



ISRAEL'S THREAT PERCEPTION: ANALYSIS OF ISRAEL AND IRAN'S RELATIONS AND IRAN'S NUCLEAR AMBITION

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the various kinds of threats to Israel's security. The threats posed are dynamic, both conventional and non-conventional. The Israel Defence Forces now have to have preparedness for both traditional and non-traditional security threats. The shift has been from conventional military face-off between states to the involvement of non-state actors like terrorist groups, cyber warfare, and nuclear threats. The nuclear ambition too has emerged as a major security threat from Iran. The Islamic Republic has an ideological perspective on Israel. Regardless of their political affiliation—conservative left or liberal—the Iranian leadership regards Israel as the cornerstone of American imperialism in the Middle East and the foundation of Western colonialism. The Islamic Republic of Iran along with non-state actors aspire to annihilate its existence. The stony relations with the other Arab states and the shift from conventional to unconventional and asymmetric war compelled Israel to adopt a proactive stance. The security doctrine revolves around the main postulates of deterrence, winning every single war and not stretching the attacks since the population is too small. Israel is aware of the fact that they have to win the wars again and again unlike the Arabs, who, if they once win there will be no more Israel. Israel and Iran have been more competitive in recent years due to strategic factors that started with the defeat of Iraq in 1991 and became more pronounced with the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Even worse, the rivalry's strategic foundation is strengthened by the conflict's elevated ideological frame. Tensions between the two countries have specifically increased as a result of Iran's pursuit of a nuclear program and perhaps the development of nuclear weapons. Deterrence along with the Israel Defence Forces' readiness and traditional way of military readiness are both equally necessary.

Keywords: asymmetric warfare, deterrence, IDF, nuclear threshold

INTRODUCTION

The very day of formation, Israel was vulnerable to attacks so it has bound it to believe that its existence is always under threat and it can resist the attacks by war alone. The constant threat to its existence leads the state to invest heavily in defence, even more than the US, and China. The division of the two states too, was very controversial as Israel is located in between the Arab state of Palestine. The idea of two states was very sensitive from the religious point of view since the city of Jerusalem is the holy place for the three religions-Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Just the next day of its inception, Israel was attacked from all sides by the Arab states. The total population in support of the Arab effort was 30 million. Israeli forces were supported by a population of 700,000.

Furthermore, the current State of Israel is not larger than Lake Michigan. The Arab world, which consists of 22 states, was 672 times larger than Israel even before Palestine was created. Israel quickly recognized that the overwhelming Arab population, Arab economic resources, and Arab political clout made it abundantly clear that even in victory Israel could never subdue its adversaries. Yet if Israel would lose even one war, that war would be its last war. Israel's borders are shared by Lebanon (79 km), Syria (76 km), Jordan (238 km), and Egypt (266 km). The State of Israel's boundaries with the West Bank and Gaza Strip are around 307 km and 51 km, respectively, but the Palestinians have not yet been awarded statehood. However, Israel contests the borders, which might shift if the Palestinians are given official independence. Israel believes that there is an enormous sea of Arabs encircling it. Its notion of security extends beyond dangers to its citizens, land, and possessions to include challenges to the state's survival. It also goes over how Israel's national security policy which has evolved in response to the ever-changing nature of security threats. Israel has to contend with several security issues in the region, such as Iran's ambitions for a contiguous sphere of influence, nuclear weapons, and regional hegemony. Asymmetric threats, territorial weaknesses, and the requirement for a potent deterrent capability are additional difficulties. These dangers and difficulties have influenced Israel's national security doctrine, with different leaders emphasizing different strategic pillars like building up strength, gaining relative advantage, and formulating alliance-based policy.

