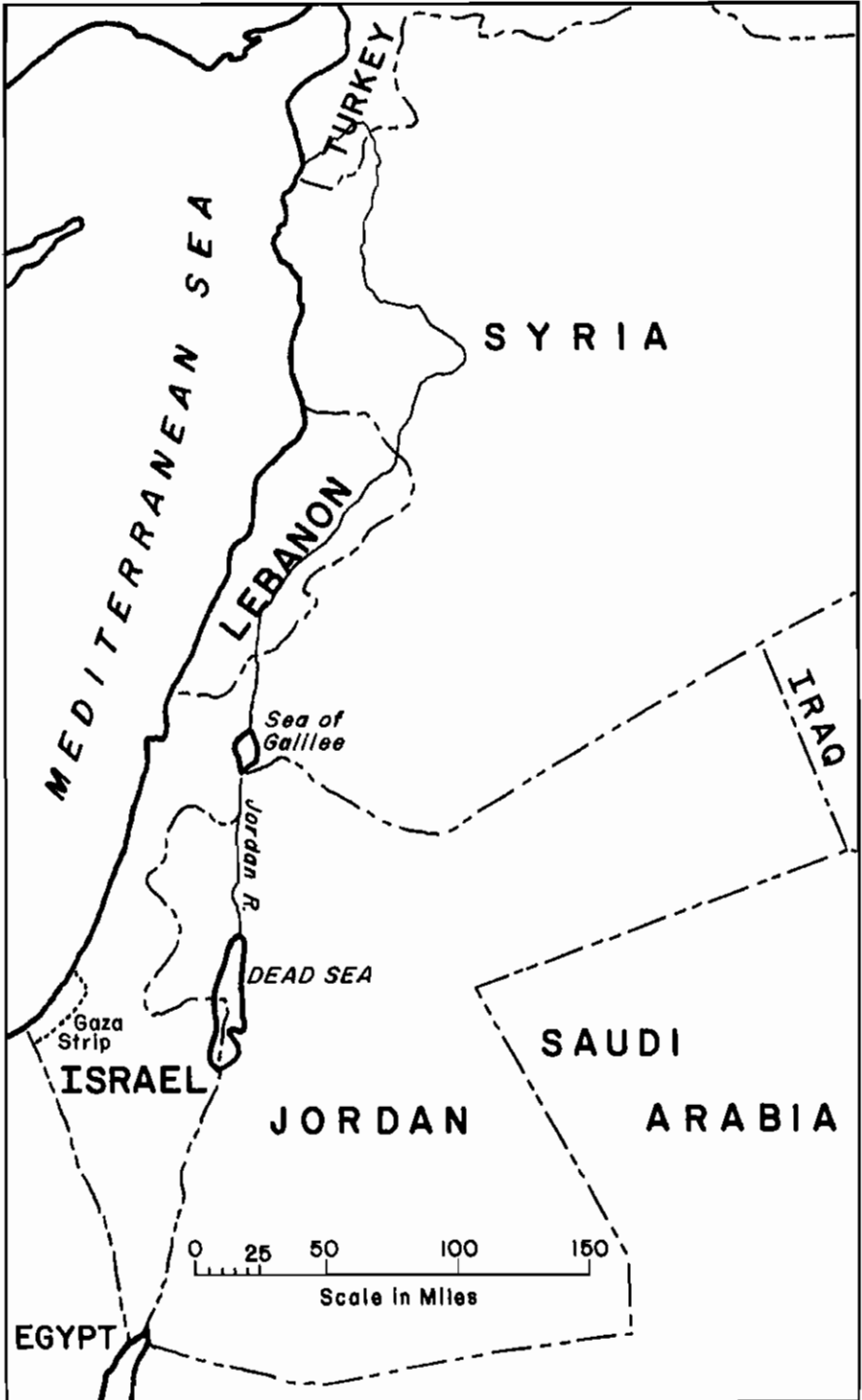
Indeed Begin inherited a well-armed Israel with greater freedom of action than it had enjoyed earlier. The Begin government continued the strong American orientation and succeeded in further reducing the likelihood of Egypt's joining a war against Israel. Yet, due to Begin's nationalist ideology, temperament and belief that Israel is an indispensable regional ally of the United States, and to his greater ability to withstand American pressure, Israel displayed fewer inhibitions in carrying out policies causing tension between Jerusalem and Washington. Furthermore, its tendency to threaten the use of military force increased. By the time Begin came to power, Israel had overcome the material and psychological problems of waging war which had existed in the first years after the October war.

### The New Perceptions

In the first period the Israeli strategic thinking was not fully articulated; in contrast, the second has seen the articulated presentation of Sharon's ideas, which have perhaps taken the form of an incipient doctrine. Sharon's views, which had been aired in bits and pieces, were brought together for the first time in the speech he delivered at an international symposium on strategic problems, held at Tel Aviv University.<sup>1</sup> This speech marked a clear departure from the first period's doctrine.

After Labor was ousted from power, the process by which Israel changed its basically defensive posture was quite gradual. There were several reasons why the Begin government held back from the immediate introduction of substantial changes. The first two are of an institutional character. First, it took time for Begin's people, most of whom had been in the opposition for years and were novices to government, to adapt to their new position and assert their views. Second, the West greeted the new government with great concern and even alarm, which led Begin to prefer to emphasize continuity rather than change. Yet the Begin government nonetheless was proved less apprehensive about international constraints on its defense policy than the previous government of the cautious Rabin. This eventually led to several changes in Israel's strategic thinking, despite the initial target of respectability. This quest for Western acceptance delayed personal and doctrinal changes in the security establishment.

Third, in the late 70s the Israeli Defense Force and the defense establishment were still mainly concerned with growth and the digestion of the huge quantities



of military hardware that were procured. Israel continued to make efforts not to fall too much behind the Arabs in the quantitative arms competition.<sup>2</sup>

Fourth, since Sadat came to Jerusalem in October 1977, and until the Peace Treaty was concluded in April 1979, Israel's high policy elite was almost solely preoccupied with the negotiations with Egypt. It was only after the treaty had been signed that Israel realized that it returned practically to the 1967 borders. Israel felt it had actually lost strategic depth, even though the Sinai desert was to be largely demilitarized.

Fifth, Israelis came to perceive that an effective loss of strategic depth had gradually taken place on Israel's eastern border. The size and quality of the arsenals of Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia were perceived as gradually neutralizing the territorial advantages conferred on Israel by its control of Judea, Samaria and the Golan Heights. Sharon said: "What should be realized is that, because of the nature of military forces, which are highly mobile, armored, and mechanized, instead of consisting mainly of infantry, as in the past, and because of the range of weapon systems in the Arab order of battle including missiles and intelligence means which cover the whole of the Israeli territory, *we face on our present borders the very same defense problems we had in our 1967 lines.*"<sup>3</sup>

Sixth, the changes in the Israeli military doctrine are connected to Sharon's impact on strategic thinking. As mentioned, his ascendancy in national security affairs became of consequence only in 1980.

Changes were not immediate, but they were drastic when they were finally made. In the past Israel considered the Arab refusal to accept Israel's existence to be the main external threat. The Begin government added, however, an additional source of threat—the Soviet Union.

Sharon, for example, said: ". . . our main security problems during the 80s will stem from external threats . . . from two sources, namely: One—the Arab confrontation; Second—the Soviet expansion which both builds on the Arab confrontation and at the same time provides it with its main political and military tools."<sup>4</sup>

Since the beginning of the Soviet penetration of the Middle East, Israel has always feared the consequences of the Soviet support to Arab countries. There were also occasionally considerable apprehensions about a possible Soviet-Israeli military clash. Labor governments in the past were careful, however, to minimize the tensions with the Soviet Union, since it was considered that a confrontation with a superpower promised to bring no benefits, and threatened to increase Israel's risks. Past governments have never defined the Soviet Union as an external threat to Israel.

The greater anti-Soviet emphasis in the Israeli defense and foreign policy has two causes: a) Begin and many of his entourage have always been vehement anti-communists. Ideology and past personal experiences made Begin an ardent anti-Soviet; b) the Soviet expansion in the Middle East, particularly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the fall of the Shah in Iran, was indeed threatening all pro-Western countries. Many countries in the Middle East and elsewhere expressed a similar concern.

As a result of these anxieties, Israel extended its security concerns far beyond its immediate Arab neighbors and the more distant hostile Arab countries. As Sharon

said, "Israel's sphere of strategic and security interests must be broadened in the 80s to countries such as Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, and regions such as the Persian Gulf and Africa, particularly in the countries of North and Central Africa."<sup>5</sup> Israel has in the past showed interest in the countries of the periphery of the core Middle East region, e.g., Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia but its military doctrine has not defined Israel's security interests on such a global scale.

Under Begin, Israel viewed itself as an anti-communist agent and as a natural ally of the US. Mutual interests existed in limiting the Soviet role in the Middle East and in helping pro-Western regimes in the area. Moreover, Israel was considered in Jerusalem as the only reliable American ally and the one with the strongest military force in the region. The anti-Soviet rhetoric of the Reagan Administration was welcomed in Jerusalem, as the Israeli government held similar views. Indeed, Israel convinced Washington, in November 1981, to sign a Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Cooperation, which was directed against the Soviet Union and its regional allies. The fields in which cooperation was to be carried out in order to prevent the Russian threat were: joint air and naval exercises, establishment and maintenance of joint readiness activities, cooperation in defense trade and in R&D.

The extent of Israel's commitment to participate in action beyond its borders against Soviet or proxy forces is not entirely clear, or how legally binding the Memo was on both parties. Yet it was the first time that Israel had signed a document which identified the Soviet Union as its enemy.