ISRAEL AND IRAN'S RELATIONS: FROM COOPERATION TO COMPETITION

The relationship between Israel and Iran has been complex, transitioning from cooperation to hostility over the years. Initially, both countries had cooperative relations driven by common geopolitical interests, including fears of Nasserite Pan-Arabism and Soviet communism. Despite the Islamic Revolution in Iran, pragmatic interests and shared enemies sustained some level of cooperation, with Iran seeing Israel as a counterweight to Baathist Iraq. Israeli leaders, on the other hand, hoped Iran would counterbalance not only Iraq but the wider Arab world. The Suez War in 1956 further solidified Israel's need to align with non-Arab countries like Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia due to the rise of Nasser's Pan-Arabism and Soviet influence. This pragmatic relationship continued into the 1980s but stalled by the 1990s, leading to the emergence of a rivalry defining the regional landscape by the following decade. Israel's Periphery Doctrine, developed by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in the 1950s, aimed to establish close ties with non-Arab countries like Iran to protect against hostile Arab neighbours. Despite never officially recognizing Israel, Iran informally acknowledged Israel in 1950, and the two countries sustained a relationship based on shared interests until the Islamic revolution in 1979. This historical context sheds light on the evolution of the Israel-Iran relationship from cooperation to rivalry. Another justification for collaboration between Iran and Israel was their shared perception of the threat posed by Iraq. Israel had by then been backing Iraqi Kurds in their struggle against the central government, and Iran, too, saw the Kurds as the regime's weak point. Thus, the secret services of Israel and Iran, the Mossad and SAVAK, teamed up to support the Kurds in their fight against the central government of Iraq.

By the 1990s, Israel and Iran had lessened their cooperation, but they did not yet see one other as a direct rival. Following the first Gulf War, Israel remained fixated on the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's Iraq. During this time, Iranian missile development (with ranges that might reach Israel) and nuclear programs began to worry the Israeli security establishment more and more, but the Iranian danger had not yet entered the political discourse or the public consciousness in Israel. Furthermore, even Israel's security establishment gave the Iranian threat a second look in the late 1990s, with some security experts speculating that tensions may ease since Iran no longer saw Israel as its primary security concern. As part of Iran's engagement policy towards the United States, Iranian officials like Khatami also made conciliation gestures to Israel at this time. These gestures included suggestions that Iran might support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. As Iranian relations with nonstate groups like Hamas and Hezbollah strengthened and threatened security in areas surrounding Israel, the Israelis came to see Iran as the root of all regional

conflicts they faced. Israeli concerns about Iran were further heightened by the election of Iranian President Ahmadinejad in 2005 and his vehement anti-Israel rhetoric and Holocaust denials. Iran's assistance in providing military training and support to allies, Hamas in 2008 and Hizballah in 2006, increased the perceived danger posed by Iran in Israeli strategic assessments. Israel did not worry about the fast military build-up that occurred during the Shah's administration; rather, Israel deliberately collaborated with the Iranian government. Additionally, there were hints at the time that the Shah was interested in obtaining nuclear weapons, but Israel did not find this to be concerning. Israel's perspective on Iran, however, radically shifted with the revolution of 1979.

EMERGENCE OF RIVAL IRAN

Israel is the target of intense hostility from Iran's Islamic dictatorship, which claims that Israel should be eradicated and does not acknowledge its right to exist. Because of this, Israel believes that Iran is the biggest danger to its security and continued existence. Over the past 20 years, Israel has grown more aware of the threat that Iran possesses. Iran's aims are rather evident and believes that Israel has no right to exist. Iran has consistently demonstrated to Israel that it is a major player by supporting any group prepared to use violence against Israel and exerting pressure on those groups to continue their anti-Israeli actions. This has been a thorough policy that has been followed without fail. Shiite organizations operating in Lebanon, such as Hizballah, as well as certain Sunni organizations, like some Fatah-affiliated Palestinian terrorist organizations operating in the West Bank, have received assistance. Israel believes that the nuclearization of Iran may bring about a chain reaction of proliferation in the Middle East.