The anti-Soviet tone in Israel's foreign policy fitted well the overall "American orientation" of Israel's foreign policy. In spite of the fact that such orientation led to a greater sensitivity to American desires, Israel under Begin did not hesitate to undertake actions not coordinated with Washington and which caused uneasiness to its extra-regional ally. The striking examples are the destruction of the Iraqi-nuclear reactor and the annexation of the Golan Heights. The relations with the United States were obviously seen by Israel as one of the most important components of Israel's national security. A discussion of those relations is beyond the scope of this article, but it should be made clear that the Begin government believed that Israel had greater freedom of action than previous governments, precisely because it saw Israel as indispensable to the American struggle to contain Soviet expansionism.

Furthermore, Israel's freedom of action in the short run was guaranteed by the time Begin came to power because the Israeli Defense Force was well-equipped, and its stores were full enough to wage war without needing an American airlift, or to withstand temporary suspensions in the delivery of arms, or other sanctions on the part of the United States. The Reagan administration took actions against Israel without precedent in the history of the relations between the two countries. It suspended the delivery of aircraft after contracts were signed, in reaction to the Israeli bombing of the Osirak reactor (June 1981) and to the bombing of PLO headquarters in Beirut (July 1981). It also suspended the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Cooperation, also a signed document. Those sanctions had little impact on Israeli policies.

The essentially regional perspective of Israel's defense policy was replaced in the 80s with a more global perspective. Israel under Begin has gradually come to

see itself as an anti-Soviet agent. As such it believed it had greater latitude because of the tacit mutual interest of many countries in the Middle East and outside of it, which shared its anti-Soviet tone.

All this notwithstanding, Israel's military was preoccupied with meeting regional threats stemming from developments in the Arab armies. Since 1973, these included the growing military capabilities of the more distant Arab countries. It was feared that those countries could threaten Israel, as Sharon said, "either by means of sending expeditionary forces to the confrontation area, or even by direct air and naval action against our naval lines of communication."<sup>6</sup> Early on, the Israeli Defense Force acquired a greater capability to act further away from home bases, as the Entebbe rescue operation indicates. Yet this enhanced capability to project force, especially by sea and by air, was given a greater emphasis under Sharon. As the Israeli Defense Force recuperated from the 1973 War and as Israel asserted its greater capability and freedom to act, its deterrent power, as analyzed below, increased. Paradoxically, parallel to this development Israel's perception of the threats which it faced also increased. The Soviet Union was added as an enemy to the growing Arab armies. The possibility of facing Russian troops became more tangible to the Israeli decision-makers. The belief that Israel enjoyed considerably greater freedom of action, enhanced deterrence coupled with a feeling of acute security problems, all new characteristics of the second period, led Israel to abandon its defensive posture to adopt a system of *casi belli*.

### Enhanced Deterrence

The defensive posture in the 70s was adopted also because Israel's deterring power diminished following the initial Arab military successes in 1973, and their subsequent political achievements. Yet, in the second period, it seems that Israel's deterring power was enhanced. Deterrence is primarily a function of the military capability and estimated intentions of a country's leadership to use the military potential at its disposal.

As mentioned, by the end of the previous decade Israel's arsenal was quite impressive. Israel succeeded in maintaining an acceptable quantitative ratio of 1:3 with respect to the combined Arab arsenals. In terms of quality of its weapons and its manpower, Israel continued to hold an advantage. Military analysts judged that Israel had corrected most of the deficiencies revealed in 1973, and that the Israeli Defense Force had been transformed into a first-class war machine. The Israeli Defense Force also managed to attain several spectacular achievements, such as the Entebbe rescue operation in July 1976, and the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in June 1981, which seemed to confirm Israel's military superiority.

The intention to use force is, however, just as important as the capacity to act in order to maintain deterrence. The credibility of Israel's determination to use its military power increased considerably after Begin came to power. Begin's hawkish image abroad obviously enhanced Israel's deterrence. His current Defense Minister, Sharon, also seems quite effective in propagating the image of an Israel ready to fight for its interests. The more aggressive and reckless image of Israel fostered by Soviet and Arab propaganda is generally harmful to Israel, but, in the sphere of deterrence, it is of service to Israel.

Those images are reinforced by Israeli declarations and actions. Begin and several of his ministers savor the feeling of power. We find in public statements a greater tendency to emphasize Israel's military might and to threaten Israel's neighbors with military action. The present government seems also to be less versed than its Labor predecessor in the art of applying measured force. The government threatens to use massive force and uses it, at a higher public profile than before. For example, Israel was the first to announce the destruction of the Iraqi reactor. Greater discreetness could have been less embarrassing for the Arabs and probably also for the West. Another example is Israel's involvement in Lebanon, which was given greater publicity by Begin's government than by Rabin's. The Israeli government under Begin did not hesitate to engage Syrian aircraft in the Lebanese airspace and even Syrian ground forces stationed in Lebanon, in spite of the possibility of escalation in hostilities. Indeed, Israel conducted sweeping land operations in Lebanon in March 1978 and in June 1982. This last incursion had political goals un contemplated before.<sup>7</sup> Thus the hawkish image of Begin and Sharon coupled with declarative aggressiveness and occasional military action lent greater credibility to Israel's declared resolution to fight under certain circumstances.

Another factor that contributed to Israel's enhanced deterrence is the Peace Treaty with Egypt, which to a great extent severs Egypt from other layers of the Arab-Israeli conflicts. Egypt still is the most powerful opponent of Israel. Egypt's policy toward Israel after the completion of the withdrawal from Sinai might become cooler, but so long as it continues its American orientation it would be hesitant to join in a military enterprise against Israel. The United States is a partner to the Peace Treaty, and would hardly condone an Egyptian military adventure against Israel.

Further, Egypt is in the middle of the process of converting its military to American equipment, the successful completion of which could take a few years. The American weapon production capacity is relatively limited and the supply schedule for the Egyptians is stretched over several years. A greater difficulty in the conversion process proves to be the Egyptian limited technical capability to maintain sophisticated weapon systems.

Therefore, Egypt's contractual obligations stemming from the Peace Treaty with Israel, its American orientation and its weapon procurement program from the West neutralizes it to a great extent for some period from taking an active role in a military encounter with Israel. This enables Israel to avoid fighting on two fronts and significantly diminishes the forces at the disposal of an Arab military effort. This situation enhances Israel's deterrence in the Eastern Front.

### The Reintroduction of *Casi Belli*

Sharon's tenure as Defense Minister has been characterized by the reintroduction of a system of *casi belli* in Israel's military doctrine, which had been absent since 1967. Several reasons, including personal convictions contributed to the reformulation of Israel's strategic thinking. For example, Mordechai Gur, who ardently opposed the concept of *casus belli*, was no longer Chief of Staff and had no influence over doctrine.

Apart from personal considerations, several substantive developments led Israel to display a greater tendency in the 80s than in the previous decade to threaten



preemptive strikes. As mentioned, the dimensions and the quality of the arms transfer to the Arab countries, which had taken place in the 70s and which has continued in the 80s, as well as the withdrawal from Sinai made Israel feel vulnerable and in a position that was essentially the same as that before the 1967 War.

Furthermore, Israel realized that it had reached the limit of quantitative growth in its military forces. The main constraint is manpower. In an interview with Israeli television, Sharon emphasized: "Israel has stopped participating in the arms race. We are not going to make any effort to compete with the Arabs in the numbers of weapons. In this we have reached the end of the road. New arms are developed, and we also have to replace weapons of earlier generations, but in terms of numbers, we have no intention to add even one tank or airplane in the coming years."<sup>8</sup> Israel seemed to have decided unilaterally not to take part anymore in the regional actors' attempts to enlarge their armies.

Yet, as the Arab armies continue their massive weapon procurement programs, the ratio of the quantity of Israeli weapons versus those in the hands of the Arabs is going to deteriorate. Lacking strategic depth and facing more numerous and better armed foes on its borders, Israel is less confident that it could successfully absorb a first Arab strike and then proceed to its decisive counteroffensive. Therefore, such an Arab attack has to be preempted.

The successful massive weapon procurement program conducted by Begin's predecessor facilitated the change to a system of *casi belli*. By the end of the 70s, the Israeli defense establishment felt that Israel had recuperated militarily from the October War and was again militarily ready to fight a war if necessary. Further, a well-equipped Israel granted the Israeli leadership greater freedom of action than it had earlier. The Israeli government could be less concerned with the American reaction to its actions when its arsenal was full. Indeed Israel could withstand even American sanctions as those following the attack on the Iraqi reactor and following the annexation of the Golan Heights. Furthermore, a system of *casi belli* can more easily be adopted when the state announcing it enjoys great credibility. As mentioned, threats by Israel under Begin and Sharon definitely enjoyed a greater credibility in the Arab world, and in the West, too.

According to Sharon, "Israel intends to prevent any deterioration in the geographic and military *status quo* in the neighboring countries."<sup>9</sup> Specifically, Sharon had in mind the following contingencies which would require an Israeli response:

1. Any violation of the clauses concerning the demilitarization of Sinai in the 1979 Peace Treaty with Egypt, or the demilitarization of the Golan in the 1974 Agreement on the Disengagement of Forces with Syria concerning the Golan Heights.
2. A massive introduction of Iraqi forces to South Syria, or Jordan, or of Syrian forces to Jordan.
3. The deployment of a SAM system along the Jordan river.
4. The movement of Syrian forces south of the line along which they are currently stationed in Lebanon.
5. The presence of nuclear weapons in an enemy Arab country or the capacity to produce nuclear devices.

It should be noted that even after enunciating a clear set of contingencies which would be intolerable for Israel, the Israeli reaction was not specified. Actually,

Sharon refused to commit Israel to any specific action in advance, in case the Arabs crossed what Sharon called a "safety valve." In a policy review before the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign and Security Affairs, Sharon emphasized that Israel's response to a violation of a declared *casus belli* would not necessarily be a preemptive strike. He mentioned that a variety of possible actions are available.<sup>10</sup> In the past such a violation was also not considered a trigger for war, but rather a warning signal that deterrence has failed.<sup>11</sup>

Israel retained additional flexibility by not always clearly defining its *casus belli*. For example, "a massive introduction of forces" leaves Israel the liberty to determine whether a concentration of forces is "massive" or not. A concentration of forces along its borders has always warranted Israeli action or preparations. Yet, since 1981, as it was until 1967, such a concentration of forces is perceived to be a serious threat and is defined as a *casus belli*, which is publicly announced.