Tehran's nuclear endeavours are motivated by several goals, chief among them being to keep the regime in power. Furthermore, Iran's nuclear program advances several revisionist ambitions of the regime, such as elevating Tehran to the position of preeminent regional power in the Middle East, supporting resistance against the "injustices" imposed by "arrogant powers" (the West and Israel), claiming leadership in the wider Islamic world, and reclaiming Iran's "rightful place" among the most significant political, economic, and scientific states in the world. Therefore, the Iranian leadership believed that having nuclear weapons would not only increase Iran's prestige and discourage foreign intervention but also provide the Islamic Republic of Iran more freedom to spread its ideology throughout the region.

Credible estimates based on information from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of the United Nations indicate that Iran has already achieved a level of nuclear weapons development known as "near threshold," meaning it has the technical capacity to produce nuclear bombs in a few years. Iran currently possesses 3.5 percent low-enriched uranium (LEU), which, if further enriched to weapons-grade uranium (WGU, generally defined as enrichment above the 90 percent level), would produce enough fissile material for five nuclear weapons, according to the Institute for Science and International Security.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated several times the threat of Iran and it is a fanatical regime driven by extreme anti-Western and anti-Semitic ideology as well as apocalyptic Shiite religious beliefs. According to Netanyahu, the Iranian regime is propelled by a militant ideology that is founded on a completely distinct set of principles. This value system may appear completely illogical to us, but it is widespread and quite influential among the Islamic militants vying for leadership. It is a premeditated attempt of nuclear-armed Iran to destroy Israel by supplying such volatile explosives and weapons to the militant groups that preach antisemitic sentiments. Such fomenting remarks made by Iranian authorities appear to support the judgment. For instance, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad vowed to "wipe Israel off the map" soon after taking office in 2005. It is quite unlikely that the October 7th attack took place without the support of Iran. Scholars call the trio of Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah a "convenience marriage". Rather than an ideological fit with Tehran's political understanding of Islam, the connection between Sunni Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Shia Iran has always been one of necessity. Consequently, organizations are always modifying their external relationships based on their strategic assessments. This was particularly noticeable following the Arab upheavals.

Also, another factor concerning Israel is Iran's growing influence and presence in the region. Iran has been backing Hamas of Palestine and Hezbollah of Lebanon. This equation lessens Iran and Israel's proximity. The Islamic Republic has ideological hatred for Israel and believes that the latter is the base of Western colonialism and a pillar of American imperialism in the Middle East and that is how the US will keep its presence in the region and counter their ideology. "The Zionist regime is a true cancerous tumour on this region that should be cut off," said Ayatollah Khamenei, demonstrating his hate for the Zionist organization. Israel is concerned that Iran may provide nuclear weapons to anti-Israel organizations like Hamas and

Hezbollah, increasing the likelihood of an unconventional conflict. In conclusion, a nuclear-armed Iran would feel more comfortable supporting terrorism against Israel as well as the US and other regional powers. Iran might even transfer nuclear weapons and technology to "proxy" groups. Iran's recent aggression on Israel and vigorous backing of terrorist organizations and terror groups are due to the recent rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia. The Islamic Republic is weaponizing Israel as the common enemy of the Arabs and sides with Saudi Arabia despite the Shia-Sunni feud. The inhabitants of Israel, according to the Islamic Republic, are not native to the area; rather, they are the conquerors of Palestine and Jerusalem, two of Islam's holiest places. Israel is therefore seen as a foreign entity. Ayatollah Khamenei even views Israeli noncombatant civilians as Iran's foes, emphasizing his enmity to certain rulers or regimes rather than their people.