The failure to mention a Syrian SAM system in Lebanon, was a significant omission. Israel obviously did not reconcile itself to the introduction of Syrian SAM batteries in Lebanon, which was a cause for an international crisis in spring 1981. Israel has been militarily and psychologically quite sensitive to the presence of SAM systems along its borders ever since the advancement of the Egyptian SAM system toward the Suez Canal in summer 1970, in violation of the Cease Fire Agreement, made possible the early Egyptian successes in 1973. Indeed Israel views a SAM system along the Jordan as a *casus belli* and it therefore opposes the American plans to supply Jordan with mobile improved Hawk missiles. As well, one of the demilitarization clauses of Sinai ensures the absence of SAM batteries in the Sinai. In Lebanon, Israel simply waited for a suitable opportunity to restore the *status quo ante*. The Israeli-Syrian encounter in June 1982 provided such an opportunity. Yet, a public announcement of the Syrian missiles being a *casus belli* followed by inaction due to American constraints was politically embarrassing.

Regarding a SAM system as a considerable threat was a lesson learned in 1973. The 1974 Agreements with Syria and Egypt and the 1975 Sinai Agreement with Egypt, which all included arrangements for SAM-free areas, have reflected this Israeli concern. Unquestionably, an Egyptian deployment of SAM batteries into the Sinai, an infringement of the military appendix to the Peace Treaty, would provoke an Israeli action, whose character and dimensions would depend upon the political circumstances at home and abroad.

The enunciation of a system of *casus belli* was a departure from the thinking in the 1970s, with one exception—the Syrian presence in Lebanon. The Rabin government reluctantly accepted the Syrian military involvement in the Lebanese Civil War since it was coordinated with the United States.<sup>12</sup> Yet, it announced the existence of a "red line," whose definition was not made public. The crossing of the "red line" by the Syrians would warrant unspecified Israeli reaction. The Rabin government refrained from committing itself to a particular content of the "red line." Further, it preferred to use the term "red line," rather than the clearer and more emphatic term *casus belli*. The latter also has legally binding overtones.

Changing the vague notion of "red line" into an official *casus belli* was the outcome of the general reversal to a system of *casus belli*. In addition, this development was also the result of the change in the American perception of Syria and its role in Lebanon.

The Reagan administration was less inclined than its predecessors to court Syria

hoping to bring it within its fold. This enabled Israel to take a more harsh position against what was perceived in Jerusalem and in Washington as a Soviet ally.

Indeed, in June 1982, Israel launched the Peace for Galilee operation, in which quite a blow was administered to Syria. The Syrians lost about 100 warplanes and 350 tanks, as well as all their SAM batteries in Lebanon. This operation can also be seen as a manifestation of Israel's new military doctrine. As mentioned, Israel regarded the Syrian SAM system in Lebanon as a *casus belli* and waited until June 1982 to strike at them. The June 1982 invasion of Lebanon was indeed given a preemptive rationale. It was explained that the Peace for Galilee operation preempted a PLO campaign to cause immense damage in the northern part of Israel. Since July 1981, when the PLO demonstrated its remarkable firepower while the Israeli Defense Force failed to find an adequate solution to the PLO'S long-range artillery, the burgeoning PLO army was considered a grave threat to the Israeli settlements in the Galilee. Further it was claimed that the 1982 intervention delayed or even prevented a general war the Syrians were preparing for.<sup>13</sup>

A new element in Israel's strategic thinking is the resolution to prevent any Arab nuclear progress, which might lead to the construction of a nuclear device. This new aspect of the Israeli doctrine was the result of Arab efforts in the nuclear field and of the healthy mistrust of the possibility of reaching a stable balance of terror in the Middle East.

Israel, acting in accordance with this aspect of its *casus belli* system, thus destroyed the Iraqi reactor. This air raid also signalled the West that Israel does not rely on Western promises for supervision of nuclear installations. Sharon's declaration that Israel's security is affected by developments in countries such as Pakistan seems to constitute also a threat to the Pakistani nuclear program. Militarily, Israel is hardly in a position to interfere with Pakistani nuclear plans. Yet, clandestine operations are a practical option and Israel could benefit from cooperation with countries like India, the Soviet Union and the United States in such an endeavor. In the absence of the Israeli desired foolproof Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, the nuclear *casus belli* could also be construed as an Israeli desire to have an effective monopoly of the nuclear option.<sup>14</sup> After realizing that it could not participate in the regional conventional arms competition, Israel possibly decided to block the possibility of extending the arms race to the area of nuclear weapons, since such a nuclear competition is not perceived to be congenial to Israel's security.

Israel's present posture concerning nuclear weapons or capacity in Arab hands obviously attracts international criticism, since Israel considers actions even against countries party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty an internationally binding document. Yet, in spite of such difficulties, Israel can hold such a posture only as long as the Arab states refuse to make peace with it. An advanced large civilian nuclear program producing electricity endows a country with the fissionable material and the technical ability necessary to produce nuclear bombs. Military action against nuclear power reactors particularly when supplied by Western firms, presents great political difficulties. Further, Israel could ill-afford to act against a nuclear reactor in an Arab country which had concluded a peace treaty with Israel. So, under the umbrella of the Peace Treaty with Israel, Egypt could realize its ambitious nuclear energy program without suffering Israeli sanctions. This program could also confer a capability to produce nuclear bombs.<sup>15</sup>

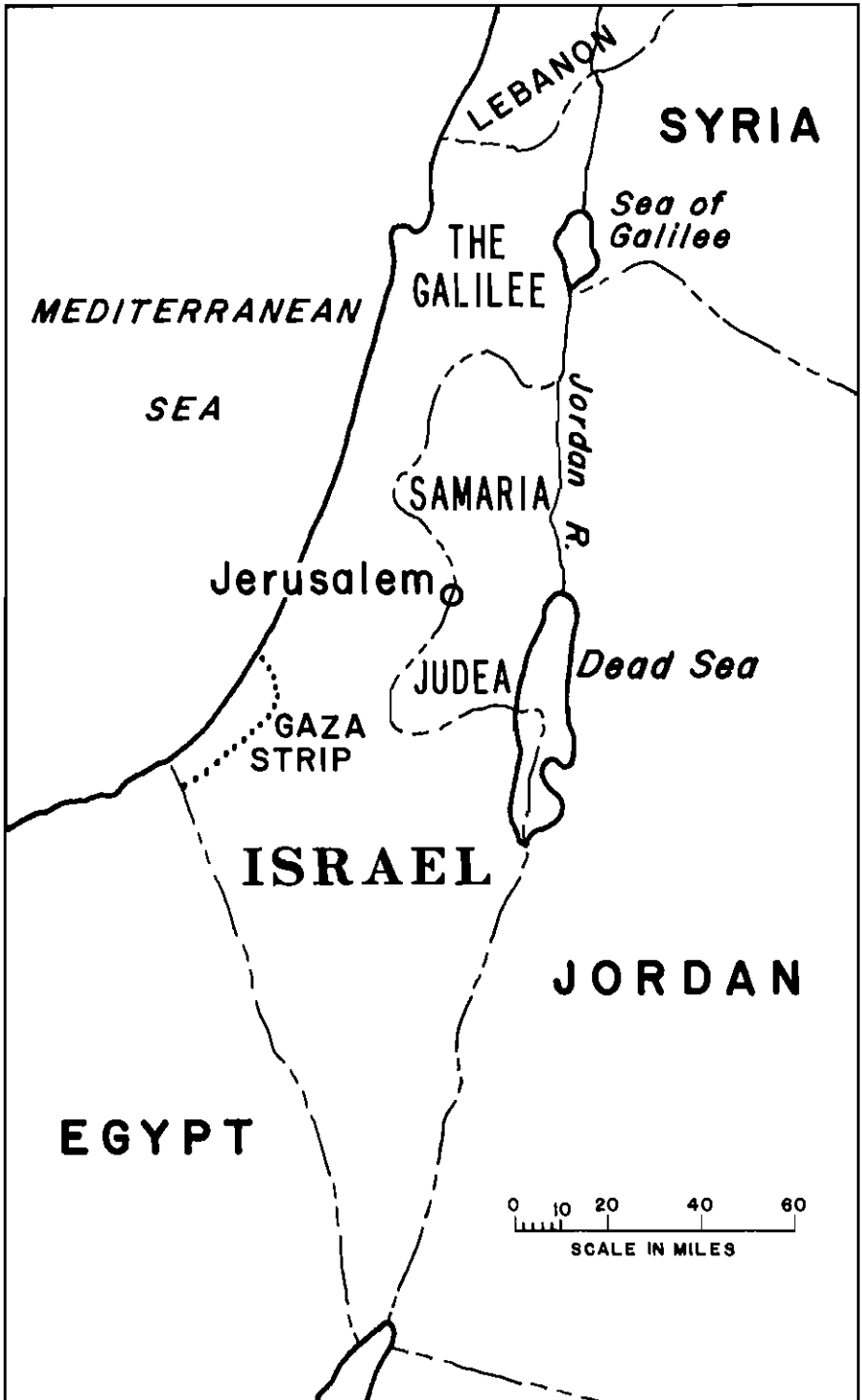
Israel's reversal to a *casi belli* system constitutes also the abandonment of what was called "secure borders." Secure borders were defined as those "borders which can be defended without a preemptive initiative."<sup>16</sup> Within such borders Israel presumably enjoys some strategic depth. As a result of having such borders a strategy of absorption of an Arab attack followed by a counterattack could be adopted.<sup>17</sup> Israel now perceives its territory as lacking strategic depth on all fronts. Secure borders are desirable, but the present border line cannot serve such a function. Therefore, preemptive strikes have to be reincorporated in Israel's military doctrine.