ISRAEL'S RESISTANCE TO IRAN'S THREAT

Over any likely anti-Israel Arab military alliance, Israel has managed to maintain both a qualitative advantage and conventional military dominance. That is largely attributable to US backing and its promise to preserve Israel's comparative advantage. Arab attitudes against Israel have changed, partly due to Israel's ongoing military supremacy. While other Arab governments have engaged in peace talks with Israel at different points in time, two Arab states—Jordan and Egypt—have signed peace treaties with the Jewish state. As of right now, there isn't a single Arab administration that claims Israel shouldn't exist or that its goal is to destroy the state of Israel. Israel and Saudi Arabia's rapprochement has also been achieved partially and they have also agreed to the common project -IMEC, offered Israel normalization of relations and comprehensive peace agreements with most of the Arab states.

Moreover, another political agenda of the Israeli coalition government is centered on Iran's nuclear threat. In his inaugural speech, Netanyahu categorically stated that the biggest threat Israel faced was the possibility of a radical regime armed with nuclear weapons. He claimed that Israel relied extensively on the international community to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons but despite the inappropriate policies adopted by the US, Iran continued its nuclear program. His stance that the Iranian threat is becoming more imminent day by day and Israelis "know how to protect" their country is "a possible hint that Tehran's nuclear facilities could be struck". It is believed that Deterrence will hold back Iran from attacking Israel or waging a full-scale war since it is aware of the grave consequences.

CONCLUSION

Traditional threats were possible to desist due to deterrence. The security doctrine rests on three pillars—Deterrence, detection to avoid war, and being the victor in the war. But as the nature of war is shifting from conventional to hybrid war with the threats of non-conventional and nuclear weapons and terror groups, Israel has to build up its defense capability as well. Additionally, it has to upgrade its technology so that it can reliably identify impending risks and signal them before they happen. The defensive strategy is relied on to assure Israel's existence, exercise deterrence, and pacify the threats. Preserving the comparative edge through human excellence, cutting-edge technology (weaponry), and many forms of intelligence and having the upper hand in cyber intelligence is the need of the hour. The intelligence community also provides Israel with the capacity to act "under the radar" and without the need to use force publicly. Nowadays, this is carried out mainly in the context of the "Campaign between the Wars". One of Israel's former Chief of Military Intelligence and top strategic analyst, Amos Yadlin has said that the capability and intention might not be eliminated and uprooted, but Israel Defence Forces (IDF) can create Deterrence which is holding the aggressor to attack. The IDF must always be in a state of readiness and be proactive. During Routine, IDF aims at maintaining peace, strengthening, and preserving deterrence by amassing power and posing a serious threat to the enemies who are preparing to attack.

Although the nature of attacks has undergone multiple folds, the probability of conventional wars still exists. This is because the number of enemies Israel possesses is not few. The fight is one against many. The rivals surround the state of Israel from all sides. Lately, the cognitive war has gained momentum thus making the war intricate and complex in form. Such threats need multi multi-operational, joint approach to prevent or counter any destruction. Permanent readiness for attacks, both low-intensity conflicts to full-fledged war, is needed. In light of the unprecedented combination of Palestinian and Iranian aggressions, Israel must take the necessary precautions to ensure that it remains the target of no unconventional attacks from these adversaries and that it can effectively avert any potential non-conventional conflict. For this, the Israel Defence Forces need control of information, preparedness of armies and arms, a current operational

doctrine, a suitable force structure, the incorporation of cutting-edge military technology, a productive organizational framework, skilled manpower, and a training course for the improvement of system-wide competencies. Israel may be better equipped to dissuade its adversaries if it were to move toward carefully considered forms of "nuclear disclosure." However, upholding the rigid precept of not becoming the first user.

Most importantly, both states must carry out diplomatic talks and negotiations to settle the issue and ease the tension. It should also shift its reliance on non-military actions like diplomatic initiatives, government-to-government dialogues, and intelligence-related activities. Since both Israel and Iran aspire to become the regional hegemony, ease of tension between the two is unlikely for the time being. At this point in time, the US along with Saudi Arabia with whom Iran had lately made rapprochement, must put efforts to de-escalate the tension between Israel and Iran and deter them from attacking one another.

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