There are two main political problems in implementing the Israeli new doctrine. In order to maintain the credibility of its deterrent power Israel has to react to any infringement of the geographic and strategic *status quo*, as defined by Sharon. Violations of the *casi belli* by means of incremental "salami" tactics would leave Israel the difficult choice between ignoring small transgressions or using force to rectify the situation. In many capitals, particularly Washington, such military action might well be considered to be excessive. In the long run, Israel's dependency has not changed, and Israel still is very much in need of US support. Even the Begin government has seemed on a number of occasions to have reconsidered its wish to act in southern Lebanon, in light of Washington's displeasure at a military campaign that could escalate into a full-scale war with Syria. The delay in Israel's action against the SAM sites in Lebanon is an example of the Israeli dilemma.

A preventive war in case Israel fears that its deterrence has been eroded because of the quantitative imbalance involves even greater difficulty. Israel has also to consider the situation after an initiated military campaign. The tremendously augmented firepower of modern battlefields, of the sort which would be encountered in the next war, would cause grievous losses in men and materiel even if Israel were victorious. Furthermore, Israel is at a marked disadvantage in replacing men and equipment.

The minimization of casualties has always characterized Israeli military thinking because the closely knit Israeli society is extremely sensitive to the loss of life. Therefore, any military campaign has to be well justified in the eyes of the Israeli public. The Begin government, in contrast to its predecessor, which had operated from the center of the Israeli political map, holds positions right of center. This makes the building of consensus for military action more difficult whenever such action deviates from the national consensus. The Labor opposition is more sensitive to the American factor, and constantly demands greater restraint and a lower profile. For example, the labor opposition is critical of the Israeli actions in South Lebanon and particularly those north of the Litani river, accusing the government of the excessive use of force.

Furthermore, a weariness with the protracted conflict can be detected in the Israeli society, reducing its readiness to make sacrifices. This increases the government's need to have a perfectly justifiable case before ordering the Israeli Defense Force into action. One such example is the air strike against the Iraqi reactor. In spite of some criticism, most Israelis did not object to a successful action without any Israeli casualties. On the other hand, reaching Beirut and its price in casualties evoked greater opposition.



## Defensive Measures

In spite of the abandonment of the defensive strategic posture, defensive measures were not neglected. Israel improved its early warning systems and its intelligence operations, but still viewed an Arab sudden attack a contingency to be taken into consideration. Israel intended, therefore "to ensure a military capability to preserve the integrity of Israel's territory, in any war opening situation including an Arab sudden attack."<sup>18</sup>

Israel actually continued to view the demilitarization arrangements in the Sinai and on the Golan, and the political obstacles to war initiation as desirable, in spite of its greater predilection for preemptive strikes. The violation of the demilitarization agreements has been announced to be a *casus belli*. Israel under Begin even agreed to the stationing of UN forces in South Lebanon in 1978. Such UN presence had been opposed by the Rabin government. Operating inside a UN controlled area or passing through it entails a political price absent before UN presence. This, and Israel's dissatisfaction with the UN performance in South Lebanon, as well as the longstanding Israeli suspicions of the UN explain the Israeli present objection to allow the UN to continue to play a role in the vicinity of its border. Yet, the Israeli government proposed a wide demilitarized area in South Lebanon.

Territorial defense was also strengthened. The territorial defense was a system of fortified settlements located on possible invasion routes, and meant to stop or delay the enemy until the Israeli Defense Force completed the mobilization of reserves, and the concentration of forces for the counterattack. This system provides an artificial strategic depth and allows the bulk of the Israeli Defense Force to transfer the war into the enemy's territory. Defense in-depth also frees first-grade manpower, since it makes optimum use of manpower with no alternative battle use such as teenagers, women, and older people.

The perceived lack of strategic depth made the territorial defense an imperative in order to ameliorate the situation. The program to consolidate the territorial defense started in the first period, and was expanded to new areas according to the future borders envisioned by the Begin government. This government sees the return of Sinai as the last territorial adjustment. It intends to hold on to Judea, Samaria, the Gaza Strip and the Golan for ideological and strategic reasons. Those regions were considered as border areas. Therefore, the new settlements in Judea and Samaria were incorporated into the territorial defense. The settlements efforts in those areas and in those planned in the Gaza sector are motivated by political and ideological reasons. The Begin government emphasizes that those regions are an integral part of the Jewish homeland not to be returned to the Arabs under any conditions.

This position, which does not receive the full support of all the Jews in Israel is defended at home and abroad also on strategic grounds. It is pointed out that historically only the control of the mountains of Judea and Samaria guarantees the control of all of Palestine. Begin's government adopted Dayan's strategic thinking concerning Judea and Samaria. This view places greater value on the mountains' line than the view prevalent in the Labor governments, which considered the control of the Jordan Valley as strategically significant. More specifically, it was claimed that the Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria serve the same security functions as those on the Golan and along the Jordan River. The location of the newly established

settlements on strategic heights and in the vicinity of important crossroads, in an area inhabited by a hostile population, also secures the lines of communication from the Israeli population centers along the coast to the mountains' line of Judea and Samaria, and from there to the Jordan valley along the Jordanese border. Most important the blocs of Jewish settlements divide the West Bank Arab population in several areas, breaking territorial contiguity, and helping prevent the evolution of a united political entity. The settlements in the Gaza Strip, along the Egyptian border, serve a similar purpose. They constitute a Jewish wedge between Egypt and the densely populated Gaza region.

All of the new settlements were incorporated into the system of territorial defense. Many of the settlers were freed from their reserve units to become part of the territorial defense deployment, whose own units were adequately armed. Each settlement was also provided with some fortification. Chief of Staff Eitan and Defense Minister Sharon have been great believers in the territorial defense, a fact which has given additional impetus to the continuing rehabilitation of this defensive concept.

## Conclusion

We have distinguished two distinct stages in the evolution of the Israeli strategic thinking since 1973. In the second stage, many of the parameters that influenced the Israeli strategic thinking changed. Begin's government was less sensitive than its predecessor to the difficulties faced by Israel in the international arena. Moreover, it believed that its alliance with the United States, an important component in its national security, was founded on strategic mutual interests. Since Israel viewed itself as an indispensable American ally in the Middle East, the American desires concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict were not considered to be a serious limitation on Israel's freedom of action in matters of great consequence for the security of the country.

Militarily, in contrast to the first period, Israel regained its confidence and had a significantly greater and better equipped fighting force at its disposal. Indeed, its deterring power, as a result of Israel's military might and the image of its leadership, improved. Yet the Begin government gradually came to the conclusion that the qualitative and quantitative developments in the Arab armies had led to a situation territorially similar to the pre-1967 borders. Israel had lost strategic depth and the Arab arsenals had become more threatening. Therefore, the Begin government abandoned in 1981 the defensive strategy and adopted a military doctrine that was based on a system of *casi belli*. Israel actually reverted to the thinking prevalent in the pre-1967 period.

Obviously, such a posture draws international criticism. The Begin government cannot entirely disregard international constraints, yet Israeli public opinion is the more powerful constraint. Israel is to a great extent weary, and the opposition to Begin's policies is significant, but when attacked, Israel easily unites behind its government. Therefore, holding a defensive strategy is politically a more comfortable position to defend internally and externally than a *casi belli* system. The test for the current Israeli strategic thinking may come soon; it remains to be seen how effective it will be.

## Notes

1. Ariel Sharon's Address to the International Symposium on Strategic Problems at Tel Aviv University, "Israel's Strategic Problems in the 80s," 14 December 1981. It is referred to here as "Address."

2. By June 1977, Israel had replaced all its losses in materiel. Moreover, the tank force grew by 50 percent; the artillery by 100 percent; armored personnel carriers by 800 percent; and aircraft by 30 percent. The qualitative changes in the Israeli arsenal were just as impressive. See Yitzhak Rabin, *Memoirs* (Tel Aviv: Maariv Library, 1981), p. 505.

3. Address, p. 8 (my emphasis).

4. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Rabin's government refused to get involved in the Lebanese morass beyond supplying arms to the Christian militias, training them in their use, and insisting upon a Syrian free zone in Southern Lebanon. In contrast, in June 1982 the Israeli goals were to expel the PLO and the Syrian forces from Lebanon and to create a new "stable political order" there.

8. *Maariv*, 18 February 1982; 23 May 1982. Lt. Gen. Eitan was more specific as to Israel's weapon procurement plan in an interview to Israeli television on the eve of Israel's Independence Day 27 April 1982. No additional units are planned, but the present units will complete their procurement programs. Only the Air Force will slightly increase its order of battle. Following those weapon acquisitions, new weapons will be purchased only for substituting older weapon systems to be taken out of service.

9. Address, p. 8.

10. *Maariv*, 30 March 1982.

11. Dan Horowitz, "Israel's Concept of Defensible Borders," *Jerusalem Papers on Peace Problems*, v. 16, 1975.

12. Rabin, p. 503.

13. See the report of Sharon's speech to the Staff and Command College (*Maariv*, 7 July 1982); and Yaakov Erez, "Interview with Amir Drori—the commander of the Northern Command," *Maariv*, 30 July 1982.

14. See Amos Perlmutter, "The Israeli Raid on Iraq: A New Proliferation Landscape," *Strategic Review*, Winter 1982. Since 1975, Israel officially favors a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone to be reached at after negotiations among the Middle Eastern nations. See "The Official Israeli Position," *New Outlook*, May 1982, pp. 68-72.

15. Egypt ratified the NPT in January 1981. This opened the way for Western nuclear cooperation with Egypt. See *Approving the Proposed Agreement for Nuclear Cooperation With Egypt: Report, September 1981*, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, (Washington, DC: US Govt. Print. Off., 1981).

16. Horowitz, p. 13.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Address, p. 6.

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